Becoming Criminal: 
A Phenomenological Sketch of Criminal Identification

Anonymous *

Although I have had a longstanding interest in critical legal studies I am entirely new to criminology. My interest has been in thinking about legal codification and the relationship between ontology, property and the law, and I have been grappling with these issues and ideas in the fields of continental philosophy and social and political theory. I usually present my papers in associations such as Existential and Phenomenological Theory, Culture, and the History and Philosophy of Science. This is my first foray specifically into criminology – and I will not be presenting a conventional academic paper. I will be telling you about my criminalization.

There is much that I cannot say and there is much that I say that cannot be said anywhere else. Only in the academic sphere, according to my lawyer, is it safe for me to speak. And there is much that I will say that I must call, perhaps, fictional. I will ask you to acquiesce to this fictionality in order to preserve this sphere as one of safe speech. I do not mean ‘safe’ in the sense of uncontested – I’m quite happy to engage in even heated debate – but rather as a place where multiple truths can be told, and where we can draw on both experience and analysis to challenge hegemonic narratives.

The criminal, I have learned, is the one identity that cannot be liberated.

Abolition, civil rights, feminism, anti-racism, queer rights and now animal rights – all shared an ethical high ground. It is wrong, or so the arguments go, to own our brothers and sisters as property, to criminalize sexual choices or to slaughter our fellow creatures. Although I admit that I am not a vegetarian. But while what and who belongs in the category ‘criminal’ is quite fluid and in flux, the category itself is socially and legally removed from having any recourse to a place of moral high ground. To be a criminal means to have broken the social contract – to have sinned against society – and as such the criminal is the enemy within: disparaged if not despicable.

As clearly not fitting the usual stereotype of ‘the enemy within’ – I am an almost-forty-year-old white chick with a PhD – there is no question that I have been cut a lot of slack. At the same time, as ‘the enemy within’ I have also been largely abandoned, in my criminalization, by the academic middle class. It was not the well-heeled tenured friends, the colleagues
whose dogs I had walked when they couldn’t get home from campus until late, whose gardens I watered every summer when they left for their cottages, and whose picky children I humoured by cutting the crusts off of sandwiches who bailed my son and I out of jail last summer. No, it was those living on the cusp of poverty and walking the thin edge between legitimacy and criminalization who understood our predicament and came to our assistance. My criminalization has taught me much about class and war, and their relationship to punishment and freedom.

I am released from jail into a fugitive existence. Prohibited from returning home, from accessing my research, my books, my bed. The empty guest rooms and spare basement apartments in the mortgage-free houses of the Marxist Feminist Theorists and United Nations consultants of my downtown neighbourhood are closed to my predicament. Effectively banished from all that is familiar, from any support systems that might still be open to me, I am taken in by the criminal underclass.

Finding myself far away from libraries, bookstores and people who speak in complete sentences, I venture out in search of something beautiful or nourishing, something to signify that life here in the impoverished periphery of the city may still be worth living. But I return without finding it to a bedbug infested apartment above a methadone clinic in a strip mall facing a four lane highway. The smoke alarm has been ripped out of the ceiling, the stove doesn’t work, the sink doesn’t drain and the cockroaches don’t even bother to scatter when the light turns on. My transition from the intelligentsia to fugitive underclass is not an easy one. I see my excessive privilege most clearly reflected in how deeply my gratitude is tinged with a rejection of the conditions and lives of my hosts, and I am ashamed of myself.

Standing in line waiting for the payphone – caught between the blinding August sun and the heat rising from pavement – attempting to call my son’s university. They have accepted him on a scholarship. How to explain that he will be a few days late for the start of classes? That no, there is no number either of us can be reached at, we are prohibited from possessing telephones and laptops – even email is difficult. Motorcycles and trucks zoom by loudly, a man tries to solicit my sexual services. I am realizing that all women in this particular corner of town must rent their orifices – that femaleness here means the exchange of sex for drugs or money. Another man, bloodshot eyes, tells me to hurry the ‘f’ up, he’s got a chop to make. The conditions of my bail have excluded my access to the basic material conditions of any semblance of
middle-class professionalism and with it any legitimacy I might have had as a mother able to effectively advocate on behalf of her child.

But bail, I learn, is about a lot more than foreclosing legitimacy. It is about creating the conditions of a fugitive existence – an existence lived in perpetual fear of the police, of impending arrest, of incarceration. As such it creates as certain perpetual vulnerability without recourse to the assistance of the protectors of the public. As the enemy of the public, the criminal is ostracized from inclusion in this category.

Four times a week I find myself in breach of my bail conditions. My curfew hits during the final leg of the two hour journey between leaving my teaching responsibilities at the University and my arrival at cockroach central. I feel it viscerally. The surface of my buttocks tingle and a nervous energy spreads throughout my limbs. My stomach fills with stone ghosts – heavy but tumultuous and howling. I am on edge, easily startled. I hold onto the metal bar in the bus packed with the exhausted working class, my whiteness standing out, trying to calm the compulsion to flee with yogic deep breathing. Several times skirmishes break out in the bus – the combination of inebriation, poverty, fatigue, and sardine-like overcrowding is not one which promotes peace and serenity – and the stone ghosts in my stomach rise to my head in a chorus of high-pitched screams...if the police are called...if they check my identity...if they find me out after curfew...

Clinging to whatever vestiges of normalcy I can muster, wearing long sleeves to cover the bed-bug welts, I add another hour to my commute every morning and return to the yoga studio. A devout practitioner, I am asked about my unusual absence and begin to speak of my criminalization. The crown attorney with whom I’ve been practicing Ashtanga yoga for years insists that bail conditions are agreed to freely and that I should not have agreed to conditions I could not comply with. I look at her incredulously. “Have you ever been to jail?” I ask. I become deeply uncomfortable as I realize that this lovely vegetarian yogini plays a frontline role in sending society’s most marginalized – those trapped in poverty, troubled relationships and drug addiction – to jail – in punishing those who have already lived far too much punishment by relegating them to a dehumanizing hell. How to negotiate this friendship with the enemy?

If punishment is understood as a response to crime, crime, I think, is best understood as a response to punishment. That is, punishment comes first. The punishment precedes the crime. Any good parent can tell you this.
When I was a teenage single mother on welfare – quite a while ago now – a university professor was doing a study and a man whose heavy odour of cigarette smoke permeated our all-organic tiny West Coast apartment for hours afterwards came to the door with a questionnaire, and asked all the wrong questions. I tried to explain to him why his questions didn’t work, why they obviated what was significant, and how they predetermined what could be learned – but there was no room on the questionnaire for these responses. Disturbed by being the object of study without any input into framing the conversation, I decided to do a PhD and I remember the example I gave him because it was about the importance of gift and quantifiability, which continue to be central problematics in my work.

My mother had visited from overseas, and, quite distraught that my child and I had no plates or bowls and were eating out of used yogurt containers – something that hadn’t bothered me in the least – stocked my house with food. The social worker told me I was to estimate the value of these groceries so that that amount could be deducted from our next month’s cheque. When I protested that the food was a gift, not illicit income, I was told that to fail claim the proper amount was not only fraudulent, but would be unfair to other mothers on welfare. The language of equality was used to justify economically punishing us for receiving gifts of nourishment.

So, although I have only recently been criminalized, criminalization feels in many ways quite familiar. I know these feelings of being trapped in impossible situations and punished for telling the truth only too well from the years in which caring for an infant entailed dependence on state administrative apparati. At that time, I had considered surrogacy in order to escape welfare, renting my womb in order to stay home with my child, to take some university courses, to save towards a down payment so we could have a stable roof over our heads. Less than two years ago, I approached growing pot in much the same way – a short-term thing, for a biological cycle or two, in exchange for a lump sum which would allow us to survive as well as participate in this social and economic order – a way to get from ‘A’ to ‘B’.

I finished my PhD in the midst of a global economic crisis and continent-wide hiring freeze. I was teaching on contract for a quarter of the pay salaried faculty make when my union went on strike. I had mortgage payments to make at twice the rate that salaried faculty and double-income families pay, and student loan payments which could no longer be deferred. My
child was now set to start university. Growing had always been there in the back of my mind, somewhere on the suicide continuum, an 'if all else fails' mode escape. This story of the global economic crisis and the strike is the official one, the one that can be told. But there was an existential, not just an economic element – although the two are deeply bound up in each other – to my crime. I was systemically exhausted, deeply disillusioned with academia, and, indeed, felt fundamentally betrayed by having my years of sacrifice, steadfast fortitude, and service garnering nothing more than enchainment to the basement of the ivory tower.

When I begin the academic climb there is a ladder with rungs on it. And in this climb I am encumbered in a way none of my peers are, leaving behind my network of friends, a rag tag team of single moms on welfare. And as I climb I tell myself, almost as a mantra, that when I make it to legitimacy I will be the voice of those who could not make the journey. As I climb the rungs below me drop away. Programs are cut. Funding is axed, but not before I have made it to the next rung. In the fourth year of my PhD studies this changes. The rungs above me begin to disappear. I reach up and there is nothing to grab onto. The funding formula has changed. Graduate students are no longer eligible for a fifth year of funds. I need this fifth year to write my dissertation. The plummeting begins. A vicious downward spiral.

Moving into my apartment to 'help' me in this situation a boyfriend with a secret gambling problem empties my line of credit of $40,000. I find myself taking a job as a teaching fellow in another city. Sixty hours a week or more. No academic freedom. Teaching the children of the elite that theirs is the only story that matters. My salary keeps us at the poverty line, insufficient to provide my own child a basic education in a city in which the public system has been emptied as the middle class move their children into private schools. I am berated by the program director for facilitating too much debate in the classroom. I awake every morning exhausted, prostituted, despairing of how I will ever find the time to finish my dissertation. Three years and many teaching contracts at various universities later, writing through every weekend and holiday, I do finish. And it is a painful finishing. My supervisor and I have a fundamental disagreement about the relationship between phenomenology and epistemology. Ethics and science must be put into fruitful dialogue, I argue. But for my supervisor their discourses belong fundamentally to different registers. They cannot be put into the same conversation. Repeatedly sending me back to the drawing
board only further radicalizes my thought. I ultimately argue for a material inception of ethics. My defence is a heated one. I leave with a PhD, but also with the sense that after all these years I have ultimately failed.

It is in this context of failure and exhaustion that I create, and fall in love with, my secret garden. It is the perfect environment to escape the cold darkness of the winter or the stinking summer city heat. A clear bright light, a gentle breeze from the fan, the gurgle of water, a faint odour of fresh fruit as buds formed amidst dark green serrated leaves. Bright red ladybugs crawl around, happily mating, fanning their wings, eating the gnats and the aphids.

I grew organic pot, of course, which went to a local compassion center for distribution to those who found it helpful. And unlike the labour of writing papers for edited books, journals and conferences, for which only salaried academics are remunerated, leaving the rest of us to try to eke out enough of a living to find time around the edges to contribute to these conversations, and unlike the lifetime of labour involved in raising a child, the fruits of my gardening labour, these lovely sweet-smelling sticky green flowers, belonged, at last, to what felt like a fair economy. While the other labours of love I have engaged in have entailed my exploitation, this was the one labour which I could both love and be reasonably paid for.

I'd like to conclude with a few words about profiting from the avails not of crime, but of criminalization.

After the dramatic part was over, that is, after the 4 a.m. raid on our small little downtown apartment filled with books and guitars, and the sweetest little pomeranian-poodle you've ever met. And after the detective let me sit in pool of my own menstrual blood for hours, refusing to let me use the toilets, and telling me that I must be insane, that the neighbourhood was trying to rid itself of socialists like me, and that if I didn't sign a statement my 18 year old son would be sodomized in jail. And after four days of incarceration which I am not yet able to talk about, after my release on bail, the extortion begins.

The police call the hydro company who cuts the power to my apartment pending a $3000 half-hour inspection by a certified industrial hygienist which must indicate that there are no mould spores in the house and that it is safe for the company's employees to inspect for electrical anomalies. The certified industrial hygienist informs me that the hydro company's mould standards are so stringent that every house in the city would fail. I call a
mould specialist company. They suggest I pay them $25,000 to rip out all
the drywall in the apartment. "But there is no mould," I say, "nothing wrong
with the electrical, only a few plants – gosh, they could have been tomato
plants!" The police call the city authorities who slap an order to remedy
an unsafe building on the door. The cost of its removal: $5000. The police
call the mortgage company which sends me a foreclosure notice. All this
takes place while my bail conditions prevent me from even going to my
house. I sneak in a couple of times to pick-up these notices and some of
my research. My apartment seems to have been broken into multiple times.
Windows have been broken, and everything of value, all our tools and
musical instruments, have been taken. All that remains is the books.

After repairing the windows and the damage done to the property, and
proving there is no mould, and nothing was wrong with the electrical, and
after paying off the city, I fight the foreclosure. The mortgage company
charges me $15,000 in extra fees and skyrockets my interest rate. A
mortgage which should be $1700 a month is now $5000 a month. I start
looking for a new mortgage company, but just as I begin this process Public
Prosecutions Canada registers a forfeiture restraint order against the title of
my property. The Crown Attorney tells my lawyer that they will remove the
restraint order in exchange for a guilty plea. Just as I think it can’t get any
worse, the police send me a bill for $2000 to cover the costs of arresting me.

When I go to the police headquarters to talk to the woman in the finance
department, when I say: "I don’t have anything left. I don’t have $2000" and
"isn’t there any way that you could arrange for a reasonable payment
plan that I can afford? I do need to eat. And I do need to sleep. And short
of starting a massive grow operation, my four-courses-a-term teaching
load just doesn’t pay these bills". I am told that to give me a payment plan
would be unfair to others. The language of equality is again used to justify
the punishment – which, I am informed, is not punitive but administrative.
Okay, I think, a punitive administration, then, which requires the escalation
of the crime in order to be complied with.

And so I stand here before you a drowning woman. As I surface after
each wave which crashes over my head and drags me under, as I surface and
gasp for air, as more and more solid material I could cling to is wrenched
from my grip, I cease to wonder how long I can keep this up, how many
more waves will drag me under before my surfacing becomes a lifeless
one. This drowning of mine is no longer about survival. Survival would
be nice, don’t get me wrong, but what is emotionally and intellectually necessary now is to speak and write about this process of drowning called criminalization.

ENDNOTES

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at an academic conference to a group of criminologists and socio-legal scholars.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author currently teaches on a contract basis at a Canadian university and is the single mother of an amazing teenager full of life and fortitude. She is pursuing a law degree and working on two books while awaiting trial. The first book, provisionally entitled *Suicide Letters from a Reluctant Criminal*, gives an account of her own criminalization. The second book provides a historical and a philosophical analysis of the entwinement of slavery, criminalization and private property.
I was born in 1965 in Tehran, Iran. Both my grandmothers had migrated to Iran from Russia after the 1917 Communist revolution and I was raised according to the Russian Orthodox faith. My childhood was relatively normal. By "normal" I mean it was comparable to the life of a child in the West. My father was a ballroom-dancing instructor, my mother was a hairdresser, and we lived in an apartment on top of a restaurant and a furniture store in downtown Tehran. I went to a wonderful Zoroastrian school for girls where students from many different faiths attended classes in a peaceful and friendly environment that was far removed from prejudice and fundamentalism. My family owned a cottage by the Caspian Sea where we spent a couple of months every summer. During the last summer before the success of the Islamic revolution, when I was 13, I enjoyed spending time at the beach, wearing bikinis, riding my bike, attending parties and dancing to the tunes of the "Bee Gees". Then, within a few months, my world fell apart. I knew nothing about the Islamic revolution until the summer of 1978 when an 18 year old friend told me that the Shah of Iran was a dictator and that he imprisoned those who spoke against him, torturing and killing them at Evin prison, a political prison located just north of Tehran.

When my family and I returned to Tehran at the end of that summer, we were surprised to see thousands of demonstrators fill the streets, yelling slogans against the Shah and the United States. My mother's eldest sister, Zenia, warned me to stay away from the demonstrations and told me not to trust the revolution. She had been a teenager when she had left the Soviet Union with my grandparents, and she vividly remembered the violence and the horrors of those years. I took her advice to heart. The Islamic revolution of Iran, which began the new era of Islamic fundamentalism in the world, succeeded in February 1979. Soon, the schools, which had been shut down as a result of the political turmoil in the country, re-opened and we went back to class. The way of life that I was accustomed to was gone and the new regime of Ayatollah Khomeini was struggling to establish itself. At the beginning, it wasn't too bad. The Revolutionary Guard and the Islamic committees had not yet gained control over everything, so there was some freedom of speech and press. I had no idea what a Marxist was, and suddenly, Marxist and Marxist-Islamist groups, which had been illegal during the time of the Shah, were everywhere. Their followers were selling their publications at every street corner. All students were excited about the new world that had
suddenly appeared – it was wonderful to learn new things about the world and to discuss new ideologies. But slowly, the government began to tighten its grip: newspapers that had even slightly criticized the government were shut down, Western novels were banned, the hijab became mandatory, and, one by one, our teachers were replaced by fanatic young women, many of whom were members of the Revolutionary Guard who were not qualified to teach at all. These newly appointed teachers spent most of the class time spreading the government’s propaganda. I was a very good student and wanted to go to university to become a medical doctor, so this situation upset me.

One day I asked my Calculus teacher to teach calculus instead of propaganda and she said, “leave if you don’t like what I teach”. I did, and most of my classmates followed me. We went to the schoolyard and refused to go back to class for three days, and many students from other classes joined us in our protest. On the third day, the principal, who was also a member of the Revolutionary Guard, called me and two other students to the office and told us that if we didn’t go back to class, she would call the Revolutionary Guard and they would either arrest us or shoot us. We decided to go back to class. I was very angry after this as I had witnessed that the revolution had not brought us democracy but a horrible dictatorship that was worse than the one of the Shah and was getting stronger by the day. I began a school newspaper and wrote articles against the government. I was a devout Christian and attended mass everyday. However, the country seemed to have become divided into extreme political streams: Fundamentalist Islam, Marxist Islam, Marxism, and Monarchism, and even though I wanted to belong, I didn’t have anything in common with any of them and felt like an outsider. As a result, I took part in every protest against the government regardless of who had organized it. During these protests, I witnessed peaceful demonstrators being violently attacked by the Revolutionary Guard, beaten, arrested and even shot. However, I was a naïve teenager, and I somehow felt that I was invincible and that nothing bad would happen to me. But I was wrong.

I was arrested at home on January 15, 1982, and was taken to Evin prison. I was 16. Upon my arrival at the prison, I was blindfolded and then interrogated. They wanted information from me that I didn’t have. So, as it was the norm at the time in the prison, they tied me to a bare wooden bed and lashed the soles of my feet with the length of a cable. The pain was
beyond belief. I couldn’t understand how the human body could tolerate so much pain. The torture went on for a while and I realized that if I had the information they wanted from me, I would have given it to them. I was not a hero. Once they couldn’t get anything out of me, they took me, along with four other prisoners, into a field and tied us to wooden poles. I realized they were going to shoot us. This was when a car came speeding toward us and one of my interrogators, Ali, stepped out of it. He gave a sheet of paper to the guards, untied me from the pole, threw me in his car and drove away. People have told me that maybe this was a mock execution. Yes, maybe it was. But to me it was very real. After all, thousands of people were executed in Evin in the eighties. Ali told me that he had believed that I didn’t know anything and that he had used his influence and his family connection to Ayatollah Khomeini to reduce my sentence from death to life in prison. He sent me to a women’s cellblock in Evin, named 246, where I was in a room with about 60 other girls. During the time of the Shah, this room held 6 or 7 prisoners. During my time, about 95 percent of the prisoners were under the age of 20, and we lived under the constant shadow of torture and death. The living conditions were horrible. There wasn’t much food and hygiene levels were terribly low. Evin was simply a place between life and death. We had no future and the present was horrific, so we always talked about the past and our memories of our families to create a beacon of hope to help us survive. We developed amazing friendships that gave us strength.

After five months at 246, Ali called me to the interrogation building. I was terrified, but even after all this time in Evin, I had not been able to predict what was about to happen to me. He told me that I was a prisoner with no rights and that he wanted me to marry him, and that if I didn’t comply, he would arrest my parents and my boyfriend. I told him I would do anything he wanted me to. All this time, I had survived by believing that my nightmare would somehow end and that I would one day go home to my family. If he arrested my family, I would have no home to go back to. He also forced me to convert to Islam, saying that his family would not accept a Christian daughter-in-law. So I converted to Islam and married him. I felt like I had betrayed God and Jesus, but I also had hope that God would forgive me. So under the name of marriage, Ali raped me over and over again. I was still a prisoner and was in solitary confinement most of the time, spending most of my days alone and my nights in the cell with him. I hated him.
He sometimes took me on short leaves of absence from the prison to see his family. I had expected them to be cruel to me, but his mother was always very kind and pretended that I was a normal person. She served me food, was very respectful and never mentioned anything that would make me uncomfortable. She gave me a sense of normalcy I had not experienced in a long time. Soon, I found myself liking Ali’s family and my feelings confused me beyond words. I felt even more confused when Ali’s mother told me that he had been a political prisoner in Evin during the time of the Shah and that he had been tortured. It was very difficult for me to see him as a victim. But then it all made sense. Ali had been given the chance to seek revenge. He believed that he was protecting his religion and his way of life, and he had allowed himself to justify horrible things for the so-called “greater good”. Somehow believing that God would save me, I promised myself that I would never become another Ali, that I would rise above the cycle of hatred and violence that had engulfed my country for a long time. I made a conscious decision to forgive him, but I believed and still believe that one should never forgive a system that creates torturers and kills innocents.

Ali was assassinated by a rival faction of the government 15 months after our marriage. After his death, his family arranged for my release and I went home after more than two years in Evin.

The first night I was home, I sat at the dinner table with my family and watched in astonishment as they talked about the weather. They were so terrified of the horrors of my past that they could not face it, so they decided to pretend it never happened. And I accepted this silence and became its prisoner for about 20 years, during which I too tried to forget the past.

It astounds me that some people believe that one can step out of an extremely traumatic experience and immediately talk about it or write a book on it. Extreme trauma can easily lead to Post Traumatic Stress disorder and other psychological problems that are very difficult to overcome. Especially when you are very young when experiencing trauma, you put the trauma in a bubble, you put it on your shoulder, you walk through your life, and you avoid anything that threatens to burst that bubble, and, as a result, you avoid life and all it offers. You avoid any extreme emotions or anything that might remind you of the past. As a result, you never truly love, hate or enjoy anything and live in a state of emotional numbness. Another good metaphor to describe this situation is to say that the traumatized person
Marina Nemat is a marathon runner who cannot stop and has no finish line. The runner keeps on going until she either dies or trips. I finally tripped. After being released from prison, my family never asked me about my ordeal. Not that I was ready to talk about it, no, but it would have been helpful if someone had said, “when you’re ready to talk, we’re ready to listen”. However, this invitation never came, and, like my family and friends, I believed that the past could be thrown away and forgotten. I was wrong.

For years, I tried to look ahead and live a normal life. I married the man I loved, Andre, who was the organist at my church in Tehran, and we eventually managed to leave Iran. Once we made it to Canada, we struggled and worked very hard to build a new life even though we had no money. We had kids and raised a family, and began to feel like real Canadians – sending our boys to good schools, watching them play sports and the piano, making friends, and trying to enjoy all the things Canada has to offer. Then my mother became ill with cancer. My mother and father had followed us to Canada in 1993. My mother died in March 2000, and I realized that she never knew the real me. No one knew the real me. The truth was that I had lived a lie for 16 years. That was when I began suffering from flashbacks and nightmares about the prison and the symptoms of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder began to surface in me. Many victims of trauma never show symptoms of psychological disorders until years later. Examples of this situation are the victims of the Holocaust who avoided talking about the camps for many years. After my mother’s death, I had a few psychotic episodes during which I locked myself in the bathroom, and began screaming and banging my head against the wall. That was when I realized I had to face the past or it was going to kill me. I either had to jump off a bridge or tell. I decided to tell.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marina Nemat was born in 1965 in Tehran, Iran. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, she was arrested at the age of 16 and spent more than two years in Evin, a political prison in Tehran, where she was tortured and came very close to execution. She came to Canada in 1991 and has called it home ever since. Her memoir of her life in Iran, *Prisoner of Tehran*, was published by Penguin Canada. *Prisoner of Tehran* has been short listed for many literary awards, including the Young Minds Award in the United Kingdom and the
Borders Original Voices Award in the United States. On December 15, 2007, Marina received the inaugural Human Dignity Award from the European Parliament and in October 2008 she received the prestigious Grinzane Prize in Italy. In 2008-2009, she was an Aurea Fellow at University of Toronto’s Massey College, where she wrote her second book, *After Tehran*, which was published by Penguin Canada in September 2010.
INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago, in March of 1996, I was enjoying the beautiful beaches, gorgeous sunrises/sunsets, and spectacular weather of the sunny metropolitan city of Miami, Florida. I was also the only defendant in a federal drug charge indictment. I was 34 years old, and a regular hard working and dedicated mom. At that moment in time, I was going through very difficult and at the same time very joyful moments of my life.

The greatest joy of my life was the birth of my two sons Yrwil Jesus and Jeswil Jose, who were, at the time, 11 and 22 months respectively. I was enjoying what I felt was the most graceful trait granted to woman – motherhood. Despite this joy, I experienced post-partum depression and felt as though I was living in the twilight zone, due to the fact that I had discovered that my husband was having an affair in which a child was born outside our marriage and that he had moved out of our family home.

I no longer thought clearly and within the blink of an eye I was involved in a crime: attempt to possess with intent to distribute cocaine. Besides the rollercoaster of feelings that I was going through, I was completely ignorant of the federal laws and the judicial system of the United States, “the country of Freedom”. I did not know anything about the Federal Sentencing Guidelines – now abolished by the United States Supreme Court as unconstitutional, nor about the witness protection program that may let a criminal get away with a crime without serving prison time or the unlimited resources of the United States Government.

Ignorance of a law is not a defense in the United States judicial system. I was sentenced to almost fifteen years of incarceration and five years of supervised release – almost a life sentence for a 34 year old female first-time, non-violent offender. There is a saying in prison that prisoners are the cousins of death because family and society forgets about them.

After I was federally sentenced, the loneliness and the grimness of prison life began to slowly kill me day by day. Once again, I became aware of how ignorant I was about the United States Correctional System. Housed more than 500 miles away from my sons, I learned that there is no program to maintain the mother-child bond. Separating a mother from her
child can be one of the most difficult aspects of incarceration and it is a cruel punishment. It is devastating for both sides and it leaves irreparable scars on the child’s life (Dalley and Michels, 2009). The United States of America calls it “collateral damage”, but I call it inhumane. Similarly, there are no programs to maintain a physical marital bond, as conjugal visits are prohibited in the federal correctional system of the United States, meaning I was to go without sex for fifteen years. Psychologists and other researchers have demonstrated that the isolation experienced as a result of incarceration and prison sentences longer than five years is very damaging to any human being even the strongest among us; some of the side effects of imprisonment are that we may become less humane and for some, more criminal (Blevins and Arrigo, 2009; Bloom and Covington, 2009; Harris and Lurigio, 2009; Hartwell and Orr, 2009; Ross and Lawrence, 2009; Ryder et al., 2009).

ON THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPRISONMENT

Serving the fifteen year federal sentence was an aside to the suffering I felt due to the separation from my sons. Yet, serving such a lengthy term in prison was a learning and educational experience; it opened the doors of an unknown world inside the most powerful country in the world. I and my fellow prisoners were coping with a complex constellation of issues and at the same time we had to learn how to survive in an environment with the following surroundings:

1. **A home of drugs, alcohol, corruption, sex, and physical and mental abuse.**

A few weeks upon my arrival at my new home, the Federal Correctional Institution at Tallahassee, Florida, I found a small marijuana cigarette on top of the bunk of my cell. I was sharing my cell with a 21 year old prisoner who had just arrived to the institution. I was extremely afraid that I would get another sentence for knowing and not reporting that drugs were inside my cell – so I chose to report the incident to the head of the Special Investigation Service unit (SIS). The officer, instead of taking care of the issue and/or opening an investigation, told the lower range officers about what I had reported. The lower range officers subsequently chose to teach me a lesson. My personal properties were intentionally spread all over the hall where my cell was located. When I complained to the office about this
incident, the officer told me, in front of all of my fellow prisoners that “you do not snitch on what happens inside prison, this is prison and you must learn how to live here”. I was curious to find out how the drugs ended-up inside my cell and learned that the cigarette was the welcome gift for my new cell-mate. It was a normal ritual inside that prison to welcome new women who had addiction problems with drugs. Curious to find out how drugs and alcohol were brought into the prison with all of its wires, fences and maximum security, I learned that it was a very well organized business composed of officers (all ranges), prisoners, and prisoner’s family members. This ‘business’ generates thousands of tax-free dollars and involves the trading of just about anything – for example, exchanging sex for a small bottle of perfume, and often entailed the physical, mental and/or verbal abuse of anyone who tried to expose the truth.

2. A system designated for male prisoners.

Many of the female federal correctional facilities in United States of America were male facilities before. The Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) at Tallahassee, Florida is no exception. Everything at FCI Tallahassee was created for male prisoners: the vocational programs; the factories; the educational programs; the prison jobs; the clothes; the personnel training; the methods of classification and more. A very high percentage of the employees at FCI Tallahassee are men, which created a series of difficulties for the women prisoners: it is an embarrassing and degrading process to be strip-searched by a male officer; to be watched 24-7 by a male officer; to be watched during your sleep by a male officer; and to have only men in positions of authority. It was difficult to speak to male officers about female issues. For example, the women inside felt like they could not approach a male officer to request extra sanitary napkins. Male officers are not suitable to work at female correctional facilities, as it is well known that female prisoners need more attention and assistance with personal problems (Arbour, 1996; Burke and Adams, 1991).

3. A pot of communicable diseases, some of them lethal, and a lack of proper and timely health care.

The number of women receiving sentences of more than one year increased by 80 percent in the 1990s (Beck and Mumola, 1999). The correctional facilities in the United States are not equipped with appropriate information,
staff and resources to attend the unique health concerns of female prisoners including but not limited to reproductive health. Every female prisoner continues to be at significant risk of contracting Hepatitis C, Tuberculosis (TB), as well as any sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia or HIV/AIDS. I was not immune and tested TB positive after five years of incarceration. While inside, I witnessed fellow prisoners die because of a lack of proper and timely medical attention who contracted STD’s, other communicable diseases and HIV.

4. **Home to a burgeoning number of females with mental disorders, traumas from domestic violence to child abuse, depression and addictions.**

Studies had found that a majority of incarcerated women abuse alcohol and/or drugs. Data from recent studies suggest that as many as 80 percent of incarcerated women meet the criteria for at least one lifetime psychiatric disorder (Bloom and Covington, 2009; Broner et al., 2009; Teplin et al., 1996; Jordan et al., 1996; Ryder et al., 2009). Women in the correctional population report higher rates of childhood abuse than women in the general population (Bloom and Covington, 2009; Broner et al., 2009; Harlow, 1999; Ryder et al., 2009), and it is common that they suffer from anxiety and depression related to the separation from their children. Since two-thirds of women in prison have young children and stress related to family concerns, this should be an important factor to take into consideration when providing mental health services to female prisoners. For me and a large number of my former fellow prisoners, separation from our children and/or family was the most difficult aspect of incarceration.

At the beginning of my incarceration I sought assistance to cope with the anxiety and depression derived from the separation from my sons. I was prescribed with legal drugs—a typical procedure in American correctional facilities (Harris and Lurigio, 2009). The prescription medication does not help and does not cure the problem, but rather converts prisoners into zombies. It is common to see the long lines of zombie-prisoners walking to the health department when the “pill line” is called. The prescription drugs, instead of alleviating my anxiety and depression, succeeded in deepening my mental health problems. During communication with my mother, to whom I confided about the side effects of the medication, my mother told me “you better stop taking those pills and you must be strong, think about how hard
it is going to be for your sons if they do not see you again. However, if you survive your sons will be able to enjoy their mom and you will be able to enjoy your sons”. These were words of wisdom. Just the picture of my sons calling me mom for the rest of their lives scared me so much that I decided to stop talking the prescribed drugs. However, every time I chose to raise my voice about the collateral damages of long-term female incarceration to the authorities, anxiety and depression from the separation of my sons would make me question why I did not think about that separation before committing a crime.

Unfortunately, correctional officers are not trained to assist female prisoners with their issues. Throughout my time in prison, I witnessed a female prisoner killing herself by throwing herself to the concrete from the third floor of a building, ongoing incidents of self-mutilation and suicide attempts, and a number of prisoners experiencing panic, anxiety and depression.

5. **The new plantations: Home of the slaves in the 21st century, with blow dryers, microwaves, television and the internet.**

Learning about “Unicor” was one of the most surprising aspects of my educational process about the machinery of the federal correctional system in the United States. Unicor, the trade name for Federal Prison Industries Inc. (FPI) is a government owned corporation that employs federal prisoners housed in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). Unicor manufactures products and provides services that are sold to executive agencies in the federal government. FPI was created to serve as a means for managing, training and rehabilitating prisoners in the federal prison system through employment in one of its industries. However, the reality is that Unicor factories have replaced the black slave plantations (Davis, 1998). Illustrating the importance of the program, Unicor is administered by a six-person board of directors that is appointed by the President of the United States. Unicor was established in 1934 and since then prisoners have been working in poor conditions for virtually no pay. Unicor has 108 factories representing seven different industrial operations comprised of almost 150 different types of products and services, including the following: (1) clothing and textiles; (2) electronics; (3) fleet management and vehicular components; (4) industrial products; (5) office furniture; (6) recycling activities; and (7) administrative and customer services, which includes data entry and encoding (Unicor,
2008). In 2007, FPI generated $854.3 million dollars in sales, but of these revenues, only 5 percent go towards prisoner’s salaries. Prisoners earn from $0.23 per hour up to a maximum of $1.15 per hour (ibid).

Advanced Data Processing (ADP) is part of Unicor’s provision of industrial operation “services”. During my incarceration, I worked for ADP-Unicor as a data entry clerk. It was not a common data entry job. Rather, we entered and processed data regarding all patent applications and patent grants filed each year at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), the European Patent EP and the International Patent Office WO. I never thought that prisoners would be trusted to handle that type of work and information. However, I soon learned that ADP-Unicor was not working for the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), which is a government agency, but rather for a private company called Reed Technology and Information Services, Inc. (RTIS).

The State of Virginia Public Records also states that the total quantity of shares for RTIS is 1,500,000 — I wonder what the value of each share is and if the shareowners know that their shares are growing from prisoner’s slave labour. The parent company of RTIS is Reed Elsevier Inc., a global publisher and information provider listed on several of the world’s major stock exchanges. The 2007 revenue for Reed Elsevier was $4,584 million (European Dollars), with company headquarters located in London and Amsterdam. Reed Elsevier is the parent of many well-known companies such as LexisNexis, Martindale-Hubbell, Reed Business Information, Public Library of Science or BioMed, and other magazines, exhibitions, directories, online media and marketing services across five continents.

Reed Elsevier was also in the business of organizing arms fairs, including those where companies sold cluster bombs and extremely powerful riot control equipment. I was literally in shock when I learned this information about RTIS, and I wonder how well known it is that this big international company benefitted from arms exhibitions and prisoner slave labour. It should be noted that due to pressure from members of the medical and scientific community, Reed Elsevier has since exited the defense exhibition business (Allen, 2008).

The idea of big business profiting from prisoner labour is not new and is reminiscent of plantation work during slavery. We no longer import slaves from Africa or need to export work to nations like China where wages are cheaper. Now we hand down long sentences to visible minority communities made up predominantly of Blacks and Hispanics, and place
them inside federal prisons to work like slaves. The United States Congress enacted a law in the 2005 Senate (Bill S.705) that stated “the bill would prevent executive agencies from entering into contracts with FPI in cases where inmate workers would have access to (1) data that is classified, or would become classified if merged with other data”; and “(40) any personal or financial information about any citizen, including information relating to the person’s real property, without the prior consent of the individual”. However, the reality of prisoner labour is quite different from this proposal. I was processing patents and confidential government information, such as new inventions in defense matters and personal information of the inventors when they filed their patents at any of the patents agencies of the world. We must question why the provisions set out in Bill S. 705 do not seem to apply to RTIS. Is it because RTIS is not a government or executive agency but rather a private company? How is it that private companies are able to do exactly what government legislation prohibits? What we know for sure, is that for the last 36 years the United States Patent and Trademark office has granted contracts to RTIS and Reed Elsevier subdivision companies. As you can conclude, no any other company can compete with the cheap cost of prisoner slave labour.

Unicor was also established to increase the inmate’s ability to successfully reintegrate into society and to lower the recidivism rate, but this is far from the truth. Unicor does not help prisoners reintegrate into society because entering data is not a marketable skill, nor would similar companies hire ex-prisoners upon their release. Instead, this form of labour employs prisoners for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 or more years without paying social security or even minimum wage salaries. Companies do not have to worry about training new employees, paying social security, retirement plans, workers compensation, insurance or any benefits that many private companies pay.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM INCARCERATION

The following is a discussion of some of the most important things I learned as a result of my lengthy period of incarceration:

1. **The value and types of freedom, time, family and personal properties.** My experience and wisdom teaches me that freedom has no price, but that there are different types of freedom: the priceless freedom of your physical
body; freedom of spirit that only you have control of; and freedom of mind that no one, not even the most powerful country in the world, can take away from you. In prison, I learned how to cultivate as well as feed spiritual and mind freedom in order to maintain my sanity despite my lack of physical freedom. I also learned that time is just as priceless as physical freedom and that it can be controlled in a variety of ways. There are different types of time—long, short, good, bad, valuable and wasteful, but only you can decide how to spend your time. So, I set a long list of goals to accomplish during my incarceration that helped me to forget (from time to time) the length of my incarceration. I also learned that family is all you have, and that not even the most expensive personal property or real estate is more important than the family. It is not as though I did not value my family before my incarceration, but it is in those moments of loneliness inside prison where a word, a smile, a hand, a hug, anything from a family member is the biggest treasure that a human being can possess, and that a truck full of 18K gold is worthless in comparison.

2. The importance of teamwork and not judging our fellow human beings.
Living with thousands of people like sardines in a can 24 hours a day definitely teaches you to understand human behavior. After almost 11 years of incarceration it is very easy for me to identify truthfulness in people and sometimes to feel their evil. Incarceration taught me that there are people that were born caring people and full of love, willing to share their lives and love, and at the same time that there are people that just enjoy the suffering of their fellow human beings. However, one of the most powerful lessons I learned and experienced as a result of my incarceration is the power of teamwork. When people have the same goal it does not matter what the circumstances and environment are, they work together regardless of the color of their skin, social status or educational level. The world saw the power of team work when America elected President Barack Obama in 2008. We should never judge another fellow human being unless we know everything about that human being because there are always two sides to a story.

3. The re-entry process begins the first day of incarceration.
The Federal Bureau of Prisons Pre-release Program, the federal government re-entry program, mandates halfway houses and non-profit organizations to assist released prisoners re-enter society smoothly. However, if you ask any
of the thousands of released prisoners if these programs work, the answer would be a resounding "NO".

My experience, like those of any of the thousands of prisoners released every year, is that we are definitely not prepared for reintegration upon our release from prison (Blevins and Arrigo, 2009; Hartwell and Orr, 2009; Wolff, 2009). I do not know if any specific program could really work because there are a lot of factors that must be considered in order to truly prepare a prisoner to re-enter society. We are not only ill-prepared to compete in the workforce, we are not prepared for the fast growing changes of society and even our own families. The long years of isolation and prison lifestyle work to destroy any possible bond/tie that the prisoner may have with society, family or the workforce.

If the released prisoner does not have experience in the field and is not mentally prepared for the challenges of living outside prison walls, it is very difficult to succeed in the first task set to a newly released prisoner – which is to find a job. So it transpires that there are always part-time underpaid jobs that are easy to get but where the salary is not enough to survive.

I humbly say that I was lucky I had a job waiting for me upon my release, but it was not only luck because I unknowingly began the re-entry the day I began my sentence. I realized that one of the reasons I wound-up in prison was my ignorance of the law. While in prison I concluded that poverty and my ignorance of the law were not going to help me win a reduction of my draconian sentence through a post-conviction remedy. Therefore, I decided to study the law and for almost 11 years I filed hundreds of pleadings on my own behalf and on behalf of my fellow prisoners. I did not get any reduction of my sentence, but I gained vast experience in the legal field.

My litigation style and analysis of case law were known by some attorneys and that helped me to find a job in a law firm. Unknowingly, throughout my entire incarceration I was preparing myself to enter the workforce upon my release by legally fighting the system. However, I still felt unprepared for reintegration. It was not hard for me to find a job, but it was extremely difficult and hard for me to digest the expansion and growing population of Miami, as well as the changing world of my teenage sons. Upon my release I was terrified to walk by myself on Miami streets. Everything looked huge – the number of people, the busses, the buildings, the expressways and so on. I used to feel like a tiny strange creature thrown into an unknown big city. The city that was well known to me before my incarceration was completely unknown
to me upon my release. I did not know the new buildings and yet I did not remember the old ones. I was always lost not even knowing where north or south was. The buildings looked like giant space shuttles moving up-down, and side-to-side laughing at me.

The most difficult aspect of reintegration was with my family. My sons were 11 and 22 months old when I went to prison, and upon my release they were teenagers. I was not a part of their lives – they were not ready for me and I was not prepared to adjust myself to fit into their lives. I had to seek help, and my family and I went through psychological and spiritual therapy.

I really do not know if any organization can prepare a prisoner for reentry. Prison breaks down all types of bonds (societal and familial) that take much time to heal. The love, emotional, and spiritual bonds do not easily rebound from the trauma and experience of being imprisoned or having your loved one incarcerated.

Efforts at reintegration must begin as soon as the prisoner enters the prison (Blevins and Arrigo, 2009; Hartwell and Orr, 2009; Wolff, 2009). By analyzing the education level of the prisoner, the length of the sentence, the types of supervised release restrictions applied, the mental and physical condition of the prisoner, and what types of jobs may be available to each prisoner based on their education and work experience, institutions could more adequately assist in re-entry (Blevins and Arrigo, 2009; Hartwell and Orr, 2009; Wolff, 2009). It is important to encourage/allow prisoners to study by correspondence, prison education programs, and through self-study, as well as encourage them to maintain contact with the outside world, especially with people in the field that the released prisoner would like to enter upon their release. I definitely recommend to all prisoners to begin the reintegration process as soon as they enter the prison.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yraida Guanipa served 11 years in a federal prison in the United States as a first-time, non-violent offender who refused to plead guilty to drug conspiracy charges. She went on a hunger strike while incarcerated in protest over her placement in a remote prison too far for her two young sons to visit. She became a self-educated paralegal and was released to a halfway house in 2006. Yraida Guanipa developed an informational and advocacy blog – “Prison Talk Online”, continues to advocate for programs that will help to maintain the mother-child bond and now writes about her experiences as an incarcerated mother. She is available to any student and/or university that would like to do research on these subjects or to a government agency that would like to approach these topics from the perspective of someone who went through the process.
I was six weeks pregnant upon entering a five-year sentence.
This was my drive to not become a statistic... hope you like it... Lynne

This is one thing I could count on as I went through the day to day affairs of my life: A DARK CLOUD! You see, I was one of those teenagers who could get by in high school and not have to worry about the future because once I skated through high school, I knew all there was to know and didn’t need any further learning to get through life!

Not really what you would call street smart, but, common sense was on my side and I could say I had a high school diploma. What else could a person need to start being an adult? If I get on the wrong track, my parents will help me pick-up the pieces and move on, and I really don’t seek to be a rocket scientist or anything major like that. Besides, if I changed my mind later, I had decent grades in high school, so I wasn’t totally against college, just not ready to commit to that yet.

That was my way of looking at things. Does anyone ever really know how their life can change in the blink of an eye? I promise you, they don’t!

But, what is truly amazing is that some of the greatest answers come in the darkest and most unusual places, which is why I feel that through even the worst experience of my life, I was blessed. A PASSING CLOUD. As I go through my day to day affairs now, in this place, I know I am here, but I no longer hold my head down and wonder, “what if”. Now, I am taking action!

I am a female prisoner in a Federal Prison Camp. But, the great thing is that I know this is only A PASSING CLOUD! I know because I am growing. I am growing because I am learning. I am learning because I am adding layers to my foundation of life, one step at a time, with education.

What a word! EDUCATION. It provides all the tools to success, career, smart choices, decisions, speaking, family values, wealth, knowledge, sympathy, empathy, advancement, and above all, direction and self worth! LEARNING! The answer was so simple all along that I don’t quite understand why so many people never get it! Simply put, when you get it, it gives you freedom and growth. Growth like you’ve never known, answers
you’ve never had, and choices that would be permanently untouchable and unreachable without it! How did I miss it? How do so many people miss it?

We, as a society, are so quick to make excuses for the reasons we DON’T need it, that, just like myself, we overlook the many positive reasons we should explore and emphasize it! I shudder to think of the many lost souls that I am surrounded by who have never experienced learning and the freedom it gives you when you set forth on a path of education.

As I sit in my classes at the prison camp, I am so engrossed in what I am learning that I feel as though I have been free forever even though I am, as society says, ‘locked up’. A SILVER LINING! I will not be a statistic. And I will not allow anyone to treat me as one. I have something now that I have earned that most people search for all of their life. What I have is SELF WORTH and DIGNITY! I have ammunition! I have all of the tools to be a successful, kind, contributing member of society.

I came to prison five years ago, pregnant, confused, hurt and lonely. And above all, with a lot of shame and guilt, with absolutely no direction. With the ammunition I have now, I will be leaving here a positive, humble, driven and confident woman. I have a new love called EDUCATION. My partner in life. I will share it with everyone because it is too special to be selfish with.

This is my SILVER LINING! Knowledge, hope, wisdom, self worth, direction and confidence. The sky is the limit! This silver lining will assure that my DARK CLOUD will always be a PASSING CLOUD because there are only sunny days ahead in my future.

Justice Served?

Making sense of it now would never happen.
I looked around and knew that I had stepped into the lions den.

Women with stories of abuse, pain and sorrow.
Most growing up wondering if they would eat tomorrow.

I entered this place unsure and with child.
I quickly realized this process would be anything but mild.

I had heard the phrase ‘going thru the motions’.
Clearly it felt much like waves in the ocean.

My charge is conspiracy, a charge they don’t have to prove.
The only comfort I get is when I feel the baby move.
The sentence was harsh and I am so confused.
Twelve years for that, the prosecutor wasn’t even amused.

The girl next to me murdered her child.
But, she’s only here for a very short while.

Justice served? I think not!
But, that’s what the judge says I’ve got!

My sentence was cut, it’s five years now.
My son has grown, but, I wasn’t there to see how.

Instead I was here, but not in vain.
I studied hard so not to go insane.

I earned two degrees to help me when I get out of this place.
I made it through the nightmare, but only by grace.

The statistics and society say a felon will never be much.
What most don’t realize though is that education is my crutch.

My son is with me now, after all these years.
His resilience and smile always bring me to tears.

Life is good now and I have started to smile.
I must admit though, it took quite awhile.

Strength, it seems, comes from very deep.
The rewards I get now, are all for me to keep.

Justice served? That’s pretty lame.
But, whatever they threw at me, I no doubt overcame!

Things in my life, at present time, I will not allow.
I’ve come too far and not slowing down now.

The time was hard, prayers and study got me through my day.
Because I’m not going back, no how or no way!
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Lynne Elliott* is a former federal prisoner in the United States who entered prison when she was six weeks pregnant. She did not see her child, a beautiful boy, again until he was five years old. While incarcerated, she earned enough college credits for two associate degrees and became a certified paralegal. Upon release, Lynne worked two full-time jobs and held a paper route. She now works for a chemical corporation and has full custody of her little boy who is now almost twelve years old. Lynne’s motto is that “if you are given a second chance, you better give it all you’ve got”.
Much media attention covered the recent 2008 closure of the Mother and Baby Initiative at British Columbia’s Alouette Correctional Centre for Women (ACCW), a program where infants born to mothers in custody were allowed to remain with their mothers. To contextualize this program and its closure, this paper draws on academic, media and grey literature sources, as well as a conversation with the Warden who was responsible for overseeing ACCW at the time. This paper argues that much of the public’s reaction to the program’s closure is due in part to a moral panic, with little regard for what is in the best interest of the affected infants and women, nor the best interest of society. We argue that prison can be the ideal time to break the cycles of abject poverty, abuse and violence in both childhood and adulthood, substance use issues, and social dislocation experienced by women (Martin and Jansen, 2008); therefore, possibly helping reduce recidivism. Finally, the paper will argue for the reinstatement of the mother child initiative in ACCW and for similar programs in other prisons for women in Canada.

The first mother and baby program in Canada began operating in a B.C. jail, the Twin Maple institution program, began during the 1970’s and operated until the institution’s closure in 1991 (Maclean, 1997, p. 32). Maclean estimates roughly 80 mother and baby pairs were part of the Twin Maples program during its fifteen years of operation (ibid, p. 33). The goal of this program was to allow mothers who were willing and able to care for their children while incarcerated. In order to offer more privacy, the women and children were housed in a separate building in Twin Maples. The program attempted to instil these mothers with the skills and work ethic needed to reintegrate successfully into the community by allowing these mothers to work in a B.C. correctional system run and operated community daycare for outside community members (Buddhadasa, 1991, p. 56-57; Maclean, 1997, p. 32).

After the closure of the Twin Maples institution and despite the rather interesting fact that corrections did not have policy or procedures in its branch regarding the programs, another similar mother and baby program began following the opening of the Open Living Unit (OLU) in Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW). BCCW is a provincial correctional facility that has held contracts with Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) that allowed them to house local federally sentenced women,
rather than sending them out of province. According to Maclean (1997, p. 33-35), roughly 35 infants and toddlers spent short periods of time while visiting their mothers in this program, while less than 10 resided with their mothers in the OLU for any substantial period of time. Theoretically, this program was open to all mothers. Although, women wanting to take part in the program were screened and subject to reference checks, as well as checks for prior social services involvement (ibid, p. 35-36). Criteria for acceptance to this program included, but was not limited to: (1) the child being less than two years of age; (2) the mother being abstinent of drugs and alcohol, and working towards addressing those "criminogenic issues" identified by correctional authorities; (3) the child being physically and emotionally suited for the program; and (4) the mother having no prior history of engaging in the physical and/or sexually abuse of children. The mothers at BCCW also ran a daycare that was open to their children, as well as the children of staff members (Martin, 2007).

After the closure of BCCW in 2004, another similar mother and baby program began operating in ACCW. Ruth Martin (2007), one of the prison physicians working in the facility states in a report that during the time this program was in operation, 13 babies were born to mothers incarcerated in Alouette, 8 of whom returned to the institution with their mothers and left the institution in their mother's care. Brenda Tole, the Warden responsible for ACCW at the time, reveals that because there was never any specific mandate, this program was not in fact a "program" but an "initiative" because BC Corrections branch never had any program specific policies in place regarding its operation (personal communication, 2009). Interestingly, at the time of our conversation, Brenda Tole was certain that the Alouette project was merely an initiative, meaning it was not a mandated program and could be removed by BC Corrections. Tole indicated that the onus of caring for these children should not be the responsibility of the corrections branch, but of the mothers and of other ministries. In her view, BC Corrections was there to help facilitate the process while other better suited ministries were expected to run the initiative. Most importantly, Tole stated that no matter what part BC Corrections plays, the Ministry of Children and Families would have to be involved. Following the conversation with former warden Brenda Tole, I concluded that these "non-program initiatives" functioned in a rather unusual way in comparison to other prison programs and appeared to be a way for those working in BC Corrections to remedy a gap in service.
Like so many other newspaper editorials printed at the time, the short editorial published in the *Vancouver Sun*, entitled "Posted by J." well summarizes the public's support for the closure of the mother-child initiative (Anonymous, 2008, p. A21). In this article, "J." vilifies women in prison, contending that prison is an unsafe place for infants and that criminalized women who are mothers gave away their parental rights when they committed crimes. The editorial closes with the author expressing that she is ashamed of the fact that these women are seeking attention in this matter. Eventually, BC Corrections spokeswoman and Director of Programs, Lisa Lapointe, stated in an interview that the Alouette program was discontinued in 2008 because of security concerns (Stark Raven News, 2008), while Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (2008), BC's Representative for Children and Youth, strongly disputed the closing of this program because of perceived security concerns, stating that this decision was harmful to the infants and mothers involved. Staff and prisoners also generally viewed the Alouette initiative, as well as previous incarnations of the initiative, as successful (Maclean, 1997; Martin, 2007; personal communication with Brenda Tole, 2009). Despite the general view that these programs were safe and successful, there is a paucity of information regarding the long-term trajectories of any of the roughly 100 mother and baby pairs from any of the three programs/initiatives that have operated in British Columbia jails and prisons, leaving such initiatives open for criticism.

**MOTHER CHILD INITIATIVES IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

The fact that women constitute a mere 10 percent of Canada's prison population (Statistics Canada, 2006), and because of this population's own unique needs and challenges, it is often difficult to determine what is in the best interest of the children of incarcerated women (Maclean, 1997, pp. iii-iv). However, it is worth noting that there has been a long worldwide history of infants remaining with their incarcerated mothers and that there are specific recommendations from well respected international organizations for such circumstances.

A 1957's United Nations document outlining the minimum standard treatment for prisoners recommended that all women's prisons provide special accommodations for women's pre- and post-natal care, allow nursing infants to remain with their mothers, and provide crèches (childcare facilities)
staffed by adequately trained personnel where infants would remain when not in the care of their mothers (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003). Much more recently, the World Health Organization stated that prison should be viewed as a time of opportunity to improve health outcomes for prisoners through increased health interventions (Møller et al., 2007). Health interventions should quite feasibly include opportunities for mothers who, due to substance abuse issues and accompanying chaotic lifestyles, have lacked pre-natal care. In more extreme cases, some women are unaware that they are pregnant until they are incarcerated and have the opportunity to meet with a doctor (Campbell, 2008). In highlighting the benefit of allowing infants to remain with their mothers while incarcerated, one World Health Organization (2002, p. 7) report states:

Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. As a global public health recommendation, infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond... Wherever possible, mothers and babies should remain together and be provided the support they need to exercise the most appropriate feeding option under the circumstances... Children living in special circumstances also require extra attention – for example... children born to adolescent mothers, mothers suffering from physical or mental disabilities, drug- or alcohol-dependence, or mothers who are imprisoned or part of disadvantaged or otherwise marginalized populations... Breast milk is particularly important for preterm infants and the small proportion of term infants with very low birth weight; they are at increased risk of infection, long-term ill-health and death.

Feminist criminologists have used this information regarding the important health outcomes for women and their children to argue that the Canadian correctional system should allow infants to remain with their incarcerated mothers in order to help improve the infant's, as well as the mother’s, emotional and physical well-being, which consequently may help mitigate
the all too often cyclical nature of inter-generational family dysfunction and incarceration (Finateri, 1999; Hayman, 2007). According to Shawn Bayes (2008) of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, over three-quarters of youth in local youth custody centres report histories of parental arrest and incarceration.

While it would be inaccurate to argue that allowing mothers in custody to keep their infants would end all aspects of familial dysfunction or recidivism, it is reasonable to argue that allowing women to retain custody of their children and supporting them after the mother’s release will help to build and maintain strong family relations that may improve long-term outcomes for both the mother and child. Interestingly, the United States, a country well known for its punitive correctional systems, now has six states operating mother and baby programs. Ohio, Indiana, California, Nebraska and Washington state correctional systems have all followed New York’s 108 year old lead by opening their own mother and baby programs (Gormsen, 2008, Anonymous 2002; Gabel and Johnston, 1995). These programs appear to be quite similar to British Columbia’s correctional mother and baby initiatives, less one major difference—the mother’s trajectories post-imprisonment have been examined. The recidivism rates of mothers involved in the New York mother and baby program were greatly decreased to one-fifth that of the general prisoner population (Gabel and Johnston, 1995). Similarly, the recidivism rates of those mothers who participated in the Ohio prison nursery were also reduced (Anonymous, 2002; Gormsen, 2008).

**CONCLUSION**

Although very few scholars would say that prisons are an ideal environment to rear infants, it is easy to view the importance of allowing them to remain with their mothers when considering the health benefits and potential positive impact on recidivism for both. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to request that BC Corrections reopen the mother and baby initiative. It is also important to remember that “one-size-fits-all” policies do not work and do not ensure equal outcomes for Canadian citizens, particularly in sectors where citizens have been excluded, marginalized, and ignored. Consequently, rectifying the lives of marginalized persons and groups often requires unorthodox remedies because “substantive equality is much more complex and difficult to achieve” (Treasury Board of Canada, 2003).
The evidence that supports the importance of keeping a baby born either in or just prior to a mother’s incarceration with that parent for at least the first two or three years of growth and development is substantial and growing. Since the early 1950s, John Bowlby has researched the process of attachment and the importance of supporting “affectional bonds” (see Bowlby, 1953; 1964; 1988; 1998). It has been a privilege to observe mother-child bonding first-hand in a number of mother baby pairs in a provincial custody setting. One case in particular stands out as confirmation of the importance of the program. A pregnant woman charged in connection with the death of her partner gave birth just prior to her trial. She was able to keep her baby while on remand and eventually transferred to the federal institution for women with her baby girl. Both have grown and developed well, have caused no security issues and neither have been the victim of any unsafe circumstances. The little girl now in her third year is absolutely on schedule developmentally, and the mother has grown and changed in ways I do not believe would have been possible had she not been so focussed on working hard to care for her child. By allowing this woman to parent her child, she has learned the necessary emotional and social skills required to be a good parent and citizen of our community.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Jennifer McMillan* served multiple provincial sentences in Canada and has since come to advocate for prisoner justice. She has served as a Community-based Researcher with Women in2 Healing and with the Doing Time Project, and has spoken at numerous community and academic forums. Jen is currently working as house facilitator for a Women’s Resource Society of the Fraser Valley housing first project and is studying at the University of the Fraser Valley where she works part-time as a research assistant. Jen also spends quite a bit of time in the gym, can often be seen riding around the city on a bright turquoise Yamaha scooter and is really looking forward to bringing home the puppy she recently picked-out named “Tugboat”.

*Alison Granger-Brown* is a Recreation Therapist with a Master’s in Leadership and Training. She has worked on contract for the Correctional Service of Canada for 11 years, bringing leisure and recreation based learning to women in custody to support their healing journey. She also delivers dialectical behaviour therapy skills training for women on parole.
INTRODUCTION

I am going to share pieces of my life that are relevant in explaining why it became so disorderly. I come from a long line of prostitutes, alcoholics, drug addicts, thieves, pimps and dysfunction of one sort or another. I pretty much did not have a chance right from the womb, and it is no one’s fault. It was my destiny. It was the way life would be for many years. My dad moved off the reservation and that is when my life would drastically change.

Had my parents known our lives would become so lost perhaps they would have made different decisions. I have heard people blaming their families, in particular their parents, but I am not one of those people. First of all, my parents are not here to defend themselves nor should they have to. Second of all, it was my choice to become a prostitute, an alcoholic with a drug problem, a thief and a prisoner. What I mean by ‘choice’ is that it was all that I knew, I was not taught anything different and this life became easy to fall into. For example, for me, being on the street was just like when a person gets up and goes to their office job in the morning – I would get up, do my drugs to get through the day and then go off to the bar to my job as a prostitute. By choice I mean that no one forced me to do drugs or sell sex and I do not blame my parents for what I experienced. However, the abuses I suffered as a child did lead me to this life – as a way to cope.

As my addictions kicked in so did my need for money to feed them. I would go to any length to get the things I needed whether they were illegal or not. It did not matter to me. I would live in this world and began my addictions at a very young age and I would continue using into my early thirties. I did not think for a moment about the damage the drug and alcohol use did to my family or to me. My life was dark, forlorn and I would lived in a fog for years. I am going to speak about the sexual abuse that I believe hindered my life. It is important.

SEXUAL ABUSE

I was sexually abused from the time I was three years old until I was eleven. We always tell our children to stay away from strangers – but it was not a stranger that molested me – it was three of my uncles. I had no idea it was
wrong. I would also be told not to tell anyone or bad things would happen to my family. I was also given money to keep quiet. This abuse was at times violent. I remember being so afraid when in the presence of these uncles. That fear led me to learn how to hide and cope with my pain. I would learn to bury the past. I would become an addict. I would abuse myself in all ways possible. I would go as far as attempting to take my own life.

At the age of six I knew what a penis looked like, tasted like, felt like and smelled like. At six, little girls should be playing with dolls and running freely, enjoying their childhood. At six I was a prostitute to my uncles. I wanted to die. I wanted to crawl into the ground and just stay there. I hated myself. I was only six years old. As I matured, I remember thinking that every man who ever came into my life would meet my wrath for what my uncles did to me. They sexually violated me in every way possible and I had no choice but to let them. I was their whore to do with as they so pleased. My wrath would be stronger with age and I was on a mission of total destruction. This is a long story made short. I would become an addict, a prostitute, a thief, a poor mother, a bad lover and it was absolutely a direct result from the sexual abuse I suffered as a child. There is no doubt in my mind. My life path was made for me – it was my destiny.

**ADDICTION: A WORLD ALL OF ITS OWN**

I would begin my addictions at the age of thirteen. I would start by drinking and smoking marijuana. At the age of fifteen I would try my first intravenous drug. By the time I was seventeen I would be a full-blown addict/alcoholic. By the time I was eighteen I was working the street as a prostitute. My life was riddled with darkness. I did not know then that there could be an alternative pathway in life. I cannot imagine how I even survived and lived through this time. I just accepted things as they were because it is all that I knew. There was no other way. It was my ‘normal’. The hardest thing for me was becoming a prostitute because it triggered the dark times spent with my uncles. Therefore, I stayed drunk and/or high in order to cope. I could not stand what I became. I hated my uncles and I would never forgive them for what they did to me. I firmly believe my life happened because of the sexual abuse I suffered as a child.

I would also never have a normal relationship. Although I would get married, it was merely out of spite and not true love. Everything that I did in
my life was directly related to the past events of my life. Alcohol and drugs would be my lover, my friend, my comrade, my mentor and would never be my judge. These things would keep me at bay and would keep me silent, calm and somewhat sane. I drank and did drugs to bury my pain, to bury my life. I did not want to remember and when I did I would drink more or drug more to get rid of the feelings.

I lived for drugs. I lived for alcohol. Men were not important but I would use them when I needed to. I would never feel passion. I would only have two orgasms in my life because I had learned to turn myself off sexually. It was the way my life would be lived. It was my world. It was my normal. It was how I functioned on a daily basis from the time I was thirteen until I was in my early thirties. At the age of eighteen, I would begin my journey in and out of jail.

**GOING TO JAIL**

I had never really done any serious jail time. Then again, I had not been caught for everything that I had done. At times I had come so close to taking another human life, but something always stopped me. I began my jail career in 1971 and the last time I was in was 1986 – fifteen years of my life were spent in and out of jail. Being inside was merely a rest for me. I was a drug addict with an alcohol problem. I also practised bulimia while I was in jail and when I was released it would stop. I was bulimic because I did not want to get fat in jail and I was not used to having access to food all of the time. Compared to what I was used to, the food was really good and there was lots of it. However, there was a point just before I sobered up where I was approximately 250 pounds and the bulimia would stay with me for around a year. Once, I did some research on the negative effects of bulimia and only then did I reach out for medical care.

I would like to share one of the first times I would not pass go and where I went directly to jail. I was eighteen or nineteen years old and I received nine months in jail for theft over a $1000. When I was using drugs I felt like I was invisible and/or invincible, and I would often steal clothes. I failed to notice a former acquaintance who was working in the store as a “floorwalker” – an individual who walks around a store pretending to shop but actually watching for thieves. I used to spend time and use drugs with this woman, and now I would be caught stealing right under her nose. I was very embarrassed.
All I could think of was the dope I would be missing out on and how I'd be in jail over the weekend. I attempted to act tough and I played the part. I could not be kind because it was not a part of who I was at that time. I had a reputation to uphold and so I did. Eventually I came down and I was sick. This was my first time getting caught and my first time in jail. The judge gave me nine months in jail. At first I was afraid because this would be my first stint in jail, but I became unconcerned after some time. Initially, I had no idea what to expect and I had a fear of the unknown. The plane ride to Pine Grove was horrifying. We stopped everywhere to pick-up fellow prisoners. The plane reeked because some of the men hadn't bathed for some time. I was lucky that the matrons at the RC buckets – a slang term we used to refer to RCMP cells – let me wash up before I left. I kept thinking that every time we stopped, that I should make a break for it. But then what would I do? I just could not stand the fact that I was going to jail. It started to sink in – the fear set in hard and fast. That was it. Do not pass go, do not collect your $200, and go directly to jail.

I had no idea what "the Grove" would be like. It turned out to be a duck walk. It was very easy time compared to the life I was living on the streets. However, it was embarrassing because once we arrived we had to be checked for lice and communicable diseases. I felt that I was now just a number, a statistic. The only thing I really disliked was when the matrons would call us by our last names. I have no idea why this bothered me so much, but it did. For the most part the matrons were okay. At Christmas time they brought in all kinds of treats. However, I felt like I did not have the social skills to respond to that type of kindness. As a result of my experiences, I had little compassion and I did not know how to treat anyone outside the realm of my cold desolate world. I did not have any goals or life inhibitions. I did not see myself in a good way at all. For that matter, I was cursed to live an immoral life. My life would become as black as my heart.

The longest stretch I did was about a year, give or take a few months. At this point in my life, I liked jail because I was tough and jail gave me status, a name so to speak. I was the girl. People would move when I walked by. It is intense what that kind of power does for a person. I really believed that I was somebody. People would talk about me like I was a threat and I loved it. I thrived on it. I misused and took advantage of my power. For example, if I saw a man I liked who already had a woman, I would not care, I would just take him for a night or two. When I was done I would kick him to the curb.
I would take things that were not mine just because I could. There would be neither rhyme nor reason for the things I did. 

I met a lot of my street sisters in jail – I wanted so much to be just like them. I would look at them and think, “I have to be like that. I want to be that fierce!” I wanted to be feared. I wanted to be noticed when I walked into a room. I wanted people to move when I walked by. Some did already but I wanted them all to move. I wanted all the power that I could possibly get. I had some of what they had but I wanted more. I always wanted more. I wanted the Devil himself to bow to me. I wanted people to look up to me and to worship me. I wanted to be the most important woman around. I wanted to be dangerous. But who I really became was a full-time loser and nothing more. What is even sadder is that I only became all these things to myself. I was the enemy. I feared me. I moved out of my own way. I was my own worst enemy and it all passed me by like two ships in the night. I had no idea where my ship was heading but most assuredly it would be destructive. What I mean by passed me by is that my life just walked out the back door. From the time I was three years old until I became sober in my early thirties life passed me by. I did not care what happened to me. I did not care what I did to others. And before you know it, I was old and missed my life as it went by. I did not have a childhood, I was not able to be a teenager and I skipped right ahead to being old. My life passed before my eyes.

**USING DRUGS IN JAIL**

I spent countless birthdays and Christmases inside. Jail became my home away from home and a place that I felt almost comfortable being in. I had no fear of jail. I even felt safe there – I had three meals a day, a bed and I was not living on the streets. However, if we could acquire drugs inside we used them. I overdosed once after injecting. I never thought that I could have died right there in that jail cell. I am thankful my girls looked after me. Despite nearly dying from an overdose, I would continue to use drugs. In those days it was pretty easy to get drugs on the inside – prescription medication was the prison’s way of controlling us. If they kept us subdued it was easier to live with us.

Once, while we were preparing for a Halloween dance, I had my friends save me their prescription drugs for two weeks or more. I was given Valium pills, which knocked me out because I was not used to them. I took them
four times a day and I was on my back for most of it. To be very honest I don’t even know why I was on them but I got them so I thought “what the hell, I may as well enjoy the perks”. I had taken about 30 or 40 pills – and I was severely tethered to say the least. I never did anything with caution. My girls looked after me again.

I also did a few months in a ‘joint’ in Burnaby called “Oakalla”. This was a seriously rank joint. It was co-ed but we never saw the men except for on the bus. I was waiting for my court date in an old, rickety building that smelled and felt damp. It was one of those places that should have been torn down rather than used to incarcerate people. It was here that I met other women who revelled in the reputation of being tough. I tried so hard to find my place in this world and just kept having setbacks. There was no place for me, not even in jail. There was never any end to the destruction of my life. I held such a fear in my heart that I cannot explain, but it was there. I so wanted to be loved. I wanted a life. I wanted to be married with 2.5 children and a house with a white picket fence. Seriously, I wanted to be good but I didn’t know what to do or how to do it. I so wanted to be accepted. So I did whatever I was asked. I very rarely said “no”. I lived in a constant state of fear that I thrived on and I prospered from, but only by negative means. The drugs and alcohol kept me in this frame of mind, whether it was on the street or in jail. It was all that I lived for and it was all that I knew. Some days I would just sit in my cell all alone. I just wanted to be alone. I would take a book and just read to fight off the insanity. I would wish for death but it never came.

ON SEGREGATION AND ATTEMPTING SUICIDE INSIDE

Time after time I went to jail for alcohol and/or drug related offences. I was constantly living with self-harm and I lived close to the edge. I wanted to die and I tried to kill myself but it didn’t work. I would yearn for death but it would not come. After an argument with a guard I tried to hang myself because I was so angry. I let this matron (guard) push me to the edge and when I fought back she had to call for assistance to lock me back in my cell. I was confined to my cell for ten days following this incident.

The worst part of jail was being segregated. Segregation was a small hollow place with nothing more than a bed, three walls and bars as a door. There was a sink and a toilet. It was a very degrading place but it was
Sharon Acoose

used as a tool to ensure the personal safety of the guards from women who resisted in some way. If we tried to self-harm, then off to segregation we would go and sometimes we would be made to wear a baby doll. A baby doll is a contraption like a straight jacket so you are not able to kill yourself. I would spend many days in segregation for one thing or another. There would be some days that I would want to go to segregation just to get away from the madness and away from myself. There was no hope, there was only fear. I longed for love and it was not there. I longed to be held and to be nurtured but it was not there. No one told me about life or how it should be and I just walked in darkness. I wanted my mother but she died when I was eighteen. Simply put, the day my mother died, I died. She was the best thing I ever had and the sad part is I never had a chance to tell her. I was totally uninspired with life. I would do my best to cover the real Sharon by hiding behind my fear and portraying myself as a tough broad. What I lacked the most was my sense of self and/or self-identity. I really didn’t know who I was. I knew who I thought I was, but it was not the real me. I didn’t want to be an Indian because of the extreme racism my people faced and I knew I couldn’t be white, so who could I be? I felt only isolation of the body, mind, soul and spirit.

I responded to these feelings by smashing up my cell, yelling, screaming and carrying on. No one came to check on me. I was sitting on the floor of my cell crying wondering what I should do – I was emotionally spent. I decided to hang myself; and began to rip up a sheet, tie it in knots, wrap it around my neck, tie it to the bar in my closet and proceeded to sit to the floor. I could feel my breath leaving, my neck was sore and I was seeing stars. I could feel my eyes popping and I was gurgling to catch my breath. I closed my eyes and waited for death to come. I was happy I was finally going to be at peace. The next thing that happened was that I hit the floor with a great crash. The bar was not strong enough for my weight and it snapped in half. I just sat there crying and laughing all at the same time because I didn’t even know how to kill myself.

STARTING TO THINK DIFFERENTLY

What I hated most about jail was the slamming of the cell doors, the bells and other noises. It drove me nuts. To this day I hate bells. The matrons had a bell and they would walk up and down the corridor waking us up. It
was like being in a black hole – a deep, dark and black hole – an endless pit of self-mutilation and horror. I used to be so scared but I would never let anyone know. I was too solid. I could never show my weakness, as it was not acceptable. To be weak was extremely not cool. At night, sometimes I would curl up on my bunk and cry. When I first went to jail in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan there were no axe murderers or serial killers – it was just women with troubled lives. The sad truth is that I was comfortable in jail. Bells, rules, lights, uniforms and regulations conditioned me. I held myself together so well inside but as soon as I was out it was pure hell in a matter of time. The day that I would get out I would turn to drugs and alcohol – same old, same old. If anything I was consistent. I firmly believe that had I not spent all those times in jail I might be dead.

My world was not normal, as we have figured out thus far. I was a hardcore drug addict with an alcohol issue and nowhere to go. I was alone and I was lost. In all honesty jail was my normal. The street was my normal. Stealing was my normal. Prostitution was my normal. My troubled life was my normal. I felt like I was on an assembly line. I wrote long hopeless letters to my sister-in-law and brother explaining my situation, and how much I was going to change once I got out. It was a never-ending story that was always the same. I always promised that this time I would go straight. It became cyclical and meaningless. The first thing I would do once I got out was go straight to the pusher man. It’s all I knew how to do. But there was this fire, this ember deep in my soul. I did want change but I had no idea how to get it. I continued to make empty promises, not only to myself but also to my family. Those promises were as hollow as my head. I had lots of friends in jail and that is all you needed. In jail, I had a name. I was somebody.

One of the most difficult things for me was the loss of my children. I had a baby at seventeen and another at twenty-three, and my last child at thirty years of age, but my addictions were stronger than my mothering skills. I lost two of these children to the system and would continue to feel an insane guilt for most of my life. I buried this in a sea of addictions so as to not feel the hurt. I would pay the piper. I would feel so much guilt that it nearly killed me. In turn my children would meet the wrath of the world and their lives began to mirror mine, which only added to my feelings of guilt. I had gone astray. I felt like there was no one there to hear my screams. When my cell closed at night I would just lie in that six-by-six foot concrete
room, wondering where had I gone wrong and why? I would do dope if it was there and if not, I would cry myself to sleep like a baby. My toughness would be shed like the skin of a snake and would return when the cell doors slammed open in the morning. There was no room for weakness, but at night when the cell doors shut so did your life as a woman. The weakness would arise like the moon and set like the sun. The emptiness that hid there was insurmountable and devastating to the body, mind, and soul.

Christmas in jail had to be the worst of all. It was lonely, boring, maddening, sickening, deadening, hopeless, remorseful, and mostly – it was desperate. There were no calls, no visits, nothing. It was just girls all feeling the same way about a day that is supposed to be the best day of the year. You felt totally alone. There have been many, many lonely moments in my life. It would take many years to find ‘me’. Once I became sober, my journey would not be easy.

And then a miracle happened. I stayed alive. I survived. I would say these words, “Hello, my name is Sharon Acoose and I am an alcoholic with a drug problem”. That simple statement would change my life. It would be the best thing I could have ever done. I would learn to deal with all my pain. I would learn to deal with all the ills and my life would change over time. I am alive. I am sane. Most importantly I am sober with no drug addictions.

CONCLUSION

Ah yes, I rose from the ashes! Each day that I am still on top of the earth is a good day. I have eighteen years of sobriety. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Justice (1993). I have a Master’s degree in Social Work (1995). And, I am presently enrolled in a Doctorate of Philosophy through the University of Saskatchewan, College of Medicine in Community Health and Epidemiology. I never thought any of these things would be at all possible. You know I thought I would be dead before I was twenty and I am now fifty-six. I am neither special nor unique, but these experiences are miraculous. I lived a long, hard and colourful life but it was all worth it. There truly is life after death. I have proven to myself what I can accomplish and I will never stop learning. I love who I am today.

I have forgiven myself for my wrongs – I had to in order to heal. I have a pretty good life today. I have full connection with my youngest daughter and her five children. I have partial connection to my eldest daughter but no
connection with her five children. And, I have partial connection with my son who has no children. All I can say is that I continue to feel for what I did to my children and for the sexual abuse I suffered as a child, but now, I feel free. I feel so nourished. In order to not die I had to let go of my past and I have. I came from the ashes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Acoose served provincial sentences over a number of years in Canada, and has since gone on to complete an undergraduate degree in Human Justice and an Master’s degree in Social Work from the University of Regina. She is currently working on her Ph.D. and is Assistant Professor of Social Work at the First Nations University of Canada. She is actively involved in a national research project spearheaded by Dr. Colleen Anne Dell that is investigating the role of stigma and identity in Aboriginal women’s healing journeys from problematic substance use.
Angels All around Me

D. Drummond

Are there such things as angels?
Somehow I think it’s true
Cause when things get to hard to bear,
It’s them that pulls me through.
I’ve found the strength to come this far,
Just by the grace of God
But have I been true to me?
Or was I just a fraud?
Of some things, I have no memories,
Why? Were they too hard to face?
I have to bring them back to me
Or I’ll be stuck here in this place.
Do I have the will to face the truth?
Of the things I may have done.
Lives were ruined, I must deal with this
I know the time has come.
Will the angels help to see me through?
I’m sure on them I can depend.
To hold my hand and dry my tears
Until the very end.
There are angels all around me
Of this I am quite sure.
I thought I knew of all there was
But they showed me there was more.
Now they are here right with me now, strengthening my mental state.
To restore some peace to those I’ve hurt
I pray it’s not too late.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

D. Drummond is currently serving a federal sentence in Canada. This poem was written in 2008.
This is Who I Am: Aboriginal Women’s Healing from Criminalization and Problematic Drug Use
Colleen Anne Dell, Valerie Desjarlais and Jennifer M. Kilty

INTRODUCTION

Illicit drug use amongst criminalized Aboriginal women is a serious health concern in Canada. Little is understood about how women’s healing is impacted by their views of themselves as, and the stigma associated with being, a drug user, involved in crime and an Aboriginal woman in Canadian society. In this article we address two ways in which women’s often silenced voices have uniquely guided a national research project: (1) experiential knowledge as methodology, and (2) experiential knowledge in knowledge translation. To engage with such a methodology we must begin by re-centring the voices and experiences of Aboriginal women. To do this we draw on the life history narrative provided by team member and former prisoner Valerie Desjarlais, who shares her story of healing from criminalization and problematic drug use throughout this article. Story sharing was identified as an important part of the women’s healing journeys and understanding of who they are. For example, Desjarlais writes:

For myself, I found that alcohol and popping pills medicated the aches and pains of internal suffering. As a result of my addictions I became an inmate in both the provincial and federal system. The type of alcohol and drug treatment I received for my alcoholism and pill popping would not be received in any particular treatment centre. It would be a treatment centre director that would direct my path to finding the key that held me prisoner in my own world. It is through this direction that led me to find sobriety for what it really is and to find myself and be proud of who I am and how I choose to live my life.

– Valerie Desjarlais, 2006

We draw on Valerie’s story throughout this article as a way to situate her experiential reality as knowledge and as a way to ground the next stage of our research process – knowledge translation. To translate this knowledge to a wider audience we collaborated with Aboriginal singer/songwriter Violet Naytowhow to develop a song based on our initial research findings specific to identity, stigma and healing.
BACKGROUND

The problematic use of drugs amongst Aboriginal women is a serious health concern in Canada. According to the 2002-2003 First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, although the documented rate of past year illicit drug use is low (7.3 percent) among First Nations (9.3 percent for men, 5.3 percent for women), it is still more than double the rate of the general Canadian population (3.0 percent) (First Nations Centre, 2005, p. 116). Aboriginal women also make up a disproportionate percentage of Canada’s injection drug use (IDU) population, and IDU is a key mode of Hepatitis C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission (Barlow, 2003; Craib et al., 2003). Between 1998 and 2003, 66.9 percent of all HIV-positive tests among Aboriginal women were attributable to IDU (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004). Aboriginal women, including First Nations, are also over-represented in Canada’s criminal justice system, including incarceration at the federal and provincial levels (Balfour and Comack, 2006; Dell, 2001a). Incarceration itself is a well-documented health risk (e.g. inadequate care) (Arbour, 1996; Kilty, 2008). In 2006, Aboriginal women made up 31 percent of the federal prison population (Correctional Service Canada, 2006, p. 12), while Aboriginal peoples represent approximately 3.3 percent of Canada’s total population (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Little is understood about how women’s healing from problematic drug use is impacted by their views of themselves as, and the multiple stigmas associated with being, Aboriginal, criminalized, and a drug user. Current research evidence suggests that the effects of competing role expectations and stigma are harmful, though minimal research exists in the substance abuse (Link et al., 1997; Ridlon, 1988) and criminal justice fields (van Olphen et al., 2009), particularly research that is specific to Aboriginal women and the gendered function of colonialism (Carter, 1997; Scott, 1992). In 2005, our team was awarded a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) grant to examine the role of stigma and identity in the healing journeys of criminalized Aboriginal women from illicit drug use. Interviews were conducted with 65 First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in treatment for illicit drug abuse at 6 National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) treatment centres across Canada, and 20 women who completed treatment. The majority of individuals interviewed were of First Nations descent.
Our team’s collaborative, multi-year project was spearheaded by the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, which steers the First Nations and Inuit addictions system in Canada towards holistic, culturally-relevant seamless addictions services, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse – Canada’s national, non-governmental addictions agency, and Carleton University. The University of Saskatchewan joined as a principal investigator in 2007. We compiled a research team and advisory group that represented a diversity of experiences as well as expertise. It is this diversity and recognition of everyone’s equitable contributions that has been the mainstay of our project. Members of our team include Aboriginal treatment providers, First Nations women who have been in drug treatment and/or prison, treatment centre directors, Aboriginal Elders, academic researchers, community agencies working with criminalized Aboriginal women, as well as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal research assistants. We also have three expert mentors to provide advice to our team in specialized areas, including traditional Aboriginal healing, drug treatment and rehabilitation. From its inception and through each stage of the research, community involvement and partnership founded and directed our project.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AS METHODOLOGY

To work toward achieving our team’s goal of contributing original knowledge to the treatment field, we grounded our project in a community-based participatory approach to research – research that produces knowledge with rather than on marginalized community members (Stoecker, 2003; Flicker et al., 2006), Aboriginal methodologies that serve Aboriginal interests (Gilchrist, 1997; Schnarch, 2004) and feminist methodologies that privilege women’s experiences (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Pederson, 2002), as well as adherence to the OCAP principles (ownership, control, access, possession) and the CIHR Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People (Schnarch, 2004; CIHR, 2007). Central to our team’s work with the women we interviewed, as well as each other, was understanding and respecting that no one form of knowledge was privileged over another (e.g. academic versus lived experience).

Our method of research differs from a conventional Western scientific approach to understanding. Our team is committed to doing research that has been identified by others as being done ‘by, for and with’ women in
drug treatment and not 'on' them (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Fitzgerald, 2004). We have extended this concept to include doing research in balance with the community. Our inclusion of Aboriginal women’s experiential voices challenges the Western scientific method as being the only way to produce empirical knowledge. Contrary to our work, Western science does not typically accept people’s everyday experiences as valid ‘knowledge’ (Tickner, 2005). Similarly, it does not generally work in collaboration with the holders of such knowledge (Smith, 1999). Respect for multiple voices and experiences is foundational to our project. Our team came to its understanding of respect over time, by working together and with the guidance of two Aboriginal Elders.

We designed our study with the intent to respect the rights, beliefs and values of everyone involved, including criminalized Aboriginal women who had abused drugs. For example, we began our project by documenting the personal healing journeys of three women on our research team. Alongside the academic literature, their healing journeys informed our research in multiple ways, from directing our research focus to the content of our interview schedule and storytelling guide. For example, through Valerie’s own desire to heal the wounds that kept her silent as a young woman and mother, she brought her life experiences, education and professional understandings to the research project. Valerie’s story advanced our team’s understanding of Aboriginal women’s healing in several key areas not identified in the extant literature, including explaining the significance and meaning of community, along with the central role of hope in individual healing. One of the overarching themes in Valerie’s story is the impact of stigma on self-identification and thus on the generation of competing identities. The following is some of what Valerie shared:

*Stigma* — I always thought belonging to a specific group of people is what identity meant. I grew up near a little village called Lestock, Saskatchewan. My late mother was a treaty Indian up until she married my dad whom was considered non-status and as a result she lost her status. In early elementary years, some of the Indian kids at school would say, “my mom or dad said you’re nothing but a ‘damn half-breed’”. On the other hand, some of the little white kids would say “you’re an Indian” and I would go home and cry to my kokum asking her “What does that mean?” I remember her hugging me and saying “you’re like me, you’re an Indian, never mind what they say”. But,
on Treaty Days (five dollar day), I would watch all my Indian relatives line-up and get their five dollars; as young as I was, I felt ‘different and ashamed’ because I didn’t know ‘who I was or what I was’.

It was difficult to figure out what I was or where I belonged because a lot of the times I lived on the reserve with my grandparents. Then, in the winter times we always moved to live with my mom on the Métis farm, off the reserve. To get to school, we rode the bus with the white kids and to think back, I liked that. It made me feel white, I guess – superiority over my own race of people.

_Incarceration of Body, Mind and Spirit_ – As a result of my stealing and lying, I ended up at Pine Grove Correctional Centre for many charges of Break and Enter, wilful damage and theft. While in there, I met an old school friend and she seemed ‘solid and right on’. There was this mental projection that I had to become ‘tough and solid’, meaning I can take all that is dished out to me and would stay true to my friends. My friend introduced me to pills and weed, and by the time my four months of a six-month sentence was up, I knew what ailments to describe to the doctor to get valium or Ts & Rs.

When I came back home, I started introducing my own relatives to what I learned could be a cheap and quick way to get ‘stoned’. I soon ended-up in jail again for forty-five days. The social worker in Pine Grove said I was a chronic alcoholic and I should look at treatment. I used his prognosis of me to my advantage, a scam to get out early. I agreed to go to the Native Alcohol Centre in Regina a few weeks before I was actually to be released. It would be the first time I met my Elder sponsor because he was the Treatment Director of that centre. Anyway, I lasted a few days in that place and took off back to home in Lestock.

The same cyclic pattern occurred again, this time I committed a more serious offense of robbery with violence – I got nine months. This would be the last time I would be in Pine Grove. While serving this sentence I escaped custody twice in which one of those escapes we over-powered the guards. The sentence from the courts ran consecutive to the current sentence I was serving at that time and I ended up with three years. I was eighteen years old and was being sent to the ‘pen’. I was scared, but I didn’t show it.
Three months from the time I was sent to Kingston Prison for Women (P4W) I had open-heart surgery. The women serving life befriended me and really took the time to talk to me about trying to change my life. One of the women told me "even if you feel no one gives a shit about you, you got to learn to start caring for yourself" and "if no one believes in you, you got to learn to believe in yourself, this is not the place for you".

That longing I felt to once again feel loved and safe started surfacing, only this time the lifers were becoming my family, they gave me that sense that I was no longer alone. Their words and caring tones reminded me so much of my Kokum. I was at Kingston for nine months when I won my appeal and got time served on my sentence. I was so scared to leave the penitentiary. I already knew what was going to happen. But, I got put on the train and headed back – how I dreaded that trip.

Sure enough the same cyclic addictive pattern started occurring. I was drinking, popping pills, smoking up and trying to crank up. I felt hopeless and helpless, like I couldn’t cope any longer. So once again, I deliberately took all my pills and ended-up in the psych ward in Regina Hospital. I felt I belonged there, because I actually felt I was going crazy insane. I spent about three weeks there and was discharged with nowhere to go and no one to go to. They told me I was suffering from depression.

I stayed in Regina with a friend of mine from the reserve and slowed down on the drinking for a while, but continued to pop pills. One weekend we partied all weekend long, quite a few of us. It was on a Sunday evening when I got the news that one of my friends I was partying with passed away from a drug overdose. I remember going into shock and couldn’t believe it. She had two little kids and it was they who found her. As I was being told this, I had this mental image of those kids finding their mom, and how devastating and traumatizing it must’ve been.

I went to the wake and funeral, and seeing those little kids tear stained faces stirred something in my heart. I remember thinking, here was a mother who loved her children very much, and now they’ve been robbed of that love because of alcohol and drugs. For some reason after that I just quit taking pills, but kept on with the alcohol and smoking weed. I end up
leaving for Alberta with the thought in my head, that maybe I could make things different over there. But things never changed. I end up in my first common-law relationship with a guy who loved booze, women and loved to abuse. After the third beating in a year, I headed back to Lestock.

When I was twenty-one, I got into a car accident with my cousin. Of course we were drunk and I started popping pills again, so we were both stoned when we hit the grader on a grid. I was going to court for Impaired Driving and met an older guy who was the native court-worker at that time. I received fine option and started to do some work for this guy. Little did I know he would become my husband and we'd have two kids together. Anyway, he was in A.A. and used to ask me to go along with him to some A.A. meetings – sure why not. The meetings weren't my interest, he was. So I would go, just to try and snag him – he kind of reminded me of my ex in Alberta and I know now that was a rebound thing. We ended up living common law five months after we met.

Well, trying to sober up for him didn’t work, because I always ended up drinking and I would try to fight him. Whenever I felt he gave up on me, I would crumble like hell for him to take me back. I was really desperate for intimacy, to feel close to someone again. When I found out I was pregnant, I was so happy because now I was going to have someone to love me. But, I ended up drinking again during my pregnancy. After my first daughter was born, eleven months later I gave birth to another daughter. I really tried to sober up, but I battled with it and used every excuse in the book to cling to a lifestyle I had become conditioned to. This pattern became a cycle for about six years, but each time the length of time I stayed sober and straight was longer and longer. The longest was eighteen months before I relapsed and went out for my last drink.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE IN KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

Our team's initial introduction into knowledge translation was featured in the CIHR Institute of Health Services and Policy Research Publication, *Evidence in Action, Acting on Evidence: A Casebook of Health Services and*
Policy Research Knowledge Translation Stories. In our article, "Responding from Within: Women and Self-Harm" (Dell et al., 2006, p. 33) we commented that our research approach “resulted in a holistic appreciation of the issue and sparked a series of partnered research initiatives with multi-sector involvement. Working in a team founded on diversity and committed to shared decision making was challenging but ultimately positive, and has led to ongoing research and knowledge translation activities”. This continues to hold true today within our team’s approach to sharing our research findings. Our team has a steadfast commitment, and we would identify a responsibility, to share the outcomes of our project so that others can benefit from it. As Ho et al. (2004, p. 70) note, “[n]on-incorporation of the knowledge generated by research into mainstream health practices greatly diminishes its value”. The key question for our team was how to do this while honouring and respecting women’s experiential voices.

Our team held a gathering in February 2009 to develop a song based on the key overarching findings of our study in relation to stigma, identity and healing. Our team collaborated with Woodland Cree singer/songwriter and Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards nominee, Violet Naytowhow. Approximately 30 individuals attended the gathering, including government and non-government decision makers, women we interviewed, researchers, treatment providers and Elders. Our goal was to collaboratively create a song portraying the healing experiences of Aboriginal women who have struggled with criminalization and drug abuse. We chose the unique form of song creation because of its neutrality among all of our team attendees (e.g. none are song writers).

Violet’s introduction to song writing with the group was analogous to story writing – with an introduction, body and conclusion. Our team focussed on the importance of drafting an ending that leaves the listener with an inspiring and forward moving message. Our team also listened to several different genres of songs to give us ideas of melody. The song writing process involved our team being divided into four groups to brainstorm three separate lyrics for the song (i.e., introduction, middle and ending). The fourth group focused on the bridge/chorus. Each group was facilitated by an individual familiar with the song writing process: Violet Naytowhow, Talla Tootoosis, Jonothon Couchman and Douglas Purcell. Lyrics were constructed based on the themes from data analysis summary reports produced prior by the team, alongside individual’s contributions from their own experiences.
After the individual groups composed their lyrics, they met together with Violet to review and work on the combined set of lyrics. The group also discussed different ways to frame the song. For example, having the song begin with drumming and an Elder speaking, and ending it with children’s laughter. Following the conclusion of our gathering, Violet and guitarist Kevin Joseph worked with the song for the next several weeks to add a melody. The draft of the song was distributed to all team members, including those not able to attend the gathering, for feedback prior to it being officially released in May 2009. The song is available at http://www.nnapf.org.

**FROM STILETTOS TO MOCCASINS**

I survived through the pain  
Many emotions like waves  
Laughing and crying again and again  
Honesty, strength, friends and devotion  
Showering gifts of hope to reclaim

Walking the streets dragging my heart  
Wandering with my head held down in shame  
When and how did my family fall apart  
Who am I, what is my name?

**BRIDGE:**  
Surviving the street lost and alone  
I started a journey to find my way home

**CHORUS:**  
From stilettos to moccasins  
Our spirit dances within  
On our way to resolution  
We find our peace  
And this is who I am

Broken barriers and new discoveries  
My spirit I now reclaim  
Coming home to who I am  
Taking honour in my name
No longer a prisoner lost in this world
  Look within my shell
  To find that pearl

CHORUS:
  From stilettos to moccasins
  Our spirit dances within
  On our way to resolution
  We find our peace
  And this is who I am


The song release took place at a fundraising event for the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan, a non-profit organization committed to assisting women in conflict with the law. The event at which it was released, titled “Rebels with a Cause”, honours ‘rebel’ women in Saskatchewan who have made significant contributions to their communities. These women are ‘rebels’ because of their strength, feistiness, innovation and determination to create change in their communities. The guest Rebel of the evening was Tantoo Cardinal, the widely acclaimed Canadian and award winning actress from theatre, television and film. One local Rebel awardee was our research team member – Valerie Desjarlais. Valerie, who is always humble, notes that the designation of ‘rebel’ fit her well because she felt that because of her past incarceration and involvement in the federal correctional system she was prevented from doing things she has wanted to. Valerie acknowledged that being able to assist others through her community service and involvement in our larger research project is a means for her to “help give others a voice”.

CONCLUSION

Our team’s respectful approach to including women’s stories and voices throughout the research process, from its design to knowledge translation products, reflect our attempt to serve Aboriginal interests through research. In particular, we worked together to legitimate, celebrate and honour the voices of the women we spoke to who are silenced through stigma,
shame, as well as discrimination from criminalization and problematic drug use. From its inception, our approach has recognized that the history of research within Aboriginal communities is fraught with disrespect and the appropriation of power. Our attempts to generate knowledge from a research process that is by, for and in balance with the voices of Aboriginal women is a unique contribution to understanding and an honour for each member of our team to be a contributing member to. There is an insurgence of negative stereotypes of Aboriginal women in Canada, and specifically women in conflict with the law (Monture-Angus, 1999; Dell, 2001b) and illicit drug users (Boyd, 2004; Murphy and Rosenbaum, 1999). Hopefully this song as well as stories like Valerie’s will assist with addressing this. Since the creation and release of the song, the team has worked tirelessly to produce a video and teaching guide for the song so that it can be used in the treatment centres where the interviews took place. The video can currently be viewed and/or listened to on different websites, including:

Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=91707422584

YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QRb8wA2iHs

NNAPF:

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Migwetch, Kitatamihin, Mikwec, thank you ... to the Creator and all others who have guided and walked alongside us on our ‘research journey’. We had the honour to speak and share in the lives of women in treatment centres, treatment staff, and women who had completed treatment programs across Canada. The women who shared their stories highlighted the importance for them to share their experiences so others could benefit from them. Your courage, strength and commitment is our team’s inspiration. Through the development of tools like the song and story sharing discussed in this paper, your voice will continue to inform and inspire many others on their healing paths from criminalization and drug abuse, as well as those working with them.
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Along with being the Research Chair in Substance Abuse, Colleen Anne Dell is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and School of Public Health at the University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Dell is a Senior Research Associate with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Canada’s national non-governmental addictions agency and the Correctional Service of Canada Addictions Research Centre. She is also an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University and a Research Associate with the National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research at McGill University and the Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. She is currently leading a five-year national study of the role of stigma and identity in Aboriginal women’s healing journeys from problematic substance use.

Valerie Desjarlais is a Saulteaux woman and a student of Cree ways. Following her incarceration she earned a Bachelor’s degree in Human Justice from the University of Regina. Valerie is a therapist and trainer in Focusing Therapy, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Domestic Violence, and Chemical Dependency. Valerie’s traditional purpose is to be speaking Cree by the time she is 50 so she could teach her children and grandchildren (all children) to find balance, as well as survive in the modern ways of today and to keep passing down the traditional ways of the ancestors. Valerie’s future academic goal is to work towards a second degree in Specialized Education and obtain her Master’s in Justice Studies.

Jennifer Kilty is Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. Her primary area of research interest is criminalized women – their experiences of incarceration and reintegration, their adoption of self-harming behaviours, and their construction as ‘violent’, ‘dangerous’ and/or ‘risky’. Using identity and citizenship theories, Professor Kilty examines how different health and mental health statuses come to affect the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of identity in prison and post incarceration. Much of this work is based on discussions of rights and ethics of care, and is framed by a prison abolitionist standpoint.
The United States is one of the most violent societies in the world. Whether we like it or not, intend to or not, our society teaches children that it is ok to use violence to get what you want. We make violence look cool and sexy. The tougher you are the more people will respect you.

– Tapp 1992, p. 10

These people are trying to erase our pasts and destroy our futures.

– Merrie Lehning, incarcerated woman who killed her male batterer, serving a 52 year sentence in Texas.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2001) the United States has one of the highest rates in the world of domestic violence against women. An estimated 78-84% of American women are survivors of domestic violence. These facts should not be surprising to anyone. What is surprising is how survivors are treated by the state, community and criminal justice system. In my research on the sexual harassment of female news workers, I found that male batterers / harassers / rapists employ four strategies when confronted with their misdeeds: 1) they lie; 2) they deny; 3) they blame the victim (say she “deserved” it); and 4) they call the victim “crazy” (Marston, 1993).

These victim-blaming strategies date back to the Burning Times, the mass gynocide/femicide by-fire of between 200,000 to 9 million women at the hands of those seeking to establish and further the then-nascent male-dominated church and ‘medical’ profession by murdering women healers, and goddess priestesses and worshippers (Budapest, 2007). In her book Witch: the Wild Ride from Wicked to Wicca, Canadian feminist historian Candace Savage (2000) juxtaposes the techniques and devices used to torture ‘witches’ with those being used to psychiatrize women today. Savage (2000, p. 71) writes that the witch and ‘hysterical’ women are discursively one and the same, and that while we have moved away from burning women at the stake, using ovarian compressions and uterus fumigators, we have not stopped psychiatrizing women. This paper will show that battered women are no longer only psychiatrised as hysterical for their reactions to the violence to which they are subjected to the hands...
of men, but that they are also criminalized and imprisoned as a result of their victimhood.

In fact, the Witch hunt can be considered to be ongoing in the U.S., especially in Texas. In Texas we can see this larger context of denial and blame playing out in the justice system’s response to male violence against women. In the Lone Star state the fact is that on a domestic violence call, the Texas police arrest battered women instead of their male batterers at least 20 percent of the time, according to the Texas Council on Family Violence. This misogynist atrocity only happens 3 percent of the time in most other states. Consider these findings which suggest, unfortunately, Texas is not unique in its practice of criminalizing female survivors of domestic violence:

In Wichita, for example, women were 27% of those arrested for domestic violence in 2001 (Wichita Police Department, 2002). Prince William County, Maryland, saw the number of women arrested for domestic violence triple in a three-year period, with women going from 12.9 percent of those arrested in 1992 to 21 percent in 1996 (Smith, 1996). In Sacramento, even greater increases were observed; there, the number of women arrested for domestic violence rose by 91 percent between 1991 and 1996, whereas arrests of men fell 7 percent (Brown, 1997). Finally, a recent California study found that the female share of domestic violence arrests increased from 6 percent in 1988 to 16.5 percent in 1998 (Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis, 1999). African-American girls and women had arrest rates roughly three times that of white girls and women in 1998: 149.6 compared with 46.4. (Chesney-Lind, 2002, p. 83).

These findings show that the problem is widespread, firmly entrenched in the U.S. criminal justice system, and that my experiences are part of the wider struggle of facing other criminalized survivors.

Gloria Steinem wrote in Revolution from Within (1992) that the only “violence” women commit is in the defence of themselves or their children. Indeed, this is not a crime, but a form of self-defence. Even Texas has a self-defence waiver in Chapter 9 of the Texas Penal Code. However, as Susan Faludi (1991) discusses in Backlash, some men believe that it is their right to control and beat women. For example, in 2007, the Philadelphia Women’s Rights community voiced their disdain when the city hired and promoted male police officers with arrest records for committing battery
(Police Beat, 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that the mostly male American police forces are arresting battered women.

By arresting female survivors of battering, Texas is part of a misogynist jurisprudence and police practice that acts to empower some men to batter women with the knowledge that the police and courts will aid them in an ultimate act of victim-blaming: the arrest of the battered woman herself, slandering her, stigmatizing her as the problem, and silencing her through Texas' notorious prisons and jails. The incarceration of female abuse survivors is happening in Texas amid a longstanding nationwide movement to free and exonerate battered women in other states, as Ms. reported on the movement in its Fall 2007 issue in an article entitled "Freeing the Survivors". Even battered women who killed their batterers in self-defence are being freed and exonerated, but not here in Texas.

Why is it that states like California are leading the movement to free and exonerate battered women, while Texas is knuckle-dragging in the Dark Ages of patriarchal violence? The late feminist and Texan political writer, Molly Ivins (1971), explains what she calls "Lone Star state culture [as ...] a marriage of several strains of male chauvinism there is the machismo of our Latin tradition; the Southern belle concept of our confederate heritage; the pervasive good ol' boyism; the jock idolatry (football is not a game here, it is a matter of blood and death); and most important, the legacy of the frontier as it was when John Wayne lived on it". To the Texan male who already believes he is an outlaw cowboy, the woman's body is one more piece of territory to be colonized: to be literally wrangled and hogtied.

I know this because I have done five years on a ten-year sentence with no prior felony convictions for being a woman in a misogynist state that is completely out of touch with common decency, national jurisprudence and proper police practice. Twice in 2004, the Austin Police found my abusive ex-boyfriend and/or his best friend on top of me, beating me and trying to kill me. Both times the police intervened only to immediately arrest me without cause, failed to help me or to arrest my batterers. These officers showed little concern for my well-being and in fact laughed at me when they were not verbally abusing me. These incidents happened eleven months apart. The first took place on January 13, 2004 when my abusive ex-boyfriend tried to smother and choke me to death. There is evidence that he raped me while I was unconscious — I had bruises on my inner thighs. When I regained consciousness I reached for the phone to call 911. He then grabbed
the phone out of my hand, which is a misdemeanour — "interference with a 911 call". When the operator answered, I screamed "HELP!", and he hung-up the phone and beat me for ninety minutes. The police never came. It was only when he dragged me outside and recruited his friend to join in beating me that a neighbour called 911 and the Austin Police Department arrived, and found both men on top of me.

In the United States, the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution mandates that a citizen can only be arrested on probable cause. It also bans illegal searches, seizures and arrests. Chapter fourteen of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure delineates the very few situations in which a peace officer can arrest someone without first going to a judge for a warrant. Witnessing a "crime in view", battering, and "interference with a 911 call" are a few of the scenarios under which Texas police may arrest without warrant. Subsequently, my arresting officer had to fabricate ex post facto probable cause for my arrest. I was originally charged with two misdemeanours: assault family violence and interference with a 911 call. By the time I was magistrated for bond, twelve hours later, the first charge was upgraded to a first degree felony for burglary. The second charge was intended to cover-up the fact that the police did not come when I screamed for help on the phone to 911.

On December 13, 2004 the abusive friend of my abusive ex-boyfriend chased me down in broad daylight. He tackled me and tried to kill me by grinding my face into the cement to smother me as he said, "Either I'll kill you first, or the cops will get you, you bitch!" That should turn your stomach and spark your outrage, as should the fact that this murderous man was right: as I was going unconscious and could taste the blood in my mouth from him tearing open my face, smothering me into the concrete, a police officer pulled-up to the curb five feet from my head. The officer laughed with my assailant, just as the January 13, 2004 arresting officer had done with this batterer and my abusive ex. Please note that in the original case my ex-boyfriend ran and got his friend to join in after beating me to a bruised, bloody mass and breaking my foot in two places. If the first unlawful arrest had been quickly and properly adjudicated to exonerate me and arrest my batterers, the second attempt on my life would never have occurred. Where would these abusive men get the idea that they could beat and kill a woman, and that the cops would arrest HER? From the larger American context of blaming women for the male violence committed against them and obviously from the Texas justice system.
In her seminal book *Backlash* (1991), Susan Faludi reported that the largest growing group among the homeless in the 1980's were battered women who had fled their batterers with their children. Surely that group is even larger now, especially with the massive economic downturn of 2008-2009. This is largely due to the vulnerability of female workers in a sexist economy that still pays only 78 cents on a man's dollar and fewer benefits (Albeda, 2009). Also a result of living in a patriarchal society, sexist attitudes that force women to shoulder the blame for their own abuse assume that a woman can go to her father/parent for help, take for granted that a woman can easily apply for and live on public assistance, or pressure a woman to find another man to support her. In 2001, when I told friends I was being battered, the response was “Oh, you need to leave him” with no offer of support after I said, “I have no money and nowhere to go”. I was advised to sell my property and leave my batterer—the onus was on me, as I was part of the problem for not leaving, not on my batterer for abusing me.

We cannot assume a battered women’s shelter is an option for all women. They are underfunded and have limited space, making it difficult for some, particularly women with children, to seek refuge. We must also avoid telling a battered woman: “You need to sell all your property and leave” as if it is free to replace our property, and as if we do not have irreplaceable documents and mementos, and so on. I would have left my batterer a year earlier, in 2001, if I had had the money, safe housing, job and other support I needed to survive. After I left my batterer, the lack of much needed support and the lack of a well-paying job forced me to return to him for help. It was during this time that my mom disclosed the 40 years of abuse she had suffered at the hands of my dad. Battering is a community problem. Despite this there is little community support or understanding. For example, a potential employer of mine told me “good luck with your personal problem”, knowing quite well that I was trying to get a financial foundation to move back to Texas to help my mom and knowing that I am, myself, a survivor of domestic violence.

In the United States, Domestic Violence Awareness Month falls in October, when Samhain/Halloween occurs, which is the most sacred Pagan Sabbat that honours the Pagan New Year and the Dead, including those murdered during the Burning Times (Savage, 2000; Budapest, 2007). This October and every day, citizens need to challenge the victim-blaming of female survivors and help to STOP violence against women. To help bring about changes we must write Texas officials and demand
they free and exonerate battered women like me. We must demand Texas legislators reinstate and expand Senate Committee Resolution 26 which was eradicated when George W. Bush became governor in 1994. SCR-26 created protections for battered women and created the Texas Council on Family Violence. The latter recommended pardons for battered women in the early 1990's during Governor Ann Richards' tenure, which the Board of Pardons and Paroles rejected. Write to President Obama and Vice President Biden and insist that they pay attention to this extremely pressing issue, and take action to end violence against women. We must tell Texas officials that the police arrest battered women and that the police who do arrest battered women, as well as the attorneys who prosecute them need to be held accountable for their complicity in allowing and perpetuating violence. Battering is a public safety emergency! Do not forget to demand generous monetary compensation, both from the state and batterers, for battered women's losses, injuries and time, jobs worthy of our educational and professional accomplishments, and sustainable, reasonable salaries for all battered women, as well as safe houses and communities to live in.

Black feminist cultural critic and writer bell hooks (2000) says that most Americans agree that they are against violence against women. However, as she points out in her book *All About Love: New Visions*, very few people want to put their beliefs into action to end battering. Why? As hooks (2000, p. 90) says, "When you explain that we can only end male violence by challenging patriarchy, and that means no longer accepting the notion that men should have more rights and privileges than women because of biological differences or that men should have the right to rule over women, that is when agreement stops". It is unthinkable and repugnant that people would not want to end battering especially since men often witness violence against their mothers or were themselves subject to male violence as children.

To end battering, we need to rethink gender roles and gender assumptions, as bell hooks (2000) suggests. We must quit thinking of women as belonging to their father, if single, or husband, if married. When a woman says she is being battered, the response should be, "I'm so sorry he's doing that. How can I help?" We should accompany the woman to make a police report or help her find shelter for herself and her children, protect her property, and we should provide on-going support. This paper has shown that the real "cycle of violence" emerges as a result of continued victim-blaming and patriarchal gender assumptions. Texas takes misogyny to its most violent extreme and to a uniquely unthinkable, repugnant conclusion: promoting
domestic violence, instead of ending it. As the African proverb states, it takes a village to raise a child. Likewise, it takes a village to batter a woman and it will take a village to end battering.

When battered women stay, we as a community should look to see what we are doing to hinder the leaving process in order to make changes to facilitate their leaving and ultimate safety. When battered women are arrested instead of their male batterers, it is again the community’s responsibility to insist that this outrage be stopped and that we follow through by holding public officials accountable.

**Justice is a Woman**

I.

Didja ever notice
how Justice is a woman?
Not a man
Not malecopsmalejudgesmalelawyers
Justice is a woman

Only malecopsmalejudgesmalelawyers
Could find a man battering a woman
(Well actually, find two men)
Call off the male batterer
Arrest the female victim
Slap their thighs with the batterer
Call the victim crazybelligerentguilty

As the blood pours out her nose,
Out her broken, bruised body
As she shivers from the
pain, the cold, the fear
Hands cuffed behind her back

II.

Jaw drops; wide-open eyes
Then kindly “Where does
it hurt, ma’am?” asks
the black EMS tech.
“Everywhere!” I tell him.
“Where does it hurt the most?” snarls
Austin P.D.’s finest, the redneck white-boy
misogynist who arrested me

He coerces EMS out of taking me
to the hospital with visible head
trauma and broken bones

The Texas Council on Family Violence
reports that Texas cops deliberately
arrest battered women instead of
their male batterers at least
20% of the time on a domestic violence
call where men commit
99% of the domestic violence.
NO OTHER STATE OR COUNTRY DOES THIS

III.

“Quit the melodramatics! If
you DON’T get out and walk,
I’ll get a jail guard and we’ll
DRAG you!”
Austin P.D.’s finest again.
Limp. Limp. Limp.

My foot was broken
in 2 places. Not
that he or the jail
nurse cared. Had
to wait for an x-ray
until I bonded out. APD
STILL wouldn’t arrest Jack
(and Johnny)
IV.

"Honey, where's the guy who did this to you?", asks the Travis County Booking Officer.

"He's at home! Is it the policy of the Austin police to arrest the victim and leave the batterer free?"

"That's NOT supposed to be their policy, ma'am"

Under the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure's Ch. 14 on Warrantless Arrests, it clearly states that the police are to arrest without warrant on the spot, crimes committed "in view" – especially domestic violence

The Fourth Amendment of the US Constitution bans illegal seizures/arrests. The 5th and 14th Amendments assure due process and equal protection of law

V.

"So he's in here, right? The guy who did this to you?"

"No"

"Did APD take photos of you?"

"No"

"Did APD take you to the hospital?"

"No"

"What the hell is APD doing?" TCSO's peace officer, exchanges glances
Cathy Marston

with her 2 female cohorts.
She grabs a camera and snaps
20 color Polaroids of the
visible oozing bruising torn-
flesh injuries

But she DOESN'T go arrest
anyone
This is 12 hours after my arrest
That is NOT Justice

VI.

If Justice is a woman
then why am I here?

Merrie Lehning says,
"These people are trying
to erase our pasts and
destroy our futures"

That's NOT Justice!

Y'all have Her blindfolded
and handcuffed
And locked away from the public
to hide Her broken bones, Her
bruised, bleeding flesh

Give Justice a black cowgirl hat
and a lasso----
not scales and a blindfold!

Then She could see
what's going on
in Texas
and STOP it
ENDNOTES

Marian Meyers (1994, p. 47) prefers the term battering because “terms such as family violence and domestic violence obscure the relationship between gender and power by failing to define the perpetrators and victims”. In this paper, I speak of male violence against women.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Cathy Marston* Ph.D. is an internationally published feminist scholar, as well as an activist/agitator on disability rights and repetitive strain injuries. She is a former journalist and is currently imprisoned in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, per the unlawful arrests alluded to in her poem "Justice is a Woman". This piece attempts to set this experience of sheer misogyny within a larger cultural framework via an inherent feminist critique of the patriarchal (in)justice system in the United States and in Texas in particular.

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A New Direction for Federally Sentenced Women, Foiled Once Again

T. A. Glaremin

What was the point, anyway, of spending millions of dollars of hard earned taxpayers' money on a new direction for federally sentenced women when the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the Government of Canada were not serious about making real changes?

I came into the federal system in 1986 – to the Kingston Prison for Women. Our justice system fell under the umbrella of the American model, which was not a very good one but the women did not know anything different from a multi-level prison. Shortly after that, Commissioner Ole Ingstrup was instrumental in introducing a new direction for the Canadian penal justice system. Similar to the European direction, it was a system built on reintegration and rehabilitation as opposed to the U.S. model that is based on revenge and punishment. The only problem with the new direction was that changes for women could not be included as a result of their multi-level security status. So when the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (1992) was passed in Parliament it included women as a group who needed special attention. The Principles in section four are the guidelines that CSC must use to direct wardens across the country to ensure that the special needs of women are met.

CSC has repeatedly failed to adhere to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, prompting Kim Pate of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies to use the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) to challenge the organization’s treatment of federally sentenced women across the country. What followed was a victory for women as the CHRC (2003) made a series of recommendations to CSC that centred on the violations of the rights of women imprisoned in Canada. Many of these recommendations echoed earlier calls for reform outlined in the Creating Choices policy document (CSC, 1990), written for and in collaboration with women prisoners. One of the most important recommendations made in Creating Choices was that the Prison for Women in Kingston be closed and smaller regional facilities built where all federally sentenced women were to be housed as minimum-security. Sadly, the millions of dollars spent by the taxpayers have been wasted because we now have a system for women where all five of the new prisons are multi-level security. The Creating Choices document, which was supposed to be a new direction for federal corrections for women in Canada, has been all but eroded by
CSC as budgetary increases for security measures by the Government of Canada have not been matched for programming, a result that is detrimental to federally sentenced women across the country.

I have come a long way from 1986 and have been inside to record the changes made in this country on behalf of women prisoners. It is now 2009 and we are worse off now then we were before so much taxpayer money was spent. It seems odd to me that when this country is in a recession that the Harper Government can still be allowed to spend millions more dollars on prisons in Canada. What Creating Choices called "a new direction" is similar to what is now called a "transformation" by the Correctional Service of Canada: this "transformation" in corrections aims to remove the section four principles from the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that guide the Service in its treatment of women prisoners. I am heartbroken as I write these words. I tried to hang myself at the Prison for Women in Kingston because conditions were so hard for me to understand. It is not easy for any abused woman to understand the principles of a man based prison, built by men for men but used to hold women that does not include female prisoners in its decision-making. Correctional decision-making regarding women is carried out within a patriarchal government. I was the only survivor of the series of hangings at the P4W (for information on P4W see Elliott and Horii, 1994; Stewart and Dumford, 1999). I lived to bury many women who could not take the systematic abuse any longer. I could not understand why I was allowed to live. I prayed to the Creator while tying knots in my sheets to end the suffering I endured there at the hands of corrupt prison guards and a government who did not care about what happened to women in this country whether they were prisoners or not.

The years flew by and the new prisons for women were built. Many of the women were expected to be transferred down to Kitchener to a community that did not want women prisoners or the prison to be there. I did not want to go. I fought hard to remain in the Kingston Prison for Women regardless of what I went through. I had some foresight and told the correctional staff working on the new prisons that it would not work. There were too many holes in the new direction for women prisoners that they either did not want or just refused to see. I was the last woman to leave the prison. I was the only involuntary prisoner transferred from the Prison for Women. Later, when they closed the only minimum security prison for women in Canada, Isabel McNeil House, in 2008, there were other involuntary transfers.
I came to Grand Valley Institution (GVI) on May 8, 2000. I was escorted by Madame Petite who died shortly after. She was a very kind and caring French woman who had a special relationship with all the women. I am so happy she was working there because she was one of the good ones. I miss her because she left a lasting impression on me because whether I was a prisoner or not she treated me like I was a human being. On the day I left she made sure I had the things I could eat in my lunch bag and even gave me chocolates to eat along with the dozen white roses the warden got for me. I think they did that because I complied with all their instructions as there were a lot of media at the gate waiting for us to leave. They allowed me to take my fish with me and I still have him to this day – his name is Victory and he is almost 13 years old. I am the only one who has a pet at the new prison because we are discouraged from forming any kind of relationships with the animals around us – whether they are cats, rabbits, foxes, raccoons, wolves, ground hogs, ducks, geese, birds, moles, deer, gophers or possums. It is against the rules to be kind to any of them. We are not to feed them or encourage any kind of contact with them. I think it is paramount for prisoners to have something to care for while locked up in prison. It makes one responsible and gives one the opportunity to think twice before getting into a conflict because you can think about your pet and who will take care for it if you are not there to do so. The rules are basically the same for the women – we cannot lend, borrow, give or trade anything to anyone for any reason. It is kind of like living in a world of sociopaths. It does nothing to help a person to be ready for release. What it does is make people afraid of doing anything when they get out.

Since I have been in GVI, we have had six female wardens and now have a male warden named Mr. Dick. We have a new Commissioner of Corrections named Mr. Head. Since the recommendations made by the CHRC for CSC to properly implement the strategies outlined in Creating Choices, a new Deputy Commissioner for Women was assigned to oversee the women’s prisons.

Our new Deputy Commissioner for Women is Elizabeth Van Allen. At first, I wondered how much power she has to oversee the way the prisons for women are run. I wondered if she has the power to see that the strategies outlined in the Creating Choices document were being enforced. I no longer wonder. The recent memo from Warden Dick that was left in our newly built mail boxes tells us that if we do not comply with the new male
management policy that our rights and privileges will be gutted. We are now back to square one. We have a man trying to force us under threat to act and be treated like men. We no longer live in a place where only women guard women or where women are the managers. So what is the Deputy Commissioner for Women saying about that this on our behalf? Looking up from the dysfunctional, hopeless, helpless, hateful, bottom of the slime pit I live in – I can say with all certainty “NOTHING”. I do not think there is any reason for us to have a Deputy Commissioner for Women when she works in a male system that prevents her from saying or doing much to ensure our equality or rights.

I believe it is time for all concerned parties across this country to stand up and disagree with the Harper Government when it comes to their hard earned money. We do not need new prisons or a “transformation” that will cost taxpayer’s millions of more dollars when people are struggling to save their homes and families. I believe this is insensitive, as well as a waste of money that can be better spent on keeping jobs and businesses open in Canada. I wonder if the taxpayers even know how much money is being spent on CSC and its hidden agenda to create more violent people that will do nothing to meet its mandate of ensuring public safety. I know I do not like losing my humanness every time they take something else away from us because of public perception of prisons being too soft on prisoners. Will that make me embrace the community when I get out? Almost every one of us who are in prison will get out someday. Will I be ready to live in a community that treated me like a man and made me ashamed that I was a woman? Will I feel safe in a community who felt it was alright for CSC to mistreat and torture women in their care while not doing anything to see if we were alive or dead? From where I sit, I will probably die in prison because of the way I am being treated. But who cares? The Government of Canada seems to be able to do whatever they want to their citizens. After all, who cares about the abused women in our country and if they are being treated fairly or not? Many of us are in prison due to lack of protection by our Government anyway.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*T. A. Glaremin* is currently serving a federal sentence in Ontario, Canada.
I am a Métis woman serving a 21-year sentence. I have been imprisoned for eight years so far and I would like to share my experiences of segregation in various penitentiaries.

There was a period of time in which federally sentenced women were held in small sectors within men’s penitentiaries (see Mayhew, 1988). Administrative and disciplinary segregation seemed relatively simple when I first came to federal. You received your institutional offence report, went before the Segregation Review Board and were sanctioned accordingly. It was only during my second year down when I noticed a palpable change in the segregation process for federally sentenced women.

After months and years of isolation, a series of incidents erupted in the women’s sector of Saskatchewan Penitentiary. This led to medium and maximum security women being labelled “high risk requiring a highly supervised environment”. One would expect that a structured routine and detailed Correctional Plan would have been implemented to reduce the high risk the women allegedly posed, but this was not the case. Essentially, the monotony of the Enhanced Security Unit (ESU) was the same as every other segregation unit across Canada. The only differences were the upgraded title and the two levels of confinement the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) imposed before release could be considered.

1. Indefinite Confinement: increased privileges within the ESU would be determined according to a woman’s behaviour. No time-frames were given as to when a woman could expect to progress to the next level (or phase).

2. Transition: a woman is slowly reintegrated into the maximum security population via school or spiritual gatherings. No timeframe were given during the transition level (or phase). After a substantial period of stable behaviour, a woman was then released from the ESU to a regular range in the general population (CSC, 2004; Hayman, 2007).

Given that I had been incarcerated in three men’s penitentiaries across Canada over a period of four years, I had the unfortunate opportunity to get acquainted with the segregation units in each pen. After my experience in the ESU at Saskatchewan Penitentiary, I was sent to Springhill Institution.
in Nova Scotia due to “efforts within the ESU having been exhausted in Ms. Acoby’s Case”. I was immediately placed in segregation once I arrived at Springhill pending a “Management Plan”. Although staff maintained similar practices in the segregation unit as those in the ESU, it can be opined that the Management Plan was more detailed and time-frame oriented. Therefore, a woman in segregation knew what was expected of her and in turn could expect an estimation of progressing to the next phase. The phases were similar to the model of the ESU.

1. Segregation: increased privileges within the segregation unit would be determined according to a woman’s behaviour.
2. Reintegration: a gradual plan was developed by the woman’s Case Management Team to allow increased interaction with other inmates and program staff. After a period of stable behaviour, a woman can be released to the general population (CSC, 2004; Hayman, 2007).

It was during my fourth year down when I was the first federal female to be placed on the “Management Protocol” for a fight that allegedly involved a weapon. The Management Protocol was developed by a group of women within CSC for “high risk women that pose a significant threat to the security of the Institution”. The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers had been urging CSC to construct a Special Handling Unit (SHU) for Women. However, the Management Protocol was developed “as an alternative to a SHU for women”. There are three steps that govern the Management Protocol.

1. Segregation: the guideline states that although there are no fixed time-frames, it should take a minimum of 6 months for a woman to complete all three steps of the Protocol.
2. Partial reintegration: a woman still resides in the segregation unit but is given increased privileges and gradual interaction with others.
3. Movement to a regular cell: a woman is moved onto a range and retains all privileges of a regular maximum security inmate. Movement off the max unit is not permitted (CSC, 2004; Hayman, 2007).

The third point is the only step of the Management Protocol that has a fixed time-frame – three months of stable behaviour along with a
recommendation from a woman's case Management team is required. The recommendation is then sent to the Warden who decides whether or not to discharge a woman from the Protocol. Although the Management Protocol states that "all policies, procedures, and legal entitlements of the administrative segregation commissioner's directive will be adhered to" (CSC, 2004), this is not the case. The Management Protocol and the administrative segregation directive overlap and contradict policies, procedures, and entitlements (CHRC, 2003; Parkes and Pate, 2006). For example, the administrative segregation directive states that inmates retain the same privileges and entitlements as those in the general population, with the exception of security requirements. The Management Protocol states that all items / privileges will be considered based on risk assessments. CSC officials have used this guideline in the Protocol to control items such as toilet paper, basic hygiene items (soap, toothpaste, etc...) and rights such as confidential legal calls and the right to contact family. Some institutions take the "observation" aspect of the Protocol literally by posting female guards to observe women taking a shower and during recreation.

Since the Protocol has officially been implemented, a total of six women across Canada have been placed on Protocol status (CSC, 2006; Parkes and Pate, 2006). Four of those women were of Aboriginal descent and some had serious mental health issues (Parkes and Pate, 2006; NWAC, 2007). At the time of writing, there are three women that remain on the Management Protocol and all three of us are Aboriginal.

Given that CSC claims the federal institutions for women do not have the proper infrastructure to house/manage women on the Protocol, plans have been made to expand upon the "security requirements".

In one institution, a Plexiglas interview room was built to accommodate "safe interactions" between state and Management Protocol women. Management officials have advised the Protocol women there are plans to build more of the Plexiglas secure interview rooms. These newly developed interview rooms conjure up macabre images of the new female "Hannibal" that CSC is essentially propagating.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the regular segregated status given to the women who are treated as Management Protocol prisoners. Though not on Protocol status (Sapers, 2009), tragically, a 19 year old first-time federally sentenced woman who was treated horrifically and similarly to a Protocol case, lost her life at the Grand Valley Institution in October 2007. As fellow
prisoners may be aware, several guards and managers were either fired or charged with criminal negligence in this young woman’s death. It took a full six months after her demise for CSC officials to begin an inquiry into the segregation units in federally sentenced women’s institutions (Sapers, 2009).

In the aftermath of all the interviews conducted pertaining to ways in which segregation and the Protocol could be improved, CSC has actually made the Protocol more oppressive and arbitrary. One need only look at the durations the women have spent on the Management Protocol to deduce it is not a successful or humane model of confinement. I find it reprehensible that the group of women who designed the Management Protocol with the “special needs of women offenders taken into consideration” (CSC, 2004; CSC, 2006) cannot even meet with us. Perhaps they do not want to confront the ghosts of women their brilliant Protocol has reduced us to.

It has been more than a decade since Madame Justice Louise Arbour released her scathing report on the failures of CSC to treat and rehabilitate federally sentenced women. We have yet to see many of Louise Arbour’s recommendations on how the system can be improved come to pass.

Perhaps the public should contemplate the words of Fyodor Dostoevsky before electing to have more punitive rather than rehabilitative penal policies:

The standard of a nation’s civilization can be judged by opening the doors of its prisons.

– Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Renée Acoby* is a Métis woman and mother currently serving a federal sentence in Canada. This piece was written in September 2008.
Women are the Fastest Growing Prison Population: Why You Should Care...
Debbie Kilroy and Kim Pate

CRIMINALIZATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

1. The fastest growing prison population worldwide is women, and in particular, racialized, young, poor women, and women with mental and cognitive disabilities. The increasing numbers of women in prison is clearly linked to the evisceration of health, education and social services, combined with a simultaneous intrusion of the state in terms of surveillance, monitoring, criminalization, and institutionalization (Braithwaite et al., 2005; Frost et al., 2006).

2. A high majority of sentenced women are convicted for non-violent property and drug offences. A majority are mothers who are likely to have primary childcare responsibilities. Gaining work skills is considered an important factor in successful community reintegration for women prisoners. However, women have little access to meaningful work opportunities or training programs while they are incarcerated.

3. Criminalized women, especially those who are Aboriginal, are likely to have histories of abuse (CHRC, 2003; Bell et al., 2004). These experiences have devastating long-term effects, which can put these women more at risk of being criminalized and then shape how they experience prison. Prison can revive controlling aspects and experiences of abuse, as well as feelings of loss of control and power over their lives.

4. Aboriginal women and girls are vastly over-represented in state institutions (Solicitor General of Canada, 2002; CHRC, 2003). The justice system has played a major role in the creation of poor social conditions in Aboriginal communities today. It has failed to provide them with protection against oppression and has instead been a tool of this oppression through the denial of Aboriginal land claims, the imposition of residential schools, the separation of families through child welfare practices, and the denial of Aboriginal control over their own communities. This has resulted in social disruption in the community and widespread poverty (NWAC, 2007). Current trends raise concerns
that “treatment” could become the next form of institutionalization of indigenous peoples in many countries.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

1. Violence against women and girls can include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as other abuses of power and attempts at controlling and coercing women, including financial control. Gender-based violence impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and it circumscribes women’s ability to function as full citizens in society.

2. While women of all backgrounds are vulnerable to violence, some are more vulnerable than others, including young women and children, women with disabilities, poor women, Aboriginal women and women of ethnic and racial minorities (Bell et al., 2004; CHRC, 2003; NWAC, 2007).

3. Discrimination based on both the sex and race of Aboriginal women is manifested in the response or lack of response of law enforcement to violence against these women (Razack, 2000). While Aboriginal people are over-policed in that they are arrested and detained under circumstances in which non-Aboriginal people may not be, they are also under-policed in that they are not available for preventive and supportive police services. The many reports of groups like Amnesty International (2004) document the increasing awareness of the numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

4. Women in subordinate social or economic positions are particularly vulnerable. Immigrant and refugee women who are paid very little and work in private homes as domestic workers often do not know their rights or the legal services available to them, and may be threatened with deportation if they report abuse (Razack, 1999). Girls and women forced into the sex trade are extremely vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and even murder, and often do not receive support despite the fact that many young women on the street are fleeing abusive situations without other economic options open to them.
5. Not only do victims of violence against women have to cope with the trauma of the violence itself, they also have to face the sexism embedded in the process of holding their attackers accountable. We know that women's relative poverty, as a result of discrimination, puts them at risk of assault by leaving them in darkened streets waiting for buses or cabs, reliant on others for accommodation or allows them only to rent substandard housing with inadequate security. The same enforced poverty makes them unable to avoid dependency on abusive partners, bosses or those who trade them for sex.

6. When member state legislation, policy and procedures fail to treat women as worthy of equality, sexism throughout the society is reinforced. As the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres has pointed out, individual men who commit acts of violence against women must take responsibility for their own choices and the consequences of their actions. No child could warp into such a man without the intentional collusion of some, the mindless cooperation of many, and the indifference of even more—and we are not speaking of their mothers. We must ask who introduced such men to pornography, weapons, abuse, to being abusive, to sexualizing abuse, to abusing for sexual gratification. We must also ask who ignored or even rewarded their actions as they became more terrible and more terrifying.

Additional information about these issues and our organizations is available at: Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (www.elizabethfry.ca) and Sisters Inside Australia (www.sistersinside.com.au).

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Debbie Kilroy is the Director of the groundbreaking Sisters Inside Inc. – a prison advocacy group in Brisbane, Australia. She was the first woman admitted as a legal practitioner in Queensland after being convicted for a criminal offence. Her dedication, commitment, and service to the community saw her awarded with an Order of Australia Medal in 2003 and the Australian Human Rights Medal in 2004.

Kim Pate is Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. A teacher and lawyer by training, she has worked with vulnerable, criminalized and imprisoned youth, men and women for more than 20 years.
Reflections on My First “Free” Prisoners’ Justice Day
“Petey”

This is my first “free” Prisoners' Justice Day. I use the word “free” because I am no longer spending this day in prison, but I use the word loosely because my friends are still trapped within those concrete walls and razor wire fences. My heart is with them. As Eugene Debs said, “While there is a soul in prison, I am not free”. My situation is very unique, as I am serving a youth sentence, but have been thrown into the adult system part-way through.

I was in juvie or in a “Youth Centre”, for nearly two years. It felt like a dumping ground for young people with mental health issues. But this was not a hospital, it was a prison – our mental health was not their responsibility. Instead, staff’s focus was on control and limiting our movement. Being surrounded by girls with severe emotional baggage was scary and traumatizing, mainly because they were children. I used to try to talk them out of slashing. Sometimes it worked and other times I bandaged their wounds. Seeing what this system does to children who need help left me so frustrated and angry. I was helpless against this system, so I lashed out at myself. I would punch the brick walls of the prison, rupturing my knuckles against the bricks until the walls were covered with blood. I could literally say that my blood was on them.

There were so many days when I wanted out because I could not handle it anymore. Not out of prison, just out, away. I came so close to giving up that my own thoughts scared me. People told me to take it one day at a time. But one day has room for so many tears and so much heartache. “Tomorrow” was impossibly far away. I often had to slow it down and count the seconds, curled into a tight little ball in the corner of my cell, where no one could hurt me or reach me. Hearing about my young friends getting out and being dropped right back into the dangerous places they came from was frustrating as hell. These were good kids, smart kids, but how could they break away from a bad life if no one helped them?

The prison was an abusive warehouse. I would hear snippets of this one kid dying from an overdose, this other kid getting pregnant when she was 12, or another one being on the run and smoking crack. Many came back on new charges or for breaching their community supervision orders. I vowed never to be one of those. One of my young friends hung herself in the prison when I was still there and by some miracle was cut down just before it would have been too late. That gave me nightmares for months.
I was involuntarily transferred to Vanier in 2007 because I had turned 20. Vanier is an adult provincial institution, but we call it “the bucket”. The transfer had nothing to do with the fact that I was deemed low risk or that I was a “model prisoner”. I simply “grew out” of the youth system. The screws in Vanier made fun of me for being so young. I was under 23-hour lock down with a cellmate and so many times we did not even get our one hour because the screws were dealing with an incident somewhere else in the prison. My mattress was on the floor, by the steel toilet. This is where I learned about the “bird bath”, which is washing yourself, and your socks and underwear, in the little steel sink in the cell because you cannot shower or do laundry for days. At night I could not sleep because women were wailing, crying for their children, and banging their heads against their steel cell doors and concrete walls.

Just to remind me not to take these “luxuries” at the “Milton Hilton” for granted, we would get strip searched roughly three times a week, and our cells would be turned upside down and inside out for “security purposes”. I used to make origami flowers, but guards would crush them “just in case I was hiding drugs”. I had to fight tooth and nail to continue the university course I started in juvie. I used to cry because my course papers would get separated, thrown around and ripped during searches. Was the only way to check if there were drugs or weapons in my loose papers to rip them? This was my introduction into the adult system. This was supposed to rehabilitate me.

In mid-October 2007, everything went quiet. A 19 year old girl had committed suicide at Grand Valley. A few screws told me, “You’re next, Y.O.” Two weeks later I was ordered to pack my “shit” because I was going to GVI.

They kept me in maximum security for five months. Everyone was super sensitive because I was only a year older than the girl who just died. I could not move off of the maximum security unit – for example, to go to Healthcare – without the halls being cleared and shut down. I had to be handcuffed, shackled, with two guards at my side. Not because I was dangerous, but because I was new. This type of standard protocol really messed with my head and almost destroyed me. I wasn’t dangerous – I was sentenced as low risk, and just came from serving two years incident free, so why was I being shackled? Those made me want to fit the label and start causing shit. On top of this, maximum security was so lonely. The other
women were at least ten years older than I was, so I felt very secluded, which made me even more depressed.

After finally escaping from the clutches of maximum security, I was bunked with a young girl who slashed herself up something fierce two weeks later. I was woken up at one in the morning and instructed to leave our cell so it could be sealed for investigation. My cellmate was shipped to a psychiatric hospital and my nightmares got worse.

I asked to please be moved to a single cell, but instead got another cellmate, who I was told was more “stable”. Ten days later, I came back to find she was gone. When I asked what happened, it turned out she was in segregation on suicide watch. I was starting to think that there was something wrong with me because everyone around me was sick of living and I had no idea how to handle this kind of guilt. Guards in the prison treated these situations as normal and that I should just get used to it. I could not wrap my head around that kind of thinking, so I was left alone, hurt and confused. Several women died while I was at GVI and the injustice of them dying away from their families really weighed heavily on me.

Here is a quote from Correctional Service of Canada’s (CSC) website about Grand Valley: “The Institution provides a positive and supportive environment focused mainly on women’s timely and safe reintegration”. Did they forget to tell this to the 19 year old who suffocated herself? Where was my “positive and supportive environment”? I did not receive a single day pass out of GVI in my two and a half years there, even though I remained incident free. CSC miscalculated my Parole Eligibility dates and by the time everything was sorted out, I was released on my Statutory Release (mandatory release at two-thirds of your sentence). I guess we have a very different definition of “timely and safe reintegration”.

The guards did not know what to do with me because I was a kid. The youth system did not know what to do with me because I was legally an adult. GVI and the youth system failed to implement the spirit of Creating Choices as it was outlined because they prevented me from providing meaningful or any input into my rehabilitation and reintegration. I didn’t have a choice. As someone with a youth sentence, I am legally supposed to have more protection because children do not have a voice. For some reason that did not happen. Even now, the youth and adult systems cannot make up their minds about who is in charge of my sentence, and I am stuck in the middle with nothing.

The only choice I had in prison was to end my life and stop the confusing torment or suffer through years of irrational pain at the hands of two
incompetent systems in hopes of somehow making a difference. My need to disseminate the seeds of truth about the system outweighs my yearning for death. I spent six years wishing to die. Now I want to work in alliance with those at risk and those who have been criminalized so they see that they are not the ones who are wrong – it is the prison system that does more harm than good.

These people who are dying in prison are not gun toting maniacs who must be slain for the protection of the public. They are dying because the government has not given them a fair shot at life. They are dying because the abuse, oppression and isolation in prison exacerbate their mental anguish – making death seems sweeter than jail. These people are dying because guards watch them hang and slice themselves, and do nothing to stop it, or better yet, because panic buttons do not work. The very systems that the government claims are put into place to protect us are watching us die. And some of us are children. This has to stop.

How many more children have to die in custody before people are convinced that prisons do not work? How many more children have to become orphans because their mothers and fathers have died in prison? I am pissed off and terrified at what the Conservative Government is trying to do right now. Stephen Harper’s ‘tough on crime’ approach will only lead to more imprisonment and longer sentences. If so many people are dying because of the way prison is now, what do you think will happen if these bills are passed? These families only want to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives and Stephen Harper is trying to render this impossible “for the good of us all”.

To quote Prisonjustice.ca, “Wherever you find the shackles of oppression you also find the spirit of resistance”. I am choosing to resist oppression and injustice. I am also remembering the spirits of those who have resisted, and who were consumed by a cruel and evil system. I was so close to being among them. I am fighting so that children like me, children who are told they have no voice, will prove the system wrong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“Petey” is a recently released woman who was charged and sentenced as a young offender, and who served much of her sentence in an adult facility. She is currently attending university and wishes to work in the area of human rights.
RESPONSE

On Self-injurious Behaviour in Prison
Jennifer M. Kilty

Women and girls in prisons around the world have a long history of engaging in self-injurious behaviour. That they cut, tear, rip, lacerate, burn, mark, scar, scratch, and bruise their skin and body is not a new phenomenon. It is however, one that correctional authorities and researchers continually fail to acknowledge (Kilty, 2006). In Canada, there is a long and blood stained trail of political ignorance of the self-inflicted harm many incarcerated women exact upon themselves. The aim of this brief response is to highlight how the correctional mistreatment of and failure to respond to the needs of incarcerated women and girls perpetuates, and at times aggravates, self-injurious behaviour. By drawing on the facts of three of the more well-known and thus documented cases of self-injurious behaviour amongst incarcerated women and girls in Canada, the goal of this entry is to re-centre self-injurious behaviour as a focal point in the fight against the abuse, marginalization, oppression and punishment of our sisters inside.

CASE 1: THE GRANDVIEW TRAINING SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

One of the first legally documented and most pronounced accounts of institutional self-injurious behaviour as a systemic issue emerged as a result of the abuses that took place at the now closed Grandview Training Centre for Girls. At Grandview, girls aged 12-17 were physically, emotionally, and sexually abused and assaulted during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970’s, until the institution’s closure in 1976. After a courageous group of women formed the Grandview Survivors Support Group (GSSG) and came forward with their stories of abuse, they were able to successfully negotiate the terms of the Agreement between the Grandview Survivors Group and the Government of Ontario (Feldthusen et al., 1999; Shea, 1999; Kaufman Report, 2002). The adjudication process revealed that correctional staff participated in the abuse of the young girls. While the survivors also accused the chief psychologist at Grandview, Dr. Robert Ross, of participating in the abuse, in the end eleven charges against Ross were stayed and the rest were dropped (Shea, 1999; Graycar and Wangman, 2007).
Part of Ross’ work involved studying the prevalence and severity of the self-injurious behaviour exhibited by the girls at Grandview. In his book, *Self-Mutilation*, Robert Ross and co-author Hugh McKay describe Grandview’s atmosphere as oppressive and harsh, with discipline being the paramount concern, second only to custody:

Speaking was forbidden, crying was punished. Self-mutilators had been counselled, punished, lectured, cajoled, reprimanded, educated, and isolated to no avail. The staff had made them hide their scars by wearing extra clothing. They had punished them for carving by reducing the limited number of privileges which they had, or by disallowing visitors, or by assigning extra work, or by delaying their release from the institution. If there is any substance to the reports communicated to us, at one point in the institution’s history a standard response to carving was the application of salt directly to the wound with a toothbrush (Ross and McKay, 1979, pp. 2-3).

The women of the GSSG claimed to have been physically beaten – including being dragged down stairs by their hair – and made to perform fellatio and engage in sexual intercourse, sometimes for different ‘privileges’ (Kaufman Report, 2002). Ultimately, two guards were convicted of physical and sexual assault in 1999, and the Ontario government issued a formal apology to the women who were incarcerated at Grandview as young girls as part of a legal compensation package that awarded victims a total sum of $16,400,000 (Shea, 1999; Kaufman Report, 2002).

**CASE 2: THE ‘INCIDENT’ AT THE KINGSTON PRISON FOR WOMEN**

In 1990, feminist psychologist Jan Heney published her account of self-injurious behaviour at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario (P4W), then the only federal prison for women in Canada. Heney (1990) found that over half of the federally sentenced women had engaged in self-injurious behaviour and that the vast majority (92 percent) engaged in self-inflicted cutting. One of the fundamental points of Heney’s report is that segregation, which was at that time and which continues to be the institutional policy protocol response for self-injurious behaviour (Kilty, 2006), is inappropriate and even harmful. Interestingly, 97 percent of the prisoners interviewed by
Heney argued that segregation was an inappropriate response, while 77.5 percent of correctional staff viewed it as the correct way to respond to and as “a necessary action” in cases where prisoners engaged in self-injury. Heney (1990) recommended the need for several correctional policy and protocol changes in order to try and prevent self-injury, and better help women who succeed in harming themselves, some of which included: do not segregate women following a self-injurious incident; invoke the use of trained peer support teams and allow women to communicate with friends and loved ones to generate support rather than punishment for the behaviour; ensure that psychological, counselling and nursing staff are always available for women to speak to; and finally, self-injury is not a matter of institutional security, but rather of the women’s mental health needs — which should always be of primary importance.

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) failed to incorporate Heney’s recommendations into correctional policy, and in 1994, what is now referred to as the “incident at P4W” where eight women were stripped, searched, shackled in the nude by a male Institutional Emergency Response Team, and left in segregation — some for up to nine months — resulted in a string of harmful consequences, including an increase in self-injurious behaviour (see Frigon, 1997). Like the abuse that occurred at Grandview, the correctional mistreatment of the women in P4W was found to be criminal (Arbour, 1996). Ultimately, the ‘incident’ in conjunction with Madame Justice Louise Arbour’s (1996) scathing report of the abuses of power and violations of law, as well as correctional policy that gave rise to it were the impetuses for closing P4W and the creation of six regional prisons for federally sentenced women in Canada. Little to no documentation of self-injurious behaviour in the new federal prisons exists. It is as though by not speaking of it correctional officials and researchers can pretend it no longer takes place. In fact, Jan Heney’s 1990 report remains the last detailed examination of self-injury by women in prison in Canada.

CASE 3: THE PREVENTABLE DEATH OF ASHLEY SMITH

Despite the dearth of literature investigating the frequency and severity of self-injury in prison, many former prisoners disclose that they cut (Kilty, 2008; Kilty, in press). This fact was recently evidenced by the tragic 2007 death of 19 year old Ashley Smith at the Grand Valley Institution for
Women in Kitchener, Ontario. Smith attempted suicide several times and was a chronic self-injurer – to the point that she had amassed hundreds of institutional charges related to this behaviour (Richard, 2008; Sapers, 2008). Smith’s death, found to be preventable by Howard Sapers (2008), the Correctional Investigator of Canada, refocused a spotlight on the issue of self-injurious behaviour, the correctional mistreatment of women who engage in it and the tragic consequences of continuing to place security ahead of addressing a prisoner’s mental health needs.

Ashley Smith was initially imprisoned as a youth at the New Brunswick Youth Centre (NBYC) but was transferred to adult custody in the Saint John Regional Correctional Centre (SJRCC) after she turned 18. In October 2006, Smith was sentenced as an adult for criminal charges laid while she was still at the NBYC. When added to her existing sentence, Smith’s custodial time exceeded two years meaning she was to serve the remainder of her sentence in a federal prison (Richard, 2008; Sapers, 2008). Smith’s eleven and a half month stay in federal custody was marred by 17 transfers between and amongst institutions, including transfers across five provinces (Sapers, 2008). Sapers (2008) identifies a lengthy list of individual and systemic failures that led him to declare Smith’s death preventable, some of which included: illegally keeping Smith in administrative segregation throughout her entire time in federal custody (11.5 months); lack of proper documentation of the extent and severity of Smith’s self-inflicted injuries; failure to respond to Smith’s repeated formal complaints and grievances in a timely manner – one of which was not opened until two months after her death; lack of timely and complete communication between all levels of staff and institution; failure to provide adequate medical and mental health care, treatment, and support; inappropriate use of force including taser use on two occasions; failure to develop a comprehensive treatment plan; and a failure of staff to properly intervene by removing items Smith used to self-harm, to arrest her self-injurious behaviour, and ultimately to stop her from asphyxiating herself as correctional officers watched from the hall.

**CONCLUSION**

The three cases briefly covered here illustrate that various forms of correctional mistreatment of women and girls persist, and that abuse and
neglect at the hands of their keepers can perpetuate self-injurious behaviour among those who are already marginalized. In fact, when considering the cases of the Grandview Training Centre for Girls, the ‘incident’ at the Kingston Prison for Women and the preventable death of Ashley Smith, the term ‘correctional mistreatment’ appears to be a vast understatement as each case speaks to actions that led to criminal investigation. As long as we continue to imprison women and girls we accept that they will never receive adequate assistance regarding their personal needs and the structural barriers that coalesce to bring them in conflict with the law in the first place. Self-injurious behaviour remains a destructive way for prisoners to cope with the stress and harm associated with the pains of imprisonment, and failing to respond or responding in ways that cause greater harm violates their rights to safe, secure and humane treatment that is guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Kilty, 2006). As such, we must reconsider community based forms of support and supervision in order to combat, as opposed to perpetuate, self-harm by women and girls in prison.

REFERENCES


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Jennifer Kilty* is Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. Her primary area of research interest is criminalized women – their experiences of incarceration and reintegration, their adoption of self-harming behaviours, and their construction as ‘violent’, ‘dangerous’ and/or ‘risky’. Using identity and citizenship theories, Professor Kilty examines how different health and mental health statuses come to affect the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of identity in prison and post-incarceration. Much of this work is based on discussions of rights and ethics of care, and is framed by a prison abolitionist standpoint.
INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, prison was considered by its promoters as the most efficient tool to reform and reintegrate prisoners (Foucault, 1975; Garland, 1985). However, the effectiveness of the use of imprisonment has continuously been the object of criticism, as multiple studies and commissions of inquiry have shown that prison could be more appropriately depicted as a ‘school of crime’ (Lalande, 2000).

Nevertheless, imprisonment is still presented as a way to rehabilitate prisoners. For instance, according to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (1992), the purpose of the Canadian federal correctional system is:

The maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of offenders; and assisting the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community (Corrections and Conditional Release Act, 1992, ch.20(3)).

Considering the importance of employment in society, it is easy to see why correctional services supports its mandate by including work programs to make male and female prisoners more ‘employable’ since most will leave prison one day. Indeed, both the Quebec and the federal correctional systems consider employment as a means to reintegration, but first and foremost as a way of reducing recidivism rates (Brouillard and Sirois, 1996; Gillis et al., 1996; Gillis, 2000).

In addition to assisting prisoners in changing their behaviour, employment is also presented as providing an opportunity to develop marketable skills in the form of work experience and to increase self-esteem, not to mention enhancing the general skills conducive to rehabilitation (ibid). Employment programs for prisoners developed by correctional services also intend to promote a change of their value system in order to bring about more compliant and less anti-social behaviour. Despite the creation of employment programs in and out of corrections, ex-prisoners, like many other marginalized groups,
still experience many difficulties in obtaining and retaining jobs. Many of
them are under-schooled and their imprisonment prevented them from
developing societal and professional skills. As a consequence, ex-prisoners
are generally unemployed, often live on social assistance, and if employed,
they are usually underpaid in precarious jobs (Frigon et al., 2003; Strimelle
and Poupart, 2004; Strimelle and Frigon, 2007). Moreover, some researchers
question the reintegrative use of employment programs in corrections because
they consider employment programs to promote “social conformity” rather
than true “reintegration” (Otero et al., 2004). The access to the work force
is still more difficult for ex-prisoners because they bear the stigma of being an offender through their criminal file. The weight of this label often places
them at the bottom of the ladder in terms of social desirability and usefulness
(Schmitz, 1985; Petersilia, 2003; Combessie, 2004).

The process of obtaining and retaining employment proves very difficult
for former prisoners and is particularly hard for women who get out of prison
and reintegrate into the community. Research about female ex-prisoners
reveals many female prisoners came from disadvantaged socio-economic
backgrounds, and that they often suffered different forms of victimization
(sexual, spousal, sexist, racist) and have experienced drug-related problems
(Blanchard, 2002; Frigon et al., 2003). The obstacles encountered by women
in their job search are often personal (e.g. self-esteem, self-confidence, tattoos,
dress, language, health), technical (e.g. training, skills, abilities), societal (e.g
obtaining credit, personal insurance), institutional and structural (e.g. release
process, conditions, numerous counsellors and specialists to be seen, criminal
record, obtaining a pardon, stigmatization, feminization of poverty, gendered
stratification...) or family related (e.g. children to care for, single parenting)
(Hamelin, 1989; Richie, 2001; Blanchard, 2002).

Based on field research conducted with criminalized women, as well
as frontline workers and professionals who work to assist them in Quebec,
we address the issue of employment and the employability horizon for
criminalized women. More specifically, we want to explore how these
women define and give meaning to the concept of employment: do they
consider employment as a unique way to social reintegration? We also want
to understand how their experiences in the criminal justice system affect
their job re-entry process after prison and to review some of the existing
resources created to help those women to find a job. Are they sufficient and
do they really address the needs of criminalized women?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of different and interrelated theories inspired our research and analysis. These are: reintegration theories, stigma theories, social capital theory and feminist standpoint theory. The concept of the social reintegration of prisoners is central in our research, but it cannot be clearly defined without examining the experiential reality of imprisonment. Ex-prisoners are affected by isolation and marginalization even after release, making it important to begin with an analysis of these concepts (Rostaing, 1997; Combessie, 2004). There are numerous theoretical approaches relating to the processes of marginalization and exclusion (Paugam, 1991; de Gaulejac and Taboada-Leonetti, 1994; Laberge and Roy, 1994; Wacquant, 1999). The works of Robert Castel and his definition of social integration particularly helped us to refine our definition of social reintegration. According to Castel (1995), exclusion and marginalization should not be described as static situations, but rather as dynamic processes. Castel (1994) identifies two major variables which play a major role in the integration process: professional integration and relational integration. The combination of these variables is argued to produce three different phases of integration: when someone has a regular job and entertains stable and significant social relationships, this person is in the ‘integration phase’. In the ‘vulnerability phase’, getting a job and keeping social relationships become problematic. Finally, the ‘dissociation phase’ indicates a situation where the person does not participate in any productive activity and is socially isolated. Employment, then, is a major component of the reintegration process of people who experienced different forms of dissociation such as ex-prisoners.

In our research, we also consider the role of social and penal institutions as producers of exclusion and marginality (Goffman, 1961 and 1970; Hattem et al., 1982), and the penal stigma attached to imprisonment (Pirès, 1983, Combessie, 2004; Vacheret and Lemire, 2007). According to this perspective, imprisonment changes prisoners’ identities and creates a new social category of stigmatized persons: “the ex-prisoners” whose “spoiled identities” will perpetually be tarnished by their experience in prison and the negative label attached to their status (Goffman, 1970). In that sense, prison produces stigmatization and despite its stated rehabilitative purposes, does not help to reintegrate prisoners successfully (Pirès, 1983; Chantraine, 2003; Combessie, 2004).
Social capital theory has also been useful to our research in exploring the role of social connections in the reintegration process of women released from prison. Social capital is a concept that describes resources that are potentially accessible through social networks and contacts (Bourdieu, 1980; Putnam, 1995; Lévesque and White, 2001). According to Putnam (1995), social networks have value and are vital for community and individual well-being. Research has shown that social and interpersonal relationships are vital for women who are released from prison, and that very few women have supportive networks when they left prison (Hamelin, 1989; Eaton, 1993; O’Brien, 2001; Maidment, 2006). Research on the factors influencing exit from welfare or social assistance also focused on the importance of social capital which plays a predominant role in this process (Lévesque and White, 2001).

Our research is also informed by feminist works which emphasize the importance of analyzing the experiences and the narratives of imprisoned women and which, in turn, highlight the numerous forms of structural oppression they remain subjected to (Carlen, 1983; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Faith, 2002; Bertrand, 2002; Buck, 2004). Standpoint theory guided our collection and analysis of our data and suggests that researchers collect stories and narratives produced by women to find linkages between them and they create a coherent whole (Harding, 1986; Comack, 1999). The knowledge produced is then perceived as knowledge about women and for women, and aims to change society and social relationships. In that sense, the standpoint approach helps to create competing discourses and to listen to the voices of criminalized women who are still largely silenced in the correctional system (Comack, 1999; Shantz, 2008).

**METHODOLOGY**

We conducted 35 semi-directive interviews. Interviewees included women incarcerated at four federal and twelve provincial prisons, as well as five halfway houses. We also interviewed fourteen staff members working at various federal and provincial facilities, and halfway houses in Quebec. As part of our investigation we organized two focus groups comprised of twelve staff members at detention facilities, halfway houses, correctional services and organizations specializing in labour force development. Given the objectives of our research, our attention was mainly focused on the
women’s sample. Nonetheless, interviews with the staff were useful in our research initiative because they provide us with staff views on the issue of employability for women prisoners, clarified certain areas of reflection and analysis, and enabled us to verify the appropriateness of some of our questions and our findings. Interviews with professionals constitute in that sense “a subjective secondary knowledge source” (Shantz, 2008, p. 58). They do not necessarily share the same ideas and same views of their ‘clients’, but they may have a different understanding of the social challenges to which the women will be confronted when they will return to ‘normal life’. In our sense, this secondary source offers a more complete picture of the situation.

For legal reasons, we had to submit our research project to the federal and provincial correctional services. After approval, some identified contact persons who contacted prisoners and asked them to participate in our research voluntarily. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim to make it easier to analyze the areas addressed in the field investigation. The interviews were then read, annotated, and summarized using individual analytical sheets reproducing the comments of the interviewees and listing them under each main area. The final step of the analysis (horizontal analysis) consisted in gathering the interviewees’ comments on each subject, selecting them according to relevance and presenting and commenting on them.

Given the time frames for the research and institutional imperatives, we were unable to interview Aboriginal women because the institutions taking part in this research were unable to provide us access to this group of women (Public Safety Canada, 2008). Despite these limits, we believe that our research will help to better understand the needs of a significant number of adult female prisoners and ex-prisoners related to employment.

Women who participated in the research were between 23 and 50 years old. More than two-thirds of the interviewees had children. Seventeen women had completed the first to the fifth year of high school. Their sentences ranged from three to 60 months, with one woman having been charged but not tried, two with life sentences and one who had completed her sentence. Thirteen women had received sentences of less than twenty months, and five women had received sentences from 25 to 60 months. The offences varied greatly, but seven were serving provincial sentences for shoplifting.

The job experiences of the interviewees were quite diverse: ten women had held more than three different types of jobs prior to imprisonment.
The jobs were concentrated in the service industry (e.g. secretary, waitress, babysitter, cashier, sales clerk). All of the women had held either stigmatized or employment deemed illegitimate at some point in their trajectories, predominantly dancing in bars, sex work and selling drugs. Twelve interviewees had been on Employment Assistance\(^2\) and four had received Employment Insurance\(^3\) benefits prior to their incarceration.

The remainder of this paper will be divided into three sections. The first provides a brief overview of the situation of incarcerated women and employment in Canada and Quebec; the second explores the central themes emerging from our field investigation; and the third presents the possible avenues which would positively improve the employment policies designed for criminalized women.

**BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF INCARCERATED WOMEN IN CANADA AND QUEBEC**

Over the past 20 years, the proportion of incarcerated women in provincial and territorial institutions in Canada has increased from five percent to nine percent, and in federal institutions from three to six percent (Frigon et al., 2003). Although the population of men incarcerated is considerably higher than women (e.g. in 2003-04, 386 women were sentenced to Canadian federal penitentiaries compared with 7,308 men (CSC, 2005)), research indicates that the number of federally incarcerated women in Canada increased by approximately 75 percent from 1981 to 2002 (Beattie, 2006).\(^4\) There was also considerable “ageing” of the federal women in corrections since 1981. The proportion of criminalized women under the age of 25 decreased from 25 percent in 1981 to 15 percent in 2002 and the proportion of criminalized women over 25 increased from 75 percent in 1981 to 85 percent in 2002 (CSC, 2002; Shantz, 2008). The recent statistics produced on adult correctional services in Canada also indicates that nearly one-third (30 percent) of women admitted to corrections are Aboriginal (Beattie, 2006; Public Safety Canada, 2008).

Despite a decrease in the overall police-reported crime rate in Canada, the incarceration rate continues to climb steadily. The rise in the number of incarcerated women is not a phenomenon unique to Canada. A number of European countries, Australia and the United States have also witnessed increases, sometimes dramatic ones, in the
prison population in general and for women in particular. The war on drugs and zero tolerance policies have been designated as some of the key factors contributing to this rise (Cook and Davies, 1999; Snider, 2003). Analyzing this phenomenon, Maidment (2006, p. 26) notes that “women are most notably affected by neoconservative and neoliberal strategies that have waged wars on drugs and welfare in Canada”. This situation explains the over-representation of racialized, poor women, as well as women with mental disabilities in Canadian prisons (Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, 2005; Maidment, 2006; Frigon and Duhamel, 2006). Due to the erosion of social programs and the offloading of government responsibilities onto individuals, Maidment argues that the increase of incarceration rates is a manifestation of the expansion of the “prison industrial complex” which is first preoccupied by the pursuit of profit and which favours the expansion of prison populations (ibid, p. 27). In that sense, the rise of incarceration should not be viewed as the effect of increased levels of crime but as the result of the corporatization of prisons.

If we look more closely at the characteristics of women incarcerated at provincial facilities and federal institutions in Quebec as a whole, Trevethan (1999) reveals that the women concerned are less than 35 years old in 61 percent of cases at the provincial and territorial level, and in 57 percent of cases at the federal level, and that most of them are unattached (single, separated, divorced or widowed). More than 20 percent of them are Aboriginal. On average, they have nine years of schooling and they are largely unemployed at the time of admission. Women under provincial or territorial responsibility are sentenced for drug-related offences, theft and fraud (Trevethan, 1999). For federal prisoners, Cyrenne (2002) notes that with respect to offences, more than 65 percent of female prisoners are serving sentences for violent crimes (murder, armed robbery, manslaughter or assault), while 35 percent of female prisoners committed crimes that did not directly involve violence (drug related offenses).

Approximately one-third of federal female prisoners are serving prison terms of less than three years, with life or indeterminate sentences in approximately 19 percent of cases. For provincial prisoners, the average lengths of sentences are approximately 81 days (Frigon et al., 2003, p.10). A recent Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview (Public Safety Canada, 2007, p. 85) also notes that women
under federal jurisdiction served a lower proportion of their sentences than men before being released on parole. According to Cyrenne (2002), federally incarcerated women on parole are different than men in the following ways: women are more likely to be granted full parole. They are also more likely to be considered in the low risk category and their reintegration potential seems higher than it does for men.

In Canada, a federal initiative to investigate the conditions of women in prisons, Creating Choices: Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, was designed in 1990 to develop research on women’s imprisonment and to develop alternatives to incarceration (Pate, 2002; Maidment, 2006). The report recommended the opening of numerous community centres for women on parole, halfway houses and Aboriginal centres. It should be noted that there remains too few services offered to women under community supervision to meet their needs, as attested eloquently by the Auditor General of Canada’s report on the reintegration of women offenders (2003). For provincially sentenced women, the lack of resources makes it even more difficult to satisfy the needs of a population whose specific characteristics – short sentences, numerous returns, revolving door problem – nonetheless appear to call for more suitable programming (Frigon et al., 2003). Despite a number of noteworthy reforms, there is still a great deal of room for improvement in the situation for women prisoners in Canada and particularly in terms of their employment needs after prison (Bloom, 1999; Gillis, 2000).

**PATHWAYS TO REINTEGRATION THROUGH EMPLOYMENT**

Three areas of analysis will constitute the next section of this article: the profiles of women, their perceptions of work, and the challenges of employability intervention with women according to the workers we interviewed.

**Profiles of Women**

A number of the workers interviewed commented on the extent to which women prisoners had experienced and were still experiencing multiple problems that made them vulnerable, and that hinder and even prevent them from going back to work after release, as Stephanie, a provincial
caseworker illustrates: “I find the girls have layers of suffering that pile up on top of one another”. The majority of the women detained at federal and provincial facilities experienced or are still experiencing various problems associated with drug use. Aside from substance abuse, health problems, and particularly mental health problems, being on employment assistance for long periods of time, as well as resorting to illegal activities for varying periods also characterize the profile of many women prisoners, as also documented by other studies on incarcerated women (Trevethan, 1999; Frigon and Duhamel, 2006).

The role of the family and children is also a key element in the lives and concerns of incarcerated women. Darianne, a federal caseworker working with women explains:

The women have children and they feel responsible, as compared with a man who is incarcerated, who won’t feel responsible in the same way. A woman will find her time in prison more difficult because she always has one foot outside. In her head, she always has one foot outside because she has children, because she feels guilty. The guilt is often there.

In addition to losing contact with their children and their partners, many incarcerated women have also lost their housing, their furniture and their material goods, a situation which creates further stress once they are released. Roxy describes the burden of trying to start all over again:

And then, when you’re back outside, you’ve lost everything, you’re all alone, you’ve lost your apartment, you’ve lost your furniture, you’ve lost everything. You have no address, no welfare. You have no welfare, you have no address. You have to start all over again.

Thinking about their time in prison, but also their pending release, the incarcerated women expressed a need for support and encouragement in their efforts, as Cindy remarked:

It might be harder for me if I were all alone, but not with some support behind me. Prison can be a good place to be when you’re all alone, but on the outside I might give up at some point.
The vast majority of incarcerated women also have low levels of education. Having an incomplete education and in some cases an almost total lack of work experience represent important challenges in terms of entering the labour force.

**WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS OF WORK**

**Work in Prison**

The incarcerated women we interviewed considered the jobs they did in prison as a way of earning money, as well as a way of avoiding boredom and idleness. The trades and occupations of the women in prison varied from one person to the next and according to the activities available at the institutions in which they were incarcerated. Many of them complained about the lack of variety, the absence of an educational component in the occupations and the low wages. Edith describes her frustration in this regard:

> On the outside I worked as a cook. Here, when you work in the kitchen, you wash dishes, wash the floors. I’d rather learn something. I know how to wash dishes. There’s nothing meaningful about that.

According to some incarcerated women, men have more work opportunities in prison and gain basic experience and knowledge that can then be transferred into the community. Linda talks about this gender-based job segregation: “A man can learn carpentry in prison and use it on the outside. Nothing for us... I hate that. There are no trades to learn in here”.

Some of the women were able to obtain more meaningful jobs, like Isabelle, who was then able to draw on the experience acquired in prison to find a job in the community:

> I’ve always worked. When I was in provincial custody, I worked at the library. In federal prison, I worked in food services for a year-and-a-half, I was a grocery clerk, I was a cook. Then they offered me a chance for a work release at a women’s centre. I was there for a year. I worked at the reception and did administrative support, among other things.

The work experience acquired during incarceration is often overlooked by the women themselves. Counselling federal prisoners, Darianne thought
that women could include this experience in their work history, since it is actual work experience:

Work experience in prison is still work experience – you can’t make it up, and it’s still experience they have acquired. We have some clients who’ve spent their lives in prison, so you have to count what they’ve done as work experience. Many of them don’t realize it can be valid work experience.

Here it seems that dissonance exists between what women and frontline workers define as ‘work experience’. We already mentioned that frontline workers develop ideas which do not necessarily mirror the experiences and values of imprisoned women. In that sense, frontline workers may know the current requirements of the labour market and prepare women more adequately to meet them. Women’s needs in terms of education and vocational training are then secondary, because they do not necessarily fit with the market demands. They also define job experience differently. To the professionals, work done in prison can be evaluated as a job experience, whereas women imprisoned view it in a different way. To them, a job in prison is mainly to pass the time and is meaningless, because it does not help produce more substantial skills they could use once released from prison. Frontline workers seem to develop a more practical and utilitarian idea of employment. Whereas imprisoned women are longing for more significant and appropriate educational and vocational training programs in prison.

Work after Prison

For some women, having a job also represents a way to rebuild their self-confidence after release. In that sense, employment is not only of economic interest, it can also help to improve their psychological well-being. Women who were able to have gratifying work experiences before their incarceration considered these experiences as ways of enhancing self-esteem and pride. Linda described her first job experience in positive terms:

I was able to go back to store D, and I’ve never been so proud of myself in my whole life. I started working after more than 20 years. I worked as a cashier all day. I loved doing it, I really enjoyed myself.
Some of the women we interviewed also talked about how the jobs they had access to did not really improve their situations, especially when they were able to live much more comfortably from the proceeds of their former illicit activities. For those who were single mothers, the low wages along with day care and travel costs often discouraged them seeking work which offered precarious conditions that did nothing to help them feel better about themselves or even to improve their situation. For these women, it seems that employment as such is not as important as their relationships with their children and their loved ones, which play a significant role. Paradoxically maybe, work also becomes less important when a woman has to deal with more pressing concerns, like the need to put a roof over her head – to get off the street.

**Obstacles Encountered by the Women During Job-Hunting**

The shame, the sense of being stigmatized, and the criminal record are barriers often cited by the women we interviewed. Roxy mentioned that possession of a criminal record narrowed a woman’s chance of getting a job:

> It is definitively an obstacle. All they have to do is dial your number and they have your whole life in front of them. I think it’s an obstacle for anyone who wants to work.

Female ex-prisoners also noted that they arouse fear, particularly among potential employers. The workers referred to certain concerns that employers may hold: Will she steal from me? Will she be reliable? Will she show up in the morning? Prejudices against prisoners are omnipresent.

For some incarcerated women, the fact of having been in prison and having been criminalized can go so far as to leave a mark on their bodies metaphorically speaking, as well as make their past more visible and create an even greater stigma in the eyes of the outside world. Stephanie, a provincial caseworker, described the fears of some women under her supervision: “Some of the girls ask me: Does it show that I’m a prostitute? Does it show that I have HIV? If you saw me in the street, what would you think of me?” For Josée, who was supervised in a halfway house, the embodiment of stigma is clear: “Yes, definitely, it’s as if you had a tattoo”. Marie-Sable, who received a one-year suspended sentence, described the burden of bearing a double stigma: as an ex-prisoner and as a person with
mental health problems. She also thought that the jobs criminalized women could get were often underpaid, if not volunteer work:

First, there's a judgment that's there, that's always there. It doesn't matter whether you have a record for theft or for murder, you have a record, it doesn't matter why... Employment is difficult. The only kind of work you can find here, or that I can find at least, is usually volunteer work... I'd like to have a job that brings in some money, like everyone else. Just because I went to prison, it doesn't mean I deserve to earn six dollars a day. That's just a mockery, it is exploitation.

Others, like Linda, were able to obtain a training certificate, but since it is related specifically to prison, there is little chance it will be useful to her after release:

The experience they give us here is very good. I got a certificate in printing. I did some sewing. I've done just about everything. With my certificate in printing, the only thing is that when you get outside it will be marked shop L., detention centre, which means you won't really be able to get a job with it. So you have a monkey on your back before you even start. You learn a trade but it doesn't mean you'll get a job on the outside.

The need to lie about one's prison experience, the need to hide one's former identity from new co-workers and employers also make it difficult to return to society and join the labour force. Those who do manage to find a job are constantly afraid of being discovered and then rejected, which makes them very vulnerable and forces them to lead a kind of double life. Sheila described her fears in this regard:

My life was on the street. It was a life of drugs and prostitution. I'm afraid of running into an employer who was one of my customers. You know, those are the things I'm afraid of.

One of the major obstacles experienced by women was their criminal record and the dilemma referred to earlier as to whether or not to reveal its existence. Isabelle commented on this dilemma:
When you know there’s a central registry, when you give your social insurance number and you have a criminal record. It can be difficult to find work and this has to reduce the range of choices. I don’t know because I’ve never experienced it. But yes, it could call up certain prejudices. It’s another human being that’s hiring you, and you may not feel secure saying yes, I’m a criminal.

For these women, having a good network makes it easier to get their lives back on track. It also helps them get through their incarceration and lessens the shock of release. Jannika mentioned how helpful it was to get in touch with her family.

It helps me that my family comes to see me often. I call my family often; it helps a lot, my little girl... The trailers are a bit more difficult, she comes to sleep here and then she leaves on Sunday. It helps, but it’s hard. What helps is to keep busy.

This field investigation involving professionals and incarcerated women shows the extent to which the problems of criminalized women are multidimensional. These women are more at risk of experiencing physical and mental health problems, drug addictions, and abuse of all sorts. Moreover, they are less likely to have benefited from formal education, vocational training and work experience.

More often than not disadvantaged from a material, social and vocational point of view, criminalized women also have little self-confidence and are not very aware of their own abilities, particularly where employment is concerned. They also consider work to be of a lesser concern than children, housing and family relations.

This first depiction of women’s profiles and discourses on work as well as the obstacles they meet during their job search highlights some interesting issues and debates around social capital and social (re)integration. Many women interviewed are experiencing or have experienced some forms of social vulnerability and disaffiliation, when they leave prison. Indeed they are not integrated through work and their social networks are often rare or non-existent. Medical and mental conditions that emerge before or in prison continue to affect them (Shantz, 2008). The stigma associated with imprisonment is also a major factor of continuous disaffiliation from the labour market.
The concept of work in women's lives seems different when defined by the women themselves and by the professionals. For the women, getting a job is an important need amongst others, like taking care of children, finding a place to live, surviving. Women's views of social integration are multi-dimensional and not only work-oriented. This explains the differences when they evaluate work done in prison. Their view differs greatly from the more practical perception of the professionals interviewed.

Strong social networks also seem to have real value, helping to find programs and services and support communities. Participants noted the roles played by families and friends creating forms of social capital which improve their access to work but also their self confidence and their ability to successfully reintegrate into the community. Research has shown that the absence of strong social relations is linked to failed reintegration (Maidment, 2006; Shantz, 2008) which indicates the importance of social capital in the reintegration process. However, some women interviewed used old and social networks that engage in illegal activities in order to survive or to find money. Does it still constitute a form of social capital, helping them to reintegrate even if their choice of illegal networks can be seen as a negative form of social capital?

Although social capital has been broadly defined as a neutral concept (Bourdieu, 1980), Robert Putnam's work on social capital in American society defines this concept as a producer of “civic engagement”, a tool to facilitate co-operation and supportive relations in communities in order to combat social disorders. Putnam (1995) distinguishes between two forms of social capital: 'bonding social capital', which refers to social networks between homogeneous groups of people, and 'bridging capital', which refers to social networks existing between heterogeneous, diverse groups of people such as choirs and sport clubs. This distinction is important because some forms of social capital can lead to negative effects on community, as is the case for some forms of bonding social capital which can favour exclusion and reinforce the existence of marginal group. According to this theory, women who use established social networks exclusively use bonding social capital, which can produce more severe forms of exclusion, because their social networks reinforce their marginal position. Consequently, social capital theory only functions if ex-prisoners use "good" or "legal" resources to reintegrate.

But what if these women would only have access to illegal tools? Do these illegal tools only lead to social exclusion or can they still have positive effects even if they are temporary? According to Edwards and Foley (1998),
social capital is not equally available to all and not all individuals have equal opportunity to access the various forms of capital. For instance, geographic situation and social isolation can also play a major role to facilitate or to hinder access to social resources. The stigma attached to imprisonment can also restrain access to some forms of social capital and social networks. In this perspective, social capital theory coupled with disaffiliation theory tend to confirm that imprisonment contributes to create more disaffiliated, stigmatized persons who have low choices in terms of reintegration because of their personal and institutional trajectories, but also because of the lack of structural and social resources available to them.

**Challenges of Employability Intervention with Women According to the Workers**

In the previous section we discussed some of the common challenges faced by female prisoners and ex-prisoners, with a focus on their perceptions of work. Below, we discuss employability intervention from the perspective of professionals who work with imprisoned women who also emphasized issues and challenges which women had touched upon.

**Different Employability Profiles of Women Prisoners**

According to the counsellors we interviewed, women in prison can be categorized in three main groups: women who have a certain amount of work experience because they previously practiced a lawful trade; women who practiced illegal work (or legal and illegal work); and women who have no work experience. In terms of employment, the experiences varied depending on the persons they met with. Some had been able to go to school and accumulate some work experience. However, most of the incarcerated women who worked had unskilled and rather precarious jobs, and their work experience was limited to service industry employment (e.g. waitress, working in bars, cleaning houses) because they had no vocational or technical training to begin with. Lack of confidence and low self-esteem were also identified as key barriers in their search for employment.

**Different Forms of Intervention with Women**

Many participants noted that job intervention greatly differs when applied to incarcerated men and women. Women are perceived as more vulnerable
in terms of employment because they are assumed to not understand or be unaware of the real issues and needs of the labour market. They also appear to be unaware of their own abilities in this regard.

Some of the professionals felt that men have a different way to find jobs — they seem more aware of the exigencies of the labour market, and pursue more practical and attainable work objectives. It seemed to the workers that men had a better ability to compartmentalize their lives into different units (e.g. employment, housing, women, children, friends), while women had a more holistic approach to life, which often made them vulnerable. When one aspect of their lives was not working, all the other aspects were affected.

These perceptions about women and men should be contextualized in order to better explain differences which are mainly socially structured. Indeed, some researchers have argued that women experienced more hardships than men during their reintegration process, particularly in terms of employment, because they are less likely to find work and the only jobs available to them are mainly casual or part-time, maintaining them in a situation of poverty and social vulnerability (Maidment, 2006; Shantz, 2008; Shantz et al., 2009). While some women may lack some knowledge about job searching and the labour market, their vulnerability is not only personal, it is also created by the social conditions and the responsibilities they have to face when they return to society. As caregivers, women must face urgent problems such as reconnecting with their children and taking care of them. Such responsibilities are rarely taken by men and interfere with women who are seeking employment (Harm and Phillips, 2001; Richie, 2001; Shantz, 2008).

Some workers also felt they needed to adopt a more holistic intervention perspective with women, taking into account all aspects of their lives and not just placing an emphasis on employment. In most cases the question of employment is not the first point addressed during a session. It is often approached indirectly, using an interpersonal approach that avoids value judgments and that takes a woman’s other problems into account before the issue of employment is raised. Stephanie, a provincial caseworker, recalled:

A lot of the time I have no choice. I can’t say that I’m going to cover all of the questions I want to raise during the hour I have for the interview because it might take a half-hour to talk about her telephone call to her mother and the confrontation she had or about the letter or the drawing her daughter
sent her, because they often bring me things they have received and I know we have to talk about it. How they're feeling, their health problems, their worries... I realize that if we don’t do this we’ll be missing the boat.

Even when the matter of employment is raised, it is necessary to address the woman’s other key concerns, such as her children, housing and the abuse she suffered.

The approach also varies according to age. In general, reintegrating older women is different because they have distinct needs and experiences. Research has shown that older women in prison are more likely than young prisoners to lack employment skills and family connections. Their health condition also affects more deeply their reintegration process (Strimelle, 2007; Shantz, 2008). With younger women, specifically those who remain incarcerated for longer periods of time, more effort can be put into training and education. The length of the sentence will also have an impact on the intervention that can begin in prison. As Charles, a federal caseworker, pointed out, women with short sentences often do not put an effort into a career change process knowing they will find it difficult to continue this process once they have been released.

**Intervention Difficulties According to the Workers**

Working with women brings with it a host of difficulties. For example, at the provincial level, the “revolving door phenomenon” interrupts programming and affects the effectiveness of different interventions. Stephanie explains the challenges faced by professionals who work with provincial prisoners:

> The difficult thing at the provincial level is that the inmates are not necessarily here long enough to be able to complete their schooling. When they come back, which happens often, they can start again and then continue on from where they were.

Also attributable to the revolving door phenomenon, participants discussed how working with this group of women can be emotionally wearing, as they are often touched by all of the suffering these women express. Contributing to this stress is that some of the professionals feel isolated in their work teams because of the scepticism of certain colleagues towards their ability to help incarcerated women reintegrate smoothly. Workers also experienced
difficulties with respect to the combination of the women’s expectations and their lack of self-confidence to make personal choices.

Stephanie, a provincial caseworker also notices that some workers in the correctional system are more critical towards imprisoned woman than towards men: “I sometimes notice that people are much harsher towards them. I also notice that some of the workers are harsh”. This attitude stems from different factors, such as the belief of some caseworkers that some women often tend to let everything go when they meet a man, thus making it more difficult to foster effective intervention strategies and outcomes. Stephanie highlights this point well:

Some women are very dependent on their partners and this is often a problem. You get things going and then they find a boyfriend or get back together with a boyfriend who’s on the other side. When this happens, they’re much more likely to drop everything.

Workers also described another specific challenge they face in their intervention with women: some women may “relapse” into their old habits and lifestyles because of the lack of money and employment. For women who have been involved in illegal work for some length of time, the financial incentive is indeed the strongest attraction, and this obviously constitutes a significant impediment in the process of returning to work. The demands of the labour force are so high for these women, many of whom have no work experience, are uneducated and have a criminal record that they would rather go back to their previous activities as noted by halfway house staffer Huguette:

It’s not easy on the job market. They have all sorts of difficulties: the DPJ [Direction de la protection de la jeunesse] on their back, an abusive spouse, debts and they’ve never worked before. Imagine what a leap that is!

In counselling women who have worked illegally, it is necessary to take into account all of the advantages associated with such work, which some women prefer to retain rather than engage in activities that are seen as less legitimate but much more lucrative. Even when a woman is thinking about leaving the sex trade (e.g. escort service, street prostitution), it is still seen as a supplement that can enable her to buy a few Christmas presents or
to continue supporting her children. Malika explains her choice of getting involved again in the sex trade:

> It's something I think about when the holidays come around and I really need money, or when I have no money. I'm afraid it might lead me to start using again. But let's say I really need a few $100 bills. I find it goes quickly. Three hours and it's over and I have my money.

Despite the fact that some feminist researchers, activists and experts analyse *sex work* as *labour* (Parent, 1994; Thiboutot, 2001; Parent *et al*., 2003; ConStellation, 2005), most workers interviewed did not want to validate this approach and preferred transforming and/or transposing illegal employment skills into a legal field. Carole, a federal caseworker, pointed out the necessity of showing that the women have developed skills through their activities:

> I always ask: What is it that you did? How did you go about it? How did it work? Instead of selling your body, what would you like to do? She's always dreamed of selling clothing, of being in marketing.

The problem here also, as we have previously indicated, is to cope with the loss of quick money and be content with more modest wages. The proceeds from their illicit activities are not as great as is often thought, but it is spent very quickly and brings no long-term gain. Working with such clients entails acknowledging the lure of what is beautiful, exciting and pleasurable as well as the economic, emotional and relational dependency of these women.

Despite these intervention difficulties, the women seem to be receptive to specialized employability and job retention services. Nonetheless, a number of obstacles that the women and the workers identified still persist. For instance, many women complain about the fact that employment programs are still largely insufficient and underdeveloped in corrections. Because of the lack of gender-specific programming, women are also often mandated to attend programs that are not centered on their needs. These comments held by the women join a number of criticisms made about work in prison. Prison work is presented by its supporters as an effective tool of social reintegration, allowing the persons detained to acquire professional skills and favouring their personal development. However, independent
studies underlined that correctional job programs are largely insufficient and outdated (Gillis, 2000; Strimelle and Poupart, 2004). Women are still often offered conventional and stereotypical tasks in prison such as household ironing, cooking, sewing and the like, jobs which do not allow them to find better paid or more specialized employment when released.

While recognizing the necessity of widening women’s horizons in job-hunting and of targeting better employment intervention practices toward imprisoned women, the workers we interviewed did not question the values of the correctional system in which they work, and the correctional practices they apply. They generally promote a renewal and an improvement of the employability programs, but still believe that tools offered to women can help them to manage better once released.

PROMISING AVENUES FOR THE FUTURE

In our interviews, many themes were explored in relation to the possible avenues for the future including the importance of a network of employers, external resources and the strategic elements to be deployed to insure positive experiences of women and employment. The need for employers is a central element. Huguette, who works at a halfway house, commented on the need to make employers aware of the needs of female prisoners and to create meaningful ties with the community in order to facilitate the transition. It has been proposed that:

The employability program should be connected to a business. I think it could be encouraging for a woman to know that if she goes for six months of employability training she’ll have a job afterwards.

Marc, another professional working as a provincial caseworker with women, noted that there are programs available to help women when they are released and that an employer’s good will also plays an important part in enabling them to find work:

Fortunately, there are still employers who will say: what I’m interested in is your job performance; I don’t want to know about what you did before. But this doesn’t apply very well in certain sectors.
Despite the fact that the significance of external resources is also a crucial element, few of the women interviewed raised this issue. Some, who had a support network in place upon their release, did not think about the question in specific terms, although they said they were somewhat afraid of going back to the world. For her part, Cindy contacted job search centres specifically intended for prisoners, which she found more comfortable to deal with because these agencies are familiar with the issue of women prisoners:

I’m less likely to feel rejected. I’ll feel more comfortable with them than with a man from Welfare and starting to tell him I only have my third year of high school and about the prostitution and about being in prison.

Others, including Darianne commented on the importance of experiencing success which can encourage employability and job retention as women feel validated, encouraged and reassured: “When they experience success, that’s what can help them the most. They feel like they’ve managed to accomplish something”. Isabelle also notes that training is the first essential element that encourages employability and job retention:

I think it’s to a woman’s advantage not just to do her time but to get some training or develop some skills to prepare for tomorrow. I think there isn’t enough emphasis on training and education for women. Sewing underwear is all well and good, but I don’t think it’s validating, it’s not something you can use on the outside... I saw some girls who had no education go to get their grade 11. Unfortunately, the girls go where they can make the most money. They go to sew underwear instead of going to school... Why not give a bonus to encourage them to go to school?

For women contemplating a return to work, Manon, a provincial caseworker, argues that more flexible forms of intervention need to be developed: “I’ve found by experience that if you’re too harsh or rigid with them, they break the contract. It’s inevitable”. Moreover, the women seem to greatly appreciate being worked with on an individual basis. Getting out of traditionally female sectors of employment also may afford more job possibilities for women prisoners. Sonia commented on women’s interest in non-traditional work:
I realized that non-traditional work interested them. As soon as they open their horizons to something other than working at a plant or a warehouse or secretarial work, they’re interested.

Additionally, many women excel in doing meticulous work and welcome possibilities where creativity can be exercised. Since the end of the 1990s, some non-traditional programs were created for women prisoners in Canada. For instance, CSC created dog training programs for women in two federal penitentiaries (Joliette, Quebec and Truro, Nova Scotia). These programs were organized to provide the women with a training opportunity in a form of activity that enables them to develop new skills and that gives them a better chance for their release. It was also used to provide a form of therapy similar to animal therapy. Various initiatives carried out in Quebec (workshops in photography, theatre, dance, writing, art therapy) should also be developed on a wider scale and involve a greater number of women in prison or under supervision. Another key aspect was identified by Sonia: working to foster recognition and transferable skills, and then working to establish ties with employers in the community in order to find jobs they could offer to women who exit prison.

Lastly, as the prisoners and workers we interviewed often noted, bonuses should be given for work in prison, but also for school work and for going back to school. In general, it was agreed that the work should be done during incarceration and continue in the community. All of those interviewed were critical of the lack of connection between the two. In addition, employment programs should be geared to the diverse realities of the women. The well-documented lack of gender-based supports for women in prison is also mentioned by professionals. That is the reason why they have proposed the development of gender-sensitive programs which are necessary, rather than programs designed for men and simply transferred to women.

CONCLUSION

In the last decade, reintegration programs for imprisoned women in Canada have begun to develop and, during the same period, the number of women sent to prison has also increased (Pate, 2002). Consequently, we are left to ponder how reintegration initiatives can fulfill their objectives while more and more women will have to face the multiple challenges
associated with their return to society, particularly when they will be job-hunting. Would choosing alternatives to prison and developing more supervising structures in the community be more helpful in terms of employment?

Research on employment after prison also raises questions about the resources that the penal system offers to the persons leaving penal institutions and the way correctional programs envision social reintegration. Since the 1980s, ‘The Welfare State’ in Canada has increasingly been under attack, and measures of social security and employment assistance have been considerably reduced. Even if access to certain resources and certain forms of assistance are still possible for the individuals in precarious situations, the message delivered to them by the social welfare system is that they must be able to care for themselves (Otero et al., 2004). The logic of the correctional system also rests on the idea that prisoners and ex-prisoners are largely responsible of their own reintegration (Ehrenberg, 1998; Strimelle and Poupart, 2004). In this context, how can women live with all these constraints and carry the weight of their own reintegration without becoming even more vulnerable? Is it enough to display some ‘willingness’ to find viable solutions?

Moreover, for some feminist researchers, prison cannot adequately meet the needs of the criminalized women given all the legal, social and psychological ramifications and consequences of imprisonment, but also because prison is first of all a bastion of the male culture (Faith, 2002). In light of the existing situation briefly sketched in this article, we conclude that the effectiveness of the penal policies toward criminalized women must be called into question. Despite some improvements, these policies do not succeed in helping imprisoned women but are, nonetheless, maintained. In that sense, our research emphasizes the need to re-think and re-conceptualize those policies by considering women’s expectations and experiences. This discussion should also take into account the numerous forms of obstacles that they encounter, by trying to diminish or suppress the structural repressive ideology that negatively impacts their lives and by proposing gender-sensitive alternatives that will benefit women.
ENDNOTES

1 Women were given fictitious names. We also guaranteed their anonymity and confidentiality.

2 Employment Assistance Services is a federal program that provides funding to organizations to assist unemployed individuals to obtain and maintain employment.

3 Employment Insurance provides temporary financial assistance for unemployed Canadians. Canadians who are sick, pregnant or caring for a newborn or adopted child, as well as those who must care for a family member who is seriously ill, may also be assisted by Employment Insurance.

4 Women sentenced to less than two years of imprisonment are under the supervision of provincial and territorial correctional services. Women who are sentenced to more than two years of imprisonment are under the supervision of federal corrections.

5 Full Parole is a type of conditional release granted by the National Parole Board in which the remainder of the sentence is served under supervision in the community.

6 To safeguard the anonymity of the persons we interviewed, as well as the confidentiality of what they told us, we considered a worker to be any person working at the federal or provincial correctional services as a caseworker, program manager or correctional officer, as well as persons employed, as employment counsellors.

7 Under the Private Family Visiting Program, private family visits are allowed once every two months for periods of up to 72 hours per prisoner. Visits take place in special family visiting units—“trailers”—located within the penitentiary reserve in an area that provides as much privacy as possible. Family members eligible to participate in the program are spouses, common-law partners, children, parents, foster-parents, siblings, grandparents and persons with whom the inmate has a close familial bond (see http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/fami/visit-eng.shtml).

8 In 2006, the Correctional Investigator of Canada noticed that federal inmates allowances for work and program participation were the same as in the 1980s, and that this situation has negative effects on the reintegration potential of prisoners, particularly during the initial phase of release (The Correctional Investigator Canada, 2006, p. 18). In 2006, the maximum inmate pay rate was $6.90 per day, but the costs of the products purchased by federal prisoners has dramatically risen. In 1981, the canteen basket cost $8.99 and the same basket now costs $61.59 (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2006).

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Véronique Strimelle is Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. She completed a Master’s in History (Belgium) and a Ph.D. in Criminology (Université de Montréal). She specializes in mediation and conflict resolution, and is presently working on theoretical and empirical research projects on restorative justice. Her other research interests relate to the history of penal institutions for youth in conflict with the law, social reintegration of persons in conflict with the law and the forms of post-institutional control.
A graduate of Cambridge University in England, Professor and Chair of the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa, Sylvie Frigon offers an original and unique take on the universe of women’s prisons. Through qualitative research, fiction, theatre, and dance, Sylvie Frigon seeks to better define the logic, process and impact of incarceration and (re)integration on criminalized women.
PRISONERS' STRUGGLES

Introduction to the Organization
Continuité-famille auprès des détenues (CFAD)
/ Family Continuity for Female Prisoners *

QUI SOMMES-NOUS?

Fondé en 1985 par Yolande Trépanier, et dirigé depuis 2003 par Liliane Aflalo, CFAD est le seul organisme communautaire au Canada dont le but premier est de maintenir et améliorer la relation mère-enfant chez les femmes incarcérées, pendant et après leur incarcération. C’est également le seul endroit non supervisé par les services correctionnels pour les femmes judiciarisées. CFAD leur permet de se retrouver entre elles pour partager, s’entraider, reprendre en main leur vie et celle de leur famille pour enfin repartir du bon pied, et ce, de leur propre chef.

NOTRE MISSION

Offrir aux mères incarcérées à la Maison Tanguay la possibilité de vivre avec leurs enfants à l’intérieur de l’établissement.

Améliorer les capacités parentales des mères faisant l’objet de toute forme d’incarcération dans tout établissement prévu à cet égard et favoriser le maintien d’un lien important entre ces mères et leurs enfants.

Dès leur libération, favoriser la réintégration sociale et professionnelle de ces femmes, ainsi que prévenir les problèmes d’adaptation, les comportements délinquants et le décrochage scolaire chez leurs enfants.

Prévenir le développement de comportements criminogènes dans la population en général et notamment dans les familles à faibles revenus de l’arrondissement Sud-Ouest de Montréal.

NOTRE CLIENTÈLE

Elle est constituée de femmes, surtout des mères de famille, de différentes ethnies et de tous les milieux socio-économiques, mais il
Family Continuity for Female Prisoners

arrive fréquemment qu’elles soient peu scolarisées et très démunies, financièrement et affectivement. Plus de 80 pourcent des femmes incarcérées ont été victimes de diverses formes d’abus physiques et/ou psychologiques.

NOS ACTIVITÉS

En établissement

Le programme mère-enfant à la Maison Tanguay (prison provinciale)
Permettre aux mères incarcérées de vivre deux jours par semaine en compagnie de leurs enfants et d’une intervenante de CFAD dans une maison mobile spécialement aménagée. Leur permettre également des rencontres familiales de groupe au gymnase de l’établissement lors d’occasions spéciales (Pâques, Noël, Halloween, etc.).

Rencontres à l’Établissement Joliette (prison fédérale)
Quatre fois par an, nous allons rencontrer les femmes incarcérées à l’Établissement Joliette pour leur faire connaître notre organisme et les encourager à bénéficier de nos services au moment de leur libération.

En communauté

Rencontres à la maison de transition pour femmes (Maison Thérèse-Casgrain)
Deux jours par semaine, une « facilitatrice » de CFAD se rend à la MTC pour des rencontres amicales avec les femmes qui viennent d’être libérées d’un établissement carcéral. Elle leur fait connaître notre organisme et nos activités. Elle les accompagne à CFAD et à d’autres endroits si cela s’avère nécessaire, car à la suite d’une longue incarcération, certaines femmes ressentent beaucoup d’insécurité dans les transports en commun.

Dîners communautaires, banque alimentaire, écoute active, soutien téléphonique
Dans nos locaux de la rue Notre-Dame ouest à Saint-Henri, nous offrons un dîner communautaire chaque jour et les femmes ont accès à une banque alimentaire une fois par semaine. Elles se réunissent en ces lieux pour
échanger, se retrouver entre elles et participer à diverses activités qui varient selon la demande.

Toute femme incarcérée au Canada (et parfois même ailleurs) peut téléphoner à CFAD et recevoir des encouragements, des conseils, des références et surtout, de l’écoute, de la part d’une femme attentive et empathique.

*Programme d’action communautaire pour les enfants (PACE)*

Le PACE, subventionné par Santé Canada, offre aux enfants dont la mère est incarcérée et aux enfants du quartier toutes sortes d’activités, de l’art aux sports, en passant par les sorties culturelles et les camps d’été et d’hiver.

**FAMILY CONTINUITY FOR FEMALE PRISONERS**

**CFAD**

**WHO ARE WE?**

Founded in 1985 by Yolande Trépanier, and directed since 2003 by Liliane Aflalo, CFAD is the only community organization in Canada whose primary goal is to maintain and better the mother-child relationship between incarcerated women and their children, during and after their incarceration. It is also the only place for criminalized women, which is not supervised by correctional services. CFAD allows them to share amongst themselves, to help one another, to take in hand their lives and those of their family so as to at last take off on the right foot, and this, as their own chief.

**OUR MISSION**

To offer to incarcerated mothers at Maison Tanguay the possibility to live with their children within the institution.

To better the parental capacities of the mothers who are subject to all forms of incarceration in all institutions foreseen for this purpose and to favour the maintenance of the important bond between these women and their children.

After their release, improve the social and professional reintegration of these women and prevent adaptation problems, delinquent behaviour and school drop-outs for their children.
Prevent the development of criminalized behaviour in the general population, notably in low income families in the South-West borough of Montreal.

OUR CLIENTELE

Our clientele consists of women, mostly mothers, of different ethnicities and from all socio-economic classes, but frequently they have a low level of education, are severely downtrodden, both financially and emotionally. More than 80 percent of incarcerated women have been victims of diverse forms of physical and/or psychological abuse.

OUR ACTIVITIES

In Institutions

The Mother-child program at Maison Tanguay (provincial prison)
To allow incarcerated mothers to live in the company of their children for two days per week with a staff member from CFAD in a mobile home especially arranged for this purpose. As well, to allow them to have family visits in a group, in the gymnasium of the institution for special occasions such as Easter, Christmas and Halloween.

Meetings at the Joliette Institution (federal prison)
Four times per year, we go to the Joliette Institution to meet the incarcerated women to introduce them to our organization and to encourage them to benefit from our services once they are released.

In the Community

Meetings at the Halfway House for Women in Montreal (Maison Thérèse-Casgrain)
Two days per week, a facilitator from CFAD goes to the MTC for friendly meetings with the women who have just been released from a carceral institution. She introduces them to our organization and our activities. She accompanies them to CFAD and to other places if it becomes necessary, because following a long incarceration, certain women feel a great deal of insecurity when using public transportation.
Community Lunches, Food Bank, Active Listening and Support by Telephone

In our premises on Notre Dame Street West in Saint-Henri, we offer community lunches each day and the women have access to a food bank once per week. They gather in this space to share, to find themselves among their peers and to participate in diverse activities which vary according to the requests.

Any woman incarcerated in Canada (and sometimes elsewhere) can telephone CFAD and receive encouragement, advice, references and more importantly, active listening, from an attentive and empathetic woman.

Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)

The CAPC, financed by the Public Health Agency of Canada, offers all kinds of activities such as sports, cultural outings, as well as summer and winter camps, to children of women who are or have been incarcerated and to children in the neighbourhood.

ENDNOTES

* This article is a reprint of a CFAD pamphlet.
The organization can be reached by phone at (514) 989-9891.
The Crossing Communities Art Project advocates the use of imagination and culture as means to share stories, histories, experiences, identities and values. The project brings together people from diverse backgrounds to collectively make art to work towards social and economic transformation.

Crossing Communities Art Project currently produces participatory videos with marginalized women and girls locally in Winnipeg and nationally, in remote northern communities in Canada. In 2009, we also traveled to Kathmandu to include Nepali women and youth in our film projects.

These short films can be seen on LookingInSpeakingOut.com – an innovative site to look in and speak out about these videos that focus on the sex trade, self-harm, addictions, HIV, violence, suicide, being transgendered and what it means to be widowed in Nepal. Crossing Communities collectively directs these videos together with women and girls whose voices are rarely heard locally or globally. This new web project is a place for people to gather on a global scale to view the films created with women and girls in marginalized circumstances, and to have an intimate view of their histories, thoughts, hopes and dreams, as well as for viewers to add their thoughts in the Speak Out Section of the site. Our goal is to bring the perspectives of marginalized women who are often criminalized women from the margins into the centre of public dialogue.

Crossing Communities Art Project started in 1996 as a weekly art studio in Manitoba’s provincial prison for women, the Portage Correctional Centre, and was at that time appropriately called the Portage Art Project. Passing Pictures with Prisoners was our first exhibit in 1999 and was the outcome of a year-long exchange between artists in Manitoba and women in prison. The exhibit was held at the Urban Shaman Gallery together with our first public conversation where we brought together women from prison, the local director of the Elizabeth Fry Society, psychiatrist Dr. Jeanne Randolph, along with an Aboriginal elder to engage the public in a dialogue about the images in the exhibit and the issues that these pictures brought forward.

This method of making art with women and then engaging the public in dialogue about the issues the women face and bring forward in their art continues to be the basic process we use today. We invite women in marginalized places, including prisons, to meet with artists and after
spending time together and learning about each other’s circumstances and values we collectively make films, photos, and videos that visualize what our participants have to say.

Our public dialogues, exhibits and film screenings take place in art galleries across Canada but also in non-art spaces. We stage events for large and small audiences, and the women and girls who participate in the art projects have lead parts in engaging the public in conversations. We video document the conversations at the events and this becomes part of the art project so that viewers can see and hear what others had to say. For example, we screened our participatory video Pictures of Self-Harm with a small group of nurses in Manitoba in a hospital setting and video documented their heartfelt response which is now being screened on the website LookInSpeakingOut. Similarly, we showed the same video to a group of youth in Kathmandu, Nepal and documented their response which is also available on the website. Still images from the video screenings provide powerful visual examinations of the women’s as well as the audience’s responses to the videos and art we have made.

Video still from *Butterfly* (2008)
by Jackie Traverse and Crossing Communities Art Project, Canada.

Video still from *White To Red* (2009)
by Rita Schrestha and Crossing Communities Art Project, Nepal.
Video still from *Gimme My Fix* (2009)
by Alexus Young and Crossing Communities Art Project, Canada.

Two of our videos, *Women and Girls in the Sex Trade* (2005) and *Pictures of Self-Harm* (2007), are available for purchase on DVD through the Crossing Communities Art Project website www.crossingcommunities.org. These videos are used by a broad spectrum of individuals who work in different public sectors, including government departments who purchase the videos to train service providers, professors who use them in their curriculums, as well as churches, addiction treatment centres, service providing organizations, drop in centres and many others. Our art projects are designed to make visible what is often difficult to see and talk about, creating an opening for dialogue where innovative solutions to social, economic and cultural challenges can emerge. The women and girls who participate in our projects also present their videos and films to open public audiences and lead discussions that increase public awareness of the social risks that contribute to the criminalization of women and youth.

Crossing Communities recently presented at the 2009 Custody and Caring International Conference. This one-day learning event explored issues of substance use in the lives of Canadian women and their ways of healing. Designed as a multidisciplinary educational opportunity, it was delivered to health care professionals, community/facility youth workers,
early childhood educators, teachers, police, policy developers, and all other interested health care and service providers in addictions and mental health services, child welfare, education and the criminal justice system. Art from Crossing Communities’ participants, including video, films and photos, was showcased. Tonya Tabobondung, a Crossing Communities participant, highlighted her work during the conference, and assisted with audience participation in the creation of a stop-motion video on women’s healing from substance abuse. Through the use of independently created and photographed frames (similar to how a cartoon is made), the conference participants told a short story. This work is available on the Crossing Communities lookinginspeakingout.com website.

Crossing Communities has been recognized for its contribution through such awards as the National Crime Prevention Strategy Safer Communities Award in 2005 and the 2007 national Kaiser Award for Excellence in Aboriginal Programming. In 2008, Edith Regier – the founder and Artistic Director of Crossing Communities – was named a woman who makes a difference by the Manitoba Status of Women.

For more information on the Crossing Communities Art Project, please contact:

175 McDermot Avenue, 2nd Floor
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 0S1
Telephone: (204) 947-5430
Website: http://www.crossingcommunities.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Edith Regier* is the Artistic Director of the Crossing Communities Art Project, located in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Along with being the Research Chair in Substance Abuse, *Colleen Anne Dell* is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and School of Public Health at the University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Dell is a Senior Research Associate with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Canada’s national non-governmental addictions agency and the Correctional Service of Canada Addictions Research Centre. She is also
an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University and a Research Associate with the National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research at McGill University and the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. She is currently leading a five-year national study of the role of stigma and identity in Aboriginal women's healing journeys from problematic substance use.
BOOK REVIEW

The Mean Girl Motive
by Nicole E. R. Landry
Reviewed by Leah DeVellis

Meanness and aggression among girls has increasingly gained attention publicly and in the realm of academia. Cases such as the murder of Reena Virk in British Columbia, Canada challenge the notion of girls being ‘sugar and spice and everything nice’, provoking researchers to examine girls and aggression.

Nicole E.R. Landry is a recent Master’s graduate from St. Mary’s University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her research has focused on youth and bullying, and more recently on girl aggression and violence. Landry’s book, The Mean Girl Motive: Negotiating Power and Femininity, addresses the social contexts of girl meanness in North America. She claims that girl meanness, including gossiping, teasing and social alienation is more difficult to detect than outright violence. From a feminist standpoint perspective, Landry contributes to present scholarship by exploring girls’ perceptions and expressions of aggression as it exists within the intersection of gender, race, and class, paying particular attention to aspects of power, femininity, consumption, and patriarchy. Landry achieves this objective through discussing and theorizing the results of in-depth focus groups she conducted with 24 girls aged 8 to 11.

Landry presents a thorough review of the relevant literature and feminist-theoretical accounts of girl meanness, and demonstrates an excellent command of the topic area. Landry’s work builds upon the previous research by exploring the complex and complicated girl culture through the lens of a feminist intersectional researcher. While previous research on girl meanness has focused on young teenagers, Landry emphasizes the importance of conducting research with younger girls. The author supports her stance by facilitating and observing focus groups where young girls are provided with the opportunity to express themselves. The text is rich with direct narratives from the focus groups. This is particularly effective in exposing the content of ‘girl talk’, by revealing the language, tone and content of the girls’ conversations. The narratives are a key strength of the book as they provide substantial evidence that girls understand meanness within the normative parameters of gender, race and class. The examples also confirm that meanness is an expression of power employed by girls considered popular and superior to other girls.
The findings of Landry’s study are fascinating. Her work reveals that girls’ normalize expressions and experiences of meanness. The research subjects possess a gendered understanding of aggression, conveyed in the girls’ acceptance of meanness within girl culture, as opposed to physical force which is unacceptable for girls and reserved for boys. Landry points out that understanding overt aggression as a male characteristic encourages girls to engage in passive-aggressive forms of antagonism. Interestingly, a girl’s ability to ‘be mean’ is highly dependant on her position in the social hierarchy of her peers. Popularity indicates a high social status, yet as the narratives bring to light, popularity is relative to a girl’s femininity, race and class. In fact, this study shows that girls are more accepting of meanness when expressed by popular girls that are pretty, skinny, White and wealthy. Landry suggests that popular girls use meanness as an avenue to express aggression without deviating from feminine standards; girls without power articulate feelings of powerlessness and an inability to express themselves. As well, meanness is often employed as a means to maintain popularity and social status.

Although The Mean Girl Motive provides a wealth of information and analysis pertaining to girl meanness and girl culture in general, there are a few areas that leave the reader with questions. First, methodologically, there is some ambiguity in Landry’s approach. Although focus groups are a suitable approach for speaking to girls of this age group as individual interviews may be intimidating, it is unclear as to how and why Landry chose to have a heterogeneous composition – racially and in terms of class status – of the focus groups. Focus group literature generally advises researchers to compose homogeneous focus groups, whether it be by age, gender, race or economic status, in order to avoid the reproduction of inherent power relations, as well as the silencing of minority or marginalized voices. Landry states that her intent is to recreate friendship groups, however she seems to overlook the power relations and hierarchies intrinsic to her approach.

Second, although Landry identifies that the focus groups were comprised of “White”, “Black” and “mixed-race” girls, the author’s discussion of race most often defaults to a juxtaposition of “White girls” versus “Black girls”. Unfortunately, this limits the parameters of Landry’s analysis to a two-dimensional discussion of race. Allowing more room for discussion of “mixed-race” girls would provide a broader understanding of race in this study and enrich the data.
Finally, when addressing the issue of race or referring to the race of her research subjects, it is unclear as to why the author chooses to present “Black” with capitalization, and “white” in lowercase. I was unable to locate a footnote or reference for this usage. From a critical perspective, this seems to reinforce Proweller’s (1998, p. 29) discussion of the raceless subjectivity of Whiteness. This discrepancy suggests that “Black”, as a race, is more visible and identifiable, while “white” lacks ‘race’ and is not defined by the same parameters applied to minority ethnicities. Again, this serves to reify normative definitions of race whereby White is the standard to which others are compared.

As girl meanness within girl culture is a relatively new and developing area of inquiry, Landry should be commended for her Canadian contribution regarding this phenomenon. The topic of girl meanness becomes a point of departure as Landry’s analysis elucidates a host of social factors that mitigate interactions within girl culture.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leah DeVellis is a PhD student in Sociology at Carleton University. Her current research interests include the sociology and political economy of punishment, prison labour, work and morality, and governance of criminalized populations.
Jackie Traverse is an Ojibway artist from Lake St. Martin First Nation and has served provincial time in the Portage jail in Manitoba. She completed a diploma in Fine Arts at the University of Manitoba in 2009. She works in mixed media producing pieces ranging from oil painting to sculpture. In November 2008, she won first prize in the Peace Hills Trust annual Aboriginal art contest. Jackie is an advocate on the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

**Front Cover: “Reminder”**

This painting, of my arms in handcuffs, is called “Reminder”. It is an homage to where I came from and a reminder to never go back. I am not ashamed of the life I have lived nor am I ashamed of my past. I honour my past, after all, it got me here.

**Back Cover: “Addiction and Pregnancy”**

The second painting is of my hands fixing up a shot. I was addicted to injecting cocaine and I used cocaine while pregnant. The power of addiction was too strong for me and it won over the love I had for my unborn child. This is one of my biggest regrets in life. After doing this painting I was free from this guilt. I think carrying guilt is useless. Art has helped me to heal myself and it has given deeper meaning to my life.
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**FORMAT GUIDELINES AND EXAMPLES**

**In-text Citation – Single Reference**

(Author Last Name, date, p. x)

Example:
In prison, as in other ‘social’ institutions, the focus of education is often the promotion of “social utility and conformity” (Hassine, 1997, p. 37).

**In-text Citation – Multiple References**

(Author(s) 1 Last Name(s), date; Author(s) 2 Last Name(s), date)

Example:
It also proposes new and less costly strategies that are more humane and effective (Richards and Ross, 2001; Ross and Richards 2002, 2003; Jones 2003; Newbold, 2003; Terry, 2003a, 2003b).

**Book**

Author Last Name, Author First Name (date) *Title of Book*, City of Publication: Publisher.

Example:
Newspaper or Magazine Article (Print)

Author Last Name, Author First Name (date) “Article Title”, Periodical Title, p. x-y – Month day.

Example:

Newspaper or Magazine Article (Online)

Author Last Name, Author First Name (date) “Article Title”, Publication Title – Month day, retrieved from URL.

Example:

Online Article (General)

Author Last Name, Author First Name [or, if author details unavailable, Website Proprietor] (date) “Article Title”, Website Name – Month day, retrieved from URL.

Example:

Legal Jurisprudence

Standards of legal citation vary according to jurisdiction and legal system. Given the international scope of the JPP, it would be impractical for us to insist on a single referencing format for jurisprudence. We encourage authors to adopt a style that is consistent and appropriate to their location. For Canadian references, and as a general guideline, we recommend the
Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation, a.k.a. the "McGill Guide," which uses the following format:

*Style of cause, [date] [if not indicated by a neutral citation], neutral citation [if available], law report volume number, law report series, page number, court [if applicable].*

Examples:


*Suresh v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration), 1 S.C.R. 3 ([2002]) 1 S.C.R. 3.*

**Legislation**

Legislative Assembly Name (date) *Act Name, Bill Name.*

Example:


**Report**

Author Last Name, Author First Name [or, if author details unavailable, Agency Name] (date) "Sub-chapter Title", [and / or] *Report Title — Month day, City of Publication: Publisher.*

Example:


**Institutional Policy Document or Communication**

Institution Name (date) *Document Title — Month day.*

Example:
