“Will I Ever Be Free?”:
Federally Sentenced Women After Prison

by

Sarah Rizun
B.A. (Criminology), Simon Fraser University, 2009

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the
School of Criminology
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Name: Sarah Rizun
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of Thesis: “Will I Ever Be Free?”: Federally Sentenced Women After Prison

Examin ing Committee:
Chair: Barry Cartwright, Ph.D.
Lecturer

__________________________________________
Brian Burtch, Ph.D.
Senior Supervisor
Professor

__________________________________________
Sheri Fabian, Ph.D.
Supervisor
Lecturer

__________________________________________
Kim Pate, J.D., M.Sc.Dip.
External Examiner
Part-time Professor, Faculty of Law
University of Ottawa

Date Defended: August 2, 2012
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Abstract

Interviews were conducted with 11 Canadian federally sentenced women to explore the process of returning to society after incarceration. Three interrelated categories of experience emerged: serving time in prison; meeting basic needs; and serving time in the community. Respondents made long-term use of resources that were available when serving time inside but also indicated lasting pains of incarceration. Upon release, meeting basic needs relating to health, income, housing, and relationships was exceptionally difficult for many women. Serving time in the community, despite some benefit, was mostly characterized by a lack of support and excessive surveillance and demands. Overall, respondents demonstrated resourcefulness after prison, but the problems they experienced posed major barriers largely beyond their control. Using a feminist lens, emphasis is placed on the need to address the inequitable social and material conditions that contribute to many women’s criminalization and that are often intensified by the pains of release.

Keywords: Criminalized women; federally sentenced women – Canada; prisoner re-entry
Dedication

To those who serve time behind the bars of social injustice,
and to those who fight social injustice.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of many people’s efforts. First and foremost, thank you to the 11 women who shared your time and stories with me. You were so open, informative, and patient as I asked about your experiences, some of which might have been difficult to share. Indeed, you often went out of your way to explain things. Your efforts are worth far more than a $40 honorarium, as they made this research possible.

Christine Lamont: You are one of the most inspirational people I know, and I continue to learn from you. Without you, I would not have had the privilege of joining the Human Rights In Action (HRIA) Collective. You also assisted with this thesis in several ways, for which I am extremely grateful. To everyone in the HRIA Collective: Thank you for including me as one of your own. You, too, have taught me a great deal and have done so much for me over the past few years. I specifically acknowledge Lara Condello and Lora Kwandibens for their assistance with certain aspects of this research.

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To my partner, Ryan: Thank you for helping me in countless ways during this journey – you carried me through. Mum and Dad: Thank you for thinking about me, believing in me, and providing the opportunities that got me where I am today. Peter and Sarah: I appreciate your support and interest in my studies. And to my second family, the Ikesakas: Thank you for being there whenever I need you.

Finally, I am grateful for the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Master’s Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and for the Graduate Fellowship from Simon Fraser University.
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## Glossary

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<tr>
<td>Criminalization</td>
<td>The legal and social process of officially labelling an individual or behaviour as criminal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daytox</td>
<td>An outpatient day program for individuals needing support for withdrawal from drugs but do not need to live in a facility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federally sentenced women</td>
<td>Women sentenced to a term of imprisonment of two years or more in Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights In Action (HRIA) Collective</td>
<td>A group of prisoners, former prisoners, and allies from the community who work together to address various issues affecting women in prison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>A concept that illuminates the role of multiple, interacting identities (e.g., gender, class, race) and hierarchical systems (e.g., patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism) in the social world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penal</td>
<td>Relating to the punishment of people under the authority of the criminal justice system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry</td>
<td>“Re-entry is the process of leaving prison and returning to society […] Re-entry is not a goal, like rehabilitation or reintegration” (Travis, 2005, n.p.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilization</td>
<td>A governing technique characteristic of neoliberal regimes that involves shifting primary responsibility in various domains, such as social welfare and crime, from the State to the individual, who is assumed to be an autonomous, self-determined subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisters in Action and Solidarity (SAS)</td>
<td>A peer advocacy group comprised of formerly incarcerated women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transinstitutionalization or transcarceration</td>
<td>A process in which individuals “are pushed from one section of the help/control complex to another” (Lowman, Menzies, &amp; Palys, 1987, p.9), such as the welfare, psychiatric, and penal systems.</td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER 1. Introduction and Literature Review

In recent years, we have learned a great deal about the nature and extent of female offending as well as gender differences in crime. We know, however, far less about the aftermath of women offenders’ conviction, incarceration, and return to the community. (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.1)

*People don’t understand how it is with us. *~ OneSky

Women in trouble with the law have long been *Too Few to Count* (Adelberg & Currie, 1987). The substantial exclusion of criminalized women from academic and penal knowledge production is still apparent in research on prisoner re-entry.¹ Yet, “women are the fastest growing segment of the prison populations in Western industrialized countries such as Canada, the United States, Britain, and Australia” (Balfour & Comack, 2006, p.15). Because most prisoners are eventually released, a growing number of women in the community will be living with the direct aftermath of imprisonment. It is thus increasingly important to explore re-entry, and to do so with a gendered lens.

Maidment (2006), P. O’Brien (2001b), and Pollack (2008) observe that the existing literature on criminalized women tends to revolve around issues before and during imprisonment rather than after – despite continuities in women’s lived experiences, such as sexism, poverty, and violence. Furthermore, most studies investigating former prisoners’ experiences are based on men or presented as gender-neutral (Cobbina, 2010, pp.210-212; Gobeil, 2008, para.3; Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.4). Another limitation of most re-entry scholarship is that it focuses on investigating quantifiable factors that are statistically linked to criminal offending and recidivism.² Cobbina (2010, pp.210-212), Gobeil (2008, para.3), and Pollack (2008, p.8) point out the paucity of qualitative explorations that accommodate women’s own perspectives of re-entry. Most research examines the historical, demographic, and psychological deficit-based factors that are predetermined by researchers. These investigations do not reflect

---

¹ Travis (2005) defines re-entry not as a goal, like reintegration or rehabilitation, but as the experiential process of leaving the institution and returning to society.

² Recidivism is usually defined as repeated criminal conviction or incarceration that occurs within two years of the date of a prisoner’s release. The current focus on criminal outcome is particularly problematic in the case of criminalized women given their low rate of recidivism: The official recidivism rate for federally sentenced women in Canada is roughly 22%, compared with 59% for their male counterparts (CAEFS, 2012a, p.2).
“women’s experiences of their total lives” (Cain, 1990b, p.10), allow for the inclusion of women’s “voices,” or produce sufficient information about what is needed to support returning prisoners (Gobeil, 2008; Pollack, 2008).

This thesis draws from, and adds to, a growing body of scholarship that takes women’s perspectives of re-entry seriously. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 federally sentenced women (FSW) who were released from prison into British Columbia (BC), Canada. The purpose was to explore their post-release experiences in the context of their total lives, and to focus on the factors that influence such experiences. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to produce knowledge that assists former prisoners and contributes to social justice.

The epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations of the current study are outlined in Chapter 2. Specifically, feminist standpoint epistemology is used, as it roots knowledge production in women’s lived experiences. The underlying theory that informs this research is an amalgamation of socialist feminism and multiracial feminism. This theoretical approach places women’s lives in a context of socially structured power relationships that exist along gender, class, race, and other intersecting lines. The connections between these epistemological and theoretical approaches and the process of conducting the research – including the selection of method, analysis of data, and presentation of results – are also detailed in the second chapter. In addition, sample characteristics, ethical issues, and study limitations are considered.

Three interrelated categories of experience emerged from the respondents’ narratives, each of which contains multiple sub-themes: serving time in prison; meeting basic needs; and serving time in the community. Serving time in prison and the direct implications of this time for women’s re-entry are the focus of the third chapter. For a number of participants, the rehabilitative programming, psychological counselling, and educational upgrading in federal penitentiaries provided lasting gains. Some respondents also developed supportive relationships with contract workers, volunteers, other prisoners, and relatives while they were incarcerated, and these relationships continued after release. On the other hand, prison-based programs and resources frequently proved ineffective in terms of providing practical, long-term benefits.

3 In Canada, people sentenced to a term of imprisonment of two years or more are under federal jurisdiction and serve time in federal institutions; people sentenced to less than two years are under provincial jurisdiction and are incarcerated in provincial institutions.
particularly in the areas of release planning and employment. Regardless of any gains made while behind bars, the pains and effects of institutionalization were deep and enduring for many women and immediately complicated their post-release lives.

Chapter 4 covers the participants’ experiences of meeting basic needs after imprisonment. Concerns regarding physical and mental health as well as addiction were raised by some women. Financial insecurity was the most commonly discussed problem, and this related to post-release barriers to employment and education. Although all of the respondents had shelter at the time of our interviews, most of their living arrangements were temporary and many of them identified barriers to stable, safe housing. The need for positive and supportive interpersonal relationships was also difficult to fulfill for many participants. Intimate partners, relatives, peers, and community groups were familiar sources of support, but such relationships were sometimes problematic. Moreover, women’s relationships with others in the community at large were often tainted by stigma. Respondents demonstrated internal and external resourcefulness in attempting to overcome obstacles to meeting their basic needs, yet many such needs remained beyond reach.

Chapter 5 concentrates on what it was like for respondents to serve time in the community. The period of localized supervision is presented mainly as an extension of penal control over prisoners’ daily lives and a hindrance to women’s re-entry efforts. Residency requirements were imposed on most participants; poor living conditions and conflicts with staff – or “guards” – were common in these arrangements. Negotiating the demands of life on the outside was challenging for many women, and this was worsened by the stipulations attached to their release. Mandatory programs and meetings with parole officers and psychologists, for example, were more likely to be experienced as burdensome controls than necessary supports. The imposition and enforcement of conditions even threatened a number of women’s interpersonal relationships. The heightened risk of reincarceration that exists when released with conditions created a great deal of stress among respondents and was often perceived as unfair. Some participants framed aspects of community supervision as personally beneficial, such as access to temporary supports, but the experience overall reinforced women’s exclusion.

I conclude this thesis in the sixth chapter with additional commentary on women’s post-release selves. Here, the interrelationships between intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social power and women’s wellbeing are drawn out. This naturally leads into the
study implications. Attention is paid to the need to challenge the current neoliberal-neoconservative regime, and the associated “tough on crime” endeavours and cutbacks in community-based services. The focus, however, is on the demand for large-scale social, economic, and political transformations that target the capitalist, patriarchal, white-hegemonic structure of society. Women return from prison to the same social and material conditions that always threatened their wellbeing, and that often contributed to their criminalization in the first place. These conditions are frequently magnified by the pains of imprisonment and release.

This study is contextualized in more detail throughout the remainder of the current chapter. I first describe, and clarify relationships between, the sociodemographic characteristics and life experiences common among incarcerated women, the nature of women’s crimes, and the socioeconomic and political context of women’s criminalization and imprisonment. Following this, the available literature on women’s re-entry and other relevant works are reviewed.

1.1 Who and Why are Women in Prison?

It is vital to understand the profile of incarcerated women and the factors that can contribute to their imprisonment in order to appreciate women’s experiences after release. Indeed, these factors follow many women out the prison gates and continue to impact their lives on the outside. The portrait of incarcerated women reveals that they are, in general, one of the most economically and socially disadvantaged segments of the Canadian population. Furthermore, many of the sociodemographic characteristics and life experiences common among women in prison are connected to the crimes they commit. These characteristics, experiences, and crimes have been further associated with inequities in the wider society. As Adelberg and Currie (1993) write: “The problems suffered by women offenders are similar to the problems suffered by many women in our society, only perhaps more acutely” (pp.148-149). The remainder of this section presents key points that describe the sociodemographic characteristics and life experiences regularly found among women in prison. Each point is followed by a discussion of its relationship to women’s criminalization and marginalization.
Poverty is one of the most consistently documented factors in research on women’s trajectories into crime (e.g., Adelberg & Currie, 1987, 1993; Comack, 1996; Maidment, 2006). Women’s choices to violate the law are usually economically motivated and made in circumstances where there are few alternatives to provide for themselves, and often their families. In fact, the majority of women’s crimes are known as “poverty crimes” or “survival crimes,” and they are typically nonoccupational property offences such as theft and fraud (Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS), 2012a).4 Scholars indicate a relationship between worsening economic conditions for women in particular and the increasing criminalization of women (Belknap, 1996, pp.51-52; Faith, 2011, pp.64, 85-86; Messerschmidt, 1986, pp.85-87).

The financial hardships that most women in prison experience and that are frequently linked with their criminalization are indicative of women’s subordination in the broader society. Comack (2006) states: “Gender inequality [...] comes in a number of forms, but the most apparent manifestation is economic” (p.65). One sign of economic inequality is that women are increasingly more likely than men to be poor (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), 2005). This phenomenon is dubbed the “feminization of poverty.” For instance, Statistics Canada data confirm that, between 2002 and 2007, 18.6% of males compared to 21.4% of females experienced poverty that lasted for at least one year (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012). BC has the highest level of poverty in Canada.5

---

4 Kong and AuCoin (2008) report that, “overall, 47% of females accused of a Criminal Code offence [in 2005] were accused of a property crime and 28% were accused of violations against the person. In comparison, proportions for males were 39% and 34%, respectively” (p.3). In the federal prison system, 64% of women are serving time because of crimes against the person, compared to 74% of men (Finn, Trevethan, Carrière, & Kowalski, 1999, p.4).

35.7% of single mothers and 20.4% of single senior women lived below the poverty line in BC (11.6% of single senior men lived in poverty; BC CEDAW, 2010, p.11).

The “pink collar ghetto” (Stallard, Ehrenreich, & Sklar, 1983) refers to the subordinate employment positions typically occupied by women. In 2009, 67% of working women – compared with 31% of working men – were occupied in fields traditionally pursued by women, namely teaching, health, clerical, sales, and service occupations (Ferrao, 2010, p.21). Women are also overrepresented in the most precarious forms of employment, such as part-time and temporary jobs that tend to offer few benefits, poor working conditions, little security, and poverty-level wages (Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003). In fact, 60% of minimum wage earners in 2009 were women, but women represent less than half of all employees (Statistics Canada, 2010b). Among full-time workers, 20% of women compared with 10% of men are in low-wage occupations (Townson, 2009a, p.6). The gendered wage gap, though shrinking, remains well documented: Women earn 71% of what men earn for full-time, full-year employment (Williams, 2010, p.13). “Women earn less than men even if they work in the same sectors or even in the same jobs. There are no occupations in which women’s average earnings exceed men’s” (CRIAW, 2005, para.14). Education does not fill the gendered wage gap:

At the lowest level of education – less than Grade 9 – women’s earnings were about 51% of those of men with the same level of education [in 2008]. While the gap narrowed for those with higher levels of education, women working full-year, full-time with a university degree earned about 30% less than equally educated men. (Williams, 2010, p.15)

Some partial explanations for job segregation by sex and the gendered wage gap include gender discrimination and sex-role stereotypes of women’s work, particularly the “male breadwinner model” (CAEFS, 2012c, p.2; Messerschmidt, 1986, p.39; Offen, 2010). Under the Canadian Harper government,

[...] the safeguarding of women’s equality has been subjected to market efficiency considerations, as exemplified by the quiet introduction, in 2009, of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. This legislation allows public sector employers to consider “market demand” in setting compensation levels, thereby preserving the discriminatory policy of paying men more than women for equal work. (Gergin, 2011, para.17)

In addition to the underpayment of women’s work in the public sphere of social life, the considerable household and caretaking work that women take on in the private sphere
remains virtually uncompensated (CRIAW, 2005). The social definition of men as producers and women as reproducers/caretakers is called the “sexual division of labour.”

In a context of employment and income inequity, it is not surprising that women tend to rely on social assistance to a greater extent than men (Lochhead & Scott, 2000). Importantly, however, “the benefit levels of social assistance programs across the country ensure that women and others in economic need live in poverty” (Lochhead & Scott, 2000, p.49). Current welfare rates in Canada range between 20% and 76% below the poverty line (CRIAW, 2005).

<table>
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<tr>
<td>The majority (77%) of women in prison have children (OCI, 2011, p.50). In addition, incarcerated women are more likely than their male counterparts to have sole childcare responsibilities (CHRC, 2003, p.6).</td>
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Women’s roles as mothers often play a part in their imprisonment. Maidment (2006) concludes from her research that, “undoubtedly, lone-parenting and the almost certain poverty that goes with it is a major factor in women’s criminal pathways” (p.60). The poverty and single motherhood that frequently characterize the lives of women in prison reflect the lives of many women at large. Childrearing continues to be socially defined as women’s responsibility. In 2006, 80% of lone parents in Canada were women (Statistics Canada, 2008). Comack (2006) argues that this discrepancy reveals gendered social relations and contributes to women’s economic inequity. Indeed, childcare responsibilities are a key explanatory factor for the gendered wage gap (CRIAW, 2005). “Women on their own,” Townsend (2009b) maintains, “are the poorest of the poor, especially women raising children in lone-parent families, who are almost five times more likely to be poor than those in two-parent families” (para.2), and nearly three times more likely to live in poverty than lone-parent families headed by men (Johnson & Rodgers, 1993, p.96). The absence of competent childcare programs and other social supports reinforce women’s employment and financial struggles (Maidment, 2006, pp.106-107).6

---

6 Canada was close to initiating the development of a national childcare program in 2006, but agreements were terminated upon election of the Harper government (Ballantyne, 2008).
Relationships between women’s experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse and their involvement in crime have been explored by numerous scholars. In particular, many women’s crimes are interpreted as forms of “resisting,” “surviving,” and/or “coping” with the pains of abuse. The use of drugs, for instance, is often framed as a means of coping with victimization (Comack, 1996). In addition, “many women prisoners serving life sentences for murder have been charged, convicted, and sentenced as a result of their involvement in defending themselves and/or their children against violent partners” (CAEFS, 2003, p.12). The specific forms of coping, resisting, or surviving abuse that are available to women are determined, in part, by an individual’s class and race positioning (Comack, 1996, pp.122-123) – as reflected in the overrepresentation of poor women in prison, as well as Aboriginal women.

The disturbingly high rate of abuse among women in prison is a symptom of more general social patterns of gendered violence. Studies confirm that the physical and sexual abuse of girls and women is widespread, far more common for females than males, and typically perpetrated by male family members and male partners (Comack, 1996, 2006; DeKeseredy, 2000). In light of the current and historical pervasiveness of violence against women by men, it cannot be explained as the outcome of individual outbursts or abnormalities. Rather, violence against women must be “analyzed as the outcome of unequally distributed social, economic, and political power structured into

---


8 It is important to recognize that the relationships between women’s histories of abuse and crimes – indeed, all of the connections made in this section of the thesis – are not intended to imply “an all-encompassing, all-embracing theory of women’s crime” (Comack, 1996, p.122). Instead, such analyses provide some ways to make sense of why some women end up behind bars. Relationships between the various manifestations of gender inequity and women’s criminalization are rarely simple and direct, and never inevitable (Boritch, 1997, p.260). For example, the role of human agency, that is, the choices that people make when they are faced with abuse, poverty, and so on, must be acknowledged, “despite structural factors which define the parameters of those choices” (Faith, 2011, p.108).
social relations, and reinforced through certain ideological assumptions and actions that contribute to sexism, racism, and class bias” (Harder, 1994, para.9).

Point 4:
Nearly 70% of women in prison have histories of substance abuse (CHRC, 2003, p.7).

Addiction to alcohol or other drugs is regularly cited as an important factor in women’s criminalization. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC, 2003) reports that such addictions tend to play more significant roles in the lives and crimes of FSW than federally sentenced men (p.7). In fact, 69% of women in prison consider substance abuse to be a major reason for their imprisonment (CAEFS, 2005, cited in Maidment, 2006, p.63). Women’s addiction problems may be connected to their crimes in several ways. Drug possession and trafficking bring many women into trouble with the law. Actually, the “war on drugs” is said to be a driving force behind the booming population of imprisoned women (Chesney-Lind, 1997). Drug use can also “act as a catalyst for crimes committed under the influence” (Maidment, 2006, p.73), and income-generating crimes, such as fraud, are often carried out to support drug addictions (Auditor General of Canada (AGC), 2003, s.4.23).

The substance abuse problems experienced by many women in prison can be linked with gendered social and material conditions. DeKeseredy (2000) explains:

Adult men and women typically use illegal drugs for different reasons. For example, men mainly use these substances for excitement, pleasure, or because of peer pressure, while women are more likely to ingest them for “self-medication” to dull the pain of poverty, unemployment, family violence, and other symptoms of class, race, and gender inequality. (pp.19-20)

Nonetheless, Faith (2011) adds that dependencies on drugs “are distributed fairly evenly among women across culture and class, but it is primarily poor women, working-class women and political minority women, across borders, who are criminalized for the use or handling of illegal substances” (p.93).
Relationships between women’s mental health problems and criminal offences are a growing area of investigation (Richie, 2001, p.374). Particular attention is focused on the rising number of women (and men) caught up in the prison system because of inadequate mental health resources and recourse in the community (Maidment, 2006, pp.88-89). K. Pate (CTV News, 2007) points out, for example: “Because women have traditionally been overrepresented in mental health facilities, as those have been shut down, the prisons are the places they are ending up” (para.14). At the same time that community-based resources are disintegrating, prison authorities are attempting to expand their mental health services. The result of this scenario is that judges are sentencing even more women to prison under the assumption that they will have access to necessary support services (Pate, 2005; Pollack, 2008). The phenomenon dubbed “transinstitutionalization” or “transcarceration” (Lowman, Menzies, & Palys, 1987) captures the destructive ways in which people can be cycled through multiple State and local help/control agencies, such as psychiatric institutions and prisons.

The mental health problems that some women in prison deal with reflect, in part, women’s socioeconomic inequities. Causal processes underlying mental disorders are complex, but research suggests that many women’s mental illnesses are linked to experiences of physical and sexual abuse, poverty, and/or substance abuse (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW), 1990). This provides important context for the over-representation of women in almost all major psychiatric diagnoses (Laishes, 2002).

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9 Claims about the prevalence of mental illness among criminalized and imprisoned women must be interpreted with caution. Although some have actual mental health problems, women who violate the criminal law (and gender norms) have a history of being “psychiatrized” by medico-legal authorities (Allen, 1987; Kilty, 2008). There is evidence that imprisoned women are frequently over-diagnosed as mentally ill, that such diagnoses have been used as forms of (gendered) control, and that mental health problems in prison are often context-dependent (Dobash, Dobash, & Gutteridge, 1986; Kendall & Pollack, 2005).
Due to systemic and structural factors, Canadians with cognitive or psychological disabilities have a much higher poverty rate and unemployment rate than Canadians without disabilities. In 2006, the poverty rate was 22.3% for the former group compared with 9.7% for the latter (Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), 2011a), and the employment rate was 51.3% for disabled Canadians compared with 75.1% for working-age people without disabilities (CCD, 2011b). Among people living with disabilities, women face especially bleak circumstances. The median income of disabled women 15 years or older was $16,867 in 2006, compared with $24,805 for their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2009b). According to the same data, 46% of women with a disability were employed compared with 56% of disabled men.

The physical health problems experienced by many women in prison may also be associated, to an extent, with women’s social positioning (CAEFS, 2012b, p.2; Savarese, 2003, p.i). Eaton (1993) clarifies:

Women’s poverty is a recognized factor in their poor health. Although women live longer than men, throughout their lives they suffer more physical and mental ill health [...] High levels of chronic, if not life-threatening, ill health among women have been variously attributed to the deprivations, both material and social, which poor women experience, aggravated by the stress of trying to care for others, especially children, with few resources and in unsuitable conditions. (p.75)

Point 6:
In 2007, Aboriginal men and women represented 2.7% of the Canadian population and 17% of the federal prisoner population (CSC, 2007). Aboriginal women are even more overrepresented in prison, constituting 34% of FSW (OCI, 2011, p.50).

Many of the sociodemographic characteristics and life experiences linked to women’s criminalization are amplified in the lives of Aboriginal women. For example, Dell and Boe (2000) report that 53% of the federally sentenced Aboriginal women in their sample were rated at the highest level of need regarding vocational skills and employability, compared with 25% of their Caucasian counterparts (p.10). They also note that Aboriginal women have a mean education level of 8.97 years compared with 10.31 for Caucasian women (p.7). Native women in prison are twice as likely to be single parents than their non-Native counterparts (Restoule, 2009, p.264). They also more
frequently report histories of physical and/or sexual abuse, and have unusually high rates of substance abuse (CHRC, 2003, p.52; Dell & Boe, 2000, p.10).

It is no coincidence that Aboriginal women in Canada are so dramatically overrepresented in prisons and are more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be disadvantaged in the larger society. Entire Aboriginal communities are devastated by poverty, violence, and substance abuse (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Native women are more likely than non-Native women and Native men to experience physical and sexual victimization, have poor health, be in need of core housing, be single parents, be dependent on social assistance, and have low levels of education, employment, and income. Data from 2005, for instance, show that the median income of Aboriginal women was $15,654, compared with $20,640 for non-Aboriginal women and $18,714 for Aboriginal men (O’Donnell & Wallace, 2011, p.33). The same data also reveal that 37% of off-reserve Aboriginal women lived below the poverty line – and on-reserve conditions are worse (O’Donnell & Wallace, 2011, p.34). It is imperative that these social maladies be understood in a context of colonialism and related cultural, socioeconomic, and political marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada (CAEFS, 2012b; Comack, 1996, 2006; Sugar & Fox, 1990).

The Neoliberal-Neoconservative Regime

Before concluding this section, it is important to further contextualize women’s experiences in society and prison within the current neoliberal and neoconservative regime. The ideologies, policies, and practices associated with this regime reinforce women’s marginalization and criminalization. In addition, the neoliberal-neoconservative order has important implications for women’s experiences after prison.

By the mid-1970s, “the steadily consistent, but relatively quiet erosion of the Canadian welfare State” (Evans & Wekerle, 1997, p.3) was in full swing. Neoliberalism took its place as the dominant political regime. The neoliberal agenda promotes the operation of a capitalist free market economy. It is “premised on deregulation,

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10 According to a 1989 survey, Aboriginal women in prison were 22% more likely to report experiences of physical abuse and 8% more likely to report experiences of sexual abuse than FSW as a group (CHRC, 2003, p.7).


privatization, and individualism” (Balfour, 2006, p.736), and assumes ideals such as free will, self-determination, and self-sufficiency (Garland, 2001; Maidment, 2006, pp.34-37). Neoliberal discourse maintains that State-provided social support programs obstruct self-sufficiency and are a drag on economic growth (Pollack, 2008, p.31). Implications of this order include “drastic cuts to social assistance, the creation of a precarious low-wage job market […] and cuts to social services, addictions treatment, and mental health services” (Pollack, 2008, p.6).

With the retreat of the welfare State and rise of neoliberalism, the social, economic, and political forces that influence people’s circumstances and choices became obscured and “a risk society emerged wherein the homeless, the mentally ill, and the criminalized, [among others, …] were increasingly responsibilized and expected to make rational choices and to accept the consequences of those choices” (Balfour, 2006, p.738). In the current context, marginalized groups are less likely to be represented as citizens in need of support and are more likely to be portrayed as “risks” or “risky” to society (Garland, 2001). Accordingly, risk-based strategies of control are now widespread, such as “risk profiling and self-regulation” (Balfour, 2006, p.738). People’s ostensible risks are often managed by various help/control professionals, including prison authorities, parole officers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers (Pollack, 2007, pp.161-162). Certainly, the construction and management of risk is an important way of “governing at a distance” (Miller & Rose, 2010) in neoliberal times so as to produce normative, self-governing citizens – as scholars like Ericson and Haggerty (1997), O’Malley (1996), and Rose (2000) explain.

At the same time that neoliberalism was underway, “neoconservatism introduced into political culture a strikingly anti-modern concern for the themes of tradition, order, hierarchy, and authority” (Garland, 2001, p.99). The role of neoconservative political ideology is evident in legal reforms that promote a “crime control model” (Hermer & Mosher, 2002; Maidment, 2006, pp.34-37). The “war on drugs” is an international manifestation of neoconservative thinking. A recent Canadian illustration is the Harper government’s Safe Streets and Communities Act (Bill C-10, 2012). This legislation includes, for example, mandatory minimum sentences and increased penalties for drug offences, as well as restrictions to the use of conditional sentences and pardons. Through such crime control policies, the prison industrial complex is expanded: More prisons are built, more citizens are incarcerated, and people spend longer periods of
time under more restrictive conditions inside (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2002). In this context, “the penal mode, as well as becoming more prominent, has become more punitive, more expressive, more security-minded […] The welfare mode, as well as becoming more muted, has become more conditional, more offence-centred, more risk conscious” (Garland, 2001, p.175).

The deeply ideological nature of crime reforms such as those happening in Canada is exposed by their disconnect with available evidence. Such reforms are occurring at a time when “the national crime rate has been falling steadily for the past 20 years and is now at its lowest level since 1973” (Statistics Canada, 2011b, para.2). Moreover, many experts conclude that “tough on crime” approaches are largely ineffective in terms of reducing criminal offending (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2002, p.110). The relationship between public perceptions of crime and the development of crime policies is complex; nonetheless, “law and order” initiatives typically “presume the political support of citizens who are seen as fearful of crime and as intolerant of ‘soft’ governmental approaches to crime control” (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2002, p.109).

As Hermer and Mosher (2002) discuss, neoconservative initiatives are justified by discursive techniques that construct and scapegoat “disorderly people” who must be punished and controlled in the name of “public safety.” Neoconservative strategies “are meant to make all of ‘us’ feel more secure when ‘they’ are removed from our midst” (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.12) or are at least sufficiently monitored. Criminalized women may be easy targets of such strategies due to their “doubly deviant” (Lloyd, 1995) status. That is, these women violated the law plus traditional gender norms, and are thus susceptible to two forms of exclusion.

In the current neoconservative climate, inequitable social and material conditions are translated into individual immoralitys and evils that must be addressed by the “iron fist” of the law (Hermer & Mosher, 2002, p.16). The construction of disorderly and “undeserving” populations has further attacked the welfare State and

[…] the ways in which we are made to feel responsible to each other. And what is most disconcerting about this shift […] is that it has taken place at the very sites in which the government is responsible for some of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in society – those with mental

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13 As Garland (2001) points out, the combination of neoliberalism and neoconservatism often involves cost-cutting in areas of need (e.g., rehabilitative programs) and increased spending in areas that are politically popular but lack evidence of effectiveness (e.g., security measures).
health issues, the young, the poor and disabled, a disproportionate amount of whom are in correctional facilities. (Hermer & Mosher, 2002, p.17)

In addition, the scarce social services and community-based supports that remain in neoliberal times are threatened further by neoconservative discourse and policies that redirect funding and resources into reactive and punitive endeavours (Mallea, 2011).

The neoliberal-neoconservative regime has disastrous repercussions for marginalized people because it hardens social divisions (Garland, 2001). For example, the feminization of poverty is reinforced since women are overrepresented in precarious employment and in need of the social services and community-based resources that are being cut. In fact, 77% of Canadians who accessed social support services in 2003 were women (AGC, 2003, cited by Balfour, 2006, p.740). The fraying of the social safety net widens inequities and leaves those who always struggled to make ends meet with even fewer choices for survival. This situation, combined with a renewed obsession with punishment and control, increases the susceptibility of the most disadvantaged citizens to criminalization and imprisonment (Garland, 2001; Maidment, 2006; Pate, 2011).

The number of women being sentenced to prison in Canada and abroad is increasing at an exceptionally fast rate. The OCI (2010) reports: “In the last 10 years, the number of women admitted to federal jurisdiction [in Canada] has increased by almost 40%. Women offenders now account for close to 5% of the total offender population” (p.49). The rate of incarceration for men has generally decreased over the past 20 years (Pate, 2011, para.31). Not surprisingly, women who face the greatest threat of criminalization and incarceration are those who are “most vulnerable because of multiple intersections of marginalization and discrimination, be it race, sexual orientation, ability – particularly disabling mental health issues – or those escaping violence” (Pate, 2011, para.4). With this background information about imprisoned women provided, the attention of the present chapter turns to the literature on women’s re-entry.

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14 The Harper government reduced or stopped funding for numerous women’s groups that provided advocacy and other services (Gergin, 2011). Status of Women Canada, for example, had its operational funding cut by 43% and “equality” was removed from its mandate (Public Service Alliance of Canada, 2011).

1.2 Women’s Re-Entry

1.2.1 The Prison Experience

Women’s experiences after incarceration are often directly related to their experiences during incarceration. Sometimes, women use aspects of their time in prison to benefit their lives upon release. On the other hand, many aspects of the prison experience do not help women’s re-entry, but rather hinder it in important ways.

1.2.1.1 Prison-Based Programs and Resources

Risk Management and Cognitive-Behaviouralism in Penal Programming

The cognitive-behavioural model – although based on research with men – dominates most of the so-called “rehabilitative” and “therapeutic” programming available to women in Canadian prisons (AGC, 2003, s.4.58). It is premised on the idea that prisoners’ risk of reoffending can be managed or reduced by changing their thought patterns. “Women-centred treatment programs founded on cognitive-behavioural approaches and ideas about women’s ‘unruly emotions’ are also part of the prison risk reduction apparatus” (Pollack, 2007, p.163). These programs are designed, quite literally, to re-program prisoners into normative, self-governing citizens (Kendall & Pollack, 2005; Pollack, 2007). In this model, women’s needs for things like substance abuse treatment, trauma and abuse counselling, and mental health services are conflated with and essentially translated into personal deficits and criminogenic risk factors (Hannah-Moffat, 1999; Kendall & Pollack, 2005).

In the penal paradigm, recognition of external factors underlying issues like substance abuse is typically thought to “feed […] into the offender’s denial and rationalizations of their offence” (Kendall & Pollack, 2005, p.76). The current fixation on risk management through cognitive-behavioural programming is especially problematic for women because their criminalized behaviours tend to be intensely shaped by the social and material conditions that such approaches disregard (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Kendall & Pollack, 2005; Pollack, 2007). Furthermore, the prevailing paradigm neglects the reality that most women return to the same circumstances upon release. Due to this narrow interpretation of rehabilitation, most women are “release[d …] to the street with little more than psycho-social, cognitive skills or drug abstinence programming, along with the implicit judgement that they are in control of and therefore responsible for their
situations, including their own criminalization" (Pate, 2011, p.4). From this critical outlook, it is clear that the present system reflects neoliberal ideology and responsibilization strategies, and reinforces an unjust status quo (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Kendall & Pollack, 2005).

**Women’s Evaluations of Prison-Based Programs and Resources**

Some formerly incarcerated women evaluate prison-based programs and resources favourably. Aspects of the carceral experience that have positive effects in some women’s post-release lives include: rehabilitative programming (particularly substance abuse programming and treatment), psychological counselling, vocational training and preparation resources, and educational upgrading. That prisoners derive benefits from the otherwise negative experience of incarceration is surely evidence of their resourcefulness; such benefits may also indicate the efforts made by some program facilitators (P. O’Brien, 2001a, 2001b).

Notwithstanding the above, prison-based resources are frequently criticized as inadequate or even absent. The following points highlight some common issues:

1. **Rehabilitative programming and psychological counselling**: Supportive relationships between prisoners and the psychologists, psychiatrists, and other prison staff who typically conduct therapy sessions and facilitate rehabilitative programs are often hampered by: the dominance of the risk management paradigm, limitations to confidentiality, extreme power imbalances, and absence of voluntary participation (CHRC, 2003, p.40; Pollack, 2008, pp.20-21). In addition, the cognitive-behavioural approaches typically employed in prison-based rehabilitative and therapeutic programs are generally less beneficial for women compared with feminist-oriented models that focus on power sharing and contextualizing experiences (Pollack, 2008, p.21).

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16 Vocational and educational programs in the prison context have also been said to reflect neoliberal responsibilizing strategies that aim to produce normative, self-sufficient, contributing citizens. They are based on the assumption that individuals have total control over their circumstances and that the provision of certain limited skills and/or qualifications can address the reasons for women’s criminalization (Hannah-Moffat, 2001, p.175).

17 That such responsibilization and governance at a distance takes place behind prison walls reveals the interaction of modern, neoliberal strategies of social regulation with more traditional, overtly repressive forms of discipline (Hannah-Moffat, 2001).


19 Group counselling in prison is problematic due to the tenuous confidentiality and trust that can exist between prisoners (Faith, 2011, p.153).
Regarding substance abuse, prison-based rehabilitative programs and the nature of the penal environment are not conducive to the identification and resolution of underlying factors, such as trauma (Eaton, 1993, p.76; Pollack, 2008, p.19). In fact, some prisoners develop addictions while serving time (Pollack, 2008, p.19; Sugar & Fox, 1990, p.8).

2. **Educational programming:** Prison-based educational programs and services tend to be limited to Adult Basic Education (Grade 10) and preparation for General Educational Development (GED) (Severance, 2004, p.78). Correctional Service Canada (CSC, 2011a) claims that prisoners have the opportunity to attend school for their secondary education (Grades 11-12), but there are a limited number of spaces and those are typically filled by prisoners working towards Grade 10 (C. Lamont, personal communication, August 22, 2011). Less than 10% of federal prisoners gain post-secondary education (CSC, 2011a), which may partly reflect the requirement that prisoners now fund their own courses.\(^{20}\) Richie (2001) concludes that, although some women attend school while incarcerated, most do not have the credentials to support themselves financially upon release (p.377).

3. **Vocational programming and employment opportunities:** Vocational training programs in prisons for women are, for the most part, extremely limited and do not permit long-term financial independence (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.52). For instance, most positions with CORCAN – a government agency that provides employment training and work experience to federal prisoners in Canada – are offered to men (CHRC, 2003, p.53). The few programs available to women tend to be for sex-typed, low-paying jobs, such as food preparation and cosmetology, and only some provide external certification (AGC, 2003, ss.4.84-4.87; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.16, 123). CSC does not have an

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\(^{20}\) In 1992, funding for post-secondary education in Canadian federal prisons was reduced (CAEFS, 2003, p.4). In response to this, CAEFS created a bursary fund for women prisoners – the applications for which greatly outnumber the available funding (CAEFS, 2003, p.4). Through another initiative, prisoners in several BC federal institutions were offered university liberal arts courses between 1973 and 1993 (Duguid, 1998). Duguid’s (1998) study suggests that such educational programming can reduce the chance of recidivism among some prisoners.
employment strategy that addresses the unique employment backgrounds of FSW (AGC, 2003, s.4.87; CHRC, 2003, p.54).\textsuperscript{21} 

There are also scarce opportunities for women to work during their incarceration (AGC, 2003, s.4.83) and most positions are, again, sex-typed, such as cutting other prisoners’ hair and cleaning the institution (Pollack, 2008, p.7). Regardless, there is little incentive to work and it is challenging to save money given the extremely low wages (Evans, 2007, p.295; OCI, 2001, s.2). Federal prisoners in Canada earn a maximum wage of $6.90 per day (CSC, 1999, s.17).

4. Release programming: Temporary absence programs, including work releases, are designed to help prisoners develop and maintain outside supports and ease the transition from institution to community (CSC, 2010d, s.1). During the 2001-2002 fiscal year, however, only 7% of minimum- and medium-security FSW participated in temporary absence programs (AGC, 2003, s.4.75). In 2011, the rate at which prisoners were granted access to these programs reached its lowest level in a decade (OCI, 2011, p.43). As the OCI (2007) confirms: “The lack of work release options for women offenders is especially worrisome, as work releases can significantly improve an offender’s ability to move successfully into the community” (p.13). Maximum-security prisoners have even more limited access to release programs; nearly 50% of women classified as such were released directly from the maximum security unit in 2003 (AGC, 2003, s.4.50).\textsuperscript{22}

Other services that may assist with release preparation are also wanting. For instance, prisoners do not have many opportunities to pre-arrange various basics (e.g., identification documents, medical doctor, bank account). Information about community resources can be difficult to find and prison employees are often unhelpful in this regard.

\textsuperscript{21} To its credit, CSC is working toward implementing a national employment strategy for women (CSC, 2010a). The OCI (2005) points out, however, that this initiative requires the provision of appropriate resources. The latest federal budget calls for CSC to cut its spending by nearly 10% by 2014 (Galloway, 2012). Prison-based programs created specifically for women are frequently cut because they become too costly to maintain (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.134).

\textsuperscript{22} Risk assessment tools used to determine prisoners’ security classifications are based on research with men and are flawed when applied to women (AGC, 2003, ss.4.39-4.45; CAEFS, 1998, 2005; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2001). Such assessments essentially translate needs into risk factors, which, when imposed upon an exceptionally low-risk and high-need population like FSW, results in over-classification (this is especially apparent among Aboriginal women; CHRC, 2003, pp.28-30).
(Pollack, 2008, p.25; Shaw, 1991, p.6). A more promising source of assistance with release preparation is individuals and groups from the community who enter prisons, typically in volunteer and advocacy roles (AGC, 2003, ss.4.101-4.103; R. O’Brien, 2006, pp.6-7). These relationships may also ease the pains of re-entry – especially for women who lack other supports – by acting as stable connections to the outside world (Fortune, Thompson, Pedlar, & Yuen, 2010; Pollack, 2009, pp.92-93).

**Gendered Disparities in Prison-Based Programs and Resources**

That the prison system was constructed primarily for males results in serious inequities for the relatively few women behind bars (TFFSW, 1990). Most policies, forms of intervention, and resources designed for prisoners and ex-prisoners are based on economies of scale – a model that is compatible with a market economy (Hannah-Moffat & Moore, 2002, p.110). As a result, they “focus on the overwhelming number of men in the corrections system [and] often fail to identify gender- and culturally-responsive options for women’s specific needs” (Covington, 2003, p.67). (The security classification tools and cognitive-behavioural programming in women’s prisons are examples of gender-biased interventions.) This remains so despite legislative reforms and official rhetoric espousing a gender-sensitive penal system in Canada (CHRC, 2003).

Regarding programs, overall, the quality and quantity tend to be far greater in men’s institutions than women’s (Covington, 2003, pp.93-94; Maidment, 2006, p.87; Severance, 2004, pp.78-79). P. O’Brien (2001b) argues that this “significant lack of services for incarcerated women reinforces their relative powerlessness and economic marginalization in the free world” (p.16). The gendered disparity in vocational programming reflects underlying assumptions about men’s roles as breadwinners, especially since women have higher needs in the area of employment.

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23 Women express a need for access to the Internet to help locate community resources (Pollack, 2008, p.25) and prepare “for today’s computer-driven workplace” (Evans, 2007, p.304).

24 I use the term “penal system” (or prison system) rather than euphemisms such as “criminal justice system” or “correctional system” to highlight the fundamentally punitive nature of the regime.

25 In terms of future opportunities, it is important to acknowledge that “very few men leave prisons prepared to successfully engage in the job market as a consequence of vocational training or education in prison” (Faith, 2011, p.155).
Federal/Provincial Disparities in Prison-Based Programs and Resources

In addition to the gendered gap in prison-based resources, there is also a gap between the quantity and quality of resources available to prisoners in the provincial and federal systems in Canada. As a result, it is not uncommon for the criminally convicted to request longer sentences in hopes of accessing programs and services that are only available in federal prisons (Maidment, 2006, pp.83-88; Pollack, 2008, pp.14-15). The Correctional Investigator sees this happen more frequently with women than men (Sullivan, 2011). This trend is obviously worrying. Federal prisoners can be subjected to the most destructive conditions of confinement, charged with additional offences that prolong their institutionalization, and faced with compounded challenges upon release (Pate, 2011, para.26; Pollack, 2008, p.15).

1.2.1.2 Pains and Effects of Institutionalization

Most prisoners deal with deep pain while incarcerated and it can follow them when they leave. Separation from support networks, inhumane and unfair treatment by staff, lack of avenues for venting and coping, and inadequate health care can create lasting harm (Evans, 2007, pp.290-295; Faith, 2011, pp.151-152; Maidment, 2006, pp.42-44, 96-101). Indeed, the deprivation of liberty that is fundamental to incarceration involves a degree of suffering for all prisoners, regardless of gender (CHRC, 2003, p.2). Nonetheless, “federally sentenced women as a group are, and have historically been, subject to more disadvantaged treatment and more restrictive conditions of confinement than men” (CAEFS, 2012a, p.3). In fact, federal prisons for women in Canada are heavily criticized for systemic human rights abuses of prisoners on the basis of gender, race, ability, and other factors (Arbour, 1996; CHRC, 2003).

Hardships associated with the prison experience are gendered in several respects. For example, separation from family generally creates greater problems for incarcerated women than incarcerated men (Canada, 1988, p.239; Liebling, 1994, pp.4-5). Research indicates that security-driven practices like segregation tend to affect women more deeply (CHRC, 2003, p.45), and survivors of sexual abuse are often re-traumatized in the carceral environment (Heney & Kristiansen, 1998). Women are over-

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26 For example, due to their small numbers, all FSW are confined in multi-level institutions, while comparatively few men are housed in such facilities. This arrangement results in greater restrictions of movement and heightened security measures for FSW (CHRC, 2003, pp.46-47).
represented among self-injurers in prison.\textsuperscript{27} Kilty’s (2008) dissertation shows that women’s use of self-harm in the carceral context frequently represents a coping strategy and/or form of resistance. Women are more likely to be considered “disciplinary problem[s]” (Liebling, 1999, p.309) by prison authorities and be disciplined severely (Eaton, 1993, p.42). The underlying reason for this may be the idea that criminalized and imprisoned women are doubly deviant. That is, women who are found guilty of violating laws or institutional rules [...] are also guilty of breaking a gender stereotype that decrees passivity or properly directed activity for women. From this perspective, the regime of the prison may be seen as an attempt to deal with women who act, as much as with women who act criminally. (Eaton, 1993, p.81)

Many women consider themselves worsened by imprisonment (Eaton, 1993, pp.41, 55). Commonly reported symptoms include depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, weight gain, and sleeping problems (Evans, 2007, p.294; Girshick, 2003, p.102; Faith, 2011, p.152). Relatedly, incarceration can increase feelings of low self-esteem that many criminalized women already have due to factors like poverty and abuse (Maidment, 2006, pp.63, 102).

Sykes (1958) coined the term “pains of imprisonment” to refer to the deprivations that prisoners deal with, including the loss of relationships, goods and services, identity, security, and liberty. These deprivations are characteristic of what Goffman (1961) dubbed “total institutions.” Total institutions, such as prisons, are closed off from the wider society, based on acute power imbalances between the “keepers” and the “kept,” involve constant surveillance, and enforce rigid rules and routine.\textsuperscript{28}

Upon return to the outside world, enormous psychological and behavioural adjustments are required. These may be especially intense for those who served lengthy sentences (Fortune et al., 2010, p.26), lack reliable support networks (Cobbina, 2010, p.2). There is variation between individual prisons in the extent to which they resemble the total institutions as originally conceptualized by Goffman (Liebling, 1999, p.340). Penitentiaries for women in Canada today are aesthetically different from the institutions of the past: “Most federally sentenced women are housed in community-like accommodations that permit them to take more control of basic activities such as cooking and cleaning” (CHRC, 2003, p.2). According to a recent report by the OCI (2010), however, “conditions in the regional women’s facilities, especially the maximum-security units, are looking and feeling a lot like those that prevail within the male penitentiaries” (p.49).

\textsuperscript{27} According to data from 2006-2008, women represented 3.7% of federal prisoners in Canada but 16.9% of prisoners who engaged in reported self-injury (Gordon, 2010).

\textsuperscript{28} There is variation between individual prisons in the extent to which they resemble the total institutions as originally conceptualized by Goffman (Liebling, 1999, p.340). Penitentiaries for women in Canada today are aesthetically different from the institutions of the past: “Most federally sentenced women are housed in community-like accommodations that permit them to take more control of basic activities such as cooking and cleaning” (CHRC, 2003, p.2). According to a recent report by the OCI (2010), however, “conditions in the regional women’s facilities, especially the maximum-security units, are looking and feeling a lot like those that prevail within the male penitentiaries” (p.49).
p.226), and are released to unfamiliar communities (Gobeil, 2008, para.34). Prisoners who served lengthy sentences return to a society that is, in many ways, dramatically different from the one they left, from the physical infrastructure to the state of technology (Evans, 2007, p.297). For some, over time, the institutional environment becomes all they know and are comfortable with, and the outside world becomes foreign and frightening (Eaton, 1993, pp.56-57; Maidment, 2006, pp.95-98). Common feelings associated with the transition include fear, anxiety, uncertainty, frustration, intimidation, disorientation, and isolation, as well as more positive feelings like joy, relief, and excitement (Evans, 2007, pp.297-298; Fortune et al., 2010, p.26).

Prisoners are often “socialized into prison [norms,] routine, and discipline” (Eaton, 1993, p.18) and simultaneously lose some of the skills and habits necessary to fulfill responsibilities on the outside (Faith, 2011, p.169; P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.61). An important aspect of prison existence is the near total deprivation of choice and self-reliance, and this can promote dependency and infantilization processes (Faith, 2011, p.152; Girshick, 2003, p.102). Consequently, many former prisoners find it difficult to regain a sense of control over their lives, make decisions, meet their needs, and perform even basic, everyday tasks (Evans, 2007, p.298; Maidment, 2006, p.103).

Though institutionalization is often negative and debilitating, prisoners also frame it in positive ways. For example, many women use the pains of imprisonment as a source of growth and strength (Faith, 2011, p.153; Gobeil, 2008, para.36; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.70-72, 122). While some former prisoners credit such subjective changes to prison-based programs and resources, others identify more informal, personal processes (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.121).

1.2.2 Basic Needs

The available literature reveals that many women struggle to meet their basic needs after release from prison. Regularly reported problems relate to health and addiction, finances, employment, education, housing, and interpersonal relationships. Such problems can play central roles in former prisoners’ lives and seriously impede their re-entry efforts.
### 1.2.2.1 Health and Addiction

#### Physical Health

Serious medical problems and health care needs are prevalent among formerly incarcerated women. Some women enter prison with issues that are unaddressed by institutional services (Richie, 2001, p.370, 373-374) and some develop health concerns due to the pains of incarceration (Shaw, 1991, p.iv). Women frequently indicate a paucity of health services upon return to the community (Evans, 2007, p.305; Richie, 2001, pp.373-374); for example, some struggle to afford medications and medical treatments.29

#### Mental Health

Conditions of imprisonment and the treatment that women receive inside can aggravate and create mental health issues (Maidment, 2006, pp.90-93). Moreover, mental health services in penitentiaries are frequently deficient (Maidment, 2006, pp.89-95; Richie, 2001, pp.274-275) and the “security” of the institution always overrides – and often conflicts with – mental health considerations (Pate, 2011, para.28). For example, behavioural manifestations of mental illness typically receive security-driven, punitive responses, such as admission to the maximum-security unit or segregation – responses that usually augment existing problems (AGC, 2003, s.4.47-4.48; Kilty, 2008; Pate, 2005, para.34). Some women therefore leave prison with unaddressed, intensified, or new mental health conditions, and many continue to find inadequate supports in the community (Gobeil, 2008, para.64; Maidment, 2006, pp.88-89, 131-136).

#### Addiction

As noted, prison-based programs are largely incapable of resolving addiction issues, and some prisoners even develop drug problems while serving time. Self-medication is a common form of coping with the pains of incarceration (Kilty, 2008; Pollack, 2008, p.19) and overmedication is a common means of gendered control used by prison authorities and medical professionals (Covington, 2003, p.82; Kilty, 2008). In fact, Covington (2003) reports that “the use of psychotropic drugs is ten times higher in women’s prisons than in men’s prisons” (p.82). For these reasons, many women leave with unresolved addiction issues, and others leave with new dependencies on prescription drugs (Maidment, 2006, p.100; Sugar & Fox, 1990, pp.8-9).

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29 Some medications prescribed to prisoners are not covered under community-based health plans (Pollack, 2008, pp.25-26).
One of the most consistently identified post-release challenges for formerly incarcerated women is fighting addiction (Richie, 2001, p.372; Severance, 2004, pp.78-79). Avoiding drugs after imprisonment, however, can be extraordinarily difficult because of the demands and stresses of re-entry (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.135; Pollack, 2008, p.22). Many former prisoners cannot access treatment programs in a timely manner – if at all – due to the limited quantity, onerous application procedures, and treatment costs (AGC, 2003, s.4.98; Severance, 2004, p.90). In addition, very few substance abuse services accommodate women with children (Evans, 2007, p.305). Most community-based programs for women who have served prison sentences do not employ a gender-sensitive framework, which is problematic given the interconnections between trauma, substance abuse, and criminalization (Covington, 2003, pp.78-83). Not surprisingly, addiction problems and inadequate community-based supports lead some women back to prison (AGC, 2003, s.4.96; Richie, 2001, p.372).

**Trauma**

Given the number of incarcerated women with histories of physical and/or sexual abuse and the limitations of prison-based programs, it is no wonder that many returning women express a need to deal with past trauma (Maidment, 2006, pp.67-73; Pollack, 2008, p.19). This unmet need is troubling because of the interconnections that often exist between abuse, trauma, addiction, mental health issues, and women’s criminalization (CHRC, 2003, p.40; Maidment, 2006, pp.72-73). Once again, formerly incarcerated women usually find little assistance with these matters in the community (Maidment, 2006, pp.109-111; Richie, 2001, pp.375-376).

**1.2.2.2 Finances, Employment, and Education**

In the current economy, many citizens are experiencing deepening financial strains.\(^{30}\) Compared to the middle-class public at large, formerly incarcerated women

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\(^{30}\) Data from Statistics Canada (2009a, 2010a, 2011a) indicate that poverty rates increased with the economic recession that started in late 2008. In 2009, nearly one in ten Canadians lived in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2011a), in 2010, food bank usage by Canadians totalled unprecedented numbers (Canada Without Poverty, 2012), and, in the past year, total household debt hit a record high (Lascelles, 2011). Ehrenreich’s (2001) account exposes the daily hardships and misery experienced by many people living in poverty.
generally face magnified obstacles. Most people experience financial problems after serving time (Harm & Phillips, 2001, pp.13, 17; Maidment, 2006, pp.106-111). Prisoners typically leave with few belongings and resources (Evans, 2007, p.297). Some lose their houses and legal sources of income because of their incarceration, and some have to deal with financial debts related to their criminal conviction (Gobeil, 2008, para.35; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.49, 132-133). Basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter, and medical care can be difficult or impossible to afford (Severance, 2004, p.82). Prisoners released on day parole can face especially impoverished circumstances. In Canada, federal parolees are given meagre funds and are not entitled to social assistance (Pollack, 2008, p.26). Poverty deeply obstructs former prisoners’ re-entry efforts, including the search for employment (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.77).

Employment can provide the following benefits to former prisoners: a degree of financial autonomy; connections with social support networks; the avoidance of idleness; a pro-social identity; and enhanced self-esteem (Evans, 2007, p.302; Gobeil, 2008, para.8; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.22, 118). Finding legitimate work, however, can be exceptionally trying. Discrimination seriously limits post-release employment opportunities. Job applicants are frequently asked to disclose their criminal records and/or explain gaps in their resumés (Pollack, 2009, p.92; Richie, 2001, pp.376-377; Severance, 2004, pp.76-78). Evans (2007) reports that “over 60% of employers surveyed in a recent UC Berkeley study said that they would definitely or probably not consider hiring an ex-prisoner” (p.302). Seventy-two percent of respondents in P. O’Brien’s (2001b) study were discriminated against and unable to get the job that they wanted (p.40). People with criminal records are subject to blanket exclusion by some professions, many of which are traditionally pursued by women, such as childcare, social work, and entry-level jobs that involve insurance bonding (Evans, 2007, p.302).

Due to the potential for discrimination, deciding if, when, and how to reveal one’s imprisonment can require careful consideration (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.40). In this process – and in the process of developing relationships more generally – the former prisoner often faces the “twin dilemmas of secrecy and surveillance” (Eaton, 1993, p.19). That is,

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31 Many people other than formerly incarcerated women face magnified obstacles in the current context. For example, transgendered people in Canada frequently experience workplace discrimination and harassment because of their gender identity (Trans PULSE, 2011). In addition, a recent survey found that 71% of transgendered people in Ontario have college or university education but nearly 50% earn $15000 or less per year (Trans PULSE, 2011).
if she reveals her imprisonment, she may face greater interrogation, surveillance, and exclusion. On the other hand, if she keeps her prison past a "secret," she may feel dishonest and uneasy about possible discovery. Some prisoners on conditional release are legally obligated to inform employers that they are on parole, virtually ensuring discrimination (P. O’Brien, 2001a, p.290, 2001b, p.44).

Some previously incarcerated women perceive formal education as a way to improve their employment and income-earning prospects (Eaton, 1993, pp.72-73, 90-91). This perception is well-founded. Ivanova (2012) refers to census data showing that "BC women in their thirties working full-time earned $56,000 if they had a bachelor’s degree, $40,000 with a college degree, and only $33,000 with a high school diploma" (para.5). The growing costs associated with education, however, mean that it is often inaccessible to the poor (Ivanova, 2012). For example, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA, 2011) points out that the average tuition for full-time undergraduates from 1991 to 1992 was $1,714, compared to $5,366 from 2011 to 2012. People on income assistance in Canada risk losing their benefits if they seek higher education (Maidment, 2006, pp.64-65).

There are very few community-based vocational, educational, and financial programs that respond to the needs of transitioning women, and women in the general population alike (AGC, 2003, s.4.97; Maidment, 2006, pp.107-111; Pollack, 2008, p.7). Research suggests that parole decision makers are more likely to deem men as having employment needs (Erez, 1992) and as requiring educational or vocational interventions (Mullany, 2002). These discrepancies reflect, once again, gender role stereotypes about male breadwinners and female domestic workers (Erez, 1992; Mullany, 2002).

Because of these problems, the process of securing and maintaining paid work can be punishing. The jobs that formerly incarcerated women typically secure are entry-level positions that pay poverty-level wages and do not permit self-sufficiency (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.50; Harm & Phillips, 2001, pp.13, 17). Some women rely on family members and friends to help meet their needs, especially immediately after release, but these individuals are usually ill-equipped to adequately assist (Gobeil, 2008, para.48; Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.17). Besides, relationships of dependence often contribute to post-release stress (Severance, 2004, pp.82-84).

Social assistance is sometimes a necessary source of income for ex-prisoners due to a lack of alternatives (Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff, 2008). Yet, as noted,
low benefits ensure that recipients remain in poverty. Receiving public benefits is also dangerous because welfare officers are sources of gendered surveillance, control, and stigma in women’s lives that can increase the risk of re-criminalization and reincarceration, especially for welfare fraud (Little, 2003; Maidment, 2006, p.138). In addition, “women receiving welfare are more likely to have their children apprehended, not because the children are mistreated, but because they cannot provide adequate housing and food” (Feminist Alliance For International Action (FAFIA), 2008, p.2). Criminalized women are often trapped in such transcarceration processes and thus subject to multiple sources of governance and enforced dependency (Faith, 2011, pp.64-65, 75; Maidment, 2006, pp.4-5, 128-129).

Faced with many hurdles to financial wellbeing, some former prisoners experience strong pulls towards choosing criminalized means of supplementing their income (CHRC, 2003, p.56; Eaton, 1993, p.74). Financial struggles and deficient material resources are often connected with women’s return to prison (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.24, 118; R. O’Brien, 2006, p.5). Nevertheless, formerly incarcerated women commonly employ strategies in attempting to overcome obstacles to economic survival, including: using personal job contacts to avoid criminal record checks; using the assistance of friends, family, and community resources; utilizing skills acquired from educational and vocational programs; and pursuing employment in areas where a past of imprisonment is irrelevant or an asset (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.31-34, 40-44, 122; Severance, 2004, pp.87-88).

1.2.2.3 Housing

Adequate shelter is a basic necessity of safety, health, and life in general. Without it, other needs and obligations, such as finding and maintaining employment, become difficult or impossible to fulfill. In fact, housing is identified in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966, art.11(1)) – ratified by Canada – as a basic human right. This right refers not only to “a roof over one’s head […] but also to a place where one can live] in security, peace, and dignity” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1991, s.7). With rising poverty rates in Canada and abroad, however, safe and affordable housing is increasingly unobtainable for many people at large, especially women (Canadian Women’s Health Network (CWHN), 2011, para.1). In the 1990s, housing conditions for low-income Canadians decayed even more
as a result of various policy changes. Governments stopped building social housing, federal funding cuts reduced the number of supportive housing services, and eligibility for social assistance support payments and shelter subsidies was further restricted (Reitsma-Street & Prentice, 2002). For these reasons, a growing number of women must live in shelters, unsafe and rundown accommodations, and “couch surf” with family and friends, as well as sacrifice other necessities such as food, clothing, and medical care to pay housing costs (Callaghan, Farha, & Porter, 2002, para.2). Ehrenreich (2001) aptly describes the current situation as the “housing nightmare of the poor” (p.212).

Many criminalized women are precariously housed prior to their imprisonment and do not have stable housing upon release (C. Lamont, personal communication, May 1, 2012). Those who have housing before going to prison may lose it because of their incarceration, and some “come out of prison to find their homes have been squatted, burgled, vandalized, or damaged in other ways” (Eaton, 1993, p.69). The Women and Young People’s Group (WYPG, 2006) observes that 61% of women were released from prison in England and Wales in 2006 without planned accommodations. In addition to financial barriers to housing (Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.19), ex-prisoners are frequently discriminated against by private landlords as well as governmental and nongovernmental housing providers (Covington, 2003, p.93; Evans, 2007, p.303; Maidment, 2006, pp.103-105).

The WYPG (2006) reports that incarcerated women as a group rank shelter at the top of their post-release concerns, whereas incarcerated men generally rank employment the highest (p.16). A number of housing problems disproportionately impact women. The loss of tenancies, for instance, is a greater cause for concern among imprisoned women than it is among imprisoned men (Liebling, 1994, p.5). P. O’Brien (2001b) writes that “when a man is released from prison, he typically returns to a home […] When a woman is released, she often must re-establish a home” (p.2). Due to the small number of prisons for women, they are more likely than men’s prisons to be located far from women’s home communities, which can make it more difficult to develop and maintain effective contact with housing providers (Malin, 2007, p.282).32 Housing can also be more challenging for returning women to secure because they generally

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32 There are six federal prisons for women in Canada: Fraser Valley Institution in BC, Edmonton Institution for Women in Alberta, Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge for minimum- and medium-security Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan, Grand Valley Institution in Ontario, Joliette Institution in Quebec, and Nova Institution in Nova Scotia.
have fewer opportunities for consistent, well-paid employment than their male counterparts (Meehan, 2002, p.6).

These problems mean that some women must live with family, friends, or intimate partners after prison. Yet, such arrangements are often problematic (Harm & Phillips, 2001, pp.10, 19). Many women cannot live with relatives because they never had that kind of support, or they lost support after their conviction, or their families are under-resourced (Severance, 2004, p.82). There are very few community-based services to assist women with locating and securing accommodation (Richie, 2001, p.378). Housing options designed specifically for returning women, Aboriginal women, mothers, and women with health issues are even scarcer (Evans, 2007, p.297; Maidment, 2006, pp.104-105; Severance, 2004, pp.82-84).³³

It is not uncommon for women who have served prison sentences to end up in dilapidated accommodations or to become homeless (Maidment, 2006, pp.104-105; Meehan, 2002, p.6). Ex-prisoners in Canada tend to experience homelessness for longer periods of time and are less likely to escape it than people who have not been incarcerated (Roebuck, 2008).³⁴ In fact, “former prisoners are among the heaviest users of shelter services” (Roebuck, 2008, p.19). Although a changed place of residence may help some women stay out of prison (Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.16), many cannot access shelter outside the impoverished areas that contributed to their incarceration (Richie, 2001, p.378; Shaw, 1991, p.19). Research suggests that inadequate housing plays a role in some women’s return to prison (Chan, 2008, para.10; Malin, 2007, pp.281-282).

1.2.2.4 Interpersonal Relationships

Baron, Byrne, and Watson (2005) declare: “The need to affiliate with others and to be accepted by them is hypothesized to be as basic to our psychological makeup as hunger and thirst are to our physical makeup” (p.213). This basic need is difficult for many women to meet after prison, and interpersonal relationships often complicate re-entry. On the other hand, many formerly incarcerated women identify relationships with

³³ Housing options for parolees can be further limited due to restrictions on movement and residency (Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.19).

³⁴ Other segments of the population are also highly susceptible to homelessness. For example, 20% of transgendered people in the United States have experienced homelessness because of family rejection and housing providers’ discrimination based on gender identity (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2011).
various individuals and groups in the community as important sources of support in their post-release lives.

**Family Relationships**

Stable family support is one of the most facilitative factors in women’s re-entry (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.50; Maidment, 2006, p.116). Family members may help returning prisoners fulfill basic needs for shelter, childcare, money, employment, and transportation. As Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) observe, “support from relatives also enhances emotional survival” (p.51). Occasionally, intimate partners are sources of concrete and moral support for returning women as well (Maidment, 2006, p.118; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.104-105).

Many, if not most, women leave prison without stable family support networks, sometimes because of pre-existing problems such as abuse (Maidment, 2006, p.115). Actually, “compared to men, returning female offenders are less likely to be able to amass family support on the outside” (Opsal, 2009, p.310). Preserving family relationships during imprisonment can be tough and they are often weakened or destroyed. Some women re-establish connections as they “prove […] themselves to be clean or straight” (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.91), for instance, but it is often impossible to repair fully the harm caused by imprisonment. Nearly half of the respondents in Dodge and Pogrebin’s (2001) study lost touch with family members because of their incarceration (p.51). Some women become estranged from their family and friends due to the geographical distance that separated them while imprisoned (Maidment, 2006, p.42; Richie, 2001, p.379), and some women do not return to their hometowns (Pollack, 2008, pp.27-28). Frequently, prisoners’ relatives are deceased by the time they are released (WYPG, 2006, p.17). It is also not uncommon for women to be rejected by their families due to the stigma, emotional pain, and financial costs associated with their incarceration (Evans, 2007, pp.298-299; Maidment, 2006, pp.115-117; Richie, 2001, p.379). Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) write that “such a void of a family support system means female prisoners must function pretty much on their own. This makes for greater adjustment problems in reintegrating into the community” (p.51).

Relationships with family members can undermine re-entry efforts. For example, some prisoners return home to relatives who are using illegal drugs or committing other

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A number of women express a need to avoid these relationships and the potential consequences, such as relapse (Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.17). But avoidance can be tricky, especially during a period of their lives that often involves insufficient resources and a great deal of stress and isolation (Evans, 2007, p.298; Severance, 2004, pp.90-91). Some women are involved with abusive intimate partners after prison – relationships that seriously complicate re-entry (Maidment, 2006, pp.103, 117-118; Richie, 2001, p.375).

Mother-child relationships frequently play central roles in women’s post-release experiences. Forced separation during imprisonment usually creates a great deal of emotional and interpersonal damage, as well as practical problems in attempts to reunite (Evans, 2007, pp.300-301; Richie, 2001, p.379). In addition, many women are unable or struggle to materially support their children after prison (Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.11). These relationships often face the threat of intervention by child protection services, even after women’s warrant expiry dates36 (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, pp.44, 48; Maidment, 2006, pp.136-138). For the most part, however, mother-child relationships are beneficial. In fact, many women identify children as their main source of companionship, stability, and motivation after prison (Covington, 2003, p.77; Gobeil, 2008, para.51) – and they are more likely to do so than men (Gobeil, 2008, para.14).

**Peer Relationships**

Like family relationships, peer relationships can hinder or help re-entry. A common problem that formerly incarcerated women experience, especially when they return to their home communities, is breaking off ties with and avoiding old friends who continue to use drugs and commit crimes (Gobeil, 2008, para.34; Pollack, 2008, p.27). Yet, as Eaton (1993) points out, a woman can be “even more susceptible to old influences when she leaves the prison and needs a home, food, and friends” (p.81). Some women find it difficult to develop new relationships after prison because of the “fracture” (Eaton, 1993, p.87) in their lives and their ex-prisoner status (Gobeil, 2008, para.35; Severance, 2004, p.84).

Post-release isolation may be heightened for women who are discouraged or forbidden from engaging in relationships with other criminalized people as part of parole or residency in a community facility (Pollack, 2009, pp.89-93). One of the few benefits

36 A warrant expiry date is the official expiry date of a court-ordered criminal sentence.
associated with the prison experience is the development of strong peer support networks (Maidment, 2006, p.82; Pollack, 2009). Research indicates that formerly incarcerated women’s relationships with criminalized others are extremely facilitative of re-entry. Such connections can provide practical information and assistance, moral support, and the opportunity to relate with others in a context of non-judgement, trust, and shared understanding (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp. 51-52, 106-110; Pollack, 2008, 2009; Richie, 2001, p.385). 

**Community Relationships**

Fortune et al. (2010) state: “Whether or not women are accepted back into the community upon release from prison has a major impact on their ability to reintegrate” (p.22). Yet, many women in prison never had stable connections in the community (Pollack, 2008, pp.27-28). After release, women’s relationships with the general public are often impaired by the stigma associated with having been incarcerated.

Goffman (1963) describes stigma as an attribute that makes a person “of a less desirable kind” (p.3) in others’ eyes, and sometimes in the eyes of the status holder. Past imprisonment confers a stigma with an effect so extensive that it takes on the quality of a “master status” (Becker, 1963). That is, the ex-prisoner status often carries such weight that, once it is made public knowledge, it dominates all other statuses held by an individual regardless of the context. The process that marks an individual as stigmatized with a master status is called “othering” and works to create social distance between “us” and “them” (Weis, 1995). The punitive othering that returning prisoners frequently experience in the community reflects neoconservative strategies; such stigmatization and exclusion are also considered “symptomatic of individualistic societies that operate within a neoliberal context” (Fortune et al., 2010, p.31).

Many formerly incarcerated women perceive themselves to be persistently judged by people as deficient, deviant, untrustworthy, and incapable of change (Dodge &

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37 Women in prison are more likely than their male counterparts to develop friendships with other prisoners (Liebling, 1999, p.309).

38 Pollack (2009) reports that such relationships can be especially beneficial for women who are released to unfamiliar communities and those who struggle with addiction (pp.90-92). Formerly incarcerated women identify other supportive relationships as well, such as those with various professionals and sponsors (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.111, 119), and friendships more generally (Severance, 2004, p.82). Some women’s spiritual supports (e.g., Elders, church members), and spiritual beliefs themselves, also ease re-entry (Gobeil, 2008, paras.50, 56; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.84-85; Severance, 2004, pp.92-93).
Pogrebin, 2001, p.49; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.28, 58; Pollack, 2008, p.25). Problems with othering and negative community relationships may be especially pronounced when cases are highly publicized (Severance, 2004, p.85). Erroneous, stereotypical, and decontextualized representations of criminalized and incarcerated women – as a group and as individuals – are widespread in today’s mainstream media, and they typically reinforce stigmatization and thereby frustrate women’s community relationships (Eaton, 1993, pp.61-63; Pollack, 2008, p.22).

The stigma of the ex-prisoner status can lead to discriminatory treatment by police, such as excessive surveillance (Gobeil, 2008, para.35; Maidment, 2006, pp.111-114). Some parolees are required to report to law enforcement agents, which can be socially humiliating (Shaw, 1991, p.15). Police scrutiny can hamper re-entry by further restricting women’s freedoms, reinforcing their status as the other, and increasing their chances of reincarceration (Maidment, 2006, pp.112-114).

It is important to remember that criminalized women can be seen as doubly deviant, having violated both gender and legal norms. As a result, women may face more intense stigmatization and ostracism when they return to their families and communities (Bastick & Townhead, 2008, p.1; Thompson, 2008, p.61). As Becker (1963) notes, in a racist society, race can also be a master status (p.34). Various social identities, including race, may thus interact with gender and the “ex-con” label in the process of othering some women (Eaton, 1993, pp.22, 72, 100; P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.65).

Braithwaite (1989) refers to “stigmatizing shaming” to denote the treatment of perceived wrongdoers as permanently bad social outcasts unworthy of forgiveness and respect – an approach that seriously hinders social (re)integration. No doubt, the negative reactions of people in the community leaves many former prisoners with an even stronger sense of exclusion from conventional society (Pollack, 2008, 2009). Labelling theorists posit that the official and/or unofficial labelling of people as deviant can impact their self-identity (Becker, 1963). Research confirms that the othering experienced by women after prison – whether real or perceived – can create or reinforce shame, low self-efficacy (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001), and a deviant self-image (Pollack, 2009, p.90). Othering can also escalate post-release frustration, stress, and anxiety (Severance, 2004, p.85).

On the other hand, women often challenge the othering they face after their release from prison. Some resist the internalization of stigmatizing master statuses by distinguishing between their actions and themselves (e.g., Pollack, 2008, p.23). In fact, this is a fundamental component of “reintegrative shaming” (Braithwaite, 1989). People can also “transcend […] the deviant label by development of an alternative better self” (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.61). Some women consider themselves transformed in positive ways after imprisonment, and some even refer to themselves as “new” or “different” people (Eaton, 1993, pp.97-98; P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.73).

Another way that formerly incarcerated women defy some of the personally destructive effects of the prison experience and associated stigmatization is through “channelling” (Rogers & Buffalo, 1974, p.109) their ex-prisoner status into constructive outlets. Through channelling, the individual accepts the label and uses it as a positive means of personal and social identification and effectiveness (Rogers & Buffalo, 1974, p.109). For example, some women utilize their backgrounds in prison to assist similarly situated others (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.106-110). Exploiting one’s largely negative experiences to create positive changes in other people’s lives can, in return, enhance one’s self-concept (Eaton, 1993, pp.67-68, 97). In a related vein, efforts to support others in the community often promote a sense of social integration (P. O’Brien, 2001a, pp.292-293).

Community Groups

Community-based organizations – specifically non-profit groups that provide services for disadvantaged populations – are appreciated by many women who have served prison sentences, especially those who lack other support networks (Cobbina, 2010, pp.221-222; Covington, 2003, pp.86-92; Gobeil, 2008, paras.55-58). These groups are often responsible for helping women negotiate the many demands of re-entry and meet their concrete needs relating to health, shelter, education, employment, childcare, transportation, and other basic sustenance items like food. They may also represent sources of moral support. Peer-based support and advocacy groups, in particular, carry great potential to assist formerly incarcerated women in material and nonmaterial ways (Pollack, 2009; Richie, 2001, p.385). Involvement with community-based collectives is reported to foster a sense of inclusion, enhance some people’s self-efficacy, and thereby challenge the social stigmatization and exclusion that former prisoners encounter elsewhere (Fortune et al., 2010; Malin, 2007; Pollack, 2009).
Despite the potential for community organizations to facilitate re-entry, there are few programs that provide assistance in even basic areas like health care, housing, and finances (Maidment, 2006; Pate, 2005, 2011; Pollack, 2008). Gender-sensitive programs and those designed specifically for women who have served prison sentences are especially wanting. This lack of support services is not surprising in the current neoliberal-neoconservative climate. Such support may be more distant after imprisonment because some community services exclude or interrogate people with criminal records. Studies suggest that insufficient access to community-based services plays a contributing role in some women’s return to prison (Pearl, 1998, cited in Gobeil, 2008, para.82; Richie, 2001, p.377).

1.2.3 Parole

“Community corrections” programs, such as parole, have proliferated since the 1960s and now constitute a central means of penal control (John Howard Society of Alberta (JHSA), 1998; Maidment, 2006, p.30). In 2003, 55% of FSW were serving time in the community and 45% were incarcerated, whereas 61% of federally sentenced men were behind bars (CHRC, 2003, p.5). The growth in the population of FSW between 2006 and 2010 caused the number of women supervised in the community or out on bail to swell by 13% (CSC, 2010b). The decarceration trend and concomitant growth of localized supervision programs reflects neoliberal offloading of centralized State controls onto various agencies and agents in the community, such as residential facilities, parole officers, and psychologists (Maidment, 2006, pp.29-32; Pollack, 2007). As Garland (2001) notes, “the chief virtue of new policies such as [...] ‘punishment in the community’ is their claim to be economically rational alternatives to previous arrangements” (p.189).


41 This concept is problematic and dangerous: “The ‘community’ is a ‘catch-all’ that escapes the critical interrogation afforded the prison” (Maidment, 2006, p.10).

42 The population of incarcerated women increased by 23% during this period (CSC, 2010b). There has been a recent decline in the proportion of women granted parole (Pollack, 2008, p.8). This is partly because many prisoners are waiving or postponing their parole due to delays in the delivery of programs and preparation of their cases by prison staff (OCI, 2007, pp.10, 17). Another reason is that the appointment of members to the PBC – the deciding body for conditional release considerations, except statutory releases – is susceptible to political patronage. McGregor (2011) reports that at least 24 parole board members appointed by the Harper government have been involved with Conservative politics. McGregor also observes that the percentage of prisoners granted parole has steadily decreased since the 2006 federal election, which suggests the influence of neoconservative crime control ideology.
The official purpose of parole is to release prisoners gradually, “ensuring that they do not present a threat to anyone and helping them adjust to life beyond prison walls” (CSC, 2010c, para.1). The paradigm that informs this process is risk management (CSC, 2011b; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). Supervisory officers, penal psychologists, and staff from residential facilities regularly “assess and/or evaluate a woman’s behaviour and attitude for the purpose of managing the risk she poses to herself and/or the community” (Pollack, 2008, p.27). Consistent with the rise of neoconservatism, the institution of parole has shifted from its original aims of rehabilitation and reintegration towards a greater concern with the ostensible management of risk and protection of the public (Garland, 2001; Opsal, 2009). For this reason, parolees are now subject to more controls than they had been in the past.

Pollack (2007) and Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) interpret the parole system as a combination of neoliberal strategies of responsibilization and governance with more traditional, centralized, and repressive forms of control. Conditional release programs and the agents involved are intended to police returning prisoners’ choices and behaviours so as to manage their risks and produce normative, self-governing subjects. According to this framework, parolees who make “wrong choices,” like reoffend or violate a condition of parole, demonstrate their failure to become such subjects and thus require stronger measures of governance, the ultimate being a return to prison.

The idea that parolees must make better choices to manage their criminogenic risk factors “hides the [social and] material conditions and histories – poverty, racism, physical and sexual abuse – that frame choice and structure how and why some women end up in prison and on parole in the first place” (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.548). Indeed, most women return to the same – or worse – conditions upon release. The expectations of parole are rooted in “idealized lifestyles” (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.548) and as long as systemic inequities persist, many women will continue to struggle meeting such expectations.

1.2.3.1 Conditions of Release

Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) describe the nature of parole conditions:

Parole conditions manage parolees’ risk of reoffending by “targeting” various “risk/need factors,” such as addictions, bad attitudes, risky associations […] and poor decision-making skills […]. Accordingly,] common conditions that can be applied to a prisoner’s parole release
include avoiding certain people and places, residing at a particular place, abstaining from \[illegal\] drugs, alcohol, or all intoxicants, and attending treatment programs or counselling. (pp.533-535)

By following their prescribed conditions, parolees demonstrate that they are addressing the assumed personal deficits that led to their imprisonment and are making prosocial choices and lifestyle changes henceforth (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009).

Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) cast the imposition of parole conditions as “a regulatory technique with multiple functions that reflect the dual concern of assistance and surveillance” (p.535). That is, parole conditions are constructed and enforced by deploying coercive controls and appealing to parolees’ own interests to stay out of prison and, sometimes, reform themselves. Some parolees claim that they indeed benefit from aspects of conditional release, such as the “structure” (Gobeil, 2008, para.38) and imposed treatment programs (Shaw, 1991).

When constructing conditions for federal prisoners, the PBC relies mostly on the actuarial risk assessments conducted by prison authorities (JHSA, 2000). These assessments appeal to neoliberal sensibilities, in that they claim to be more efficient than subjective evaluations and clinical assessments of individual cases (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2001, p.vii.). But “actuarial risk assessments have been found to contain inherent race, class, and gender biases that contribute to the regulation and marginalization of already disenfranchised communities” (Pollack, 2007, p.25). A major problem is that they transform parolees’ needs, historical factors, and social problems – relating to, for example, family violence, mental illness, and substance abuse – into risks for reoffending. Because criminalized women generally have high needs and low risks, “women are always considered ‘at risk’ of breaking the law or violating parole” (Pollack, 2009, p.88). The present scheme results in the imposition of unnecessary techniques of surveillance and control (Mullany, 2002). In turn, the greater degree of surveillance and stipulations imposed on a parolee increases the likelihood of parole violations and reincarceration (Erez, 1992, p.107).

Formerly incarcerated women often describe parole conditions as overly-restrictive, intrusive, untenable, and unrealistic (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.76; Shaw, 1991). Shaw (1991) argues that the excessively controlling nature of conditions impedes paroled women’s self-determination. Stipulations such as regular reporting to parole officers, psychologists, and sometimes halfway house staff and police, as well as
mobility restrictions and treatment and program attendance can be burdensome and stressful, especially in addition to other post-release demands.\footnote{39} Parole conditions may be exceptionally difficult to fulfill for some women who are poor (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.77) and who have health problems (Thompson, 2008, p.54).

Parole conditions can weaken returning women’s interpersonal relationships. For example, non-association provisos threaten peer relationships and sometimes create family separation, especially among Aboriginal women (Sugar & Fox, 1990, p.13). Requirements to report all intimate relationships, as well as parole officers’ power to contact intimate others, can also cause problems for returning women and their support networks (Gobeil, 2008, para.38; Pollack, 2007).

Parole conditions that regulate women’s associations have gendered implications. Penal research and policies increasingly frame women’s interpersonal relationships as criminogenic need/risk factors and, as a result, they are “increasingly targeted as sites of gendered regulation and reform” (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.541). Erez (1992), for example, reports that women on conditional release are more likely than their male counterparts to be deemed as having relationship needs. Hannah-Moffat (2004) and Pollack (2007) similarly observe that paroled women’s histories of abuse by men are framed by CSC and the PBC as risks that must be managed through surveillance of their current relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual.\footnote{44} When evaluating women’s associations, highly normative conceptualizations of “functional relationships” and “prosocial individuals” are deployed (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, pp.541-543). This obsession with women’s relationships reflects the identification of women’s social roles as largely relational to men and as tied tightly to the family (Erez, 1992). It also reflects sexist assumptions about women’s “natures” and the causes of women’s crimes, like dependency on others, susceptibility to bad influences, and poor decision-making skills (Pollack, 2007; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009).

Another common parole stipulation is sobriety. Drug use is strongly linked to many women’s crimes and is thus frequently constructed as a risk that must be


\footnote{44} Such knowledges of women’s histories of abuse and the link with women’s criminalization originally grew out of feminist thinking. The dominant framework, however, consistently co-opts such knowledges and uses them to further penal ideologies and objectives, such as punishment and responsibilization (e.g., Hannah-Moffat, 2004; Pollack, 2007).
managed. Data from 1996 reveal that 60.5% of paroled women were ordered to abstain from illegal drugs and 57.9% from alcohol; the percentages are 51.4 and 51.7, respectively, among a sample of paroled men (Grant, Motliuk, Brunet, Lefebvre, & Couturier, 1996). Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat’s (2009) analysis of PBC decision narratives shows that “substances themselves are ascribed influential powers” (p.541) over women on parole – powers that justify the imposition of conditions to avoid substance use entirely, and often the people and places associated with it. This discourse again reflects assumptions about women’s dependency and susceptibility to external influences. The substance abuse risk factor may also be managed through conditions that order attendance at treatment programs, as well as more physically invasive conditions like drug testing (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.541). The aforementioned data from 1996 further reveal that the PBC imposed conditions for substance abuse programs on 33% of women compared with 18.5% of men. Violation of the abstain condition is the most common reason for the termination of parole (AGC, 2003, s.4.96).

Parole boards sometimes require parolees to avoid specific locales – what Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) call “spatial techniques of governance” (p.543). These conditions often target individuals’ need/risk factors relating to drug use, and thus order the avoidance of liquor establishments (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). In fact, liquor establishments are implied by the formulation of release conditions as having an inherent criminogenic power so risky that parolees dare not step foot in them. Certainly, this discourse “delegitimizes [these establishments …] as places for leisure, social interaction, and even potential employment” (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.544). In a similar vein, some parolees must avoid specific geographical areas constructed as criminogenic based on normative evaluations of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). These neighbourhoods, however, can be hard to avoid when they are considered to be one’s home (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.545).

Technical violations of parole are often trivial and a result of simple human error; sometimes, they are beyond a parolee’s control, such as claims made by other

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45 Very few studies provide information about gendered differences (and similarities) in the imposition and enforcement of parole conditions.

46 R. O’Brien (2006) reports that drug use is responsible for 90% of parole revocations for FSW (p.3). Comparable data for male parolees are unavailable.
individuals (Evans, 2007, p.297; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.80, 82). In the 2001-2002 fiscal year, technical violations accounted for 75% of all women’s parole revocations, compared with 64% of their male counterparts, and this number is growing (AGC, 2003, s.4.95). The constant surveillance and threat of reincarceration that conditional release entails create feelings of anxiety and powerlessness for many parolees (Opsal, 2009), and the experience is sometimes described as comparable to imprisonment (Pollack, 2009, p.88). Those serving life sentences are in prison or on parole for their lifetime, and this can be extraordinarily trying (Shaw, 1991, pp. iv, 13-15).

1.2.3.2 Halfway Houses

Community residential facilities (CRFs), commonly known as halfway houses, are usually operated by non-profit, non-governmental organizations contracted by CSC and paid a per diem rate (Bell & Trevethan, 2004, p.iii). CSC (2010c) maintains that CRFs “provide a structured living environment with 24-hour supervision, programs, and interventions to assist the offender with a gradual and structured transition to the community” (para.5). Residency conditions are increasingly imposed on parolees. For example, FSW represented 5% of all CRF residents in 1997 and 7% in more recent years (Bell & Trevethan, 2004). In their analysis of the sociodemographic profile of CRF residents, Bell and Trevethan (2004) report that “significantly larger proportions of women were released to CRFs than directly to the community” (p.25). Residency conditions are spatial techniques of governance imposed on parolees deemed as having higher needs/risks (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, pp.545-547). Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) argue that this governance may have gendered implications through, for example, the enforcement of house rules, such as curfews and cooking responsibilities (p.546).

Paroled women have mixed experiences in CRFs, and there is variation between different facilities (Shaw, 1991, pp.9-11). Certain aspects may be beneficial, such as the temporary shelter, staff, resources, programs, and other residents (Gobeil, 2008, para.50; P. O’Brien, 2001a, p.289, 2001b, pp.37-40). On the other hand, residency conditions may also complicate re-entry. Post-release facilities for women are in short supply because of the small population of FSW (CHRC, 2003, p.56). As a result, women

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47 The proportion of prisoners released to CRFs as opposed to directly into the community was 51% in 1997-1998 compared with 58% in 2001-2002 and 56% in the following year (Bell & Trevethan, 2004, p.19).
with residency requirements often live in facilities located far from their hometowns (Gobeil, 2008, para.5; Shaw, 1991, pp.iv, 16) and that are not gender-sensitive or attend to their needs (Maidment, 2006, pp.143-144). Canadian CRFs also tend to be located in impoverished and unsafe neighbourhoods, often with a large number of people selling and using drugs (Pollack, 2008, p.22; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.541).^48

Other halfway house residents can create problems for returning prisoners. For example, drug use is common in CRFs, which can make it especially difficult for parolees to fight addiction (CHRC, 2003, p.55). Some residents have their belongings stolen (Shaw, 1991, pp.9-10). Another consequence of the small number of facilities for women is that many house individuals in a variety of circumstances, such as people who are homeless, in active addiction, even male sex offenders, and this can frustrate women's re-entry efforts (Gobeil, 2008, para.64; Maidment, 2006, p.143).

Parolees also experience problems with CRF staff. Some women perceive employees as demeaning and unhelpful with, for instance, accessing community resources (P. O'Brien, 2001b, p.36; Pollack, 2008, pp.22, 25). This dearth of support is due, in part, to the offloading of State programs onto local organizations that are under-resourced to adequately respond to their clients’ needs (Maidment, 2006, p.143). In addition, the support function of halfway house staff is limited by their contractual and financial relationship with the prison system. As Maidment (2006) explains, these agencies “become co-opted by and absorbed into the formal State apparatus […] and are more often than not pressured into conforming to State-based ideologies” (p.127), particularly the risk management paradigm. Supportive relationships are undermined by employees' perceptions of parolees as always at risk of violating conditions or reoffending, their obligation to supervise parolees and make regular reports to parole officers, and their power to contribute to parolees’ reincarceration (Maidment, 2006, p.147; Pollack, 2009, pp.87-89).

The constant surveillance, controlling structure, and restrictive, inflexible, and often petty rules at halfway houses further hamper some women’s re-entry (Gobeil, 2008, para.5; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.35-36, 135). Other surveillance techniques used by staff can be incredibly intrusive and distressing, as they include checking bank accounts, calling employers, and smelling breath for drug use (Gobeil, 2008, para.33; Shaw, 1991, pp.9-10).

^48 As Maidment (2006) clarifies, the concentration of CRFs in impoverished areas is indicative of under-resourcing and NIMBY (“not in my back yard”) thinking (p.127).
Pollack (2009) concludes that the dominance of risk discourse and related practices of surveillance in CRFs threaten to reinforce women’s exclusion from the community (pp.88-89).

1.2.3.3 Parole Officers

A standard condition of parole is to report to a parole officer on a regular basis (PBC, 2011a). CSC’s (2011c) website details the centrality of this agent’s role:

The parole officer is CSC’s key link with supervised offenders in the community and is crucial to managing offender risk [...] The parole officer ensures that the offender follows his or her Correctional Plan by visiting with: (1.) the offender, with or without warning; (2.) family, police, and employers; and (3.) persons who may be assisting the offender in a program. If the offender breaches parole conditions or seems likely to do so, the parole officer can take disciplinary measures, which include sending the offender back to jail.

These agents, in particular, play direct roles in the surveillance of returning prisoners’ circumstances, decisions, attitudes, and behaviours, and are thus central players in the penal project of producing normative, self-governing citizens (Pollack, 2007; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). Parole supervisors are intended to play another role, however, “as a resource person and a confidant to counter the pains of re-entry that the parolee may experience” (Griffiths & Cunningham, 2003, p.282).

While some returning prisoners perceive parole officers as unhelpful and too controlling, others identify them as sources of concrete and emotional support (Maidment, 2006, p.120; Pollack, 2008, p.22). Traits associated with supportive supervisory officers include respectfulness, flexibility, leniency, non-intrusiveness, and a willingness to listen and provide assistance (Cobbina, 2010, p.219; Gobeil, 2008, paras.7, 52-53; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.78-79). Yet, as Faith (2011) states, “with heavy caseloads there are limits to how helpful they can be” (p.170). Some, for example, are unaware of – or unwilling to assist with locating – community resources (Pollack, 2008, p.25), and some are slow to complete the paperwork necessary for parolees to engage in various activities (Shaw, 1991, p.iv).

The risk management paradigm, in particular, taints the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. For many parolees, the dual role of their parole officers as watchers and helpers is inherently flawed, as the former impedes qualities that are important for the latter, such as trust (Maidment, 2006, pp.119-120; Pollack, 2008,
After all, when paroled women as primarily controlling and punitive rather than as accommodative of their post-release needs (Opsal, 2009; Pollack, 2009, pp.87-88).

The dominance of risk thinking encourages supervisory officers to perceive and treat paroled women as primarily controlling and punitive rather than as accommodating of their needs (Pollack, 2008) writes that “the notion of being ‘at risk’ lends itself to focusing on the ‘negative’ things that [parolees …] have done at the expense of encouraging women’s capacities and supporting the changes they have made” (p.22). Some women regularly feel degraded, infantilized, and stigmatized when interacting with parole officers (Eaton, 1993, p.96; Pollack, 2008, p.22). Many parolees feel as though their perspectives are discredited due to the privilege given to professional perspectives (Pollack, 2008, p.28; Shaw, 1991). Other commonly reported problems with parole officers include unreasonable intrusiveness and scrutiny, attempts to direct personal choices, unfair enforcement of rules, and weak understandings of re-entry (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.80-83). For these reasons, such relationships can strengthen women’s sense of otherness in the community (Pollack, 2009, p.89). In fact, some prisoners consider returning to, or remaining in, prison until a full release because of these troubles (Pollack, 2008, p.22; Shaw, 1991, pp.iii, 7).

It must be recognized that “parole officer monitoring operates on assumptions about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of women after they exit the institution” (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.63). Criminalized women’s double violation of legal standards and gender norms helps determine the nature of disciplinary surveillance in the community, as it does in the institution (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.26). Regarding the management of parolees’ “bad attitude” risk factor, for example, supervisory decision making may be distorted by the idea that “women, unlike men, are not expected to be hostile or belligerent, or to display criminal attitudes” (Erez, 1992, p.123).

### 1.2.3.4 Psychologists

A fairly common condition imposed on federal parolees is to follow psychological counselling, and data from 1996 indicate that this stipulation is applied more often to women’s release (41%) than men’s (28%) (Grant et al., 1996, p.59). This condition reflects dominant discourse that frames women’s crimes as rooted in psychological and
emotional need/risk factors that can be neutralized through therapeutic, chiefly cognitive-behavioural, interventions (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.538).

Penal psychologists in the community perform essentially the same roles as they do in the institution, namely the determination and treatment of “risk” (CSC, 1994; Folsom, 2010, para.8). He or she conducts regular specialized assessments – specifically covering the emotional, attitudinal, and psychological need/risk factors identified by CSC and the PBC (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009) – and recommends or delivers interventions designed to manage such risks. If a psychologist deems a parolee’s risks to be too high for community management and self-governance, this professional opinion may contribute to the revocation of parole (PBC, 2011b, s.2.3(1)).

Some parolees consider relationships with mandated professionals to be helpful (e.g., Maidment, 2006, pp.119-121; P. O’Brien, 2001a, p.293). Pollack (2008, 2009) reports that many others object to these forced relationships. The ability of psychologists to assist parolees is stymied by their alliance with the penal system (Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2009). Paroled women frequently speak about these relationships as marred by a lack of confidentiality, trust, and shared understanding, extreme power imbalances, and the dominance of professional, risk-based perspectives (Maidment, 2006, pp.119-122; Pollack, 2009).

The available literature, as reviewed in this chapter, shows that many criminalized women face significant troubles before, during, and after their imprisonment. The profile of women in prison reveals incredible socioeconomic disadvantages, and such disadvantages are often variously associated with women’s imprisonment. The carceral experience, though providing some limited benefits, leaves many women injured. Upon exiting the institution, even basic needs can be exceedingly difficult to meet. For those prisoners released on parole, the challenges of re-entry tend to be amplified, as penal oversight expands over their daily lives. The information reviewed in this chapter provides important context for the current study. The attention now turns to the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations of this thesis.

49 Respecting psychological reports, “relevant personal psychological information will be fully disclosed within CSC for the purpose of case management, including release decision making and the supervision or surveillance of the offender in the institution or the community” (CSC, 1994, s.21).
CHAPTER 2. Using Theory and Method to Produce Knowledge About Women’s Lives

This chapter outlines the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological bases of the present study and highlights the interrelationships between these bases. Specifically, standpoint feminism, socialist feminism, and multiracial feminism are introduced. The research process is then detailed, including the selection of topic, sample, and method, the ways in which the data set was analyzed and represented, as well as ethical considerations and study limitations.

2.1 Knowing Women’s Lives

The epistemological assumptions that guided the ways in which this project was designed, carried out, and presented can be traced to standpoint feminism. This approach is especially helpful when exploring subjugated experiences, such as those among criminalized women. Feminist standpoint epistemology is a way of knowing that frames women as the experts of their own lives. It also welcomes the imposition of my socialist-multiracial feminist framework that works to contextualize and critically analyze women’s experiences, and thereby promote social change.

Standpoint feminism developed from the recognition that mainstream knowledge production tends to reflect value-laden visions of white, middle- or upper-class men – despite claims of scientific objectivity (Cain, 1990a; Hartsock, 2004; Jagger, 2004). Letherby (2003) states: “Women, alongside many other subordinated groups, have long had their experiential knowledge discounted in favour of the authorized knowledge of the academy” (p.22).

Standpoint feminists seek to address this neglect by rooting knowledge production in women’s lived experiences. Not surprisingly, this epistemological shift results in very different types of knowledge, with serious social implications. In fact,

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50 Criminology, for example, has been heavily criticized as “gender-blind and gender biased” (Menzies & Chunn, 1991, pp.7, 14). Traditional criminological theories ignored women altogether or rooted women’s crimes in their biologically and psychologically “inferior” nature (Klein, 1973; Simpson, 1989; Smart, 1976). It was not until the 1970s that women’s exclusion from and misrepresentation in criminology started to be addressed (Chesney-Lind & Faith, 2001, p.290).
 [...] it is the assertion of women’s experiences as valid that has powerfully demonstrated the subordination of women to men in every area of social life. Women’s accounts of what their lives are like have forced reconceptualizations of social relationships and the nature of power. (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994, p.124)

By highlighting previously missing experiences and producing a more holistic representation of society, we can see more clearly what is in need of change and we can strive toward a more equitable world (Brooks, 2007, p.69).

The idea of “women’s standpoint” does not imply an essentialist perspective (Comack, 1996, pp.33-34). It is now accepted among most feminist standpoint scholars that women share a material reality marked by inequity, but all women do not experience the same inequities (Letherby, 2003, p.57). Thus, “while oppression is common, the forms it takes are conditioned by [class,] race, age, sexuality, and other structural, historical, and geographical differences between women” (Letherby, 2003, p.57). In this way, standpoint feminism is useful for acknowledging the role of fractured and intersecting identities in shaping people’s experiences (Brooks, 2007, pp.69-78). This recognition of difference strengthens the feminist standpoint analysis because, “for each of these overlapping groups of women, some aspects of reality may be clearly visible and others may be blurred” (Jagger, 2004, p.64).

The researcher who takes a feminist standpoint approach must start with women’s experiences, but she or he has an “obligation to go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone” (Maynard, 1994, p.23). The role of the researcher is to listen to and navigate through women’s accounts of their lives so as to identify important similarities and differences, and to theorize about connections with underlying social relations and the feminist struggle (Cain, 1990a, p.134; Comack, 1999). Feminist standpoint scholars recognize that their analyses of women’s lives are inevitably partial and dependent upon – among other things – their own subjectivity, biographical and social positioning, and use of theory (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994; Naffine, 1997). Comack (1999) eloquently describes the role of the feminist standpoint researcher as akin to a “quilt maker” who weaves together women’s standpoints in her own attempt to make sense of their lives.

Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994) acknowledge that there are “no stable rules of validation which can ensure that feminists always know best” (p.146). In the end, feminist interpretations of social reality are tested by how well they help women and their
allies confront that reality (Jagger, 2004, p.64). Feminist scholars have long held that social justice praxis is a necessary element of feminist research:51 “The point is to change the world, not only to study it” (Stanley, 1990, p.15).

2.2 Theorizing Women’s Lives

The dominant theoretical perspective that informs this project is rooted in socialist feminism and multiracial feminism.52 Socialist feminism draws attention to the ways in which “capitalism interacts with patriarchy to oppress women more egregiously than it does men” (Maidment, 2006, p.20). Multiracial feminism complements this approach by incorporating multiple, intersecting forms of oppression into the analysis, and thus highlights the importance of differences within and between various social groupings.

Socialist feminism developed largely as a critique of the Marxian assumption that the economic structure of modern society, namely capitalism, is the “base” of social relations, institutions, and ideologies which, in turn, typically work to reinforce the base.53 According to Marxist thought, the capitalist structure produces and bolsters inequitable social and material conditions between those who own private property and the means of production and those who do not (Marx & Engels, 1848). In this paradigm, capitalism must be dismantled if social injustices are to be addressed.

Socialist feminists expand the logic of Marxism by drawing attention to patriarchy: “a social structure of men’s control over women’s labour and sexuality” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p.511). They point out that capitalism exists in a patriarchal context. Both structures interact – and often feed off each other – to shape social relations, institutions, and ideologies which, in turn, tend to reinforce the patriarchal and capitalist base. In this regime, women are doubly oppressed: They generally occupy subordinate positions as labourers in the productive sphere of the economy and in the reproductive sphere of the family (“the sexual division of labour”). This positioning in both the public and private realms fosters particularly harmful social and material conditions.

51 See, for example, Brooks (2007), Hesse-Biber (2007a, 2007b), and Kelly, Burton, and Regan (1994).

52 Multiracial feminism goes by many names, including multicultural feminism and Black feminism.

53 See Eisenstein (1979a, 1979b), Hartsock (2004), and Messerschmidt (1986, pp.1-24), among others.
for women as a group compared with men as a group. The prevalence of male violence against women and the feminization of poverty, discussed in Chapter 1, are notable examples. According to socialist feminists, the “dualistic system” (Messerschmidt, 1986, p.30) that underlies these conditions must be dismantled to achieve substantive change – “merely replacing or tinkering with parts of the system perpetuates the subordination of women in a different form” (Boritch, 1997, p.79).

Although the socialist feminist framework is useful for understanding how women are oppressed on the basis of class and gender, it continues to be heavily criticized for failing to incorporate other factors (Comack, 1996, p.30; Maidment, 2006, p.22). Multiracial feminists challenge the insufficient attention in most feminist theorizing paid to racial hierarchies and structures such as colonialism.\(^{54}\) Importantly, multiracial feminism sharpened the feminist lens even further by introducing the concept of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1991) explains that intersectionality “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p.1245), including, but not limited to, gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and ability. Recall the ways in which many criminalized women are marginalized on multiple grounds of identity, as reviewed in the previous chapter.

An important qualification is needed at this juncture, articulated nicely by Comack (1996):

To insist that structures like capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism do exist, and that they display historically specific forms of control and regulation over people’s lives, does not by definition negate the role of social agency or the various forms of resistance and power of individuals within those structures. What it does suggest, however, is that individuals’ actions, behaviours, and ways of knowing or perceiving their world will be conditioned and contoured by their social positioning within it. (pp.28-29)

The role of human agency in women’s lives before, during, and after imprisonment is retained in this study.

2.3 The Research Process: Making the Quilt

2.3.1 Positioning the Researcher and Selecting the Topic

Regarding the role of the feminist standpoint researcher, Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994) state:

Interpretation […] becomes revealed as the key methodological step in this process of attempting to link data and social relationships […] Some form of openly reflexive interpretation then seems essential if we are to claim any validity for our conclusions. (p.145)

Reflexivity is by no means unique to feminist research, but most feminist scholars stress its importance throughout the process of knowledge production. As noted, feminist standpoint scholars recognize their role as “quilt makers.” Certainly, many “feminists have been stern critics of ‘hygienic research’; the censoring out of the mess, confusion and complexity of doing research, so that the accounts bear little or no relation to the real events” (Kelly, Burton, & Regan, 1994, p.46; also see Oakley, 1981).

Becker (1967) says that, since it is not possible "to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies, […] the question is not whether we take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on" (p.239). He suggests that we acknowledge whose side we are on,

[…] use our theoretical and technical resources to avoid the distortions that [such commitments …] might introduce into our work, limit our conclusions carefully, […] and field as best we can the accusations and doubts that will surely be our fate. (p.247)

Although I employ various strategies to prevent my own standpoint from unduly influencing the research, this thesis remains partial. Reflection on how this is so is necessary for the reader to “understand [my …] contribution to the materials/narrations provided and those silenced” (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003, p.200). It also allows me to “avoid the tendency of claiming universal truths [and to instead …] place my project within a specified context” (Leavy, 2000, para.15). By remaining reflexive and transparent throughout the research process, the credibility of this study can be more thoroughly assessed (Chenail, 1995; Wainwright, 1997).

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Part of being reflexive involves exposing “our personal biographies [and social positioning, since this information is] relevant to the research that we do in terms of choice of topic and method, relationship with respondents, and analysis and presentation of the findings” (Letherby, 2003, p.9). To position myself, I am a Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, 27-year-old woman with no children who was born and raised in BC. Of course, I am also a graduate student; this project is for my Master’s thesis and I therefore benefit from it directly.  

Certainly, my personal/political positioning as a feminist academic, advocate for criminalized women, and activist for social change shaped the research process, from conception to completion. Nearly four years ago, after years of studying criminalized women in university, I was provided an opportunity to know some of these women on an experiential level when I joined the Human Rights In Action (HRIA) Collective. This group is made up of women in prison and in the community who work together to address various issues affecting incarcerated women. Much of the work is focused on promoting women’s release by their eligibility dates, as well as, more generally, “ensuring that all women survive their experience in prison intact” (C. Lamont, personal communication, June 15, 2011). Upon request of the women inside, we also started projects that assist with obtaining identification documents and arranging post-release subsidized housing. This work and the relationships that I have developed supplement my knowledge of existing research and theory in major ways. In addition, this background has deepened my commitment to feminist praxis. Reflexivity in the present study is especially important because of the strength of this background, as it helped me navigate my dual-role as an advocate/activist and a researcher. Given my background, it is not surprising that I chose a topic related to criminalized and imprisoned women for my thesis. I initially contemplated carrying out a study with women inside prison but, because of unacceptable restrictions on academic freedom imposed by CSC, I shifted my focus to women’s experiences after incarceration. This shift immediately proved worthwhile, as I realized the comparative dearth of research on the topic. By reviewing the literature and continuing to work with

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56 This self-description does not imply that my existence has been free of hardship. (In the words of Hughes (1994), “life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.”) Rather, this positioning is an acknowledgement of key sociodemographic factors that shape people’s experiences and perceptions. It is also an acknowledgement of my social privilege compared to most of the women I interviewed. As noted shortly, these factors might have influenced the interview dynamics and resulting data.
women in prison and see their struggles for basics such as housing, the message became clear: Just like before and during imprisonment, overwhelming numbers of women continue to face incredible – often intensified – challenges afterwards. The central questions that this study seeks to explore are:

1. How do women experience re-entry?
2. How do women’s experiences before and during imprisonment influence their experiences after imprisonment?
3. What factors impede or facilitate women’s return to society?

2.3.2 The Women

The sample selected for this study comprises 11 women who served federal prison sentences in Canada and who lived in the Lower Mainland of BC at the time of the interview. I recruited four respondents directly through my involvement with HRIA, four others were offered my contact information by a fellow activist/advocate, and three were recruited by previous interviewees. In the end, only two of the participants were women who I had never worked with as part of HRIA.57

The sample is fairly representative of the population of FSW in several important respects. As Table 1 shows, Aboriginal women are overrepresented in the sample (54.5% compared to 31% of the population), and Caucasian women are underrepresented (36.4% of the sample compared to 57% of the population; CSC, 2006, p.12).58 The low levels of education among most respondents, as reported in Table 2, resemble those among the population. Regarding age, most FSW enter prison in their 20s or 30s (CHRC, 2003, p.6). Of course, the respondents are slightly older (see Table 3) because they already served time and, for some, years had passed since their release (see Table 4). The lengths of respondents’ sentences differ slightly from population statistics. Seventy percent of FSW in prison are serving sentences of five years or less, compared with nearly two-thirds (63.6%) of the sample, as noted in Table 5. The proportion of respondents serving life sentences (18.2%) is virtually identical to

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57 My pre-existing relationships with nine of the respondents varied in terms of intimacy.
58 Despite the relatively large number of Native women in the sample and my sensitivity to racial factors and intersectionality, surprisingly little information emerged from the interviews that related specifically to Aboriginal identity.
that of the population (18%; CSC, 2006, p.12).\(^{59}\) One factor that is significantly underrepresented in the sample is parental status: Whereas 77% of FSW have children (OCI, 2011, p.50), only two participants (18.2%) were responsible for dependent children at the time of our interviews.\(^{60}\)

Table 1: Self-Identified Racial Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal/Métis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish(^{61})</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Highest Level of Formal Education at Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed GED</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Age at Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage does not total 100 due to rounding

\(^{59}\) See Table 6 for a breakdown of the lengths of time that respondents served in prison.

\(^{60}\) One respondent had adult children. Three respondents had children who were adopted. Had the sample been more representative in terms of parental status, different knowledge would have been produced. I nonetheless strived to pay heed to respondents’ experiences as mothers.

\(^{61}\) The Jewish identity is not a racial category and could be subsumed under Caucasian, but this was an important way in which one respondent identified herself.
Table 4: Time Since Release at Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time since release</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 8 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Length of Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of sentence</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-18 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Time Served in Prison (Most Recent Sentence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in prison</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage does not total 100 due to rounding

2.3.3 The Method: Letting Women Speak

The method of data collection used in this project is the in-depth, semi-structured interview. This method is aligned with the research questions and with my feminist standpoint approach. That is, it allowed me to explore women’s re-entry experiences from their own perspectives. When I asked one respondent, OneSky, what she thought of my approach to our interview, she replied, “you let me speak.” The in-depth interview is actually hailed by many feminist scholars as a principal means through which to uncover and understand marginalized voices (Hesse-Biber, 2007a; Reinharz, 1992, pp.18-45). Reinharz (1992) argues that this method “is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an anecdote to centuries of
ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women” (p.19). Furthermore, the open-ended nature of the interviews permitted the emergence and exploration of important similarities and differences in respondents’ re-entry experiences.

An interview guide was designed in advance based on a review of the literature and some preliminary ideas. It was pretested by submitting it to a formerly incarcerated woman for her consideration. Miner-Rubino and Jayaratne (2007) maintain that “this process can provide insights into interpretations of question meanings and therefore may enhance the quality of the measures” (p.313). Indeed, it resulted in significant improvements to the guide. The final instrument consisted of a small number of open-ended questions and numerous potential topics for discussion that centred around the research questions. This design ensured that each interview covered specific topics, but also made room for digression and spontaneity on the part of myself and respondents. As Hesse-Biber (2007a, pp.115-116) and Reinharz (1992, p.25) suggest, these qualities make for more thorough examination of the subject matter, help to control the researcher’s assumptions about what topics are important, and allow for the clarification of meaning. Due to the exploratory and emergent nature of this project, it was necessary to make slight revisions to the guide over the course of conducting the interviews. Such revisions reflect respondents’ suggestions, a desire to explore unexpected themes, and a perceived need to stay aligned with the original research questions.

The interviews were carried out over two months. I arranged to meet respondents at locations that were comfortable for them. Seven interviews occurred in restaurants or coffee shops and four were conducted in private residences. The duration of interviews ranged from just over 1 hour to 3.5 hours. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of respondents. One woman chose not to be tape-recorded, so I made written notes.

The in-depth interview is intensely interactive and the unique interpersonal dynamics between the researcher and respondents affects the knowledge that is produced (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). My past experiences with HRIA and pre-existing associations with most of the participants carries dangers and benefits for this study. For example, because I often occupied several positions relative to respondents –

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62 The interview guide is found in Appendix A.
including a friend, fellow advocate/activist, and researcher – it is difficult or impossible to differentiate between them. I do not know if some women viewed me in one position more than another and, if they did, how this influenced the data. There is a chance, for instance, that some respondents provided more information that they thought was relevant to my role as an advocate/activist.

The degree of shared understanding that existed in my interviews means that I might have failed to explore some areas as deeply as an unfamiliar other would have. Further, “participants too might hold back from giving fulsome accounts, relying on the interviewer to draw on their own background” (Lewis, 2003, p.66). Nonetheless, I remained conscious of this potential during the interviews, and remembered that our talks were more than conversations.63 One strategy that I used to avoid undue bias was “to adopt […] an artificial naivety” (Letherby, 2003, p.126). That is, I made an effort to ask respondents for elaboration or clarification of meaning even when I thought I already understood what they meant, and even when it felt inappropriate and unnatural, such as in the following exchange with Clarice:

I was immensely happy to get out. (Why were you happy?) [pause; laughs] ([laughs] I know it’s obvious, but just explain what were the things that made you [pause]) Well […]

Upon transcribing the interviews, another problem related to my background became apparent: On several occasions, I completed respondents’ sentences when they paused in speech – an unconscious attempt to confirm shared understanding. The process of transcription provided an invaluable opportunity to become aware of my weaknesses as an interviewer, and thus helped to address them over time. For example, I allowed far more silences in later interviews compared with earlier ones.

I realized very quickly that it was difficult to portray a façade of neutrality during the interviews. Although I frequently made use of default responses such as “mmm,” I also made favourable comments or body gestures (e.g., head nods) when respondents discussed issues with which I strongly agreed. Some scholars argue that such responses “can inhibit the objective of obtaining a fulsome, open response which is as free as possible from the researcher’s influence” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003,

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63 Because I had pre-existing knowledge of many respondents, when I asked them to tell me about themselves, it was necessary to add something along the lines of, “I already know some things about you, but what should I include in this research?”
As a result, respondents might have provided me with more information about the topics that I displayed overt interest in ("reactive bias").

The benefits of maintaining a façade of neutrality during interviews, however, are often overrated. In fact, a common aspect of feminist research practice, generally speaking, is that "the researcher feels free to step outside the formal role of the neutral asker of questions, expressing their own feelings and giving information about themselves" (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p.140). I agree with Webb (1984, quoted in Reinharz, 1992) that, in many cases, "to respond to these women with ‘uh huh’ or ‘that’s interesting’ [...] would have been somewhat awkward to say the least and would not have contributed to encouraging them to speak openly about their experiences" (p.31). There is a difference between unduly influencing the research and showing genuine empathy and concern for human beings. I simply could not – nor did I think it beneficial to – conceal whose side I was on while speaking with these women. And, actually, “being committed to seeing things from the perspective of respondents is [often] a necessary aspect of feminist research and not something to avoid” (Letherby, 2003, p.125).

Genuine expressions of agreement may be especially useful in interviews with criminalized women. After all, these women’s voices are typically not heard, let alone empathized with. Moreover, many criminalized women have had lengthy conversations with professionals who portray a cold stance of detachment. Some participants in this study might have developed healthy inclinations to hold back from expressing authentic reflections on, for instance, how they have been treated by the penal system. In the context of our interviews, it seems plausible that respondents were sometimes more open with me when I made favourable rather than neutral responses. I think this was the case with Jessica, for example, with whom I had not worked in the past and who expressed some initial concern about how the media represented her high-profile case. The following exchange occurred early in the interview and reflects my attempt to let her know whose side I was on:

So that was the whole charge, right. It’s like, now I have to register as a sex offender. (Now he is?) I have to. (What?!) I’m a registered sex offender for life. (Oh my god!) And if I don’t do that, I go back to jail. (That’s such bullshit!) I know, right. So, it’s a life sentence, right.

The advantages of my past experiences with HRIA and many of the respondents probably outweigh the potential drawbacks. Access to respondents, for one, was
unproblematic.\textsuperscript{64} In addition, I had pre-established relationships of non-judgement and trust with most of the women. This was extremely valuable, as the quality of knowledge produced through an in-depth interview is highly dependent on the establishment of a good rapport between researcher and respondent (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p.143). Similar to Evans (1979, quoted in Reinharz, 1992), I believe that “the rapport that developed in many interviews resulted in part from my own and my informants’ confidence that […] my personal experience […] allowed me to comprehend what they had to say in a way that no ‘outsider’ could” (p.27). I noticed this during the interviews and jotted in my journal:

I find it very helpful to be able to rephrase what respondents say using my own background, as it seems to confirm a degree of shared understanding – hopefully with the effect of encouraging more open dialogue.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the respondents were more candid when sharing their experiences with someone who they were familiar with, who they knew was on their side, and who was actively involved “on the ground” with the issues under discussion.

Thus, I believe that I had a degree of insider status with respondents due to my background of knowledge and experience (as well as my gender), and that this fostered more robust access to respondents’ lifeworlds. Still, I was an outsider in important ways. Perhaps most significantly, I have never experienced imprisonment and re-entry. I am also a different race, class, and age than most respondents. That I am a student is another difference that likely played a role in my relationships with participants. After all, “I have a research agenda” (Hesse-Biber, 2007a, p.114). These factors, and many more, shape the interview dynamics and certain knowledges are hindered or facilitated in the process (England, 1994, p.249). Phoenix (1994) concludes:

It is not, however, possible to be certain which of these social relations will have an impact, when it will do so, and what the impact will be […]. The simultaneity of [various factors …] make it extremely difficult to tease apart the aspects of the interviewer which are having an impact on the interviewee or on the power dynamics between interviewer and interviewee. (pp.55-56)

\textsuperscript{64} Access to respondents was likely enhanced by the geographical proximity of the two main halfway houses for women in this region (C. Lamont, personal communication, February 20, 2012), as well as the honorarium offered.
2.3.4 Analyzing the Women’s Accounts

As James (1986, p.21) similarly asserts, although my approach to this research was not characterized by detachment and objectivity, the analysis process was, nonetheless, methodical and rigorous. Collecting and analyzing the data was a rather fluid process that resembled a “spiralling research approach” (Berg, 2009, p.26). For example, as I started speaking with respondents, it did not take long to realize that possible themes were emerging and what these may mean in terms of existing literature and theory. I made notes of ideas for further exploration.

Tape-recordings were manually transcribed verbatim following each interview; each recording was reviewed twice in its entirety to ensure accurate transcription. The final data set totalled 268 pages of single-spaced text. Undoubtedly, the transcription process was a central stage of preliminary coding, memoing, and analysis. Detailed transcription also prolonged my engagement with the data set and thereby strengthened my familiarity with it.

After transcription, the data set was manually deconstructed into recurring themes through a process of constant comparison and contrast, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). I engaged in open coding and memoing as I minutely and reiteratively reviewed each transcript for “naturally occurring classes of things […] and important characteristics of these items” (Berg, 2009, p.148). This stage also involved confirming, rejecting, or modifying the preliminary ideas I had jotted down while collecting and transcribing the data. During this process, I recorded common elements that appeared within and across interviews. I specifically looked for commentary that was relevant to the research questions and that appeared important to interviewees.

When I could no longer discover additional items upon further readings of the transcripts, the list of common elements formed the first draft of potential themes. This list was then analyzed and deconstructed. Several items overlapped considerably and were therefore reframed as aspects of broader themes. Some were abandoned due to space constraints, comparatively low prevalence, and lack of fit with other themes. During the write-up stage, additional patterns became apparent and the themes and overarching categories were regularly modified and reorganized to best represent the

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65 Reviewing the tapes and transcripts for a second time revealed numerous (albeit minor) errors, even despite what seemed like meticulous transcription the first round.
data. Three overarching categories of experience were the result: serving time in prison; meeting basic needs; and serving time in the community. Each category contains several key themes and multiple subthemes.

One quality control technique that I used during the construction of themes was to “remain attuned to negative cases, that is, cases that do not follow the pattern of relationships we imagine are there” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.310). I intentionally looked for data that were inconsistent with other patterns I had identified, which usually involved searching for positive aspects of women’s imprisonment and re-entry experiences. In addition, following the advice of Berg (2009, p.361), I include such inconsistencies in the results discussion so as to modify my theory and permit the reader to determine whether they invalidate my interpretations overall. Counts are also used in many cases when I do not name each relevant respondent; this will help the reader to judge the representativeness of the themes (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.311).

The “grounded theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) approach employed in this project might also help protect the authenticity of the data and credibility of the results. Although I could have determined specific hypotheses from theory and a set of concepts and coding categories from the literature before beginning the interviews and analysis, an inductive approach was selected in an effort to best represent the data. This approach is also consistent with standpoint feminism, which begins with women’s concrete experiences (Letherby, 2003, p.74). I therefore immersed myself in the respondents’ accounts and explored their particularity and totality before making formal generalizations and connections to theory and research. As Becker (1998) points out, this approach allows for the emergence of unexpected ideas and categories (p.85).

An inductive approach does not imply a “pure” account of the data (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.32). As previously mentioned, I entered the research process with an important background of knowledge and experience that influenced what I observed and how I connected my observations to broader issues. Berg (2009) clarifies that no research can be purely inductive because “insights and general questions about research derive from previous experience with the study phenomena. This may represent personal experience, scholarly experience (having read about it), or previous research undertaken to examine the matter” (p.347). Regarding the role of feminist theory in grounded analyses, Wuest (1995) reminds us that it “may influence what is
observed and the discussion topics, but only concepts that emerge from the resulting data will enter the resulting theory. The emerging theory is driven by the data" (p.133).

2.3.5 (Re)Presenting the Women’s Accounts

Once I was confident that strong themes had been identified, I began the process of presenting results. The fluidity of the research process continued through this stage, as the data continued to be interpreted and I frequently revisited the transcripts for additional confirmation, elaboration, and illustrative quotations. Certainly, the process of writing

[...] makes us think about data in new and different ways. Thinking about how to represent our data forces us to think about the meanings and understandings, voices and experiences present in the data. As such, writing actually deepens our level of analytic endeavour. Analytical ideas are developed and tried out in the process of writing and representing. (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, quoted in White, Woodfield, & Ritchie, 2003, p.288)

The process of representing respondents’ accounts and further imposing my interpretation of them underlines once again the authority and responsibility involved in my role (England, 1994; Hesse-Biber, 2007b; Letherby, 2003). In fact, Cotterill (1992) suggests that “to define other people’s realities for them and for a wider audience may be the greatest power the researcher has” (p.604). It was thus important that I strive to represent the women’s realities as accurately as possible.

Recognition of partiality is a helpful way to approach the power of representation and analysis (England, 1994, p.250). Although I strived to protect the authenticity of the data, “feminist interview-based research is unable to guarantee that the interviewee will not be misunderstood or rejected in the research process” (Reinharz, 1992, p.25). It is worth repeating that the ways in which I interpreted and represented the women’s accounts reflect my standpoint and how it interacted with those of the respondents. As such, “other representational possibilities” (Hesse-Biber, 2007b, p.343) of participants’ re-entry exist.

One specific strategy that can minimize the likelihood of misrepresentation and enhance the credibility of the researcher’s interpretations is to provide thick, rich descriptions of the raw data (Edmonson & Irby, 2008, p.81; Wainwright, 1997, p.13). The findings chapters in this thesis are packed with quotations from respondents, and each
theme is illustrated by multiple respondent accounts. As Palys and Atchison (2008, p.386) suggest, this should allow the reader to thoroughly understand the diversity of the data and to verify the connections that the researcher has made between the data, the constructed themes, and the related analyses. Focusing on the women’s narratives in this way is also consistent with my feminist standpoint perspective. A healthy balance between respondents’ words and my analysis must be achieved in the end product, especially when it is a “relatively privileged researcher […] who is] studying those whose experiences have been marginalized” (Fine et al., 2003, p.170). Comack (1999) states: “Giving women a voice […] means quite literally sharing authority with them on the written page” (p.299). Despite my heavy reliance on quotations, most of the women’s words could not be included, and the selection process further reflects the partiality of my analysis.

Another way to represent respondents’ words with greater accuracy, context, and meaning is to preserve the nuances of interview dialogue (DeVault, 1990; Reinharz, 1992). During transcription, I devised a method for coding as many subtleties of speech as I could recognize. When presenting the findings, however, it was simply too distracting to include all of the details that I had spent so much time and energy trying to portray on paper. I therefore edited the women’s accounts for readability purposes (e.g., removed many emphasized words, added ellipses). It is vital to recognize that “each decision about these matters results in saving or losing aspects of interview talk” (DeVault, 1990, p.105). Editing the participants’ narratives reveals another one of my roles as researcher.

One subtlety of respondents’ speech that I include in the results is the regular use of terms such as “you know,” “like,” and “right.” DeVault (1990) maintains that the use of words like these often does not reflect “stumbling inarticulateness, but appears to signal a request for understanding” (p.101). Such requests take on particular force given that criminalized women are typically ignored or misrepresented by dominant knowledge producers. James (1986) suggests that researchers also pay attention to nonverbal communication in interviews. This might be important in research with criminalized women as well because “often members of a subordinate group cannot clearly articulate their frustrations and discontents; yet these may be expressed in inchoate ways” (p.21), such as pauses, laughter, or deep breaths. These descriptors are thus bracketed in the
findings. I also include strongly emphasized words (underlined) and repeated words, and do not translate respondents' vernacular into formal English.

The authenticity of the data set was protected further by paying attention to the complexities of respondents’ accounts. Such attention was surely aided by my feminist standpoint and socialist-multiracial feminist approaches, which encourage the recognition of women’s similarities and differences. Another strategy that I used in an attempt to do justice to participants’ experiences was to be wary of overstating the “hot spots” (Fine et al., 2003, p.187) and ignoring the more mundane aspects of re-entry, like what type of food they were eating. Also, the complexities of women’s lives, and the social world in general, were represented through recognition of oppression and resistance, victimization and agency, hope and despair (Fine et al., 2003).

2.3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study meets the minimal-risk requirements set by the SFU Research Ethics Board. Because I chose to conduct research with human participants, I had important ethical responsibilities to fulfill. In addition, “ethical questions are heightened in feminist interview research because feminists try hard to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women” (Reinharz, 1992, p.27).

Informed consent was obtained from each respondent prior to the interview by providing an oral consent script that we read together and that she kept for her records.66 The script informed participants of the nature of the research objectives and method, the intended uses of the research, their rights as respondents, and the foreseeable benefits and risks involved. Respondents were not required to provide direct identifying information in this project and strict confidentiality was offered. Still, six women declined use of a pseudonym and opted for their real names. Four respondents chose their own pseudonym and I chose the name for one woman.

Tape-recordings were erased immediately following transcription, which typically occurred within two days preceding each interview. Upon transcription, further information was anonymized, such as other individuals’ names and some potential indirect identifiers. When writing-up the results, additional information that might indirectly identify respondents became apparent – especially given the small population

66 The oral consent script is found in Appendix B.
of FSW – and was removed (e.g., names of transition houses). All sensitive data were securely stored and only I had access to the data set.

Each respondent was compensated $40 for her time and expertise.\textsuperscript{67} I consider this compensation necessary in a context in which criminalized women are under-valued for their contributions to knowledge production. Respondents were also offered delivery of a complete or truncated copy of the research upon future request; none have made this request to date.

Ethics were also ensured by remaining conscious that in-depth interviews are liable to “ethically important moments” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I was aware that respondents might recount painful experiences in their lives before, during, and after imprisonment. Nancy, for example, started to cry while sharing some of the struggles relating to her illness and criminalization. Portraying a stance of neutrality would not have been ethical. Instead, I validated her feelings and empathized with her in whatever way my background allowed. As Palys and Atchison (2008) write, researchers “have a humanistic obligation to treat people with dignity and safeguard their interests” (p.70).

Another aspect of ethical engagement with respondents in the context of this study was knowing when to shift between my role as researcher and advocate. That is, a few respondents were experiencing significant problems in their post-release lives and I therefore offered assistance at the end of some interviews.

2.3.7 Study Limitations

In addition to the limitations already revealed through the above reflexivity, several others should be considered when interpreting the results of this thesis:

1. Reliance on the individual interview: Different methods can produce different data sets, “neither more true than the other” (Fine et al., 2003, p.200). As Lewis and Richie (2003) point out, the use of multiple methods (“triangulated research”) has the potential to create a fuller understanding of respondents’ experiences and add credibility to the research findings and interpretations. One method that might provide particularly rich insight into women’s re-entry is the focus group or “feminist group interview” (Reinharz, 1992, p.222). Callahan (1983, quoted in Reinharz, 1992) suggests:

\textsuperscript{67} One respondent did not accept payment.
Women’s participation and the flow of ideas and information [could …] be enhanced by being able to listen to each other’s experience and to interact with each other […]. A group interview format facilitates women building on each other’s ideas and augments the identification of patterns through their shared experience. (p. 223)

2. **Absence of member or respondent validation:** The validity of research can be enhanced when respondents or similarly situated others review the analyses so as to confirm, modify, or reject any information (Fine et al., 2003, p.200; Hesse-Biber, 2007a, p.128; Reinharz, 1992, p.21). Participants or other women who served prison sentences did not have the opportunity to read my interpretations of the data. This is unfortunate, given that criminalized women are often excluded from processes of knowledge production and are misrepresented in dominant discourses – problems that I otherwise sought to confront. The lack of respondent validation was (and remains) possible in terms of access to willing participants, but time constraints prevented the use of this quality control technique.

3. **Memory deterioration:** Human memory is always susceptible to deterioration over time. In addition, certain memories may be more or less likely to be recalled, and such recall may be context dependent (Gobeil, 2008, para.81).

4. **Use of snowball sampling:** Conveniently, three respondents were recruited by previous respondents. Palys and Atchison (2008) caution, however, that “one’s first snowball may well influence the shape of the snow figure that results […] In general, people are more likely to know people who have similarities with them” (p.126). Thus, there may be limited diversity among those recruited in this manner.

5. **Missing experiential outliers:** That I could contact and interview the 11 respondents might say something about their experiences. That is, the sample may not be representative of women who face the most challenges after imprisonment, since these women might be more difficult to reach (e.g., those who are “on the run” or homeless). Conversely, the sample might be missing experiences at the other end of the spectrum, in that women who have the easiest time after their release might also be less accessible (e.g., those who have moved on and are entirely removed from relevant communities).  

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68 Thank you C. Lamont for these insights.
6. **Present socioeconomic outliers:** Two of the respondents in particular, Clarice and Daisy, were selected due to ease of access, as they are fellow advocates/activists. They are also outliers in the sample (and population of FSW) in terms of socioeconomic status. In fact, they both raised concerns about this difference and the potential impact on the data set. For example, Daisy and I had the following exchange after speaking about the material assistance she received from friends:

> So, again, I’m lucky. A lot of those women are not. (Yeah.) You know, so, I’m not really the common, common person to even, you know, make comments, really. (Mmm. [pause] Well, your case, I think it’s good, you know, good for me to include, ‘cause, I mean, it shows how important supports are.) Oh, very. (You know, and if you found it at all difficult, then that shows how rough the women who don’t have much help have it.) Yes, it’s very difficult. I mean, just in every, every way.

That these women are included speaks to the diversity of the sample.

This chapter presented my use of epistemology, theory, and method to produce knowledge about women’s lives. It was revealed that feminist standpoint epistemology and socialist-multiracial feminist theory inform this project in fundamental ways. These ways of knowing and thinking are useful tools to unearth and understand the experiences of women after prison and to stimulate social change. In addition, the epistemological and theoretical approaches that guide this study have important implications for the research process, including selection of the in-depth, semi-structured interview and representation of the women’s narratives. The importance of researcher reflexivity was also highlighted throughout this chapter. With the stage set, we now turn to the heart of the quilt: the women’s accounts.

The following three chapters describe key findings about prisoner re-entry that emerged from interviews with 11 FSW in the Lower Mainland of BC. The chapters represent interrelated categories of experience, and each contains multiple sub-themes:

- Serving time in prison
- Meeting basic needs
- Serving time in the community

Drawing from Sir Isaac Newton’s famous quotation, this research “stands on the shoulders of giants” in that it builds on the literature reviewed in Chapter 1.
CHAPTER 3. Serving Time in Prison

This chapter concentrates on specific aspects of respondents’ prison experiences that had direct implications for their post-release lives. A number of participants made some gains while serving time in prison, particularly relating to various programs, resources, and supportive relationships. At the same time, many prison-based programs and resources proved unhelpful after release, and the pains and effects of institutionalization frequently followed women into the community.

3.1 “The Little That We Had There, It Helped Huge for Me” (Joanna)

3.1.1 Prison-Based Programs and Resources

Rehabilitative Programming and Psychological Counselling

As the available literature shows, prison-based rehabilitative programming and psychological counselling can have beneficial carryover effects in women’s lives after release (e.g., Gobeil, 2008, paras.55, 59; Maidment, 2006, p.82). Five of the eleven respondents in this study identified some advantages of such programs. Patrice and Jessica credited rehabilitative programming with enhancing their relationship skills:

A year ago, I would’ve totally not of got along with, like, anybody if you didn’t roll in my circle of friends. Now I’m, like, totally chill and I’ll get to know anybody. (What do you think changed that?) Programming, probably. Some of [the tools I learned] were, like, really beneficial. ~ Patrice

They had a program there, I can’t remember exactly what it was [...] That was okay, like, I got stuff from that. I dunno, it was, like, teaching you how to communicate with people [...] That was really helpful. ~ Jessica

Regina also used prison-based programs to help her change in positive ways:

I went to jail for four years, four months. And in that time, I, like, really wanted to change who I was because I was tired of being institutionalized and bein’ in jails. And I thought, like, I had to do this for myself [...] So, I took the programming [...] I took what I could from them to learn.

She credited one program that

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69 This passage is abbreviated for readability.
[...] helped a lot because it taught me how to manage my emotions, and how to recognize when I’m in a high-risk situation or when I’m triggered [...] Before I used to just get mad [...] But today, now I can say, well, I feel like this.

Although Regina’s rapport with the prison psychologist deteriorated, they initially had a “really good relationship” and their talks helped her “be more aware of how I was.”

Kelly and Nancy derived some benefit from prison-based substance abuse programs. Kelly commented:

_The WOSAP [Women Offender Substance Abuse Program …] I went to, they were good. (Yeah?) I got a lot out of that program. It helped. It helped try to identify some of my, you know, triggers and emotions._

Nancy was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in prison. She said that it helped to an extent, and perhaps initiated a process of healing. She only began to deal with the trauma at the root of her substance abuse after prison when she attended treatment on her own volition.

**Educational and Vocational Resources and Programs**

Six respondents worked on their Adult Basic Education, GED, or Adult Dogwood while serving time and one completed her GED and Adult Dogwood. For Kelly, such efforts reflected how she “made the initiative to try to change and look for things in FVI [Fraser Valley Institution] that could help me, right.” Kelly and Patrice chose to continue with educational upgrading after prison in hopes of improving their employment prospects. Liz expressed confidence that she would complete her GED and culinary arts degree in the future, but added that she needed the assistance of a tutor.

Respondents did not speak favourably of prison-based vocational programs. In fact, no one said they gained employment skills in prison that assisted them on the outside. Nonetheless, a few pointed out the potential of such programs:

_I mean, it gives ‘em something to fall back on, like flagging or something, right. Yeah, those certificates, I mean, they’re expensive to get on the outs, right, if you have to pay for ‘em. ~ Kelly_

_Programs like [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System] and first aid and food preparation and stuff, those are just basic certificates, but they could help you, like, and […] the forklift. (Okay.) Those are just basic things, like, you could get a job with. ~ Regina_
Liz participated in first aid, food safe, and culinary arts programs in prison, which she said might help her employment endeavours “if I apply it.” But, as explained in Chapter 4, she faced financial barriers to completing her schooling in the community.

**Federal/Provincial Disparities**

There is a disconcerting trend underway in Canadian sentencing practices: Women are being sent to prison for longer periods of time only to access services that are increasingly absent in the community (Maidment, 2006, pp.83-88; Pate, 2011, para.26; Pollack, 2008, p.15). Two respondents revealed that they were part of this pattern. Faced with 18-month jail terms for their crimes, Kelly and Patrice requested that a Judge sentence them instead to federal prison for 2 years plus a day. Their motivation was to access programs and resources that they understood were unavailable in the provincial system. Kelly shared:

> I knew getting provincial time wasn’t going to help me get off drugs. As soon as I was released, I would be right back into the same action. (Mmm.) I needed to be accountable for what I did and try to change my life. And, so I went federal. I found federal a lot better than provincial – a lot more programming, a lot more help.

**3.1.2 Supportive Relationships**

**Volunteers and Contract Workers**

Ten respondents talked about the supportive relationships they developed with volunteers or contract workers while serving time and how these relationships helped ease the pains of incarceration and release – a finding supported by previous studies (e.g., AGC, 2003, ss.4.101-4.103). Kelly, Liz, OneSky, Joanna, and Regina were introduced to the HRIA Collective in prison. They each commented on the pre-release and post-release assistance provided by this group and its sister group, Sisters in Action and Solidarity (SAS), including peer support and help with material resources. The roles of HRIA and SAS in these women’s lives are detailed further in Chapter 4.

Eaton (1993) writes: “The identity of ‘prisoner’ is fostered in the environment of the total institution, the all-embracing prison. If the hold is weakened, if the totality of the institution is fractured, then the identity will be less confirmed” (p.113). Clarice shared how her involvement with a volunteer theatre group in prison provided a connection with the outside world and thereby fractured the totality of the institution:
We had a theatre group [...] They were really great. They helped to [...] maintain a relationship with, you know, social reality. You know, everyone doesn’t think the way that these guards do, or the way that prisoners do either [short laugh].

Regina was introduced by her fellow prisoners to a volunteer group, M2/W2, that paid for some of her transportation shortly after release. Kelly also connected with this group and shared:

They gave me a ride from FVI, yeah. (Nice.) Although if they didn’t give me a ride and I didn’t have nobody, then FVI, one of the guards would’ve drove me, yeah. Which woulda been, like, really? Am I gonna go in handcuffs, too, or what?

Providing transportation might seem like a minor form of support, but the words of other respondents reiterate that who is responsible for physically transitioning prisoners from the institution to the community is important:

Often the [Primary Workers] end up [giving women a ride], the guards in, in uniform, to [the halfway house]. Yeah. (Huh.) It’s just sad. ~ Cate

It really felt good to have that support – somebody there other than a CSC van to drive you. Like, you felt like you were cared for. ~ Regina

Indeed, this form of transportation may represent the first sign of community support – or lack thereof – that women have after prison.

Three respondents spoke of the relationships they developed with non-Aboriginal, religious-affiliated individuals or groups in prison. These relationships were particularly important because they provided continuous support throughout the women’s transition from prison to the community – a feature that other research suggests can be highly beneficial (Fortune et al., 2010):

I went to church while I was in there. The lady pastor that was there, she hooked me up with the pastor out here, he works with people that were in corrections. He’s really nice. He comes and we talk and takes me for coffee or out for a little bite to eat. In my AA program I did my step five [“Confession”] with him. You know, he’s just supportive. I’m glad I found him ‘cause I’m still talkin’ with him. And it’s, like, two years later, that I’ve been out, right. (Right.) So yeah, he’s good, you know, he gave me a crib for the baby. I just don’t feel judged by him.70 ~ Jessica

I still talk to [the Jewish cantor from prison] and I still see him and stuff, right. And he’s even said, out here, if I need references [...] if I need services, like have

70 This passage is abbreviated for readability.
Kelly pointed out that the support she established in prison was especially valuable because she was released into unfamiliar territory with few connections:

“I got support through the Catholic ministry [in prison], I think it’s Catholic or Christian, I’m not sure, for when I got out actually. They set me up with, it’s like a group of people that help you, like a support network […] a team of two women and one male. So there’s, you know, somebody always available for you, right. (Wow.) And we met once a week […] So I used them when I first got out, ‘cause I was kinda scared, you know, when I got out. I didn’t, I’ve never lived in Vancouver, never been here, my family’s not here.

Five respondents developed relationships with the Native Elder during their time inside. In fact, at the time of our interviews, Joanna, Nancy, Regina, and OneSky were still in close contact with the Elder and regularly attended sweat baths (purification rituals) at her house. The Elder assisted a number of respondents in material ways. For example, she offered her house when Regina did not have a place to sleep, and she might establish a private home placement for Nancy and OneSky. More important than material support, the Elder has provided invaluable moral support and played a vital role in these women’s lives as a spiritual advisor, source of Native teachings, and, as stated by Regina, someone to “spend time with.”

Previous studies indicate that spiritual supports and beliefs facilitate some women’s re-entry (e.g., Severance, 2004, pp.92-93). Joanna, OneSky, and Regina credited the Elder with helping them develop spiritual selves and connect with Aboriginal teachings, which played positive roles in their lives after prison. Joanna and OneSky shared how the Elder and Native teachings helped them emotionally:

[In prison,] I learnt, I dunno, to be cold […] (Is that still, like, following you today, when you’re out?) No, ‘cause I met the Elder, right. And I got to open up and I got a lot of different teachings […] But, hadn’t that of been there, I think I would still be in prison. I’d still be cold and angry and fighting. I don’t think I’d be as far as I am right now. So, the little things that we had there, it helped huge for me. ~ Joanna

Regina was not familiar with her culture prior to her involvement with the penal system. She also shared that some of her relatives experienced residential schools. The Native Women’s Association of Canada (2011) reports that an “estimated 40% of Aboriginal inmates in prisons are residential school survivors. Many others are intergenerational survivors” (para.7). The residential school system was a key policy of colonialism that attacked and nearly annihilated Aboriginal cultures (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).
I learned how to deal with things emotionally [...] I learned how to grieve. No drinking [...] No, I don’t want your tablets [...] You know what I do need to do? I need to go to my room for a couple of minutes – could you leave me alone? [...] So, that was huge for me, huge. ~ OneSky

When I asked Regina how her newfound connection with the Elder and Native teachings helped her on the outside, she replied: “I pray, I go to sweats [...] It just makes me feel like I’m part of something, you know, like I belong somewhere.” OneSky also pointed out the joy of belonging to a spiritual community of like-minded others: “It’s wonderful to know others who think like me.” Nancy indicated a positive sense of purpose gained through actively practicing Native culture and being her “Elder’s helper.” The sense of inclusion that these women derived from relationships with Aboriginal supports and teachings likely challenged some of the exclusion they faced elsewhere in the community.

Peer Relationships

Incarcerated women often develop positive connections with their fellow prisoners (Liebling, 1999, p.309; Maidment, 2006, p.82). Regina, Cate, and OneSky commented on the peer support networks that they developed while serving time – relationships that extended to the outside world. For example:

I made maybe three or four friends that I feel are my good friends. I write them and stuff, and they write me [...] We support each other and tell each other we’re proud of each other and [...] hang in there, you know [...] We’ll hang out when they’re out, too. ~ Regina

I wrote to one of the girls who was still [... in prison] until her release. And then I, I started talking to [a friend from prison] again because I saw her when I was at parole [...] She used to take care of me [...] She was just so happy to see me. ~ Cate

Family Relationships

As clarified in Chapter 4, some women’s family relationships deteriorated as a result of incarceration. Interestingly, however, three respondents mended previously fractured relationships with relatives while serving time, mostly because they proved “clean” and out of “that lifestyle.” Kelly and Patrice shared:

My kids seen me addicted, right. Yeah, they lost hope in me. And then, when I went to jail, I kinda got that back, their support, you know [...] And they’re glad that I’m clean, right. So, they look at it as a positive thing, and so do I, right. I mean, I could be dead right now, right. ~ Kelly
My stepdad and my brother and my sister that I haven’t seen in, like, seven years, I started talking to them when I went to jail […] I got to see them for, like, the first time, like, two weeks before I left [from prison] to treatment […] If I would’ve turned back now to drugs and like to that lifestyle, I’d probably never ever see them again. ~ Patriece

Before her imprisonment, Joanna did not have custody of her children due to her drug use, but she had two of them back by the time of our interview. She explained how they developed a relationship: “We had [private family visits] and we talked on the phone everyday and we built a really good relationship that way […] Unfortunately, it happened through jail.”

3.2 Aspects That Hindered or Did Not Help Women’s Re-Entry

3.2.1 Prison-Based Programs and Resources

Some respondents used aspects of their prison experiences, such as access to certain programs and supports, to assist them upon release. A more prevalent theme that emerged from respondents’ accounts – as the following sections detail – was that prison-based resources were frequently problematic and failed to provide meaningful post-release benefits.

Vocational, Educational, and Financial Resources and Programs

Cognitive-behaviouralism – despite its well-documented problems – is the dominant approach used in prison programming for women (AGC, 2003, s.4.58). Indeed, cognitive-behavioural programming is apparently given higher priority than more realistic interventions addressing basic needs, such as vocational training (Pate, 2005, para.32, 2011, p.4). This situation was observed by Patriece:

They didn’t really have too much [...] employment] stuff there. Like, there’s a workshop or whatever that I could’ve taken, but [...] the women said that, who were in the program, that it wasn’t very beneficial to anybody [...] So, there wasn’t too much to do with the employment. It was more like, like, the programming’s based for, like, kind of, like, problematic behaviours. So, like, fraud, or B ’n Es, or drug use, or gambling or, or, or, right.

Liz was the only respondent who said that the training she took in prison might assist her job search in the future. Even after 16 years, OneSky was not taught anything that would help her with a job. Kelly was enrolled in a CORCAN program that was cut after four weeks due to an institutional security matter, namely a missing screwdriver. Consistent
with Eaton (1993, p.33), this incident reflects how the nature of the carceral context can obstruct educational and vocational initiatives.

The limited vocational options available in women's prisons and the absence of an employment strategy that addresses the unique circumstances of criminalized women, as documented by the CHRC (2003, p.54), were highlighted by several respondents. Cate, for example, did not qualify for most vocational programs due to her developmental delay. Her experience thus illustrates the failure of prison programming to meet the intersecting needs of women with disabilities. It was only after she was released that she found a training program that accommodated her circumstances. Jessica participated in an employment program in prison, but added:

*I don’t know if that’s something that I’m passionate about. (Okay, yeah.) ‘Cause it’s more along the lines of construction [...] But, it did help me get through bein’ in there, not having to sit in my cell or whatever for eight hours a day [...] But in terms of actually using it or whatever? (Yeah.) I dunno. I don’t think so.*

Existing research shows that prison-based vocational programs and resources are either designed for men or are limited to traditionally female-concentrated fields that carry little promise of post-release employment and financial security (AGC, 2003, ss.4.84-4.87; CHRC, 2003, p.53; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.52). Joanna expressed frustration with the current arrangement:

*Sure, they have CORCAN. But, I mean, in all reality, do all girls wanna [...] do roofing [...] or building? [...] And the hairdressing course, I mean, you can’t get your ticket in there, so why are you taking the course? [...] I mean, they got the dog training thing there, but how many people wanna do that? (Yeah, it’s limited.) So, like, they should have different things.*

Daisy, Regina, Jessica, and Kelly also called for a greater variety of employment opportunities and programs in prison, as well as improved resources, such as career counselling and job search assistance.

The educational credentials among most respondents remained low and, until further advancement, would probably not make much difference in terms of employment and income.72 Richie (2001) made a similar conclusion in her research with formerly incarcerated women. Moreover, as explained later, two respondents in this study faced

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72 As reported in Chapter 2, nearly two-thirds (63.6%) of respondents had no high school diploma or equivalent at the time of our interviews.
financial hurdles to finishing their GEDs on the outside. Daisy criticized the present format of educational programming in prison:

_The teacher [in prison] mostly teaches up to Grade 10, ‘cause that’s their mandate. But, there are students there who take Grade 11 and 12 classes, but they virtually have to do it on their own by correspondence, which is really tough. (Mmm.) And some of ‘em there take university courses, and again it’s the same thing [...] Grade 10 is not enough for any kind of job these days._

The poverty and related troubles that many incarcerated women seek to resolve through formal education prevents them from accessing such education, as pointed out by Regina:

_You do have to pay for your own university courses. (Okay. What do you think about that?) Well, I think they should provide it for free, because a lot of us can’t afford to pay for our own classes and stuff. (Yeah.) [pause] But that’s what’s gonna get us the good jobs and stay out, right._

As Regina might have predicted, none of the respondents acquired post-secondary education while incarcerated – very few prisoners do (CSC, 2011a). The deficient educational and vocational resources described by many of the women in this study are problematic since most of them (at least seven) lived in poverty before prison and experienced unemployment, underemployment, and/or income assistance.

A few respondents pointed out the dearth of prison-based assistance with money management. Joanna stated: “I really think they should have paying your bills […] managing money […] They should have courses like accounting, or anything like that to do with survival.” Liz thought that a program on money management might have helped her after release. Daisy suggested that CSC hire an “investment officer” to assist prisoners with financial matters.

Despite the lack of financial assistance and the pitiful wages paid to prisoners, Cate and Liz left prison with small savings. This money helped them purchase a few basic necessities immediately following release. Nonetheless, Clarice emphasized the limitations imposed by low wages: “Even if we saved every cent that we earned, it would just be negligible. It’s, it wouldn’t make any difference to how we could live on the outside.” The OCI (2001) would agree: “Inadequate pay levels negate the saving of sufficient funds to support reintegration” (p.7).
Rehabilitative Programming, Psychological Counselling, and Mental Health Services

Several respondents criticized rehabilitative programming and psychological counselling in prison. For instance, some commented on the lack of support provided by the CSC psychologist. Jessica rightly perceived the role of the psychologist to be similar to other prison employees, which is focused more on risk management than support:

(What was the psychologist like in prison?) She was okay. She just kinda got your background and your crime, why you think you became the way you did, blah, blah, right. It wasn’t, like, to help or support you or anything [...]. It was just part of what they had to do, I guess.

Jessica did find a supportive counsellor in the community upon her release from prison. Regina initially considered the prison psychologist helpful, but when she did not support her temporary absence to visit her ill mother or attend her funeral, their relationship was damaged irreparably. Her account reveals how criminalized women’s relationships with professionals in prison can be obstructed by the prioritization of penal objectives over women’s needs and the absence of shared understanding between “expert” and “offender,” as other research confirms (e.g., Pollack, 2008, pp.20-21):

We used to have a good relationship. We’d communicate and she’d help me [...]. But, her saying that [I could not visit my mom] really shut me off from her [...]. I stopped talking to her after that [...]. It was kinda like she had her own agenda. Like, she wanted, she wanted to see me do this and that but, at the same time, I wanted to do what I needed to do – what I felt was right.

Daisy observed the insufficient psychological support in prison and considered herself “fortunate in so far as I had good therapy before I went in there, ‘cause I didn’t get any support while I was in there!” Similar to the CHRC (2003, p.40), she criticized the power imbalances and limited confidentiality that characterize prisoners’ relationships with penal psychologists:

The problem is that when you go to therapy in that situation, they’re paid by the CSC. (Yeah.) And it’s not private. And I know for a fact it isn’t because I know three or four therapists that used to work at [a prison], and they all left when they were told that they had to disclose their notes [...] And don’t think the inmates don’t know. (Mmm.) So, you’re not gonna tell your therapist the things that you really need to tell them. You’re gonna tell that therapist what they wanna know and what you think they wanna hear to get out!

Indeed, prisoners are often aware that their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes are interpreted in terms of risk by such professionals and are therefore cautious in these relationships (Pollack, 2009, p.88). Joanna echoed Daisy’s observation:
The psychologist there, you know, you put everything in there and then they become a staff [...] How can you put trust into that? [...] They say, “well, it’s confidential,” but in all reality, is it really? [...] So, like, a lot of the time, you just fake it ’til you make it, right. But, meanwhile you’re cryin’ inside because you really need this help, right.

Joanna drew attention to problems created when prison employees facilitate rehabilitative programs:

I took the [dialectical behaviour therapy] there and [pause] how can you take a program when the staff are [...] the facilitators and then after the program they go back as being a guard? [...] And they pass judgement and, ya know, it, it’s not fair. You can’t trust them [...] But] a lotta girls need that help – I know I did.

Joanna and Daisy believed that the effectiveness of prison services could be improved if professional therapists, counsellors, and program facilitators were as independent from the prison system as possible, with minimal or no reporting requirements. Such calls are supported by previous studies. For example, Pollack (2008) reports that counselling programs run by feminist agencies with some autonomy from CSC have greater potential to assist women than those facilitated by prison staff (pp.20-21).

At least three respondents’ narratives highlight how the prison context can further discourage prisoners from deriving something meaningful from rehabilitative programs. Kelly touched upon the confidentiality problems created by “the prison gossip grapevine” (Faith, 2011, p.153):

I mean, they had AA and NA [Narcotics Anonymous] in FVI, but it wasn’t really, you know, a safe place to start your recovery. Because a lot of people, whatever you said in there, would’ve been talked about in the yard [... But] part of your sobriety is being able to talk and having the confidentiality.

Jessica also illuminated the incompatibility of the controlling and punitive carceral environment with effective rehabilitative programming when she commented that what one gains from any given program

[...] depends on your state of mind, too. Like, are you really grasping what they’re saying [...] ’Cause when you’re in [prison], you just wanna be out. You don’t think about anything else, right [...] I probably did learn a few things in there, but, if that was out here, like, the same thing, I probably would’ve learned a whole lot more.

For Regina, the agony of imprisonment conflicted with her drug rehabilitation efforts, as she continued to use drugs to cope with the experience – a fairly common strategy
among incarcerated women (e.g., Kilty, 2008). When I asked if substance abuse programs helped, she replied: “No, ‘cause I wasn’t even clean in jail [pause] ‘cause I wanted to escape that reality.”

The excessive cognitive-behavioural programming in prisons for women was made clear in several respondents’ accounts. For example, Cate had to take dialectical behaviour therapy – a major approach of cognitive-behavioural therapy – three times and emphatically stressed that “enough’s enough!” Nancy was “programmed to the hills” and Jessica was “programmed out” in prison. OneSky had to take a substance abuse program for problems that she did not have. Joanna raised issue with the repetitiveness of the three levels of WOSAP and argued that prison authorities “should take the advice of the women and hear what they have to say and build off programs like that, right.” As of now, such programs reflect the power of the prison system to interpret women’s experiences and identify their needs. That women are being “programmed out” in this way is troubling given the problems with cognitive-behavioural approaches. The abundance of these types of programs contrasts sharply with the scarcity of more practical initiatives, despite what appeared to be greater needs for the latter among respondents.

Cate was the only participant who self-identified as mentally ill.73 For her, one of the worst parts of imprisonment was the system’s inability to respond appropriately to her mental health needs. Her experiences of deficient mental health services, security-driven responses to manifestations of mental illness, and institutional conditions that typically aggravate existing problems are supported in much scholarship (Kilty, 2008; Maidment, 2006, pp.89-95; Pate, 2011, para.28). She explained:

_Proper mental health care wasn’t always there […] They didn’t know what to do with me half the time. (What did they do with you?) Segregation. (Seg.) Or [Regional Treatment Centre], which is like a city cell […] They have quiet rooms and they’re little, you get a mattress on the floor, a metal toilet and sink […] It sucks. If you’re lucky you get a book. But you’re stuck in your cell, except when you shower. There’s two guards […] outside watching you, but they just sit there […] and do nothing with you […] For me it makes it worse. For other people it makes it worse […] They get worse because they’re so confined. They don’t wanna be locked in that kind of place. (What do you think they need?) Hospital, treatment, right? They don’t need that._

73 Joanna and Regina were officially classified as mentally ill, but they did not identify themselves as such.
Clarice likewise observed that “any existing mental health conditions are definitely worsened by the fact of being in prison.” The deficient responses to Cate’s needs during her incarceration extended through to her release preparation:

*Our psychiatrist is always rushed and is totally not with the program all the time [...] She’s insisting that I have autistic traits. (Okay.) I’m like, well, how to I get diagnosed when I’m out? “I have no idea, I only work in jail.” (Huh.) Very helpful! [...] I’m literally thinking I’m gonna have to go around on advocating missions for myself, ‘cause they just don’t, CSC doesn’t give me anything back. They finally made my mental health team referral eight weeks before I’m out, which, you need more time than that for it to go through!*

**Release Preparation: “I Wasn’t Prepared, but I Knew I Wanted Out” (Jessica)**

As detailed later in this chapter, many respondents found it shocking and difficult to re-enter the community after a period of long-term confinement. It is not surprising that they also indicated deficient prison-based assistance with release preparation. Daisy observed many women’s limited access to resources that can minimize the shock of release:

*Maybe the people that have a big family that visit them all the time, maybe that would help. But, you know [...] many families don’t live close by, or they’ve lost them. (Yeah.) So that makes it very difficult [...] Maybe if they could get them out for work experience a lot, that would help [...] But, oftentimes, they’re not taken [on temporary absences] because the staff are not available to take them or they don’t have enough volunteers.

A firm connection between prisoners and the community undermines some of the traditional qualities of a total institution and can thereby facilitate re-entry. Yet, several respondents related inadequate opportunities for creating and maintaining such connections while incarcerated. The scarcity of temporary absences and work releases, for example, was a common topic of discussion – as it has been in previous studies (e.g., AGC, 2003, s.4.75). Patriece was in prison for six months\(^\text{74}\) and therefore not eligible for Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) due to the six month waiting period. She commented, however, that had she been, the pains of release would have “for sure” been reduced. CSC’s growing “culture of restriction” (CAEFS, 2012a, p.3) was observed by Cate:

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\(^{74}\) In 1997, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (1992) was amended to allow all first-time federal prisoners who have not been convicted of a violent crime or serious drug offence to apply for day parole after serving one-sixth or six months of their sentence, whichever is longer. This procedure was repealed in March 2011.
They don’t use their ETAs enough. So you basically, a lot of us go from in to out and are like, what the heck happened?! [...] You don’t know what you’re getting into, and I didn’t know where I was going or what it’d be like.

Joanna was released on an ETA, but it was poorly planned by prison authorities, who apparently did not understand the pains of release. As a result, her pass was cancelled:

For the first ETA, they sent me to a powwow and there was, like, thousands of people there [...] It was too much [...] You go into shock, right [...] So that was my first ETA, right. And then I landed up losin’ it because I was shaking so much [...] I wasn’t able to compose myself [...] They should’ve, like, initially sent me somewhere quiet, and then let me build it up [...] They should have passes where they slowly integrate you.

Joanna also pointed out missed opportunities for work experience that could have assisted with post-release employment – a finding that is supported by the OCI (2007, p.15):

Work release, you know, like a lot of girls go for it, but, it never happens, right [...] They will go up before the warden and stuff like that, and they, they don’t approve it, right [...] I mean, for myself, when I first got out, do I really wanna go into a restaurant and start working right off the bat when I just, I don’t know cashiering, I don’t know that stuff, right.

The AGC (2003) documents the folly of using sexist and racist tools to classify prisoners as maximum security, where they are confined in the most controlling environment with limited access to programs, and from which they are often released, unprepared, directly into the community (s.4.50). This was also highlighted by Jessica, a young Aboriginal woman:

(Did you feel like you were prepared for release?) No, because I was in the max, right [...] There’s not really much there for you. I just, I wasn’t prepared, but I knew I wanted out [...] (Getting out from max would probably be hard ‘cause it’s the extremes of being so confined and then all a sudden you’re out.) Out, out in the open, right. They don’t seem to get that [...] (What would’ve helped you be better prepared for being released?) Probably not being in max. ETAs would’ve helped. Kind of, like, having a low down on what was to be expected. (Ah.) You know, not just being booted out. You know, “your time’s up – see ya!”

Despite a lengthy incarceration, OneSky did not have adequate opportunities to prepare for release:

Something called “reintegration” never happened. I just got picked, there you go [motion of picking something up and dropping it [...] I went to a fucking garden. From the prison to the garden, from the garden back. I went, on Friday night,
from the prison to a room, from the room back [...] What kind of reintegration is that?

Patrice shared the experience of a fellow prisoner:

There should be more ETAs, yeah, definitely. There’s a lifer [someone serving a sentence of life imprisonment] there [...]. Just trying to get her ETAs was, like, really difficult, right. Like, even to, like, LAPS [Langley Animal Protection Society], which is, like, an SPCA animal shelter. (Yeah, yeah.) Like, she fought for, like, four or five months just to get one ETA to go to LAPS. Like, they shouldn’t tell us that we’re, we’re allowed to, like, go and do things in the community if they’re not gonna grant them for us ever, right.

As the available research suggests, people serving longer prison sentences generally face more acute challenges upon release and accordingly require greater transitional supports (Fortune et al., 2010, p.26).

Several women were caught off-guard by their release, which made the transition especially intense. Liz described her departure:

I thought I was leaving at the end of the month. I was not prepared to leave that day. I was over-fricking-whelmed! [I found out that I was leaving that day] so I rushed home [to my cell] and started packing. That was at, like, 11 o’clock – and I was gone by 2 [o’clock].

Kelly was also surprised by her release and the condition that she live in a halfway house:

They made me wait right to the last minute before they actually told me that [...] my paper decision came in. Like, it was like a week before I was released [...] And that’s when I was told the residency was put on [...] So, I was, like, kinda shocked over that.

OneSky was stunned by her sudden release from prison:

I’m in shock, because I was going, I thought I was going that day for a UTA [Unescorted Temporary Absence] hearing. Six, six months of UTAs and go into the day parole [...] So, anyways, we went for [day parole] and they bloody gave it to me! [...] So, now [pause] I’m, I’m in shock. I’m still in shock that I’m out.

Respondents pointed out that prisoners are unable to learn about and prearrange many of the basics they will need after prison, as Pollack (2008, p.25) also reports. OneSky reflected: “Did I get a driver’s license? Did I go to the mall? Did I figure out how to get a bank account? [...] None of that. Nothing.” Daisy observed: “A lot don’t even

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75 This passage is abbreviated for readability.
know how to open a bank account, how to use the ATM machine, how to, you know, use a cellphone.” Joanna suggested that someone in prison “teach you about phones [….] They should teach about outside life. But they don’t, right. So, you see a lot of people repetitively go back in and out, ‘cause they don’t know, it’s too much.” Keeping prisoners updated on social necessities would probably reduce some of the shock, stress, and sense of difference that many respondents experienced upon release. Daisy and Jessica also criticized the insufficient computer preparation offered in prison and specifically the absence of Internet, since these things are vital today. For example, Daisy said:

A lot [of women in prison] don’t even know how […] to use a computer […] They should be able to use the Internet. And don’t tell me in this age of computers that there isn’t some program that you can, you know, put on your computers to stop people from using them the way that you don’t want them to use them [….] Because they need the computer skills […] They don’t get any of that, whatsoever. And, so, it’s very hard for them.

Identification (ID) documents like birth certificates, SIN cards, and BCIDs are vital for life on the outside. Nonetheless, Nancy, Regina, Liz, Patrice, and Cate were missing some form of basic ID when they were released. Daisy called for more assistance with such necessities:

They should be able to get their ID while they’re in prison. They should be able to get, you know, take their driving test if they need to while they’re in prison, all those things to facilitate them getting out and being able to do things […] They should […] try to do everything to stop that person from coming back – to make it as easy a transition as possible.

Jessica called for more reintegrative supports in general: “Once you’re in prison, I think if they […] helped you to reintegrate back into society, a lot of people won’t be coming back.” Regina commented on the reality experienced by many women as they exit prison:

The whole CSC doesn’t give a shit about you when you get out. They just drop you like a hot potato and think, “oh, well, just do it on your own,” you know. Like, it’s a really sad situation because a lot of people get out and they go back to their old familiar ways because they have nowhere to get a new start and they have no, no idea what to do with themselves.

Gendered Disparities in Prison-Based Resources: “No, I Don’t Wanna Sew” (OneSky)

Four respondents raised issue with the greater quantity and quality of services and programs available in men’s institutions compared with women’s – as the extant
literature confirms (e.g., Covington, 2003, pp.93-94; Maidment, 2006, p.87). Clarice observed, quite rightly, that much of what is available in penitentiaries is geared toward men’s needs because men represent the vast majority of the prisoner population. Cate provided an example of gendered disparity: Federally sentenced men have access to a wider range of mental health resources inside and outside prison. OneSky was in contact with several men in prison and heard of gendered inequities in terms of programs and resources:

We by far get treated differently from what the men do. My friend’s over, minimum, at Ferndale [...] The amount of passes he gets, compared to mine was, oh, you’re going where?! You’re going there and you’re going over there and you’re doing this and you’re going, oh and then, “I’m working ‘til 10 o’clock at the hobby shop” and busy, busy, busy. And not us, oh no. Oh, you wanna make a quilt? No, I don’t wanna sew. Oh, do you wanna play volleyball with some strange men? No, I don’t wanna do that. Do you wanna do, like, these things that I had no interest in?

OneSky specifically commented on the greater vocational opportunities available to her male friend:

[He] can make those nice wooden chests and he’s doing wood burning, beautiful art. Like, he can make a ton of money doing that. He does tattooing [...] The men just have a lot more going on [...] And I get him to tell me all the time, what do you do? What?! “Don’t you get that?” I say, fuck no. Yeah. “Well, why?” I said, ask them! ([laughs] Yeah.) They just say it’s not done, or they don’t have time.

Daisy supported OneSky’s observation when she asserted that “the men get more training programs, for sure, than the women.” These types of gendered gaps in resources reflect the underlying patriarchal ideology that reinforces women’s social disadvantage (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.16).

3.2.2 Pains and Effects of Institutionalization

Eaton (1993) states: “Women coming out of prison bring with them the sense of self that was cultivated in response to the prison” – a self that may “continue to exclude the woman from the world around her” (p.18). Respondents discussed various pains of incarceration that had carryover effects in their post-release lives. Nancy, for example, said that she had “post-traumatic stress” because of her prison experiences and was “broken” by the pain. Some days, she did not want to get out of bed. Regina had thoughts of hopelessness and suicide related to the cumulative anguish she experienced
in prison and in the community. Many women specifically talked about the harms caused by separation from support networks – the effects of which are detailed in Chapter 4. Consistent with Maidment (2006, p.99), some participants’ injuries related to inhumane and unfair penal practices.

Total institutions are characterized by acute social distance and imbalance of power between the “keepers” and the “kept” (Goffman, 1961). Prisoners are denied a significant amount of control and must generally accept the ways they are treated and abide by the choices made by prison authorities. This can have long-term consequences. Regina and OneSky spoke of unjust and harmful decisions made by staff with which they continued to struggle. As already mentioned, Regina was not allowed to visit her dying mother or attend her funeral – a situation faced by many prisoners (Evans, 2007, p.295):

*I still think about that a lot. You know, like, that’s like the worst thing you could do to somebody, ‘cause they need that closure. Because it still bugs me today. Like, I’m still not dealing with it [...] I get really angry and depressed ‘cause I didn’t have closure and pay my last respect. That was my mom, like, that was someone that you can’t [pause] replace.*

The 16 years that OneSky spent under the control of others with few avenues for venting created lasting pain:

*I have a lot of issues still to do with what CSC did to me, and I don’t really think that they’re gonna go away for while [...] The games [...] The charges for nothing [...] They killed a dog, that, that they let me rescue [...] Fucking around with my relationships inside. Making me go to [...] segregation] for long, longer periods than anybody else. Locking me on a unit for a year [...] Involuntary transfer to a men’s prison [...] three months turned into one year [...] That and missing my last [Private Family Visit] with my dad. (Aw, man!) They [fucked] me up on that, too. And it goes on and on. But you know what we do, Sarah? We just stuff it and go, keep going [...] You can’t really solve anything, you can’t even, you can’t even, you know, make sense out of it [...] And then you’re not supposed to have any rage, and you’re not supposed to be mad or angry or sad or glad, or anything [...] I don’t know how that comes out – I don’t.*

The seemingly severe discipline that OneSky experienced might be indicative of that experienced by many doubly deviant women in prison, as past studies suggest (Eaton, 1993, pp.42, 81; Liebling, 1999, p.309). That OneSky was gay76 (and not docile) likely influenced the ways in which she was treated, as she shared several instances of

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76 This was the term OneSky used to refer to herself.
related discrimination. Indeed, Canadian prisons for women have a lengthy history of discrimination on the basis of gender and other factors (Arbour, 1996; CHRC, 2003).

Nearly all of the respondents indicated other lingering effects of institutionalization. Their accounts highlight psychological and behavioural adaptations that prisoners must often make in the highly isolated, controlled, and routinized prison context, and then subsequently make upon return to the community. The effects of prolonged confinement in a total institution were also evidenced by respondents’ intense feelings after prison, especially immediately following release.

Joanna said that “everything was culture shock” when she was released from prison. In fact, many respondents represented the transition from the institution to the community as akin to culture shock. Oberg (1960) writes:

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life, [such as] when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, […] how to make purchases, […] when to take statements seriously and when not […]. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness. (p.177)

The transition from prison to society can force the existence of social customs to the level of conscious awareness. Joanna explained how she felt when she re-entered an environment that she had lost touch with, and pointed to some parts of the prison experience that she brought out with her:

*I was nervous, I was anxiety […] It was weird […] getting cigarettes or lighting your first cigarette. ‘Cause we weren’t allowed to smoke inside, so I felt like I was doin’ somethin’ wrong, right. (Wow, eh. Yeah.) Yeah, so you go to a restaurant, you wanna take the salt and pepper shakers and put ‘em in your purse, right [laughs]. ([laughs]) Or wrap up your utensils and put ‘em in your purse. (‘Cause that’s what you did inside?) Yeah […] I felt like I was outside my body, right. And it was just like everything was echoing around me, right […] It took me a good six months just to feel comfortable […] I’m pretty up to beat [now], but I mean, in large crowds, I still get timid sometimes.*

Joanna also had to unlearn prison “lingo” and relearn how to converse in the community because “out here, it’s totally different.” She suggested there be a program on communication for returning prisoners.
Although longer-term prisoners typically experience greater transitional difficulties due to the effects of institutionalization, respondents who were incarcerated for relatively short periods of time also expressed major challenges. This illuminates the power of the total institution. Patrice, for example, was detained for six months. She passionately described some of the emotional, mental, and physical consequences of institutionalization that materialized upon release:

I had an anxiety attack [...] As soon as I got into Wal-Mart, like, I felt my face just go red and [...] I was overheating, like hot and cold, hot and cold [...] Just, like, lots of people, like, rushing by me and I was like, oh my god, I need to leave! I didn’t even buy anything [...] After three or four times of going out, like, it kinda cooled down. But, if we went somewhere new, I’d be like, ah, this is intense [...] ‘Cause in jail, like, you can’t do anything. You’re, like, you’re behind the gates [...] and you get, get so used to, like, the routine and everything. And then you get out and it’s like you’re free and you can do whatever you want every day. It’s like, what? [...] Just knowing one thing for so long, right, and then it changing. Like, everything changes at once. (Yeah.) It’s just, like, really overwhelming, right. I probably didn’t even leave [the halfway house] for, like, a week when I first got here.

Nancy did not leave her halfway house for one week due to the shock and fear of re-entering a world that she had been estranged from. Jessica described how she felt when she made the transition after two years behind bars; similar to others, she wondered if and how she would “make it” on the outside:

I was nervous, I was scared. I was just like, you know, that became my life, that became my home, right. (Ah.) You know, knowing what to expect and then going out there and [pause] it’s almost like you’re walking out blind, right. (Yeah.) Like, yeah, I’ve been out there forever, but still, like, you got used to that system and the routine and the people and you knew what to expect and that kinda thing. And then you go out there, you’re just like, wow [...] I was just like, will I make it out there? You know, like, I knew I would, bottom line, but just fighting with myself.

Regina spent over four years in prison. She realized upon release that she had lost some of the skills that are important to function in the community:

Going from a little crowd of people [in prison], to a second stage of people [in a transition house], and then to a whole world [...] It’s a lot to take in [...] Like, when I went to AA in Vancouver, I was just standing off to the side while everyone else was talkin’ around me [...] I’m just learning how to [...] function in a big crowd [...] You think you remember how to live when you go in, but as the years go by you forget that, you forget how it is to be free. And, coming out again, I’m just learning how to breathe.
Cate described what the transition was like for her:

You just get so anxious and you get so worried. ‘Cause you’re just, you’re leaving a situation that, though it’s not home, it’s where you’ve been for a while. And you know the rules, you know how to play by them, you know what to do, you know the con-code. (Yeah.) You’re fine.

As the preceding accounts illustrate, anxiety and fear are common feelings upon leaving a total institution. Some respondents also experienced positive feelings during the transition. Regina and Jessica felt a mixture of emotions:

I was excited, but really scared, too. ~ Jessica

I was feeling, like, exhilarated [...] Walking out those gates, [...] you’re like, this is finally it, man [...] And it’s like nothing can stop you [...] So [pause] I was happy. But at the same time I was [...] apprehensive, because I didn’t know, like, well, how are things gonna go for me? What’s gonna happen for me? And, you know, like, am I gonna fail? Am I gonna fall back into my old ways? A lot of doubt, a lot of anxiety. ~ Regina

After serving 10 years in prison, Clarice “was immensely happy to get out [...] You know, I just wanted to be back with my partner and have some freedom and do some different things, [...] really basic things.” Clarice credited her positive mind frame and lack of shock to the abundance of community support she had during her time in prison and after. Research supports this finding: Re-entry tends to be more difficult for people without stable support networks (Cobbina, 2010, p.226).

Participants recounted how they were socialized into prison existence and how this socialization conflicted with norms, customs, and ways of thinking on the outside. Clarice spoke of a particularly antisocial way in which she was trained to think in prison. She and her partner, who had been incarcerated for roughly the same amount of time, noticed as they returned to the community that they

[...] couldn’t walk down the street without seeing scams. You know, like, this is a possibility, that’s a possibility [...] I’m sure all the women inside have got it, too [...] It comes from all the, the things that you’re not allowed to have. It’s not, it’s not from the ground up, it’s from the administration and the guards down. They say, “you can’t have this” [...] And you can’t understand why on earth can I not have such and such a thing? And then they’re, “well, you could use that for something, you could use that as a weapon, you could do this, you could do that, if you got this then you could hide something in it this way.” You know, they really, they train you in all the possibilities, you know, of [...] things that you could be up to inside that haven’t even occurred to you [...] It’s not that I would have acted on any of this [...] it was just funny to me [...] That sort of gradually
wore off, but years, years. And [...] it is still there to some degree. [long pause] And that’s 10 years later, 11 years later.

Cate’s account further illustrates that what prisoners learn in jail, such as lessons relating to the deprived sense of security, can become engrained and reinforce their sense of difference upon return to the community:

People always look at me at the dinner table and they’re like, “why don’t you sit normally, with your chair completely into the table?” (Why don’t you?) Because I’m always ready to run. You learn in jail to have that philosophy of you’re never safe [...] You’re always looking over your shoulder. I mean, even when someone walks in the room, I usually turn my head and’ll be going like, what? [...] I know my housemates are probably safe, but for some reason [...] I always make sure that I can run [...] You learn to be defensive in jail, you learn to keep your back up.

Many criminalized women are trapped in processes of transinstitutionalization (Faith, 2011, pp.64-64; Maidment, 2006, pp.128-129). At 38 years old, Cate had been involved with the mental health system since the age of 15, and she had been in and out of prison since the age of 20. She remarked: “I’ve been in institutions for years. So, for me it’s twice as hard being out ‘cause I’m so used to everything being controlled.”

OneSky was incarcerated for 16 years; we had our interview only 16 days after her release. She indicated a way of thinking in prison that persisted and a need to relearn the ways of life on the outside:

I don’t fucking know how different I am [...] The thinking, conspiracy theories still there. The paranoia, still there. And god only knows what else [...] I need some time to, like, you know, almost detox from that fucking environment and [pause] see how I am. I, I need to be able to function [...] I think it’s all gonna be pretty shocking for a long period of time [...] It’s very stressful [...] It’s, like, relearning things, and I need to take it slow [...] I don’t feel like doing anything except for [pause] getting through, day to day.

OneSky also wondered: “What am I gonna do with my time that makes me feel like it has some kind of quality or meaning to it or something that, that makes me feel good about me again?” As often happens, OneSky became so familiar with the prison environment and routine that, upon return to society, she felt like the proverbial Stranger in a Strange Land (Heinlein, 1961). She was hypersensitive to her new surroundings and extremely cautious of potential dangers due to the adaptations she had made in prison. Such potential for danger materialized when she was confronted by a drunk man making
homophobic slurs. Her experience thus illustrates an added challenge that gay women may face after imprisonment:

I’m constantly very aware of where I am, who’s around me [...]. Everybody and everything is strange. So, I really have my shield up [...]. I don’t like anybody coming near me to touch me. I really panicked about, like, that situation that I had the other night, when I got called a fag. I didn’t, my tongue froze [...]. I’m not comfortable enough to, you know, take care of myself [...]. The yard’s bigger [now], and it’s a lot scarier. ‘Cause I don’t know exactly who’s gonna be [...]. I knew 30 people, I knew 40 people (yeah) or 50, every day I would see them. I knew who I’m not gonna talk to. (Yeah.) I really panicked about, like, that situation that I had the other night, when I got called a fag. I didn’t, my tongue froze [...]. I don’t like anybody coming near me to touch me. I really panicked about, like, that situation that I had the other night, when I got called a fag. I didn’t, my tongue froze [...]. I don’t like anybody coming near me to touch me. I really panicked about, like, that situation that I had the other night, when I got called a fag. I didn’t, my tongue froze [...].

As other studies similarly find, a number of respondents had difficulty resuming basic responsibilities after leaving the total institution, where they were cut off from the usual operation of society and denied control, choice, and self-reliance (Maidment, 2006, p.103; P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.61). Cate, Joanna, and Nancy had to relearn how to handle money. Cate and Joanna said that it was “weird” to deal with cash because they went many years without doing so. Nancy did not know what to do with her first cheque and did not create a bank account until three years after her release. As noted by Cate, even basics like crosswalks sometimes require relearning – “and I’m just crossing the street!”

OneSky’s experiences with basic tasks further illustrate the dependency and infantilization processes that Faith (2011, p.152) and Girshick (2003, p.102) suggest are cultivated in prison:

[In prison], you know, somebody made all my decisions. For 16 years, I didn’t have any choices. Now, I have choices, but I don’t know exactly what the right choice is to make yet, yeah. And I have to [...] really think hard [...] I had to take somebody with me to get a phone. (Okay.) I took somebody with me to get a bank account. I looked at my friend like she was the mother. People started asking questions [laughs] ([laughs]) and I would look up [to my friend for the answer].

Daisy did not consider herself institutionalized after six months inside, especially since she, like Clarice, had considerable social support before, during, and after her sentence. Yet, she saw others struggle with the debilitating effects of institutionalization:

You don’t make any decisions for yourself in prison [...] So when you come out, you know, you’re missing a lot of skills, if you like. You’re not used to taking responsibility [...] Like, everything is done for you [...] A person I know, who was
a lifer [...] she was out for [...] over a year, but she’s gone back in. And she’s gone back in because it is now easier for her to be in than it is to be out [...] I think, for some people to make the jump [...] and be responsible for themselves for everything [...] is going to be incredibly difficult, unless they’re given, you know, different kinds of support.

OneSky also knew people who returned to prison because they did not have adequate support and could not “fit into this anymore.” She reflected on her own ability to re-enter society after many years of imprisonment:

I was already cooked at five [years into my sentence]! Institutionalized at five! You’re already fucked. Another five, oh yeah. Another five, oh no [...] If you keep me much longer, I’m going to be fucking useless! [...] Like, it’s borderline now. What am I gonna do? [...] I know lots of people who go back [to prison] ‘cause they can’t get this. There’s nothing left. They don’t have any family. Well, neither do I. No really big job career. Well, neither do I [...] That’s why they do go back. They [pause] can’t fit into this anymore. We were removed for that long. Am I in that category? I don’t know [...] I’m hoping I can figure it out.

Prisoners released into unfamiliar communities can face particular challenges (Gobeil, 2008, para.34). Kelly, Patrice, OneSky, Regina, and Nancy indicated that this was the case for them. Four of them talked about difficulties navigating local public transportation systems, namely the SkyTrain, and three identified the parole office as a very stressful destination to travel to. There is only one parole office for women in the Lower Mainland of BC, so many parolees must travel to a different city to fulfill reporting requirements. Kelly shared:

It was scary. I mean, having, you know, to go to the parole office, you know, not knowing how to get there. I mean, never been on a SkyTrain [...] I’m still getting used to it [...] Trying to get around and not being scared of getting lost, right [laughs …] (Did anyone help show you the ropes with that kinda stuff?) No. Just got out there and did it myself.

OneSky remarked:

The transportation thing, it really bothers me. And it’s gonna take me quite a while to sort that out [...] I don’t know how to get to [the parole office in] New Westminster by myself, and it’s all about that SkyTrain [...] Once I get on it, where the fuck am I gonna go? Am I sure that I know how to get back? [...] I was never from the city. I’m from [... another area and] I had a [car! [...] I’m gonna have to do lots of practice runs, that’s all, you know. (Yeah.) If I get lost, I get lost. I got the phone.

77 Abbotsford Parole Office Supervisor, personal communication, January 10, 2012.
Nancy also shared how difficult and stressful it was to learn how to use the SkyTrain and travel to and from the parole office in a city with which she was unfamiliar, especially on her own, with a chronic illness, and during the period immediately following release. Like others, she got lost several times. At the time of our interview, she had recently moved to a different halfway house in yet another city, which initiated a new learning process.

As Sykes (1958) notes, prisoners are deprived of most goods and services. Upon release, prisoners must adapt to changes that occurred to these goods and services, and technological developments can be drastic (Evans, 2007, p.297). Five respondents in this study commented on the need to acclimatize themselves to such transformations. Debit cards were new for Clarice, and the popularity of credit cards was something to which Nancy and OneSky had to adjust. Joanna maintained a sense of humour when she described some of the changes that she observed:

> I didn’t know how to run the water under the tap, ’cause now it’s, you put your hand underneath there, right. And then the toilet, I thought the black thing was a camera taking a picture of my ass? I didn’t know how to get the paper towel out.

Joanna realized soon after her release that computers and the Internet are “what life’s about today.” For example, she had to learn the format of online education to work on her GED, which she found somewhat frustrating. Regina and OneSky discussed some of the social changes they noticed and, like Joanna, experienced some frustration trying to adapt:

> Everyone’s texting like crazy and, like, I don’t know how to text [...] And Facebook [...] now it’s a big thing [...] I’m kinda computer illiterate, but I’m, like, self-teaching [...] It’s annoying, but I’m tryin’ to figure it out. It’s like, you go in and [pause] a lot of things have changed. ~ Regina

> I got the basic [cellphone] and I can barely use that. I have to practice [...] I feel like an idiot because it’s all technology [...] I still get panicked if somebody’s walking near me and they’re talking [...] I’m not sure if they’re on the phone [...] This is all weird. People go fast, it’s too fast. Walking around, they got those bloody [cellphones] and I think, nobody just walks around. And they’ve all got earplugs in and they’re, they’re [texting motion]. I thought [pause] it just looks weird. ~ OneSky

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78 Joanna’s perception of a camera in the toilet may reflect her socialization into the prison environment, where surveillance is omnipresent.

79 OneSky’s perception of the outside world being fast likely reflects the comparative slowness of prison existence as well as actual social changes in technology and communication.
Respondents’ accounts illustrate how the prison experience can foster feelings of low self-efficacy that hamper re-entry. Although the effects of institutionalization are largely negative and debilitating, research reveals that some former prisoners frame certain consequences in personally beneficial ways (Faith, 2011, p.153; Gobeil, 2008, para.36; P. O’Brien, 2001b). Patrice credited the highly routinized prison environment with helping her remain on an effective schedule after release:

[In prison,] like, I wake up, I make breakfast and I go to program and then I go to school and I work out and I go to bed. And that was my daily routine for six months [...]. I liked the structure of it, ‘cause, like, before I never had any structure. There was never, like, a set day for me [...]. It prepared me lots ‘cause I’m like that now still. Like, I wake up really early and I have breakfast and I do what I gotta do, right.

Some women indicated that their incarceration led them to find positive meaning for their lives. Kelly, Regina, and Jessica considered their prison experiences to be turning points that helped them have a “new/fresh start” in the world. Kelly, for example, looked at her imprisonment as a good thing because she “could be dead right now” if she continued using drugs. OneSky considered her post-release self stronger due to the agonies of institutionalization: “If I could survive that, then I can make it through a lot of stuff that most of these people out here never could.”

As demonstrated in this chapter, what happens in prison can have direct implications for women’s re-entry, some of which are positive and many of which are negative. Certain programs, resources, and supports that respondents accessed while serving time assisted them afterwards to varying degrees. Any long-term benefits derived from the prison experience is no doubt testament to the participants’ resourcefulness, and often the assistance of others. Indeed, the pains and effects of institutionalization frequently proved intense and long-lasting; for many women, they frustrated efforts to re-establish their lives instantly upon stepping out the gates. Once outside the gates, former prisoners must meet their basic needs of life. Respondents’ experiences of meeting such needs are the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4. Meeting Basic Needs

This chapter chronicles how respondents attempted to meet their basic needs of life after serving time in prison. Commonly discussed problems relate to health, employment, education, finances, housing, and interpersonal relationships. The findings show that participants were resourceful in their efforts to address their needs, but such efforts were often strenuous and sometimes inadequate.

4.1 Health

Respondents indicated difficulty meeting their physical and mental health needs upon release. A few women also struggled with drug addiction. Moreover, these difficulties were often magnified by participants' lack of supports and resources in the community.

4.1.1 Physical Health

As existing scholarship confirms, many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women have serious physical health concerns (Richie, 2001, pp.370, 373-374; Thompson, 2008, p.53). Several respondents talked about how their physical health problems and difficulties meeting related needs elevated the stresses of re-entry. Nancy was diagnosed with a life-threatening condition in prison. After release, her health remained precarious and she continued to suffer greatly. Like many others, she found very little assistance in the community to meet her health needs. As a poor woman with a chronic illness, basic tasks were often difficult to complete, such as using public transportation. Upcoming sections reveal other ways that Nancy’s ill health negatively impacted her life after prison.

Some respondents could not afford medications and medical treatments due to post-release poverty (also see Pollack, 2008, pp.25-26). Regina could not purchase various prescriptions until she obtained an Indian Status Card with the help of HRIA. The meagre funds provided to federal parolees do not permit them to meet their health needs. Kelly, for example, struggled to afford her prescriptions when she was initially released on parole and had to stop taking one type of medication. Joanna, a recovering addict, found it worrisome that she was denied coverage by her parole officer and thus
could not afford a cortisone injection to replace the narcotic medication she was taking for a back injury. Joanna also spoke of the inadequate dental care provided to parolees and the impact on her self-esteem:

*I need to get my teeth fixed. It has to be an emergency or your face has to be out to here [places hand in front of her face] before you can go in. And then you only get $500, unless it’s an emergency. So, there goes your self-esteem again.*

Cate observed other women struggle to find “proper medical care” after prison:

*Most people don’t have a family doctor when they get out […] I mean, they can go to clinics and stuff, but other than that, it’s really hard […] I’m lucky that, because I live where I live, they got me [a doctor in] a core clinic […] but [a halfway house for women] doesn’t do that […] And even meds […] it’s so hard to get your meds […] The protocol upon release is we get two weeks of medication, and that, and then you have to find someone to give you more. But that can be hard.*

As predicted by Cate, OneSky experienced difficulty finding a family doctor. She met with a doctor who was accepting new patients, but “he was more interested in hearing why I was in prison.”

The pains of imprisonment can create and/or compound health problems (Shaw, 1991, p.iv). Some respondents linked their current health issues with the prison experience. Regina developed diabetes while incarcerated and attributed it to the lack of opportunities for exercise, her poor diet, and her family’s medical history. Regina, Liz, and Jessica gained a considerable amount of weight while incarcerated, which posed potential health concerns and threatened their self-esteem. In fact, Jessica connected her weight gain with her brief drug relapse following release. Such concerns about appearance must be considered with a gendered lens: Beauty myths and body image norms play important roles in the control and oppression of women at large (Wolf, 1991).

OneSky had trouble sleeping in prison, especially in segregation, and was prescribed Seroquel as a sleep aid. Kilty (2008) reports that “there is a current reliance on and misuse of the drug Seroquel, which doctors are prescribing to criminalized women due to its sedative side effects, despite being marketed for treatment in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder" (p.272; also see Kilty, 2012). OneSky developed a dependency on this drug and shared what it was like to quit after her release from prison: “It has fucked up my sleeping pattern – my mind could not rest […] I was] staying awake for hours and [pause] feeling weird.”
4.1.2 Mental Health

The poor treatment of prisoners with mental health issues continues throughout the release process. Cate related the difficulty meeting her needs through the prison and parole systems:

> It’s hard trying to get my supports after CSC because they leave ‘em to the last minute. Like, I’ve been on them applying for my mental health team since I got out [...] And I may not get a mental health team because of my needs. Like, for some reason [the prison psychiatrist] took borderline [personality disorder] completely off the table for that, and just put my bipolar and some of my medical stuff.

Cate had to switch medications upon release due to inconsistent coverage between prison and parole, which was “not fun, especially when you have to do it at the last minute.” She shared a recent crisis when she was “ready to bang my head or do something,” but had difficulty accessing her medication because of barriers imposed by the parole system:

> My psychiatrist is through New West[minster] parole. But he never, there’s no way I can call him, right. ‘Cause he’s through CSC, the mental health nurse accesses him. So, if it’s a weekend that I need something, I’m SOL [“shit out of luck”].

This arrangement jeopardized Cate’s wellbeing and her release, as it could have resulted in a parole violation and reincarceration.

Cate also recounted problems meeting her mental health needs through community-based resources – a situation in which many women find themselves (Gobeil, 2008, para.64; Maidment, 2006, pp.131-136). She had trouble securing supportive housing, for example. Her access to community support services was further limited because “they ask you about your criminal history […] My history sucks.” She provided an ironic instance when an anger management program deemed her “too angry” to participate based on her record. Such discrimination is confirmed elsewhere (e.g., AGC, 2003, s.4.98). Although Cate considered herself “lucky” to have the support of several community groups, her account highlights adversities that other returning women with mental health issues might experience.
4.1.3 Addiction

Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Richie, 2001, p.372; Severance, 2004, pp.78-79), four respondents identified addiction as a major challenge after prison. Kelly observed the connection between relapse and reincarceration: “I see so many women come and go. It’s, it’s a real shame because [pause] the addiction’s stronger than, you know, the reality, right, of being free.” Liz’s parole was revoked in the past because “I wanted to use [drugs ....] And I wanted to see my mom. And, it was the whole boredom thing.” Her mother was in active addiction for 40 years. Liz recognized the complication this created:

I [used to go ...] to my mom’s house and use [drugs] and see my mom. It was kind of a [pause] kill three birds with one stone [laughs ....] I seen her the other day and I didn’t wanna use drugs. (Right, right.) But, yeah, seeing her makes it easier to use [....] It’s a very difficult situation.

As reported in the literature, avoiding such relationships can be difficult and undesirable given the shortage of other supports that often exist during this stressful period (Eaton, 1993, p.81; Severance, 2004, pp.90-91). Liz was undecided if she would abstain from drug use after parole, but was resolute on staying sober until then.

Jessica and Kelly were determined to fight addiction for the rest of their lives and struggled with it every day. Indeed, research reveals that avoiding drugs after imprisonment can be exceptionally difficult (P. O'Brien, 2001b, p.135; Pollack, 2009, p.22). When I asked Jessica what her biggest concern was leaving prison, she replied: “Probably using [drugs]. That was my biggest one.” Kelly shared the following when I asked how she felt upon release:

Well, anxiety, like, am I strong enough to do this? Like, am I gonna, you know, fuck up? Am I gonna be able to do what I’m supposed to do to keep out [of prison], right? Because I’m still fresh in sobriety, it’s scary. I mean, every day I challenge myself, right. Especially being on the SkyTrain and people asking, “you want drugs?” That’s a big challenge for me [....] I’m gonna have to learn how to, to deal with [....] the main thing inside that sent me there in the first place [....] I think, you know, a lot of it is I haven’t dealt with the grief right, my husband’s death. And, when those emotions come up, I tend to get depressed and [....] I wanna hide that, right, suppress it.

Jessica made a connection between her past sexual abuse, anger and depression, and drug use. She added: “Once I start dealing with some of that trauma, I’ll be able to move, like, way forward [....] But, like, right now, I’m gettin’ by.” Regina linked her current
addiction problems with experiences of violence and poverty, feelings of hopelessness and isolation, and the grief related to the death of loved ones. These women’s experiences illustrate the limitations of prison-based substance abuse programming (as scholars like Pollack (2008) highlight), since underlying factors related to their drug use remained unresolved.

Jessica and Kelly relapsed after prison but were sober at the time of our interview. The circumstances that surrounded Kelly’s relapse reveal the danger of parole-mandated treatment programs that are in short supply and involve lengthy waiting periods:

> I got out [...] but because part of my parole condition was to attend a treatment centre, I couldn’t really go forward in life. So, I had to wait ‘til I could get into treatment. But in those couple months, I had relapsed [...] So [then] they got me in immediately [...] Yeah, that’s harsh!

Kelly also had difficulty accessing community-based programs on her own:

> I tried to get into a daytox program so I could still, you know, maybe work and do daytox [...] before I went to [parole-mandated] treatment. And, I went to the daytox but, because I was 11 months clean, they wouldn’t take me. I had to be 4 months [...] I couldn’t believe it. I go, are you fuckin’ kidding me?! It doesn’t matter if I’m 11 months or 2 years or 3 years clean, I still have to fight addiction every day.

Jessica found that few substance abuse services are sensitive to gender. She faced exclusion from support groups because she was a single mother who had to bring her child with her to meetings:

> I just go to the [groups] that don’t mind kids right now [...] The other meetings, you know, you get pretty much shunned upon because you have a kid, right. ‘Cause your kid’s makin’ noise and [other people are] tryin’ to listen and all that kinda stuff, right [...] So it’s kinda tough at times.

Jessica often needed to find respite care for her child in order to attend these meetings. Such problems with community-based addictions services are confirmed in previous studies (AGC, 2003, s.4.98; Evans, 2007, p.305; Severance, 2004, p.90).

As explained Chapter 5, living in a halfway house made it more difficult for Jessica and Kelly to fight addiction. Kelly remarked on another aspect of parole that frustrated her recovery:

> One of the biggest things I have concerns with is going for the [urinalyses]. Where they send us [...] it’s not a great place at all! I mean, these are a trigger
for a lot of drug addicts. People are in there getting their methadone or are high [...]. You’re gonna have to learn how to deal with it, but, I think they could’ve picked a better spot.

In this way, the enforcement of parole conditions designed to reduce the chance of relapse can actually create pressures to use drugs.

For Kelly, Patrice, and Jessica, supportive family relationships provided them with motivation to stay sober. Patrice, for example, said that reuniting with her family was “a kick in the ass.” She added that they would “probably never talk to me again” if she were to return to drug use. Jessica shared how her identity as a mother, in particular, was a driving force behind her sobriety:

> Once I got pregnant and stuff, I was like, you know what, this kid needs a mom. You know, I don’t want him to be in [foster] care. And just, like, you know, all that stuff, like, really helped me straighten up.

Kilty (2008) finds that criminalized women often refer to their role as mothers as “both a strategic attempt at staying clean and a motivation to initially become clean” (p.196). Kilty also points out that this way of thinking may be rooted in penal discourses that construct “good” mothers as sober mothers, which may subsequently cause women to feel even worse about themselves if they relapse (p.198).

Jessica and Kelly mentioned strategies that they employed to evade potential triggers of drug use:

> I get offered all the time, being on the SkyTrain, right. I try to avoid it now, especially at night when I work. I take the bus because, you know, avoidance is best, right. ~ Kelly

> There’s a lot of junkies in this building [...]. That’s why I do my own thing [...]. I just don’t hang out with those people. ~ Jessica

Kelly used a major relapse-prevention technique when she decided not to return to her hometown after prison:

> When I was released, to go back to Kamloops wasn’t a likeable thing for me, because of my drug addiction [...]. I chose not to go back for my own sobriety [...]. I mean, I sold drugs there for a lot of years, right. I know a lot of people. (Yeah.) It would be easy enough just to get, you know, into that again, right. Real quick.
Full-time employment also helped Kelly avoid substance abuse: “I work every day [….] It keeps, you know, my head space outta this, right. (Yeah.) Being bored is only gonna lead me back to substance abuse.”

4.2 Finances: “You Need Money for Things, You Know” (Liz)

At least seven respondents always struggled financially on the outside, and all of the participants indicated a lack of financial resources after prison. Daisy observed: “When a lot of [women] get out, they have maybe a couple of hundred bucks and maybe an outfit that the prison supplied, and that’s it!” Several respondents shared how post-release poverty hampered their re-entry efforts.

Some participants experienced serious financial and material losses because of their criminal conviction and incarceration – a finding that is supported by existing scholarship (Eaton, 1993, p.69; Gobeil, 2008, para.35; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.132-133). Two women lost their jobs and could not return to their previous areas of employment. Daisy remarked: “Some [formerly incarcerated women ….] lost any money that they had, or any belongings.” In fact, Daisy lost her own house and savings. She also had to declare bankruptcy, which made it difficult “to get a credit card or to open a bank account.” OneSky shared: “I had lots of money and cars […] I had it all […] and I lost everything.” Like Daisy and OneSky, Clarice was from a middle-class background but still returned to society with “very, very little money to spend on anything other than basic food and canned tobacco for a number of years.” Most of Regina’s belongings were stolen or destroyed while she was in prison. Kelly also “lost everything” because of her incarceration:

Gettin’ out, having no money, having nothing. Like, I lost everything. (Fuck.) They raided my house, I went to jail. My kids tried to get as much as they could outta there, but by then all the drug addicts had already pillaged everything […]
Whatever the cops didn’t take, right, which I had to sign away to […] My laptop, all my electronics […] Yeah, gotta start over.

Pollack (2008) reports that people on day parole can experience severe financial strains (p.26). Several respondents in this study clarified that they are provided $28 per week and are not allowed to receive income assistance or disability benefits. Food is supposed to be provided through their housing providers, and some transportation and

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80 Respondents’ use of avoidance techniques may partly reflect the internalization of penal “thinking strategies” (Pate, 2005, para.37) and risk management discourse.
medical costs are also covered on day parole. The monthly allotment of $112 is therefore intended for all other expenses. It goes without saying that few people would find this amount sufficient to live on. When I asked Nancy how she was doing financially, she simply reminded me: “Well, I live on $28 a week.” OneSky expressed a sense of infantilization when she described receiving “an allowance” on parole:

“We’ll give you a little money to go to the dollar store, but don’t go far” [...] Like your mother saying, “here you go.” It’s silly.

Five of the six respondents who were receiving this income at the time of the interview spoke emphatically about its inadequacy.

The ability to physically move around the community helps one integrate into it, yet many respondents struggled to afford transportation, particularly those who were on day parole. As women in poverty, many formerly incarcerated women must rely to a great extent on public transportation, but even this was sometimes out of participants’ reach. OneSky wanted to travel to the West End of Vancouver because, as a gay woman, that was where she felt more comfortable:

But, then again, I’m spending $2.50 to get there [...] I only get a [bus] ticket if I go to see the PO [parole officer] or [psychologist]. So, everything else comes out of my pocket [...] If I wanna go anywhere, it’s gonna cost me five bucks [...] Twenty-eight bucks, that’s how much they think we’re living on. And where, what am I gonna do with that? I don’t know. I’m not going far [...] I feel stuck, right there, at that [halfway house ...] Like, where am I gonna go, besides walk up this, this way?

Kelly pointed out the flawed logic of ordering or encouraging parolees to engage in various activities in the community without ensuring sufficient means of transportation:

Part of CSC, I think they should provide transportation [...] I mean, they want you to make these appointments, but they won’t provide the bus tickets to do it [...] To go see your parole officer, no, [my halfway house] won’t give you the tickets, nor will the parole officer. Which makes no sense. (No sense.) You have to go there once a week [...] I started workin’ so now programs don’t provide bus transit tickets [...] I can’t go to a meeting, ‘cause they won’t give me tickets to go to meetings, but yet they want you to get that support. Well, how the fuck do I get there?!

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81 Robins (2009) writes that the West End of Vancouver is “where Western Canada’s largest gay and lesbian population lives [...] and it] has long been one of Vancouver’s most liveable and tolerant neighbourhoods" (para.3).

82 Apparently, some parolees receive transportation costs for specific purposes through their parole officers and/or halfway houses, while others do not.
Daisy also highlighted the potential effects of poverty on parole:

You get some pocket money [on parole]. (Mmm.) Not enough, I might say. I mean, you also should be given a bus pass, but you’re not given those. Because how can you, if you don’t have a bus pass, you know, go for an interview, or go to AA, or whatever you need to do to help yourself?

Kelly shared how her search for employment was made more difficult:

You’re only allowed 10 bus tickets a month [...] So, how the hell are you gonna go out there and look for a job with 10 bus tickets a month? [...] So, they’re not helping to get you out there. They’re, you know, puttin’ up a lot of barriers, right. (Yeah.) They want you to do it, but they don’t wanna help you, right.

Liz indicated that insufficient funds for transportation can encourage parole violations:

I need to get, like, a bus pass or something [...] They only give you $28 a week and 10 bus tickets a month, and they can only be for, like, parole appointments or doctors or stuff like that [...] So, [when I went somewhere else] I just told them I was going to a doctor’s appointment and [...] I need a bus ticket to get home.

When Nancy asked halfway house staff for a bus pass, they replied that part of “learn[ing] how to reintegrate” was to budget her $28 income or find employment. As Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) note, the institution of parole, and often its localized decision makers, assume “idealized lifestyles” (p.548) that many women do not have.

Transportation was also a problem for Regina. She received income assistance but, given the poverty-level rates, still struggled to make her way around the community. Similar to others, she experienced particular difficulties navigating the area because she was released to unfamiliar territory with few social connections or supports:

Moving to Abbotsford, I didn’t know my way around and I didn’t really know anybody. And, you know, I was starting fresh and I didn’t have anything, except welfare [...] So, it was hard ‘cause you have to find out where everything is, you know, especially just getting out. (Yeah.) And having nothing.

Regina often had to rely on others for transportation to medical appointments, support groups, job interviews, the probation office, and shopping areas.

Arguably, access to suitable means of communication also fosters social integration. Cellphones, for example, are important for many people in Canada today and can be exceptionally important for women on parole. Nancy’s cellphone bill consumed a large portion of her monthly income, but it was important to have it due to
confidentiality restrictions on telephone calls at the halfway house. Kelly needed a cellphone to make long-distance calls to her family; her adult children paid for it until she found a job. Cellphones also helped respondents perform mandatory “location changes” to halfway house staff and parole officers:

I have a cellphone, which is, you know, a necessity ‘cause you have to location change everywhere. ~ Kelly

I got this phone because I need it when I’m out [...] Location changes are a must. And I have to call [the halfway house] every four hours [...] and call if I’ll be late. If I didn’t have [a cellphone], I’d be panicking! ~ OneSky

As already mentioned, many respondents left prison with few belongings. Former scholarship documents women’s struggles to afford basic necessities after prison (Severance, 2004, p.82). Liz “got released with $133 [...] I went and I bought clothes, ‘cause I needed clothes [...] I didn’t have anything, right.” Joanna and Kelly identified another reason why women often need new clothing after prison:

Clothes that my, my daughter sent me [did not fit …] I mean, I had gained a lot of weight from being in jail, right. ~ Kelly

You got no clothes when you get out either. Like, and you’re buyin’ your underwear and bras. And, I mean, you’re gonna lose weight or gain weight, one of the two, right. ~ Joanna

Other basic necessities were difficult to afford for a number of respondents. As stated by OneSky: “Five, ten dollars is nothing [...] I went to Wal-Mart and picked up a few things I needed – hundred bucks!” Surviving on day parole can be especially challenging since:

They don’t supply all your basic needs at the halfway houses anymore [...] Like, they’re only supplyin’ tampons, pads, and that’s it, right. So you gotta buy your own toothbrush, toothpaste, you gotta buy your shampoos, your deodorants. But if you smoke on top of that. ~ Joanna

Twenty-eight bucks a week is not enough [...] You can make more money in jail! [...] The halfway house] doesn’t provide shampoo or nothin’ like that. You have to pay for your own razor, shampoo, all your hygiene [...] The only thing they provide are tampons, that’s it, right. Other than that, everything else you have to buy. Twenty-eight bucks a week ain’t gonna buy that, right [...] A lot of the girls are struggling, right. But then [halfway house staff] say in return, well that’s why you need to get a job, right, if you want those things, right. Which is, whatever [short laugh] you know, it’s not that easy, right. ~ Kelly

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83 Fortune et al. (2010) report that the restrictions on incoming telephone calls imposed by halfway houses have virtually cut some women off from support networks (p.25).
Some women indicated that poverty had negative effects on their self-esteem. Kelly, for example, said that her inability to afford transportation upon release from prison made her feel “not important enough.” Regina commented: “Being able to get certain things, like, shoes and a haircut or whatever, you know, obviously makes me feel better. Yeah, more confident.” Joanna underlined the connection between material resources, self-esteem, and “fitting in”:

> I can’t get my teeth fixed […] You can’t get your hair cut […] You see everybody else, so you’re self-esteem goes really low […] Because, you know, like, you have joint shoes on, you have joint clothes, but you don’t have enough to go out and do anything, right. (Mmm.) You see girls get their nails done or they have the makeup on or they have a nice perfume on or, ya know. You can’t fit in […] Deep down inside it really bothers you, right.

Joanna’s narrative once again highlights the role of gendered beauty myths in the control and oppression of women.

Missing ID was another problem faced by several respondents. Kelly’s children stored hers while she was inside, but she noticed that many women in her halfway house did not have any ID cards nor the money to get them. Nancy had to spend almost half her weekly income on her SIN card upon release. As stated by Regina: “IDs and birth certificates and stuff like that, you really need that when you get out […] Like, how are you gonna get from A to Z without it?” Cate could not cash her release cheque because she did not have the proper ID to open a bank account. Like Cate, the only photo ID that Liz had was her prison card, but she stressed “you need picture ID for everything!” Patrice, Regina, and Liz contacted HRIA to pay for their documents, which was important because, as Liz remarked, “I don’t have 35 bucks to get it.”

For the two women who were serving life sentences, difficulties in meeting basic needs impeded them from applying and qualifying for full parole, since applicants must apparently demonstrate for the PBC that they can support themselves.84 OneSky said:

> If I were to go for full parole, it means I don’t need CSC anymore […] If you’re on full parole, they know that you have your own job, you can support yourself […] I’m not gonna be there for quite some time.

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84 As the PBC (2011c) website explains, day parole requires parolees to return nightly to a halfway house, whereas full parole “allows the offender to live in the community, subject to conditions and supervised by CSC.”
Nancy explained how her financial struggles were exacerbated by her illness. For instance, much of her income went towards health-related necessities and her medical condition made employment difficult. Her health and financial difficulties led her to ask: “How can I apply for full parole when I can’t take care of myself?” Shaw (1991) similarly reports that a number of women on day parole opt-out of full parole because they feel they are not capable of self-sufficiency (p.105). Yet, self-sufficiency seems difficult to attain given the circumstances of day parole and numerous other hardships faced by returning women. As a result, some must remain dependent on the grossly inadequate supports provided on day parole, and remain subject to greater penal controls.

Joanna and Jessica were caretakers of dependants. Their accounts illuminate the added challenges that this role can create in women’s post-release lives. Joanna reflected on the struggle of caring for her family while on day parole:

*I’m tryin’ to look after my [elderly and disabled] uncle, my two kids, have a house, right [....] Like, that 28 bucks is very limited, right, and especially if you can’t work [because of parole restrictions].*

Her lack of funds also made it difficult to take care of her children during the day:

*They only allow you to have tickets to go to a parole office or to a program. So, if you’re livin’ [in a halfway house] in Vancouver, and I’m livin’ in Delta, how do I get home every day?*

Joanna, Liz, and Nancy pointed out that their financial options on day parole were restricted by their exclusion from income assistance and disability programs. For women like Nancy, however, this support might have helped her obtain full parole. Liz and OneSky recognized the possibility of income assistance as a means of support after day parole, given their scarce alternatives – a situation in which many formerly incarcerated women end up (Harding et al., 2001, pp.13, 17). Liz was on welfare prior to her imprisonment and knew that, although it might help, it is far from sufficient:

*I’ve been on [...] welfare. (What was that like?) It was money [laughs]. (Was it enough to live?) Well, enough for that day [laughs]. (Do you mean [pause] ‘cause you had alternative sources of money?) Yeah [laughs].*

Regina experienced considerable financial strains trying to survive after prison on welfare. She talked about the difficulty of affording necessities like shelter, clothing, food, and personal hygiene products. She had to rely on others to help meet her needs but these people had limited resources themselves and such relationships of dependence
created additional stress. Extant research indicates that many women find themselves in such relationships of dependency (Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.17).

Jessica – a young, Aboriginal, single mother of a newborn – was trying to survive on social assistance. She shared the struggle and anxiety associated with meeting her family’s basic needs, such as schooling, clothing, food, and health care, and the definite absence of any “treats” for her child. She continued:

*I don’t like welfare. Doesn’t pay much and [pause] it helps when I need it, like, I’m needing it right now [....] I really wanna work hard to get off welfare, right. ‘Cause, you know, I wanna be able to put money away for him to go to college [....] It’s hard bein’ a single mom. It’d be different if I was married and had my own place and that kinda thing.*

Cate always lived in poverty and often depended on disability payments because of her mental health issues. She highlighted the pittance that social assistance provides by comparing it with what she earned in prison:

*One thing that’s hard is, I had more money on the inside than I do on the outside [....] I’d get $5.80 a day [....] That’s a lot more than I get now! I get about $2 less now [....] ‘Cause everything else is paid for, I get this lovely cheque for 95 [dollars] every single month, and that’s it.*

A number of participants were caught up in such processes of transinstitutionalization; Cate had been involved with prison, income assistance, psychiatric services, and child protection services.

Respondents displayed great resourcefulness when they shared various strategies that they used in attempting to resolve economic problems. For example, a number of the women garnered assistance from family, friends, and community groups. Another common strategy was to adopt a strict budget. Cate remarked: “I can budget $95 [a month]. It sucks […] but you have to.” When Liz and I discussed her financial situation, she said: “I just gotta be careful of my spending habits.” She and Kelly cut down on smoking, for instance. Liz and Nancy bought second-hand clothing, and Jessica only bought inexpensive clothing for her baby. Jessica had to maintain a budget not only to ensure her welfare, but also that of her family. Like many single mothers (Little, 2003, p.241), she made sacrifices to care for her child and spent very little on her own needs “in case [my baby] needs stuff.” She described how she saved $250 for her child’s surgical operation:
I went a lot of months without. Like, I would go to the food bank [...] and make do, right [...] I’ve been budgeting [...] Like, I don’t have much summer [clothing ...] I’ve been, like, lucky we have laundry here ’cause I have to do laundry every couple days.

Some respondents considered and/or secured alternative sources to supplement their income. Clarice went back to school and took out student loans. She, Joanna, and Regina also searched for and accepted whatever “side jobs” they could. Liz’s scant options for a decent living after prison may lead her to choose prostitution:

I can’t stand not having money, right [...] If it means that I need to, to, you know, get into escorting or, or even, you know, doing [pause] what I used to do, I was standing on a corner to get money, that’s what I might have to do.

Liz is not alone: The CHRC (2003) reports that other formerly incarcerated women are in similar predicaments (p.56).

4.3 Employment and Education

Only three of the eleven respondents were employed at the time of our interviews, two of whom (the socioeconomic outliers discussed in Chapter 2) had university education prior to their incarceration. A common theme that ran through the women’s accounts was the importance of employment and education for post-release wellbeing, and the difficulty of securing these resources after prison. The benefits of employment are many, the most obvious being monetary gains. As stated by Kelly: “I’m okay financially now that I have a job and, I mean, I get a pay cheque every two weeks [...] I make minimum wage, but I pay for, you know, my necessities.” Daisy’s job allowed her “to buy a new car and, you know, clothes and have a home and stuff like that.”

Some respondents recognized additional benefits of employment. As noted, Kelly pointed out the importance of working to stay “busy and focused […] and out of trouble.” Joanna made a similar observation:

A lot of the time when you get out [...] you’re bored, right. (Yeah.) So, that’s when you’re gonna start lookin’ for excuses to go this way or that way, right. So, you need to find somethin’ to do.

A number of respondents illuminated potential advantages of employment for their sense of self. Daisy emphasized how helpful it was to have a job
that I’m proud of [...] If you can find a job that you feel like you’re contributing and you enjoy it and stuff [...] it makes a lot of difference to your self-esteem.

Regina believed that an art career would enable her to “move forward with my life, [...] earn a living doing what I love, [...] tell my story, [...] and feel good about what I’m doing.” Jessica said that finding a job that she enjoyed doing every day would “make me happy.” Previous studies support these material and nonmaterial benefits of post-release employment (e.g., Gobeil, 2008, para.8; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.22, 118).

Respondents identified numerous barriers to finding and maintaining legal employment after prison. Some of these barriers related to parole. As Chapter 5 details, the requirements of parole often conflict with the demands of life on the outside, including employment. For example, the cognitive-behavioural programming mandated in prison at the expense of practical, long-term interventions is replicated in the community. In fact, Joanna was not able to secure a job because of the programming required of her. Her account illuminates how these restrictions, combined with being a middle-aged mother, can complicate re-entry:

For the last year and nine months, [my parole officer] said I wasn’t allowed to work [...] They just want me to do programs. And I’m like, well, I’m 40 years old, I’ve done 37 programs, why won’t you let me work, right? Like, I got maybe 25 years to make a pension, and for my kids to have money.

Daisy had the resources and support (as explained in a future section) to resolve employment difficulties related to her older age:

I could’ve asked for my [professional] license to be reinstated [...] But, I didn’t do that because I was already [60 years old ....] Because of what happened [...] financially, I was going to have to work until I was 70. So, I decided to go into something else where I could work ‘til I was 70 at least.

Daisy also raised issue with the competing demands of employment and programs: “When you first get out, it, it’s almost impossible to have a job, because you’re asked to go to courses and programs, and you’re supposed to see [parole supervisors].” Kelly could not begin work until she completed a compulsory substance abuse treatment program that lasted several months. She further explained how, when she found a job after treatment, she had to organize her hours to accommodate parole requirements:

When I first got the job, I had to tell my employer that I couldn’t work on Tuesdays ‘cause I have the program then, right [...] I told him I have a
commitment already to school [.... And] workin’ night shifts, everything works out, ‘cause in the day time I can do everything to do with parole.

OneSky did not yet consider employment because she could “barely function” after 16 years of institutionalization. Nonetheless, like Joanna and Daisy, she expressed concerns about limited options due to her parole requirements, criminal record, and older age:

How are you gonna have a job and how are you gonna do all this stuff when your time surrounds them still? [The psychologist,] I gotta see her. Yeah, well, I have to take this program. Oh, I’m doing a couple of programs at the [halfway] house [...] When am I gonna have the time for that? [...] And] I hear it all the time, [former prisoners] not being able to find work. I think my chances of doing anything normal would probably [pause] and my age bracket, like this is 16 years later, I’m 55. I’m not 20! [laughs]

Discrimination against former prisoners by employers is widespread (Richie, 2001, pp.376-377; Severance, 2004, pp.76-78). This was observed by Patricece:

Supposedly for, like, [a woman on parole], it was really hard to get a job, right. Because, like, she was honest with all the people, like, all the places where she applied. Like, “I’m on parole, these, I have conditions, dah, dah, dah.”

(Yeah.) But, like, who wants to hire someone who was a federal inmate, right?

Numerous respondents raised concerns about possible disclosures of their imprisonment to employers as a result of being on parole. Patricece touched upon a dangerous power of parole officers: “When you get a job, you’re supposed to tell your parole officer, but your parole officer can […] talk to your work.” Joanna also highlighted the threat that such powers pose to parolees’ employment options and release:

“You can work,” and then [my parole officer] goes, “oh, but I have to talk to your [employer] and disclose your crime.” So how do I get a job? [...] A lot of people aren’t comfortable with that. They get resentment and they get angry. And then they just say, “fuck it,” and go back to crime, right.

Some parolees must inform potential employers of their parole status (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.44). This was the case for Nancy, who rightfully wondered: “Who’s going to hire me?” She obtained several vocational credentials after prison and was still virtually unemployable because of discrimination based on her record. The few people who did hire her “keep on firing me” after they investigated the details of her crime. Nancy stressed that on top of these problems, her health issues “really hinder me in finding and keeping a job.”
Some parolees are not required to disclose their record to their employer but they face the constant risk that their parole officer will reveal it anyway. Daisy remarked:

The majority of [parole officers] will suddenly phone up two days before and say, “I need to see you on Thursday.” And then you have to take time off work, that means then you have to tell your employer, I’m on parole. Or you’re gonna lie. (Mmm.) And, encouraging them to lie by putting ‘em in that situation doesn’t help [....] You shouldn’t have to tell [your employer] because the chance of getting a job, you can forget it. But, they set it up in such a way that, you know, they can just turn up at your work. And, they can ask to see you during your work time, and you have no opportunity to plan around that.

Halfway house employees sometimes call women’s employers to confirm their locations (Gobeil, 2008, para.33). This could have revealed Kelly’s parole status to her boss:

It was over the weekend and I was at work, and [the staff] couldn’t get a hold of me. They thought I was past my curfew, which I wasn’t [....] They phoned my employment [....] asked for me and disclosed who they were. And my boss, he’s Italian, so I don’t really think he clued into what Corrections Canada was [....] My job, everything was in [jeopardy ...] right there.

A number of respondents expressed concerns about criminal record checks conducted by potential employers. Daisy commented: “It’s not easy, I don’t think, to find a job where they’re not going to do a criminal records check.” Jessica was especially worried since employers could view her status as a “sex offender”:

It’s gonna be hard getting a job. (Ah.) You know, they’re gonna do a criminal check. (And [sex offender is] gonna come up?) Mmm. And it’s, it is bad. They should have like, I dunno, like, ‘cause I’m a different case or whatever. I’m not, like, out there touchin’ little kids and stuff [...] like you would think of a sex offender [...] But, they’re gonna check. Most people nowadays do checks. And once that comes up [...] they just see that label and they go, like, “no, we don’t want you.”

Regina faced “the box” (Evans, 2007, p.302) on her first attempt at seeking employment after prison and did not even bother applying:

They asked about my record just to [work as a gas station attendant ....] I was looking over the application and I saw the question, “do you have a criminal record?” and two options, “yes” or “no.” I just shut down and thought, yeah right, who’s gonna hire someone with so much stuff on their record?

Regina was concerned that she would face discrimination not only as a former prisoner, but also as a Native woman, because that was what she experienced in the past:
Growing up, you know, I wanted to work, tried to go get jobs, and I’d always get turned down ‘cause I’m Native [...]. I was going around dropping my resumés off, really feeling ambitious about my life and wanting to get a job, and I’d never get call backs [...]. Nothing’s changed now [pause] except I got a huge rap sheet.

Even so, Regina was optimistic that she would experience less racism and more legal opportunities in BC than she did in Saskatchewan.85

The potential for discrimination further arises when employers consider former prisoners’ resumés (Pollack, 2009, p.92). This was a source of concern for Clarice: “I found the whole idea of writing out a resumé […] to be a pretty damned daunting task. I mean, what was I going to say about the lost decade?” The Internet may also block parolees’ job opportunities. Kelly explained:

I Googled my name, nothing comes up [laughs ....] ‘Cause I’ve known other girls that, as soon as their name’s Googled, boom [...]. Employers don’t even have to do a records check, all they have to do is Google […] I know I made front page in Kamloops but, but it’s not on Google. So, thank god.

Daisy said of Internet search engines: “You apply for a job or whatever, they’re all looking, they’re all investigating […] It’s bloody scary!”86

Kelly recognized that she would not necessarily be excluded from a job if her criminal record were disclosed, but she could face heightened surveillance:

It’s a family-run business and, you know, and they always talk Italian so I never know what they’re saying [laughs]. (Oh [laughs].) And I would have that in the back of my head, you know: Are they talking about me, right? (Ooh.) You know, are they watching me, every move I make, you know? [...] That would make me feel uncomfortable, right – them knowing, right.

A few respondents commented on the internal conflict over the “twin dilemmas of secrecy and surveillance” (Eaton, 1993, p.19):

85 Eaton’s (1993) pioneering work on re-entry, based on interviews with 34 women in England and Wales, illuminates some of the ways that racism can heighten Black women’s post-release challenges. For example, she discusses limited employment opportunities due to racial discrimination (pp.22, 72, 100). Given the geographical context of Eaton’s study, the issue of Aboriginal prisoners was not addressed. In sharp contrast to the UK, where there are no Aboriginal populations, Aboriginal identity continues to be a prominent factor in the Canadian penal system.

86 The role of technology, particularly the Internet, in women’s post-release experiences is a theme that reflects current social changes, and it sets this research apart from earlier works such as Eaton (1993) and Shaw (1991). In fact, this theme is seldom reported in more recent studies on women’s re-entry as well.
I shouldn’t have to be up front with my employer about it [...] But should I or shouldn’t I, right? That’s the question, right. ‘Cause you, you know, you work at being truthful and open and honest in your life with your [drug] recovery. So, I’m kinda, like, not being that open and honest, right. I’m fighting that issue right now [laughs]. ~ Kelly

It doesn’t behoove you, really, to lie about it, because it’s, it’s, it’s making you do things that are not socially acceptable [laughs]. But, you know, sometimes you’re forced into doing those things. (Yeah.) You know, and it’s not a nice situation to find yourself in. ~ Daisy

You know, it’s really hard to be honest. ~ Jessica

Regina and Cate expected that employment would be more difficult to find because they still did not have legitimate employment skills or experience. Cate might find it especially difficult to secure work due to her disability. Liz related the stress of having a criminal record combined with no employment history and few job search skills:

Since I’ve been out, I’ve been Googling jobs, trying to find a job, and it’s fricking hard! It is so hard. Like, who’s gonna hire somebody who just got out of a federal jail, you know? And I have no experience [...] And not knowing how to do a resumé, too, right.

Joanna posed the question: “How do you go in an interview for a job when you haven’t had a job in many years, right? [...] And, like, how would you prepare yourself for that?” She, Daisy, and Regina argued for improved community-based employment services and resources for returning women and women in general. Joanna and Regina specifically mentioned a need for greater assistance with career choices, resumés, and interview skills. Regina called for more paid training programs for women. None of the respondents said that they were offered or mandated vocational programs as part of their parole, despite a clear need for such programs. Available literature suggests that this may reflect a broader gendered pattern in the decision-making process of parole authorities (Erez, 1992; Mullany, 2002).

P. O’Brien (2001b) reports that some women experience problems in their efforts to find employment due to post-release poverty (p.77). As noted by Daisy and Kelly, a lack of resources can make it difficult to travel to job interviews. They also commented that many women leaving prison lack proper interview attire. For Kelly,

[...] the biggest thing was tryin’ to find clothes to go for an interview, right [...] ‘Cause I had no money to buy clothes, you know. (That’s a big thing.) It is, it was a big thing, you know – to look presentable, right.
Some respondents highlighted the exclusion of former prisoners from fields of employment that are frequently pursued by women – as Evans (2007, p.302) also points out. For example, Joanna’s “biggest dream is to work with youth, but because of my crime, I don’t know if it will let me.” Daisy lost her professional licence in a traditionally female-concentrated area, but could have had it reinstated. Kelly had to work for minimum wage because of her limited options: “I’m a certified bookkeeper, but I can’t go back to that because of my criminal record, right. Even though it’s drug trafficking. But, still, I need to be bondable, right.”

Participants’ accounts further revealed that, when formerly incarcerated women do secure employment, it is often of the entry-level, minimum wage variety that does not permit self-sufficiency and wellbeing. This finding is supported in the literature (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.50; Harm & Phillips, 2001, pp.13, 17). Daisy said that many women

[...] can’t make enough from their job because they’ve not been trained properly, you know. (Yeah.) They’re only getting, you know, bare minimum wages [...] which are just not liveable.

Although Kelly appreciated her part-time job as a dishwasher, she still indicated difficulties getting by on only $600 a month. Cate was in a catering training program with a prospective wage of $9 per hour. When I asked Regina what it was like to enter the job market, she drew attention to “the cycle of poverty and the lack of incentives to join the ranks of the working poor created by a substandard minimum wage” (Maidment, 2006, p.62), and the related temptation to resort to crime:

It got frustrating, accepting you have to work for minimum wage [...] I don’t have much job skills and I really don’t like working for minimum wage [...] I had jobs before and I really resented people who told me, “do this, do that, do this,” and then I’d do all that and at the end I’d only get a cheque for 365 bucks after working 40 hours in two weeks. (Yeah, no doubt.) Working my ass off, you know, for what? I was always broke. (Yeah.) So, it’s, it is tempting to go back and [sell drugs]. (Yeah). Especially when that’s all I really know and I’m good at it. Make three, four thousand profit compared to a 365 dollar cheque every two weeks.

Daisy observed the links between unemployment, poverty, self-esteem, and criminalization:

The one thing that I realized from being out and talking to [...] other people who’ve been out, the one thing that seems to really keep them out and stay out is to find a job that they can be proud of. (Mmm.) And that pays them enough to

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87 This was before the May 2012 minimum wage increase in BC to $10.25.
be able to move away from the problem areas [...] and be able to, you know, feel happy about the space they’re living in and the work that they’re doing.

Respondents used strategies in hopes of increasing their chances of being hired. Regina and Kelly decided to reside in the Lower Mainland of BC, in part, to take advantage of the perceived employment prospects. Patrice garnered career advice from a friend who worked in the field she wanted to pursue. Regina planned to apply for funding from her Native band for a heavy machinery course so that she could one day earn a higher income. Patrice and Kelly visited the employment counsellor at their halfway house to create resumés, and Liz intended to do the same. Kelly repeatedly searched the Internet until she found a job. She also took advantage of the free used clothing in a woman’s drop-in centre to find presentable attire for a job interview. Cate joined a free catering training program to address her lack of work skills and experience; the program might also connect her with future jobs and thus help her avoid criminal record checks.

A number of respondents used, or planned to use, various tactics to avoid discrimination when searching for work. Regina sought the assistance of a community-based employment program that helped her scour the area for jobs that did not ask about criminal records. Kelly and Jessica strategically decided if and how to reveal their ex-prisoner status to employers. Kelly chose not to disclose her record. She told her boss that she was in school rather than parole programs and that she rented an apartment out of the halfway house building in case he ever noticed her in the area. Despite Jessica’s concerns about the consequences of her record, she planned to “be honest with the employer” and immediately explain the circumstances behind her “sex offender” label in an effort to minimize the potential for unfair judgement. Joanna considered changing her surname so she would not be discriminated against.

Some respondents sought employment in areas where a criminal record was irrelevant or even an advantage. A number of women worked with friends to avoid potential problems. OneSky had a job opportunity through a friend, Daisy found employment through friends, and Clarice worked for a relative’s friend after prison, “so I didn’t actually have to apply for the job […] and I definitely did not submit a resumé.” Clarice also worked as a tutor:

Again, no resumé required. So, it was basically eight or nine years before I looked for work from virtual strangers. And even then, I only applied [. . .]
current job] and I’d met the head of that society before [...] in the context of me being an ex-prisoner.

Joanna adapted her employment goals to avoid discrimination: “Now, I made up a resumé to work with people in addictions [...] so I can disclose my crime, disclose my addiction and stuff like that, right. Sorta reversed it.” Such strategies are commonly used by former prisoners (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.31-34, 40-44; Severance, 2005, pp.87-88).

Although some respondents received assistance from community-based supports, Regina and OneSky recognized the gendered nature of vocational and other resources. Regina observed that employment centres are primarily focused on men’s needs: “There’s more programming for men, most definitely [...] Like, employment help is usually geared toward men, like, the trades.” OneSky expressed frustration at the gendered unavailability of resources:

“I’ve heard guys being offered jobs and stuff and they were barely at the halfway house [...] They got a lot more connections and support, and they were all getting jobs and there’s a lot of money coming in. And I thought, fuck, I’m poor ass broke, nothing, sitting at that fucking house. Yeah, it’s different [...] Men are more apt to help each other. Women don’t have the resources. Yeah, the men, more apt to help each other. “Oh, you need a job? Well I know connection, connection, connection.” (Okay.) Yeah. And women, “no, I don’t even know what I’m doing.”

The poor state of community-based vocational and financial resources for returning women is well documented (AGC, 2003, s.4.97; Maidment, 2006, pp.107-111; Pollack, 2008, p.7).

Similar to women in Eaton’s (1993) research, some respondents in the present study looked to formal education as a strategy to overcome employment and financial troubles. Patrice planned to pursue further schooling to become a youth worker. Daisy emphasized how important education was for her employment prospects, but also recognized her relative privilege in this regard: “I was already educated before this all happened [...] I could’ve done seven or eight different things when I got out, in terms of getting a job, but most people can’t.” Joanna, Liz, and Regina spoke of obstacles in the way of reaching their educational goals after prison. Joanna started working toward her GED, but found it financially difficult and could not afford the tutoring she needed. Liz also expressed concern about how she would pay for the math tutoring she needed to complete her GED and how she would fund her culinary arts degree. Regina shared her dream of enrolling in university to work toward an art career, but did not have the means
to pay for it, especially since she defaulted on student loans in the past. Thus, the poverty and associated problems that these women wanted to overcome through formal education also made such education more difficult to acquire. This is a problem faced by many people with low incomes (Ivanova, 2012).

4.4 Housing: “There’s Just Not Enough of It” (Cate)

Nine women were released from prison to a transition house. Richie (2001) writes, however, “these are typically only temporary arrangements, and most women are ultimately left on their own to find and secure long-term housing” (p.378). Faced with a lack of funds and limited options, six of the respondents who had been in transition houses expressed uncertainty about subsequent accommodations.

The dwindling low-income housing options in BC that are documented by Reitsma-Street and Prentice (2002) were illuminated by many respondents’ accounts. Released to a halfway house, Kelly was glad to have “free rent,” but she was anxious about where she would live afterwards. With the assistance of HRFA, she applied for BC Housing while in prison. At the time of our interview she had been on the waiting list for several months. She investigated other low-income options, but was worried about cost: “[The rent is] 400 bucks a month […] I’d have to pay rent, buy my own food. I only make 600 bucks a month.” She called for CSC to play a more supportive role:

If I’m staying [at the halfway house] until March, I need to start looking at a place before then, looking for avenues of, you know, furnishing it and […] being able to afford it. You know, or I’m just gonna go back to what I know […] I know a couple women that, you know, on their full parole, they’re living […] in the shelter. So, I mean, I don’t wanna have to do that […] CSC doesn’t really help you with that. It’s not really their concern. Their concern is just making sure you abide by the rules, right […] I think they need to be more proactive with BC Housing and stuff like that, right.

Liz also applied to BC Housing while in prison and was aware of lengthy waiting lists. She considered living with a friend after her warrant expiry date, but had doubts due to her friend’s active addiction. Thus, Liz identified another option: “If need be, on warrant,

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88 Daisy was released to a friend’s house under a private home placement; as noted, she lost her house due to her criminal conviction. Clarice had post-release housing with a family member.

89 Two respondents who were serving life sentences, Nancy and OneSky, expected that they would not acquire independent housing for a long time, which likely made it less of a concern. Joanna was in a halfway house but had her own home with her partner and children.
I’ll go downstairs to the shelter at E. Fry.” Patrice wanted to remain on residency conditions until she saved enough money for her own place. Like Kelly, however, she recognized that CSC does not necessarily make decisions based on what returning prisoners want or need:

*Like, basically, like, if I started working, I could just bank all my money [...] until I think I should be taken off residency, right. But, doesn’t really work like that [...] The parole officers are] just like, “you get re-evaluated every six months.”*

As highlighted by Liz and Kelly, and supported by the available literature, some women’s options for shelter after prison are so scarce that they end up homeless (Maidment, 2006, pp.104-105; Meehan, 2002, p.6; Roebuck, 2008). Regina and Cate believed they would be homeless if not for transition housing. Regina declared:

*I’d be homeless if I didn’t have [this recovery house] to come to [...] If there wasn’t houses like this here, I dunno what I woulda did. I’d probably be back in Saskatchewan, being hopeless and doin’ crime and, you know, selling drugs and shit just to survive.*

Living in a transition house can also be troublesome. Regina hoped to move “into my own place, so I can be independent [...] and do the things I wanna do on my own terms.” Yet, she realized that this goal would be hard to reach:

*We put in for BC Housing two months before I got out, and it’s been three months since I’ve been out and still nothing, you know, nothing. (Yeah. [pause] And looking at it on your own?) I can’t afford it. Or they’re in areas I wanna avoid, with drug dealing and stuff right out my door.*

Like Regina, Cate faced the possibility of staying in a transition house for an extended period of time due to the absence of alternatives. As a woman living with mental illness and in need of supportive housing, she faced particular hurdles:

*I’ve been on the Coastal Health Authority list for an enhanced [Supported Independent Living unit] for five years [...] Two buildings, I’m at sixteenth on the list, and one building, seventeenth. We’re talking another year. (Mmm.) [long pause] So [...] it’s one of the things that’s a major hurdle. But, I’m lucky [...] because [the transition house that I am in [...] will keep me until I have a bed [...] If I were in [a halfway house], what would happen July 22nd if there’s nowhere to put me? I’d be homeless! (Do you think a lot of other women are in those situations?) Yeah, ‘cause it’s, like, there is no housing, right [...] BC Housing has a waiting list, Mental Health has a waiting list, Jewish housing has a waiting list [...] ‘Cause there’s just not enough of it. (Hmm.) And people don’t realize that. They think people who are homeless have a choice, and sometimes they don’t!*
Returning prisoners can face additional problems securing shelter because of their criminal records and parolee status (e.g., Harm & Phillips, 2001, p.19). Clarice pointed out the housing restrictions created by conditions that require parole officers to approve of parolees’ residences. She explained that the approval process can be slow and impede women from leaving problematic living situations. It can also make it difficult to secure housing since a place can be called for in the time it takes for approval, or a security deposit can be lost if a parole officer does not approve it. Clarice shared the experience of a woman who had to live in a car because her parole officer did not support her living arrangement or an alternative. When the parole officer learned of her homelessness, however, she was sent back to prison.

Former prisoners are regularly discriminated against by landlords and housing providers (Covington, 2003, p.93; Evans, 2007, p.303; Maidment, 2006, pp.103-105). Daisy identified criminal record checks by potential landlords as major barriers to post-release housing. Jessica had problems securing shelter due the combination of her criminal record, parole conditions, and financial difficulties:

*Even when I had to get places and stuff, they wanted a criminal record [...] So, it was hard getting a place [...] I just had to go though people that didn’t ask those stupid questions, right. And then I finally got a place and I had to roommate with somebody ’cause I couldn’t afford the rent, you know. (Yeah.) And then she was drinking and I can’t be around people that are drinking – that’s guilt by association, right [...] So then I moved in with my mom, and my parole was over after that [...] Housing’s a big issue. (Like, ’cause women can’t get it?) Because of their crime or, you know, because there’s no support to help them.*

After speaking with Daisy about some of the obstacles to housing faced by formerly incarcerated women, she asserted:

*So, where are they gonna go? If they don’t have a family that can house them, and many of them don’t, they’re gonna gravitate back to where they know. They’re gonna get a cheap place to live in, in scuzville.*

The majority of respondents in this study could not rely on family or friends for housing and there are few community-based support services that assist with housing needs, as others similarly observe (Richie, 2001, p.378; Severance, 2004, p.82). The only viable housing options for some former prisoners are in impoverished neighbourhoods with high concentrations of street crime (Shaw, 1991, p.19). Regina mentioned that much of the housing she could afford was located in areas where a lot of people sold drugs and Jessica was uneasy living in an unsafe area where she used to work in the sex trade.
Meehan (2002) reports that mothers may experience unique accommodation problems after prison (p.6). Jessica indicated specific concerns as a mother of a newborn:

\[\text{It’s a really nice place. It’s not in a good neighbourhood [...]. Like, everyone in this area, like, you know, I used to work the stroll over here, right. You know, prostitution, that kind of thing. (Mmm.) So, like, you know, you see guys that used to be your dates and, you know, they say, “oh, you have a baby” [...] and they want to touch him [...]. So, I just don’t want him to be exposed to that, right.}\]

4.5 Interpersonal Relationships

Respondents’ narratives reveal that positive and supportive relationships are a basic need that can be difficult to fulfill after prison, and that negative relationships often complicate re-entry. Women also indicated that when their interpersonal needs are met, to varying degrees, numerous benefits can result. Relationships commonly discussed by participants include those with intimate/sexual partners, family members, peers, and other individuals and groups in the community.

4.5.1 Intimate Partner and Family Relationships

As stated by Liz – and confirmed elsewhere (e.g., P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.104-105) – “a good man” or intimate partner of any sex can ease re-entry by providing concrete and/or moral support. For several respondents, relationships with intimate partners did just that. For example, Joanna and Patrice’s partners helped them financially after prison. Joanna also explained how her partner assisted with caretaker responsibilities:

\[\text{I landed up meeting my partner, and I got into that quick because I needed somebody to look after my uncle, right [...] We’ve been together a year and seven months now [...] So, I’m normally [at my house] in the morning and then I go [to the halfway house] at night, when I have to be home by curfew, right. (Okay.) So, other than that, my partner’s there.}\]

OneSky developed an intimate relationship with a fellow prisoner who was still inside. Their relationship was unique in that they shared the prison experience. They spoke on the phone regularly and she hoped to one day start a life together on the outside. OneSky described the ways that they could mutually support each other:

\[\text{She said, “when I hit the Coast, babe, I’ll take care of some of the stuff that you can’t do [...] I know all about the computers and the phones” [...] There’s stuff}\]
that I know that, that she can’t do [...] If it all works out, it’ll be great. (Mmm.)
At least I’ll have [...] somebody close to me who wants me to do well.

Clarice’s partner had served prison time and their relationship was thus also distinct. She explained that this relationship helped her adjust to life on the outside because “I could always talk to [my partner] about how exactly it was that I didn’t fit in or think like other people anymore, and I’d be absolutely understood. It was the same way for him.”

Clarice added, however, that most intimate relationships are not as enduring: “I know from [being in prison] that it didn’t always work out. In fact, in most cases a relationship wouldn’t […] survive, you know, a long period of separation like that.”

Family support is reportedly central to many prisoners’ re-entry efforts (e.g., Cobbina, 2010, p.218; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.50). In the current study, several respondents considered their families to be important sources of moral and material support. It was also clear, however, that many women’s families had limited resources to assist, as Severance (2004, p.82) similarly observes. Kelly was physically apart from her family, who lived in the interior of BC, but still “talk[ed] to them every day […] They’re there for me, right […] My family’s good support.” When I asked Kelly how her family supported her, she replied:

*Emotionally. Well, they were supporting me financially before I got a job, too, right […] My kids were helping me out with some money […] But it was hard for a mother to ask the kids for money, right.*

Regina’s family helped her in tangible and intangible ways as well, and thereby eased some of the pains of re-entry. For example, her sister contributed to bus fare so she could visit her dying brother in a different province, and her siblings helped her adjust to new technologies such as “texting.” They also lessened her sense of loneliness by keeping in regular contact. Clarice’s family supported her in vital ways during and after her imprisonment. Like Regina, they helped her adapt to social changes, such as “megastores.” She did not need to search for housing because she rented a suite in a family member’s place. In fact, her family helped with

* [...] a lot of material things. I mean, you know, we had no ID and we just went with my mother to the bank and got bank accounts. And, we got our ID, you know, she had some stuff, I guess, saved away somewhere, you know, that a lot*

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90 Research suggests that there may be particular benefits from intimate relationships between former prisoners since there is greater potential for empathy and support (Gobeil, 2008, para.15).
of women don’t have. People that are going to be looking out for, you know, long periods of time after their documents and things like that.

Kelly was thankful that her daughter eventually secured her ID documents:

_I didn’t have my identification. I didn’t know where it was, ‘cause all my stuff was taken, right. (Oh, shit.) But, luckily, my daughter tracked it down [...] and mailed it to me about a month after I got out. So, you know, that’s important [...] I was glad I got all that: birth certificate, SIN card, BCID, everything._

Patricia explained further how the support of her family helped after prison:

_Just knowing that they’re, like, a step ahead of me and, like, telling me, like, pulling me along, and they’re like, come on this way, right. And, like, so it’s totally motivation to, like, stay where I am, right. (Yeah.) And keep doing what I’m doing – so I can have them in my life again._

Liz considered her mother and brother to be sources of support in that “they just make sure that I’m doing good and that I’m staying here and, you know.” While she was incarcerated, Liz’s mother stored her clothing for her. Jessica’s mother provided her with housing for a period of time after prison. Her mother also assisted with childcare responsibilities, like babysitting when Jessica had to complete reporting requirements with the police and attend substance abuse meetings.

Women’s children are often central sources of post-release support (Covington, 2003, p.77; Gobeil, 2001, paras.14, 51). Jessica repeatedly talked about her relationship with the child she gave birth to after prison, and how it improved her general wellbeing:

_I got this little gift of joy here and, you know, it just makes me wanna keep workin’ at what I’m doing. You know, staying clean, getting off welfare [...] He makes me stronger. Yeah, I’m really happy with him._

P. O’Brien (2001b) writes that returning women’s relationships with their children can foster a sense of self-efficacy (pp.102-103). Joanna touched upon this when she made comments like: “I’ve managed to keep a home, I’ve managed to keep my [elderly and disabled] uncle, my kids, them in school.”

Some respondents revealed a lack – or complete loss – of family support after prison, as other scholarship also documents (Maidment, 2006, pp.115-117; Opsal, 2009, p.310). Daisy commented on the situation of returning prisoners as a group:

_I’m lucky, but many of those women that come out of prison, they don’t really have families, or it wasn’t a healthy environment anyways [...] or they’ve lost their families because they’ve been inside for so long._
Cate never had a very supportive relationship with her family:

My family has been there a bit [...]. But, I don’t see them all that often. They’re not [pause] (You’re not that close?) No [...] I don’t think prison’s helped [short laugh]. But, I mean, I was out of the house at so young anyway, I mean [pause]. (Yeah. Yeah.) My parents haven’t really, I mean, I didn’t live with my mom, really, since I was 16.

Some family relationships are ruined because of imprisonment (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p.51; Richie, 2001, p.379). Cate pointed out the physical distance that separates many women in prison from their hometowns, making visitations unlikely: “The jail in this region, it’s in Abbotsford. But, you have people from the Island, we have people from Prince George, from the Interior. They’re not close to their families!” Joanna described what happened to some of her relationships:

They deteriorated because a lot of people weren’t allowed to come in [to prison] because of who they were or because of their record or, ya know, it was too far, or no transportation, right [...] So, you lose a lot of contact and then you have to build it when you get back out. (Yeah.) But, then again, sometimes you don’t get that chance ‘cause they’re passed on.

In this way, the geographical separation of women from their families increases the pains of imprisonment and threatens re-entry by weakening support networks.

Kelly, Patriece, and Regina chose to remain geographically removed from their home communities and families to avoid hometown “trouble” and ostracism, among other reasons. Still, this move left them with few social connections and they found it emotionally difficult to remain apart from their loved ones. Regina and Kelly mentioned associated feelings of isolation and fear. For example, Kelly related:

Being alone down here, that was a big thing [...] I came from Kamloops, being arrested and [pause] you’re automatically dropped down here in Vancouver. No support, my family’s all up there [...] So it was kinda, it was scary.

For women who serve lengthy sentences, family members often die before their release dates (WYPG, 2006, p.17). Joanna shared: “When I was in prison, my mom passed, right. And, I never really got to know my mom, right [...] Right after that, my, my uncle passed.” Nancy suffered the devastating loss of several family members in a

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91 Their choice to remain in the Lower Mainland of BC might have been influenced by the fact that the only federal prison for women in BC is in the Lower Mainland – that is where they were released, and that is where they stayed.
house fire while she was in prison, OneSky lost her father, brother, and partner, and Regina lost her mother and best friend.

Some women are rejected by family members due to the pain and stigma associated with their incarceration (e.g., Evans, 2007, pp.298-299). Nancy’s family had either died or “disowned” her and thus she said, “I don’t really have a family.” OneSky stated:

I have two remaining family members who really don’t want anything to do with me. (Why?) ‘Cause they can’t deal with this jail business and what, what I did. And so, I’m kind of a secret now [...] (Were you close with them before all this happened?) Absolutely [...] Did everything for them and I was well taken care of [...] So, the last gift you can give to people is their privacy. That’s what I did.

Returning women’s strengths and resourcefulness were reflected in OneSky’s response to such familial exclusion:

I’ve lost my blood family, so I’m working on making my own family in the world. Folk don’t have to be blood to be my family now. I know who loves me – just the way I am – and who doesn’t. They know what I’ve done and still love me.

Like other women after prison and on welfare (FAFIA, 2008, p.2; Maidment, 2006, pp.136-138), Jessica faced the risk of losing her child to foster care:

I went to the [Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD)] and just told ‘em my story [...] You know, I wanna keep my baby and I’ve been working really hard [...] She’s like [...] “we’ll just keep an eye on you for a while” [...] if they think that I’m sleeping with the baby [in my bed], it’s bad, they’ll take him away [...] They just do stupid stuff [...] If they have an accusation against you, they have to look into it. (Okay.) But, usually while they’re looking into it, they take the kid! And once they take the kid, ‘cause it takes two minutes to take your kid, it takes two years to fight for them back!

Because of this risk, Jessica was cautious in her relationships with others, including the MCFD: “I do have a little book, it’s in my room, that every appointment I have with the worker, I write everything down. Just so in the future, they can’t use something against me.” To help protect her family further, she avoided people who could have got her into trouble, including her father who was in active addiction.

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92 Maidment (2006) notes that such “mistrust of child protection agents is a common theme among criminalized mothers” (p.138).
4.5.2 Peer Relationships

With shared experiences of imprisonment and release, former prisoners are often more apt to provide each other with concrete and informational assistance, as well as moral support (P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.51-52, 106-110; Pollack, 2008, 2009). Several respondents in this study discussed the supportive relationships that they developed with other former prisoners. The primary source of support for OneSky was other people who served time:

And who’s there to help me? [...] Nobody. Just women, lifers [...] If it weren’t for [...] other former prisoners, I don’t know what the hell I would do. Like, I would be really stuck, you know.

OneSky, released into an unfamiliar community, struggled with the disorienting and debilitating effects of institutionalization. Other returning women helped her adjust to the local area and public transportation system, and accompanied her to buy a cellphone, set up a bank account, and go to the medical clinic. One of her friends dealt with a man who harassed her on the street a few days after she was released. Other women helped her become acquainted with the parole system and halfway house. She also noted the support provided by a formerly incarcerated man and his wife:

They will help me if there’s something I need [...] If don’t know something, if [CSC or halfway house staff are] doing things I don’t understand, or if something goes terribly wrong: Help, what do I do?! [...] I get a lot of information from them [...] They really have good advice and they’ve helped a lot of people get out of jail and stay out of jail.

OneSky did, however, find it distressing to “interfere with other people’s lives [...] I feel like a idiot, having to ask them, oh, could you come with me?”

Like other respondents, OneSky had reciprocal relationships with many of her peers. She became close to one FSW who was ill and did all she could to “help us make it through another day,” like accompany her to medical appointments and other destinations, help her when she felt weak, assist her around the house, listen to her, and offer advice. She mentioned that, in return, “it helps me to see how another lifer copes.” Patrice commented on the mutually beneficial relationships she had with her peers when I asked if anyone helped her navigate the community:

One of the women that lives [in the halfway house] helps [...] Another woman in the halfway house] is helping me lots now, too [...] We] go out lots together [...] We kind of help each other out, right. ‘Cause she’s like, “‘kay, I know this part of
“town,” I’m like, ‘kay, I think I kinda know this part of town, right [...]. It’s like a swap, right.

Kelly spoke about her goddaughter, who was recently released from prison:

_We’re both lookin’ out for each other. And, you know, it’s kinda nice to have some kind of family around [...]. (In what ways do you help each other?) With NA, goin’ to [...] meetings and stuff like that [...]. She’s not working right now and, you know, I help her as much as I can. And, you know, she’s from Kamloops, too, right. She’s got no family down here either._

Joanna described how she supported other women leaving prison:

_I take the time and I show everybody around when they get out and, you know, stuff like that [...]. It’s just like I said to [a FSW], I said if you make your [parole] appointments on Tuesdays, right, mine are from two to four, I can take you there and then you can come to my house for dinner [...]. Then I can take you back [to the halfway house ....] Until you feel comfortable, right._

Nancy was known by many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women as “mama” because of the trusting and caring relationships they had. She was also a member of a peer support group and supported others in her capacity as “keeper of the drum.”

Some respondents talked about the support they received from community collectives that comprised a large number of peers – a topic that overlaps with a future section on community groups. Their accounts reveal the greater potential for trust, shared understanding, and non-judgemental settings in these relationships compared with those that lack the common experience of imprisonment. OneSky and Regina’s experiences with a support group for parolees also illustrate the potential of such relationships to normalize reactions to the transition, foster a sense of hope, and “redefine spaces of community” (Pollack, 2009, p.93):

_I’m part of that group because we all suffered in the same way [...]. They get it [...]. I know exactly what they’re talking about and feeling. (Yeah.) And when I told them what’s up with me, I told them like I was one of their own [...]. They] reinforce that I’m doing good._ ~ OneSky

_I go to LINC [Long-term Inmates Now in the Community] and we all just sit around and talk. It’s easy to talk with them [...] because they understand you [...] They say, say a lot in common, you know [...] It’s different than sitting around with people [...] who don’t know what you’ve been through, like, jail-wise, you know. Like, jail, jail people have this common understanding._ ~ Regina

Joanna, Regina, and OneSky commented on the importance of collective understanding when they spoke of the support from HRIA (a group of prisoners, former
prisoners, and allies from the community) and SAS (a group of formerly incarcerated women). OneSky highlighted the shared understanding in such groups: “I think you guys get it, what we go through [… ] I don’t think I, I have to say too much and you’ll get it.” When understanding is shared in this way, unfair judgment is less likely. A number of women commented on the importance of non-judgemental supports. Joanna said:

> We look at you guys [from HRIA and SAS] and we say, well okay, they don’t pass judgment, they accept us for who we are … Ya know, it’s nice. And it’s nice just to sit down and talk to somebody, you know.

For Kelly, the shared understanding of addiction in support groups for drug withdrawal helped her cope:

> If I wanna stay sober I need to step up and just ask for help, know where I can go and [inhales and exhales] yeah. [pause] And that’s the big thing with NA and [Cocaine Anonymous] that I go to. I mean, people are like me there, right. They don’t judge me, we’re all there for the same reasons. (Yeah.) So, it’s good to have other people know where you’re coming from, right.

Available research confirms the high potential of peer-based community-groups to assist formerly incarcerated women (Pollack, 2009; Richie, 2001, p.385).

> Friendships with other individuals in the community can also facilitate re-entry (Severance, 2004, p.82). Liz mentioned a friend of hers who

> […] really cares about me, right. And he doesn’t want me workin’ the streets no more. And so, like, we’ve become really good friends. He’s gonna get me a cellphone, maybe give me some money so I don’t have to work anymore and, and stuff like that, you know.

Nancy spoke of an elderly man she sometimes visited who was an important source of love and companionship: “We both care for one another. We’re both lonely and lost.” Regina’s friends helped her adapt to social changes, such as the social networking website Facebook.³³ Regina and I became friends through our work with HRIA. She said that I helped her in concrete ways, like providing transportation. She also commented on the intangible ways relationships like ours helped:

> I think it’s really beneficial, like, to have somebody that’s […] able to help you when you need help, or they’re able to talk to you when you need someone to talk to […] Like, sometimes you just need someone to listen to you and not, “oh, you gotta do this and you gotta do that.” (Yeah.) It’s better sometimes just to

³³ Regina and OneSky said that Facebook helped them connect with supportive others after their release from prison.
have a friend, like, that understands and doesn’t judge you ....] It’s the relationships you build that help you get through it, if you wanna make it in this world, you know. If you come out here and you don’t have nobody, then it’s really hard and you feel really lonely. But if you have people there that help you or at least, like, be there for you, you know (yeah) it makes it a lot easier to keep going. You know, you feel as though, like, you can’t let them down.

Daisy and Clarice had much greater access to resources than other respondents, and this was reflected in the ways that their friends supported them after prison. For example, Clarice’s friends gave her a car so she did not have to rely on public transit. Daisy had “a number of friends who are not judgmental and have stepped forward to help me enormously,” including: buying a company so she could manage it; lending her money so she did not have to go through a bank; creating a joint credit card and bank account so she could rebuild her credit; and providing a private home placement so she did not have to stay in a halfway house.

A few respondents talked about friends that they lost while incarcerated. Clarice noted the damage that years of no contact can do to some relationships:

*There were friends I had that I haven’t seen since. (Because of that, you think?) Yeah ....] I might have lost touch with them anyway ....] But, yeah, I mean [11 years] is a long time to be out of society.*

Daisy was rejected and ostracized by past friends due to the stigma of her incarceration:

*I lost maybe four friends because they were pretty judgemental ....] I was a little hurt ....] And there are some people still who I have stopped seeing that, no matter what penalty you paid, it’s never enough. That you shouldn’t have a nice car, or a decent job, or be happy, or have your own home ....] And I don’t know what you’re supposed to do to be forgiven ....] It makes a lot of difference to your self-esteem if people can forgive you.*

Some women intentionally disconnect with previous friends and acquaintances to avoid potential problems after prison (Gobeil, 2008, para.34; Pollack, 2008, p.27). Kelly, Regina, and Patrice moved away from their hometowns, in part, to avoid some of the people and places that contributed to their incarceration. Jessica stopped associating with certain individuals after her release because “they were just my using friends ....] people I got high with.” Nonetheless, Patrice explained that ending such relationships can be difficult:

*A lot of the people that I knew before, like, I don’t talk to now at all ....] Because, like, everyone that I used to hang out with either does drugs or does crime or sells drugs, right. So, that’s not the lifestyle that I want anymore ....] We’ve all
known each other for, like, seven, eight, nine years, right [...] They were basically like my family, right. So, it is hard.

Liz and Jessica spoke of friendships that they wanted but did not have. When I asked Liz what would help her stay out of prison, she replied, “just friends. Like, good friends.” Jessica experienced difficulty finding “the right kinda friends” because of the stigma attached to her illness:

I can kinda tell when people [...] wanna be my friend or whatever and when they just [...] look at me as an illness, not as a person [...] It’s always nice to have friends. (Yeah.) But, you wanna have the right kinda friends.

Consistent with Eaton (1993, p.87), Cate found it challenging to develop new relationships due to the fracture in her life created by imprisonment and the fear of reinforcing her stigmatized identity by acknowledging that fracture:

None of my housemates know I’ve been in jail [...] I don’t want them to know. I want it, like, not to be based on that [...] I’m trying to keep it on the [down low], but it’s hard. People wanna know where I’ve been, lived before. And I just say Abbotsford [...] And they say “where?” And I say, oh, just somewhere working on myself [...] I don’t want that part of me to be part of me anymore [...] I wanna move on with my life and stuff, but I just have that little [pause] paper trail.

As the following section illustrates, it can be even more difficult to “move on” after imprisonment when the community ardently refuses to do the same.

4.5.3 Community Relationships

The General Public

Participants’ relationships with the general public frequently represented sources of post-release anxiety, stress, and stigmatization. Daisy’s biggest concern after her release from prison was

[...] coming home and facing the neighbours and everybody that knew and didn’t really know the reasons why. (Ah,) I mean, at least my friends kinda knew what had happened and why. But, you know, for a lot of people in your neighbourhood, they don’t know. They just go, “oh, she’s the [person who committed that crime], and, you know, what the hell is wrong with her?”

Kelly indicated a sense of fear when re-entering the community as an “ex-con”:

That was the biggest fear, I mean, just the world on the outside, right. Tryin’ to reintegrate yourself in the community, right, without being looked at in a different way.
Some respondents felt as though they were automatically identified as ex-prisoners immediately following release, even without the label becoming public knowledge or having any direct interactions with people. The effects of institutionalization likely compounded such self-perceptions. This immediate sense of difference might further reflect an internalized sense of otherness developed through the process of being officially labelled and treated as a convicted criminal and prison inmate, consistent with the logic of labelling theory (Becker, 1963). Professional discourses in prison also encourage internalization of a “criminal self” (Pollack, 2007, p.163) in hopes of correcting it. Finally, it is likely that women’s automatic sense of stigmatization upon release reflects their knowledge that such forms of exclusion are indeed prevalent in the community.

Patience did not need to interact with anyone to feel as though her identity as an ex-prisoner followed her out the gates:

*Even though I didn’t, like, really have any incidences, I felt like I was like, “ah, ex-criminal!” [laughs ....] I felt like everyone was staring at me, like they all knew I was from jail.*

Joanna explained how she felt “little” and like an “outsider” when she initially re-entered the community:

*When I first got out, for the first month, I felt like people knew I was in jail [....] I think everybody feels like that when they first get out, if you’re doin’ a long stretch or whatever [....] It feels like an outsider [....] You just feel, like, little [....] There was days where I felt, like, well, why can’t I fit in, right?*

Regina felt like “the odd man out” when she attended a social gathering soon after her release:

*Yeah, I could go socialize and stuff, but at the same time I’d feel self-conscious and be, like, you know [....] Like, you feel like they know what you’re, you just got out, and that you’re the odd man out, you know.*

Kelly believed that she was labelled by others simply standing in front of the halfway house:

*Just having a smoke outside [the halfway house], people driving by, right [....] ‘Cause anybody in the, in the neighbourhood knows what [the place] is, right. So, I mean, we’re already labelled, right, being outside there [....] I mean, you can’t miss it, the big [....] building, right! [laughs ....] I feel embarrassed, right. (Yeah?) You know, it is embarrassing but, whatever. What can you do, right.*
Some women were othered by people in the community when their ex-prisoner status was made known through specific interactions. For example, Daisy’s parole condition to report regularly at the local police station made her feel like the other in that setting:

*They have a program where you have to check-in at the cop shop [...] And that’s embarrassing because you go in there and, you know, you, everybody has to go to the same counter regardless of what you’re going in for. (Okay.) And then everybody knows what the hell you’re there for, right [...] And [the police are] not exactly discreet!*

Liz shared a recent episode when she experienced stigmatizing shaming:

*When I was coming back from my mom’s the other day, there was this lady on the bus that knows my mom, right, this lady and her boyfriend. And we were talking about parole and [...] this lady kept looking back at me and was, like, just kept shakin’ her head. And I was like, well, what? I just wanted to say, like, what the fuck is your problem, right?*

Without valid IDs, some women must to use their prison cards for a period of time after release (Pollack, 2008, p.25). Two of the respondents in this study revealed how showing such ID instantly reduced them in others’ eyes “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963, p.3):

*I went to get a pack of smokes and [the clerk] asks me for ID [...] I get my prison ID, I was like, here you go. And she just, her jaw literally fricking dropped [...] It’s embarrassing but, hey, you know, who cares, right. ~ Liz*

*When I had to show my prison ID, at first, it was weird. People just look at it and they’re like “what?!” They don’t know what to say. They forget that even though we’ve done stuff, we’re still people. ~ Cate*

M. Alexander (CBC News, 2011) expects that such punitive public attitudes towards people who have served prison sentences will continue or grow in Canada with the enactment of the Safe Streets and Communities Act (Bill C-10, 2012).

Despite serving such a lengthy sentence, OneSky did not experience many cases of othering except when she was asked questions that related to her time inside. When people asked where she got her tattoos and she replied with prison, they appeared shocked and immediately ended the conversation. In this way, her tattoos were permanent reminders of her ex-prisoner status and sometimes left her “visibly stigmatized” (Eatton, 1993, p.77). Clarice said that, “in a generic type of anonymous situation, I certainly felt that I could and did blend in when I wanted to.” She did,
however, experience othering in specific situations. During a university class, for example, the professor asked if anyone had served time in prison. She described the reaction of students to her affirmative response: “Oh god, there’s a criminal in here!” Her master status as a former prisoner dominated her status as a student.

Multiple identities often intersect to stigmatize formerly incarcerated women (e.g., Bastick & Townhead, 2008, p.1; P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.65). Two respondents suggested that the doubly deviant idea can exacerbate the othering process. Nancy believed that she was perceived by people in the community as different and dangerous due to her criminalized past, “especially as a woman.” Clarice, too, commented on the gendered stigmatization of women who have served prison sentences: “It’s almost like you’ve done something in addition to the actual charge because women just don’t do that.” Jessica provided three reasons for her experiences of stigmatization and discrimination: her “sex offender” label, her Aboriginal background, and her illness. She made comments like: “A lot of people just look at me like I’m just a disease” – signalling a key master status. Regina’s identity as both Native and a former prisoner impaired many of her interactions with people.94 Regina was also gay,95 as was OneSky, and Cate was living with a mental illness. Though these latter issues were not specifically discussed by respondents, it is reasonable to suspect that their experiences of othering were shaped by various, intersecting factors.

The Mass Media

The mass media tends to portray criminalized women in negative, decontextualized, and stereotypical ways (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Faith, 1993), and these representations can have lasting consequences in women’s post-release lives (Eaton, 1993, pp.61-63). Jessica shared how the high-profile nature of her case impacted her relationships and reinforced her stigmatized status:

> My story was all over the media, it was all over the paper. So, it wasn’t [...] somethin’ to be proud of, right [...] I didn’t like it because, like, people out today will recognize me [...] Even on the bus, like, “oh, there’s that girl that was on the news.” And it’s like, yeah and what? [...] ‘Cause, you know, like, sure I did something, yeah, I’m not denying it. However, you don’t know the whole circumstances behind it [...] It makes me feel sad that, like, that’s how people

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94 Regina and Jessica mentioned stereotypes about “drunk Indians.”

95 This was the term Regina used to refer to herself.
are. (Yeah.) I feel, like, sometimes angry […] You know, everyone makes mistakes and it’s too bad that that has to follow you.

Social stigmatization can foster a sense of shame and anxiety (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Daisy indicated such feelings as a result of repetitive news coverage:

_The newspapers spend every moment they can trying to take photographs of you and put you in the newspapers. So, I had to deal with all the shame of that, the publicity. (Fuck.) And it never ends because reporters always bring it up when they’re writin’ another story and they include you in it […] Stuff comes up in the newspaper all the time […] You know, that, it’s really hard ‘cause you’re having to relive it, relive it, relive it. So, you know, the punishment doesn’t stop – it continues, really._

Daisy felt particularly uneasy in social situations when she knew a newspaper article was recently published about her case. Kelly realized that being in the news media could have possible ramifications for her reputation in her hometown. When I asked what it was like to be on the front page of her local newspaper, she replied:

_It was harsh. You know, people reading my name, my age, everything, what happened, yeah. ‘Cause I know a lot of people in Kamloops, right. Like, yeah, I was married, I had a family life there and a lot of people know me, not just in the drug world._

Joanna’s concerns about media coverage were gendered in that they extended to her children:

_When my kid’s friends come over […] are they gonna watch that television? Are they gonna see me in that documentary of my crime? […] They represented me, like, as some chick that’s just out of control […] It was nothing like me and they put a lot of lies in it […] It’s disturbing, horrendous […] I know I’m tryin’ to change and everybody’s allowed their opinion but, deep down inside, it really bothers me, right. (Yeah.) ‘Cause when do I get a chance to grow and heal?_

Joanna also believed that this publicity thwarted her search for employment:

_For a year straight, I plugged in resumés. But, because of my last name, right, and because of the Viva 96 channel, they disclosed my crime and the whole nine years, so that makes it really hard._

Several women pointed to the Internet as a potential source of stigmatizing exposure. Daisy illuminated the social consequences of this modern form of media:

_On the Internet, there’s a bunch of articles about me. (Okay.) You can never erase them […] That’s a concern, people Googling your name and the stuff comes up. It can be very embarrassing and awkward. And then […] socially_
people can find out [...] And it’ll go on forever. Even if I [...] have a pardon, then all that stuff is erased, except the damned Internet!

Liz and Kelly searched their names on the Internet and were relieved not to find anything. Regina searched her name to try to find a video she was in as part of a theatre group, “but, it didn’t show up. And my last crime showed up [...] It doesn’t say anything about the good things I did with my art, it’s just all about the negative stuff.” Yet again, this focus on “the negative stuff” reflects the power of the ex-prisoner master status. Understandably, Clarice said that she would rather her niece and nephews ask her about her imprisonment, rather than search the Internet, so that she could explain the reasons behind it.

The Police

Three respondents mentioned interactions in which they were targeted unfairly by police officers and treated harshly because of their criminal records. Their accounts illustrate how police can hinder re-entry by reinforcing former prisoners’ sense of otherness and exclusion from the community, further restricting their freedoms and increasing their chances of reincarceration – as existing research supports (Maidment, 2006, pp.111-114). Cate shared an episode that occurred only six days after she left prison:

I had a very scary moment. When I got out, I didn’t have a disability bus pass. (Okay.) But I had the paperwork that it was paid for, which I’m allowed to show as a legal fare. (Alright.) But, I’m on a SkyTrain going somewhere, not a SkyTrain officer, two cops are doing fare checks. (Okay.) And I hand them my fare, and they’re like, “that’s not,” and they’re like “you can’t be on here.” They dragged me, they told me, get off the train at Columbia, they wouldn’t give me a word edgewise [...] Literally, I thought they were gonna arrest me! [...] And they basically treated me like crap. (Yeah.) Well, because they know you’re an offender, ‘cause they can find out very quickly. I come up in the computer as a federal releasee [...] And if we have contact with the police, we’re generally supposed to declare.

Kelly described a recent event in which she experienced discrimination:

[Me and a friend] were havin’ coffee in the park one night and it was, like, 11 o’clock at night and, of course, the cops pull up. I have to produce my parole papers, my card [...] But the [laughs] police officer calls me out of the car. I get, you know, patted down, the whole works, purse torn apart, you know. It says on my conditions, all male relationships [must be reported]. “Well, does [he] know that you’re on parole?” I’m like, yeah. “Well tonight’s gonna be a good night, he’s gonna find out!” I’m like, really, guy, really? (Wow.) And he asked him, [my
friend is] like, “yeah I know” [...]. It’s ridiculous, just for having coffee in a park [...] It’s embarrassing, you know, ‘cause right away they treat you like [...] you’re doing something wrong, you’re a criminal. They’re ready to put you in handcuffs, throw you in the back of the car and off you go [...] no questions asked. You know, the cop asked me what kind of drugs I was selling [...] He was quite rude, actually [...] I felt bad for [my friend] because he, you know, he felt so helpless, right. And I think the cop was more worried about him than anything, because I was a criminal, right! [laughs ...] That [kind of treatment will] last for the rest of my life. Every time I get stopped, right, my [record] comes up, boom, right away.

Three years after Daisy served her sentence, she continued to be targeted by police:

I’ve been pulled over and [...] they’ll be fine when they’re chatting to me, they go back to their car and then they get to see, of course, I have the record, right. (Yeah.) And then it’s, “get out of the car,” and then they pull out all your glovebox, all the trunk, and then they’re trying to find everything they can to getcha [...] That has happened to me four or five times, and it’s happened fairly recently [...] It does make you angry, because it’s just not fair [...] And I really wasn’t doing anything wrong.

Stigmatization as Partial and Resistible

That respondents were persistently othered as “ex-cons” by people in the community was reflected in some of their interactions with me during our interviews. For example, Joanna seemed to expect that I would have the same perception of her, as one of her first questions was if I was ever “scared” to meet women coming out of prison. Pollack (2009) observes that stigmatization can impact women’s sense of self (p.90). In this study, some participants’ responses implied that a fundamental part of who they were as people related to their criminalization. When I asked Cate to tell me about herself, she said that she was “a special needs offender, with high risk mental [pause] high mental health needs.” In a similar vein, when I asked Jessica about her release conditions, she responded: “Basically, tell people what you are” – that is, a “sex offender.” When I asked Kelly to tell me about herself, she clarified: “Like, about my crime?”

Conversely, other aspects of our interviews challenge the totality of negative labelling and indicate women’s resistance to it. Each of the seven respondents who did not suggest that our interview take place in a private residence said that it was a non-issue to speak in public areas (e.g., coffee shops) about their prison and post-release

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96 Cate’s first instinct to refer to “risk” is revealing, as it reflects the “hybridizations of risk/need in penalty” (Hannah-Moffat, 2005).
experiences. Moreover, six of them did not appear to conceal their ex-prisoner status by, for example, speaking quietly or looking around to see who was overhearing our conversation. Instead, they spoke very openly about their experiences in the midst of other people. Another interesting finding is that six of the eleven respondents chose to use their real names in this project, and even offered their last names. These things would likely not have occurred if stigmatization were omnipresent and entirely debilitating.

OneSky shared a number of experiences that suggest stigmatization does not always characterize formerly incarcerated women’s interactions with members of the community:

I had to go to the walk-in clinic. The doctor: “Well, who’s your last doctor?” Well [...] And I just said, I just got out of jail, after 16 years [...] And, “holy shit, 16 years?!” [...] And I, I’m short on these tablets [...] and I need your help. Can you help me? “Yeah, okay.” That was fine, I got through that one. Went to the bank. The guy asked me some questions about my last bank account and once again [...] I’ve been in jail for 16 years [...] there’s no bank account. I don’t even know what I’m doing [...] Can you help me? “Oh, sure.” Was very polite [...] And at the phone place. Like, I don’t know how to work any of this, I just got out of jail. And, “oh, oh yeah” [...] So, I got warned by some other prisoners about revealing too much information. But I thought, well, you can’t be dishonest either [...] I’m not gonna be punished by these people for telling them I just got out of jail and I feel stunned. And, I’ll just tell them the truth and see what happens. And nothing bad happened [...] I thought, oh, they didn’t, they didn’t have a funny attitude with me. They were more than willing to help me [...] But, that was only three things.

Several respondents employed strategies to avoid or lessen the chances of being stigmatized and discriminated against. Patrice, Regina, and Kelly did not return to their hometowns, in part, to avoid discrimination and harassment by locals and/or police. Kelly pointed out the benefit of moving to a place where she was

[...] not known. Yeah, can actually get a fresh start without being, yeah, discriminated against, right, or somebody knowing [...] If somebody knew me, they would go, “oh, she just got out of jail,” you know.

Some women were careful to censor what they said or wrote so as to avoid negative reactions from others. Clarice, for example, refrained from speaking freely about her

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97 My interview with Regina occurred in a private home, as per her suggestion, but she was willing to speak with me in a public location.

98 One respondent did speak quietly and, at one point, switched to an entirely different topic when someone approached us.
prison experiences in most public spaces and with most people. Cate answered people’s questions about the fracture in her life vaguely. Daisy had to be cautious with the use of her real name:

I would never write a fundraising letter in my own name because, you know, people can, if they wanna check on you, they’re gonna find stuff. And then [...] you’re letting your organization down. So, I have to be very careful.

Although some respondents indicated that their sense of self was threatened by the pains of imprisonment and release, many also resisted, to an extent, the internalization of others’ negative judgements:

I don’t really care what other people think [...] I feel like I’ve paid my price and learnt my lesson. ~ Regina

I don’t care if people know I’m on federal parole. I don’t care. Like, I fucked up in the past and I’m paying for it [...] Try living in my shoes [...] I’m on parole. I am on parole. And, I’m paying for my crimes. I did something bad [...] I’m learning from my mistakes. And, if people can’t deal with that, then they’ve got a problem. That’s their issue, that’s not my problem. ~ Liz

I just gotta brush it off, ‘cause there’s no point in me carrying it [...] I think about what’s my stuff, what do I own, and what’s theirs, right. (Yeah.) And try not to get caught up on their stuff. ‘Cause most of the time is not even my stuff, it’s their stuff that I’m getting caught up in [...] And that can take me [...] back out and using [drugs].99 And, you know, it’s not worth it today, I have too much to lose. ~ Jessica

A number of respondents conveyed a positive self-identity after prison. Liz declared: “I’m good with who I am. It’s taken me a while to get to that, that place. But I am good.” One technique used by some former prisoners to protect their sense of self as they return to a cruel, retributive, and unforgiving community is to focus on their criminalized actions rather than their person – a strategy that is supported by reintegrative shaming theorists (Braithwaite, 1989):

I don’t think I’m a bad person. I made bad choices in life. ~ Kelly

What I did is not who I am [...] I’m not a bad person. ~ OneSky

I did something wrong but that, that’s not who I am [...] I’m tryin’ to move past that. And, you know, I know that, you know, that was something that I did – that it doesn’t define who I am. ~ Jessica

99 Severance (2004) documents that social stigmatization can produce negative emotions and thereby frustrate drug withdrawal efforts (p.85).
Women can transcend the deviant identity by “changing” themselves in positive ways (Eaton, 1993, pp.97-98; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.61, 73); six participants in the current study said that they did this. Some women credited prison-based programs and resources with fostering such change, while some credited more personal, self-initiated methods of introspection. OneSky, Joanna, and Regina, for example, spoke of developing new spiritual selves in prison that endured upon release.

Respondents also used tactics to overcome a sense of exclusion from the community. Clarice spoke with her partner in a context of shared experience and understanding: “The result was that despite feeling somewhat apart from the community generally speaking, I still felt pretty comfortable in my own skin.” Regina remarked:

*You can really feel isolated [....] But, sometimes you just gotta stand up and put yourself out there. That’s what I did a few times to meet people. (Yeah?) Like, sponsors and stuff. Like, I just say, you know, I just got out and I’m just getting back into society and I’m learning how to live and stuff.*

Cate resisted exclusion and “made my own community when I came out,” much of which was made up of community groups.

Several respondents channelled their stigmatized status into socially effective outlets. Specifically, seven of them spoke of the ways they gave back or hoped to give back to other people in similar situations as themselves, such as those struggling with addictions, youth in crisis, and currently or formerly incarcerated women. Participants thus used their own experiences, which were largely negative, to contribute to positive changes in other people’s lives and society at large. Such efforts, in turn, often contributed to a positive self-regard and a stronger sense of connection to the community, as other studies also document (Eaton, 1993, pp.67-68, 97; P. O’Brien, 2001a, pp.292-293, 2001b, pp.106-110). Joanna, for example, associated “giving back” with “fitting in”:

*I’d like to fit in a lot more. Like, I wanna give back, right. (Okay.) So, and I’m doin’ meals on wheels and the bannock on the run and stuff, but I also wanna help more. Like, my biggest dream is to work with youth [.... or] people in addictions, right, ‘cause I’ve been through all that.*

Patrice asserted: “I wanna help people now.” Like Joanna, she hoped to work with youth to help them cope with some of the struggles she experienced in the past. Jessica shared:
I like to help people [\ldots] You know, like, sometimes when I’m walking down here [on the street], I’ll give out some money here and there [\ldots] It just makes me feel like, you know, there was people that helped me when I was down here, you know, and just kind of returning the favour type deal, right [\ldots] I think you really have to walk a mile in someone’s shoes to kind of know. (Yeah.) You know, have the kindness of your heart to do something for somebody.

Nancy and OneSky said that part of their motivation to participate in this study was the possibility of improving other criminalized women’s lives and the broader society. Nancy also “went back in prisons and told my story [\ldots] I’ve touched many people’s minds and hearts.” Several respondents became committed to formally working in solidarity with other women who were serving or had served prison sentences.

**Community Groups**

In contrast to the fairly difficult relationships with individuals in the community at large, respondents often developed positive and supportive relationships with community groups – a finding that is consistent with previous research (e.g., Cobbina, 2010, pp.221-222). The material and nonmaterial supports provided by such groups can help women address many post-release demands and challenges. As mentioned, respondents used community-based organizations to help with basic sustenance items, IDs, housing, employment, addiction, and to connect with peers. Respondents spoke in more detail about the importance of such groups in their post-release lives.

Kelly commented that women who come out of prison

\[\text{[\ldots] need to build a good support network for themselves, through CSC and separate from CSC, right. (Yeah.) You know, ’cause they need to be able to have that continuous support after CSC. ’Cause, I know a lot of girls, once they’re released on full parole, shit starts happening, right. (Yeah.) And they’re goin’ right back, right.}\]

Cate emphasized that the community-based supports she established were central to her wellbeing after prison: “I’m doing better now [compared to before prison and during prison]. But, that’s probably because I have the right supports for the first time in, like, a decade or longer.” She built her own support network of community groups:

\[\text{I have my community at [my transition house]. I have my community with the Jewish Services I use [\ldots] The bagel club is a Jewish support group. (Oh, cool.) We have an activity on Sunday, community kitchen Monday, Wednesday afternoon is gonna be support group, plus they have a catering company [\ldots] And, it’s just a place to go [\ldots] But I’ve made my community. Like, a lot of us don’t have that.}\]
As illustrated throughout this study, post-release supports provided by CSC are limited. It is therefore not surprising that the supports considered most important by respondents were typically found on their own accord – once again signifying the women’s resourcefulness. Cate described how she helped herself as she transitioned from prison to the outside world:

*When I get out, I don’t trust the CSC to get what I need, ever! [...] So, I found the bagel club, I found [another support], CSC didn’t. [...] When we had a crisis in the [transition] house, CSC had nothing to do with it! I talked to [...] one of the Jewish people I see, I talk to my mental health worker through Jewish Family Services [...] I talked to my supportive citizen program. It’s like, ‘scuse me, CSC wasn’t involved in this at all!*

In addition, faced with the possibility that CSC would not provide a mental health team, Cate connected with “a mental health outreach worker for Jewish Family Services. She gets a few psychiatrists that she could probably fit me into.”

Nancy suffered from a chronic illness and was well-aware that she had to find her own supports in the community: “I just got to get supports, build my own.” For instance, when her halfway house moved locations, she was not offered the assistance of professional movers. So, she contacted an Elder from a community group to help. She also found an organization that provided transportation to and from the hospital for her medical treatments. In addition, the trauma and grief programs run by another group helped Nancy deal with some issues after prison.

Kelly was introduced to AA and NA in prison and parole-mandated treatment but decided to continue with the programs afterwards. She identified them as major sources of support. In fact, she remarked: “I’ve got a lot of support in line right now with NA and sponsor, groups, a home group, everything.” Jessica attended substance abuse meetings in the community and also considered them helpful.

Jessica built a post-release support network that involved numerous community-based groups and programs. She asserted with confidence: “I get whatever I need, and if I don’t, I know where to get it [...] I know where the resources are.” For example, she participated in an employment preparation program and was working toward her Grade 12 education through another organization. She found a community project that assists mothers living with addiction especially helpful:

*They have, like, other moms there, right, that I can meet. And they [...] give you a bit of food, like milk and eggs, every week, and his formula [...] ‘Cause [his
And they have free lunch there. And there is, like, 16 steps and all that kind of stuff. (Oh, okay.) And, there are doctors there if you, your baby gets sick or if you have questions, and you need someone close by and that kinda thing. Like, it’s really supportive.

Jessica also hooked up with a local clinic that provided her child’s medication for free. They offered free counselling services as well, so when “I just need to get shit off my chest, she’s there for me.” In fact, this counsellor helped her begin to address some of the trauma that was related to her addiction and criminalization.\textsuperscript{100}

Several respondents connected with HRIA in prison and said that this group and its sister group, SAS, supported them upon release. Joanna, Regina, Patrice, and Liz sought the assistance of HRIA to pay for their ID documents. For OneSky, HRIA and SAS were sources of moral and concrete support. For example, HRIA assisted her and Regina with some transportation costs. Acting in my capacity as an HRIA member, I gave Regina a ride from prison the day she was released, and she expressed how important this was:

\textit{It felt really good when you picked me up because I felt like, you know [...] I had no positive support to pick me up or nothing [...] Someone has enough time to pick you up and take you around and take you out to eat, like, you know, you felt appreciated and you felt loved. I felt loved, you know. (Mmm.) Like, cared for. Like, I felt something with somebody and they’re there to show me, like, you are appreciated, you know.}

Continuing the aforementioned theme of “giving back,” OneSky, Regina, Daisy, and Clarice joined HRIA and/or SAS so that they could use their prison experiences to assist similarly situated women. In this way, they embraced their ex-prisoner label and employed it as a positive self-identity and means of social effectiveness. Clarice stated:

\textit{This solidarity work started in prison, where we needed each other to make it through. This is just a continuation of that [...] So, I mean, being in prison is obviously, you know, clearly what inspired me to, you know, join in this work. I gained a greater understanding of the sector in prison and realized that it’s so worthwhile [...] and, just, no one knows about them [...] So, of course I enjoy doing this work and I feel that I’m doing something meaningful.}

\textsuperscript{100} Jessica also mentioned her relationship with, not a community group, but a State agency, the MCFD. As discussed, this agency represented a further form of transinstitutionalization, gendered surveillance, and control in her life and threatened her family’s relationship. Nonetheless, she took advantage of the benefits it offered – benefits that were in short supply through other means: “I use them for the good.” For instance, the MCFD paid for respite care so she could participate in support groups. She also liked her new apartment, which was only available to people involved with the MCFD.
After speaking with Daisy about the supports that she had during and after prison, she explained why she worked with other FSW: “I know that I’m completely the exception. And so, that’s why I work with [women in prison …] Because I feel that they need all the support they can get.” OneSky also found meaning in this work. Her account elucidates how, sometimes, “the prison experience becomes a resource to be drawn on” (Eaton, 1993, p.67):

Because I just had a horrible 16-year experience, I could use what I have learned to possibly help, or give knowledge of how to help, those I left behind [....] There may be something we can do for somebody that would help them, actually help them, and for that, I think that would really be a great thing [....] It’s just small ways to give back. And for now, that’s what keeps me going.

Regina explained how she used her background to help other women and, in return, help herself through working with SAS and HRIA:

It helps me give a voice to what I’ve been through for future women that are coming in the system [....] I just wanna be a part of something that helps people, that helps women move forward in a good way [....] It makes you feel good because you’re giving yourself, you know, and it makes me feel as though, oh, I’m not so selfish. ‘Cause, like, I wouldn’t’ve volunteered before [....] But, like, now it’s something I believe in […] and it feels good to be part of a cause you believe in, you know. (Yeah.) It makes me feel like I belong and, like, that I’m a asset to the group. So, it gives me a lot of self-value and, like, self-belief.

These accounts illustrate some of the ways that involvement with community-based groups can challenge social stigmatization and exclusion and foster a sense of inclusion and wellbeing, as others also conclude (Fortune et al., 2010; Malin, 2007; Pollack, 2009).

**Problems with Community-Based Supports**

Despite the above, problems with community-based supports were apparent from the respondents’ accounts. Several women highlighted consequences of having too few community services. Such shortages are documented elsewhere, and they reflect the current neoliberal-neoconservative climate (Maidment, 2006; Pate, 2005, 2011; Pollack, 2008). Kelly could not access a substance abuse treatment program while she waited for parole-mandated treatment due to strict eligibility restrictions; she subsequently relapsed. Cate was discriminated against and excluded from a community rehabilitative program because of her criminal record. Although Nancy was thankful to have found an organization that provided transportation to some of her medical
appointments, she commented that “the drivers were very rude and arrogant” and often late to pick her up – treatment that might have reflected their knowledge of her ex-prisoner status.

Some respondents talked about the lack of community-based supports designed specifically for women. As mentioned, OneSky and Regina pointed out gendered discrepancies in the provision of vocational resources, and Jessica experienced exclusion by support groups because of her childcare responsibilities. OneSky concluded that men “got a lot more support and a lot more help […] in every area.”

The common challenges of re-entry, described throughout this thesis, indicate that most women lack assistance even with basic necessities. Many respondents further observed the overall paucity of supports specifically for women who have served prison sentences, as past studies confirm (e.g., AGC, 2003, ss.4.97-4.99):

People see the struggle [...] but they don’t get the support they need. ~ Cate

I think there should be a lot more support for us getting out. ~ Joanna

A lot of [what we need] is just more supports, right. ~ Jessica

The government should fund groups like [HRIA and SAS] with so much amount of money per year for, to help people get clothes or for transportation or whatever, you know, like, get resources […] Like, you guys should have support so you can support more people with more stuff […] Which I think would really help a lot women coming out of jail. ~ Regina

In general, I see a huge lack of support […] That scares me, for all of us […] You put me all alone into, you know, “there you go, figure it out!” Holy fuck! That, that’s a huge challenge here. I’m gonna have to fuckin’ step up and really help myself. ~ OneSky

Participants’ accounts demonstrate that former prisoners indeed help themselves, and often their peers. Liz quoted the classic song performed by Billie Holiday when I asked what her major sources of support were: “Me, myself, and I” (Roberts & Kaufman, 1937).

This chapter detailed themes that emerged from respondents’ accounts concerning basic needs of life after prison. Issues of central importance related to health, finances, employment, education, housing, and interpersonal relationships. Layte, Maître, and Whelan (2010) write that
[...] three key processes promote social integration at the individual level: firstly, attachment to or access to the labour market; secondly, the provision of basic essentials in terms of income and the ability to lead a lifestyle acceptable to the majority of people within a country; and thirdly, social support and membership of a family unity or small group of some form. (p.59)

It goes without saying that prisoners’ re-entry efforts are critically obstructed when their basic needs for concrete resources and supportive relationships are not satisfactorily met. As the following chapter details, re-entry efforts can also be undermined by localized supervision programs.
CHAPTER 5. Serving Time in the Community

In this chapter, I explore respondents’ experiences of serving time in the community. All of the women were released from prison with conditions, with nine on some type of conditional release at the time of our interviews. Garland (2001) writes: “For many of these parolees and ex-convicts, the ‘community’ into which they are released is actually a closely monitored terrain, a supervised space, lacking much of the liberty that one associates with ‘normal life’” (p.178). Indeed, a number of participants described the period of localized release as the extension of institutional confinement and control into their lives on the outside:

“It almost felt like you were in jail. You know, you still have these, you know, kind of like walls that were still there. ~ Jessica

It’s not really being free, it’s not in prison. We’re in another place now […] I have to be careful. I have my limits, I have my parameters. ~ OneSky

Even when you’re out, you’re not free, ‘cause everything you do, you have to be so careful with, right. ~ Cate

Overall, respondents in this study highlighted how penal oversight can frustrate re-entry in various ways but also provide some benefits.

5.1 Transition Housing

Seven respondents were released with residency conditions to Community Residential Facilities (CRFs) – forms of spatial regulation that are increasingly imposed on FSW who are deemed to have high needs/risks (Bell & Trevethan, 2004; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, pp.545-547). Cate was not released with residency, but likely would not have been permitted by her parole officer to reside anywhere other than a

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101 This includes Regina, who was placed on a recognizance order immediately upon release, at the request of the prison warden. Section 810.2 of the Criminal Code (1985) permits the imposition of a recognizance order (a.k.a. peace bond) on a person who is “fear[ed …] on reasonable grounds [of committing …] a serious personal injury offence.” The order can last 12 months, but may be renewed. It requires that the individual “keep the peace and be of good behaviour […] and to comply with any other reasonable conditions prescribed by the recognizance,” which mirror many of those imposed on parolees. Probation officers are responsible for their supervision in the community. Breach of the recognizance can result in up to two years imprisonment. That this law is, as explicitly stated, based solely on the “fear” of an offence that has not occurred, raises significant concerns about its constitutionality. Regina also raised issue with the unreasonable nature of this law.
specific transition house for women coping with mental illness, trauma, and abuse. Regina was released on her warrant expiry date under a recognizance order to an addiction recovery house for women. Although Cate and Regina’s transition housing was not technically mandated as part of their release and the facilities were not as tightly allied with CSC as formal CRFs are, their experiences are included in this discussion. The following sections review the problems with transition housing that hindered respondents’ re-entry, as well as the benefits that some women derived from these living arrangements.

5.1.1 Living Conditions

In light of the poverty to which most formerly incarcerated women return, it is not surprising that some parolees consider residency conditions beneficial because they ensure the provision of various basic necessities (P. O’Brien, 2001a, p.289). This was reflected by several respondents:

It’s the free rent that gets me. ~ Patrice

I got free rent, free food, you know. So, it’s not that bad. ~ Kelly

You got your own room, you know, it was doable [...]. You got fed. ~ Jessica

As noted, Regina and Cate would have faced homelessness if it were not for transition housing.102

Even though some women appreciated that they had a place to sleep and eat after prison, a number also pointed out poor living conditions in transition houses, especially CRFs. Such conditions may reflect the neoliberal offloading of State responsibilities onto under-resourced local agencies, as Maidment (2006) suggests. It goes without saying that to be forced to live in a poor-quality physical environment does not benefit one’s wellbeing. For women coming out of prison, and who are often struggling with numerous other issues, poor living conditions may add more stress to an already stressful period.

Kelly deplored the conditions at one halfway house:

I think they could provide a lot more for us women, you know. Like, the beds in there are, like, so old, the springs are comin’ up [...] We’ve asked to have our

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102 OneSky found the programs offered at her halfway house helpful because they allowed her to earn an extra $50 per week.
carpets cleaned, ‘cause they’re so frickin’ gross [...] Our pillows are stained [...] They gave me a comforter that had big burn holes in it [...] The towel, like, they gave me when I first moved into that room was, like, old and raggedy.

The income provided to parolees in CRFs is not intended to cover necessities like pillows and blankets, but Kelly still had to purchase much of her own bedding.

Comack and Lyons (2011) recently report:

While anyone can be at risk of a bed bug infestation [...] reliance on second-hand furniture and clothing, lack of access to affordable, quality housing, and lack of control over the maintenance of rental units make low-income residents vulnerable to infestation. (p.1)

Kelly and Joanna related a recent incident with bed bugs at a halfway house which the staff or CSC did not address in a timely and appropriate manner. For instance, old infested furniture was not disposed of and only one room was cleaned, contrary to a pest inspector’s advice. Kelly added: “Then, when we asked about it, they wouldn’t give us any information [...] I think it’s our right to know – we live there!” Joanna was directly impacted as her room and belongings were infested. As Comack and Lyons (2011) confirm, bed bugs can have exceptionally devastating effects on low-income people’s “daily lives, their social relationships, their identity, and their physical and mental health” (p.2). Joanna had to clean most of the infestation with very little assistance and threw out many of her belongings. When she was moved to another room, she found more bugs. Nancy had a terrible experience with bed bugs at her previous halfway house. In fact, she would “rather sleep outside.” Her bites were so “massive” that she had to go to the hospital, and then went into cardiac arrest from the combination of bite medication and medication she was taking for her illness.

Five respondents spoke of problems with the food provided in transition houses. Some women had to pay for their own food due to its shortage and poor quality. For example, Joanna noticed that staff at the halfway house did not handle raw meat properly and she

 [...] got really sick the last couple times I’ve eaten there. So, I refuse to eat there. Like, I’ll eat dry stuff, that’s about it, right [...] A lot of the girls there, like, they just go out and buy their own stuff, right.

Nancy and OneSky also commented on the poor quality of food and water available in their halfway house, and OneSky, too, got “sick from the food here.” Nancy, OneSky, Kelly, and Regina further mentioned that the staff who shopped for groceries
disregarded their requests and dietary needs and took much of the food for themselves. Regina said that most of the food was gone in the first few days after a shopping trip.

5.1.2 Locations: “Mardi Gras Every Day” (OneSky)

Patricce did not consider the location of her halfway house problematic: “We don’t get a lot of, like, people that trigger me or anything. It’s, like, a small decent area.” On the other hand, three respondents indicated that the locations of their halfway houses created extra problems to deal with after prison. In contrast with Patricce, Kelly did consider the location of the same house to create triggers for drug use:

Another big thing is [... when an organization] moved in downstairs [...] their office is now the main office down there. (Okay.) Which is a lot of triggers, because they deal with a lot of people welfare won’t deal with. They handle welfare cheques [...] So, I mean, we have a lot of [pause] undesirables hanging out there [laughs ....] You know, it, it does make a big difference for some of the women.

This is likely another reflection of under-resourced agencies that, for economic reasons, must combine various programs for a diverse “client” base into one building.

Nancy and OneSky spoke of the area surrounding their halfway house as deteriorated and unsafe, and they were uncomfortable with the concentration of homelessness and drug use. Due to funding issues and NIMBY thinking, many CRFs in Canada are located in similar areas (Maidment, 2006, p.127; Pollack, 2008, p.22). OneSky described the vicinity as “Mardi Gras every day” and Nancy lost sleep from the street noise. OneSky felt unsafe walking outside – a feeling that was probably magnified by the effects of institutionalization. OneSky’s sexual orientation could further intensify such feelings. She mentioned:

I can walk for a distance, but I feel like I need to be really careful. Where I go, what time, you know, if it’s night time [... Because of] people, like running into that drunk guy [...]. I don’t like the area [...]. I’d be more comfortable in the West End ‘cause there’s a lot of gay people there.

These narratives contradict CSC’s (2010c) touted aims of residency requirements. Rather than ease the transition from prison to the community and reduce any risks, such arrangements often hamper re-entry. In fact, these environments may even be framed as creating risks for parolees (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009).
5.1.3 Other Residents

Several respondents identified other former prisoners, many of whom lived in their halfway houses, as major sources of support. Some women, however, also experienced problems with other residents. For example, drug use is fairly common in CRFs (CHRC, 2003, p.55), as observed by Cate and Daisy. Jessica had difficulty coping with addiction in a halfway house because she knew some of her housemates were using drugs. In addition, Jessica had problems with residents who did not pass on telephone messages and created “rumours […] to try to push your buttons to see if you’ll react to them, so you get in trouble, you go back [to prison].” She also had some of her belongings stolen. Regina’s release was in jeopardy when she had an altercation with another resident in her recovery house and the police were called.

Due to the small number of CRFs for women, many facilities accommodate a range of residents (CHRC, 2003, p.55; Gobeil, 2008, para.64; Maidment, 2006, p.143). OneSky found it troublesome to live in a CRF that housed transient homeless women. Nancy spoke of “different conflicts with different clients” in the house, including once when she was verbally assaulted. OneSky raised issue with other people who regularly visited the house: “Sex offenders sweat here and are in our downstairs bathroom. That is fucked!” The high proportion of FSW who have been sexually and/or physically abused by men makes this especially disturbing. Once again, respondents’ accounts refute the PBC’s assumption that such spaces are free of risky people and activities.

5.1.4 Staff

A number of respondents identified employees at residential facilities as post-release supports, consistent with P. O’Brien (2001b, pp.37-39). Kelly said of her residency requirement: “I look at it as a positive thing […] because it’s helping me to keep, you know, stable and I got support and stuff.” Such support was sometimes as minor as providing maps to help her and others like Patriece navigate an unknown territory. Other times, the assistance was more substantial. A staff member at Regina’s recovery house personally drove her to various destinations, which helped her become familiar with the area.

The following is Patriece’s response when I asked if and how halfway house staff assisted her:
They’re just, like, always asking, like, “are you okay? What do you need help with?” [...] They want you to do 15 hours a week of something [...] and they’re like, “we’ll help you find a [...] place to volunteer at” [...] The] employment counsellor [...] she’s helped us lots. Like, she redid my resumé and she’s getting me back into school.

Liz made a similar comment about staff: “They’re always asking me how my day’s going and, and if there’s anything that they can help me with, do I need anything. So, they’re, they’re pretty proactive with me.” Halfway house staff accompanied Jessica to the hospital when she became ill. Cate considered the employees at her transition house very supportive:

I have my own support staff where I live [...] We have a [Registered Practical Nurse] in the house, and there’s a psych nurse on staff there five days a week. We have an advocate for anything from taxes to anything like that. She got me a clothing allowance [...] We have the director who [...] works on our housing and stuff.

Regina found one staff member at her recovery house particularly helpful:

I was really depressed a couple days ago and I reached out for help [...] She helped me in that way. Like to, just someone to talk to, you know [...] ‘Cause she was in the [prison] system, too, and she understands [...] I can relate to her. Whereas, like, other staff, I can’t really relate to. And they can’t relate to me ‘cause they don’t understand my mentality, my frame of mind.

This individual’s ability to assist Regina had much to do with her own imprisonment. They had a shared understanding that is often missing, especially in the so-called “support” provided through CSC. Patrice suggested that staff at halfway houses could perform their support role better if they had lived experience:

I think it definitely would benefit, like, the women. Especially, like, their jobs are basically to help us, right. So, like, I think the more they know about the experiences that we’ve had, then I think they’d be able to help us more, right, so, and understand where we’re coming from and what we really need help with, right.

Research confirms that “most services that are successful in helping women reintegrate into the community have hired [...] women who have been similarly situated” (Richie, 2001, p.385).

Some women worried about the lack of support and resources offered by halfway house staff. Joanna remarked: “Halfway houses, they have no support. They don’t, like,
help you [....] So, it’s nerve-racking.” For example, she received no assistance with locating community programs. OneSky commented:

Who’s there to help me? Do you think anybody at that halfway house is helping me do anything? Nobody. Nothing [....] Halfway houses aren’t built, like, homecare workers and, oh, even somebody to drive [....] Yeah, I panic about the lack of support.

Nancy said of the halfway house from which she recently moved: “I don’t know what the support workers do.” She found no assistance navigating the community and travelling to appointments, meetings, and programs. She also stated that staff offered no support beyond a moving truck when they had to relocate houses, which was very difficult because of her fragile health. Such inadequate support is a frequent concern among formerly incarcerated women, and it may reflect these agencies’ limited resources (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.36; Pollack, 2008, p.25).

As Pollack (2008, p.22) also finds in her research, several respondents in the present study discussed negative interactions with transition house staff. Joanna explained how employees treated her poorly and assumed the worst of her during the bed bugs infestation:

I says, well, I need to come upstairs and sleep, and they refused! They said I had to stay in that room. So, I phone my parole officer and I said, that’s it, I’ve had enough, send me back [to prison] or move me, right. (Wow.) So, they landed up movin’ me to [a different halfway house]. I landed up takin’ all my stuff and getting it done. They paid for my laundry, but all my other stuff, I landed up throwin’ a lot of stuff out [....] But, just the treatment, it wasn’t good, right. (Mmm.) So, it was very unprofessional. And especially coming out into the world, right. And I was at the hospital the night before because of my tailbone [injury], so they said that I brought the bed bugs [laughs]. (Oh my god!) So in my report, it says that I brought them in, right. And then I got to [the other halfway house], then I got bit on the lip [by a spider] and then they said I was on drugs! [....] Because I had the bites down [the side of my face and ....] a spider bite [on my lip], right. So it looked like sores [....] So they sent me for a urinalysis test, it came back clean.

The automatic assumption that Joanna was on drugs reflects pessimistic risk thinking as well as the power of the ex-prisoner master status.

Joanna said that her relationships with staff became “personal and they were doin’ up all these different reports and tryin’ to get me on different things,” such as falsely accusing her of violating parole conditions. OneSky shared a recent incident that she had with a “vindictive guard” at her halfway house who made a false accusation that she
was behaving violently. Nancy moved to a different halfway house because of the problems staff were creating for her. She spoke of several instances when staff were vindictive and disrespectful. For example, they wrote in her report that she was showing a “deterioration of attitude and health,” which she explained was related to her illness and the negative house environment. Staff also reported that she was abusing pain medication – another claim that was “detrimental to my wellbeing and freedom.” Several other respondents expressed concern about what was written in their “reports,” “records,” and “documents” because of the potentially significant repercussions in terms of their parole; Pollack (2008, pp.28-29) makes a similar finding. Moreover, Joanna perceived such reports as privileging professional discourses above her own perspective – as far as she knew, the authors “only put their side in.”

Regina labelled staff at her recovery house “control freaks” and described their actions as akin to strict parents. On one occasion, a staff member confiscated her blanket because she did not make her bed in the morning. When I asked how this made her feel, she replied, “belittled. Just really childish and angry.” OneSky said that a staff member at her halfway house acted as though she was a “guard” – a revealing word choice – and continually monitored residents. In fact, this individual retriggered the defensiveness and anger she felt in prison. OneSky gave another example of the control issues at the house:

*We can’t access the Internet anymore. There are major control issues here. It’s more like kindergarten. One of the guards here told on someone for looking up something they don’t approve of. I need the Internet to learn stuff, so I’m so fucking mad about that.*

Kelly’s halfway house had only “two regular staff members. Other than that, they’re all relief workers.” This understaffing and staffing inconsistency created problems, as she realized when they called her place of employment because they were unaware of her curfew. Kelly discussed the risk that this posed to her re-entry:

*I mean, either they’re not training their relief staff properly, somewhere there’s a communication breakdown that coulda ended me in jail [....] And then when I got back there, she was as rude as can be [.....] You know, how professional is that? [....] So, hopefully it doesn’t happen again, but you never know.*

Kelly’s sense of powerlessness in avoiding such risks to her release is common among parolees (Opsal, 2009). OneSky recounted a similar incident when an employee’s error could have jeopardized her parole:
I got called from a staff while visiting in Langley asking me if I was coming home. She thought she heard me say at my 6:30 check-in that I was on my way home. I never said anything like that. I said I am in Langley now, location change [...]. When I got back, I asked her why she did that and she thought I was being rude.

Some respondents spoke of favouritism on the part of halfway house staff. When Jessica mentioned the difficulty of living with other women who were using drugs, she added:

It’s favouritism, too, you know, because, like, they got away with it. They didn’t get called in, they didn’t get in trouble, they didn’t get piss tested [...] Some people didn’t do anything and they got in trouble.

Kelly observed staff “picking on” her friend by waking her up in the early mornings to find work, even though they did not do the same with other residents. Kelly also perceived favouritism when she was refused permission to move to second-stage housing on a different floor of the house, while other women in less favourable circumstances were allowed. She was bothered by this decision, since the move would have provided slightly more living space and independence, been rent free, and helped her gradually transition to the outside world. She asserted:

If they don’t help me slowly reintegrate now, I mean, they’re gonna kick me out in March 2012. I mean, is that really helping me? No. All of a sudden, wham, okay, you’re booted out. Then what, right? (Yeah.) I think they need to give me that little bit of a push, right.

Kelly highlighted problems associated with the lack of confidentiality between residents and staff:

You have to be careful with what you say. And, I, I’ve been caught a couple times already [...] unaware that, you know, because I’ve talked to them about it, my parole officer comes to do the visit here and we’re in the room with the other staff, and they bring it up [...] Or they write it in their reports. You know, it’s like, wow, okay, maybe I shouldn’t of said that then. (Yeah.) Which, you know, there’s that confidentiality, safety that we don’t have, right. (Yeah, exactly.) And yet they want us to talk to them, right.

Kelly provided one instance when she told halfway house staff that she was having coffee with a male friend and they made her report it to her parole officer as a “relationship”:

I mean, it was a date for coffee, it wasn’t a relationship. But, I had to disclose it to [my parole officer ....] I was fuckin’ pissed right off! [laughs ....] It makes us not
want to be truthful to them, right [...] I don’t think that’s fair, right, for them to report that, ‘cause I’m goin’ to have coffee with some guy.

As future sections detail, such scrutiny of returning women’s interpersonal associations is prevalent.

The lack of confidentiality that Kelly mentioned stems from the alliance between halfway house staff and parole officers, who work together to monitor women on parole. As observed by OneSky: “[Halfway house staff] document everything [...] and all the records are sent to my PO.” Many of the narratives reported above illuminate how this alliance can obstruct trusting and supportive relationships between women and CRF employees. As other scholars argue, the penal risk management paradigm taints women’s relationships with community supervisors in fundamental ways (Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2008, 2009).

5.1.5 Rules and Surveillance Techniques

Consequences of the alliance between the penal system and local organizations that operate CRFs were made apparent by several respondents. One way in which transition houses attempt to manage risks and provide structure is to enforce various rules. Similar to past research (e.g., Gobeil, 2008, paras.5,33; Shaw, 1991), respondents in this study commented on the overly-restrictive, unreasonable, and infantilizing nature of many such rules. In fact, a sense of infantilization pervaded a number of participants’ experiences while on localized release.

Nancy raised issue with the rule that residents ask permission to access locked kitchen cupboards: “I feel degraded and embarrassed to beg them to open the cupboard so I can get a cracker [...] I feel like a dog begging for a treat.” Responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning, enforced in some CRFs, also add to the competing demands faced by women as they return to society. As noted, Regina had to tidy her room every morning, or else lose the “privilege” of a comforter. She also had to wake up at a specific time to complete her chores and participate in devotion. Kelly commented:

Being home for dinner every day [...] We’re grownups, right. Like, if we don’t wanna eat, we don’t, you know. I cooked the other day and there was only me [laughs]. And I had to go to work right away [...] You have to cook, you have to do chores, you know, it’s ridiculous.
Joanna also explained how the requirement to cook dinner added to the demands of re-entry and hindered community and familial reintegration. You gotta cook dinner at [the halfway house]. So, like, if you’re not there, like, if you’re working and you got your own home, then you gotta go back, cook dinner. You gotta be [at the house] for that half hour. (Yeah.) It doesn’t make sense [...] especially if you’re not eating, right.

A number of respondents experienced problems with having to remain inside the facility during the night. Kelly pointed out that a curfew “limits what we can do.” For example, she could not attend various events that occurred later in the evening. Joanna considered her curfew “annoying” because it made other obligations, such as childcare and housework, difficult to fulfill. Eaton (1993) writes that, for some, “a structured environment […] is too reminiscent of the prison” (p.117). Liz touched upon this when she raised issue with the strict rule enforced by CRFs that parolees remain in the building for the first 48 hours after release:

I think that’s part of the reason why I bolted [...] the first two times when I got released. I didn’t wanna have to stay inside and, and be on restriction for any 48 hours or whatever. I wanted to go out and go shopping and do what I had to do and, you know, just get out there. And, like, “no, you have to stay in 48 hours.” It’s like, ‘scuse me? I was just in for, like, a year, or two years, or however long I was in, and you’re telling me I have to stay in here?!

Another way in which CRFs attempt to spatially regulate returning prisoners is through the requirement to report specific destinations when leaving the house and when changing locations in the community. These rules were troublesome for a number of respondents. Sometimes, women did not know the exact locations they were going and wanted to have freedom of movement in the community. Actually, respondents revealed that this rule sometimes encouraged violations due to its restrictiveness. Liz and Kelly employed the same strategy: jot down the local shopping centre and make trips around the area.

Several respondents explained how the “location change” requirement was needlessly burdensome, infantilizing, and a hindrance to re-entry:

If I go to 7/11, change my mind and wanna go back, I need to location change [...] I’m used to it now. At first, it was kind of an annoyance, right [...] You know, I mean, it’s kind of childish. ~ Kelly

103 P. O’Brien (2001b) reports similar barriers to familial reconnection created by halfway house rules (p.36).
Oh yeah, [we] are in New West. Now we’re at Tim Horton’s [...] and we’re going to London Drugs across the street. Oh, we’re at Blockbusters [...] Now we’re gonna hit the SkyTrain and come home. Ooh. (Wow.) Fuck, it’s like telling the mother [...] It’s like being in the [prison] yard. Oh, I’m going down to building B. Oh, no, I’m in the gym now. ~ OneSky

Every time you change your location, you have to call in [...] If I don’t know where I’m going, I have to sit down and I have to think about, okay, where am I gonna go now? [...] It’s like, I’m between this block and this block, on this side of the street [...] It is so annoying. And if you don’t have a cell phone? [...] It does make it hard to get out and around, ‘cause it’s like, I dunno, it’s frustrating. ~ Liz

In addition to location changes, when Nancy, Joanna, and OneSky left their halfway house for any reason, they were required to record their clothing and the names of people they were with, plus call CRF staff every four hours. I asked Joanna what she thought and felt about these rules: “Belittled [...] I think it’s just a control thing.” OneSky described this degree of control as akin to prison: “They document everything – just like jail!” She also conveyed an understandable sense of paranoia about making any human error and unintentionally breaking one of these rules, since her parole was at stake.

Several respondents shared distressing ways that staff intruded into their daily private lives through other surveillance techniques. Personal relationships were sometimes monitored. Joanna said that halfway house employees often investigate women’s associations by asking questions about them. CRF staff told other residents not to call Nancy “mama,” which she perceived to be an attack on her supportive peer relationships. An employee at Regina’s recovery house told her to stop all contact with women in prison – a common technique used to govern returning prisoners (Pollack, 2009, pp.89-93). Regina, however, considered such relationships to be supportive and therefore ignored this staff member’s piece of advice.

Regina described various techniques of control used by workers at her transition house. For example, they regularly questioned her whereabouts and new belongings, and sometimes “snoop[ed]” through her things. Halfway house employees called OneSky’s cellphone when she was away from the house “because they are nosey.” When Nancy would return to the house, staff members often looked into her eyes, smelled her for signs of drug use, and asked, “where have you been?” and “who were you with?” When she got new belongings, they asked, “where did you get that?” When she got rid of belongings, they assumed that she was suicidal and intervened in her life to a greater extent. When she dyed her hair, “they assume I’m trying to change my
appearance.” Nancy concluded: “You’re on high suspicion always […] Constantly questioned, checked on, peeped on. Observation to the max.” It is plain to see how such risk thinking and practices can reinforce women’s sense of exclusion from the community (Pollack, 2009, pp.88-89).

Although many respondents perceived and experienced halfway house rules as problematic, others considered some rules and staff practices helpful. Jessica commented:

*The staff were awesome […] They would get me up. Like, some days I’d just wanna sleep ‘cause I was just, you know, didn’t wanna deal with whatever. So they’d get me up and get my meds and, you know, “get up and eat,” that kind of thing. Kind of encourage you.*

Liz considered the rule to be home for dinner “good” because “it’s probably the only time I’m actually eating.” In sharp contrast with other women, Patrice did not find the operation of the halfway house unnecessarily restrictive or invasive whatsoever:

*You just have to tell them, like, where you’re going so they can write it down. And then you just gotta sign out, right, and what time you left and where you’re going. And then when you get back you just have to sign in and what time you got back at, right […] It’s pretty open, right […] As long as you, like, listen to, like, the rules. Like, do your chores and […] when it’s your day to cook or whatever, you’re on kitchen duty […] So, it’s pretty good. (Do you find they’re, like, up in your business and stuff like that?) Oh, definitely not […] If we don’t wanna talk about something in front of staff, we just go into the back room anyway, right. But they’re never on us, like, 20 questions about, like, what we’re doing that day or exactly where we went to.*

Jessica did not have significant problems dealing with halfway house rules either:

*Like, as long as you’re, like, phonin’ them so they know what’s goin’ on, it’s okay. (Okay.) And just to go in there and, like, expect there to be no repercussions, like not telling them where you are, not telling them what happened, why you’re late or whatever. I’ve always grown up around rules. I’m pretty good with rules.*

5.1.6 Differences Between Houses: “It’s Just a Totally Different Environment” (Cate)

In 1991, Shaw reported that living conditions and rules vary greatly between halfway houses (pp.9-11). Participants in the current study also spoke of differences between transition houses in terms of the degree to which they hindered or helped their re-entry. Four respondents had been in different transition houses and discussed the ways in which they were operated. Nancy recently moved to another CRF. It had been
only 11 days but she applauded the staff for offering support that was non-existent in her former house. For example, they already provided transportation to and from medical appointments and helped her locate community services in her new area of residence.

Joanna mentioned some differences in terms of control between two halfway houses for women:

[At one halfway house], they’re all over you. Like, you gotta be home for dinner, right. You gotta do your chores [...] Whereas [at another one], I like it, they’re pretty laid back, right [... The other house staff are] right in your face. They wanna know [...] anything and everything, right. And the staff wanna meet [the people you are with ...], they wanna monitor it and, yeah. So, they’re right up in your business.

OneSky stressed that, although there were definite problems with the halfway house she was sent to, it was better than the alternative:

My experience with [another halfway house ...] on my work release was that they were almost worse than the guards [in prison ....] It’s very laid back over here. (Oh, is it?) You don’t have to be home at five o’clock for dinner [...] This once at [another halfway house], we couldn’t even sit and watch TV by ourselves! But, I have a TV in my room here [...] And I have my own phone. I feel like I can be private in my own room. So, it’s a lot more laid back and it’s a lot more comfortable for me [...] You don’t have those people breathing down your throat like at [another halfway house]. So, yeah, I keep reminding myself: could be worse!

Cate’s transition house was not closely connected with CSC in the ways that CRFs are.\textsuperscript{104} For instance, it did not reserve a specific number of spaces for returning prisoners; she was the only FSW who lived there. The relative separation of Cate’s transition house from the penal system is probably a major factor in her dramatically different experiences. Her residency experiences actually overlap to a great extent with the discussion on community group supports. As noted, most halfway houses do not address women’s specific needs, largely because their small “client” base makes specialized resources too costly. Unlike Cate’s past experiences in CRFs, her present transition house met her mental health needs because that was what it was designed to do. She had regular access to support staff that assisted with things like health care, housing, clothing, and taxes. She described some of the ways that her housing arrangement helped and compared with her experiences elsewhere:

\textsuperscript{104} Cate’s transition house was operated by a non-profit organization and funded by Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and BC Housing.
I’ve been at [a halfway house] and it just doesn’t work. It’s not the right environment. (How come?) ‘Cause there’s no mental health! Even CSC said, if you send her to [the halfway house], she’ll be back. [The place I am in now] is the proper housing for me. I have my own support staff. It’s more of a family environment than anything. Everybody there, we all have needs, they’re all different needs, but we all have the same history. We all have mental health and trauma and abuse, right. I’m lucky that I’m here. There’s a lot of people I know that, they’ve been at [other halfway houses], they keep going in and out ‘cause it’s not the right place. We all take care of each other here.105

Cate also observed varying degrees of control in different facilities, and indicated less of a role played by the risk management paradigm in her current transition house:

When I’m at [the halfway house], like, if I come here and see you, and then I wanna go somewhere else, I have to phone them. (Right.) But [at the place I am in now ...] I can tell [staff] when I’m going out, I don’t have to tell [them] when I’m coming back or exactly where I’m going [...] I technically don’t have a curfew [...] I mean, we can come and go [...] Some places, they don’t hurt you when you make a mistake, they just help us learn from it. CSC brings out the map when that happens. It’s like, “you were here, you’re not supposed to be here, we want you here, but we don’t want you there.” [...] It’s just a totally different environment.

5.2 Competing Demands

Several respondents stressed how overwhelming and difficult it was to manage the numerous, often competing demands of conditional release and life on the outside – a finding that much research supports (e.g., Cobbina, 2010, pp.225-226; Richie, 2001, pp.380-381). Demands commonly discussed by participants include: reporting to supervisory officers, psychologists, halfway house staff, and sometimes police; attending mandatory programs; abiding by transition house rules; as well as fulfilling regular requirements of re-entry, such as finding and maintaining paid work. OneSky recognized that it would take time to figure out how to juggle all of the responsibilities expected of her, especially given her disorientation after serving a 16-year sentence. When speaking about a possible job opportunity through a friend, she replied:

It’s a nice suggestion, but not right now. I don’t need to be that busy yet. I have to figure out the getting to the PO thing. I have to figure out the psychologist. Who needs me where and when and in what form [...] ‘Cause I know, I’m fuckin’ panicking thinking about, oh my god, you know, all, all, all this stuff [...] The

105 This passage is abbreviated for readability.
biggest problem that I have now is [...] don’t pull me in too many places. I need to do just a couple of things and I need to do them well – until I’m comfortable.

Joanna explained in more detail how her residency condition hindered her ability to reconnect with her children:

Just bein’ able to be at home, right, with my kids [...] it gets hard, right. And that’s why I fight for my fives and twos, right. Like, I’m never at [the halfway house], right. I wake up at seven [...] I’m home by 8:30, right. I’m back at [the halfway house] by 11:30, right. I’m only there to sleep, right. (Yeah.) So, and the [parole] board doesn’t see it, the parole officer doesn’t see it. They think that it’s gonna be a burden to go home, when I can do 10 times better at home.

Once again, Joanna’s account illustrates how the imposition of parole conditions can have gendered implications. Her difficulties raise the question of whether parole board members are fulfilling their requirement, as set forth in the NPB Policy Manual (PBC, 2011b), to “be cognizant of and sensitive to the needs and circumstances of […] female offenders […] when contemplating imposing conditions” (s.7.1.6). Some parolees’ own homes are constructed by the PBC as criminogenic and too unregulated for those deemed as high needs/risks (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.547). As Joanna pointed out, penal professionals “see” things differently, and their perspective reigns supreme.

Cate was deemed by CSC and the PBC to have mental health needs that necessitated control in the community, and this added to the demands required of her. She had to juggle obligatory appointments with her parole officer, psychologist, psychiatrist, and psychiatric nurse, as well as mandated programs and support programs that she attended on her own accord. She saw no benefit in the mandated appointments with various help/control professionals, especially since she was “totally stable” and surrounded by community-based supports of her own making. Nonetheless, she was

[...] on the highest reporting conditions. I have more appointments than I need. I need a social planner some days to figure out who fits where. It’s like, why do I have to do all this? It’s only for another couple months. Why can’t I just see my PO once a week and that be the end of it? I want my life back, thank you.108

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106 “Fives and twos” is a parole arrangement where a parolee can live at home for five nights during the week and return to the halfway house for two nights.

107 The PBC was formerly titled the National Parole Board (NPB).

108 This passage is abbreviated for readability.
The prioritization of control over support in the imposition and enforcement of parole conditions, as documented by Opsal (2009), is highlighted by Cate’s experience. Her account also reveals how women’s needs for support are transformed into risk factors for control under the dominant penal framework, and how this can lead to “condition overload” (Mullany, 2002, p.173).¹⁰⁹

The excessive amount of cognitive-behavioural programming that targets women’s “deficient” thinking processes in prison is reproduced in the community. For several respondents, compulsory programs created extra challenges to manage. Kelly had to wait several months to access a mandated treatment program, which meant that she could not “move forward” and secure employment in the meantime. This sense of stagnation combined with a lack of other supports contributed to her relapse. After treatment, she continued to find it difficult to move forward with her life: “It’s hard to set any goals ‘cause I have to work around CSC still, right.” She highlighted further the control over support function of program conditions:

> My parole officer is concerned that I still need self-monitoring. She wanted me to do the program again! I’m like, really?! If I haven’t learned it, like, the last three times, you think I haven’t got it yet or what? So, now I have to go Tuesday for the program for 10 minutes, check-in and leave. And then, you know, I have to go to work right after, right. It’s a waste of my time, really […] I’m already controlled by a halfway house. You know where I am all the time. I see the psychologist at least once a week. Why do I have to do this program again?

Joanna could not work for a long period of time after release because of the excessive programs she was ordered to take. Like Kelly, her parole officer was “tryin’ to stick me in programs that I’ve already done, already mastered, right.” OneSky found the requirement that she partake in a self-management program unhelpful and framed it as yet another condition that she had to fulfill to remain out of prison. Liz, too, spoke unfavourably about the programs that she was required to attend on parole:

> I don’t even wanna go to meetings now. I have to do three meetings a week, but I’m not going to meetings after warrant [expiry date ….] They just got all these things of, of what they want me to do and it’s just so frustrating, right, like, programming and stuff like that.

It is not surprising that parole-mandated programs – and parole conditions more generally – are often inconsistent or in conflict with women’s lives: They reflect the penal

¹⁰⁹ PBC members regularly interpret parolees’ mental health needs as risks of reoffending, especially violent reoffending (Hannah-Moffat, 2004, p.377).
system’s interpretations of prisoners’ experiences and rest upon flawed assessment tools (Pollack, 2007; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). Pollack (2008) writes that women often make “attempts to break through the dominant correctional approach in order to try to get the support they need” (p.28). Joanna resisted the imposition of unnecessary programs but conveyed the difficulty of such self-determination:

They don’t let you pick the programs that you would like to take, right. And I just fought that the other day, right. ‘Cause they wanted to send me to Tsow-Tun Le Lum [an addiction treatment centre] and I said no, I tried it and it’s not my teachings and it’s repetitive and I don’t want that, right. And I said I’ll go but I’m doing it for you and not me, right. And […] the supervisor was there and she said, “well, okay, what would you like to do?” And I said I’d like to do violence and anger, right. She said, “okay, I’ll give you a week to find one.” So, I actually found one in Vancouver that I got an interview with tonight […] So, it, it’s hard, it’s really, really hard, right. I mean you can make it really easy and, and walk through their hoops, but are you really gonna be happy inside?

As Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) point out, parole conditions are intended to facilitate the surveillance of parolees, but they are also constructed to appeal to parolees’ self-interests. Kelly and Patriece indicated that a mandated drug treatment program assisted their return to the community to an extent. They specifically shared some of the lessons relating to the identification of triggers. Although Kelly relapsed during the waiting period for the program, it familiarized her with “the NA and AA lifestyle, sobriety,” which she continued to follow:

I came out, you know, with a lot of information and it’s helped me so far […] I liked Peardonville [addiction treatment centre]. It was okay […] I never done the steps before, so, I had done them in Peardonville. Which is kinda good. I mean, I got a lot of things needed out of me that I couldn’t do on my own.

5.3 Parole Officers

Parole officers’ commitment to the risk management paradigm and limited resources for support are documented in the literature (e.g., Pollack, 2008, pp.22-23) and illuminated by the respondents’ accounts. OneSky had 16 years’ experience to know that she was not going to receive much support through the penal system. For her, parole supervisors represented a hindrance to re-entry; she wanted anyone from CSC to “leave me alone so I can figure this out, because you’re still not gonna help me.” Several respondents commented on the lack of support offered by parole officers. Joanna’s parole officer refused to assist her with educational funding and with locating community
resources. Nancy simply asserted: “I’ve got no help from the New West[minster] parole.” Their meetings basically consisted of her parole officer asking “if I’ve done anything I’m not supposed to.” OneSky exposed the control over support role of parole officers:

   [My parole officer] thinks I’m doing good. I guess that means, well, [OneSky], you don’t use substances and you follow the rules we forced you to live by in the community [...]. Yeah, she’s only happy because I follow the rules. No support.

Like many others, Regina experienced her condition to report regularly to a probation officer as punitive:

   Seeing the PO, it gets annoying [...]. She just asks you questions. And, you know, like, I did my time, you know, and I feel like it’s just dragging on. Like, I’m still being punished and it’s not even fair. (Yeah.) And it’s like, fuck, I just wanna be free!

Parolees frequently consider their supervisory officers to be invasive and infantilizing (Eaton, 1993, pp.95-96; P. O’Brien, 2001b, pp.80-83). A number of respondents spoke of unreasonable intrusions into their private lives, such as calls to employers and intimate others. The governance techniques used by Kelly’s parole officer extended to her financial decisions:

   My parole officer asked me, “have you saved any money?” I go, no, why? Am I supposed to? It’s my money, right [...]. My first week cheque of every month, that pays all my bills. The next cheque is mine, right [...]. She’s telling me I need to start saving money. Well, that’ll be my choice, right.

Joanna’s parole officer represented penal surveillance and threat over her daily life:

   My PO is really controlling [...]. She likes to know anything and everything, right. And if I miss something, she calls it a breach. So, I lose a weekend pass or my curfew goes down, right. So, it’s like you need to tell her when you wipe your ass, ya know. Which I think is stupid, right. (Yeah.) But, to some degree it’s, it’s reasonable because it’s parole and it’s mandatory, I get that. But to some degree it’s [pause] (yeah) yeah.

Cate’s parole officer imposed mobility regulations in addition to the geographical boundaries set by the PBC. Her narrative shines more light on the infantilizing dominance of penal perspectives above women’s own understandings, as previous research supports (Pollack, 2008, p.28). She mentioned an occasion when she needed to leave the Lower Mainland to attend a funeral:

   I have to call my PO if I’m going to Chilliwack because [...] I’m outta the Lower Mainland [...]. It’s like asking your parents if you can go out and play [short
laugh]. (Mmm.) ‘Cause it’s right in my boundaries, but she, she wants to know if I leave the Lower Mainland. I’m like, why?

Daisy, who served six months in prison and two and a half years on conditional release, powerfully articulated the pains of parole:

_I found it harder being on parole and having to deal with the parole officers and their rules and the ways they behaved than I did being in [prison ....] The fact that they don’t treat you with any respect at all. They always suspect the worse [....] And that is why a number of prisoners won’t go out on parole. They will just wait ‘til they’re finished their whole sentence and then not have to deal with parole [....] So, they go straight from the prison setting out into society. So, what good is that?

The pervasiveness of risk management discourse and related surveillance techniques while serving time in the community can reinforce former prisoners’ sense of exclusion and otherness (Pollack, 2008, 2009). Nancy, for one, shared that the negative treatment she received from parole officers and other penal professionals kept her stigmatized with a master status: “They label me as a criminal. So, where does my persona and my gifts as a human being, as a true, genuine individual, come in?”

Consistent with Shaw (1991), findings from the current study show that women serving life sentences face exceptional challenges on parole. The two lifers emphasized that the above challenges will exist, to varying degrees, for the rest of their lives. OneSky desperately longed to be free of penal controls after years of institutionalization:

_I was in that environment for 16 years, answering to them for 16 years. And now, I gotta answer to these fucking parole officers for the rest of my life [....] When am I gonna get time [pause] to just be? [....] How long can you take this, somebody controlling your every fucking move? I’m [exhales] I’d really rather done 20 or 30 years straight and say, there you go [....] I’m not going to be doing anything bad. Like most women, it’s a one-off situation [....] And to do this for life, yeah, that irritates me [....] How am I gonna pull this off? I’m gonna have to try.

Daisy also commented on the circumstances of lifers on parole:

_The people that have the hardest time is the lifers and, you know, their chance of reoffending is almost zero, actually. And yet, they, they don’t really get many chances [....] They are on parole for the rest of their life. And that parole officer can do whatever they like [....] Some of them are fine, but there are some that are real power mad and [....] can make your life misery [....] I mean, I would rather kill myself than be on parole for the rest of my life [....] After having experienced the two and a half years [....] I just couldn’t stand it. You know, the
power that they exert and the control that they have [...]. I just think it would be incredibly difficult.

In contrast to the largely negative picture painted above, a small number of respondents received a degree of assistance from their parole officers. Kelly was the only one who considered her parole officer a strong source of support. Like women in previous studies (e.g., Gobeil, 2008, paras.52-53), Kelly identified qualities such as empathy, flexibility, and willingness to listen and respond to her needs:

I have a really good parole officer [...] She is awesome. She used to be a addictions counsellor, so she kinda understands where I’m coming from [...]. And it does help. Whereas, some parole officers don’t have that kind of background and they look at, you know, a relapse as a relapse [...]. When I relapsed [...] she didn’t send me back [to prison]. She worked with me and we figured out, we’ll get you into [treatment] right away. But I’ve seen other girls be sent back for one relapse, right.

OneSky did not perceive her parole officer to be a source of support but said that she helped to an extent by understanding that she needed to “take it really, really slow” and by giving her some time before asking her to travel to the parole office. She remarked:

It’s hard to tell so soon, but she’s listening [...] I hear that she’s one of the better ones, and I believe that [...] ‘Cause I’ve had dealings with two of the other ones [...] and I don’t like them at all [...] I find them really gamey.

Nancy did not find her parole officer to be helpful whatsoever, but she did mention the assistance provided by the “Reintegration Officer.” This individual offered to take her to programs and other community resources, gave her housing tours, and advocated for improved living conditions at her halfway house.

5.4 Psychologists

A number of respondents discussed the condition to meet with a penal psychologist. Two of them framed this stipulation in a somewhat positive way. When I asked Kelly if the psychologist helped, she replied: “Yeah, she does grief counselling and stuff. We’re doing a grief book right now. So, yeah.” The psychologist performed some therapeutic function for OneSky during their discussions about “remaining issues with my mother and abandonment.”
Nonetheless, some respondents, including Kelly and OneSky, raised issue with the coercive and futile nature of such counselling sessions, which added to the demands of re-entry:

*Every week is the same thing for me. I just go to work, come home, go to work, come home. So, really, I don’t know what there is more to talk about, right, for an hour. But, gotta do it, it’s part of parole, right [...]. On top of it, they wanted me to get another drug and alcohol addictions counsellor, on top of that [...]. Jumping through their hoops again [...]. Which makes no sense, right. Why do I need two? Because parole said.* ~ Kelly

*On Friday [...] I will be seeing] the psychologist, that I don’t really care for [...]. And, I don’t know what I’m gonna talk about, because [pause] she’s not the kind of woman, like, my psychologist was [someone else ....] No funding to see her. So I don’t have a choice.* ~ OneSky

The absence of voluntary participation likely hinders the helping potential of such relationships in the community as it does in the institution (Pollack, 2008, pp.20-21). OneSky was well-aware that she needed to “talk about my feelings” with the psychologist and “play their game” to protect her release. Cate explained the futility of her obligatory meetings with a CSC psychologist and psychiatric nurse:

*It’s really weird for me to see a psychologist because as of my [warrant expiry date], I can’t afford one, right. So, it’s not gonna continue [...]. And I’m supposed to see [...] our psych nurse from New West[minster] once a week [...]. She’s okay, but I don’t really need her, ‘cause I have another nurse in my house and I have a mental health outreach worker in the community [...]. I don’t wanna relationship with her [short laugh]. She’s not gonna be around much longer.*

Clarice perceived the condition to see a psychologist on full parole as punitive. She was “livid” because “as far as I was concerned, I had done my time. I had to report to a parole officer and that was it [...] And there was nothing to help, anyways, I was fine.”

The limited assistance provided by CSC psychologists and that many women would not choose to see them otherwise illustrates their control over support function. As emphasized by Clarice, the stipulation to see a psychologist actually expands carceral power over parolees: “If you don’t go, if you forget an appointment or something, you risk getting tossed back in the clink! […] It’s not a benevolent thing.” Cate further highlighted the psychologist’s role as a controller of risks rather than supporter of needs:

*Part of my release conditions [...] is that I have to follow whatever [CSC] decide[s] I need for psychiatric and mental health. What they think I might need
[...] is a journal. They read my journal. I edit my journal [...] I have to edit for CSC.

Participants’ accounts reveal a critical disconnect between imposed discourses that construct them as in need of psychological assessment/treatment and their own understandings of what they need after prison. Pollack (2009) writes about the sharp differences in perspective between “expert” and “offender,” the privilege given to the former and its risk management paradigm, and the reinforcement of parolees’ exclusion through penal discourses. These qualities were powerfully illuminated by Joanna’s experience of mandated psychological evaluations:

*Every two years I gotta get a psych thing done, evaluation done. And, ya know, I hadn’t, I haven’t been in trouble for nine years, haven’t got into a fight, nothing. And they classify me as a psychopath and as someone with [...] multiple illnesses [...] and that I’m on the border of reoffending and that I’m a violent offender and I should remain a Schedule One offender for the rest of my life [...] I’m still in shock [...] Like, what do you mean? (Yeah.) And how do I fight that? Ya know, like, how do I? ‘Cause once it’s on [my report], it’s on there, right. So [pause] and I don’t believe that I’m a psychopath. I don’t believe that I have multiple illnesses.*

Similar to halfway house staff and parole officers, the ability of CSC psychologists to develop helping relationships with FSW is hampered by their alliance with the penal system, particularly their duty to monitor and manage parolees’ “risks” and their power to contribute to parolees’ return to prison (Maidment, 2006, pp.119-121; Pollack, 2008, pp.27-29). Inherent in the psychologist’s role is his or her obligation to disclose parolees’ personal psychological information to CSC for purposes of case management (CSC, 1994, s.21). Respondents were aware of such limits to confidentiality and the ways in which they were perceived in terms of risk. Daisy stated:

*When you get out and you get a therapist, it’s the same thing: They’re paid by the CSC [...] So what, you’re gonna tell them your inner most thoughts? No, I don’t think so. Because things are discussed at meetings. So, you know, so that’s no good.*

That Cate felt she needed to edit her journal indicates distrust and knowledge that what she wrote could be used against her. For Kelly, the close connection between the psychologist and parole/prison system “is a concern, right. It kinda holds you back a bit from saying a lot, right, trying to get everything out.” OneSky was unsure about exactly how confidential her discussions with the psychologist were, but was clear on one thing: “Do I trust her? No.”
A number of respondents suggested that the ability of psychologists to assist former prisoners might be enhanced if they had some degree of shared experience and understanding. This suggestion is supported by the available literature (Maidment, 2006, pp.121-122; Pollack, 2009, p.91). Clarice had no need to speak with a psychologist, but pointed out:

*It’s not as if she would have any understanding either, as just, you know, someone who didn’t have a background [in prison …] what kinds of experiences we had had […] She just wouldn’t have any idea. There was nothing that she had to tell me, you know, that would help me.*

Kelly commented on the psychologist’s lack of experience with addiction specifically:

*You know, you can talk your face off, like the psychologist does, but she, she doesn’t know, she’s never struggled with addiction […] Unless you’ve been there, you know, it’s hard to fight.*

### 5.5 Interpersonal Implications

As already shown, interpersonal relationships can be important sources of post-release support. Yet, many women lack such connections and find it difficult to build new ones. Respondents’ accounts reveal that conditions of release can obstruct re-entry by further threatening their relationships. For example, Daisy explained how paperwork delays on the part of her parole officer frustrated her ability to reconnect with family:

*When I asked for leave to go somewhere, like to the island, they said, “yes, we’ll do […] all your documents up.” (“Kay.) But, then they […] leave it to the last minute […] and] they haven’t done the documents. So you didn’t leave because if you did, you, you’ll be back in prison. (Fuck.) And on two occasions she forgot to put in all the necessary paperwork, so I couldn’t go. And I had to let down some members in my family who had taken the day off to accompany me.*

In a rare occurrence, Patrice had input into her parole conditions and succeeded in removing the rule that she not associate with gang members because, “basically, you’re telling me that I can’t talk to, like, half my family.” Liz was not as fortunate. In an attempt to target her drug use need/risk factor, she was ordered to avoid a specific geographical neighbourhood well-known by locals for its concentration of people selling and using illegal drugs. As Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) propose, such spatial regulation reflects the idea that parolees/women are highly susceptible to criminogenic external influences. But Liz’s mother lived in the prohibited area and she found it difficult or impossible to avoid – she considered this space home. She was also
ordered to avoid other people in active addiction, including her mother and girlfriend. The attempt to govern her choosing these avoidance strategies was unsuccessful, as she saw greater value in maintaining her relationships:

Little does [my parole officer] know, I was in Vancouver the other day. I was with my mom who is in active addiction [...] And with my girlfriend, like, come on, you know, like, you can’t tell me I cannot see these people [...] Because it’s like, you’re leaving me with nobody!

Existing research confirms that non-association conditions can threaten parolees’ family and peer support networks (Pollack, 2009; Sugar & Fox, 1990).

Many of the respondents’ interpersonal associations were targeted for governance through the condition that they report intimate relationships to their supervisory officers – a stipulation frequently imposed on women with histories of abuse (Pollack, 2007). This condition often frustrated the development and continuation of respondents’ relationships. Nancy, for example, could not simply go on a date with someone and do things spontaneously because she had to report everything well in advance. She also said that it was difficult to “try to have a friend because their private life is no longer private,” since they had to be assessed by her parole officer. In fact, one of her friends became irritated by the intrusive questions they had to answer during a Community Assessment (CA). It was partly because of these conditions that she did not have “a relationship in 13 years [...] It’s hard to live alone.” Kelly expressed concern about the impact of disclosure conditions on her relationships:

Once I disclose that [relationship …] they wanna know everything about the guy. They want his address, they want to have a CA done on him, they wanna do a [criminal record check] on him, the whole works [...] And I was seeing this guy and he’s just terrified – and he doesn’t even have a criminal record or nothing! [laughs]111

110 “The objective of a Community Assessment is to provide complete, accurate, and quality information that will assist in the correctional process. Community Assessment Reports enable staff to identify and confirm the level of support available to an offender while he/she is incarcerated and upon release” (CSC, 2008, s.1). These reports can be completed when it becomes known that a parolee has a new source of support. Information is gathered through in-person interviews and/or telephone contacts.

111 “As a part of the information gathering process, parole officers may contact the police to verify whether the collateral contact is known to police and/or identify the existence of a criminal record” (CSC, 2008, s.13). This suggests that the objective of CAs may go beyond the identification of a parolees’ level of support to include normative evaluations of those supports.
Liz found the condition to report her intimate relationships so objectionable that she chose not to obey it. Regina also had to report close relationships to a probation officer as part of her peace bond. She emphasized the intrusive nature of this condition and how it could hinder the development of support networks after prison:

I have to, or the PO has to, disclose [to people who I am in a relationship with] that I’m on a [peace bond ....] It’s invasive […] I don’t like it, anyway. (Do you think that, like, what impact do you think that might have on developing those relationships?) It’d have a major impact. It’d be, like, devastated. It wouldn’t even happen. They’d be like, “well, why are you on a [peace bond]?” Oh, for, ’cause I’m a serious risk to society. Then, like, they’d have to wonder what’s your real problem […] They’d judge you, like, “what’s wrong with you if you’re,” you know […] They’d just end it because they’d have so much questions and be, like, unsure for themselves, you know […] Some would give it a chance […] But, like, I dunno, it’s kinda embarrassing, like, to have to do that, to tell somebody that you, like, wanna get to know.

Joanna’s parole officer almost reported a breach of her conditions because she did not disclose that her close friend took care of homeless people. She pointed out the social barrier that such conditions created:

But that wasn’t my life, that was her life. (Right, right.) But, because I didn’t tell [my parole officer] about her life, I almost got breached […] So what she’s tellin’ me is, if I have a personal life, I have to disclose my friend’s personal life as well. How do they expect me to get anywhere in a social community?

Joanna was also released with a disclosure condition that undermined her children’s relationships:

I have my two kids, right. So, if they wanna have anybody over at the house […] if they’re spendin’ the night, due to the National Parole Board, or my parole officer, you have to disclose your crime to their parents, right. (Oh my god.) And a lot of parents get scared, like, “oh my god, she’s a murderer,” right. Well, there goes my kid’s best friend […] And, it’s like, my kids don’t understand […] It’s really hard, it’s like, what do I do when my kids’ friends come over, right?

Kelly shared another instance that illustrates the potential barriers to relationships created by the parole system:

One of the big things […] a few months ago was the girls were on Plenty of Fish dating site and that, on the computers. (Oh, okay.) It got back to the parole office. So, the parole office had a meeting about it and told [halfway house staff] they had to put a net nanny on our computers, so we couldn’t access those anymore. Isn’t that fucked up? Like, that to me is, like, ridiculous. (Yeah, totally.) We’re not kids, you know, if we choose to go on a dating site.
As previous research suggests, such invasions into returning women’s private relationships reflect underlying assumptions, like parolees’/women’s vulnerability to external influences and poor decision-making skills (e.g., Pollack, 2007). The blockage of relationships that women in Kelly’s house were trying to build online is a good example of the normative understandings of “functional relationships” (e.g., monogamous, cohabitating) that are used to evaluate the “riskiness” of women’s associations – a conclusion that Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat’s (2009, pp.541-543) study supports.

5.6 Risk of Reincarceration

The very nature of conditional release means that parolees face the constant risk of reincarceration for numerous reasons, particularly technical violations of conditions (AGC, 2003, s.4.95). Nancy said that she was nearly sent back to prison when a warrant was issued for her arrest because she was “one minute late” for curfew. Daisy made an important point about the unrealistic expectations of parole – a point that is made elsewhere (Evans, 2007, p.297; P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.82):

*You could be back in prison so quickly for various things [...] The problem with [parole] is that they hold you up to a level of behaviour that far exceeds the majority of people that are free [...] It exceeds anything that’s reasonable and that’s what is so difficult about it, really. (Yeah.) And, and a snap of a finger, they can have you back.*

Regina did not think that the consequence for violating a condition of her recognizance order should be reincarceration, especially when some conditions “don’t make a whole lotta sense.” For example, she found it difficult to avoid drinking establishments. In contrast with PBC narratives (see Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009), Regina did not construct these spaces as risky, but rather as socially enjoyable. Although she derived some benefits from the “structure” provided through conditions of release, she emphasized that being “put back in jail […] is] not gonna help me, right.”

The constant risk of reincarceration can weigh heavily on parolees’ shoulders and cause a great deal of fear and anxiety (Opsal, 2009). As stated by Kelly: “One of the biggest fears for the women are: Am I going to get sent back?” Jessica remarked: “I’m a registered sex offender for life. And if I don’t do that, I go back to jail. So, it’s a life

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112 I intentionally use the word “risk” in this context to privilege women’s perspectives of the risks they faced after prison and to challenge the dominance of penal perspectives.
sentence, right — always something over my head.”113 When I asked OneSky what her major concerns were, she instantly replied:

*Keeping out of prison! [...] It’s not about reoffending. I don’t, I don’t even think that way [...] The two important things I need to do is that fucking PO and the psychologist. I cannot fuck up with them. (Yeah.) Being, being late for them, means going back [...] Five, ten minutes, “oh, oh, call the police.” You know, cops are gonna get me and blah, blah, blah. (Wow.) Five or ten minutes, Sarah, it goes, everything I’ve worked on [...] Miss an appointment, if you show deterioration, if you have a certain attitude, it you’re too snappy with them. I keep that in my mind at all times [...] That’s why, eventually, when I have to travel by myself, like, I gotta be there [...] You gotta get everything lined up so that their happy.*

Nancy mentioned risky claims of her “deteriorating attitude” – the assessment of which might have been influenced by traditional assumptions about gender-appropriate mannerisms, as previous research indicates (Erez, 1992).

Nancy, Kelly, and OneSky pointed out earlier that errors or claims made by halfway house staff could put parolees at risk of reincarceration. OneSky was worried that other people might also make false claims that threatened her freedom, so she avoided being too social:

*I keep thinking: Keep yourself safe. Don’t be, you know, telling too many people your business [...] If I don’t get involved, nothing can go wrong. (Yeah.) She can’t say things, she, she can’t hurt me [...] So, isolation? Yeah, I know a lot about that [...] I don’t want to mingle and mix too much.*

Supervisory officers have considerable influence in the decision as to whether a parolee will be sent back to prison (CSC, 2011c). OneSky commented: “Having a good relationship with the parole officer, that’s huge [...] She controls my life.” Regina was anxious before meeting her probation officer for the first time, and hoped that she was not “a hard-ass.” Kelly appreciated having a parole officer that understood addiction and did not send her back to prison when she relapsed. Conversely, Joanna found it stressful to have a parole officer that breached, or threatened to breach, her parole for minor violations.

Findings from this study reveal that certain characteristics may increase women’s chances of reincarceration. For example, respondents fighting addiction indicated a greater risk of parole revocation due to relapse. Statistics show that drug use is by far

113 This passage is abbreviated for readability.
the most common reason for the termination of parole (AGC, 2003, s.4.96). As stated by Kelly: “That one time’ll send me right back.” Liz was sent back twice in the past for this reason. Actually, Kelly and Jessica said that their biggest worries after prison were relapse and reincarceration.

Women’s health conditions may also increase their risk of reincarceration (Thompson, 2008, p.54). Many of the claims made by halfway house staff about Nancy related to her illness. Nancy also found it difficult to travel to appointments, which threatened her parole. Cate’s mental illness raised her chance of being sent back to prison. In fact, she was reincarcerated in the past because she did not have proper supports in the community. As she said: “The part of me in jail [pause] isn’t me. It’s my mental illness wanting to be safe, and there’s nowhere else where I’m safe.” Sometimes, Cate admitted herself to the hospital when she needed extra support. This could have been framed as a reason to send her back to prison, and so she learned not to report it immediately:

When I [... was] in hospital on a Sunday [....] and they said they were keeping me overnight, I didn’t dare phone the duty [officer [...] Because the problem is, is you see my file, it’s not so pretty [....] And so my chances of getting a warrant were 50/50 [....] They’d be like, “well, that’s just gonna triple her risk factors” [....] And so I just knew that I didn’t wanna go back in [prison] and so I knew not to call them [....] They’d be worried that my housing is unstable [....] They’d be like, “we need to put her somewhere really safe.”

That Cate’s need for support could be interpreted as a risk to be controlled through reincarceration shows, once again, the penal conflation of women’s needs and risks. Her experiences also illustrate the dominant perception of prisons as safe spaces for women with mental illness, given the near absence of alternatives; this perception is confirmed and criticized elsewhere (e.g., Pate, 2005).

OneSky’s sexual orientation could have indirectly increased her risk of parole revocation if she had to physically defend herself against a hate crime. When she told the story of an intoxicated man who made homophobic remarks, she mentioned her heightened concern as someone serving life on parole and how she minimized the risk of getting into trouble:

As a lifer, I can’t be [...] getting into fights and, oh no, nothing to do with violence and I, if anything happened, she’s my witness and, oh my god! Yeah, I just need to avoid at all costs. So, I’m thinking, well, should I go on that
Commercial Drive? Yeah, maybe not at night time when people have been drinking for a long period of time. That’s not a good idea.

As discussed in terms of institutionalization, OneSky also expressed concern about returning to prison because she could not “fit into this anymore” – something that she and other respondents saw happen to other people, and that existing research substantiates (Maidment, 2006, pp.95-98). For parolees serving life sentences, the risk of reincarceration will exist until they die. Cate commented on the particular hardships experienced by this segment of the population:

Lifers, ‘cause they’re on long-term supervision, they may have more concerns because they end up in halfway houses for years, right [...]. And it’s just because, for them, once [their parole is] revoked, the process is a nightmare to get back out. So, it’s harder for them ‘cause they have all this stuff they have to do, and it’s for the rest of their life.

Poverty may also amplify parolees’ chances of having their release revoked (P. O’Brien, 2001b, p.77). In the current study, certain conditions of parole or the halfway house were difficult for some respondents to fulfill due to limited funds. Sometimes, false destinations had to be reported to the halfway house in order to receive bus tickets. In addition, attending various appointments or programs without transportation, or making location changes without a cellphone, proved challenging.

Certainly, many respondents raised issue with the overly-rigid and controlled system of parole and the associated risk of reincarceration, but some also framed this aspect of release in a way that served their interests. Kelly considered the rigid setup of parole helpful to fight addiction:

I like the structure, for myself [...]. Being structured and looked over, I mean, I could, you know, do whatever I want, I could fuck up at any time, even with that structure, but, I mean, it makes it a little bit harder for me, right [laughs].

Even though Kelly worried about where her urinalyses were conducted, she framed the condition itself positively:

It’s good for an external use. Like, it helps, like, kinda keep you in check. I mean, if I didn’t have it I’m sure I’d probably be using [drugs [...]. Knowing that that’s in effect, that’s in the back of my head [... and it] keeps me a little bit stronger each day, right. (Huh.) ‘Cause I don’t wanna go back, right.

Similar to Kelly, Patrice considered the condition to abstain from drugs
[...] pretty good, right. Like, it’s kinda [...] hanging over my head, like, you’re not allowed to do this and you’re not allowed to do that. But, like, I don’t want to do that right now anyways, right.

Consistent with Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009), these narratives reflect the ways in which parole conditions are designed not only to control parolees, but also to appeal to their own desires to stay out of prison and, sometimes, change themselves.

### 5.7 Gendered Disparities

Some respondents spoke of inequalities between the resources for, and treatment of, women and men on parole. Joanna remarked:

*I think the guys have a lot more resources [...] Like, when I go to the parole office, I see them [...] I notice they got a lot more resources and they have a lot [...] of different programs.*

She also touched upon the smaller number of parole offices available to women, and the complications that this can create:

*[Men] got it a lot easier with their parole officers, right, ya know. Like, we’re stuck in New West[minster]. How come we’re not out in Vancouver when there’s parole officers out here?*

When Kelly discussed having to go to “trigger areas” for urinalysis testing, she added: “They do, like, urinalysis testing right at the halfway house for men [...] They’re not put in that situation.”

The CHRC (2003) documents the lack of community-based facilities available to FSW compared to their male counterparts (p.56). Cate specifically criticized the absence of post-release housing for women living with mental health issues:

*There’s so many women that still need housing and stuff. Like, CSC has [pause] Willingdon, one other place, and Manchester on the Island. They all take mentally ill male offenders. There’s not one in Canada for females [...] And they, and our mental health needs are higher than men.*

The limited housing options available to FSW were observed by Joanna as well:

*Men have a lot more halfway houses than women. We’ve only got, like, Anderson Lodge, we’ve got Columbia Place, we’ve got the one out in [White Rock ...], so, and Kamloops. (And guys have them, like?) Everywhere. And they got a lot more [private] home placements than us women.*
Nancy raised the issue of gendered housing inequalities. She seemed frustrated that she and her housemates were recently forced to move into a lodge that formerly housed men and was “left in shambles,” while the men got a new lodge. She bluntly declared: “The men get everything, women get nothing.”

Daisy and Joanna perceived inequalities in the parole conditions typically required of women and men. Their observations suggest that women parolees may experience condition overload:

When you come out and you’re on parole, and when you get a weekend away, you have to check-in with your parole officer at night. (Okay.) The men don’t have to. (Are you serious?) Yeah, I think that’s true. There’s definite differences between what the men have to do and what the women have to do. ~ Daisy

I think the men got it easier because [...] their parole officers don’t disclose their crime. Whereas women, I’ve noticed, ‘cause I’ve been askin’ a lot of men that and I’ve been askin’ a lot of women [...] ‘cause I wanna know, like, am I the only one that my parole officer’s doin’ this to? And, so far, the men say, “we don’t have to disclose that.” (Really?) And the women are just like, “yeah.” ~ Joanna

Clarice and her male partner were incarcerated for the same charge and approximately the same time. She therefore had insight into the differences between the men’s and women’s prison and parole systems. For instance, prison authorities wanted her, but not her partner, to go to a halfway house. This discrepancy might reflect women’s doubly deviant social status and perceived need for greater controls. Available research confirms that, proportionally, women are more likely than men to be released to a CRF (Bell & Trevethan, 2004).

Clarice also described gendered psychological treatment:

They have to do a psych assessment before you can be released [...] My partner went through the whole rigmarole, and in his report [...] the psychiatrist] wrote: “Well, you know, there doesn’t seem to be any mental disorder [...] He seems to, you know, have a pretty firm personality [...] Counselling wouldn’t probably make much difference.” And with mine [...] the psychiatrist] came on two different days because [...] he couldn’t get the whole thing done in one afternoon session [...] And in his report, he wrote: “Okay, well I couldn’t find any mental disorders, but, but, if she were to lose the support of her partner, then I would want to reassess.”

That Clarice’s psychiatrist wanted to reassess her stability if she was no longer in a relationship with her partner – but not vice versa – indicates gender role expectations and stereotypes about women’s dependency on others. Erez (1992) explains:
Because a woman’s identity is largely relational and is closely tied to her role in the family, it is expected that dysfunction in domestic roles will weigh more heavily in decisions concerning the needs of female parolees (p.110) [...] Being married is [perceived to be] an informal source of social control; a husband is also a caretaker. (p.121)

Clarice continued to reveal gendered disparities:

\textit{And then, on top of that they, they put as one of my conditions that I had to go and see a psychologist regularly [...] Just the fact of imposing that, just, assumption that, you know, women want to go to a psychologist and that sort of thing, just really, really badly pissed me off.}

This assumption is not surprising, since penal discourse frames women’s crimes as stemming mainly from psychological and emotional deficits that can be resolved through therapeutic interventions and through close oversight of behaviour (Kendall & Pollack, 2005; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009, p.538). In fact, research indicates that psychological counselling is imposed more frequently on women than men (Grant et al., 1996, p.59).

This chapter documented women’s experiences of “punishment in the community” (Garland, 2001, p.189). The dominance of the risk management paradigm that aims to produce normative, self-governing citizens arched over many of the respondents’ accounts. As scholars like Garland (2001), Maidment (2006), and Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) suggest, localized supervision programs extend the carceral gaze over prisoners’ lives. Although some participants in this study derived benefits from certain aspects of conditional release, for the most part, their experiences were characterized by a lack of support and excessive surveillance, scrutiny, and demands that were inconsistent or in conflict with the rest of their lives. In addition, respondents regularly felt infantilized, stigmatized, and excluded during the period of supervised release and by the ways that various help/control professionals treated them.

The findings detailed in this chapter and the previous two reveal a general theme of hardship: Challenges abound in women’s experiences of serving time in prison, meeting basic needs, and serving time in the community. What else can we conclude about women’s re-entry? Where should we go from here? The final chapter provides some answers to these questions.
CHAPTER 6. Conclusion and Implications

The pains of imprisonment and release can clearly take a toll on one’s physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Nevertheless, after consideration of the challenges that pervade many women’s lives, human agency must be appreciated as part of this transition process to the community. Accounts of women who have been incarcerated – in this study and previous ones – regularly reveal qualities such as adaptability, perseverance, resourcefulness, an ability to cultivate hope, and care and concern for others.114

OneSky emphasized the importance of self-belief for her post-release wellbeing:

If you don’t keep [your mind] strong [...] keep believing that there’s one more thing to do out here. Yeah, believe it. Nobody’s gonna believe it for you [...].

Okay, now that 16’s past, now let’s get on a good path here – ‘cause I can fuckin’ do that. I think I can, you know. I can, I can do something worthwhile [...].

You know, nobody believes that [...] we’re capable of change, but we really are [...] I know some success stories – lifers that have gone on to do good things.

Why can’t I do that? (Yeah.) Why not? Just, keep that frame of mind going. Like, it’s not going to be easy, but it’s doable. I can do this. (Yeah.) I can do this.

Certainly, respondents’ strength of will was reflected in the many strategies they used in attempting to overcome various barriers. The following quotations further reflect participants’ determination to surmount post-release obstacles:

I knew, like, I won’t go back [to prison.] I knew that, you know, that wasn’t who I was, right [...] It’s like, you know what, this is a new start, we have a new place, you know. I mean, I’m in sobriety [...] I knew I would do better and it’s been over two years and I haven’t been back. So, obviously I’m doin’ something right. ~ Jessica

I just wonder why my life is so hard. But, I keep continuing, caring, and sharing, and getting the direction I need [...] I never give up that hope [pause] triumphs over experience. ~ Nancy

In fact, some women made powerful assertions that they will “do good” and “get what [they] need” if they “want it bad enough”:

What I’ve boiled it down to is just wanting it. If you want it bad enough, you’ll work hard enough to get what you need, right. ~ Jessica

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It’s me that’s gotta put the effort into it, right. Can’t expect it to just happen [...] It’s up to the individual, right. And if you want it bad enough, you’ll do good, right. ~ Kelly

It would be dangerous to interpret the above narratives as support for a neoliberal ideology in which individuals are responsibilized for their circumstances, choices, and conduct – to imply that, if only women were to have stronger will, they could “do good” after leaving prison. Such an interpretation underlies the types of thinking strategies that women are encouraged to adopt by the penal system. As Pate (2005) points out, without recognition of the social and material conditions to which women return, such thinking strategies can rob them of their previous survival strategies and make them feel as though they are deficient individuals if they do not succeed after prison (para.37). In the end, broader forces at the community and societal level must be acknowledged and addressed.

Prior scholarship confirms that women’s post-release wellbeing and self-efficacy are greatly enhanced by the tangible assistance and intangible benefits of concrete resources and social support networks (Eaton, 1993; P. O’Brien, 2001b). Several respondents in this study emphasized that their confidence and ability to “make it” after prison was highly dependent on the supports and resources they had in the community. For example, Cate remarked: “Now, I wanna be out, but I’m also in an environment that validates that […] I have the right supports for the first time.” Regina highlighted this point further when she related her thoughts and feelings upon release:

I was thinking, I ain’t goin’ back and you’re really self-talking yourself in a positive way [...] And, you know, you have someone there [...] to support you and, you know, that made me feel really good about myself [...] Like, this was a new start and these are people in my life that are gonna be there to help me [...] And that really makes you wanna do good for yourself, because people believe in you. (Mmm, yeah.) Like, people are take, takin’ the time out to support you. And it shows, like, hey, maybe I do got value and I am worth something. Maybe I can do this.

In a similar vein, Clarice stated: “I’d chalk up the absolute confidence I had that everything would work out to the community support I had throughout.” Daisy repeatedly reminded me that it was her social supports and related material resources that enabled her to re-enter the community with relative ease.

The reverse applies as well. The overall lack of community-based support services and resources available to formerly incarcerated women – and women in
general – was a common theme in respondents’ accounts. The current state of supports hampers many women’s re-entry and preserves existing disadvantages. Thus, as many others likewise conclude, there is a need to aggressively develop community-based support services and resources to help women overcome challenges after prison.\footnote{See Cobbina (2010), Dodge and Pogrebin (2001), Evans (2007), and Malin (2007), among others.} Key areas of need include:

- **Health care**: Development of and assistance with accessing mental and other health services, (trauma and abuse) counselling programs, and substance abuse treatment; enhanced services that address the interconnections between abuse, addiction, and other (gendered) factors

- **Finances, employment, and education**: Development of and assistance with accessing improved income support, vocational, and educational programs; provision of and assistance with accessing basic necessities (e.g., food, clothing, transportation); assistance with finding and securing jobs

- **Housing**: Development of more housing options (e.g., low-income housing, transition housing); assistance with finding and securing housing

- **Relationships**: Development of and assistance with accessing peer support groups and childcare programs; development of community education and consciousness-raising programs about marginalized and criminalized women

This community (re)investment requires a paradigm and policy shift within the State and society away from the current neoliberal-neoconservative regime that reinforces socioeconomic inequities, and towards a welfarist model. Importantly, many of the areas of need listed above impact women at large and often play a role in women’s criminalization. But mending the social safety net is ultimately a Band-Aid approach to the issue of women’s imprisonment and re-entry.

The conversation about change must focus on deeper social conditions that structure women’s experiences, opportunities, and choices. Towards the end of our interview, Clarice reflected:

_Talking to the women, and once you got to know them, you know, you would see, just, these women never had a chance from, from the very start to do something other than what ended them up in prison [...] I mean, in a perfect world, you know, the intervention against having the women wind up in a spot where she’s between that rock and hard place would have been there [...] But that’s, you know, that’s big scale changes that are needed, not, not just individualized little interventions here and there – because they don’t work._
This study helps us problematize terms such as re-entry and reintegration, and it supports the kinds of big scale changes of which Clarice spoke. As other authors similarly underline, most criminalized women never entered or integrated into mainstream society in the first place, and they certainly do not after their incarceration (Evans, 2007, p.298; Maidment, 2006, p.10; Pollack, 2008, p.31). Women return from prison to a social, economic, and political environment that always threatened their wellbeing. Sexism, racism, ableism, and other intersecting forms of oppression shape women’s lives after prison as they did before. Women continue to be perceived by dominant ideology in misogynistic ways. Labour remains sexually segregated, the wage gap gendered, poverty feminized. Women are still exceptionally vulnerable to ill health, relationships of dependency, various forms of State control, sexual and physical abuse, and other adversities. If women do reintegrate, this is the community in which it is done.

On top of these pre-existing disadvantages, my analysis of 11 FSW’s narratives confirm the generalizability of findings from previous studies: Formerly incarcerated women face new, often interconnected disadvantages associated with their status as ex-prisoners. Women sometimes use their prison and parole experiences as resources to be drawn on – sadly understandable and admirable in the current context. For the most part, however, these experiences do not help their situations but, rather, leave them scarred and further excluded. These women, as a group, are subject to intense (gendered) controls, they are easy targets of othering, they are extra vulnerable to discrimination, they have few concrete resources, their interpersonal relationships and other community-based supports are threatened, and their wellbeing is precarious overall. Problems that many criminalized women face before imprisonment are intensified after leaving the institution. Indeed, such problems contribute to many women’s incarceration to begin with and they continue to lead some back behind bars. Women who are also “ex-cons” are pushed even further to the margins of society; they are punished once again for societal injustices.

I agree with Maidment (2006) and Pollack (2008) that, in the end, what must be addressed are the inequities that underlie many women’s criminalization and that deepen the pains of imprisonment and release. The social and material conditions conducive to all women “making it” must be created. This means that the capitalist, patriarchal, white-hegemonic structures that result in women’s marginalization must be dismantled. Power, resources, and labour must be equitably redistributed across all
realms of society. In increasingly mean times, it is urgent that we dig at the root the problem. I conclude this thesis with a piece written by Regina, from which the title of this study derives. It poetically highlights the struggles of living on the margins, the longing for freedom from conditions of injustice, and the hope that keeps humanity moving forward.

Social structural transformation is an enormous task and perhaps somewhat idealistic. It is important to consider pragmatic measures through which this type of transformation might be accomplished, but this thesis does not allow for extensive coverage of such measures. One way to work towards large-scale transformation is to build solidarity in support of change. This can start on the ground with each individual and, as it spreads to others, it can develop into a social movement – a revolution. In her poem “The Low Road,” Piercy (1980) writes:

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more. (p.45)

Implications for penal reform may also stem from this project, as they do in other studies (AGC, 2003; CHRC, 2003; Fortune et al., 2010; Gobeil, 2008; P. O’Brien, 2001b). Decriminalization and decarceration strategies, for example, could reduce our reliance on prison. In addition, several respondents offered specific suggestions to make the prison experience less damaging. It is vital, however, that implications for penal reform do not take centre stage. Such recommendations are dangerous because they can reinforce the legitimacy of the penal regime and obscure underlying problems (Pollack, 2008, p.31).
Will I Ever Be Free?

Often, I glimpse into the mirror. The eyes are sometimes not mine, replaced. I roam through the urban jungle, like a ghost, fading and trapped, haunting or haunted. I know everyone’s secrets, where everyone hides. I’ve been stricken with rage and hatred, run so deep, Hitler seems a saint. I am a fallen angel, the dim star.

I’m sick of the battles, ‘cause survival’s been bending me. For so long, I’ve done every silhouette, every play, every drama. Why is it so punishing to take a part of the game? Yeah, I know, I’ve inflicted death once too many a time. It’s them, though, that let self believe. Fade like a flower, to be placed on their caskets. Death is quick and slow, almost rude, when you’re still left to breathe. Is life supposed to be about: suffering, abuse, mishandled, disregarded? Whose children are these?

How long must the chain enslave me? The screws in the machine. How long will justice kick me in my smashed teeth? How long will I be beaten? Will I ever be free? Free of the discrimination, the system, the shame, that’s been killing the diminished. The evil that bred from the ideal king, who hated me ‘cause I was different. I hated them so much, I became them, and hated myself.

I never knew where I came from. I belong nowhere. Where am I leading to? This, alone, is nothing new. Obviously part of the problem, ‘cause there’s never been a solution. While I sit in this hotel room, smokin’ the crack spliff, a million miles away from some home, somehow, I miss. Engulfed by inadequacy, strength is what I need. Fuck the demon drugs, obsessive, slanged love. Encaged dove, I wanna find freedom, beyond the city lights. A clean high, not such a hectic life. Speeding down the fast lane, I need to earn my angel wings. I need to dig my way outta this grave. My mind’s adrift. The scent of missing a bigger part of me.

Baby, maybe it’s not really you. Run away, catch a train, no bound. Old emotional wounds, the windows visualize it all. The hallways whisper the truth to the pain. Love’s like a slut, one hard bang and she’s gone again. With a thousand different addictions, it’s ourselves we’re missing. Razor blades, Smith and Wesson. Fallen ruins, I dream of building my castle. Game’s got queen of hearts and king of spades, diamonds to dazzle, clubs to fall down. Win or lose, another must be dealt. Take the shirt off my back. See the will to live in these eyes. I’ll gain back my power, I was so long denied.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Biographical information:

**Tell me a bit about yourself.**

*Possible topics:*

- Sociodemographic characteristics: E.g., where born and raised; ethnicity/race; age; economic status (employment history, income adequacy and sources); ability; relationship/marital status; parental status; schooling
- Significant relationships
- Life-defining experiences
- History with systems of control
- Perceived impact of the above topics on life

2. Prison experiences:

**Tell me what it was like to be in prison.**

*Possible topics:*

- Negatives and/or positives
- Passing the time
- Programming, services, resources
- Relationships (e.g., peers, staff, volunteers; family, partners, friends)
- Living conditions
- Mental, physical, spiritual wellbeing/needs (incl. medicalization; substance use; self-injury)
- Security-driven practices (e.g., security levels; strip searches; segregation)
- Lack of independence (incl. institutionalization)
- Role of biography/identity in prison experiences
- Management of/coping with difficulties

3. Post-prison experiences:

**What it was like to leave prison and re-establish your life on the outside?**

*Possible topics:*

- Approaching release
- Level of preparedness
- Thoughts, feelings, concerns
- How long since released
- Type of release and impact on post-prison life (e.g., mandated conditions; relationships with supervisors; length of supervision)
Major things that hindered and/or helped re-entry (e.g., prison experience; resources and supports)

- Reunification and relationships (family, children, friends, partners, others)
- Employment, finances, and basic necessities
- Housing/accommodation
- Competing demands
- Changes between pre-prison, prison, and post-prison identity (as perceived by self and others)
- Stigma and discrimination
- Community inclusion/exclusion; meaning of “community”
- Sources of (formal, informal) control/supervision
- Mental, physical, spiritual wellbeing; met and/or unmet needs
- Role of biography/identity in post-prison experiences
- Management of/coping with aforementioned difficulties
- What needs to be changed

4. Missing information:
   Is there anything that we’ve already discussed that you’d like to talk more about?
   Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you think is important for me to know?

5. Interview feedback:
   What was this interview like for you?
   Possible topics:
   - Benefits and/or non-benefits of participation; motivations for participation
   - Interviewer-interviewee relationship (e.g., differences and/or similarities)
   - Thoughts and feelings on this project

   Do you think I should make any changes for future interviews?
   Possible topics:
   - Approach to interview
   - Questions/topics
Appendix B: Informed Consent Script

You’re invited to participate in a one-time interview to speak a bit about who you are and your life before prison and during prison, but the focus will be on your experiences after prison. Since I’ve never been in prison, I might miss important things to talk about, so please share whatever you think I should know about the topic.

The reason I’m doing this is because I want to work with you to help make your voice heard and the experiences of female ex-prisoners known so that we can create change that improves the lives of women inside and outside of prison. The information that you share will be used in my Master’s thesis at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and in other academic and hopefully more public reports and discussions. You’ll be paid $40 for your time and expertise.

There’s a small possibility that the interview will stir up painful thoughts and feelings relating to your life before, during, and after prison. If this happens, please let me know, and remember that you don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want to. You can also contact me after the interview if you’d like to talk more, and I’ve listed some support groups for women who’ve been in prison at the end of this letter if you’d like to talk with someone else.

If you don’t want your real name made public, I’ll keep it confidential (even if I’m ordered by a court to release it) and I’ll use a made-up name in the transcript, notes, and results. But, I need to let you know that if you identify a child who may now be in harm’s way or who’ll probably be harmed in the future I’m required by law to report it to the appropriate authorities, so it’s probably best that you don’t share anything like that. I also need to let you know that some people who know of you may be able to identify you by your responses, but I’ll try to delete or hide anything that might identify you in the results. You should try not to name any other individuals during the interview, but if you do I’ll keep them confidential too.

If you agree to be tape recorded, I’ll be the only person who has access to the recording and it’ll be erased after I transcribe the interview into writing. I’ll keep the written transcript and notes after the project is done since I might use parts for other publications, but I’ll be the only person who has access to them; they’ll be stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer and memory stick.

You’re totally free to choose to participate or not. I hope that the interview will last one to two hours, but you can stop at any time. You can remove any or all of the information you’ve given or refuse to answer any questions for any reason. You can also take a break at any time, and express any concerns and ask any questions whenever you want. You’ll be paid $40 for your participation regardless of what happens during or after the interview. If, after the interview, you think of information that you want to change, contact me within two weeks and I’ll change it; but, once the results are published, it’s impossible to make any changes. The results will be available in the SFU library, but if you want, you can contact me later and I can deliver a final copy or summary to you.

If you are a First Nations member, I’m required to tell you that your Band hasn’t given approval of this project.
If you have any questions, concerns, or comments after the interview, you can contact me or my supervisor, and if you want to make a complaint about how you were treated during the interview, you can contact the Director of the Office of Research Ethics at SFU.

- Is there anything about this study that you don’t understand? Any questions or concerns?
- Can I start the tape recorder now? If not, then I’ll only take written notes.
- In light of what we’ve just read about this study, do you want to participate?
- Do you want to be identified by a made-up name? If so, what name should we use? If not, what name should we use (e.g., first name, last name, nickname)?
- Would you participate if you weren’t guaranteed that your identity will remain confidential?

**Principal researcher:** Sarah Rizun  
Phone: [redacted]  
Email: [redacted]  
Mailing address: School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

**Supervisor:** Dr. Brian Burtch  
Phone: 778-782-4038  
Email: [redacted]  
Mailing address: School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

**Director of the Office of Research Ethics:** Dr. Hal Weinberg  
Phone: 778-782-6593  
Email: [redacted]  
Mailing address: Office of Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Multi-Tenant Facility, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6  
Application number: 2011s0195

**Support groups for women who have served prison sentences:**

*Sisters in Action and Solidarity*  
Phone: [redacted]  
Email: sasvancouver@gmail.com  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 78005, 1755 East Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5N 5W1

*John Howard Society of the Fraser Valley*  
Office phone: 604-852-1226*  
Toll-free phone: 1-877-640-1122*  
Mailing address: #1-1653 Salton Road, Abbotsford, BC V2S 7P2  
*Ask for Karen if you served a life sentence and Connie if you served a shorter-term sentence.

*Women in2 Healing*  
Office phone: 604-875-3658  
Toll-free phone: 1-877-849-6626  
Email: womenin2healing@gmail.com  
Mailing address: BC Women’s Hospital, UBC Department of Family Practice, Box #177, Room D204A, 4500 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3N1