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"I'm Just Not Good in Relationships"

Victimization Discourses and the Gendered Regulation of Criminalized Women[1, 2]

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This article examines how risk discourses carry specific gendered meanings within the context of women-centered correctional practices. Based on interviews with 52 women who served federal prison sentences in Canada, the author examines how abused women are constructed as violent and the discursive and practical implications of this construction. Feminist-informed victimization narratives merge with correctional risk discourses to govern criminalized women's relationships once they are released into the community. Correctional policy and programming encourages self-regulatory strategies that constitute abused women as at risk of being violent in the context of relationships.

Keywords: *risk; victimization; parole; female offenders*

Despite some important reforms, feminist efforts to change criminal justice practices and policies to improve the treatment of female prisoners have not significantly altered the foundations of penal theory and practice. In fact, some have argued the efforts of activists and feminist academics have served to perpetuate and legitimate the logics of imprisonment (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Snider, 2003). Research has illustrated that the correctional mandate to punish, as well as the "psy" sciences (psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy), have transformed the ideals of feminist prison reformers into gendered strategies for governing female prisoners (Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, 2003; Faith, 1999; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Pollack, 2000a; Pollack & Kendall, 2005; Snider, 2003). One of the areas less developed, however, is the way in which "risk" discourses carry specific gendered meanings within the context of women-centered correctional practices and how they are used to regulate the behaviors of criminalized women both within and outside of prison.

According to Nikolas Rose (2002), risk thinking can be traced across a diverse range of sites as heterogeneous processes governing socially marginalized populations. This article follows Rose's (2002, p. 214) suggestion to ask questions about how and where risk thinking has emerged and to what effects. I focus on how the mobilization of gendered victimization discourses positions abused women's relationships as a site

of correctional regulation. I begin this article with a discussion of feminist victimization narratives and how correctional discourses psychologize these narratives and link them to ideas about women's risk. This is followed by a discussion about risk thinking in correctional practices and the ways in which it is gendered. The remaining part of the article focuses on discursive framings that link women's propensity for violence to their experiences of being abused in relationships. I conclude with a discussion of the importance of a feminist critique of the penal–welfare state in studies on gender and punishment.

Victimization and Relational Narratives

Feminist criminologists have highlighted the gendered factors that have an impact on women's involvement in crime. In particular, there is now a wealth of empirical scholarship documenting the fact that well over the majority of imprisoned women in North America have histories of childhood abuse and have experienced violence in their intimate relationships with men (Comack, 1996; Gilfus, 2002; Owen, 1998; Richie, 1996). This research, often referred to as the "pathways to crime" literature, illustrates that attempts to cope with victimization experiences, such as childhood abuse and violence against women, propel many women into situations that put them at risk of being criminalized. For example, Mary Gilfus (2002) identifies six interrelated pathways women may travel from victimization to incarceration. These include running away from home to escape abuse, living on the streets, addictions, poverty and homelessness, being abused by male intimates, and state violence.

The pathways literature has heavily influenced contemporary understandings of the experiences and needs of female prisoners and the factors that lead to criminalization. This work contributed to the criminological literature by "blurring the boundaries" of established notions of victims and offenders (Comack, 2006, p. 41) and by helping to contextualize how women's actions become criminalized. These contributions created a counternarrative to the dominant story of the criminalized woman as "mad" and "bad" by drawing attention to women's ways of coping with violence and other victimization experiences.

Scholars have pointed out that correctional discourses often transform the theoretical contributions of feminists into individualistic and psychologized understandings of criminalized women (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Kendall, 2002; McCorkel, 2003; Pollack & Kendall, 2005). Given the therapeutic discourse in which victimization talk is generally swathed, attention has been drawn to the psychological impact of trauma. In privileging gender as an analytic category, the role of state and institutional practices in perpetuating social exclusion is diluted and replaced by discussions about women's self-esteem and psychological treatment needs. This is not merely a theoretical dilemma about what subject has been created by those studying and theorizing about criminalized women, but it is one that has

had concrete consequences for criminalized women. Correctional discourses have been able to effectively adopt feminist rhetoric about women-centered programming without having the basic premises of penal policy threatened.

The Canadian situation offers a poignant example of this process. In recent years, the recognition that imprisoned women have experienced very high levels of victimization has gained a certain amount of currency within women's corrections and has been incorporated into the discourse, programs, and policies of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC; Fortin, 2004; Laishes, 2002). A central focus of correctional policy with federally incarcerated women is the idea that women's life experiences, involvement in crime, and program needs are different from those of incarcerated men. Laishes (2002), for example, states that female prisoners differ from their male counterparts in that they have higher incidences of mental illness due to their experiences of abuse. She asserts that "some mental health problems experienced by women offenders can be linked directly to past experiences of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and assault" (p. 6). The CSC, therefore, states that gender-specific programming is necessary to help women heal from past abuses and become empowered to make changes in their lives (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990). Feminist advocates for criminalized women emphasized the gendered and racialized context of women's lives and pointed to socioeconomic factors in the criminalization of women (Comack, 2006). However, once incorporated into a correctionalist frame, gendered understandings are predominantly psychological, and socioeconomic context disappears. Although correctional discourse may state the relevance of social context, the focus remains on the psychology of female prisoners. Fortin (2004) writes, for example, that prison interventions must take into account the social, political, and cultural context unique to women in society and then argues that this means "understanding the psychological development of women" (p. 38). When incorporated into correctional logics and discourses, the victimization narrative becomes psychologized; that is, there tends to be a focus on the psychological and emotional impact of such experiences and how impaired thinking, decision making, and lack of emotional control lead women to commit crimes. The psyche of criminalized women is the site at which reformation occurs.

Recently, Canadian correctional researchers have drawn upon a branch of feminist psychology called relational psychology to substantiate the assertion that women's psychology should be the foundation upon which gender-specific programming is built (Fortin, 2004). Relational psychology was developed by feminist psychologists at the Stone Center at Wellesley College as a way of understanding how women's psychological development differs from that of men. Traditionally, developmental psychological theories have posited that the journey toward mature development is one that culminates in autonomy, independence, and separation (Jordan, 1997). However, relational theory argues that women's development differs from the traditional male model of psychological development and asserts that women's sense of self is cultivated through connection rather than separation and is in fact damaged by disconnections

(such as abuse, violence, incarceration). Relational disconnections and violations, such as child abuse, rape, and male violence, are thought to render some women susceptible to drug abuse, street life, and criminalization. Using the work of Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003), correctional researchers implicitly connect relational disconnections to women's lawbreaking and thereby construct relationships as risk factors.

Once something becomes equated (either empirically or discursively) with criminal behavior, it typically becomes, in correctional lexicon, a "criminogenic factor." Criminogenic factors are those aspects of an individual that are thought to be linked with criminal behavior. The recent emergence of relational theory as an organizing framework for conceptualizing gender-specific programming for female prisoners has become enmeshed with risk discourses that aim to predict and manage women's potential for "pro-criminal behavior" (Fortin, 2004, p. 39). Thus, *risk* and *relationships* become entwined. Hannah-Moffat's (2004) study on parole decision making illustrates the discursive processes inherent in this equation as well as the serious consequences of *practices* that result from these assumptions. Her review of the decisions made by the National Parole Board of Canada illustrates that women's responses to victimization are being used to justify crucial decisions about continued confinement or freedom. Perhaps of most concern is that her data show that parole board members linked women's self-defensive actions (against male partners) with women's own potential (risk) to behave violently if released from prison. Therefore, states Hannah-Moffat, "risk is gendered in that for women (but not for men) victimization and relationships become central to general and violent recidivism" (p. 373).

Before further examining the consequences of entangling past victimization with future violence, I briefly review the role of risk thinking in the governance of social marginality and its relevance to criminalized women.

Risk Thinking and Self-Regulation

Risk thinking has been identified as a key principle of neoliberal governance strategies both within and outside of the criminal justice field (Baker & Simon, 2002; Kemshall, 2002; O'Malley, 1996; Rose, 2000). Theorists have examined the social construction of risk and, in line with Foucault's notion of governmentality, "what is done *in the name* of risk" (Baker & Simon, 2002, p. 18). There has been a recent focus on both the discursive formations of risk and the actual practices of risk management that flow from these constructions. Rose (2000) states that the risk gaze is often aimed at those who are most socially excluded—those who experience poverty, homelessness, addictions, mental health issues, and criminalization—and thus is fundamental to the regulation of social exclusion. The contours of risk thinking shape strategies for controlling socially excluded populations whose risk is managed by a myriad of control professionals, such as psychiatrists, social workers,

correctional and probation officers, and, increasingly, counselors and therapists. As strategies for the regulation of social marginality, risk practices in general are heavily intertwined with therapeutic and quasi-therapeutic discourses and practices. An arsenal of therapeutic programs may be mobilized to act on the selves of those who have failed to appropriately manage their own risk, to "empower" them to be self-regulating (Cruikshank, 1996; Kemshall, 2002; Rose, 2000). Thus, the concept of *self-regulation* is central to processes of risk management and risk reduction. As Kemshall (2002) notes, "Self-regulation is the key principle of government in advanced liberal societies. The well-educated citizen will make the required choice, those who do not are recast as the blameworthy agents of their own misfortune" (p. 43). Correctional approaches encourage self-regulation both through prison programming and through community corrections. Notions about reintegration are imbued with the suggestion that those who do not self-reform are not, in fact, deserving of social inclusion, because "the community is willing to accept those offenders who reform themselves" (CSC, 2006a). By implication, then, the community will not accept those who have failed to appropriately reform themselves.

The construct of being at risk to reoffend is central to criminal justice and correctional practices. Prison and parole services are organized around this concept and aim to reduce the risk posed by an individual to the security of the prison, to themselves, and to others. The CSC's (2006b) philosophy of risk management states that

> Staff draw on a large body of research on offenders and sophisticated analytical tools in measuring risk. These tools, along with information files and staff's professional experience and judgement, help to determine whether an offender can safely and successfully return to the community.

Correctional risk discourses evoke an aura of positivist objectivity, making claims to the scientific basis of risk assessments. However, 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 (Hudson, 2002; Kemshall, 2002; Silver & Miller, 2002). In addition, the prediction-based design of actuarial risk assessments "depoliticise[s] the process of social regulation" (Silver & Miller, 2002, p. 144), because their purpose is to predict violence, not to alter the conditions that may give rise to it. Therefore, risk discourses are inherently decontextualized, focusing instead on individual characteristics that are thought to be statistically linked with criminal offending.

Integral to risk management strategies are prison programs that target aspects of an individual that contribute to his or her criminal behavior. Because these aspects must be statistically related to crime and amendable to change, most programs focus on reforming the selves and subjectivities of prisoners. Research has shown that prison programs for women encourage a psychologized notion of "the criminal self." In particular, cognitive–behavioral programs (deemed by correctional researchers

and policy makers to be the most effective strategy for making people stop committing crimes) decontextualize gendered, racialized, and classed experiences and focus instead on changing thinking patterns (Fox, 2001; Kendall, 2002; McCorkel, 2003; Pollack & Kendall, 2005). Women-centered treatment programs founded on cognitive–behavioral approaches and ideas about women's "unruly emotions" are also part of the prison risk reduction apparatus (Pollack & Kendall, 2005). Although researchers have focused on how prison programming encourages the adoption of the criminal self story line and the gendered impact of prison risk assessments and risk management strategies, few have investigated the impact of processes of psychologized self-regulatory practices on women released from prison.

The Study

Canadian research on women's postprison experiences is largely quantitative, focuses on recidivism rates, and is conducted by the correctional service itself. The underlying premise of most of these studies is that recidivism can be predicted and can be prevented by targeting risk factors. Studies on recidivism tend to turn their gaze toward the individual characteristics and situations of criminalized women, despite that research has shown that women are often reconvicted due to lack of community supports (Richie, 2001).

There has been much emphasis on reforming women's prisons in Canada but virtually no examination of women's postprison lives or their experiences of being under community correctional supervision. Furthermore, although there have been many calls for gender-specific approaches to assist women released from prison, few have investigated the gendered regulation processes of correctional supervision itself. Given that Canada is currently being heralded as a world leader in women-centered corrections, it is vital that researchers and advocates *outside* correctional services be involved in examining women's postprison experiences.

One of the purposes of this research was to examine the impact of women-centered programming from the point of view of those incarcerated under this correctional model. This examination was directed at both the prison system itself and on the women's postprison experiences in the community. Participants were asked questions about prison programming, release planning, experiences of being on parole, and challenges and supports for establishing a postprison life.

As of March 2006, there were 508 women on conditional release from federal prisons[3] in Canada. Another 401 women were incarcerated in federal prisons (CSC, 2006c). This article reports on one of the themes that emerged from 52 interviews with women who had served federal prison sentences.[4] Interviews were conducted by me (the principal investigator), by another member of the research team, and by graduate students involved with the project. Participants were recruited through individuals and organizations that work with criminalized women. I attempted to get

participants from a variety of backgrounds and with different types of experiences with the correctional system. For example, efforts were made to obtain diversity in living arrangements (e.g., halfway houses, treatment centers, living on own), racial and cultural backgrounds, various lengths of prison sentences (2 years to life), time out of prison, and type of parole (e.g., day, full, completed parole). No attempts were made to recruit women with certain types of convictions, and women were not specifically asked to talk about their criminal charges (although many did).

Participants were given a $40 honorarium in recognition of their time and expertise. Interviews took place in halfway houses, individual homes, shelters, treatment centers, and community organizations. Interviews were open ended, semistructured, and asked questions about prison programming and services (including release planning) and experiences of being released back into the community.

Participants were located in 18 large and small cities across five different provinces. Twenty-nine participants were on day parole, 11 were on statutory release, 8 were on full parole, and 4 had passed their warrant expiry date. Twenty-six of the women were living in halfway houses, 20 women were living with family, friends, or on their own, and the remaining 6 women were living in treatment centers or women's shelters. Nine interviews were conducted in French, the rest were conducted in English. Ten women identified as Aboriginal or Metis, 2 as Black or biracial, and the rest as Caucasian. Prison sentences ranged from 2 years to life sentences.

There were three general phases to the data analysis. The first phase involved reading over the hard copy of the transcripts in their entirety and making handwritten notes about significant concepts and themes. This is similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open-coding techniques. By comparing concepts and themes across interviews, I began to see the emergence of various categories of experience. The second phase of coding was conducted with qualitative data analysis software called Nvivo. This program allowed me to compare and contrast categories as I developed them. In the first coding and analysis phase, I examined data within the context of a whole narrative, and in this second phase I compared and contrasted data categorized under the same heading. It was during this phase of the analysis that I began to see the various ways in which women's risk was being defined and "managed" in the community. One of these risk factors was a history of being abused by men. Abused women's risk is monitored through the requirement that they disclose any new intimate relationships to their parole officers. Furthermore, women's descriptions of themselves mirrored correctional discourses that decontexualize their responses to abuse and instead frame their actions as a result of bad relationship skills. The mandatory reporting of intimate relationships is generally required by the National Parole Board of Canada if a woman incurred a violent charge against an intimate partner or when relationships are thought to contribute to other risk factors, such as emotional instability and/or use of alcohol and/or drugs.

During the final data analysis phase, I traveled between the data, the coding of the data, and the relevant scholarly literature. This phase resulted in the analysis presented

here about the discursive connections between victimization, women's potential for violence, and the regulation of abused women's relationships.

What is specifically examined in this article are data from interviews with women who commented on the reporting policy and/or upon discursive connections between victimization and risk. I have used excerpts from selected transcripts (nine interviews) to illustrate the impact of this policy and its related assumptions on both the women's postprison lives and the discourses they use to navigate understandings of themselves within the context of intimate relationships with men.[5]

Violence in Relationships and "Intimacy Issues"

Policy and program discourse can influence how those who are subject to its regulation constitute their subjectivity, struggles, and goals. In outlining the various tensions within feminist criminology's construction of the female criminalized individual, Snider (2003) questions whether the subjectivity of criminalized women created by feminist "expert knowers" has "percolated down the social order to (re)constitute the female offender herself" (p. 361). She is particularly interested in victimization discourses, as they have been mobilized by feminists to advocate for improved prison programming and to challenge the demonization of imprisoned women. Participants in this study engaged in a variety of ways with the current conceptualization of criminalized women as both victims of abuse and as emotionally disordered. Victimization discourses have indeed percolated down to correctional policy and practice, and criminalized women employ them in various ways to constitute their subjectivity as well as to negotiate and challenge the correctional system. It is likely impossible to know what reflects true self-understandings and subjectivities, because the rewards for women to adopt dominant correctional framings are manifold. However, what does seem evident is that correctional practices are saturated with risk thinking that features victimization discourses and that criminalized women employ myriad and contradictory strategies to negotiate these constructs.

Data from this study reveal a tension between resisting current constructions and reproducing a constitution of the self as unhealthy and relationally deficient. For some, the deficit-based discourse is more readily absorbed by those for whom prison provided a certain amount of safety and time to dry out from alcohol or drugs. Due to lack of community supports and opportunities, prison can be the first time a woman is able to access help for her addictions. In these cases, help is contingent on conforming to the punishment regime. As Julie[6] said, "Being under the system for four years, I had to follow everything they had asked. Because if I don't follow through, then they're not going to help me." By discursively constituting themselves through correctional frames, women's access to various supports and possibilities of release is likely to be expedited.

When asked about their experiences of returning to the community, participants in this study spoke about a number of restrictions placed upon them as conditions for their release. These included parole stipulations such as reporting to their parole officers, refraining from use of drugs and alcohol, and seeing a correctional service psychologist. One of the stipulations that participants who had been abused by men in intimate relationships found particularly intrusive was the requirement to report to their parole officer any new relationships in which they became involved (this appears to be the case for both heterosexual and lesbian relationships). There were a variety of responses to this stipulation, with some women challenging the construction of abused women as violent and others adopting the dominant correctional framing that they are angry and unable to regulate their emotions.

One of the main issues raised in regard to disclosing their intimate relationships was the invasive nature of this stipulation. Although no longer confined behind walls or under the control of prison officers, the experience of parole is characterized by scrutiny and surveillance by halfway house staff, parole officers, and correctional psychologists. Two women spoke very succinctly about the intrusive nature of having one's private relationships also scrutinized and assessed (because the parole officer reserves the right to define the acceptability of the relationship). Dawn, for example, asked, "Do I have to tell you every time I'm having sex . . .? When does my life become private?" and Quinn joked, "Shall I call [my parole officer] *before* I have sex, or *after*?"

Not only are abused women required to have their relationships scrutinized, but a psychologized framing of abuse operates to encourage self-regulatory pseudotherapeutic practices. As Quinn stated, "I have to report all intimate relationships . . . they think that I have issues around . . . *intimacy*" (laughs). Thus, women's experiences of abuse are reduced to intimacy issues, which, when linked with risk discourses, places them at risk of future violence. This framing is in line with the overall psychologized thrust of Canadian women's corrections that locates the "cause" of crime within women's psyche. Because of the correctional emphasis on women's psychology and vulnerability to victimization, women are encouraged to view themselves as at risk when in relationships. Within the psychologized risk discourse, previous experiences of victimization are reconfigured as a personal failing and pathology. Constructing victimization as intimacy issues not only dramatically undermines the realities of violence against women but also translates into increased regulation. Intimate relationships therefore become a gendered site of surveillance and regulation of the criminal justice system. Tania, for example, states that because she was abused by her ex-husband,

> They want to know about any changes in my relationship with my [current] husband. If we're having problems, they want to know. If we break up, they want to know. Because of my *ex*-husband . . . *I'm* being punished for what *he* did to me.

The policy focus on women's intimate relationships is also reflected in prison programming, as illustrated by Dawn's description of a relationships class in prison. She said that women were asked to define the qualities of a relationship they were willing to negotiate and those that they were not. They had to articulate their *wants* and *needs* under each category. The following comment illustrates Dawn's attempt to resist decontextualizing and psychologizing her experiences:

> I'm sitting in a relationships class, there was up on the wall, it says "Negotiable, non-negotiable, wants, needs, wants, needs," under each heading. So they look at me—they think I'm a hard case—they look at me, and they say "Ok, Dawn, pick something and put it under the categories." So I said "I need a job, this is for when I get out, it's under non-negotiable, I need a job." "No, you don't." "What do you mean, 'no I don't?' I need a job. I need a job. That's non-negotiable."

Some women attempted to resist an exclusive focus on intimacy issues by drawing attention to the structural issues they also face, including lack of employment opportunities (especially after a period of imprisonment) and poverty. However, core programming for federally sentenced women is largely cognitive–behavioral and focuses on women's thoughts and behaviors. Liz pointed out the irony of the predominance of psychological programming at the expense of other types of programming, such as job skills and apprenticeship opportunities, in that "women deal with their anger but have no roof over their heads."

Self-Regulation and Self-Esteem

People on parole are supposed to become prudent managers of their own risk (Kemshall, 2002). They are expected to know their risk factors and take steps to ensure appropriate self-monitoring. This project is aided by the various "control professionals" (Rose, 2000, p. 332)—such as parole officers, psychologists, and halfway house staff—who assess such things as the nature and quality of women's intimate relationships. Some of the criteria used to evaluate the impact of a relationship on women's level of risk are whether their partners have been incarcerated[7] and how "stable" the relationships are deemed to be. Women need to balance their own safety and well-being with the requirements of the risk apparatus in which they are entangled. Dawn, for example, was in a relationship that was abusive, yet felt that her risk level would be elevated should she disclose this information to her parole officer (as this might result in more intensive controls over her life). She decided to stay within an abusive relationship until she was eligible for full parole, at which time she would no longer be required to have her "risk" (and relationships) intensively monitored:

> CSC says that you have to be stable before you get full parole, and if you don't maintain this relationship and look like you're having a stable type of deal, then guess what's happening? . . . and there was a lot of abuse going on. So I'm thinking to myself, "You know what? Full parole is coming, full parole is coming . . . it's going to be OK. As soon as full parole hits, dissolve the relationship."

Correctional approaches that draw on relational psychology substantiate Dawn's concern. Recent correctional research asserts that "the loss of valued relationships play[s] a greater role in female offending" (Bloom et al., 2003, as quoted in Fortin, 2004, p. 38). Losing a relationship, perhaps due to experiencing abuse, could then be read by correctional and/or parole staff as increasing a woman's risk to reoffend. Barb's comments reflect this perspective that the loss of a valued relationship puts her at risk of extreme emotions and getting in trouble:

> I have to have my relationships monitored . . . when I get into a relationship, it usually turns abusive and then, I get in trouble. You know, in the long run, I get in trouble, because breaking up is an emotional time for me . . . I get really angry . . . I'd get beat up, you know, so I'd turn around, go to the pub and have a few drinks and then jump in my truck and go back home, and bang. . . . I know now, the parts where, you know, everything had to be my way in the relationship and stuff like that. And, it was hard and I would get mad.

Barb's description of herself as angry and as needing everything her way echoes correctional program and policy documents that stress women's inability to regulate their emotions and control their anger. That Barb's relationships usually turn abusive and that she would get beat up is only relevant insofar as it relates to ideas about her risk or getting into trouble. Women's prior behavior is disconnected from the context of abuse and is taken to mean that *relationships in general* are sites in which they may behave violently.

Individualistic and deficit-based framing of women's responses to male violence is perpetuated through the notion that abused women have very low self-esteem. The research about criminalized women is replete with self-esteem discourse (Pollack, 2000b). There is widespread acceptance that low self-esteem is a problem for imprisoned women that they need to address through programming. *Creating Choices* (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Woman, 1990), the document on which recent reforms to federal women's imprisonment in Canada have been based, identifies low self-esteem as a significant factor in bringing women into conflict with the law (see Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000, for a critique of *Creating Choices*).

In this study, Rachel had to participate in a self-esteem program while incarcerated. While talking about it, she seemed somewhat ambivalent as to whether the programs she took on self-esteem were helpful. After a moment of reflection, she

said that it may have helped "to build up my self-esteem because, like, the strip search was really hard on myself." Strip searches are a common prison practice and often a prerequisite for getting passes for such things as visits with children. For most women, submitting to a strip search is degrading. In Rachel's case, the same system that is humiliating her is offering her ways of feeling better about being violated! Not only do the psychologizing discourses decontextualize abuses of male power but also serve to legitimate uses of *state* power. Pollack and Kendall (2005) found a similar dynamic in their analysis of cognitive–behavioral programming with women with mental health diagnoses. Within the context of a prison therapeutic milieu, women were taught strategies for "distress tolerance." Such therapeutic practices within the context of a punitive setting carry the potential to stifle prisoner resistance to unjust prison practices.

Extending the reach of self-esteem discourse even further, this study found women's low self-esteem is explicitly linked with their propensity for violence. Risk discourses get mobilized around narratives about self-esteem and women's involvement with abusive men. As Selma stated,

> I have to report what kind of relationships I have, because they kind of don't want you to go into a relationship intimately, because they know what's going to happen, you know . . . like me, for example, once I got into a relationship, that's all I focused on. I didn't focus on getting well, I didn't focus on taking care of me, I didn't focus on, you know, loving me and whatever.

Women who have responded to male violence with aggression are encouraged to see themselves as lacking self-esteem and as violent. The psychologized risk thinking that permeates correctional practice with criminalized women has concrete policy implications as well as a direct impact on women's articulations of their subjectivity. Dorothy's statement about criminalized women is a clear articulation of correctional discourses that link abused women's victimization with a propensity for violence: "If we have self-esteem, we're powerful; if we don't love ourselves, we're dangerous."

Sam was abused in several of her relationships with men and stated that she has to have her relationships monitored because "relationships are bad for me." She also stated, however, that she "won't let nobody hurt me ever again" and that she will defend herself physically against "the next [violent partner] who screws with me." Her comments reflect the importance of contextualizing women's use of force and the problems with correctional invocations of risk discourses. To some degree, Sam sees the logic of monitoring her relationships in that she knows she will defend herself should someone attempt to abuse her. However, it is criminalized women who experience regulation and sanction over their attempts to protect themselves from male violence.

Gender, Risk, and Punishment Within the Neoliberal Context

Findings discussed in this article are consistent with Hannah-Moffat's (2004) research on parole decision-making processes about women with nonviolent criminal convictions. Her findings illustrate that decisions about women's propensity for violence are often based on how a woman responded to abuse (e.g., whether she used violence against her abuser). She concludes that

> The omission of an analysis of gender and power in this risk frame, disadvantages women, misrepresents the nature of violent relationships, and formulates a spurious link between resistance in the context of a violent relationship and the potential for violent recidivism. (p. 376)

Furthermore, Hannah-Moffat also found that women who did not reproduce correctional therapeutic stories about their experiences were considered to be more at risk of violent offending (p. 380). This speaks to the ways in which women are encouraged to self-regulate by reproducing psychologized discursive frames about victimization and risk.

Constructs such as mental illness, self-esteem, and therapeutic programming are often taken for granted by scholars and researchers. An uncritical acceptance of therapeutic and self-esteem discourse perpetuates the psy-ing of women's social marginalization and diverts attention from systemic oppression. Given the intimate relationship between strategies of risk control and psychological and therapeutic discourses, an examination of how women are constructed as unwell within the context of correctional and criminal justice regimes is clearly warranted. This is of particular urgency because well-intended feminist exposures of the emotional and psychological impact of violence against women and childhood trauma (as evidence of the needs of criminalized women) have recently been reconfigured as risks (Hannah-Moffat, 2004).

There is often a tension between feminist work that aims to improve women's daily lived experience within correctional systems and that which aims to deconstruct the premises and practices of the system itself. As Snider (2003) writes,

> Feminist criminology today has reached an absurd and ironic impasse. We now have one group of authorized knowers busy using knowledge to construct new programmes and disciplinary regimes to "help" the female offender they know, and another group busy deconstructing the efforts of the first. (p. 371)

Arguably, working within oppressive systems inevitably means to some degree reproducing marginalizing and oppressive practices even while challenging others. As the situation in Canada illustrates, even when correctional policy makers attempt to reform women's prisons, the logics of risk thinking impede feminist visions. One aspect of

this tension relates to the theorization and negotiation of the power of the correctional system to define and interpret the experiences and needs of imprisoned women.

Feminist scholars have illustrated the importance of focusing on state processes—rather than individual characteristics of women—in our work on gender and punishment. This work argues that many studies on women, criminalization, and punishment leave state power and its various manifestations unexamined (Roth, 2004; Sudbury, 2005). Sudbury (2005), for example, states that using victimization or abuse narratives to understand why women come into conflict with the law without contextualizing these experiences within a larger socioeconomic framework "obscures the broader social disorder signified by mass incarceration, and it sidesteps the question of why the state responds to abused women with punishment" (p. xv). Feminist scholarship about the gendered, classed, and racialized nature of state regulatory strategies has pointed out congruence in regulatory strategies used in various sites across the penal–welfare state, from social assistance programs to penal policies. Haney (2004), therefore, has suggested that feminists interested in gender and punishment explore the ways in which "penal welfarism" (Garland, 2001) is gendered and racialized. She argues for the examination of linkages across state systems to expose and challenge the logics of neoliberal regulation of social marginality. Both Haney and McCorkel (2004), for example, have illustrated how gendered discourses of empowerment and dependency operate across the penal–welfare system to "absolve the state of its role in social reform by holding individuals accountable for personal and societal failings" (Haney, 2004, p. 347).

Neoliberal "responsibilizing" techniques are indicative of market-driven values such as privatization and freedom of choice. Social policy characteristic of neoliberal values produces the self-reliant individual, responsible for his or her own success and/or misfortune. As the state retreats from its social welfare responsibilities and adopts instead what could be called the *privatized individual*, strategies for social governance are no longer centrally located within governments. The governance of individuals takes place at a distance. Decentralization and partnerships with private companies and nonprofits have led to a proliferation of actors charged with carrying out a state agenda. These partnerships have resulted in the hybridization of the public–private space (Rose, 1996), which renders state power opaque (Roth, 2004). Psychological discourses and therapeutic practices are often sites through which regulatory processes are dispersed. The "search for the state" (Roth, 2004) is more challenging when processes are embedded within the language of healing and support. Casting our gaze onto the complex and often obfuscated mechanisms of regulatory strategies may help us better anticipate, confront, and challenge practices that transform feminist discourses into "ruling practices" (Smith, 1987).

Risk discourses proliferate across the penal–welfare system and, as found in this study, take on gendered formulations in the regulation of women on parole. The merging of psy discourses with correctional risk frameworks depoliticizes the issue of violence against women and decontextualizes women's use of force in abusive

relationships. Furthermore, this merging translates into increased regulation of women under correctional supervision in the community and perpetuates the psy-ing of women's experiences of abuse. We should be cautious about calls for a gendering of risk assessments and classifications systems for criminalized women (in the contexts of presentencing, imprisonment, and parole) and other such reforms. These approaches, although perhaps slightly improving conditions for criminalized women, nonetheless accept the basic logics of penal philosophy and help to legitimate correctional practices. Lessons learned from the Canadian experience and the current neoliberal climate suggest the need for approaches that challenge the premises of penal practice and social regulation of criminalized women.

Notes

1. I am using the term *criminalized women* rather than the commonly used term *female offenders* to signal processes and practices rather than a reified identity. This is part of an effort to challenge discourses that construct criminalized women as "other" and separate them from those who research and write about their experiences. In addition, as illustrated by one of the participants in this study, the term *offender* dehumanizes. She stated that people working within the correctional system need to understand that "they're not working with *offenders* . . . they aren't working with *garbage,* they're working with people."

2. I would like to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in funding this research.

3. A federal prison is for those sentenced to 2 years or more.

4. At the time of writing, all interviews had not yet been completed. There will be in total approximately 75 women interviewed for this study.

5. One participant spoke about the stipulation that she report any new intimate relationship with a woman.

6. To ensure confidentiality, all names used are pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves.

7. In fact, most women (and men) on parole have a stipulation that forbids contact with anyone known to have been involved with any illegal activities.

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