

## ARTICLES

### **“You Can’t Have it Both Ways”: Punishment and Treatment of Imprisoned Women**

SHOSHANA POLLACK

*Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada*

*In this article, I report on findings from a qualitative study with 68 formerly incarcerated women in Canada which examined their experiences of imprisonment and release to the community. Data from this study illustrate a disjuncture between women-centered correctional policy rhetoric and the lived experience of incarceration. Programming is greatly affected by the prison culture of punishment and control and thus is not generally experienced as empowering. A women-centered approach is also not evident in regard to job skills development as prisoners are predominantly utilized for feminized jobs such as hairdressing, cooking, and cleaning the prison.*

**KEYWORDS** *female offenders, women’s imprisonment, prison programs, gender, crime*

In recent years, in recognition of the differences between how women and men become criminalized, feminist criminologists and policy makers have pushed for gender sensitivity in women’s corrections (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004). Within these discussions, Canada is often touted as a progressive model for incarcerating women (Maidment, 2006). This reputation comes from reforms made in the 1990s to the federal women’s prison system that included cottage-style living units (rather than the old-style bars and cells) and the use of “women-centered” principles to describe new approaches to correctional programming (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990). The fallacy that recent reforms have led to prisons that are empowering for

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Address correspondence to Dr. Shoshana Pollack, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, 120 Duke Street, Kitchener, Ontario N2H 3W8. E-mail: [spollack@wlu.ca](mailto:spollack@wlu.ca)

women has been amply illustrated by Canadian researchers. Scholars and activists have illustrated how the appropriation of feminist- and Aboriginal-informed healing discourses have been transformed into gendered strategies for governing imprisoned women (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Hayman, 2006; Pollack & Kendall, 2005).

What has not been examined, however, is how women themselves experience life under the current women's prison regime. In this article, I report on findings from a qualitative study with 68 formerly incarcerated women in Canada that examined their experiences of imprisonment and release into the community. The focus here is on what participants said about their experiences of prison programming. Data from this study illustrate a disjuncture between women-centered correctional policy rhetoric and the lived experience of incarceration. Programming is greatly affected by the prison culture of punishment and control and thus is not generally experienced as empowering. A women-centered approach is also not evident with regard to job-skills development because prisoners are used predominantly in feminized jobs, such as hairdressing, cooking, and cleaning the prison.

I begin this paper by situating the increasing rates of women being sentenced to prison within the neo-liberal context at a shrinking welfare state and individualizing strategies for reforming "unruly" women. I have divided the findings of this study into three themes: prisons as treatment centers?; prison programming; and gender and employment.

## IMPRISONING WOMEN WITHIN A NEOLIBERAL CONTEXT

Neoliberalism, as an ideology and a set of socioeconomic policies, has led to a shift in how the North American welfare state functions and governs. An important aspect of neoliberalism is the reconceptualization of the state as a provider of support to viewing the state as facilitator of the free-market economy (Mullaly, 2007). With this reconceptualization comes reduced state spending on social services and welfare and employment benefits as well as the development of a "culture of control" (Garland, 2001) characterized by the law and order discourses and new forms of state regulation. The dismantling of social services and welfare state provisions in tandem with a political appetite for incarceration have resulted "in the increased criminalization of the most marginalized and vulnerable members of our communities" (Neve & Pate, 2005, p. 27).

At the same time that neoliberal policies are exacerbating poverty and devastating social services, the number of women being sentenced to prison terms is skyrocketing worldwide (Sudbury, 2005). Not coincidentally, prisons have become big business in industrialized nations. Law and order discourses and increasingly harsh criminal justice responses obfuscate the realities of increasing economic and social marginalization, which are contributing to

the rising numbers of (largely racialized<sup>1</sup>) women being incarcerated. In the United States, for example, Chesney-Lind (2002) states that there is a “women’s imprisonment boom.” Both Australia and Great Britain are also experiencing an increase in the numbers of women being imprisoned (Balfour & Comack, 2006). Despite decreasing crime rates, the rate of women being sentenced to federal prisons in Canada is steadily increasing. Between 1997 and 2006, the population of women in federal prisons jumped 22% (Correctional Service of Canada, 2006).

Prisons figure in the public imagination as symbols of punishment and deprivation of liberty; they represent a space that contains and regulates people’s behavior in order to make the “other people” (those who are not in prison) feel more safe. Within a social services climate that has long waiting lists and costly fees, prisons are, ironically, one of the few places that cannot deny entry to those in need. As Garland notes, prison now functions as a “repository for the mentally ill, drug addicts, and poor, sick people for whom the depleted social services no longer provide adequate accommodation” (2001, p. 179).

Consequently, one finds a contradictory network of correctional policies and programs that aim to reform, regulate, and discipline “unruly” populations (Garland, 2001). A key feature of this network is that punitive models of correction collide with therapeutic frameworks, thereby integrating discourses of empowerment and treatment with practices of punishment and control. This is especially salient with regard to imprisoned women who are most often considered unstable, dependent, and un-empowered (Haney, 2004). Practices within the “*therapeutic*” (Carlen & Toombs, 2006) paradigm disqualify an understanding of how structural and systemic factors contribute to marginalization, addictions, criminalization, and poverty (Fox, 1999; McCorkel, 2003; Pollack & Kendall, 2005).

Women represent a small proportion of people in jails and prisons in Canada. In 2003 and 2004, 9% of prisoners in provincial and territorial jails were women, and 6% of federal prisoners were women (Statistics Canada, 2006). An overwhelming majority of imprisoned women are convicted of property offenses, whereas 3% are convicted of violent offenses (Statistics Canada, 2006). The most common offense by women charged with property crimes is theft of less than \$5000 or fraud. Many women have committed income-generating offenses such as fraud, shoplifting, prostitution, and robbery to support addictions (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2003). In Canada, the fastest growing group of incarcerated women is Aboriginal.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Franz Fanon (1963) is credited with the original conception of the term *racialization*. Here I use Murji and Solomos’ definition, which refers to “the processes by which racial meanings are attached to particular issues—often treated as social problems—and with the manner in which race appears to be a, or often the, key factor in the ways they are defined and understood” (2005, p. 3).

<sup>2</sup> The word *Aboriginal* refers to the indigenous peoples of Canada.

The rate of imprisoned Aboriginal women jumped 72.5% between 1996 and 2004 (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2006). Although Aboriginal people compose 3% of the Canadian population, 19% of federal prisoners are Aboriginal. For women, this number is even higher: 32% of federal female prisoners are Aboriginal. In 2003 there were 822 federally sentenced women, 374 (45%) of whom were in prison and 448 (55%) of whom were out on bail or under community supervision. By 2006-2007, there were 476 women in federal prisons.

## UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT: THE IMPRISONING OF WOMEN IN CANADA

A number of tragic and dramatic events in the late 1980s and early 1990s (a Royal Commission of Inquiry; the closing of the Kingston Prison for Women (P4W); a Canadian Human Rights Commission investigation; and reforms in how women are imprisoned) have marked the past 20 years of women's federal corrections. Between December 1988 and February 1991, seven women at the Kingston Prison for Women (P4W) committed suicide. Six of the seven prisoners were Aboriginal. In 1989, the Solicitor General of Canada appointed a Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women whose mandate was to examine how women in the Kingston P4W were treated and to develop a policy and plan that would be more responsive to the needs of women prisoners. In 1990, a report called *Creating Choices* provided the foundation for the development of a new strategy for incarcerating women serving federal sentences. The task force that conducted the inquiry made significant recommendations that were to change the philosophy, geography, and programming of federally sentenced women. As a result of this report, between 1995 and 1997 the Correctional Service of Canada opened five regional prisons for women: Edmonton Institution for Women in Alberta, Grand Valley Institution for Women in Ontario, Joliette Institution in Quebec, Nova Institution for Women in Nova Scotia, and the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan, a prison for Aboriginal women. The Kingston Prison for Women was officially closed in 2000.

In addition to changes in geographical location, *Creating Choices* also recommended that these new prisons be based on what they termed women-centered principles, such as empowerment and respect, and that they be responsive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal women. In acknowledgment of the high numbers of incarcerated women who had experienced abuse and the lack of appropriate supports for Aboriginal women, *Creating Choices* emphasized the importance of therapy and empowerment within a women-centered framework (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990). One of the subsequent critiques of the report stated that it did not adequately recognize or articulate the ways in which the prison environment

actively contradicts notions of support and empowerment or how to negotiate these contradictions within a women-centered policy framework. As a result, the correctional system endorses empowerment policy rhetoric, but few progressive ideological, discursive, or programmatic changes have actually resulted from these policies (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000). Moreover, the therapeutic rhetoric eclipses the very real fact that poverty, addictions, and exclusion from the labor market are significant factors in the criminalization of women (and men).

In 2003, two separate government bodies, the Auditor General of Canada and the Canadian Human Rights Commission, released reports that condemned the treatment of female prisoners in federal prisons. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003) found that federally imprisoned women, in stark contrast to being empowered, experience human rights violations on the basis of their gender, culture, and mental or physical disabilities. Areas of particular concern related to prison conditions included male-based security classification tools, lack of appropriate counseling, limited employment training opportunities, and the lack of a grievance mechanism by which prisoners can have complaints such as harassment addressed.

Although there have been several significant government reports in the past 5 years, with the exception of Lasovich's (1996) report on release housing for formerly incarcerated women in British Columbia, we have very little qualitative information from criminalized women themselves about the experience of imprisonment and of reintegration. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of imprisonment and return to the community from the point of view of criminalized women.

## METHODOLOGY

The principal investigator and research assistants interviewed 68 women who had served federal prison sentences in Canada. Forty-one women identified as Caucasian; 22 as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit; 4 as black, and the race ethnicity of one participant is unknown. Participants were located in 19 large and small cities across eight Canadian provinces. Interviews lasted between 1 and 1½ hours and were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. Two participants did not wish to be tape recorded, so hand-written notes were taken instead. All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves by which I could refer to them in public forums. Many women said they had street names or nicknames. I requested that they choose names by which they were not known in any other context.

Participants were recruited through individuals and organizations that work with criminalized women. Flyers advertising the study were put up in halfway houses and community agencies. Potential participants were asked

to call me or my research assistant if they wished to participate. In addition, women sometimes referred their friends to the study after they had participated. All efforts were made to ensure that women who saw the flyer within the context of service-delivery agencies were aware that participation in my study (or not participating) would in no way affect the services provided by halfway houses, community agencies, or any other organization. This point, as well as assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, was clearly articulated in an information letter and consent form. The study was approved by a university research ethics board.

I attempted to get participants who came from a variety of backgrounds and who had had differing types of experiences in the correctional system. For example, efforts were made to obtain diversity in living arrangements, racial and cultural backgrounds, length of prison sentences (2 years to life), time out of prison, and type of parole (e.g., day, full, or no longer on 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). Interviews took place in halfway houses, individual homes, shelters, treatment centers, and community organizations. Interviews were open-ended, semistructured, and included questions about prison programming and services and about the experiences of being released back into the community.

There were three general phases in the data analysis. The first phase involved reading all transcripts and noting 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 such as barriers to community inclusion. 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 the second phase I compared and contrasted data categorized under the same heading. During the final data analysis phase, I traveled among the data, the coding, and the relevant scholarly literature. This article reports on the theme of punishment and treatment that emerged from this analytic process. The findings are organized into three themes: prisons as treatment centers?; programming and punishment; and gender and employment.

### PRISONS AS TREATMENT CENTERS?

For many participants, prison represented the possibility of receiving help for their addictions. It is important to understand that the context in which many women are increasingly being criminalized is one of poverty, racism,

addiction, lack of community supports, and violence against women. Participants spoke about how these struggles often related to the criminalization of survival strategies and the feeling that community resources were not accessible to them.

I was on the street and this guy attacked me and I stabbed him three times. I went to prison, I was on dope and I went to prison, like no one helped me when I was on the street. No one. I cried out for help many times. . . .

—Hannah

I would be dead if I hadn't gone to prison. I mean I would have OD'd or somebody would have killed me, that's where my life was going.

—Susie

Of the 68 participants, 66 stated that they had been addicted to drugs or alcohol. Participants identified obstacles to receiving drug or alcohol treatment in the community, such as long waiting lists, programs that are not culturally relevant for Aboriginal people or responsive to women's needs, and expensive fees. Caitlin points to the relationship between poverty and addictions and offers a poignant reflection on the role that imprisonment plays at this nexus.

You can put yourself in detox. They keep you to a maximum of 12 days, and then where do you go from there? Unless you have a family who has a lot of money and is willing to pay for treatment centres...where do you go? What do you do? . . . I wasn't asking to go to jail, per se, I was asking to save myself from my life, because I was an addict and I couldn't get ahold of myself.

Given the difficulties of finding subsidized addiction treatment in the community, particularly outside of large urban centers, many women in this study intended to deal with their addictions while incarcerated. At the same time that publicly funded addiction, counseling, and mental health services are being eviscerated in the community (Mullaly, 2007), the *federal* women's prison system appears to hold the promise of therapeutic support for criminalized women. The notion of prisons as being therapeutic, healing, and supportive sometimes made federal prisons appear to be better options than doing time in provincial jails. Across the country, provincial jails are infamous for their lack of programming and support (Micucci & Monster, 2004); they tend to function primarily as warehouses. Given the dismal conditions in provincial jails, the idea of a therapeutic prison may be

particularly appealing, even if it means enduring a longer prison sentence. In fact, the promise of obtaining treatment in federal prisons has led some women facing shorter sentences in provincial jails to request federal prison time (Maidment, 2006; Neve & Pate, 2005). The following comment from Quinn, a participant in this study, illustrates this point:

I saw women that were incarcerated [in a provincial jail]—6 months, 18 months, 2 years or less—and I just could not believe the sight of them. They were just zombies. And no programming, no funding . . . it was just so sad. And I . . . just knew I had to take control over it. So I asked the judge to go to federal, knowing that they offered therapeutic . . . they had a therapeutic approach.

That women are willing to serve longer prison sentences in order to get help that is often unavailable in their communities, and that judges are willing to sentence them in this way, is quite disturbing. Holding out the promise that women will get real help by doing a longer prison sentence could potentially increase the number of women doing federal time. Longer prison sentences compound women's circumstances when they are released; they are away from their children for longer periods, and they are disconnected from family, community, and the labor market, which further exacerbate their disconnection from the community and feelings of alienation.

## PROGRAMMING AND PUNISHMENT

All the participants in this study were aware of the correctional rhetoric about therapeutic and supportive programming, and some of the women interviewed had been previously incarcerated in provincial jails as well as under the former federal prison system for women. Women's comments about their experiences of imprisonment under the "women-centered" regime across the country reflected an engagement with the contradictory discourses about prisons as being both empowering and punishing. One of the central themes in relation to this contradiction was the sense of disappointment and disillusionment experienced when it was found that prisons provide relatively little support and are not safe places for healing. The following comments reveal an awareness that correctional policy has shifted its discourse from framing women's prisons as places of punishment to framing them as places of support. Despite the correctional rhetoric, women's lived experiences confirm the reality that the purpose and mandate of imprisonment is to punish and control. As Liz states, "call it prison and we're going to punish people. Don't call it rehabilitation and reintegration,



because it's not. You can't have it both ways." Other participants made the following observations.

. . . I know that maybe it's not necessarily CSC's [Correctional Service of Canada] job to help these women, but isn't that the point of being in jail? Rehabilitation, not punishment?

—Caitlin

You cage them up for a couple of years and say OK, your time's up. OK, go. And that's not what it's supposed to be about anymore.

—Stephanie

Sometimes I think it would be better to go back to the old way, you know, where you got nothing, you didn't expect anything. And you got nothing and, you know, that was the way it was.

—Susan

. . . they have some staff there that are . . . really small-minded and think that jail is all about punishment and that kind of stuff. So I think that's where the problem comes in, yeah. And it's too bad, because if everybody had the attitude . . . about their mission statement, about creating choices and empowering women, I think that it would really make a difference for women.

—Sherri

The women-centered rhetoric also leads women to expect that they will be treated by correctional staff in supportive and respectful ways. As Sherri states above, some staff "think that jail is about punishment," which suggests that her own expectations were that jail is no longer only about punishment. However, it is precisely because prisons are indeed about punishment that the women-centered rhetoric rings false.

Participants who had been incarcerated at the Aboriginal Healing Lodge found the ethos and climate of this prison to be significantly less hostile than the non-Aboriginal prisons (11 women had experienced both the Healing Lodge and another prison for women). Reasons for this were related to the Aboriginal programming philosophy that emphasized holistic approaches to life and healing and focused on building connections between staff members and prisoners. Yet even within this context, the reality of the punitive environment affected the ways in which women experienced healing practices. Although women did express appreciation of the opportunity to have access to cultural and spiritual traditions and to speak

with elders, the fact that the Healing Lodge was operated by the correctional system framed their experiences. Stephanie gained a lot from speaking with elders, fasting, and taking part in sweat lodge ceremonies. However, she questioned a prison environment that intertwines punishment and healing and points out this contradiction.

. . . they [Healing Lodge staff] want you to heal too fast, and on their terms. Like you know what I mean? When you go to the Healing Lodge they make you write—it's called the healing plan—and they make you write like all your issues. Like, for example, you know, abused, sexually abused as a child, and you know, got into prostitution and addictions and all that. So they want you to write all that stuff and what do you think you need to do to overcome that. What can you do daily, and like you gotta follow that, like that's part of being there.

Stephanie goes on to say that if you do not participate daily in your healing program you can be “charged,” which means being punished or being denied access to certain rights and privileges. She states that you have to heal “on their terms” by adopting the routines, strategies, and methods employed at the Healing Lodge or risk being penalized.

Women who had been imprisoned at the other five federal prisons expressed similar sentiments. Although individual group facilitators may have been appreciated, participants spoke about the overall punitive environment as seriously undermining the therapeutic potential of counseling. Women questioned the effectiveness of mandated therapy when the environment in which it was taking place was one of punishment, hostility, aggression, fear, and disrespect. The prepackaged correctional programming was questioned for the control the facilitator has over the predetermined topics as well as how programs are run. Susan suggested that an alternative approach would be to integrate into the program models an understanding of the past experiences of the participants and how they may be responding to the prison environment:

And, you know, the teachers and the groups had good intentions, I'm sure. But if you acted out in group, you got kicked out. You got a lot of women with fetal alcohol syndrome, a lot of women with issues. And we don't have the greatest attention spans in the world. You know? And so they'd get hyper and start laughing and goofing around and they'd get kicked out of the course, which I—how helpful is that? When you run a course with an iron hand, you're not going to have any people that benefit from it. You've got to, kind of, take stock of the people that you've got to work with and build a course around them.

The themes of flexibility, respect, confidentiality, and client-directedness were common in participants' talk about programming and counseling. The

very positive assessments of a small sexual abuse counseling program highlights the significance of these issues for imprisoned women.<sup>3</sup> Each prison is supposed to provide a trauma/sexual abuse counseling service. It is a very small program that is contracted out to community organizations and generally involves brief one-to-one counseling sessions. The therapist can usually see only a handful of women each week. Despite the fact that the service is limited, women in this study who had the opportunity to see a sexual abuse counselor greatly valued the experience. Participants who had one-to-one counseling sessions spoke about the insight they had gained into both their addictions and their other behaviors and feelings. In all regions, the sexual abuse counseling program was viewed in very positive terms, and respondents felt this type of therapy significantly affected how they cope with, and understand, many of their past and current experiences. Women articulated several reasons for this. First and most important, the counselor was not considered to be part of Correctional Service of Canada in that she was hired from the “outside” to deliver the program. Participants spoke of the obstacles to being honest, open, and vulnerable with prison staff and the significance of having a therapist/counselor who was allowed to keep their therapy sessions confidential:

There is another program run in CSC [Correctional Service of Canada], but not through CSC, which was very beneficial to me. And it's called Trauma and Abuse, for survivors of trauma and abuse, and it's run by an independent group of social workers who are actually paid by CSC but don't work through CSC, so...and that's voluntary as well, it's not a part of anybody's correctional plan, so the people that were in that program wanted to be in that program, and that made a huge difference.

—Caitlin

That the women emphasized the voluntary nature of this program is reflective of a prison environment that mandates certain kinds of programs and therapies and stipulates them in a woman's correctional plan. Most correctional programming is cognitive-behavioral, targeting thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that are believed to be associated with crime. This type of programming goes “by the book,” in the sense that the facilitators tend to define the general topics of exploration, provide information to the women, and guide them through the weekly agenda. Although on contract with

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<sup>3</sup> The literature concerning the provision of sexual abuse counseling to women prisoners has engaged in a debate as to the advisability of providing this treatment in an unsafe environment. Although most authors admit it is preferable to allow women in prison to access community-based trauma counseling services, this is often not permitted by authorities. Therefore, sexual abuse counseling that takes place within prisons must do so with a heightened awareness of the power imbalances, the limited options for self-care, and the increased potential for retraumatization (Pollack & Brezina, 2007).

CSC, women felt that the sexual abuse counselors' approach was founded on notions of respect, confidentiality, and support. One of the ways this manifested itself was the fact that some sexual abuse counselors allowed the women to see the files they were keeping about them. Files and documentation hold a lot of significance in the prison context because what the authorities write about a prisoner has serious consequences. The theme of *The File* loomed large in these interviews, and many women felt that expert discourses such as those of the psychiatrists and psychologists were privileged over their own accounts of their experiences (Pollack, 2008). In contrast, they experienced sexual abuse counselors from the outside as being more collaborative in their approaches. Colleen's comment is illustrative of what participants said about sexual abuse counseling:

Sexual abuse therapy—fantastic program. The lady [therapist's name] who runs it—unbelievable. She is not under their contract; she's an outside contract. So she comes in and women feel more comfortable with her. Unless you are endangering your life, other's lives, or . . . people in the others' life, what you and her talk to, it stays between you and her. . . . She writes a report for them, and she lets you see. Here's a copy of the report, so you know exactly what's been put into your file. And that's fine. Whereas the psychologist and the psychiatrist are run by them [Correctional Service Canada].

Sexual abuse counseling sessions were confidential (not shared with prison staff), and the transparency of the documentation had the effect of building trust and providing a context in which women felt comfortable dealing with past trauma. As Jessi commented, "I liked seeing her because she was from the outside and she didn't tell corrections what I said. Like it was private." Women stated that although the therapy was quite time-limited, they gained insight into their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. These insights helped them to deal better with self-blame, addictions, and self-harm, allowing them to respond in new ways. A number of women also arranged this type of therapy once they were released because, as Tanya said, "I need my sexual abuse therapy to help keep me strong, so I don't reoffend."

#### "A PROGRAM IS GREAT, BUT A PROGRAM DOESN'T GET YOU A JOB IN SOCIETY": GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT

Participants in this study took a multifaceted approach to understanding what contributed to their criminalization and what would assist them in their post-prison lives. A prevalent theme in the interviews was the sense that despite reintegration discourses about community connections and job

skills, women were provided with very little support in these areas. In fact, participants observed that the emphasis on women's psychology—their thoughts and attitudes—eclipsed the relevance of social exclusion, such as lack of access to jobs, education, and training opportunities. As one participant noted, although women may “deal with their anger [they still] have no roof over their heads.” Most women in this study had very little work experience and identified job connections as an integral part of connecting with community and supporting themselves and their children when released from prison.

The work opportunities given to women in prison are cooking, cleaning and maintaining the prison, and hairdressing, all gender-stereotyped jobs that are unlikely to assist them in entering the labor market. The feminized nature of these jobs was recognized by many participants, who saw it as a gender-based inequity. As Hannah stated,

. . . they need to have more training in prison, like specific training. I don't understand why girls can't do something like mechanics or something like that in there . . . a job that is real, like a man's job. That's what we should have in prison are men's jobs instead of these stupid maintenance—go drive around on the friggin' lawn mower all friggin' day in circles. That's not gonna help. “Oh what did you do?” “Oh, I drove a lawn mower around and around in circles in [prison] for 10 years”. That's not gonna help. They need, like I don't know, cabinet-makers or something like that to come in there.

Several women emphasized the need to be taught trades and suggested that people in the community be asked to come into the prison and teach them “all kinds of things, like electronics, small-appliance repair. . . . And there are people in the community that could do that.” Lisa echoed this option, suggesting that they be taught “a trade” in order for “the women to come back into communities and make a go of it.” Women also felt that men coming out of prison were better equipped to obtain employment, particularly through an organization called CORCAN, operated by Correctional Service of Canada, which provides employment skills training to federal prisoners. Women in this study had the perception that CORCAN was predominantly a support for male rather than female prisoners. River said that this therefore gave “some security for the man...where there's nothing for women.” Although she said she was “probably dreaming,” River thought it would be helpful if

. . . some sort of big company would be able to say “we'll hire women that are getting released from federal prison and pay them this much,” or whatever. Like, just to know that somebody...if you had a job leaving the institution, I think that would make a world of difference because people wouldn't be coming back, they'd be out there busy working and making a few dollars, something like that.

Although technically women prisoners are supposed to be given the opportunity to have job placements in the community and be given passes to attend these, this rarely happens (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2003). Instead, women are given cooking, cleaning, and maintenance jobs, all of which contribute to the running of the prison itself. When placed on a résumé, these types of job experiences at best relegate women to feminized and racialized low-wage employment or, at worst, are skills that are not marketable in the community.

Not only did participants state the need for job training, they also noted that the stigma associated with incarceration undermined their employment opportunities in the community. In particular, women are faced with how to explain time gaps on their résumés as well as with the fact that many employers require disclosure of criminal conviction on application forms. All these factors reinforce the importance of providing links between women's institutions and community businesses so as to develop training and apprenticeship programs aimed at connecting them with employment once released.

## DISCUSSION

As the prison-industrial complex expands and the incarceration rates rise, prisons are increasingly filled with women (and men) who have experienced abuse, poverty, addictions, and mental health issues. With fewer community resources available and a shrinking welfare state, marginalized women are being locked up in greater and greater numbers. Prisons become the default response to social inequalities and marginalization. Yet imprisonment exacerbates social exclusion by removing people from their communities and families and by diverting community resources into prison systems (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002; Richie, 2001).

Given the high profile of the Canadian women's federal prison system and its reputation for being therapeutic and supportive, women in this study had expected to receive treatment for addictions and related issues. Although women found some individual group facilitators helpful—particularly those who “treated us like humans, not animals”—the coercive, hostile, and inflexible prison environment often undermined the good intentions of individuals. An exception to this was the sexual abuse counseling program. The unanimity of responses by the women who talked about their experiences of sexual abuse counseling was striking; they appreciated the counselors' awareness of the power and control issues as well as the respectful and collaborative treatment model (Pollack & Brezina, 2007). The central aspect of the model employed by agencies contracted to deliver this type of counseling was the ability to facilitate trust through confidentiality and non-correctional treatment modalities. In particular, women benefited from the fact that the

counselor came from “outside” and was “not controlled” by Correctional Service Canada. Participants trusted that their confidentiality was ensured and felt that the sexual abuse counselor allowed them to direct the course of therapy rather than following a set agenda or script.

The data from this study show that the focus on programming at the expense of job-skills development and opportunities is consistent with neoliberal regulatory strategies that emphasize individualism, personal choice, and self-sufficiency and ignore the relationship between socioeconomic exclusion and criminalization. Further, in contrast to the gender sensitivity promoted by the correctional system, discrimination exists in the cleaning, cooking, and hairdressing jobs given to women prisoners. Participants held the notion that a “real job” is a “man’s job” and wondered why they could not be taught trades, such as carpentry and electrical work. There was also the perception that CORCAN, the main employment site for former prisoners, was a support only for men, who received from it post-release employment opportunities.

The data presented here raise questions regarding penal policy and practice and the role of women’s prisons within the neoliberal context. In his genealogy of contemporary shifts in the governance of crime and social order, Garland (2001, p. 8) argues that since the 1970s there has been a decline in “the rehabilitative ideal” and a turn toward “retribution, incapacitation and the management of risk.”<sup>4</sup> At least at the discursive level, the Canadian federal women’s system seems to reflect a hybridized model of punishment and rehabilitation that results in contradictory, uneven, and diffuse strategies of governance.

The notion that prisons should be gender sensitive or women centered comes from the recognition that despite the fact that the rate of imprisoned women is low compared to that of men, women prisoners have experiences and needs that are different from those of men and that require gender-based understandings and responses (Bloom, Covington, & Owen, 2004). Participants in this study wanted the prison system to be held accountable for their claims of rehabilitating and reintegrating women in a supportive environment. As Sherri said earlier, the actual realities of prison do not reflect “their mission statement, about creating choices and empowering women.” Simply inserting women into male-based criminological theories about crime and “what works” with prisoners offers little substantial change. Discursive changes such as these are reflective of Foucault’s observation that “[P]rison ‘reform’ is virtually contemporary with the prison itself; it constitutes, as it were, its programme” (1979, p. 234). The notion that tinkering with prisons to make them less egregious bolsters their legitimacy as a

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<sup>4</sup> The field of social work has also seen a shift toward risk management, particularly in the fields of child protection, mental health, and correctional supervision (Pollack, 2008).

social institution and is why some reject reformation in favor of prison abolition (Davis, 2003). In the Canadian context, gender-sensitive rhetoric has further entrenched the use of prisons as a response to gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequalities.

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