Women, Work & Reentry

A Report on Access to Employment for Women who have been Incarcerated

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Acknowledgements

This report seeks to communicate findings about employment and employability for women who have been incarcerated in Ontario. I acknowledge with gratitude the 21 reentering women who shared their stories and insights with me. I also acknowledge the contributions of 13 people I interviewed who are directly involved with formerly incarcerated women: Elizabeth Fry Society workers, parole officers, teachers, employment advisors and other support workers. Many of the research participants expressed willingness to help advance this research, but also hoped to better address the multiple challenges women face in reentry. My hope is that in sharing their narratives I have done justice to their stories and that my analysis can further efforts to support women when they reenter the community after periods of incarceration.

This research project which informs this report was part of my doctoral studies in the Department of Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University. I am grateful to my committee, Sheryl Hamilton, Diana Majury, and Aaron Doyle, whose comments and guidance were extremely valuable throughout the project. I am also grateful for the feedback and insight from Kelly Hannah-Moffat and Jeffrey Monaghan. This project received ethics approval from the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, and was conducted with permission from the Research Branch of Correctional Services Canada. I am grateful for funding received through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship. I would also like to acknowledge funding through Ontario Graduate Scholarships and Carleton University.

- Anita Grace, PhD

Executive Summary

This research was undertaken to examine the challenges women face in obtaining employment after periods of incarceration. It was also designed to explore the nature of employment supports that women received, primarily in the community but also inside institutions. Theoretically, I was interested in understanding how reentering women were directed toward employment, which includes not only the steps they were told to follow, but also how women were instructed to see and present themselves as 'employable'. As such, this project is historically and contextually grounded in the history of women's corrections in Canada, and the ways in which women are directed to be economically productive citizens.

In 1996, the Honourable Louise Arbour recommended that priority be given to vocational training for federally incarcerated women. However, in the years that followed, federally incarcerated women continued to have few vocational programs, and of the employment interventions that exist, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) reports have not shown clear indications of program efficacy. What role then should vocational training have in women's corrections? How does employment, and employability, fit within the objectives and priorities of rehabilitative programming for incarcerated women? This report seeks to lay out the material, structural, and conceptual barriers that prevent women who are reentering the community after periods of incarceration from becoming employed (or recognized as employable). It also provides analysis of women's lived experiences of receiving employment support. Research findings are based on interviews with 13 service providers and 21 reintegrating women in urban areas of Ontario. These interviews were conducted during a preliminary research project in 2015, and then as part of the broader project in 2017-2018.

This report begins with a brief profile of women who are or have been incarcerated in Canada, and provides an overview of scholarship about the relationships between employment, work, and reentry. It then offers discussion of the employment supports available to women both inside prisons and in the community after their release, and the material and practical aspects of finding employment upon release from prison. In discussing the transition from institution to community, this report highlights key concerns, such as the criminal record; physical and social needs; and obligations to abide by parole and probation conditions. Finally, women transitioning from the institution to employment in the community are generally instructed to follow certain steps, such as writing résumés, submitting job applications, and preparing for interviews. These steps, though logically leading toward the possibility of a job, become increasingly difficult and anxiety-provoking, such that the penultimate step to becoming employed (having a job interview), is the one that women fear most. Finally, this report ends with a reflection on the 'choice' of employment for women, locating this choice within its various constraints and questioning the degree to which emphasis on employment forecloses other opportunities for belonging.

Profile of incarcerated and reentering women in Canada

Within Canada, imprisonment is a divided responsibility between federal and provincial governments, such that those who receive sentences less than two years serve their sentence in provincial institutions or jails (or in the community under supervision), while those with sentences two years or more serve time in federal institutions. Within both federal and provincial corrections, women make up a fraction of those who are incarcerated. For example, in 2016-2017, the number of women admitted to federal prisons was less than 10 percent of the number of men (402 women compared 4,407 men).[1] Most women (over 90 percent) who receive custodial sentences are sent to provincial jails.[2] Still, in Ontario, women make up only 13 percent of the incarcerated population in provincial jails, and about 19 percent of the population under community supervision.[3] These numbers are small in comparison to men, which has resulted in prisons, and correctional programming being designed primarily for men.[4]

> *Basically, jail is like one of the hardest, the lowest points in someone's life. Right? … But, if you can make it through that, right then you can definitely make it in the real world. Cuz that's just some fake world that like's it messes with your mind, it messes with you physically, emotionally, mentally. And if you can survive that, you can survive anything. - Donisha*

Despite the historically low rates of women's incarceration, in the last decade these rates have risen alarmingly.[5] Changes to criminal justice policies resulted in a 77 percent increase in the number of women federally incarcerated between 2005 and 2015,[6] which has been partly attributed to the increase of mandatory minimum sentences.[7] It is also extremely troubling that despite repeated calls to address the over-incarceration of Indigenous people,[8] Indigenous women continue to make up a disproportionate amount of the women who are incarcerated (36.6 percent), and are receiving federal sentences at increasing rates (up to 253 in 2016-17 from 177 in 2007-08).[9]

Yet even while women's rates of incarceration have gone up, women still generally spend less time than men in prison or jail.[10] The vast majority of incarcerated women will be released back to the community, either in a graduated reentry via residency in a halfway house after a portion of their sentence has been served (conditional release), or upon attainment of their statutory release date ('stat').[11] Prisoners in Canada, in both federal and provincial institutions, are eligible for conditional release after serving the

[1] Public Safety Canada, "Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview," 38.
[2] Public Safety Canada, "Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview."
[3] Malakieh, "Adult and Youth Correctional Statistics in Canada, 2016/2017."
[4] Comack, *Coming Back to Jail: Women, Trauma, and Criminalization*; Adelberg and Currie, *Too Few To Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*.
[5] Recent trends suggest that Correctional Service Canada (CSC) is making effort to reduce women's incarceration, such as by increasing the number of women under community supervision (Kelly, Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights 2019). And with regard to provincially sentenced individuals, most sentenced to the Ontario correctional system are supervised in the community Sapers, "Corrections in Ontario: Directions for Reform.".
[6] Comack, Fabre, and Burgher, "The Impact of the Harper Government's 'Tough on Crime' Strategy: Hearing from Frontline Workers," 3.
[7] Mangat, "More than We Can Afford: The Costs of Mandatory Minimum Sentencing."
[8] See Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Aboriginal Justice Implementation Committee 1999; Monchalin 2016.
[9] Public Safety Canada, "Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview," 53 & 63.
[10] Only 3.5 percent of those serving a life or indeterminate sentence in Canada are women. Public Safety Canada 2017, 57.
[11] Statutory release refers to a conditional release that is subject to supervision after an individual has served two thirds of their sentence (Public Safety Canada 2017, 73). Women have higher grant rates of federal day parole (83.4%) and full parole (39.8%) than men (69.3% and 25.7% respectively) (83).

lesser of either one-third of their sentence or seven years (unless they are serving a life sentence for murder). Conditional release means they are allowed to live in the community, but must report to a parole or probation officer and abide by various conditions (such as not associating with certain people or being in certain geographic areas, being of 'good behaviour', and abstaining from drugs and alcohol).[12] Given the relatively small number of women under supervision (in comparison to men), halfway houses for women provide residence to women under both federal and provincial supervision.

It is widely recognized that most incarcerated women have been economically, socially, and racially marginalized.[13] Notably, those working within and alongside the criminal justice system typically consider women less violent than men, but more psychologically troubled due to lived experiences of trauma and violence and their intersecting marginalizations.[14] Indeed, the vast majority of women's convictions are related to 'poverty crimes', such that they reflect "systemic inequality, discrimination, and marginalization emanating from their class/race/gender locations".[15] These perceptions of incarcerated women as socio-economically disadvantaged are bolstered by statistics, such as those that indicate that incarcerated women hold poorer employment histories than women in the general population,[16] or that more than half of federally incarcerated women in Canada do not have a skill, trade, or profession.[17] In addition to a weak employment history, incarcerated women typically have low education levels; less than half of incarcerated women in Canada have a high school diploma.[18] In comparison to reentering men, reentering women also seem to have exceptional challenges; for example women released from federal prisons take, on average, 82 days to find work, almost twice that of reintegrating men's average of 45.[19]

In recognition that incarcerated women, and women exiting prison, are disadvantaged in multiple and intersecting ways, one can argue that the 'reintegration' is disingenuous. Many women who have been incarcerated were never 'integrated' into a community in the first place. As such, throughout this work, the term 'reentry' is generally favoured over 'reintegration'. Reentry is understood as an on-going and indefinite position, one whose departure is marked by exit from a carceral space, but whose arrival has no clear point. Within the idea of reentry is the implication that individuals move from a space of constraint to one of freedom. Yet post-carceral 'freedom' is somewhat illusory, and always contingent on the on-going compliance with various rules and duties. There is much emphasis in scholarship on women's pathways to crime and their experiences of incarceration. But what about their pathway from prison into the community? And what are the policy and program discourses that shape women's experiences of reentry?

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[12] Individuals who were not granted conditional release will be given statutory release after serving two-thirds of their sentence (unless their sentence is life or indefinite). Indigenous prisoners are more likely than non-Indigenous prisoners to be denied conditional release and serve their sentence up to statutory release, or even warrant expiry (Public Safety Canada 2019, 91)

[13] Comack and Balfour, *The Power to Criminalize: Violence, Inequality and the Law*; Hannah-Moffat, "Risk and Punishment"; Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat, "Under These Conditions: Gender, Parole and the Governance of Reintegration"; Maidment, *Doing Time on the Outside*.

[14] McKim, *Addicted to Rehab: Race, Gender, and Drugs in the Era of Mass Incarceration*; Wyse, "Rehabilitating Criminal Selves: Gendered Strategies in Community Corrections."; Greiner, Law, and Brown, "Using Dynamic Factors to Predict Recidivism among Women: A Four-Wave Prospective Study."

[15] Balfour and Comack, *Criminalizing Women: Gender and (In)Justice in Neoliberal Times*, 64.

[16] Over 70 percent of incarcerated women were unemployed when taken into custody (Nolan and Power 2014). Among the general population, in 2009 fifty-eight percent of Canadian women were employed Ferrao, "Paid Work," 5. Nolan and Power, "Does the Type of Community Employment Obtained by Offenders on Release Correspond with Their Institional Vocational Certificate?," 1.

[17] Delveaux, Blanchette, and Wickett, "Employment Needs, Interests, and Programming for Women Offenders," 25.

[18] Mahony, "Women and the Criminal Justice System," 33.

[19] These numbers about the average length of time for those released from federal institutions was obtained via email conversations with CORCAN management.

In 1996, the Honourable Louise Arbour recommended that priority be given to vocational training for federally incarcerated women.[20] However, 10 years later, CSC admitted that federally incarcerated women still had few vocational programs and had "minimal access to meaningful work opportunities while incarcerated."[21] This may be because a previous CSC report noted that "little evidence has generally been found for the effectiveness of employment interventions in decreasing recidivism for women offenders in particular."[22] Additionally, some analysis of post-carceral employment indicates that the perceived gains of employment may be linked more to the quality of the job than the simple fact of having a job.[23] Other studies note the difficulty in separating the benefits of employment from those of other key aspects of reintegration, particularly housing.[24]

Indeed, the link between employment and successful reentry is not unanimously agreed upon by researchers, and definitive claims about employment's reintegrative potential are difficult to make, particularly in reference to women. In part this may be because the bulk of research on reentry and employment has been conducted on men, or refers to men and women as an aggregate population. Yet in addition, programs designed to enhance employability or other soft skills ('life' skills) can be difficult to capture in evaluative frameworks given variances between programs and between measures of success.[25] Employability programs may be co-evaluated with educational ones,[26] further complicating precise evaluation.

What role should vocational training have in women's corrections? How do employment, and employability fit within the objectives, and priorities, of rehabilitative programming for incarcerated women? Given the ability of parole and probation agencies to require reintegrating women to participate in employability programs and demonstrate their 'employability', it is important to question and explore the rationales and practices of employment programs. It is also important to explore women's lived experiences of receiving 'employability support' in order to understand how women experience such support. Women's narratives form the foundation of this work, and detail the ways in which reentry women experience and interpret the governing practices related to the production of employability. In particular, this project prioritizes the narratives of reintegrating women as part of the feminist effort to address the invisibilization of women in correctional policies and practices.

[20] Arbour, "Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston," 133.
[21] Correctional Service of Canada 2007, 48.
[22] Delveaux, Blanchette, and Wickett, "Employment Needs, Interests, and Programming for Women Offenders," 5.
[23] Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*; Uggen, Wakefield, and Western, "Work and Family Perspectives on Reentry."
[24] John Howard Society of Ontario, O'Grady, and Lafleur 2016; Fontaine and Biess 2012.
[25] Griffiths, Dandurand, and Murdoch, "The Social Reintegration of Offenders and Crime Prevention."
[26] e.g. Dowden and Andrews, "What Works for Female Offenders: A Meta-Analytic Review."

Employment, Work, and Reentry

Employment so naturalized in contemporary society that it seems inevitable. It seems obvious way that people exiting prison will be expected to find employment in order to be able to function within the community. 'Labour market participation' is understood as a desirable and necessary goal, particularly for those who must reintegrate into society after periods of incarceration.[27] Additionally, employment, in the context of reentry or 'rehabilitation', is described not only as offering economic incentives, but it is also seen as providing structure, routine, a social network, and enhanced self-esteem.[28] It is described in academic scholarship as having a "normalizing effect" on people and as providing reentering individuals with a sense of personal dignity.[29] Employment is thus held up as the key to success, a chance for individuals to redeem or 'reinvent' themselves. Academic scholarship also correlates unemployment with crime and suggests that being unemployed increases one's chances of becoming criminally convicted.[30] As such, employment is considered a way to reduce the likelihood of recidivism, or to promote 'desistance' from crime.[31]

Since employment is seen as key to successful reentry, correctional systems have a long history of establishing employment programs within institutions. Making people employable aligns with social and political ideas and policies that focus on moral and cultural causes of poverty.[32] Such an approach emphasizes work values which are rooted in classic theories on divisions of labour in society, the Protestant work ethic, and the liberal social contract.[33] Michèle Lamont, in her study of working-class men of America and France, connects the emphasis placed upon being hardworking with discourses of personal dignity, yet notes that this drawing together of 'hard work' and 'dignity' occurs within the oppressive conditions of low-wage labour, labour which is "often painful and time-consuming, yet underpaid, physically demanding, or psychologically challenging because repetitive".[34] Being able to persist in these conditions requires mental and physical fortitude. Shadd Maruna notes that adults with criminal records are often confined to low-status, repetitive work – "thankless, stinking work".[35] As such, being 'employable' may not only require that one is ready for a job, but that one is prepared to accept and persist in a thankless, stinking job. This invites reflection on how people are directed, through employability programs, to be willing to take on work that may not appeal to them or which they might find difficult or even dangerous. As will be discussed below, the employment options for those with criminal records are severly constrained and 'good' jobs are hard to find.

In addition to thinking critically about the value of employment, particularly menial, precarious, and difficult employment, this report also invites reflection on the value of 'work'. Feminists have long argued that 'work' is not limited to paid employment, and discourses of work should take into the account the unwaged, reproductive, and domestic labour which women are expected to perform.[36] Gendered divisions of labour have historically been based upon Victorian, paternalistic and patriarchal beliefs about the social

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[27] Usher, "Employment Training: Britain's New Bantustans"; MacKinnon, *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's Labour Market*.
[28] Graffam et al., "Variables Affecting Successful Reintegration as Perceived by Offenders and Professionals."
[29] O'Brien, "'Just like Baking a Cake': Women Describe the Necessary Ingredients for Successful Reentry after Incarceration," 290.
[30] Hagan, "The Social Embeddedness of Crime and Unemployment."
[31] Delveaux, Blanchette, and Wickett, "Employment Needs, Interests, and Programming for Women Offenders."
[32] Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*; MacKinnon, *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's Labour Market*.
[33] e.g. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*.
[34] *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*, 26.
[35] *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*, 121.
[36] e.g. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*; Oakley, *Housewife: High Value Low Cost*; Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*.

and biological categories, and abilities, of women.[37] For centuries, women's 'primary roles' have been seen as wife and mother.[38] Women's positions within the sphere of waged work has historically been, and continues to be, complicated by conflicting gendered norms and expectations which pull women between the spheres of unwaged domestice labour and waged employment.[39] Even when women live with a spouse or partner, they are likely to be responsible for the lion(ess)'s share of domestic responsibilities.[40]

Despite apparent progress from such restrictive notions of women's roles, and the growth in women's waged labour over the last century,[41] workplaces can serve to perpetuate, rather than free women from, entrenched gender norms and divisions. Employers typically value and recompense traditionally 'masculine' skills more highly than those which are traditionally 'feminine'. Women's roles and contributions as workers are less valued than men's, as is evident by the persistent gender-gap in earnings.[42] In particular, feminized areas of work (such as domestic work, health care, education, cleaning, and customer service) receive lower pay and are more vulnerable to precarity, such as through temporary contracts, part-time hours, and non-unionized work environments.[43] In Canada, "health care and social assistance" are the "most common industr[ies] of employment for prime working age women in all forms of paid employment except part-time temporary".[44] Additionally, in Ontario, more women than men work for minimum wage (12 percent versus seven percent) and they are more likely than men to work part-time.[45]

Legislation such as the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, first adopted in 1962, ostensibly protects women from unequal pay and discrimination. Yet even into the 1980s, policies addressing matters such as workers' compensation virtually always portrayed employees as men (and their dependents as women) and focused more on accidents and injuries of the type men might experience in the workforce, rather than the repetitive strain injuries and stress that impact women workers.[46] Additionally, economic stimulus packages have benefited men more than women, such as by increasing jobs in male-dominated areas like construction. Since the 1980s, government policies addressing unemployment and other social problems have shifted from a Keynesian welfare approach toward an emphasis on market mechanisms, individual responsibilities, and short-term job training designed to meet labour market demands.[47] Yet at the same time, there are government policies which restrict labour market participation; for example, people on social assistance will have their income deducted if they earn more than $200 a month. This creates a disincentive for wage earning, while keeping individuals bound to the meagre supports from the state.

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[37] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Anitwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*; Gatrell, *Embodying Women's Work*.

[38] White, "Women and Unions," 2.

[39] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Anitwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*; Gatrell, *Embodying Women's Work*; Slaughter, *Unfinished Business: Women Men Work Family*.

[40] Vosko and Clark, "Canada: Gendered Precariousness and Social Reproduction"; Gatrell, *Embodying Women's Work*; Glover and Kirton, *Women, Employment and Organization*.

[41] In Ontario, as in other Canadian provinces, women's labour force participation has risen dramatically since World War II, from about one-quarter of working-age women in the 1950s to sixty percent in the 1990s to over eighty percent in 2014 Rinehart, *The Tyranny of Work: Alienation and the Labour Process*, 5; Statistics Canada, "The Surge of Women in the Workforce.".

[42] McInturff, "Ontario's Gender Gap: Women and Jobs Post-Recession"; Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work*.

[43] Vosko and Clark, "Canada: Gendered Precariousness and Social Reproduction"; Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work*; Glick, "Trait-Based and Sex-Based Discrimination in Occupational Prestige, Occupational Salary, and Hiring."

[44] "Canada: Gendered Precariousness and Social Reproduction," 32–33.

[45] McInturff, "Ontario's Gender Gap: Women and Jobs Post-Recession," 6.

[46] Reasons, Ross, and Paterson, *Assault on the Worker: Occupational Health & Safety in Canada*.

[47] MacKinnon, *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's Labour Market*.

Criminal records and other barriers to employment

Women leaving prison face complex, systemic barriers to employment. Existing research is unclear about which barriers preceded women's conflict with the law (such as socio-economic exclusion and systemic racism), and in what ways their involvement with the criminal justice system has impacted or augmented these barriers. But what is clear is that precarious housing, poverty, addictions, and violence are too often what await women after release from institutions and halfway houses. In what ways can employment, or employment training, successfully address the intersecting factors that produce and entrench the socio-economic marginalization of women?

The barriers which women face in obtaining employment (or being seen as employable) include basic issues such as lack of fixed address, an interview 'outfit', or transportation.[48] Another barrier commonly mentioned in literature on women's reentry refers to the inequitable division of domestic labour and child care responsibilities. The majority of incarcerated women are mothers, and prior to their incarceration were sole-custody parents and primary caregivers for their children.[49] Upon release, women regain, or seek to regain, custody of their children, and again will likely be the sole provider of support to them. Given the absence of a national, affordable daycare program in Canada, women in minimum-wage jobs are often unable to pay for daycare. They are confined to the unpaid roles of providing care for their own children, ironically unable to afford to work.

Yet of all the barriers women face to employment, barriers which will be discussed in more detail below, the criminal record stands out as one of the most significant. The criminal record is certainly not a challenge unique to women. According to a 2016 report, approximately 3.8 million Canadians, or 10 percent of the population, have criminal records.[50] The criminal record is generally understood to result from having been convicted of a criminal offence. A criminal record check reveals every criminal offence of which the individual has been convicted and for which a record suspension or pardon has not been issued or granted.

Given that the criminal record can prevent people from accessing employment that offers a living wage, criminalized individuals will often seek to have their record suspended. The process of record suspension is legislated through the *Criminal Records Act* (1985). By the end of the 2011/12 fiscal year, 456,000 Canadians had received pardons since 1970, and 96 percent of these were still in effect, indicating that only four percent had re-offended.[51] That same year there were 29,849 pardon applications.[52] However, after new legislation came into effect making the process more difficult and expensive (and changed the terminology from 'pardon' to 'record suspension'),[53] the number of applications significantly declined; there were only 11,563 applications in 2016/17.[54] The lengthier, costlier, and more onerous process of

[48] Delveaux, Blanchette, and Wickett, "Employment Needs, Interests, and Programming for Women Offenders," 103.
[49] Scobie and Gazso, "It Was Easier to Say I Didn't Have Kids"; Withers and Folsom, "Incarcerated Fathers: A Descriptive Analysis"; Vis-Dunbar, "Child Apprehensions in BC Correctional Facilities."
[50] Public Safety Canada, 2016, 111.
[51] A record suspension is revoked by the Parole Board of Canada if a person is convicted of another indictable offence and certain summary offences, if the Board deems the person to no longer be of good conduct, and if the Board determines the application for suspension was knowingly false or deceptive (*Criminal Records Act* 1985 s 7). *Chu v. Canada* 2017, para 2.
[52] Crawford, "Public Safety Minister Vows to Overhaul 'punitive' Criminal Pardons System."
[53] Legislative changes implemented by the federal Conservative government in 2010 and 2011 made criminalized individuals wait longer before they could apply for a record suspension (formerly a pardon), increasing the time from five to 10 years for indictable offences, and three to five years for summary offences. Applicants must also pay more, as the fee increased from $150 to $640. Murphy, Sprott, and Doob, "Pardoning People Who Once Offended"; McAleese and Latimer, "Reforming the Criminal Records Act.".
[54] Public Safety Canada, "Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview."

obtaining a record suspension has been discouraging for women, particularly those who have been living in the community for a long time.

For those who have not been able to have their criminal record suspended, the ubiquity of background checks means their histories of contact with the justice system can follow them for years, and even a lifetime. In Ontario, the *Human Rights Code* (1990) does not prohibit employers from asking about a criminal record, or from choosing not to hire someone who has a record. Increasingly, "Canadian organizations – employers, volunteer managers, educational institutions, licensing bodies and governments – are incorporating police record checks into their hiring and management practices".[55] A report from the John Howard Society of Ontario found that 60 percent of employers require a police record check for all employees, and 15 percent of the employers surveyed would not be willing to take into consideration the type of offence, such as whether or not it is relevant to the requirements of the job.[56]

Advocates for justice-involved adults have mobilized campaigns such as 'ban the box' to take such questions off job applications in order to increase people's chances of making a favourable impression on employers who might then be willing to hire despite the record. Other recommendations include encouraging employers to consider the amount of time that has passed since conviction, since recidivism rates generally decrease with time, and/or deferring background checks till after the application process in order to increase chances that applicants can get an interview.[57] Additionally, advocates often seek to remind employers that while employers are permitted to ask about criminal convictions, they are not allowed to ask about provincial offences (such as speeding or careless driving which are violations of the *Ontario Highway Traffic Act*).

Policies and practices relating to criminal records have gendered impacts that have not been adequately acknowledged. For example, people with criminal records are barred from working in positions of authority or trust over vulnerable persons.[58] This restriction has particular impacts on women since, as noted above, stereotypes about the types of work women are capable of and suited to doing have resulted in women's employment being clustered sectors that involve educating and caring for vulnerable individuals.[59] Barring reintegrating women from these industries thus has a much more significant impact on them than the same limitation does on men.[60]

Given these numerous barriers to employment for women who are exiting prison and other carceral spaces, what supports are available to reentering women? How do women experience such supports and respond to the imperatives placed upon them to find employment?

[55] Canadian Civil Liberties Association 2014, 5.
[56] "The Invisible Burden: Police Records and the Barriers to Employment in Toronto," 5.
[57] Petersen, "Toward True Fair-Chance Hiring : Balancing Stakeholder Interests and Reality in Regulating Criminal Background Checks."
[58] Vulnerable persons are defined as those who, because of age, disability or other circumstances, are in positions of dependency on others and are at heightened risk of being harmed by persons in authority or trust to them (*Criminal Records Act* 6.3(1)) Individuals with convictions related to sexual and violent offences are permanently barred from working with vulnerable persons.
[59] Gatrell, *Embodying Women's Work*.
[60] Thompson, Lutfy, and Bertrand, "The Needs of Women Offenders under Community Supervision."

Research Project

This report is part of a broader project on women's reentry and employment. The data presented here pertains to one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 21 formerly-incarcerated women and 13 service providers. Interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2018 in urban areas of south-eastern Ontario. Research participants were recruited with the assistance of Elizabeth Fry (E. Fry) Societies as well as other community-based groups who provide services to women who have been incarcerated.

The only sampling criteria for service provider inclusion was that they provide employment-related support to reintegrating women. While all of the service providers interviewed for this project provided employment-related support to reentering women, the ways in which they did this varied significantly. Only four of the service providers interviewed worked exclusively with criminalized and/or reentering women; only five service providers had roles which were primarily related to employment support. (This reflects the employments supports available to women in the community, such that there are few, if any, organizations focused on reentering women's employment needs.) The rest provided support to women which included, but was not limited to, employment. The roles, and role titles, of service providers also varied, which is indicative of differences in ways in which employment supports are positioned within community organizations. Roles included Reintegration Coordinator, Employment Consultant, Employment Advisor, Community Employment Coordinator, Case Worker, and Executive Director. Of the 13 service providers interviewed, 12 were women; 10 were affiliated with a community-based organization; and 10 were white. Service providers had an average of six and half years of experience, with the most being 23 and the least one year. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was chosen with intention, such that I chose names common to the woman's generation, ethnic, and socio-cultural context. The pseudonyms of service providers in this study are: Donna, Elena, Heather, Patricia, Natasha, Jessica, Sarah, Sheila, Kim, Maria, Helen, Jeff, and Susan.

The participation criteria for reentering women in this study was that they had been incarcerated in either a provincial or federal institution. Participants were recruited through flyers distributed at halfway houses and community-based organizations, but more frequently by word of mouth or by my presence at a halfway house, where the majority of interviews with reentering women were conducted (n=13). Other interview sites included a bail house, coffee shops, and a private home. Of the 21 women who participated in this research, nine were white, five were Indigenous, three were Black, and four were Asian. Their average age was 38. At the time of the interview, 11 women were employed. Just over half of the women (12) had children, and one was pregnant with her first. Of the women who had children, for eight of them, their children were grown up and were not economically dependent on them. Of the other four, only one currently had her children living with her. The other three women were living in a halfway house, but two of them indicated they would be living with their children upon their release. This project purposely recruited those who identify as women, but data presented here includes Andy who was in the process of transitioning from female to male.[61]

Five women had come out of provincial jail; 16 out of federal prison. The length of time since their release varied significantly, from one week to five years; the average was 10 months. All except one were still under supervision. When asked if they had any disabilities, only two women identified physical injuries, although others mentioned physical limitations during the conversation (such as back pain that prevented them from standing for long periods). Eight women identified a disability relating to mental illness, such as being 'bi-polar' or having learning disabilities, depression, anxiety, or just general 'mental

[61] Although Andy, who was beginning to identify as a male, is an outlier in this project, their contribution is still important, particularly as their presence in this project is an acknowledgement of the current context of corrections in Canada, such that there is uncertainty about where to 'place' those who are non-binary or transitioning in our correctional institutions that classify gender as distinct categories of either male or female.

illness'. As with service providers, pseudonyms were chosen with careful intention; they are: Alexa, Tina, Chantell, Andy, Becky, Elaine, Ashley, Donisha, Zahra, Malone, Srila, Theresa, Carla, Holly, Janessa, Nicole, Lori, Joan, Melody, Lin, and Tara.

Reflexivity and acknowledgement of personal standpoint are key aspects of feminist research methodology.[62] I have sought to engage thoughtfully and transparently with the theories and methods I employ to make sense of the phenomenon I explore, as well as about my own politics, values and position, my relationships with research respondents, and my situation within the communities in which I was conducting research. I draw from the concept of 'women's standpoint' [63] to both reflect on my own position, and to maintain that women do not share a single position but are located in various socially organized activities, places and spaces and make effort to identify some of these spaces. I also believe in acknowledging my position, not only as a researcher, but in the various other aspects of my identity. During and beyond the period of data collection, I held a volunteer role in the community as Chair of the Citizen Advisory Committee of the Ottawa Parole Office. Through this role, I was able to obtain project funding through CORCAN[64] and CSC, and partner with the local Elizabeth Fry Society, to implement employment workshops for women at the halfway house. Additionally, we were able to engage, and remunerate, a woman who had been federally incarcerated to develop and lead these workshops. This has been very meaningful for me as an opportunity to put my research into action. By engaging with the community, and finding ways to put research into action, I have felt both enriched and challenged. Although this research primarily focuses on the research interviews conducted for my doctoral research, my understanding has been informed by the on-going participation in supporting and working with reentering women and agencies involved with them.

[62] Harstock 1987; Devault 1990; Comack 1993.
[63] Harstock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism"; DeVault, *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*.
[64] CORCAN is the employment and employability program of CSC.

Employability programs inside institutions

Women who have been incarcerated describe experiencing the 'lowest points' of their life while inside. Incarceration is an oppressive and punitive space in which their mobility and agency are severely constrained. "You've been in one geographical location for how many years?" said Ashley. Such a confining experience "changes you as a person." Within the constrained space of prison, women are made responsible for their own self-improvement, but given limited choice and control over the conditions in which they can act.[65] Indigenous women in particular are impacted by the lack of sufficient access to culturally appropriate programming and services which could help them navigate their carceral environment.[66] Access to programs, including those targeting employment and employability, vary significantly depending on whether institutions are federally or provincially run.

Federal prisons are mandated to provide employability training to those who are incarcerated.[67] Of the 16 women coming out federal prison, all but two had participated in employment programs offered inside. Tara said she chose not to because she was hoping "to go right back on ODSP" after her release. Tina, who was 60 years-old at the time of our interview, said she did not participate in employment programming. "That's not for me," she said. "That's for the young ones." The other 14 women all participated in at least some employment programs, although Holly and Lori only did WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training, which seemed to be the most readily accessible program, but also the one with the least value. "You're asking one of the women, like one of the prisoners, to put the CD in the DVD player and project it on the screen, and facilitate the program," Ashley explained. "That's your WHMIS training inside." She added that she had taken WHMIS training five times, suggesting that participating in such programs may be a way to relieve boredom rather than gain knowledge or competency development. "WHMIS certification isn't really going to change what you can earn," echoed Melody.

Women described participating in employment programs that, in their eyes, had little value. Ashley participated in a 'textiles' or sewing employment program. "It's like slave labour," she said. Similarly, Joan indicated that she took part in a work program that was "something silly" but was "a way to kill time and put money in the canteen." She said the job itself did little to provide her with employable skills. "It doesn't qualify you for anything really," she said, and described her job as 'watching [men] pour concrete.' She would mostly stand around and sometimes do small things to assist those who were doing the actual labour. "Whatever little things, fetch and carry shit, they wanted me to do," she said. For this 'job' she was paid five dollars a day. Such accounts of training suggest that some programs are experienced as little more than a distraction and a line on a résumé.

Yet participation in employment programs is one of the ways in which incarcerated women are expected, by prison and parole staff, to demonstrate their 'commitment' to reform. Thus, women described participating in programs even though they had no interest in the actual training they were receiving. For example, Janessa got her 'forklift ticket' inside, but had no desire to get a job driving one. Indeed, Lin expressed frustration that the employment programs offered at Grand Valley Institution (GVI) focused on skills she was not interested in acquiring, such as manual labour. Nonetheless, she participated in all the programming that was available.

> The only reason why I took it all is because that's what they're looking at, to see if you're participating. Because if you're not participating, they're going to say, 'Why are you not

[65] Comack, *Coming Back to Jail: Women, Trauma, and Criminalization*, 206; Hayman, *Imprisoning Our Sisters: The New Federal Women's Prisons in Canada*, 239.
[66] Wesley, "Marginalized: The Aboriginal Women's Experience in Federal Corrections."
[67] *Commissioner's Directive 735*, 2017.

> participating? You're not adjusting well. You're not ready.' So, that phrase fake it 'til you make it'? It's prevalent. Everybody does it.

Melody confirmed that many women at GVI just participate in programs in order to satisfy their correctional officers. She was one of a few federal women who said that the programming available inside *was* beneficial.

> We had another [program], it was called Ready to Work. … It was fifteen days, Monday to Friday, from eight to four. And it was like, we got five different certifications, so we got our Smart Serve, our Safe Food Handling, WHMIS, … Workplace Essentials and Service Essentials. Right? So, and it was, that was really good intense program… So, we, we went through an interview process in order to get into this program. They only took 10 people at a time. And, you had to take it when you were getting ready to leave, so, you'd have all these certifications.
>
> Interviewer: So you did find that helpful then?
>
> Oh, big time. Yes. Because, even like at my place, it's a grocery store, but we sell alcohol. So it's like, okay, I can sit here and I've got my Smart Serve. ... It was like, that was another plus, in order for me to get this job, right?

Melody's account indicates that some of the practical skills, such as certification in Smart Serve, can assist women in the job market. Similarly, Srila got her Food Handling Certificate while at GVI, which helped her get her current job at a company making edible arrangements; and Zahra's letter of reference from her employment manager at GVI helped her land a job in a restaurant.

Yet while some women indicated they came out of prison with certifications to list on their résumés, others used their time inside to focus on their education. Lori said that when she taken into prison she did a grade-score equivalency test which resulted in a grade four assessment. So, during her years at GVI, she took academic upgrading classes. She said, in a tone that suggested both pride and self-mockery, "I graduated Grade 10 while I was in the pen, at what, 40-years-old or something." Joan also indicated that she had focused on obtaining her Grade 10 while she was incarcerated. Both women expressed some pride in this accomplishment, but it was not clear that for either of them it had afforded any new opportunities upon release. Indeed, research suggests that those with high school equivalency do not achieve the same employment success as those who completed high school.[68]

Service providers in the community expressed concerns about the lack of employment support for women inside prison, especially in comparison to what is available in men's prisons. Since there are fewer incarcerated women in Canada, fewer programs exist for them. Heather, a manager of a halfway house, described federal programs as 'illusory'. She also suggested that even if women come out of an institution having completed employment programs, they still have immediate and practical barriers that eclipse the benefits of such training.

Nothing for provincials

While participants in this research project were mostly from federal institutions, the majority of incarcerated women in Canada serve time in provincial, not federal, institutions. Those who receive provincial sentences (the 'provincials') have been convicted of 'summary offences', meaning offences that can be dealt with summarily or promptly. The crimes for which they are convicted are considered less

[68] Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua, "The Effects of Cognitive and Noncognitive Abilities on Labor Market Outcomes and Social Behavior," 413.

serious than 'indictable offences' which have sentences of at least two years in federal prisons. Yet although the amount of time provincials served behind bars may be shorter than that which was served by federals,[69] their experiences seemed to be much worse. It is ironic that women whose sentences are short are in some ways are more disadvantaged by their experience of incarceration than are those women serving longer sentences. Provincials were unanimous in casting their jail-time as, at best, a 'waste of time'. Some also described their experiences as traumatic. "The food is crap. They treat us like crap. The guards are sexual predators or they're violent with us or threaten us," said Andy. "They say like, 'you'll be leaving in a body bag.' Shit like that." While women in federal institutions are housed in minimum, medium or maximum-security units, depending on their risk assessment, almost all provincially sentenced inmates are placed in maximum security by default and there is no standardized security risk assessment tool.[70]

In her research on provincially incarcerated women in Manitoba, Elizabeth Comack found that over 70 percent of her respondents had prior experiences of incarceration, and for many of them coming back to jail was a "defining feature" of their lives.[71] Research in the United States has associated the 'revolving door' of prisons with psychiatric disorders[72] and addictions[73]. "Provincials have a high turnover rate" said Heather, a manager of a halfway house. She said that 90 percent of the women from provincial jails had substance abuse issues. Like other service providers, Heather, attributed women's re-incarceration to addiction, noting that drug-addicted women may not be able to resist the temptations they face when they are back in the community. Using drugs again, or more precisely, being caught for using drugs while on probation or parole, will often send women back to jail. Yet recidivism for drug use must be looked at in the context of a severe shortage of addiction treatment facilities for women in the community, and other supports (such as safe housing) that can help women maintain sobriety. Unable to get the support they need inside jail, and struggling to find it in the community, many of these women end up back in jail, or, Heather said, they "end up in bad situations, homeless, on the street, and then they end up prostituting because that's how they have to afford their habit."

With regard to rehabilitative and employment programming, there is a stark difference between what is available to women in federal and provincial institutions. Women who had served time in provincial jails and detention centres consistently reported that there were no employment programs available to them. What little programming exists is notoriously under-funded and unsupported, generally run by community service providers and volunteers, and lacking in facilitation space and supplies.[74] Carla said she received "nothing" in provincial jail. Becky said, "there might be someone that might come in once every like blue moon to give like a talk or something," but added that there was not really much support. "There's no programming for employment," said Andy. "No AA meetings, no counselling, no discharge planning." Nicole indicated that she was able to access some programming, but noted that it was very limited.

> They give you anger management, or they give you like, oh, how to cope with addictions, you know? Those are all great things to learn, but like, some of us aren't addicts and some

[69] In theory, women convicted of summary offences serve less time behind bars than those who receive federal sentences, however, my research indicates this is not always the case. I met with federal women who served a third of their time (8 months of two years) in federal prison and then were released to a halfway house. In contrast, Nicole spent 15 months in a provincial jail before being released to a halfway house.

[70] Sapers, "Corrections in Ontario: Directions for Reform."

[71] *Coming Back to Jail: Women, Trauma, and Criminalization*.

[72] Baillargeon et al., "Psychiatric Disorders and Repeat Incarcerations: The Revolving Prison Door."

[73] Warner and Kramer, "Closing the Revolving Door?: Substance Abuse Treatment as an Alternative to Traditional Sentencing for Drug-Dependent Offenders"; Harrison, "The Revolving Prison Door for Drug-Involved Offenders: Challenges and Opportunities."

[74] Sapers, "Corrections in Ontario: Directions for Reform."

> of us are in there just because we made stupid choices. And um, you know, like we, we're going to come back out to real life eventually, right?

Nicole was the only provincial woman interviewed who said she had participated in an employment program inside, but she spoke of it with derision. She was part of a small group of women who helped in the kitchen with the preparation of meals for her own prison and the neighbouring men's correctional complex. Like Ashley's description of the GVI textile program, Nicole described the work as "slave labor". She added that she and other workers did not actually get monetary remuneration. "We get paid in chocolate bars and chips and pop," which made her feel like she was being "treated like a kid" and did not help with trying to maintain a healthy diet or weight. Thus, women coming out of provincial jails are much less likely than federally sentenced women to have been given meaningful programming, and are more likely to feel unprepared to enter the job market.

Opportunity doesn't just show up at your door and knock. You really gotta reach out and you've gotta make yourself available for it, right? So, even though there's not much that's offered, take it. … Take the small little things like you know, that you can do, the little steps that will better yourself.
- Nicole

Employment supports in the community

Soon after her release from federal prison, Malone enrolled in a community-based employment program. Like many other such programs in which reentering women participate, this one was not designed specifically for women coming out of prison, rather it was non gender specific, and non barrier specific (although Malone said a lot of the other participants were also coming out of jail). Over the course of three weeks, she and the other participants were taught a variety of employability 'soft skills', such as job searching, work 'etiquette', and time management – the "skills to help you find employment," she explained. Program participants were paid for their time and were expected to treat the program like a job. Similarly, Donisha joined a community-based employment program; in her case one targeted at youth. The two-week instructional program was followed by a four-week job placement. Like Malone, Donisha had been paid to participate in her program. In fact, she laughingly said that a service provider had encouraged her to enroll by telling her, "you'll get paid just to sit and look pretty." But Donisha insisted she did more than that, describing the training she had received such as workplace safety and use of power tools. She was pleased about the work placement she was given afterward. "It's helping me get to where I want to be, right?" she said. "So, yeah, I'm, I'm planning on staying there for a while."

> *It takes a lot of courage and guts to just really stand true and be true to yourself. It takes time. There's no quick solution. - Ashley*

Malone and Donisha described in mostly positive terms the employment support they had received in the community. Nicole said there were several programs and resources available in her local Indigenous community centre of which she could 'take advantage'. Similarly, Melody, who had been in the community for 14 months, insisted there were adequate resources available. "I don't agree with the idea that there's nothing out there," she said. "There is, if you want it." But she added that women "have to look for it." Still, the perception of what is available, and the utility of these resources, varied significantly among women interviewed. Thirteen of the women interviewed had not participated in any community-based employment programs. While six of them indicated this was because they did not feel they needed extra support, or at least not the type of support available through programs offered to them, others insisted there was little help available to reentering women. "There's no help offered, no, no, no," Joan said emphatically. "There's nothing, nowhere. No." Women also noted that most of the employment programs for reintegrating adults were targeted at men. "I'm like, wait, why they don't have like something, specific to like, you know, for me?" Nicole asked. "Why can't I jump on that program that *he's* doing?"

Certainly, when it comes to employment programs, women seem to still be considered 'too few to count'[75] and there is a general lack of employment programs targeted for reentering women in urban Ontario. Supports for reintegrating adults in the community are consistently under-funded and under-staffed.[76] Thus, there is a patchwork of various employment services and programs, a network of community-based organizations that provide various services to those seeking employment and/or those involved in the justice system including Elizabeth Fry Societies, John Howard Societies, Employment Ontario offices run by the Ontario Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development, YWCA Employment Centres, employment centres for immigrants, or resource centres for marginalized women. Some employment-related programs are run out of homeless shelters, others in community centres and non-profit agencies. Some are attached to colleges, adult high schools, or provincial employment support centres. The variety of locations and programs was described by some as indicative of the diversity, and

[75] Adelberg and Currie, *Too Few To Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*.
[76] Maidment, *Doing Time on the Outside*; Ricciardelli, Evans, and Peters, "Navigating Employment Post-Release: An Introduction."

adequacy, of support available to women, but by others as an indication of the lack of coherency. Kim, a parole officer who supervises women, noted that reentering women "always kind of get lost in the shuffle."

One of the reasons there is a lack of targeted employment supports for women may be due to differences in mandates between community-based organizations and their funders, particularly CSC. Donna had been with an organization assisting women in conflict with the law for several years. She said her organization did not receive any funding to specifically address women's employment needs. "If a woman expresses a desire in finding employment, we might be lucky in being able to help them," she said, adding that this would likely be the responsibility of the individual case worker. "But really, there's no core employment program here. We've attempted to get them going. We've been denied funding." She was extremely critical of CSC and CORCAN for not supporting women's employment. "I find it absolutely abhorrent and appalling that more attention isn't paid to women's employment," she said. "To me it's criminal that CORCAN puts the majority of resources into, into men and virtually ignores women. You know, I can't understand the justification for that." This speaks to constraints faced by non-profit, community-based organizations that are heavily, or even completely, dependent on program funding. If employment for women is not identified as a key intervention for reintegrating women, such as by government and corrections, then it is difficult for community-based organizations to receive funding to invest in employment programs.

Types of programs and supports offered

Only three of the women interviewed had participated in the type of employment program in which participants are placed in an apprenticeship or actual job. Malone and Donisha were both given job placements after completing the classroom portion of their employment training. "Like they make sure you get the job," explained Donisha. "They go out there for you, right?" Malone mentioned that her program was equipped to give employers a financial incentive to hire program participants, explaining that her wages would be partially paid by the program for the first two or three weeks. "So, yeah it gives the employer an incentive." Ashely had participated in an employment program designed to give marginalized people access to trades. "It was really good," she said. "Basically, it gives people who would never have an opportunity in that field or industry like a chance to, you know show their abilities or work ethic." She explained that she was able to explore a variety of trades, including carpentry, electrical work, and general labour. "So we got like a whole rounded experience." She also got a variety of certificates that would be necessary for employment in the trades, such as safety at work, forklift operation, and working at heights. Although Ashley decided not to take an apprenticeship after she completed the program, she indicated that this was still an option she was considering. These types of programs are often designed to mimic 'work', such that participants are expected to show up each day on time, and to stay for a full-day of training. "They're strict with like punctuality and stuff," said Malone. "They want it to be like a real work, like they're trying to get you in the swing of things, like as a real job."

Some women who had participated in employment programs in the community received various types of support, but had not been placed directly into a job. Joan and Andy received certifications such as forklift operation and WHMIS. Others received more general support designed to boost confidence and develop 'soft skills'. For example, Holly joined an employment program at a local Native women's centre, which she found helpful because she said it "was all about building confidence." She mentioned that the program included drumming and other cultural components. "We smudged every time we went in," she said. "We ate together." Yet while Holly said this program was great, she added that it was "geared towards Aboriginal women, not *per se,* you know, people coming out of prison." She did not feel comfortable disclosing to the group that her barrier to employment was a criminal record.

Other programs accessible to reentering women are those which focus on educational upgrading. Patricia runs an educational program that offers high school equivalency to adults involved in the justice

system. She said that an important characteristic of this program was its flexibility. She described how the program allows for the various ways in which students can complete the requirements, such that they may be allowed to complete a one-year program over two or more years; and they may be permitted to drop out and re-enroll without losing credits. Indeed, she did not expect that students would complete the program through continuous participation.

> Let's put it this way, people don't just like stay for the two years and get it done. I would say that on an average they're on and off the program for four years or so, or even three years. But very few people are able to really just get it done within the two years.

Patricia listed some of the challenges her students encounter in completing this and other similar programs: drug and alcohol addictions, instability in housing (often related to poverty), and recidivism. Patricia noted that it was important to be accommodating. Yet at the same time, as Malone indicated above, Patricia indicated that the program was also geared toward preparing students for the workplace.

> Even in terms of coming on a regular basis, coming on time. I always say, you know, yes, we're a flexible program here, but what we are doing is we're getting you ready for when you go to college or when you get employed, to be on time, come on a regular basis, and dress appropriately. And speak in an appropriate manner too.

Service providers are thus working to balance the disciplinary aspects of their programs with the accommodation they recognize their students require. But it is not only punctuality that is being disciplined. Patricia and Malone both indicated that women's dress and speech were also being disciplined. "They'll send you home like if you're, you know, if you're wearing a short little skirt or something," Malone said, "just because they really kind of want to teach you the lesson." Similarly, Patricia said that part of teaching participants to 'dress appropriately' meant no "little tank tops or little shorts or anything like that." She said that she would give "feedback" to women such as "Don't wear that top; it's a bit too low at the front." Similarly, Elena noted that women at her halfway house "come in their tank tops and their track pants and their shorts, or they put on a pair of long leggings and a tank top that you know, isn't long enough, and they think they're presentable." She said that she had to "start from the basics" and teach them what was 'appropriate'. She described the type of conversation she would have with a woman at the halfway house. "You can't talk like this. You can't dress like this. You can't do this, you can't do that." In other words, reentering women are chastised for dressing in clothes considered too 'sexy' or revealing. As noted above, Donisha had been told by an employment counsellor that all she needed to do in the training was "sit and look pretty". Conveyed through such 'advice' is that women should be pretty, but not sexy. Clearly, 'employability training' extends beyond employment skills to include instruction on manners, dress, and comportment.

Advice about how to dress and present oneself may be consistent with sociological understandings that manner of dress is a means of demonstrating belonging in the mainstream,[77] and suggests service providers are trying to 'help' women 'fit in', but can also be understood as disciplining women's sexuality and gender performances.[78] Susan said that she and other employment support workers "address those interview characteristics and presentations and behaviours and attitudes" because she recognized that there are widespread perceptions that "women should be, you know, mannered in such a way." Though not defining this 'way' in which women should be mannered, she suggested that it needed to include docility, politeness, and no overt sexuality. In preparing women for work, society, and its gendered expectations, service providers may anticipate that by disciplining women's gender performances they are increasing women's chances of being successful in job interviews and gaining employment opportunities. Yet through

[77] Goffman, *Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*.
[78] McKim, "Roxanne's Dress: Governing Gender and Marginality through Addiction Treatment."

such 'supports' and 'guidance', the dominant scripts of how gender should be performed remain unchallenged and are even further entrenched. Given the disciplinary context in which such instruction is being given (such that women could be sent home from class for wearing a skirt that was too short), women are clearly being told that their successful reintegration depends upon their 'appropriate' performances of gender and compliance with entrenched norms of sexual respectability which, along with norms of domesticity and motherhood, have long constrained women.[79]

While overt performances of gender are disciplined through employability programs; women's internal characteristics are also disciplined through the variety of programs that encourage ethical self-reformulation.[80] Indeed, when examining the types of programs available to reentering women, it is striking that many seem to have little to do with employable skills, but rather focus on emotions and relationships. Examples of such programs include healthy living, healthy relationships, anger management, grief and loss, creative writing, crafts, and yoga. This corresponds to the emphasis placed in corrections on what is characterized as women's emotional and psychological needs.

In the late 1980s, the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW) was established to examine and make recommendations on women's federal incarceration.[81] Their investigation, culminating in a 1990 report titled *Creating Choices*, recognized the connection between women's criminalization and their historic and structural contexts, arguing that "issues such as poverty, racism, wife battering, and sexual abuse are central to women's crime."[82] The Task Force called for 'gender-responsive programming' and outlined a strategy for reform based on five principles: empowerment; meaningful and responsible choices; respect and dignity; supportive environments; and shared responsibility. However, gender-responsive programming, as interpreted and implemented by correctional services in other jurisdictions, has been found to focus on women's emotional desires,[83] needs,[84] and "problematic personal patterns."[85] Such programming typically emphasizes women's relationships (wives, girlfriends, and mothers) over their economic and individual autonomy. As such, the call to recognize women's experiences of violence, trauma and abuse has been answered by a therapeutic focus on women's emotional and psychological needs. Intervention strategies frame women as child-like, in need of maternal/paternal direction and therapeutic governance[86] – even in need of being told how to dress. Such approaches, while perhaps intentioned to address women's gender needs or recognize gendered expectations in the workforce, reinforce norms about how 'good' women should dress and behave They communicate to women that the barriers they face are personal, not structural. Yet as will be discussed in the next section, reentering women face multiple challenges as they transition from the institution to the community, the impacts of which can only be grasped if they recognized as part of a broader system of political, social, and gendered constraints.

[79] Sim, "At the Centre of the New Professional Gaze: Women, Medicine and Confinement."
[80] Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*.
[81] The work of the Task Force led to the closing of the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston and the construction of regional prisons and a healing lodge, as well as the development of new programs and strategies.
[82] TFFSW 1990, 83.
[83] Haney, *Offending Women: Power, Punishment, and the Regulation of Desire*.
[84] McKim, *Addicted to Rehab: Race, Gender, and Drugs in the Era of Mass Incarceration*.
[85] Wyse, "Rehabilitating Criminal Selves: Gendered Strategies in Community Corrections.," 246.
[86] Hannah-Moffat, *Punishment in Disguise: Penal Governance and Federal Imprisonment of Women in Canada*.

From the institution to the community

Adjusting back into the community after being incarcerated is an on-going process that is neither easy nor quick. Many reentering women reported struggling with anxiety and uncertainty, and well as with fear of being re-apprehended. They also said they needed to re-learn how to navigate life on the outside and they experience "disorientation and trepidation" in negotiating all the demands of adjustment and resettlement.[87] Data on federally incarcerated women indicate that 60 percent of reentering women have no credit history, 63 percent have financial debt, and almost half cannot afford a residence.[88] Heather, who managed a women's halfway house, expressed it more starkly, noting that many women come out of institutions with "nothing, absolutely nothing". They likely have no money; they lack weather-appropriate clothing; and they have nowhere to go. As noted above, prison, especially provincial jail, is often described as a revolving door.

Andy, who spent 20 years in and out of jail, attributed the revolving door phenomenon to lack of support for women both inside jail and in the community.

> If you don't have the safety net in place, you don't have someone to drive you to a safe destination, where are you gonna go? You're gonna go back to that old place right away, … That's why you get people continuously going back and forth in the system. It's because you don't have any, they don't have any support for those people.

Andy is identifying some of the basic needs that women have when coming out jail: a safe place to stay and a means to get there. Indeed, upon reentry women often need immediate support for housing, and sustained support for other concerns like addictions, health, and a source of income.[89] Reintegration literature presents basic and immediate concerns as 'stabilization needs', but notes that due to a 'poverty of social capital', most reintegrating adults are unlikely to have supportive contacts in the community who will help them meeting these needs.[90]

Nicole had only been released from a provincial jail for about a week when we spoke. But this was not the first time that she had come out of detention and she knew that it would be challenging to try to rebuild her life again. "They just kind of like throw you out, right?" she said. "Like they don't tell you like go here, here's what you're gonna do for money and here's how you're gonna do it." Nicole was not alone in comparing release from prison to being thrown or tossed out. Like other women, she indicated that release can be experienced as a sudden lack of support, almost an abandonment. Several women indicated they are met with "nothing" upon release. Even service providers like Jessica, a former halfway house manager, described the transition as abrupt. "They're almost just pushed out," she said. "And then the community has to take up the slack to figure out what to do with this person."

> *No ID. No housing. No people. No family. No job. No ID to get welfare. No way to get ID cuz when you come out of provincial, they don't give you nothing, they give you a bus token. Like you come out in the middle of winter with summer clothes on. And they give you a bus token. To go where? To do what? There's nowhere to go. No clothes. No nothing. You go out in the snow. All you have to do is go back to crack. – Joan*

[87] Maidment, *Doing Time on the Outside*, 102.
[88] Zinger, "Issues Facing Federally Sentenced Women: An Ombudsman's Perspective."
[89] O'Brien, "'Just like Baking a Cake': Women Describe the Necessary Ingredients for Successful Reentry after Incarceration."
[90] Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*; Ricciardelli, Evans, and Peters, "Navigating Employment Post-Release: An Introduction."

Stabilization needs

For those who do not transition from the institution to the community via a halfway house, their first priority is shelter. Those who are released to halfway houses have a buffer of time, but they still expressed anxiety about where they will go next. Jeff, a director of a small social enterprise, told me about a woman who died four months after her release from the halfway house, a loss which he said was because she "didn't have the housing support she needed." She was living in a place that "was just really not appropriate for anyone actually." Jeff said she was doing well in the employment program. "She loved coming to work," he said. "She did not love going home." In Toronto, where this woman lived, studio apartments rent for over $1,500 a month, while monthly shelter allowance for someone on Ontario Works is $368.[91] Lack of financial means to secure adequate housing is a very real concern for people leaving prison, one which relates to the "bi-directional relationship between homelessness and incarceration" such that homelessness puts people at risk of incarceration and incarceration puts people at risk of homelessness.[92]

Another immediate, practical concern for most reentering women is their lack identification (ID). Joan indicated that this was an immediate barrier upon release, insisting that for some women there was "no way to get ID cuz when you come out of provincial, they don't give you nothing." Obstacles to the provision of ID also reflect the lack of coordination between government institutions,[93] and shortcomings in the management of personal belongings for those who are released. While individuals are incarcerated, particularly if they are held in provincial jails or detention centres, they are typically not provided with opportunities to apply for ID. Lack of ID can complicate multiple aspects of reentry, such as applications for housing and opening bank accounts. "You get out and you get your life back together," Ashley said, "but it's not that easy, especially when you need to get your ID, you need to, you know, figure, there's so many components of your life." Some forms of ID, such as passports, require a guarantor, which can be difficult to find for women whose lives prior to incarceration were marked by poverty and marginalization. Halfway house staff like Heather and Elena described the time and effort they had invested to help women at their residence obtain ID. They indicated a fatigue not only with the system (the bureaucracy, the delays, the paperwork), but also with women who fall back into addiction, disappear, or are re-incarcerated after weeks of effort were made to get ID. "They're so transient," Heather said, adding it could be hard to find someone who could verify a woman's identity. She was one of several service providers who expressed a mix of frustration and sympathy toward the women she sought to help.

Women have other immediate needs, particularly for clothing. "There's some girls that are in here right now who have nothing," said Malone about her fellow residents at a halfway house. "So it's like we're just kind of helping each other. You know? We'll give her some shoes if she needs them, or whatever." Later that day a large donation of used clothing was delivered to the house. Some residents immediately began looking through it to find items in their size, but also flagged items for others. At another halfway house, the manager also mentioned that she receives donations from a local consignment store and noted that clothing was an immediate and pressing concern for many of her residents. "A lot of them gain a lot of

[91] CBC, 'What Toronto's average monthly rent of $1,800 gets you in cities Canada-wide," CBC Toronto 1 Mar 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/rent-toronto-canada-1.4002899. Stats on OW: Homes First, "Info and Stats", https://homesfirst.on.ca/info-stats.

[92] Gaetz and O'Grady, "The Missing Link: Discharge Planning, Incarceration and Homelessness," vii.

[93] For the Ontario health card (OHIP), the Ministry of Ontario requires original copies of three documents, such as certificate of birth or citizenship, and a passport. They also require a proof of residency and do not accept residency in carceral institutions. In other words, prisoners who do not have an OHIP card are not able to begin the process of applying for one until they have a residence in the community, which creates a gap during which access to healthcare is made difficult.

weight in the institution," Kim said about women parolees. "So yeah, so they're coming out they don't even have clothes for to go to work."[94]

As noted, halfway houses offer a sort of a buffer for women, such that they provide shelter, food, and assist with things like access to ID and clothing. This liminal space can also be important in that it allows women to readjust to the process of anticipating and addressing their daily needs. Nicole described her experience of incarceration as debilitating in that women forget how to provide for their own basic needs outside of the institutional walls.

> We forget too when we go to jail and whatever you know just like away from this all, like whether it's rehab or like you know just like real life, you know? Like things are given to us, right? Like we have three meals a day given to us, or provided. We have a bedtime. We have a bed. Like, you don't think of rent. You don't think of, so you know, when you come out, you don't really have, you don't think of those things….
>
> You forget when you're in there, when someone's feeding you, when someone's clothing you, when someone's like, how much things are gonna affect you if you don't have clothes to go to a job interview or like you don't have money to buy food and you're like starving throughout the day, you know?

Nicole described this process as becoming 'institutionalized'. She gave an example of how, in the early days after her release, she was unaccustomed to anticipating her daily needs: she left the halfway house for a day of training and only realized later that she had not packed a lunch, nor did she have any money to buy food. Similarly, Elena, who worked in a halfway house, noted that because life inside an institution is highly regulated, for some women it is a struggle to find ways to develop their own routines. Patricia O'Brien notes that the controlling prison culture can reinforce a "lack of planning for future responsibilities".[95] So, upon release, many women must not only secure their stabilization needs, but re-learn how to anticipate these needs.

Social needs and other challenges

Donisha also used the word 'institutionalized' to describe what happened to women who were incarcerated. "A lot of females, a lot of people, um coming out of prison, jail, whatever the case is, they're institutionalized," she said. "They don't know how to act, like they don't even know how to talk to somebody, right?" She indicated that she felt overwhelmed, nervous, and excited about all the change she was seeing around her. "When we come out, like it's even, it's a new world now," she said. "Like it's a new place. It's a whole new system, like, you know? Everything is different, you know?" She described at times being almost giddy with the realization that she could talk to strangers. "It's like, hi!" she said, pretending to wave excitedly at someone. "Hi! Hi! What's your name? Hi! It's good to see ya! Good to see ya!" Donisha gave a hearty laugh. "Like people look at me, what's wrong with her?"

Though she made her point with humor, Donisha was speaking to the very real challenges women face in re-learning how to navigate relationships with those on the outside, whether with strangers on the bus, co-workers, or bosses. Similarly, Heather said women coming out of incarceration have to "get over the social barriers, and the social anxiety, and dealing being institutionalized. … It's hard. It's hard for them."

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[94] Comack's *Coming Back to Jail: Women, Trauma, and Criminalization*. research on incarcerated women in Manitoba also notes that many women gain weight while inside due to the poor quality of food, much of which is deep-fried, and the lack of opportunities for exercise.

[95] "'Just like Baking a Cake': Women Describe the Necessary Ingredients for Successful Reentry after Incarceration," 290.

She added that incarceration enforces a 'yes, ma'am' 'no ma'am' environment after which women often struggle to advocate for themselves.

Joan indicated that it was not just the shift from the institution to community that was challenging, but also a need to find a social network that was different from what she had pre-incarceration. "I had no friends, no family, no nothing," she said.

> My daughter wasn't speaking to me. My son wasn't speaking to me. Nobody was speaking to me. Um, I had to fit back in to society. Cuz depression is bad without having anybody to reach out to. You can't afford a psychologist. …I was having problems fitting back into community. I didn't know any straight people. All I knew was drugs and shit. So, it was really hard to fit back in.

Though this report focuses on employment, it is vital to recognize these social aspects of reentry which clearly have profound impacts on women.

Another challenge for women who are reentering the community is learning about and navigating technological, political, and socio-cultural changes that have happened 'on the outside'. Depending on the length of their sentence, women might be unprepared for how people now communicate with each other (texting instead of calling). They may be unfamiliar with new ways to get around the city (Uber and Presto cards), or feel uncertain about changes to banking (web banking and e-transfers). Kim noted that women who have served long sentences are "quite out of touch with a lot of things" which puts them "behind the eight ball" in terms of navigating the outside world. Heather said her residence had a woman in her 70s who had been incarcerated for over 30 years. "So it's like okay, where do you start?" she asked rhetorically. Those who have not experienced the disconnect of incarceration and prolonged removal from the community may have difficulty anticipating the needs of reentering women, some of which may not be obvious even to women themselves until they try to board a bus or submit a pdf attachment with their on-line job application.

For women who are mothers, reentering the community might mean resuming care for their children. Those who are struggling to provide and care for their children face profound challenges in securing employment that is safe and that provides a living wage. Since reentering women are much more likely than men to be sole caregivers of their children, they are more likely than men to have to consider how to negotiate these competing demands upon release. Patricia described some of the questions mothers need to consider when looking at potential jobs. "They are thinking about, okay, how many hours is this going to be? Is it going to be nights, is it going to be weekends?" she said. Natasha, who provided employment assistance to adults with barriers, knew of a local cleaning company that would hire women with criminal records, but only for overnight shifts in corporate buildings. She noted that some women might leave their children home alone at night when they went to work, placing at risk both her children's safety and her continued custody of them should the situation be made known to child services. "One woman had just had a baby and she would bring her baby to work [at a cleaning job] when it was at night," Natasha said. Bringing an infant to a work site where it might be exposed to noxious chemicals is a stark indication of the risks women and their children face in trying to satisfy the demands of employment and childcare. Indeed, overnight work schedules are particularly prohibitive to single mothers and those who do not have a trusted partner or family member who would look after their children during their absense, and who also face heightened scrutiny from child protection services.[96] Susan noted that few reintegrating women are able to find support form a social network in looking after their children during employment hours since many have "burnt their bridges" with family members and cannot turn to them for assistance.

[96] Maidment, *Doing Time on the Outside*, 136–39.

Additionally, service providers like Donna noted that the lack of affordable daycare means that women's wages are mostly, if not wholly, spent on paying someone else to look after their children.

> The costs of childcare mean that if all that is available to you is a minimum wage job, then you are not financially any further ahead by working than you would be by being on [welfare or disability support]. So there's just the very realistic economic barrier for women who are parenting.

The lack of affordable childcare, and of supportive social networks, can place both women and their children at risk. Several service providers noted that women who are unable to provide for their children through legitimate employment may turn to illegitimate work that puts them at risk of reincarceration or victimization.[97]

Interestingly, while nine of the 13 service providers discussed or at least mentioned challenges posed by competing demands of childcare and employment, few reintegrating women identified their children as a barrier to their employability. This may be due to the fact that few of the women in my study had young children who were or would be in their care, but it may also indicate how those supporting women may emphasize women's relationships and personal needs over their economic ones. For example, Nicole expressed frustration with the lack of employment programming available to reintegrating women in comparison to that which is available to men. She has twice served sentences in provincial jails and said that almost all the programming for women focused on addictions, anger-management or mothering. I asked her if she also thought women's programming didn't emphasize employment. She responded, "I agree a thousand percent with that." She described how the expectations seem to be different for men and women.

> Like I see someone telling me to take a parenting course and go take care of my kids. Like, I don't see someone saying, 'hey listen, you can get a six-figure job if you do this course.' Like you know? You know, six months you're gonna be on your way to like success. Like I don't see that. And it sucks. Because you know, women, as women we do a lot, we do a whole lot.

Though she has two children who will be living with her after she leaves the halfway house, Nicole insisted that women are capable of "more than being mom".

Another challenge that women face is lack of education, and its lack is commonly linked to experiences of poverty, unemployment, and marginalization. As noted above, some incarcerated women use their time inside to upgrade their education. Kim noted that many of them will indicate plans to continue their education once they are released. But even though about 25 percent of the women under her supervision had not completed high school, Kim said she's had "little success in getting them to continue high school on the outside." When faced with the immediate and pressing concerns of food and shelter, once women are in the community, their focus may turn from education to employment. "All the other variables come in to play," said Kim, and indicated the things she heard from parolees. "I can't go to school because I'm not gonna get paid, so I'll go work at Tim Hortons… And then next thing you know, school's out the window."

In addition to encouragement to pursue education, reentering women might also be encouraged to address other needs before seeking employment, particularly needs relating to addiction and well-being.

[97] see also Allan, Bennett, and Chettiar, "My Work Should Not Cost Me My Life: The Case against Criminalizing the Purchase of Sex in Canada"; van der Meulen, "Illegal Lives, Loves, and Work: How the Criminalization of Procuring Affects Sex Workers in Canada."

Kim explained how she might encourage women under her supervision to prioritize needs other than employment.

> That's often a need for them to you know, really work on themselves to be, you know, the mom that they want to be, or uh the partner that they want to be. So, I give them that opportunity, like if that's gonna increase your self-esteem? Then, okay we'll delay work a little bit. We'll get you into this program. We'll get you, you know, maintain your sobriety. Get you set up so you have a home group, NA or AA group that you can tap into. Cuz in the long run, I think that's gonna be better than jumping in to a job that they're not prepared [for].

The recognition that women may not be ready to start working immediately upon release suggests that while employment is considered important, it is not necessarily the first priority for reintegration. Indeed, Elena, who worked in a halfway house, noted that women who are seen as a risk for drug use may be discouraged from finding employment since those supervising them do not trust that income brought in won't be used for drugs.

> The more money they start collecting, the more that it goes to use for other things, as opposed to saving it. And a lot of it too has to go with if you have financial disclosure and they're making money, and it could be a few dollars here and there, and it's all coming in cash-wise, we don't know. We don't know where it's going to. So it's making sure that if they do get a job, that we know all the information, where they are, what they're doing. So they usually start focusing on staying clean first, and then the job comes later.

Elena's account indicates the surveillance extended over women residing in a halfway house, and how parole conditions impact women's possibilities for employment. Indeed Donna, who managed services for criminalized women, indicated that reentering women often received conflicting ideas about their abilities or readiness for employment.

> There have been instances of [women] finding employment and then being asked to cut back hours because they're spending too much time working and not enough time focusing on their internal growth.
>
> Interviewer: So mixed messages.
>
> Very, very definitely mixed messages. Um and you know women themselves find it confusing. They say well, obviously I need to find a job in order to be self-sufficient and yet you're telling me I have to cut back that job now.

When there is disagreement about how women should 'successfully' reintegrate, women are pulled in multiple directions. This is indicative of the tension within women's corrections that, on one hand, considers criminalized women to be traumatized victims and directs 'gender-responsive programming' toward their emotional and psychological needs, and on the other hand requires reentering women to be self-sufficient and responsible, demonstrating their reformed identity through participation in the labour market. The tension between seeing women as damaged and in need of support, and in viewing them as individuals who are a potential risk to themselves and the community, can be seen in how women are supervised and how their conditions are enforced.

Halfway houses and parole conditions

Halfway houses are designed as intermediate spaces between institution and community, and several reentering women expressed appreciation for the buffer it provides. For example, Donisha, expressed an appreciation for the time to adjust and find their footing.

> Cuz you don't pay rent here, right? So it's not like you have very big responsibility being here. It's actually better being here when you're trying to find a job, cuz you don't have to pay rent, you don't have to pay for groceries. You don't have to pay cable. Like you don't have to pay any of that. So you just work, make your money, come back.

Yet halfway houses are also places in which women's behaviours and activities are closely supervised. Madonna Maidment describes such spaces as "another layer of enforcement and urged compliance."[98] Indeed, failure to comply with parole or probation conditions, which are often enforced by halfway houses, may mean that women are charged with 'breaches' and possibly re-incarcerated.[99]

Women living in halfway houses typically have curfews which limit both how late they can return to the house at night and how early they can leave. Jobs that have irregular hours, such as those typically associated with the types of casual and seasonal work that is available to people with criminal records, can be difficult to manage for women living in residences with curfews. "I'd get up at like 5:30 in the morning," Joan said. "And the halfway house would say 'Oh, you can't leave till 6:00'." She pinched her voice as she imitated the staff, indicating how she felt their response was unreasonable. Joan, like some other reentering women, indicated some houses had reputations as being particularly strict and women perceived them as even eager to send women back. But Joan said decisions about curfew could also be influenced by individual discretion and interpersonal relations. "I may have had just one shitty staff that day," she said. "Who knows? Either way, they didn't let me out on time for me to make it to that job. She added that by because she arrived late, she lost that work opportunity. In contrast, Zahra (who was referring to a different halfway house) said, "My curfew's technically 11 o'clock, but they extended it, because I work, till whenever I get in." The discretion with which halfway house staff and parole officers enforced or removed curfews was frequently mentioned both by reentering women, and a couple indicated their curfews had been extended to allow them to work. Similarly, service providers who were in positions to enforce curfews (house managers and staff, and indirectly the parole officers) all said they could extend curfews to accommodate women's employment.

Halfway house residents must also report where they are going each time they leave the house. Kim, a parole officer, showed me the log sheet of women at the halfway house in her jurisdiction. She could see when each woman left the house, where she went, and when she returned. Running her finger down the list, Kim remarked, "She's going to work. And this [next name] is the one that's looking for a job." But she looked at the places this woman had gone, such as a grocery store, a community centre where she participates in programs, and Tim Hortons. "It's not looking like she's looking for a job," Kim concluded. "So, I'll have to question her on that." Women may also need to phone their supervisors, such as the halfway house staff, or their parole or probation officer, to check in when they are not at the residence. In some cases, they are required to do so from a landline, which can be a challenge given that landlines are increasingly being replaced by cell phones.

For women who are employed in the community, parole or probation officers might also stop by women's places of work to check on them. This can be anxiety-producing for those who do not want co-workers or employers to know they are under supervision. Kim described accommodations she makes with women under her supervision so as to not make her visits obvious. For example, she may not approach their

[98] *Doing Time on the Outside*, 18.
[99] Comack, *Coming Back to Jail: Women, Trauma, and Criminalization*.

place of work, but park her car nearby and phone her parolee, who then comes out and meets with her in the car. Indeed, among those interviewed who had supervisory roles with regard to reentering women, most mentioned the accommodations they made to support women, such as adjusting curfews or over-looking outbursts of temper and aggression. However, Elena indicated that staff sometimes suspected women took advantages of accommodations they were given. "Sometimes you can give an inch, they take a mile," Elena said, and indicated she did not always believe the reports women made about their whereabouts or activities. "They can say oh I'm going to work. You're like, 'okay perfect'. And then they get back at 12ish, their usual time, but then you're like, 'oh, it doesn't look like you were at work. Where were you?'" As such, both reentering women and service providers described transition to the community as a space of support and accommodation, but also of supervision and close regulation.

Impact of conditions on employment options

The Parole Board of Canada (PBC), when granting release, details the conditions that will placed upon women in the community. These decisions are made based upon CSC's risk and needs assessments conducted during women's incarceration. Approximately three-quarters of women are released on parole with at least some specific supervisory conditions.[100] These conditions have significant impact on women's employment options since prohibitions can include not being allowed to have a job that requires handling money (for those whose charges related to fraud), serving alcohol (for those whose convictions were associated with addiction, or operating a vehicle (for those with convictions related to dangerous or impaired driving). While women comprise a small minority of those convicted of sexual offences, those with such convictions are severely restricted in their mobility in the community and in the types of jobs they can have. For example, Tara listed her restrictions, "No schools, no malls, no libraries, no community centers, no parks, no beaches, no campgrounds, no bike paths," she said. "Like there's a huge list of places I can't go." Restrictions imposed upon women can also be geographical, such that a woman must reside within a certain area and not return to others. For example, a woman who committed crimes in one part of the Greater Toronto Area, and whose victims are still living in that region, will likely not be allowed to return there. This can pose multiple challenges for women whose families and support system members reside in the same community as their victims.

Chantell had held a career in administration before being convicted on charges of fraud. After her release, she described getting mixed messages from her parole officer and the parole supervisor about the interpretation of the condition which prohibited her from 'managing finance'. She would take job descriptions to her parole officer and ask if she could apply for them. She was annoyed at being told 'yes' by her parole officer, but then told 'no' by the parole supervisor.

> So one understood [the job] to be nothing at all to do with finance, and one understood it to be *manage*. So petty cash, for example, is that part of it? Like most reception duties have some element of petty cash or whatever, like seriously? … So that was frustrating for me.

Realizing that the issue of finance management was going to be on-going, and a source of frustration, Chantell decided to walk away from administrative work completely and train in event management. However, she noted that she has still run into problems with regard to things like ticket sales, event budgets, and other financial matters. As long as she is under supervision, she has to disclose all of these duties to her parole officer and said she has been put in awkward positions where she is unable to perform all the tasks required with a job because someone in the parole office thinks the duties fall under her restriction category. Yet despite that Chantell clearly found the restrictions to be often unreasonable, she indicated she always complied with the demands of the parole office. "I was like, you know what? This is my freedom at stake."

[100] Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat, "Under These Conditions: Gender, Parole and the Governance of Reintegration."

Chantell was willing to move into a new career in order to facilitate compliance with her conditions. But Kim, a parole officer, noted that some women who had fraud convictions were extremely discouraged about no longer being able to stay in their chosen profession.

> I have to be realistic with them and say listen, you know there's too many barriers. You have special conditions that says you can't be in charge of any kind of finances. So you have to think about career change.

Kim said one woman struggled for over two years trying to get back into her profession before finally moving to a different field. During the extended stretch of trying to find work, this woman was forced to declare bankruptcy and then worked long hours as a waitress to try to make ends meet.

Jessica said she had seen some women at the halfway house she managed who were strong and resilient, but were held back by parole conditions and restrictions. "Adhering to their probation or parole orders always came first," she said. "So that would limit them, like the restrictions." Indeed, Tina, who had been in and out of institutions for much of her life, insisted the correctional system sets women up for failure.

> They want failure. They want people to fail so they can say, oh yeah, we'll make it tough for them so they'll always come back. You know? That's the mentality. And I'm not a paranoid person, you know, I'm pretty straight up. I know, I see it. I lived it.

As Tina's quote demonstrates, women experience the practices of corrections and supervisory conditions as punitive and even malicious. Supervisory conditions placed upon women also mean that women must navigate contradictory messages, such as what Chantell received regarding what jobs were available to her. It falls upon them to figure out how they can navigate these messages, ever aware that their freedom may be at stake. In this context of overlapping barriers and conflicting constraints, how do women navigate the 'steps to employment'?

Steps to employment

As noted above, women have multiple 'stabilization needs' that must be addressed upon their release to the community. Those working to support reentering women generally expressed a recognition that women need some time to get settled and address their immediate concerns. "I usually tell them to decompress a little bit from being in the institution," said Kim, a parole officer. "Like, if they've served a longer sentence, I'll say, you know, you've got two weeks. But um, once two weeks comes and goes, you're gonna be looking for a job." Heather, who manages a halfway house, suggested the emphasis on employment often comes from probation and parole officers who "don't want [women] sitting here doing nothing." In other words, it is not long before women are expected to pursue either education or employment. Unless they can get an exemption (such as by proving disability or having aged out of the job market), this expectation is enforced by those who are in positions of authority, such as parole and probation officers and halfway house managers. Most women choose to pursue employment, even if that 'choice' is not entirely their preference.

> *So my advice would be actually if you really want a job, follow the steps." - Srila*

The metaphor of 'steps' came up frequently in conversations about the process of transition from the institution to employment. Nicole described the lack of support upon release by saying, "They don't give you those steps" to find the things she needs. Andy suggested reentering women need to take things "one step at a time," indicating the process is gradual and requires patience. Theresa warned that women should not try to 'skip steps' along the way. She suggested that for those who had addictions, they must address these before they tried to take on employment, suggesting that otherwise women would "miss all of the steps." She added, "Like it's not just all of a sudden you get out and I'm gonna go look for a job." Not only do women need to take things in steps, but these steps might be incremental. "I just think that, for me, ever since I got out of prison, everything comes in little baby steps," said Holly. "I needed to move up the little steps till I was ready." Similarly, Nicole indicated that women should be willing to do the "small little things", the "little steps that like will better yourself."

Service providers also indicated that women need to follow the steps. "We always tell them, like take things one step at a time, as opposed to just jumping into a full-time job and looking at the money aspect of it," Elena said. "Cuz a lot of them aren't ready." Elena described women exiting prison as needing more support to identify and follow the steps to employment. Helen also used the metaphor of steps, indicating that she referenced this to encourage people to accept jobs that may not be in themselves appealing, but could open other possibilities.

> They have to find something. And often times it's not the most meaningful position for them, um, but at least it's a start. And that's what we talk about, just getting back into the routine and uh, it's a first step towards your long-term goal.

The identification of long-term goals was something several service providers identified as challenging for reintegrating women, and indeed personal goal setting is in many ways incompatible with the institutionalization described above, and which prescribes and mandates particular pursuits. Service providers also recognized that women's basic needs, such as housing, food, and safety, will take priority over goals that might relate to education or employment. Yet they noted that women are caught in a chicken and egg quandary with no clear solution: women need to have their basic needs met in order to be able to obtain and maintain a job, but they need a job in order to be able to pay for these same needs. Nonetheless, service providers often articulated the various steps women needed to follow in order to find employment. Yet before looking at the steps, it is important to examine what kinds of jobs are available to women exiting prison, and to take into account that these jobs are mostly low-paying, low-skilled, and temporary.

Jobs available to reentering women

Nicole said that being incarcerated was one of the first times in her life she found herself sitting and taking stock of her situation.

> I'm like, where do want your life to go? Right? And how are you gonna make it get there? Like you know? This [question] is for anybody. Everybody. They ask you when you're five, you know, like what are you gonna be when you grow up, right? You don't think of it that much. You're, 'I'm gonna be an astronaut' or 'I'm gonna be this.' And like you're 25 and you're in jail and you're like, holy fuck! I was gonna be an astronaut! You know? That's not happening. NASA's not calling you next week. So like you gotta get out there and you gotta find something else.

Vocational psychologists could likely offer several explanations for why Nicole did not end up working for NASA. Linda Gottfredson suggests that as children grow, they adjust their occupational aspirations to fit their gender, abilities, and interests, but also, importantly, their socio-economic class.[101] Nicole grew up in an impoverished neighbourhood of Toronto. While she might have thought she could be an astronaut when she was five, as she got older, she would have narrowed her aspirations to the perceived accessibility of a more limited set of occupations. Nicole expressed her own 'reality check' when she said, "that's not happening. NASA's not calling you this week." Those childhood dreams of outer space were clearly expressed as fantastical, bearing little resemblance with the actual career she held prior to incarceration – working as a self-employed esthetician.

All of the reintegrating women interviewed for this project had previous job experience which informed their perceptions of the type of jobs which they could again pursue. The following quote from Holly is a typical account.

> I did telemarketing. I worked at a pizza shop. I worked at, uh, a Rogers store. I worked um, at a pizza place, oh I did say that, at a pizza place. I worked at a couple pizza places. I worked at, um, other things that would put on my résumé like I did um, you know like places like Kmart and stuff when you have to count stock, I did stuff like that. Um, the bakery.

Most women listed a similar array of low-pay jobs. Joan said she took "just any minimum wage thing I could get." She also interspersed her 'legitimate' work with 'illegitimate' work, such as selling sex or drugs. Similarly, Holly said she took breaks between jobs, saying she "didn't always work, work, work, work" in formal jobs, but earned an income for several years as an escort.

Given that most women's job experience was limited to minimum-wage jobs, these were the types of jobs to which they were applying or to which they were encouraged to apply by service providers. At the time of our interview, 11 women were employed. Their jobs included working in restaurants, food service or food production (Zahra, Lin, Theresa and Srila), environmental cleaning (Andy), construction (Donisha), and housekeeping (Holly). Melody had a full-time position in a grocery store; Joan worked the overnight shift in a men's shelter; Alexa had a job in a warehouse. Chantell had finished a program in event management and was working in a placement; prior to this she was briefly employed at a call centre. Similarly, when I asked service providers what jobs they had seen reentering women obtain, they listed positions such as catering, food preparation, asbestos removal, and customer service. They also suggested that women might find work in grocery stores, warehouses, call centres, and restaurants. Thus, my findings

[101] "Circumscription and Compromise: A Developmental Theory of Occupational Aspirations."

correspond with literature on reintegration and employment which indicates that jobs available to those with criminal records are likely to be precarious, low-paying, low-skilled, temporary and/or seasonal.[102] Still, even for these jobs there are certain 'steps' that women must follow to obtain them. These usually start with making a résumé.

Make a résumé

As noted above, there are few employment programs designed specifically for reintegrating women, and women are typically directed to a variety of organizations and services in the community as they follow the steps toward employability. The most widely available support seemed to be assistance with creating a résumé. "If you need help building a résumé," Srila said, "there's people to do that." Kim echoed this saying, "there doesn't seem to be gaps" with regard to résumé development, and she rattled off several community resources to which she could refer women. "People are always willing to print them off." A résumé is practical and tangible. It can also be produced within a relatively short period of time, which may be partly why it was most easily accessible employment support available to reintegrating women.

Five of the reintegrating women interviewed said they had received support in the community in developing their résumés. "I'm still very grateful that John Howard helped me with my résumé," said Holly. "Because that's another fear I had, was I really, really don't like doing that kind of stuff." Holly was relieved to see that there was a way to do up the résumé that did not include dates, which made her time away from employment less conspicuous. Zahra and Srila both mentioned that they had received help with their résumés while at GVI, and then had used these to get jobs upon their release. Carla and Elaine indicated they were planning to get help with their résumés in the near future. Résumés are, of course, constrained and constructed narratives which are purposefully filled with idealized half-truths. We hide certain things and make others perhaps shine more brightly than is warranted. For women coming out of prison, there is much they wish to hide, and they may struggle to articulate the skills and competencies they possess.

Elena runs workshops with reentering women to help them develop their résumés. She indicated that many women did not know how to craft one, suggesting that they would often just provide a bullet point list of jobs they had done. Through her workshops and individualized support, she guided women on how to fit their experiences into the appropriate framework and narrative. "Are you able to talk to people?" she would ask. She then translated this into 'communication skills', indicating to women how they could frame their competencies as employable skills. However, Elena noted that despite such measures, crafting even the most rudimentary résumé was challenging when women did not have any employment history and lacked their high school diploma. Indeed, Joan received help in building her résumé, but noted that the service provider "struggled to make it look good."

Even for women who had some education or previous job experience, Elena said most were anxious about how to explain the holes in their employment history. She would help them 'hide' these gaps by using the employment programs women did while incarcerated to fill in time. However, she also noted that even if women are able to craft a résumé that hid the period of incarceration, many were still afraid that employers would see through the narrative and know that they had been incarcerated. "A lot of them, they'll say, 'Oh yeah, looks good on paper,'" she said, but they were still fearful of how to answer questions an employer might ask. The fear that someone will see through the idealized narrative of a résumé is by no means limited to reentering women. However, service providers consistently expressed the perception that reentering women were particularly vulnerable to anxiety about how to explain their past.

[102] Western, "The Impact of Incarceration on Wage Mobility and Inequality"; Ricciardelli, Evans, and Peters, "Navigating Employment Post-Release: An Introduction."

Apply for a job

Several reentering women indicated that halfway houses and employment services needed to do better at providing job boards, information about job fairs, and notices of companies that were hiring. But others indicated that women needed more support than simply access to websites or directions to the local Employment Ontario office. Applying for a job can be intimidating for anyone, but as Holly noted, this is especially true "for women who never had a job before, who's coming out of prison all of a sudden they want you to get a job as part of your parole." She said that women who have not held formal jobs before "don't even know what jobs are, what jobs entail." Even women who had previous job experience reported feeling anxious and ill-prepared to start applying. For example, Melody said she had been out of prison for about three weeks when a caseworker told her about a place that was hiring people with barriers. "I'm like, I'm not ready for this," Melody recalled saying.

Applying for jobs risks rejection, about which several women indicated they were acutely aware of and fearful. "I would apply for jobs not hear back and start thinking oh my gosh, everybody knows," Chantell said. Holly echoed this fear and added that she was concerned rejection could set her back in her recovery. "I was afraid that if I got turned down and turned down, that it was going to just, where some people might be feisty about it, I was afraid that it might, like, hurt me," she said. She paused before she said 'hurt me', as if she was not sure how to describe what might happen if she was repeatedly turned down. She had been learning to recognize triggers that might lead to a relapse in her addiction, and said she was aware that feeling discouraged and rejected could be a trigger for relapse. Lori also indicated that being turned down for a job could be harmful to her mental health. "I get down on myself when I get rejected a lot," she explained. She had applied for a part-time dishwashing position and indicated that if she was not accepted, she would likely be too discouraged to try again. Alexa said she had become very discouraged after "walking everywhere", applying for jobs for over a month and never getting a call back. "I had blisters under my feet, everything from walking just for, just to look for work," she said. "I applied for over 50-something jobs." She had been ready to give up when she finally got a call about general labour position. "That was the day I was supposed to throw in the towel," she said with a laugh.

Given the association of discouragement and anxiety with job application, it is not surprising that many reentering women indicated that they needed more emotional support during this process. "I think it takes people who are willing to take time, willing to go with you to a place, help you through that whole process and hold your hand," said Ashley. "I know, like you're adult, you're supposed to be able to do that," she said, but explained "it's hard to get someone to understand what being locked up behind walls, to not see civilization day after day, month after month, year after year, does to a person. Okay? It's messed up."

Joan also said she needed someone who would 'sit with her' to help her with job applications. But she was referring not to emotional support, but rather to the support needed to navigate the bewildering changes in processes and expectations. Indeed, Maria, who led employment workshops for marginalized women, commented that women were often not familiar with changes to job application processes, such as the ubiquity of online applications. She said they would ask her, "Why can't I just walk over and drop [my résumé] off?" As such, for service providers who are assisting women with job applications, this often requires helping them navigate changes in technology, which can include navigating online job sites and uploading a résumé. However, there were reentering women who indicated they were technologically capable, but lacked access to the tools they needed. "They should have a computer here," Tina said, referring to the halfway house. "You should write that down: a computer with Internet." Without access to the Internet in their residence, Tina said women had to 'parade' around town to find computers they could use at the public library or other community organizations.

Pass the interview

Like Alexa's experience of applying for 50 jobs before finding a position, many women indicated they had applied for numerous jobs before landing an interview. Yet getting to this next 'step' in the application process seemed to be experienced less as success and more as an obstacle. If applying for jobs provoked anxiety, the prospect of a job interview only amplified it. Lori had a job interview lined up for the dishwashing job, but she was extremely anxious about it. "I haven't done an interview in 15 years," she said. When asked how she felt, she bowed her head and replied in a whisper, "nervous as hell."

"Some people don't know what [the interview process] is going to be, right?" explained Holly. "And that scares them." As noted above, the types of employment experience common to women exiting prison were low-wage, low-skill positions. These were not always acquired formally – such as through applications and interviews. For example, Srila's previous job experience included working at her brother's bar and cleaning houses with a friend. "It was just like, hey can you help me out? Can you stay?" Joan also indicated that her previous 'job' had been an informal arrangement with a friend who cleaned houses. "She hired me on for like, once a week, minimum wage-slave, scrubbing floors, toilets type of thing." Lack of experience with a formal job application process certainly seemed to contribute to women's anxiety about formal job processes and job interviews.

Not all reentering women lacked experience with applications and interviews. Yet even if they had succeeded in these processes in the past, they now had to consider how they would answer questions about their criminal record. Lin, who had extensive professional experience, had managed to secure a job interview a couple months after her release. She was nervous about the interview, primarily because she did not know how to respond to questions about her criminal record and the two-year gap in her résumé. She called up a woman who was part of her support network, a volunteer she had met her during her time at GVI. "I really just want to be transparent," Lin told her. "Do you think I should say it right out before I even start?" She described reentering women's no-win position reentering women: if they admit their record, they are likely to be met with a negative response based on stigma associated with criminalized adults. If they offer up explanations for their past, they risk appearing to be making excuses and as being unwilling to accept responsibility, and thus morally corrupt. If they lie about their record, they risk being found out and fired.

Most women anticipated that if they disclosed their criminalized past during an interview, they would not likely be offered the job, although Melody had an experience that shows this is not always true. She had participated in a program that provided general 'job readiness' training, after which she was referred to the owner of a Tim Hortons franchise who had agreed to offer employment to program participants. She successfully passed a group interview and an individual interview. She was then invited to meet with the store manager. As they were talking, the manager mentioned that she had partnered with the training program because she wanted to assist people struggling to access employment, but she was unclear about the nature of Melody's barrier. Melody is a petite, soft-spoken woman who wears a small gold cross around her neck and who presents herself very professionally. She likely did not appear to fit to any of stereotypes the employer might have had about those with employment barriers. In response to the question, Melody said she sighed, then told the manager that she had a criminal record. The manager seemed surprised, then asked Melody if she would like to talk about it.

> So then I just sat there and I said, listen, if I don't tell you about it, I could walk out this door and you can sit here and you can Google my name and you can see all the negative stuff that was said about me. And, I said, or, we can sit here, and I can tell you everything, the good, the bad, everything. Sat there for about a half an hour, telling her my whole story.
>
> And then she stood up. She's right where you are [sitting across from her at a Tim Hortons table]. And she stood up and she came over to me and I'm kind of like, I thought she was

> going to say, get out of my store. And she came over and she's just standing there. So then I get up thinking, I better leave, right? She just put her arms around me and hugged me and she said, I want to welcome you to our family.

Melody's story of acceptance is an outlier among those of research participants. It indicates an ideal scenario, one which women might hear about or hope for, but rarely experience. Yet even such a positive experience does not guarantee long-term success. Melody was unable to stay in the job after someone who knew about her past recognized her and began harassing her at the store. In the next job she applied for, Melody chose to not disclose her criminal record. She successfully got the position, but during our interview, she repeatedly expressed an almost crippling fear that her current employers will find out about her past and fire her. She said she felt like she was living a "double-life" and described fantasies of walking into her manager's office and unburdening herself of her heavy secret. Clearly, the decision about if, when, and how to disclose one's past during a job application or interview is fraught with challenge, such that the penultimate step on the path to employment may also be the most difficult one.

Don't give up. Keep going. It gets better. Actually, it gets harder, and then it gets better. - Andy

‘Choosing’ employment

The steps to employment may seem obvious, and indeed reentering women and service providers indicated there was the logical, practical path that women should follow upon their release. Employment was described by some reentering women as both a possibility for, and a proof of, return to a previous identity. For others, becoming a ‘working person’ was a way to create a new, ‘reformed’ identity. Still, there were some women who said that while they were open to work opportunities, they were ambivalent about its value, and even others who indicated that work was *not* part of who they were or what they were interested in doing.

Slightly over half of the women I interviewed described themselves being ‘working persons’, ‘hard-workers’, and other such terms that indicated that they identified work as part of their identity. For most of the women who described themselves as working people, work seems to have been central to their pre-incarceration identity. “When opportunity comes, I get on,” Srila said, “cuz, that’s, that’s always been me.” She seemed to consider work important as a general activity because it demonstrated how her life after incarceration resembled her life prior to incarceration. Even though she was dismissive of her current part-time job making edible food arrangements (“I’m leaving this job soon; I’m like out of here”), being employed allowed a continuity of identity as a worker. Similarly, Alexa indicated that being a worker was who she was. “I was just never a lazy person,” she said. “I’ve always been a working person.” She added, “I just felt like, it [not having a job] kind of made it look like I wasn’t having no ambition to do anything.”

Like Alexa and Srila, women often communicated that it was the fact of having a job that was important, rather than the actual characteristics of the job (such as type of tasks performed). Several said they were ‘willing to do anything.’ “I don’t really care what I’m doing,” Andy said, “as long as I’m making money.” Yet even while earning an income was a motivator, it was not the only one. As indicated above, women described associations between employment and a positive sense of self. Some, like Carla, suggested that being employed could help women maintain their post-carceral ‘reformed’ identity.

> I think that you should be busy during the day. Like idle hands, right? I think it’s important, just to keep your body healthy too. Like I find it’s not just the money, it’s like your health. Like, right? It’s important to just mentally have something to do in your day, you know? Yeah, especially as our kind of women, like after being in jail, you know, to bring us up, just to make yourself feel better too.

The concern is not simply with being idle, or as other women said, ‘being lazy’, it was that being idle might lead to engagement in other (negative, harmful, or criminal) activities. Indeed, keeping ‘busy’ has been noted as part of a relapse prevention strategy for those dealing with substance abuse,[103] and was referenced by other women as a way to alleviate boredom.

However, other women spoke more ambivalently about employment, demonstrating not just an indifference to the type of tasks performed, but rather to the value of having a job. Holly said she appreciated some of the positive aspects of her job, such as interactions with co-workers, but she suggested that she only pursued work because she was pressured to do so by her parole officer. (She had been told that if she did not get a job, she could not go back home to visit her family.) Tara said she was also being pressured by her parole officer to get a job, but getting a job after release had never been part of her plans. “I didn’t plan on getting a job when I got out. I was just originally going to go right back on ODSP,” she explained. She was looking half-heartedly for a job she might do, but was discouraged about her chances. “I haven’t worked since probably 2009,” she said. Arguably, when poor and marginalized people are forced to work “at the very lowest level” of jobs, they are receiving messages that not only their labour, but their selves (in

[103] Fox, “Restoring the Social: Offender Reintegration in a Risky World.”

capitalist terms) are worth very little.[104] For women whose previous job experiences were low-pay, low skill work, it does not seem surprising that there is a degree of ambivalence about such roles. Employment may be seen to offer few rewards, monetary or otherwise.

For other women, their expressed ambivalence about work related, at least in part, to the tensions between the roles of mother and employee. Elaine was also looking to receive social assistance rather than take on paid employment. She had seven children, ages three to 16, and described herself as "a mommy getting paid by love". While she suggested she *could* work hard if given a job, her priority was returning to her kids and to their full-time care. She also pointed out that she received more in social assistance as a caregiver for her children than she could expect to earn in a job. However, returning to being a 'full-time mom' was not an option for all reentering women, nor was it something all women wanted. Zahra expressed relief that for the first time in her life, she was being encouraged to think about her own goals and possibilities. She described her life prior to her incarceration by saying "I didn't get to do anything I wanted to. It was always about [my husband], my family, the kids… I wasn't doing anything with my life. Just sitting on welfare, taking care of my kids" She was adamant that she wanted to do more than return to being a stay-at-home mom.

A few women who were interviewed expressed more than ambivalence toward employment, indicating that they were stepping away from employment. "I'll be back to the employment world in five years," Janessa said, "Just not right now." Her immediate plan was to get on ODSP. Tina reported that she was able to earn some income through honorariums for speaking, drumming and leading Indigenous ceremonies. This suited her well since she was adamant about refusing formalized employment arrangements. "I'm not into tax," Tina said. "I refuse, you know." Wearing an 'Indigenous Lives Matter' T-shirt, Tina was expressing resistance not only to formal employment arrangements, but the broader colonial political structure which her taxes would fund. Ashley, another Indigenous woman, also expressed resistance to employment, although her discussion of resistance was not without contradictions. She had participated in prison employment programs at GVI such as sewing, something which she described as "tedious". And yet, despite the work being dull, Ashley expressed surprise and pleasure in discovering new skills. "Wow, I actually can do this," she said. "I'm actually good at this." She added that by participating in such programs "you learn about yourself." What she learned seemed to be not only that she had certain manual skills, but also that she could find pleasure in this work. Yet she repeatedly insisted that she was not going to be pressured into taking on a job. "Everyone in this world is like work, work, work and then drop, you know?" Ashley said. "Like don't stop till you drop." She said employment was just not a "priority" anymore. She suggested that she had pursued it in the past out of a desire to prove herself and please others, adding that this desire to please others and fulfill their expectations was what got her into "a whole bunch of trouble." By resisting employment, she was being truer to herself. She insisted that taking on employment was akin to becoming imprisoned again. "You're just like blinded and plugged in and you think that you've escaped this, but you haven't," she said. "You're just a prisoner yourself. You're a prisoner to the system."

The suggestion that working people become trapped within a system is important to consider, especially in the context of the low-wage labour typically available to reentering women. Employment available to criminalized and marginalized people is often precarious and thankless and unappealing. Women leaving prison typically "return (integrate) to the very same socially and economically disadvantaged locations that had brought them into 'conflict with the law' in the first place".[105] Additionally, since finding a job can be so difficult for reentering women, once women find a place that is willing to hire them, they may feel stuck there, even if the situation is not good. Joan was working nights

[104] Young, *The Vertigo of Late Modernity*, 76.
[105] Maidment, *Doing Time on the Outside*, 10; see also Maruna, "Reentry as a Rite of Passage"; Reynolds, "Glossary of Terms."

at a men's shelter. She spoke with pride about her 'nerves of steel' that enabled her to manage the overdoses and belligerent clients during her nine-hour-long shifts. She also said the employer went through employees "like a meat grinder" and that she was working in a "giant petri dish" of colds, flus, strep throat. Still, she did not think she could leave.

> I'm too terrified that I'll never get another job to quit and go explore and see if I'll get another one. I'm too afeard that I will never get another job if I leave this one, either willingly or unwillingly. … I'll stick with the one I've got.

Susan, an employment counsellor with a community-based organization, said she knew of a place that was willing to hire people with criminal records, yet she would not send her female clients there after hearing that women were being sexually harassed. She added that in her experience, reentering women could be particularly vulnerable due to their limited options. "They've been so conditioned to cower and to submit, right?" she said. "And then the fear factor. I'll let that go, because I can't lose my job."

Concluding thoughts

As noted at the beginning of this report, there are many claims about employment's value as identity-building and as key to people's post-carceral reform. This research demonstrates that such claims are frequently expressed by service providers as well as by reentering women. However, this research also indicates that careful consideration is warranted with regard to the importance placed upon employment for women, particularly in terms of its provision of identity and its supposed promise of integration and inclusion. The narratives of the reintegrating women I interviewed challenged idealizations of work as inherently meaningful, or even as providing economic independence. Many recognized that the opportunities available to them were boring, damaging to their health, or otherwise unappealing. They described such work as a means to an end, the end being the pay-cheque.

Thinking about women's experiences, and placing that within the current context of the precarious gig economy and the disproportionate impact on women of the COVID-19 pandemic,[106] I wonder about the ways in which the position of the worker, a position which valorizes individual productivity as narrowly conceived with the confines of waged employment, limits our recognition of, and appreciation for, other possibilities for social belonging. Are we not foreclosing other opportunities for belonging that could be more accessible (such that they do not require a criminal record check) and reflective of women's wants and interests? This is not to say that some reintegrating women do not want waged work. This research clearly shows that many do, and they expend significant effort to demonstrate this. But I believe it is important to ask what other possibilities could be made available to women that could allow for, and create, opportunities for inclusion. Indeed, reintegrating women indicate they have other aspects of their identity that could take precedence to being a worker.

Our capitalist system, and particularly the high costs of housing and other living expenses in urban areas, certainly requires that reintegrating women be given opportunities and supports in finding employment. However, the subject position of the employable woman should not be the only one to which incarcerated and reentering women are directed. There is a need to foster more holistic and socially-based conceptions of redemptive subject positions for women who are reentering our communities.

[106] Qian and Fuller, "COVID-19 and the Gender Employment Gap Among Parents of Young Children."

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