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Doing Time on the Outside  
Managing Relationships with Imprisoned Men

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**DOING TIME ON THE OUTSIDE**  
**MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH IMPRISONED MEN**

**Erin McCuaig**  
**2007**

**Submitted to the Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.**



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	2
ABSTRACT .....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
LOCATING THE RESEARCH .....	9
<i>Part 1: The Social Conditions and Issues of Women Partners of Prisoners</i> .....	10
1.1. <i>Lack of Social Support</i> .....	10
1.2 <i>Stigmatized Public Interactions</i> .....	11
1.3 <i>Multiple Challenges</i> .....	13
1.4 <i>Financial Hardships</i> .....	15
1.5 <i>Coping with the Challenges</i> .....	16
<i>Part 2: The Correctional Conditions and Issues of Women Partners of Prisoners</i> ..	18
2.1 <i>Stigmatized Correctional Interactions</i> .....	18
2.2 <i>Visiting as Stressful</i> .....	18
2.3 <i>Coping with Visitation</i> .....	20
2.4 <i>Responsibilized Partners</i> .....	21
3. <i>The Positive Side to Enforced Separation</i> .....	22
Concluding Comments.....	23
THEORIZING THE RESEARCH.....	25
1. <i>Stigma from the Analytical Lens of Goffman (1963)</i> .....	26
1.1 <i>Managing Information</i> .....	28
2. <i>Structural Stigma</i> .....	31
3. <i>Presentation-of-Correctional-Self</i> .....	33
3.1 <i>Resistance</i> .....	36
4. <i>Presentation-of-Social-Self</i> .....	39
Concluding Comments.....	41
THE METHODOLOGY .....	43
1. <i>Epistemological Orientation</i> .....	43
1.1 <i>Qualitative Methodology</i> .....	44
2. <i>Data Collection Method</i> .....	45
3. <i>Recruitment of Participants and Notification of Study</i> .....	47
4. <i>The Population of Study</i> .....	48
5. <i>The Interview</i> .....	49
6. <i>The Sample of Women Partners of Prisoners</i> .....	52
Molly.....	52
Jennifer.....	53
Lucy .....	53
Tammy .....	54
Sally .....	55
7. <i>Method of Analysis</i> .....	55
8. <i>Limitations of the Research</i> .....	57
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....	58
<i>Part 1: The Challenges of the Correctional Context</i> .....	59

<b>1. Stigma</b> .....	59
<b>1.1 Structural Stigma</b> .....	60
<b>2. Interpersonal Stigma</b> .....	66
<b>2.1 Overt Encounters of Stigma</b> .....	67
<b>2.2 Verbal Abuse</b> .....	67
<b>2.3 Application of Criminal Charges</b> .....	68
<b>2.4 Drawing upon technology</b> .....	70
<b>2.5 Covert Encounters of Stigma</b> .....	71
<b>2.6 Prolonged Waiting</b> .....	71
<b>2.7 “Games”</b> .....	72
<b>3. Physical Space</b> .....	73
<b>4. Resistance: Corrections and the Criminal Justice System</b> .....	75
<b>4.1 Covert Strategies of Resistance</b> .....	76
<b>4.2 Undermining Technology</b> .....	77
<b>4.3 Every Day Acts of Resistance</b> .....	78
<b>4.4 Smiling</b> .....	78
<b>4.5 Compliance</b> .....	79
<b>4.6 Creating an Alternative Discourse</b> .....	81
<b>4.7 Managing Relations</b> .....	82
<b>4.8 Seeking Support Networks</b> .....	83
<b>4.9 Escapism</b> .....	84
<b>5. Overt Strategies of Resistance</b> .....	86
<b>5.1 Challenging Authority</b> .....	87
<b>5.2 Humor</b> .....	88
<b>Concluding Comments of the Correctional Context</b> .....	88
<b>Part 2: The Challenges of the Social Context</b> .....	90
<b>1. Contextualizing Identity</b> .....	90
<b>1.1 The Challenge of Maintaining a Positive Identity</b> .....	91
<b>2. Stigma and Stereotypes</b> .....	92
<b>2.1. Stereotypes and the Families of Women Partners of Prisoners</b> .....	93
<b>2.2 Stigma in the Community and Workplace</b> .....	93
<b>2.3 Stigma and Personal Friendships</b> .....	94
<b>2.4 Stigma and Stereotypes from Prisoner’s Families</b> .....	95
<b>3. Coping with Stigma in the Social Context</b> .....	96
<b>3.1 Constructing Positive Identities</b> .....	97
<b>3.2 Keeping Busy</b> .....	98
<b>3.3 Insulation / Isolation</b> .....	98
<b>Concluding Comments of the Social Context</b> .....	100
<b>Part 3: The Challenges of Intimate Relations Related to Incarceration</b> .....	101
<b>1. The Financial Consequences of Incarceration</b> .....	101
<b>1.1 Phone Bills from Collect Calls</b> .....	102
<b>2. Uncertainties of the Future</b> .....	104
<b>3. Emotional and Physical Challenges</b> .....	107
<b>4. The Responsibility of Being the Caregiver</b> .....	108
<b>Part 4: The Positive Side to Enforced Separation</b> .....	109
<b>Concluding Thoughts and Comments</b> .....	111

<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: Interview Guide.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Recruitment Text.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: Ethics Approval.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: List of Resources.....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: List of Codes.....</b>	<b>135</b>

## ABSTRACT

Traditionally criminological inquiry has excluded the voices of female partners of imprisoned men, leaving their lived experiences and impacts of incarceration unacknowledged. This is a disturbing oversight in light of the stigmatization of this group both by the correctional system and in society. This thesis is an exploratory study that seeks to capture some of the experiences and challenges faced by female partners of male prisoners to shed light on their lived realities. In order to do so, this study has built upon symbolic interactionism, by drawing on Goffman's concept of stigma, the more recent theorizing around this concept as well as the issue of resistance. This theoretical framework has provided a useful lens through which to examine how structural stigma and interpersonal stigma are experienced by female partners of prisoners.

The research is a qualitative study. Five female partners of male prisoners were interviewed regarding their experiences, challenges, and negotiations in the correctional and social spheres. The findings were analyzed and ultimately broken down into four sections: the challenges experienced in corrections and in the social realm, the hardships of intimate relations related to incarceration and the positive side to enforced separation.

The analysis revealed that the experiences and coping strategies of women partners of prisoners are diverse. Further, structural stigma and interpersonal stigma (in particular the use of search technologies) were significantly present. In response to these challenges the study highlights that the women engaged in numerous tactics of overt and covert resistance. The findings, while recognizing the agency of these women also speaks to the imperative need for Corrections to humanize their policies and practices.

## INTRODUCTION

*I do believe that there needs to be something done to make the system work properly. Like I say, what's written down is one thing-what really goes on, is a totally different game. (Molly)*

Historically, criminological inquiry has directed its gaze towards issues of crime and harm in a manner that has overlooked a population that also experiences the impact of imprisonment, namely, the intimate partners of prisoners. Despite the fact that these individuals are marginalized in the criminal justice system and within society, their needs and life experiences continue to be unacknowledged. This exploratory study seeks to shed light on the plight of female partners of male prisoners. To this end, the following questions are used to guide me in this endeavor: How are the lives of women affected by their partners' incarceration? What challenges do they confront and how do they manage them?

Chapter One entails a literature review which addresses the historical research on women partners of prisoners and discusses the core themes unearthed in the findings. By revisiting previous work on women partners of prisoners, this chapter contextualizes my research. Chapter Two details the theoretical framework of the study. Here, I acknowledge that the study is grounded in Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma, and provide an overview of his work before exploring more recent studies of stigma. Interwoven in the fabric of my theoretical framework are the key concepts which I will draw upon and develop in my analysis.

Chapter Three details the methodological approach used in the research. Included in this discussion is the epistemological orientation in which I situate the research and an

overview of the qualitative method adopted. Further, the recruitment process will be detailed, as well as the ethical considerations taken into account. Following this, the data collection and method of analysis will be discussed. Lastly, within this chapter, I introduce the women interviewed for this study, presenting a brief biography of each participant in order to draw attention to their individuality. These descriptions also serve as a reference point for the subsequent analysis.

Chapter Four consists of the analysis of the empirical material. Here I weave together the various themes and sub-themes extracted from the raw data to form an exploration that draws upon the theoretical and conceptual framework of my study, while relating key findings previously noted in my literature review. In doing this, the general challenges and coping strategies faced by women partners of prisoners within the social and correctional spheres will be examined with a particular emphasis on structural and interpersonal stigma, the intimate costs of incarceration located outside of stigma, and the positive side to enforced separation.

In concluding the thesis, the key findings of the study will be discussed in light of what they suggest for the existing conditions of women partners of prisoners, as well as how these points of inquiry can be expanded in terms of future scholarly research. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to provide an unabated voice for five women belonging to a population which has generally been excluded from the criminological enterprise.

## CHAPTER ONE LOCATING THE RESEARCH

The following chapter will provide an overview of the relevant literature regarding the partners of incarcerated men while, where appropriate, drawing on the literature on families of prisoners. Given the thematic findings of this literature, I have divided the chapter into two sections. Part one of the chapter examines the social issues facing women partners of prisoners and situates the discussion by drawing upon the following key themes: stigmatized public interactions; multiple challenges; financial hardships; and coping with the challenges. As such, this section will underscore how in the social realm, these women face an array of challenges that they negotiate by employing a number of diverse managerial strategies.

Part two of the chapter examines the literature regarding women partners of prisoners in relation to corrections. Here, I draw upon the themes of stigmatized correctional interactions, visitation as stressful, coping with visitation, and responsabilized partners to underline how the prison itself embodies a number of obstacles and challenges with which the women must contend. As a side note, to conclude this chapter, I will address a noteworthy finding that is paradoxical to the normative assumptions of incarceration. That is, I will explore some of the positive sides to enforced separation which surfaced in the studies of various researchers.

Taken in sum, the literature forms the basis upon which I undertook my research. It also exemplifies how the experiences of partners of prisoners entail a number of challenges and adjustments during the incarceration phase that often place significant strain on these women.

## **Part 1: The Social Conditions and Issues of Women Partners of Prisoners**

Families of incarcerated persons have been referred to as “forgotten victims” who have been overlooked by the criminal justice system (Girshick, 1996, p.11). As such, the experiences of this population have been characterized as being “confusing, shameful, disturbing and sometimes tragic” (Fishman, 1990, p.113). In King’s (2004) comparison of interviews with murder victims’ families with those of death row prisoners’ families, it was found that both groups felt discriminated against, isolated, and ostracized by the criminal justice system (p.205). Eschholz, Reed, Beck and Blume (2003) support the latter findings, adding how hardships endured by family members are not only intensified by their treatment in the system, but also vis-à-vis the community and the media (p.176).

### ***1.1. Lack of Social Support***

A dominant theme emerging from the literature on families and partners of imprisoned men concerns the fact that incarceration strains intimate relationships (see for example, Fishman, 1990, p.271; Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.73). That said the issue of social support and lack of resources is a line of inquiry that has been considered by researchers (Carlson & Cervera, 1992; Selber, Johnson, & Lauredale, 1993). Indeed, Codd (1998) notes how the assistance that is available for prisoners’ families and partners is often voluntarily administered, and given its informal nature, is seldom acknowledged by criminal justice agencies and the like (p.149).

Beyond this, Tewskbury and Demichele (2005) claim that the absence of assistance for prisoners’ families has been attributed, in part, to a punitive justice system, where emphasis is no longer on rehabilitation but is guided by a retributive philosophy that is characterized by the imposition of longer sentences and the curtailment of

prisoners' liberties (p.295). This agenda seeps into the consideration of families and partners of incarcerated persons and further discounts their role in the criminal justice system.

Not only do families and partners of incarcerated persons lack social support on a macro level, but the literature indicates that this occurs at an interpersonal level as well. More specifically, the research has found that although wives generally receive support from their respective families, the support can be partial (Girshick, 1996, p.41; Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.73). To highlight, in Girshick's (1996) study, women characterized their support from friends as being precarious, as they were more apt to interpret the relationship as harmful (p.41). Several wives in this research also reported that their parents did not wholly provide them with support as they did not approve of their daughters' involvement with prisoners (Ibid, p.41). Similar links can be drawn in Fishman's (1990) ethnographic study on wives of prisoners however in this case women spoke of the lack of assistance offered by their in-laws (p.125).

### ***1.2 Stigmatized Public Interactions***

Given that there is a notable absence of social support for the families and partners of prisoners, the potential for stigma is increased. In effect, there is widespread consensus in criminological research which suggests that families and intimate partners of incarcerated persons are a marginalized group vulnerable to stigmatization (Goffman, 1963, p.30; Morris, 1965, p.108; Fishman, 1990, p.113; May, 2000, p.217). Notably, Girshick (1996) asserts that the public's negative perception of criminalized persons makes it difficult for most people not to morally judge (p.10). In this sense, the loss and forced separation of an imprisoned man is different than traditional losses experienced in

society such as death and divorce given that they tend to be absolved by others (Ibid, p.10).

Despite the fact that the maintenance of intimate relationships with persons on the outside has been shown to positively impact the successful reintegration of prisoners (see for example, Glaser, 1964, p.366), the 'outside' half of this relationship is often negatively perceived by others. To illustrate, a study completed by Brink (2003) found that the public tends to believe that women partners of prisoners have low self esteem and that they are emotionally inept because they are intimately involved with 'criminals' (p.396). Shichor's (1992) research unearthed similar negative views, including that communities generally perceive families and partners as a population which takes advantage of the social welfare system and is implicated in drug use and deviancy (p.75). Escholz, Reid, Beck, & Blume's (2003) interviews with families of prisoners found that alongside others negative reactions towards them, many attributed their poor treatment in the community to the misrepresentations of prisoners in the media (p.173). They also felt that the media crippled their ability to proceed with their lives in a productive manner.

Such judgments therefore create a climate which often renders the incarcerated individual's family members generally and partners more specifically socially isolated. Within this context, Girshick (1996) recounts how underlying notions of longing for acceptance and struggling with the absence of honesty in social interactions are common experiences for women partners of prisoners (p.4). In other words, the disclosure of a partner's incarceration is a significant source of stress for women which often dictate the nature of their social interactions. In this study, it was found that the circumstances of a prisoner's offence is presented by families and partners in a manner that makes it appear

more socially acceptable to others (Ibid, 1996, p.37). This strategy can therefore be understood as an attempt to preserve the prisoner's (and their own) dignity. Fishman (1990) asserts that these feelings also manifest when mothers must weight how or if they will inform their children that their father is in prison (p.131). It would appear that these women feared that their children would be treated poorly and their concern that they would be stigmatized was central to this disclosure (Ibid, p.131).

The former findings suggest that the moral judgments that society tends to assign to those intimately tied to the prison population (as being 'deviant' or 'immoral') ultimately exacerbates their discredited identities (Goffman, 1963. p.4).

### ***1.3 Multiple Challenges***

Alongside the experience of stigmatized interactions, the literature indicates that there are multiple challenges and stressors that impact the lives of women partners of prisoners (see for example, Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.22; Girshick, 1996, p.31). First, the reality of having to fulfill several roles and responsibilities in the absence of a partner subsequently places pressures on women particularly in terms of decision making (Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.144). According to Fishman (1990), the imprisonment of a husband is a "crisis point" which requires restructuring the family unit (p.5). Reportedly, wives bear the full burden of this task and must facilitate the adjustment for their children while acting as the 'caregiver' to their husbands (p.6). In keeping with this finding, Carlson and Cervera's (1992) interviews with wives of prisoners reveals how their most common struggles included managing finances, as well as child rearing and disciplining (p.73). Notably, these issues were the root of tension in most marriages within this particular study (Ibid, 1992, p.85).

Jamieson and Grounds' (2002) exploratory study on the effects of long-term imprisonment of Irish Republican ex-prisoners and their families found that during the incarceration phase, families tried to conceal their personal hardships from prisoners in order to minimize their anxiety (p.21). Similar results were evident in Fishman's (1990) research where conversations between wives and prisoners were generally artificial in nature and did not focus on tangible subjects including plans for re-entry (p.271).

A second element of this population's struggles concerns the emotional and physical impact of incarceration. To name but some, Laura Fishman (1990) has cited "illness, anger, depression and resentment" as the most common feelings expressed by wives of prisoners (p.209). In building upon the previous findings, Christian's (2005) ethnographic study on the effects of incarceration on prisoners' families, found that sacrificing personal well-being is central to the role of this population (p.37).

In addition, Morris (1965, p.292) and Fishman (1990, p.194) have discussed the loss of sexual intimacy as another source of stress for this group of women. Further, Girshick (1996) highlights how feelings of powerlessness and loss of control in terms of communication to their loved one, frequently characterize the experience of partners of prisoners (p.82). Consequently, feelings of loneliness often encompass the forced separation (Fishman, 1988, p.57; Girshick, 1996, p.57; Morris, 1965, p.292).

In offering a different vantage point to the previous findings, King's (2004) research found that both prisoners' families and the families of victims suffered from similar symptoms, namely, guilt, insomnia, and depression (p.205). They also reported a tendency to dwell on the past and experienced difficulties in dealing with their newfound realities after the trial had finished. Similarly, Eschholz's et al. (2003) research examined

the impact on families of those tried for capital crimes, and found that many family members reported the following symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder: ‘intrusion’ (reoccurring thoughts about the crime affecting one’s sleep, and overall perception), ‘avoidance and numbing’ (withdrawal and restrictions on being able to visit certain places and people due to the impact of the crime), and ‘hyperarousal-anger’ and ‘irritability’ ( p.166).

#### ***1.4 Financial Hardships***

The previous sub-section has addressed some of the emotional challenges faced by women partners of prisoners. However the impact that incarceration has on the economic well being of this group is another key aspect of their experiences. This issue is reinforced within the literature, as several researchers have indicated that such conditions are often exacerbated during terms of custody (Carr, 1995, p.1; Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.73; Fishman, 1990, p.199; Fishman, 1988, p.57; Girshick, 1996, p.59; Christian, 2005, p.45; Morris, 1965, p.292; Brink, 2003, p.394). As such, Girshick (1996, p.119) and Morris (1965, p.301) affirm that the challenges of imprisonment are particularly felt at the economic level given that at the outset, the majority of female partners of male prisoners are impoverished. Accordingly, wives of prisoners are often forced to find employment (Girshick, 1996, p.43; Morris, 1965, p.292). The women researched in Girshick’s (1996) study further nuances this challenge by pointing out that securing work can be jeopardized by the disclosure of their partner’s incarceration to potential employers (p.43).

Alongside the economic plight of women partners of prisoners, the literature reveals that there are additional practices as a result of incarceration that require

expenditure. One case in point concerns visitation (see for example, Burstein, 1977, p.70; Girshick, 1996, p.61). In order to sustain their relationships, women are under pressure to plan for institutional visits which can entail rearranging work schedules and seeking childcare (Sturges, 2002, p.35). For this reason, many women must strategize to pay for the general expenses of daily living alongside the additional costs of incarceration. These expenses can include supplying their partner with money, the payment of collect calls, as well as the costs of gas and accommodations incurred by their travels to the institutions (see for example, Sturges, 2002, p.35; Girshick, 1996, p.60; Brink, 2003, p.395).

Interestingly, Fishman's (1990) study discovered that the resulting strains of incarceration made some women feel hostile towards their husbands. Moreover, their hostility was particularly acute when they felt that the prison afforded their partner a better quality of life than their own (Ibid, 1990, p.202).

### ***1.5 Coping with the Challenges***

Thus far I have sketched the various challenges which emerged in the research on women partners of prisoners that essentially relate to their day-to-day social realities. I now turn to review the various coping strategies adopted by these women. To illustrate, Carlson and Cervera (1992) have identified that securing savings, having support from others (prisoner's families included), children, religion, and utilizing positive measures of assistance better equip women to deal with their partner's term of custody (p.73). Writing letters and engaging in phone contact also helped couples to deal with the forced separation (Ibid, 1992, p.144). In addition, many family members of prisoners in Christian's (2005) study reported that having hope that parole would be granted and remaining cognizant that the situation was temporary helped them to negotiate the strains

of incarceration (p.43). Lastly, Fishman (1990) explores spouses coping strategies in relation to the stigma they experienced in their social circles (p.270). As such, managing information about their husbands' imprisonment, dissolving ties to their partners, adopting 'normal' lifestyles and or identities, and avoiding labels that alluded to their ties to prisoners were cited as fundamental coping mechanisms. Finally, although visitation can disrupt women's financial states, it also serves as an instrumental coping strategy for those 'doing time' on the outside (Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.59). Correspondingly, institutional visits have been cited by Girshick (1996) as "the real world while the time outside the prison is just the time between visits" (p.4).<sup>1</sup>

In addition, some families and partners are motivated to visit the penitentiary to minimize the possibility of their incarcerated loved one being subject to institutional abuse and neglect. Christian's (2005) study found that several visitors did not trust correctional staff and to combat the potentiality of abuse, became active in the visitation programs. In doing this, they were able to demonstrate their agency and show correctional officers that these particular prisoners had supportive outside contacts who would, if necessary, advocate on their behalf (p.41). In fact, however, as Carr (1995) notes, partners and families of prisoners seldom pursue formal grievances for fear of losing their visitation rights (p.1).

---

<sup>1</sup> Lori B. Girshick (1996) is a researcher who is also a female partner of a male prisoner.

## **Part 2: The Correctional Conditions and Issues of Women Partners of Prisoners**

### ***2.1 Stigmatized Correctional Interactions***

To this point, I have described the social challenges and coping strategies that have emerged in the literature on female partners of incarcerated men. I will now switch lenses to examine what the literature reveals in terms of the women's experiences within the correctional environment itself.

While many female partners of prisoners encounter stigmatized public interactions, the literature illustrates that this is not limited to the social setting (Fishman, 1990, p.169; Comfort, 2003, p.103). In fact, the findings of Girshick (1996, p.5), Fishman (1990, p.134), and Sturges (2002, p.40) reveal that within the penal environment, women partners of prisoners are frequently perceived by institutional staff as sources of potential problems and are subsequently treated with suspicion. This can have numerous consequences. For example, Fishman's (1990) research established that correctional officer's treatment of women subsequently impacted on their sense of self-worth (p.150).

### ***2.2 Visiting as Stressful***

As mentioned earlier, visitation can help women partners of prisoners to maintain their relationships, yet some literature suggests that there are invisible costs to visiting penitentiaries (Fishman, 1988, p.55; Fishman, 1990, p.138; Christian, 2005, p.46; Carr, 1995, p.1; Girshick, 1996, p.5; Comfort, 2003, p.78; Brink, 2003, p.395; Gordon & Bainham, 2004, p.266; Sturges, 2002, p.33). In other words, there are sometimes subtle and unpredictable consequences that women partners of prisoners face upon entering the

institution which are essentially traced to the operational practices and policies of the prison.

This literature identifies the processing of visitors into penal institutions as notable. Girshick (1996) explains how many wives in her study educated each other regarding institutional policy and procedures to overcome the confusion concerning the processing of visitors (p.4). The lack of information for women visiting the institution is identified as an issue in her research given that many women knew very little about corrections at the onset of their partners' carceral term (Ibid, 1996, p.78). Moreover, visitors' attempts to clarify institutional policy were dissuaded by irritated prison administrators (Ibid, p.78).

According to the work of Girshick (1996, p.72) and Fishman (1990, p.138), the regulations for visitors are rigid and unforgiving. Comfort's (2003) ethnographic study of women who visited male prisoners at San Quentin Penitentiary, found the regulations to be problematic, in that the rules were frequently changing making them extremely difficult to follow (p.96). As such, visitation was often contingent upon the women's ability to adapt to these shifting rules. Similarly, Christian's (2005) research found that the visitation program and its policies make it an uncomfortable experience to which one must become accustomed (p.40). Arguably, this adjustment can become a significant obstacle for some visitors.

Further, Girshick (1996) notes how the visitation experience can also become strained in light of the possibilities of lockdowns, delays, abuse of institutional policies and procedures, and harassment by correctional officers (p.4). In another line of inquiry, Girshick (1996, p.5), Fishman (1990, p.138), and Comfort (2003, p.96) contend that

humiliation is another unpredictable outcome of the visitation process for female partners. An example of this includes the act of being strip searched by correctional officers (Girshick, 1996, p.87).

Lastly, Brink's (2003) research observed how the overall experience of each visit to the prison is often dependent on the institutional head, who holds the discretion to determine the nature of the visit, if the visitor will be harassed, and to what level they will have to submit to these policies (p.395). In a similar sense, Comfort's (2003) study noted how the imposed conformity, obedience and standardization of the prison often leads to the loss of personal freedom and agency for women visiting institutions (p.101). Given this, some partners of incarcerated persons develop fears of the visitation process (Girshick, 1996, p.4).

To summarize, the previous findings suggest that visitation can be a strenuous and unpredictable experience for women partners of prisoners. Further, these encounters differ from their normal social interactions. Girshick (1996) extends this assessment, noting how women partners often feel like they lead "dual lives" (p.5). This phenomenon is best captured in the following statement as one female partner avows, "no where are we free, not within the prison walls with our husbands, not outside in the free society" (Ibid, p.5).

### ***2.3 Coping with Visitation***

In a similar vein to coping with the emotive and economic stressors of having incarcerated partners, these women also develop several strategies to deal with the difficulties experienced in visiting their loved one. Christian's (2005) study sheds light on

how conversations between women visiting the institution often lead to friendships where the strains of incarceration can be shared (p.39). These findings suggest that solidarity can result in significant support. By contrast, some of the women in Fishman's (1990) research would disassociate with prisoners' wives whom correctional officers would strip search to cope with the stressors of visitation (p.150).

A small number of studies (Comfort, 2003, p.86; Fishman, 1990, p.149) examine how women partners negotiate their presentation-of-self (Goffman 1959) in the correctional environment as a coping mechanism<sup>2</sup>. This concerns how they act and present themselves physically and psychologically to correctional staff at all levels of interaction within the prison system<sup>3</sup>.

Now that I have sketched the challenges and coping strategies adopted by intimate partners of prisoners in the penal environment, I will move on to explore an alternate facet of the corrections system, namely, the issue of responsabilized partners.

## ***2.4 Responsibilized Partners***

As previously mentioned, the experience of female partners of prisoners has traditionally been ignored in criminology. However, there is one study which highlights how their role is woven into the criminal justice fabric when prisoners are approaching parole: Silverstein's (2001) study explores how the prison population is governed through parole board hearings and how the role of families and partners are bridged into these practices and discourses (p.395). He discusses how parole boards categorize families in terms of being 'caring' and 'uncaring' and how this is central to determining if prisoners

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<sup>2</sup> This coping strategy will be explored in further detail in Chapter two, as it serves as a strategy of stigma management used by women partners of prisoners in the prison.

<sup>3</sup> For example, when the women are being processed into the institution, while they are waiting to visit their partner, and during their visit.

are constructed as governable in the community and thereafter suitable candidates for parole (ibid, 2001, p.405).

According to the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, the National Parole Board is required to make “the least restrictive decision consistent with the protection of society” (“CCRA”, 1992, Section 101; Silverstein, 2001, p.396). With familial ties and community support being critical release factors in determining the successful parole of prisoners (see for example, Brodsky, 1975; Glaser, 1964) female partners are therefore viewed by the corrections system in terms of the degree to which they help prisoners overcome their criminogenic tendencies and strive to adopt law-abiding futures (Silverstein, 2001, p.395). That said, these individuals bear partial responsibility for the monitoring and reintegration of prisoners once paroled (Ibid, 2001, p.415).

The previous discussion highlights that the role of female partners of male prisoners is by no means static. Within the prison, the women are by and large subjected to disdain from correctional officers and are forced to reconcile this quandary in order to be granted their visit. However, upon the prisoner’s parole review the role of women partners is acknowledged as positive, albeit within the constraint of a regulatory system. In this regard, the literature infers that the contradictory nature of the system continuously displaces the valuation of women partners of prisoners.

### ***3. The Positive Side to Enforced Separation***

Before concluding, a caveat regarding the lives of female partners of imprisoned men will be briefly acknowledged. While it is clear that many intimate relationships are negatively impacted by incarceration, a few studies have discovered that there are

potential beneficial aspects to this experience (Fishman, 1990, p.203; Girshick, 1996, p.49). For example, Girshick (1996) found that for many women she interviewed, incarceration served to strengthen their relationships (p.49). In Fishman's (1990) study, women cited tranquility, newfound independence, increased self understanding, and less domestic responsibilities as some of the advantages from having their partner in prison (p.203). Further, a small number of women used this time to terminate their already unstable marriages while others no longer had to endure their husbands' physical violence or worry about economic misfortune (Ibid, 1990, p.112).

### ***Concluding Comments***

This chapter has explored the research conducted on female partners of imprisoned men. I have highlighted the core findings of traditional researchers and detailed the challenges and negotiations met by these women in both the social and correctional spheres. It is important to note that what arises from the literature is that the women experience varying degrees of stigma, and that this phenomenon occurs in multiple contexts, namely, in their social circles, and within the confines of the penitentiary. Given that the theoretical framework of my study is rooted in Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma, I am therefore able to build upon these findings.

In concluding this chapter I would like to draw attention to the limitations of the previous studies for informing the present study. The studies are for the most part American and also from the United Kingdom (for example; Brink, 2003; Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996; Comfort, 2003; Morris, 1965), and we cannot necessarily relate the experiences of this population to the Canadian context. The different demographics and the considerable presence of privatization particularly in the U.S. (see for example,

Christie, 2002) give rise to empirical questions that warrant scholarly investigation.

Another shortcoming of the research reviewed is that the studies are considerably dated (for example, Morris, 1965; Brodsky, 1975; Fishman, 1988; Fishman, 1990) with some notable exceptions (Brink, 2003; Christian, 2005). This thesis seeks to add a contemporary account of Canadian female partners of male prisoners, exploring their lived experiences, and how they manage and negotiate adversity.

## CHAPTER TWO THEORIZING THE RESEARCH

In the following chapter, I will present the theoretical framework of the study that will guide the subsequent analysis. The point of entry is grounded in Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma. Given this, the first section of the chapter will provide an overview of Goffman's (1963) work on stigma. I will then proceed in the second section of the chapter, to examine the work of various researchers who have built upon the concept of stigma since Goffman.

To further frame my research, more recent studies will be explored by drawing upon the concept of 'presentation-of-self' (Goffman, 1959). The first section will examine the coping strategies as well as the acts of resistance utilized by stigmatized persons within the correctional setting. As such, I will center the issue of the presentation-of-correctional-self; however in order to contextualize the practice, I will first introduce the concepts of 'structural stigma' (Hannem, *forthcoming*), 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961a) and 'contamination' (Goffman, 1961a).

The second section will speak to the presentation-of-social-self by exploring how individuals manage their stigma and negotiate their identity in the social realm. Accordingly, this framework has been adapted for my analysis to underline how the stigma experienced by female partners of prisoners' is neither simple nor straightforward.

## ***1. Stigma from the Analytical Lens of Goffman (1963)***

The concept of stigma (Goffman, 1963) is rooted within a symbolic interactionist framework. That is, stigma is premised on the understanding that meaning is constructed within social interactions (see for example, Blumer, 1969). In 1963, Erving Goffman presented a sociological conceptualization of stigma in his seminal book entitled: “Stigma; notes on the management of spoiled identity”. His work added a new dimension to the study and interpretation of human social interaction.

According to Goffman (1963), stigma is “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (p.3). This negative attribute creates a relationship characterized by depreciation in which social responses influence human relations. Within these contexts, the humanness of the individual in question is minimized and s/he is no longer regarded as a complete, normative social actor (Ibid, p.3). Goffman (1963) contends that there are three types of stigma: ‘bodily’, ‘moral’, and ‘tribal’ (p.4). ‘Bodily stigma’ entails physical malformations and defects (for example, having one leg). ‘Moral stigma’ concerns unfavorable character flaws such as criminality or idleness, while ‘tribal stigma’ stems from sources such as race, nation and religion which can be passed down through generations (Ibid, p.4). With respect to female partners of prisoners, a moral stigma is encountered. Since these women are intimately tied to members of society (prisoners) who have a questionable moral standing amongst the general population, the morality of these women or perceived lack thereof, is the basis on which others stigmatize them.

According to Goffman (1963), stigma unfolds along a continuum of attribute and stereotype. Unfavorable attributes are distinguished by ‘normals’<sup>4</sup> who in turn link them

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Normals’ consist of individuals who do not possess stigmatic attributes or in other words those who are not stigmatized (Goffman, 1963, p.4).

to a particular stereotype. For example, the status of being a woman whose partner is incarcerated may invoke a stereotypical assumption that those who are involved with 'criminals' are deviant or socially problematic (see for example, Brink, 2003, p.396; Fishman, 1990, p.134). This 'stigma-theory' thereafter serves as a basis by which 'normals' justify their discriminatory perceptions of the stigmatized (Goffman, 1963).

Goffman (1963) distinguishes several identities that are impacted by stigma. A 'social identity' concerns an identity that is allocated by others which is based on people's personal attributes (Ibid, p.2). For example, in a social environment, the initial appearance of a stranger leads people to predict the attributes belonging to this individual (Ibid). Social identities are further divided into 'virtual' and 'actual' identities. The 'virtual social identity' refers to the perceived stereotypical judgments of a person's characteristics. By contrast, the 'actual social identity' entails the actual qualities s/he could have (Ibid). Further, Goffman (1963) contends that stigma can impact one's 'personal identity' and 'ego identity'. 'Personal identity' is the life history and biography of individuals. This particular identity also determines how people cope with their stigma (for example, in using information control) (Ibid, 1963, p.106). Lastly, the 'ego identity' concerns how the individual subjectively feels about their stigma (Ibid, p.106).

Stigmatized populations are further categorized into the 'discredited' and the 'discreditable' (Goffman, 1963, p.4). A 'discredited' individual has a characteristic that is readily acknowledged (for example, a burn victim) whereas a 'discreditable' person is someone who possesses a stigmatic attribute that is not instantly apparent yet is still significant to their personal identity and life history. The sample population of the present

research is discreditable given that their status as 'partners of prisoners' is not visibly apparent at the outset of their social interactions.

Goffman (1963) also asserts that stigma is 'sticky', explaining that "those who are with a discredited or stigmatized person are then marked by association with the discredited individual and may, in turn pass the stigma to other connections twice-removed" (p.30). As such, outsiders may presume that "he is what the others are" (Ibid, 1963, p.47).

### ***1.1 Managing Information***

Having described stigma, I will now proceed to explore how stigmatized social actors cope in their interactions. One focal path of inquiry as identified by Goffman (1963) concerns the management of information. More specifically, we will consider the concepts of 'passing', 'in-group' and 'out-group alignments' and the 'wise'.

Goffman (1963) asserts that stigmatized individuals and 'normals' share similar conceptions regarding identity, yet the stigmatized are aware that 'normals' will not assess them equally (p.7). Potentially, this causes stigmatized agents to feel shameful (Ibid, p.7). In spite of this, those who are stigmatized employ accommodative strategies to keep their poise and sense of self worth when they are in uncomfortable and embarrassing situations with 'normals' (Ibid).

That said a fundamental strategy used by stigmatized people concerns the management of information. That is, stigmatized people can manage their discreditable attributes by controlling its disclosure to others. One such strategy of information management concerns 'passing' (Goffman, 1963, p.73). This tactic entails disguising the

discrediting attribute. Not surprisingly, a persons' ability to pass is often determined by the 'visibility' of their attribute. To illustrate, those who are blind are in a more challenging situation to pass than former mental patients (Ibid, 1963, p.48). Thus, the discreditable population has more flexibility and breadth to blend into different social settings. However, the visibility of the stigmatized attribute may already be common knowledge prior to their contact with 'normals' through gossip or previous interaction.

Passing is best achieved in superficial social interactions given the absence of intimate ties (Goffman, 1963, p.65). Naturally, passing can become difficult in the context of close personal relationships such as friendships. In these situations, the perceived need to pass can cause an array of anticipatory anxieties for individuals which in turn inhibits their passing ability.

'Out-group' alignments concern the role that stigmatized people adopt to blend in with 'normals' and mainstream society (Goffman, 1963, p.114). Moreover, these are the interactions that occur outside of their respective 'in-group'. To facilitate exchanges within these particular social settings, the stigmatized are required to reject the beliefs that those who possess stigmatic attributes are less than human. They are also expected to follow a particular script of language and behavior prescribed by the 'in-group'. This may include displaying good manners and being appreciative towards 'normals' who attempt to make them feel comfortable (Ibid, 1963, p.115). However, Goffman (1963) notes how these alignments can be challenging in practice, since the public claims that they are a part of the general population, but that their tainted attributes sets them apart from mainstream society, and therefore, cannot go unnoticed (Ibid, 1963, p.123). As such this places stigmatized people in a 'grey' area.

By contrast, an environment where stigma management is not required occurs when the stigmatized interacts with the 'wise' (Goffman, 1963, p.28). The 'wise' are 'normals' who possess a particular insight which allows them to identify and sympathize with the stigmatized (Ibid, p.28). Not surprising, stigmatized communities generally welcome the presence of the 'wise'. Goffman (1963) distinguishes between two types of 'wise' (p.29). The first concerns those who are 'wise' from their occupational experiences such as professions which service the needs of the stigmatized (for example, nurses treating their patients). A person may also be 'wise' in light of their position in the 'social structure' (Ibid, 1963, p.30). For example, the children of incarcerated persons are 'wise'. Notably, the 'wise' belonging to this later category are impelled to endure partial 'discredit' for the stigma of their kith and kin.

To avoid the challenging experience of having to manage a tainted attribute, the stigmatized can also turn to 'in-groups' (Goffman, 1963, p.114). Such group alignments play a role in one's understanding of self. 'In-groups' are typically mutual-aid/ self-help assemblies whereby individuals possessing similar discreditable attributes can unite and work on building constructive self perceptions (Ibid, 1963, p.113). This also includes demystifying harmful societal responses towards their stigmatizing attributes. However, in-groups can become problematic if their ideologies come to dominate or 'politicize' the lives of its members. This is because it renders them further isolated from 'normals' (Ibid, 1963, p.114). Therefore, in-groups can be counterproductive by serving to reinforce social division.

Having briefly sketched Goffman's (1963) work on stigma, I turn now to the more recent research which has explored and refined this concept. The following section will speak to the presentation-of-correctional-self by exploring the strategies of stigma management which relate to the penal environment. Included in this discussion will be the concept of resistance given that it also serves as a mechanism of negotiating stigma which at the same time challenges power. To locate the discussion, this section will begin by integrating and building the concepts of 'structural stigma' (Hannem, *forthcoming*), 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961a) and 'contamination' (Goffman, 1961a).

## ***2. Structural Stigma***

A macro level approach to the study of stigma allows us to examine state structures and their implications for female partners of prisoners. As such the concept of 'structural stigma' (Hannem, *forthcoming*) will be explored and adapted in the analytical framework of the present research to further comprehend the stigmatized interactions experienced by female partners of male prisoners in the correctional setting. Structural stigma is defined as a stigma which "arises out of an awareness of the problematic attributes of a particular group of people and is based on an intent to manage a population that is perceived, on the basis of the stigmatic attribute to be 'risky' or morally bereft" (Ibid, p.14). Moreover, interference, rules, and observations often characterize the lives of these marked individuals based on the belief that they are members of a 'risky' population (Ibid). To this end, structural stigma captures how there are stigmatic assumptions that are systematically embedded in the social structure of corrections that unfold in particular practices.

The findings in Fishman's (1990) research exemplify the concept of structural stigma. Indeed, this study proposes that the structure of penitentiaries has developed in reaction to the view that visitors of prisoners are potential 'norm-violators' and therefore need to be treated as such (Ibid, p.181). This is realized by the imposition of rigid and explicit visitation policies. Agents of the system utilize screening tools (such as metal detectors) and practices that appear to embody this judgment. For example, strip searches are conducted under the assumption that this population brings illicit substances into the institution. In other words they are understood to be (at best) prospective 'criminals'. Thus to disprove these presuppositions women are required to tolerate the screening procedures. Given this, the status of intimate partners in the prison has been suggested to be equivalent to those of prisoners (the population that an institution is designed to manage, house and punish) (Ibid).

A fundamental concept which speaks to the power dynamics within the carceral environment and the stigmatized interactions that occur within it concerns the 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961a, p.13). A 'total institution' (Ibid, p.13) refers to the organizational structures of institutions and the processes that are imposed upon the people that live in them. Moreover, all routines are restricted and operated within the walls of these institutions. The prison is one such example of this phenomenon. The process of 'disculturation' (which entails the mortification and transformation one experiences inside the institution) has particular relevancy to the research because it highlights how people are reconstituted by the institution (Ibid). Hence, it compromises one's sense of self, or being.

Given that the environment of the total institution embodies particular forms of mortification, a concept which captures this phenomenon concerns ‘contamination’ (Goffman, 1961a, p.23). This concept is used to highlight how a total institution assaults one’s sense of self, and suppresses people’s agency. This is because “the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiments of self profaned” (Ibid, p.23).

Sources of contamination have been linked to the visitation waiting area of prisons and the subsequent policy and practices used on visitors. Reportedly, this environment essentially becomes a ‘source of contamination’ which reminds women that they also share their husbands ‘discredited status’ (Fishman, 1990, p.139). Contaminative sources can also include strip searches, the removal of personal possessions, enforced exchanges with prisoners, compliancy to instructions, and having to adopt conservative self-presentations (Ibid, 1990, p.136). The women’s enforced contact with other women in the waiting area has also been identified as a source of contamination (Ibid, p.136). This institutional policy was deemed contaminative because it reminded women of the “special low status” they had (Ibid, 1990, p.182). Sources of contamination are pertinent to the study because they demonstrate how the regulations, policies, and procedures of an institution which dictates all elements of prisoners’ experiences seep onto the experiences of their partners within the prison.

### **3. Presentation-of-Correctional-Self**

The preceding concepts have provided a basis to establish and contextualize the following section which will look at the presentation-of-correctional-self. Given that in

the prison, correctional officers tend to stigmatize women partners of prisoners (Fishman, 1990, p.179) some women will negotiate their identity in order to cope in this setting. This said, the concept of ‘presentation-of-self’ (Goffman, 1959) is pertinent to the present study because it allows us to make sense of how this group mediates their stigma.

‘Presentation-of-self’ concerns the various ways in which people present themselves in social interactions (Goffman, 1959). Correspondingly, a sub-concept which further situates the presentation-of-self concerns “impression management” (Ibid, 1959). ‘Impression management’ entails the different ‘masks’<sup>5</sup> that people wear to avoid drawing attention to themselves, and in particular, how specific personas are displayed within particular social circles. With respect to female partners of prisoners, this may entail projecting a ‘self’ that appears strong-willed in their interactions with ‘normals’. Essentially, this ‘performance’ is an attempt to control the impression that they give to others.

Correspondingly, the presentation-of- correctional-self concerns the various ways that women partners of prisoners portray themselves in the context of the correctional system: more specifically, the modifications women make to their persona and appearance in order to negotiate their stigma in this environment. As such, the coping strategies of ‘putting on a performance’ and ‘disassociation’ (Fishman, 1990) as well as ‘trimming’ (Goffman, 1961a) will be explored to highlight some of the systematic adjustments women make within the correctional setting.

In Comfort’s (2003) ethnographic study of females who visited men in prison, she spoke to the institutional policy that required women to dress conservatively (i.e. no short

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<sup>5</sup> Note the idea of a ‘mask’ is used by Goffman (1959) to capture the different fronts that actors put on in executing their performances within various social settings to essentially portray particular images to others (p.19).

skirts or tank tops were permitted) and highlighted that women who wore clothing that correctional officers felt challenged these codes of presentation (i.e. by wearing a low cut shirt) often had their visit(s) refused. In addition, rigid prison policies prohibited the possession of personal items such as makeup, gum, tampons, and cigarettes (Ibid, 2003, p.99). Thus the women were required to modify their aesthetic self-presentations to minimize their stigma from correctional officers. Arguably, these processes are particularly threatening given that such possessions symbolize one's personal identity (Goffman, 1963; Comfort, 2003).

Further, having to remove one's personal possessions speaks to the 'trimming' (Goffman, 1961a) processes of visitors entering penitentiaries (Comfort, 2003). 'Trimming' entails the molding of self in which one is reduced to an object that is systematically filtered through the administration of the institution (Goffman, 1961a, p.60). As such, this concept can be adapted to the present research to further comprehend the presentation-of-self (Goffman, 1959) and to explore how female partners make these negotiations in order to visit their loved ones.

Coping strategies used by women partners of prisoners to minimize their stigmatized encounters with correctional officers have also entailed 'putting on a performance' and 'disassociation' (Fishman, 1990, p.148). 'Putting on a performance' involves adopting a particular set of behavior and language to foster a positive impression upon correctional officers. This includes disguising observable signs which indicate that they are prisoners' wives and presenting themselves as 'conventional' to the administration (for example, speaking politely and dressing conservatively) (Ibid, 1990,

p.139). Thus, the goal of putting on a performance is to be positively received by correctional officers.

On the other hand, 'disassociation' concerned avoiding contacts and friendships with wives that correctional officers had previously stripped searched (Fishman, 1990, p.150). By 'disassociating' with these particular women, it decreased their chances of being subject to this particularly invasive practice.

### ***3.1 Resistance***

In order to understand the stigmatized encounters of women partners of prisoners in the correctional setting, we also must make sense of their agency. Thus the concept of resistance proves useful in this context. Given that there is little said about the resistance of female partners of prisoners, in order to further situate the discussion of the presentation-of-correctional-self, I will begin this section by acknowledging an important body of literature which speaks to the resistance of the prison community.

Cohen and Taylor's (1972) research on long-term prisoner's strategies of resistance found that dissent takes five primary forms: 'self-protecting', 'campaigning', 'escaping', 'striking' and 'confronting'(p.134). 'Self-protecting' is tied to the privilege system within total institutions (Goffman, 1961a) and entails the measures that prisoners take to respond to their situational realities that ultimately ameliorates some of the strains of incarceration. This includes acquiring an acute awareness of their circumstances, as well as coming to understand them through various means of knowledge acquisition such as education (Cohen & Taylor, 1972, p.134).

The second tactic of resistance concerns 'campaigning'. This strategy of resistance involves prisoners using means such as letter writing and 'moaning' to challenge the injustices to which they are subjected. By contrast, 'escaping' concerns a collaboration of prisoners who in a literal sense, plan an escape from the penitentiary (Cohen & Taylor, 1972, p.143). 'Striking' however, concerns prisoners' refusals and typically takes the form of hunger strikes. Lastly, 'confronting' is a direct challenge to authority that is organized in an anti-authoritarian manner and which embodies a form of group solidarity. Confronting can be violent or non-violent and is intended to stimulate political awareness of prisoners' rights.

In establishing these five fundamental tools of resistance, Cohen and Taylor (1972) elucidate how prisoners present themselves with dignity under circumstances that deprives them of their autonomy. The essence of these strategies of resistance can therefore be kept in mind for the present research, as they provide a context in which I can begin to examine the forms of resistance engaged in by women partners of prisoners.

Given that my participants are a marginal group whose status is further discredited within the prison, discussions of resistance can be expanded by acknowledging 'every day acts of resistance' (Scott, 1985). Scott's (1985) research on the day-to-day strategies of resistance of peasants in Southeast Asia underlines how disenfranchised persons can practice covert means of resistance to undermine power. These tactics of resistance differ from overt means of dissent in their "implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals" (Ibid, 1985, p.33). Further, these strategies are concerned with mitigating oppression at the micro level of the individual, where informal tactics are

adopted in light of “immediate defacto gains” (Ibid, 1985, p.33). As such, every day strategies of resistance included such acts as ‘foot dragging’, and ‘false compliance’.

In highlighting the strategies of resistance developed by peasant societies, Scott (1985) unveils how traditional collective action (such as revolutions and strikes) is not the only recourse for marginal groups seeking to affect broader change. Indeed, in the context of repressive conditions of class struggle everyday forms of resistance utilized by peasants provide an alternate way of resisting and enacting agency with out risking the potential costs of overt action.

Scott (1990) also speaks to the idea of a ‘hidden transcript’ in his research on resistance. A hidden transcript is an alternative understanding of power that can not be spoken to power without serious consequences. The idea of a hidden transcript is pertinent to how women partners of prisoners resist their stigma in the penal environment, given the power imbalances embedded in the total institution and the agents of control who regulate their interactions.

In building upon everyday acts of resistance Riessman’s (2000) study on the stigma and everyday resistance practices of childless women in South India found that women would ‘speak out and act up’ when in distressing encounters with ‘normals’, engage in ‘resistant thinking’ (Collins, 1991), avoid certain public spaces, and reject the ideology of ‘motherhood’ (p.130). Resistant thinking entails the conscious act of refuting one’s stigma. For the women in this study, this was achieved by utilizing positive self affirmations. Other women resisted by avoiding spaces within the village where they could be stigmatized by others. In contrast, ‘speaking out and acting up’ concerned more

direct confrontations with those who antagonized them for being childless. Lastly, rejecting motherhood entailed embracing one's childless status (Reissman, 2000, p.127).

The above methods of everyday resistance are applicable to the research given that Reissman (2000) speaks to a context of dissent that is also gender specific. In this sense, the study is valuable when considering the mechanisms of resistance practiced by female partners of male prisoners.

For the purpose of the present research, coping will be defined as the various strategies that female partners of prisoners adopt in order to manage the impact that incarceration has on their lives. Resistance will be defined as the overt and covert tactics women employ to challenge their relations of power.

#### **4. Presentation-of-Social-Self**

It is not only in the correctional environment that women partners of prisoners negotiate their stigma, it is also in their social worlds. The following section will speak to the presentation-of-social-self by exploring how stigmatized people manage their interpersonal exchanges in the social realm.

Given their stigmatized identities, marginalized people adopt strategies to cope in various social settings. According to Braman (2002)

...the stigma related to incarceration is often borne by the non offending relatives of prisoners, something we do not see or hear about because it is in the family's interest to hide it (p.134).

Thus, given the denunciation of prisoners' partners in the criminal justice system and in society (Fraser & Squiers, 1998) the need to conceal and manage this discreditable information is heightened. In order to understand the negotiations made by the women in

their social worlds, the concepts of presentation-of-self and impression management will be revisited in light of related studies.

Prisoners' wives in Fishman's (1990) study exercised 'impression management' to control the discreditable information of their husbands' imprisonment. Moreover, several of the women attempted to portray normative images of themselves to others despite their husbands' status, while contemplating how much of their stigmatizing information they would disclose to people (Ibid, 1990, p.126). As such, four strategies were identified: 'affirmation', 'misdirection or avoidance', 'covering up', and 'jailing' (Ibid, p.126). The women carefully selected these approaches based on their predictions of community reactions (Ibid, 1990, p.127).

'Affirmation' was the most prominent strategy which entailed a full or partial disclosure by women regarding their husbands' imprisonment (Fishman, 1990, p.127). The women would then go on to explain to others how this fact did not alter their normative status as a mother or wife. Additionally, it was noted how "wives generally received some help from others, in the form of tactful inattention, in insulating themselves from their husbands' spoiled identities" (Ibid, p.127). Receiving social support therefore ameliorated their ability to mediate their stigma and enabled them to better retain a positive sense of self.

'Avoidance and misdirection' included questioning others about their past or current criminal behaviors to show that they were not immune to stigma as well (Fishman, 1990, p.128). Conversely, 'covering up' entailed concealing the information about their husbands' status (Ibid, 1990, p. 129). This tactic was used most often when women felt that their 'official identities' could be compromised (for example, their

employment). Lastly, 'jailing' was the most scarcely used tactic. This strategy required women to completely restructure their lives, including severing ties to friends, family, and the community so that the prison would become their central focus (Ibid, 1990, p.130).

Other authors have explored experiences of negotiating stigma in terms of techniques of rationalization (Sykes & Matza, 1957). For example, Thompson, Harred, and Burks (2003) found that the techniques of rationalization and neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) utilized by topless dancers included 'denial of injury', 'condemning the condemners' and 'appealing to higher loyalties' (p.562). The 'denial of injury' was displayed by dancers who were puzzled at why others stigmatized them for their occupations, where as 'appealing to higher loyalties' was reflected in dancers who rationalized their occupation at an altruistic level (for example, to provide a good life for their children). Lastly, 'condemning the condemners' was practiced by dancers who drew attention to the immorality of others and questioned their moral authority to judge dancers (Thompson et al., p.562).

The preceding accounts provide a window for which various strategies of stigma management can be observed, which taken together, allude to the presentation-of-social-self. To this end, it serves as a framework for which I will examine how women partners of prisoners negotiate their stigma in the social sphere.

### ***Concluding Comments***

By providing an overview of the historical origins of stigma and the manner in which it operates as well as the various contemporary findings unearthed by researchers, I

have set out the conceptual and theoretical tools which will inform my analysis.

Considered in this context, the concepts of structural stigma, total institution, and contamination will situate the exploration of the current study by painting the setting in which the interactions and negotiations of women partners of prisoners unfold, and how the structural dynamics of the institution cultivate conditions for stigma. Further, the concepts of trimming, coping and resistance will be adapted to the present research to draw attention to the manners in which women partners of prisoners are subjugated and how they respond to these experiences.

In short, the common thread in the studies under discussion is that female partners of prisoners are a discreditable population whose interactions are best understood through the presentation-of-self (Goffman, 1959). By using a two fold approach to this concept, I am better able to situate the sample population to sketch a more adequate picture of their stigmatized encounters both socially and within the realm of corrections.

### **CHAPTER THREE** **THE METHODOLOGY**

To this point, I have conducted a literature review of a related research pertaining to women partners of prisoners, and etched the theoretical framework of the study. The following chapter will detail the methodology selected for the present research project. To begin, the epistemological lens in which I am locating the study, as well as the assumptions of the qualitative research tradition will be addressed. Following this, I will detail the data collection technique and provide a profile of the population of study. The sample obtained will then be described, proceeding with my method of analysis. This chapter will conclude by addressing the limitations of qualitative research.

#### ***1. Epistemological Orientation***

Epistemologically, this study is rooted in critical social science. That is, the philosophical orientation and justification of knowledge (Schwandt, 1997, p.39), is situated in an approach which seeks to make visible the complexity of human interaction and which aims to stimulate individual and social transformation. To realize this goal, critical social scientists draw upon critique and self reflexivity when conducting their research (Schwandt, 1997). This includes drawing attention to the contradictions embedded in social issues, phenomena and belief systems. In locating the ontology of critical social science, Fay (1987) succinctly states that, “critical social science is an endeavor to explain social life in general, or some particular instance of it, in a way that is scientific, critical, practical, and non-idealistic” (p.26). Further, critical social science presupposes that people have agency, and as such, are the creators of their own self conceptualizations and sense of being (Ibid, 1987, p.47). Social science research is

therefore marked by researchers' attempts to reinforce the "complexity of human life" (Rubin & Rubin 1995, p.35).

By adopting a critical social science perspective, my research is strengthened. Indeed, by emphasizing the agency of human beings this point of departure positions me in a manner that both compliments and harmonizes my aims to elucidate the lived realities of women partners of prisoners.

### ***1.1 Qualitative Methodology***

Given that I am working from a critical social science perspective, where the heart of this framework lies in the human experience of the social world, the methodological approach of this study is qualitative. Qualitative methodology seeks to make sense of people's narratives (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.xii ). As Glesne and Peshkin (1992), assert:

Since qualitative researchers deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or "qualities" that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, they regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the worlds around them (p.6)

Furthermore, qualitative methodology is a broad category used to describe an array of research strategies (Flick, 2002, p.6) which include, but are not limited to, detailing, deconstructing, and interpreting "the meaning not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world" (Van Maanen, 1983, p.9). As such, qualitative inquiry embodies a flexibility distinct from other methods such as questionnaires and surveys, permitting researchers to capture the details of social experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.7).

The qualitative research of this study is exploratory in nature. More specifically, it seeks to examine the thoughts of women partners of prisoners. In this regard, I am striving to gain a snapshot of the lived realities of this particular population (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, & Cook, 1962). As mentioned in Chapter One, since traditional criminological research has tended to exclude the partners of incarcerated persons, an exploratory study was elected to yield rich, fine-grain data from a hidden and marginal segment of society. Further, in adopting this form of inquiry, I am able to better furnish a portrait of these women.

## ***2. Data Collection Method***

A researcher's choice of technique at any point in the project depends on the strategy adopted, views on epistemology and the social world, the specific qualitative genre to which the work links and how these preliminary choices interact with participants in the setting (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.117).

To best capture this portrait, I looked to adopt a design that allowed for sufficient flexibility to capture human experience. Thomas (1993) points out how the collection of data may be one area where flexibility is the most crucial, because "our study can be no better than the data we collect" (p.41). Therefore, in order to obtain fruitful and pertinent data, the decision was made to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which are often used by researchers who are attempting to gather data that is more guided and specific in nature (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990, p.5).

Indeed, the interview technique is a salient part of a researchers' methodology because it permits him/her to listen to the voices of marginalized groups who are understood to be the experts of their own lives. Beyond this, interviews create a situation whereby the researcher and the participant are able to collectively examine the "meaning

of the questions and answers involved” (Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985, p.3). In other words, it allows for the negotiation of understanding (Ibid, p.3).

According to Marten Shipman (1981), asking questions is challenging, requiring “knowledge of the likely impact of questioner on respondent” and “sensitivity to the symbolic sophistication of humans, non-verbal as well as verbal” (p.89). In keeping with the former statement, I strived to facilitate a space for the women to speak in which the data would emerge naturally. However, at the same time, I was motivated to uncover information regarding specific subject matters.<sup>6</sup> As such, the interview guide (Appendix A) was designed to elicit insights from women partners of prisoners by posing open-ended questions concerning their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies within the social and correctional spheres. More specifically, questions also touched upon the issues of stigma and resistance.

A central objective when structuring interviews is “to ensure that the results are deep, detailed, vivid, and nuanced” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.76). This is particularly important given that as Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain, “through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate” (p.1). Thus, by referring to the interview guide, I was able to introduce my participants to various subjects, upon which they would in turn elaborate. Reportedly, this set up better situates researchers to posit the worldviews and insights of their respondents, while simultaneously allowing their narratives to flow organically (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.124). However, it is important to consider that interviews can be restricted to one occasion or moment in time. For this reason there may be a lack of trust between the

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<sup>6</sup> These subjects included experiences of stigma, visitation, the corrections system and resistance, as well as the general challenges and negotiations made within the social and correctional arena.

participant and the researcher. Indeed, interviewees may be hesitant to provide elaborate and detailed narratives. Therefore the truth that emerges in one moment in time may not necessarily be the absolute truth, which can make it difficult for researchers to determine if the insights of their respondents are exhaustive.

### ***3. Recruitment of Participants and Notification of Study***

Participants were recruited for this study using ‘snowball sampling’. More specifically, I first circulated information regarding the study through social and professional networks, which in turn, was passed on to interested persons (Babbie, 1999, p.174). After each interview, I asked participants if they could recommend other respondents. Given that this is a method of non-probability sampling, and is generally not representative of the target population, it is most appropriate for exploratory studies (Ibid, 1999, p.17; Walker, 1985, p.180).

For the purpose of this study, the social and professional networks included family members and acquaintances, as well as an organization called “Bridgehouse” located in Kingston, Ontario. A recruitment text was drafted that detailed the aims of the research project, the role of participants, as well as my contact information (see Appendix B). I then proceeded to conduct phone calls to persons belonging to these social and professional networks. Over the phone, I would orally recite the recruitment text to these individuals. It was my hope that these agents would then pass along the agenda of my research project to potential candidates. At this point, should they decide they would like to participate they could contact the researcher. By presenting the recruitment text

verbally over the phone I ensured that there was no deception and individuals were positioned to make informed decisions if they wished to participate in the study.

#### ***4. The Population of Study***

Initially, I had hoped to recruit eight to ten women who were in a long-term intimate relationship with a federally incarcerated man for at least six months prior to and one year during his term of imprisonment, serving a sentence of between five and ten years. The ages of the target population were to be flexible, ranging from 18 to 65. However, given time restrictions and the limited number of participants wishing to participate, the initial profile was negotiated to be more adaptable to interested persons. These changes included the partners' type of custody and length of sentence, the context in which the intimate relationship began and the number of participants.

Five women were ultimately recruited. Two of the participants were in their early twenties and without children, while the remaining three informants consisted of mothers in their fifties. Two of the participants that I interviewed met their partner when he was already in federal custody. By contrast, three interviewees had been with their partner prior to his incarceration. Two of the five men were incarcerated in provincial correctional facilities, and one man had recently been released from a provincial jail. Naturally, the disparity of their partners' type of custody (provincial versus federal) was indicative of the length of time that the prisoners were serving. As such, this ranged considerably, from under two years to indefinite terms of imprisonment. Lastly, all of the women I interviewed had been in the relationship with their partner for at least a year.

Although the sample size is quite small, and cannot be generalized to all women partners of prisoners, Crouch and Mckenzie (2006) remind us that “it is in the nature of exploratory studies to indicate rather than conclude” (p.492). Further, in adopting an inductive approach<sup>7</sup>, the consensus is that each participant’s story can be focused upon with depth and detail. Hence, the lens of inquiry is positioned upon the distinction of each human subject, rather than on the quantification of participants (Platt, 1992, p.24; Crouch & Mckenzie, 2006, p.493).

### ***5. The Interview***

The interviews took place over a span of four months, each being conducted in a different geographic locale across Ontario<sup>8</sup>. The interviews were conducted in English and consisted of one session, lasting between one and two hours. Four participants wished to have the interview at their residence, and one participant elected to have the interview at my residence. By allowing the participants to choose where they felt most comfortable, I hoped to set a secure environment where the women would feel at their best to share their thoughts and insights.

Before commencing the interview, I orally reviewed the informed consent form (Appendix C) with my interviewees, reciting the detailed aims of the study, the role of participants’, and addressed issues of confidentiality and anonymity<sup>9</sup>. This was an important measure, given that the issue of informed consent serves as one of the most fundamental ethical considerations when conducting research (Miller & Bell, 2002).

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<sup>7</sup> The use of an inductive approach will be explored in further detail under the sub-section: ‘method of analysis’.

<sup>8</sup> To protect the anonymity of participants, their resident towns were altered.

<sup>9</sup> Ethics approval was sought and granted on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa. (Appendix D).

According to Miller and Bell (2002), informed consent entails the understanding that sound research stems from equipping participants with the necessary information regarding the study and their role as participants, while positioning them as sensible individuals whose considered opinions are respected (p.157). It is also where interested participants are reminded that their participation is voluntary, and of the potential risks and/or emotional discomforts that may result from participating in the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.112).

In keeping with the former guidelines and ethical principles of conducting research, I first reminded participants of their right to terminate, halt, refuse to answer questions and or withdraw from the project at any point in the research process. Also, I confirmed that should this happen, the honorarium did not have to be returned<sup>10</sup>.

Second, I assured participants of their anonymity throughout the research process, highlighting that all identifying information would be changed in the transcription process, and that their names would be replaced with a pseudonym<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, participants were reminded of their right to delete any information which they perceived to be troubling or that they did not want to be used in the analysis. They were also reminded that they were entitled to a follow-up interview if they felt they needed clarification or if additional information was required.

Because the sample population is intimately associated with incarcerated persons (a community whose socio-political and economic capital is marginal), ensuring anonymity was particularly pertinent in this study. As such, I underlined to participants that I would not be asking them personal questions regarding the nature of their partners

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<sup>10</sup> Individuals were offered an honorarium of twenty five dollars to cover any expenses incurred as a result of their participation. The honorarium was given to participants prior to the interview.

<sup>11</sup> Pseudonyms would also be applied to any persons that participants named in their interview.

offence, but rather, I reminded them that the research was solely concerned with the impact that incarceration has on the lives of women partners of prisoners<sup>12</sup>.

Third, I explained to participants the goals and overarching aims of the research project. Fourth, participants were reminded that I would be leaving a list of resources with them which they could access should they wish to talk to someone about any emotional discomfort that they may experience, prior, during, or after the interview (see Appendix E). Lastly, I asked participants if they would be comfortable having the interview recorded on audio tape. After having read through the informed consent form, I asked the interviewees if they had any questions or if they required further explanation. Participants then signed the informed consent forms, one of which they kept. Following this, I began to conduct the interviews.

All of the participants agreed to have their interviews recorded on audio tape. However, I also took handwritten notes throughout the interview, in order to make points of reference, which later could be used to probe participants, if need be, to elaborate on particular situational experiences. As noted earlier open-ended questions were asked to participants using an interview guide which was structured to elicit insights regarding the experiences, stigmatized encounters, challenges and negotiations relating to the corrections system, as well as in the social circles of women partners of prisoners. Before concluding the interview, participants were asked about their personal background and demographics. In addition to this, respondents were questioned about their personal thoughts regarding the research project. Lastly, informants were asked if they desired a copy of the transcript, and were thanked for sharing their insights. Of the five

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<sup>12</sup> It was also verbally noted by the researcher and written in the informed consent form that the researchers have no formal association with Lifeline, Correctional Services of Canada or the National Parole Board therefore no correctional or other benefit could be anticipated as a result of participating in the research.

participants, four requested a copy of the transcript. The transcript was mailed to them using a stamped, self addressed envelope. Participants were given a time frame of two weeks in which they could mail, email, or contact the researcher by phone to request changes to their transcripts. None of the participants contacted the researcher regarding their transcripts, nor did any of the respondents request a follow-up interview.

### ***6. The Sample of Women Partners of Prisoners***

The former section has detailed the interview process, and the ethical considerations taken into account for this project. I will now provide a brief summary of my participants to introduce the women interviewed in this study. In doing this, I hope to paint a picture of the women which can be kept as a backdrop for the subsequent analysis.

As well as being varied in age, the personalities and characters of the women in this study are unique. Although the participants belong to a marginalized group, it is important to recognize that their social location is privileged given that they are Caucasian women.

#### ***Molly***

Molly was a friendly, direct and open woman nearing fifty years of age. Both a cancer and an abuse survivor, she was very outspoken about her life history and experiences. From Irish ancestry, her parents came to Canada in the late 50's, her father being an electrician and her mother, a secretary. She described her childhood as "good", stating: "*I had everything I ever wanted*". A mother of three who lives in a town home near a park, Molly grew up in Ottawa, and has one sister and two brothers. When Molly

gave birth to her two eldest children, she operated a government funded business out of her home. As they grew up, she moved on to work in a restaurant. Along with engaging in various artistic crafts, Molly indicated that she aspired to write a book based on her experiences with the corrections system. Molly disclosed that her partner is serving a life sentence in a federal institution, and that he was already in prison when she was introduced to him through a friend over the phone. At the time of the interview, Molly was not working, because she was suffering from a joint related illness.

### ***Jennifer***

Jennifer was a humorous, cheerful woman in her fifties who grew up in Oshawa. The mother of a son and a daughter, Jennifer has one brother, two sisters, and both parents who were “*still together*”. Jennifer attended high school until grade ten, acknowledging that she disliked it immensely. She was a gracious and lighthearted individual devoted to her grandchildren, citing them to be the foci of her interests and one of the major events in her life. Jennifer has held the same job working with children for approximately twenty years and lives in an ornately-decorated home with a roommate. Jennifer’s partner was in federal custody when she was introduced to him over the phone. She disclosed that he has been imprisoned for nearly twenty years. They have been together for approximately three and a half years.

### ***Lucy***

A spunky, fast-talking, fifty year old woman, Lucy presented as witty, candid and unreserved. Born and raised in Toronto, with a grade ten education, Lucy disclosed that she has been a drug addict for the majority of her life. Her volatile feelings towards her

partner were woven into her narratives, accounting for the considerable ebb and flow of the interview. Lucy has two grown children and three siblings and lives alone in an apartment. Her job history includes working in the arena of finances, home entertainment, computers, as well as owning several businesses. Lucy met her partner through a friend and they began their relationship roughly a week before he was incarcerated. Initially, he was imprisoned in a federal institution, but at the time of the interview, had recently been transferred to a provincial correctional facility. They have been together for almost a year and a half.

### *Tammy*

Tammy was an attractive, soft spoken brunette in her early twenties who is without children. Tammy describes herself as a responsible individual, a quality which she indicated her partner was lacking. An only child who is currently residing in Kingston, Tammy had previously lived in Victoria and California. Tammy enjoys outdoor activities such as hiking and basketball, and has held a myriad of occupations including administration, government, sales, retail, and the service industry to name but some. Like her job history, Tammy's education is also diverse, including the fields of business and the arts in which she obtained a diploma in fashion design. Currently, Tammy works as a full time waitress. She initially met her partner in high school and later began an intimate relationship. They have been together for three and a half years, in which Tammy articulated, for roughly two of these years, he has been incarcerated in various provincial correctional facilities. Tammy lives in a rented apartment with her partner, who had been released from prison just prior to the interview.

## *Sally*

Sally was a courteous and articulate young woman in her twenties. Growing up in Calgary and currently living with family in Hamilton, she is an only child whose parents divorced when she was young. Sally mentioned that she is particularly close to her step-mother. She enjoys the outdoors, spending time with family and friends, listening to music and going to the movies. Currently, Sally is obtaining a post secondary education in the field of social services and is working part-time in the community. Sally is childless and had been with her partner whom she met through mutual friends for a year before he went to prison. He is incarcerated in a provincial facility and, at the time of the interview, had been in custody roughly a year while waiting to be sentenced.

## *7. Method of Analysis*

Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned. Working with the data, you create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories and link your story to other stories (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.127).

After completing the interviews, the tape recorded data was transcribed verbatim. Two of the interviews I transcribed, and the remaining three were transcribed by a hired, professional transcriber<sup>13</sup>. As the most preliminary part of the analysis process, I familiarized myself with the data by systematically reading the transcripts. The raw data was then interrogated, to tease out central themes, sub-themes, and patterns which were subsequently categorized. This “iterative” process is otherwise known as coding (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.178). It is important to note that coding is, in part, based on

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<sup>13</sup> The fact that a professional transcriber would be hired was included in the informed consent form and was verbally articulated by the researcher to the participant prior to the interview.

the subjective, considered judgment of the researcher (Selltiz, et al., 1962). That said, I strived to be cognizant of the issue of subjectivity and let the themes emerge naturally from the data without imposing meaning. However, it must be acknowledged that like the interview process, I was also motivated to uncover themes which reflected the various subject matters incorporated in my interview guide. Four central themes emerged in the coding process: the challenges of corrections, the challenges of the social realm, the challenges of intimate relations, and the positive side to enforced separation<sup>14</sup>.

Generating core categories which reflect the main findings of the study and bringing about suggestions from this data is a form of inductive analysis (Patton, 1990, 306; Schwandt, 1997, p.69; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From these categories, a reflexive process of analysis develops wherein the researcher also refers to secondary data such as the existing related research and literature to denote the commonalities and disparities of their findings. In doing this, I used a Goffmanian framework to tie together the conceptual and theoretical framework of my findings.

Accordingly, qualitative researchers view social phenomenon as multi-layered, and presuppose that individual accounts are copious (Glesne & Peshkin; 1992, p.7). As such, they strive to capture and deconstruct this phenomenon through research. However, sometimes upon closer examination, detailed data appeared too sensitive and the participants' anonymity could potentially be jeopardized. For example, one of my participants spoke in-depth about the details leading up to her partners' conviction. The content was exceptionally intricate, and as the researcher, I felt that intimate details of

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<sup>14</sup> For a more exhaustive list of codes which detail the various themes and sub-themes of the findings please consult Appendix F.

this nature could put this particular interviewee at risk. Given this, the decision was made not to amend the details but rather to omit this particular set of data from the transcripts.

### ***8. Limitations of the Research***

Given that qualitative research is concerned with the interpretation of individual meaning and qualities belonging to a particular segment of the population, generalizations are beyond the purview of this research. As mentioned earlier, the sample size is small, amounting in number to five participants. Therefore, the scope of the study is limited in terms of representation. Lastly, another notable limitation concerns the race and language of the participants given that the women interviewed were Caucasian and Anglophone.

## **CHAPTER FOUR** **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

I now turn to the analysis of the narratives in light of the theoretical framework which has been laid out in Chapter Two. I will focus on four areas that reflect the core findings of this study. Part one of the chapter will examine the challenges of the correctional context. More specifically, I will address two main themes which emerged from my interviews namely, that stigma and the physical space of penal institutions conditions the experiences of women partners of prisoners. Following this, I will discuss how my respondents employ tactics of resistance in response to their experiences of stigma in the correctional sphere. I will then move on to the second part of the chapter which seeks to explore the social context. Here I switch lenses to examine three broad challenges described by my research subjects: the issue of identity; stigmatized encounters; and the application of stereotypes. As we will see that while in the correctional setting my participants engaged in resistance strategies which challenged dominant forms of power, in the social realm, we see the management of stigma. The final part of the chapter addresses the costs of incarceration that are located outside of stigma. Here four sub-categories will be identified: the financial impact of incarceration; uncertainties of the future; the emotional and physical consequences of enforced separation; and the responsibility of being the 'caregiver'. A final caveat has been adapted as part four of the chapter and serves as a side note to conclude the analysis. This section seeks to address the remaining set of findings from the study which highlight the positive aspects of enforced separation. This inclusion brings to light how my participants are able to surface as resilient agents despite their stigma.

Although the aforementioned findings are in keeping with the literature on women partners of prisoners (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996) in building and contributing to this body of knowledge, I have structured the narratives of my informants along a continuum of shifting contexts to elucidate the complexity of their lived realities.

### **Part 1: The Challenges of the Correctional Context**

The participants in this study sketched a picture of the carceral setting which suggests that behind the walls of the prison, women partners of prisoners face an array of obstacles that undoubtedly differ from those encountered in their everyday interactions. In the following section of the chapter, I will situate these challenges through the voices of my participants. More specifically, I will explore how structural and interpersonal stigma impacts upon them in the prison setting. Additionally, the physical nature of the prison environment will be discussed. Lastly, I will explore how my participants engage in acts of resistance to contest their stigma and to respond to power. This section will conclude by highlighting how the above themes coalesce to signify that the experiences of women partners of prisoners unfolds within the context of a total institution (Goffman, 1961a).

#### ***1. Stigma***

As highlighted in Chapter Two, the theoretical framework of this research is grounded in Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma. Given that the unfavorable attribute of the participants in this study is not visibly apparent, it manifests in particular

situational contexts. My respondents reveal that in the prison their experience of stigma is particularly salient.

Indeed, the discreditable status of a female partner of a male prisoner must be disclosed to prison officials as one of the most preliminary procedures of the visitation process. As such, in this space, the ability for women partners to pass is unrealizable. Thus, within the confines of the penitentiary, my participants' status is transformed, and they become discredited. Their identity henceforth becomes 'spoiled' (Goffman, 1963).

To begin then, it is most appropriate to revisit the concept of structural stigma (Hannem, *forthcoming*) given the pertinent role it plays in the lives of my research participants.

### ***1. 1 Structural Stigma***

In Chapter Two, we noted that prison is a state institution which embodies particular rules and regulations. Technological tools are structured into the screening process of visitors entering penitentiaries and are premised on the belief that this particular population poses a threat to the institution, more specifically, that they are potential contraband carriers. As such, the concept of structural stigma (Hannem, *forthcoming*) resonates with several of the testimonies of my participants who spoke of the institutional rituals of visitor screening. More specifically, structural stigma was exemplified in the search technologies applied on the women when attempting to visit

their partner in prison. The first tool identified by the three research participants whose partners were incarcerated in federal facilities concerns the ion scanner.<sup>15</sup>

The ion scan machine was implemented in Canadian Federal Penitentiaries in 1995 in an effort to reduce the amount of illicit substances entering penal institutions (Friedman, 1997, p.121). This technological device is applied on visitors to detect if they are potentially concealing drugs on their person (Collins, 2003, p.2). By swabbing and scanning pieces of their personal belongings (such as for example, their jewelry) correctional officers are able to acquire measurements which indicate the presence of microscopic particles of illicit substances on visitors. A negative test implies that the visitor is not carrying drugs and thus the visited is granted. By contrast, a positive test infers that the visitor has a high amount of drug particles on their person and may potentially be concealing drugs. In this instance, a visitor can expect to be questioned and or searched by staff. Ultimately, the visitor will be granted a closed visit<sup>16</sup> or will be denied visitation.

My respondents reveal the problematic nature of the ion scanner in the following accounts. Molly, an interviewee in her fifties' whose partner is serving a life sentence, expresses her sentiments towards the ion scanner:

*(...) I've seen people come in with (..) their.. driver's license still in the envelope, not even open. And they'll open it up right there .. 'cause they've .. been hitting on the ION scanner. And they'll go, "here is a brand new license, you open it up, it's still in the envelope". And they open it up and .. cocaine. (..) I laugh- nine out of ten bills in this country have cocaine residue on them. Those ION scanners were removed from our airports 'cause they weren't accurate. Our federal system bought them off the twits (..)*

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that ion scanners are employed exclusively within federal institutions therefore those participants' who were visiting their partners in provincial correctional facilities are occluded from this sub-section of analysis.

<sup>16</sup> Closed visits prohibit physical contact between prisoners and their visitors by using a glass plate to separate the two parties, requiring them to communicate using a phone.

Lucy offers a different view towards this machinery in the following statement:

*(..) it's a wonder they don't fingerprint you. You know they might as well, because to me, taking swabs of your clothing is like taking a fingerprint (..) So, they might as well fingerprint you too and (..) tattoo ya, and stick you in there (..)*

Having to submit to the ion scanner is not only unsettling, but positive ion scan tests can have serious ramifications. For instance, Jennifer's continued pattern of 'hot hits'<sup>17</sup> on the ion scanner resulted in years of conditional restrictions being placed on her visits. In the following statement, Jennifer explains how she feels that she has been targeted because of the nature of her partners' offence:

*(...) 'cause he's in for drugs (..) So automatically I'm a drug person (..) I don't do drugs (..) The strongest thing I do is a Tylenol One (..) But I'll go up there and they'll tell me, and not just that I'm testing positive for something, I'm off the charts. I'm off the charts for cocaine. I'm off the charts for heroine (..). The first time I went in they told me I was off the charts for heroine. (...) I don't go near it. I've never been near it.*

In another instance, Jennifer details an encounter with the ion scanner:

*(...) I was in there one day with their brand new machine, there was three guards in there. They swabbed whatever it was they swabbed and the machine sounded like, you know when you win on the lottery machine? It goes, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding-that's what the machine was making. And the two guards that were sitting down, sat up and go, "I've never seen it do that before". And I go, "what, what are you talking about?" And they said "you're off the charts for heroine". I said "there's no way, I've never seen heroine in my life". "You're off the charts" (..)*

According to Hannem (*forthcoming*), members of stigmatized groups "are considered to be 'risky' or to somehow threaten the social order, and thus may be subject to intervention or surveillance designed to minimize their risk to the general population"

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<sup>17</sup> A 'hot hit' is a term employed by correctional officers which infers that the ion scan test they performed on the visitor elicited a positive reading, hence alluding to the presence of illicit substances on that particular individual.

(p.13). The ion scanner is therefore a preventative measure applied by agents of the state who presuppose that women partners of prisoners are potential norm violators given their association to criminalized segments of society. For this reason, the imposition of this invasive search technology is symbolic of structural stigma. Indeed, the use of this tool is clearly an institutional practice reflexive of the stigmatic assumptions embedded in the social structure of corrections. Moreover, its presence is justified under the presumption that women partners of prisoners are potential contraband carriers and therefore necessitate particular invasive measures to manage this threat. Lastly, the measurements produced by the ion scanner can cause further disadvantage to the women (by indicating that they have drug particles on their person) which subsequently opens them up to added stigma and jeopardizes their visitation.

Indeed, the stories of my research subjects support one of the central concerns of critics: that Correctional Services of Canada strives to responsabilize prisoners' families and partners for the perceived 'drug crisis' inside its federal prisons by utilizing the ion scanner and consequently interpreting its results as evidence of one's deviancy (Collins, 2003, p.2). For instance, note how when Jennifer attempts to assert her innocence, correctional officers reject her statement by continuing to declare that she is "*off the charts*" for heroine, hence calling on science as the truth and de-legitimizing her claims of innocence.

Further, each occasion when the ion scanner provides a positive reading, the results are recorded in a file that can have detrimental effects on the relationships and futures of prisoners and their visitors (Collins, 2003; Friedman, 1997). For Jennifer, this tool crippled her visitation: "(..) *I think in the past three years ..maybe three months we've*

*had open visits ..the rest have all been closed visits*". One could argue therefore, that the measurements provided by the ion scanner create a hierarchy of deviance in which women partners of prisoners are situated.

In a similar line of inquiry, the physical act of submitting to the ion scanner can be a particularly shameful experience in and of itself. In Lucy's case, visiting a prison was already problematic, therefore the ion scan process served to crystallize her devalued status. For Lucy, submitting to this machine caused her to feel tainted. In recounting how she felt on these occasions she provides a summation: "*Dirty. Very dirty, because you never know where they're swabbing.*" Lucy's comments shed light on how for some women partners of prisoners, the ion scan process can be especially distressing and damaging to one's sense of self. Notably, such experiences can shape the self-concepts of stigmatized persons (Mullaly, 2002).

Another piece of equipment structured into the visitor admission procedures inside the prison concerns metal detectors. Visitors must go through this structure to ensure that they are not bringing in contraband or weapons. Thus the use of this device, much like the ion scanner, is justified on the basis of institutional safety. That said, Jennifer recalls an unpleasant experience with the metal detector in the following statement:

*The last time I went in there I had to go through a metal detector seven or eight times. (..) I went through the first time and (..) I took off my gold. Went back through again, took off my sunglasses, took off my reading glasses, took off (..) my ring (..) they told me to put my hands over my belt. Each time I went through it was something different. So I put my hands over the buckle on the belt. Now keep in mind, the clothes that I have on are (..) it's always the same belt, always the same jewelry, always the same everything. I put my hand over my belt, it didn't go off. I went through again, it did go off. Took my belt off, went through, I was fine. Went through again, went off again. I said "well the only thing that is left on me that has metal on it, is my under wire bra, did you want that?"- "well, no, Jennifer, it's okay, you can go in".*

Clearly, having to submit to the metal detector can quickly turn into an upsetting and uncomfortable experience for some women partners of prisoners.

Not only are the uses of technological tools such as ion scanners, and metal detectors indicative of structural stigma, but they also serve as examples of the 'trimming' or 'programming' that occurs within total institutions:

Admission procedures might better be called trimming or programming, because in thus being squared away the new arrival allows himself to be shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations (Goffman, 1961a, p.16).

The stories of my participants reveal that when they remove personal possessions such as jewelry, belts and the like (for the ion scanner and metal detectors) women partners of prisoners are shedding parts of their identity, given that "people invest self feelings" in their personal belongings (Goffman, 1961a, p.23). Thus, one's sense of self becomes fractured. Moreover, their individual possessions are removed in order to pass through the mechanisms of the institution and cascade to the next phase of visitor screening. Keeping this in mind, these measures of dispossession are harmful since they are symbolic of people's identity markers.

Beyond this, it has been noted that punitive actions are facilitated by employing the use of technology, which is increasingly evident in penitentiaries (Christie, 2002, p.131). According to Christie (2002), technology enables the state to reinforce social and physical divides, facilitating its ability to marginalize and punish people (p.133). The accounts of my research participants suggest that the ion scanner removes human accountability from the corrections system at the same time as it generates a repressive climate which stigmatizes female visitors.

## ***2. Interpersonal Stigma***

It is not just the technology that inflicts stigma upon the women who visit their partners in penitentiaries, but it is also the agents who apply it. Therefore the structural stigma experienced by women partners of prisoners is compounded by incidences of interpersonal stigma. More specifically, interpersonal stigma speaks to the stigmatized experiences of my respondents which correspond to correctional officers.

When asked how they found the experience of visitation, all of my respondents recounted unpleasant and even cruel encounters with correctional officers. As mentioned in my literature review, the perceived sense of being criminalized by correctional officers has been identified in various studies on female partners of prisoners (Girshick, 1996, p.5; Fishman, 1990, p.134; Sturges, 2002, p.40). Given that in the prison my respondents' stigmatic attribute is transformed to discredited in light of their association to their incarcerated partner, my respondents support this finding by disclosing how correctional officers perceive them as 'criminals'. As Molly effectively explains:

*(..) most times .. you're treated like you're the inmate. Like, you're treated like somebody that's in jail. When you're visiting somebody in jail, you seem to be categorized as being guilty for whatever it is that they're in there for (..)*

The latter comments resonate with Goffman (1963), who asserts that the stigma one incurs from association with the stigmatized is particularly acute in the context of criminality. As such, the social identity of the 'criminal' is sticky and assigned to those most intimately linked to them, namely, their partners, spouses, and girlfriends: "the assumption being that he [*sic*] is what the others are" (Ibid, 1963, p.47). In keeping with this idea, correctional officers presuppose that incarcerated men have character defects.

For example, the misconception that prisoners' are by nature deviant, untrustworthy, and morally bereft is common place (Friedman, 1997). Hence, this forms the lens by which correctional officers perceive and treat prisoners' female partners.

The preceding discussion has established that there is a collective sense amongst women partners of prisoners that correctional officers play a significant role in confirming their discredited status in the prison. In building upon this argument, I will now examine, through the voice of my participants, how correctional officers act as 'stigmatizing agents' (Fishman, 1990). Moreover, my respondents reveal how correctional officers stigmatize them both overtly and covertly. Keeping this in mind, I will first explore some of the explicit ways that correctional officers stigmatize women partners of prisoners.

### ***2.1 Overt Encounters of Stigma***

The manners in which correctional officers overtly stigmatize women partners of prisoners are diverse and varied including exercising verbal abuse, drawing upon technology, and in one case, even laying criminal charges.

### ***2.2 Verbal Abuse***

In the following statement, Lucy, an interviewee in her fifties, recalls some of her interactions with correctional officers:

*(..) there was two guards there that just .. they hated just the sight of me, and it's not that I did anything wrong, they just hated the sight of me, you know. And it's like, what is it? Do I look better than you? Are you jealous that I'm seeing this man? It's like-you have the problem here, I don't. You know .. so, "well, you're here again." Well, yeah, I'm here (..)*

She goes on to provide another encounter:

*(..) there's one guard, he asked me for my phone number.(..) And they would ..[say to me] "oh, well, (..) you don't have outside sex? - well, you've gotta be one of the first". Like this is what a guard said to me. He says "so, you know, who is it -your boyfriend outside? I go, "he's my boyfriend". "Well you have to be the first" (..)*

Lucy's story adds another layer to the preconceived notions that correctional officers have of women partners of prisoners. Not only are they largely viewed as criminal, but they can also be perceived to be promiscuous. Beyond this, Schur (1983) notes that women experience several forms of stigma that at the outset, is marked by the fact that they are female (p.37). Thus, my respondents' stigmatization by correctional officers is compounded with their gender status, while taking place in an institution that deprives them of their autonomy. Hence, it can be suggested that these factors cause female partners of prisoners to be more vulnerable to sexual harassment in this environment. This idea is also supported by the fact that gendered forms of harassment "may sometimes constitute punishment for women's perceived violations of norms" (Ibid, 1983, p.141). In these terms, the moral stigma attached to female partners of prisoners may be the basis for which male authority figures justify their misconduct.

### ***2.3 Application of Criminal Charges***

In a different example, the stigma Molly endured from correctional officers was particularly abrasive and longstanding. She explained how they often carried out discriminatory acts by placing various restrictions on her visitation such as suspended, closed, and even denying visits all together. In fact, she recounted one occasion where an altercation with correctional officers led her to be criminally charged and convicted:

*(..) I mean, I got charged with trying to take a maximum security facility down with a harmless object. And I now have a criminal record because of it, who are they gonna believe?- guards or somebody who visits a lifer (..)*

Molly is suggesting that the incident leading to the charges was embellished by staff in an effort to punish her. Molly's comments reveal that she is cognizant that as a female partner of a male prisoner, there is a lack of credibility equated with her social identity. In Molly's eyes, her social location in the criminal justice system stifled her endeavors at vindication. She goes on to explain:

*(..) I think that the charges and all that stuff went down (..) I think they thought I'd walk. Say "oh, okay, I've had enough, I'm leaving", but I didn't. It was nine months before I was allowed to visit him again though. Had to go through court before they'd allow me to come back and visit. A judge said that he did not want this affecting the visits. The street cops here even told me after I was arrested and they brought me back home they said "this is bullshit, you're being railroaded". I said, "I know that, you know me". You know, but- it's a game, it's all a game.*

After having incurred a criminal record, Molly asserts that she is now more compliant with correctional officers to prevent further punitive sanctions. Her story also resonates with Goffman (1961a) who noted that:

The occasion on which staff members first tell the inmate of his deference obligations may be structured to challenge the inmate to balk or to hold his peace forever. Thus these initial moments of socialization may involve an "obedience test" and even a will-breaking contest: an inmate who shows defiance receives immediate visible punishment, which increases until he openly "cries uncle" and humbles himself (p.17).

In these terms, Molly has experienced the consequences of challenging the 'obedience tests' put forth by staff. Consequently, she must now carry the additional burden of having a criminal record, which exacerbates her stigmatization, including her 'life chances' (Goffman, 1963, p.5). As a result of her battles with correctional officers,

Molly discussed how visitation is now an unpredictable process for which she finds it hard to prepare:

*(..) you never know, when you're going to visit from one day to the next. You know (..) are 'yall gonna be on closed visits, are they going to accuse you of this, or are they gonna say the ion scanner did this, oh the dog hits you for this. (..) you know what you're doing, so you know .. whether it is correct or not.*

Molly's comments support the literature on families and partners of prisoners which underlines visitors' lack of trust with prison staff (Christian, 2005; Friedman, 1997; Collins, 2003). Her story also reveals how the unpredictable behavior of correctional officers can further dampen the difficult act of visiting one's partner in prison.

#### ***2.4 Drawing upon technology***

Another manner in which correctional officers would overtly stigmatize the women was when they were being processed into the penitentiary. By drawing upon search technologies such as the ion scanner (a form of structural stigma), they were able to rely upon a scientific truth to reinforce their presumptions of women partners of prisoners as being a problematic group. Thus it is the user interaction of the technology which causes it to become a form of overt stigma experienced by the women.

Jennifer informed me that correctional officers would stigmatize her using the readings she allegedly produced on the ion scanner. Indeed, these measurements were employed by staff to form suspicions of her which led to her every action being questioned. In the following statement, Jennifer explains how after being placed on

closed visits for some time, she had come to the decision that she was going to forfeit her visits:

*(..) I haven't been up to see him, it will be almost a year in a few months. (..) because it's too hard- to drive all the way up there to talk to him on the phone. I can do that from here ..plus he's getting out in a few months so. But yeah, it's just (..) so difficult to go up there.*

Jennifer's experience highlights the net costs of the ion scanner. Namely, how 'normative' means of salvaging ties and relationships through physical contact visits are stripped by this machine.

### ***2.5 Covert Encounters of Stigma***

My research subjects also reveal how correctional officers can adopt covert mechanisms through which to stigmatize them. Indeed, it was found that some corrections personnel would unnecessarily prolong the visitation procedures, and or deceive the women with "games" to ultimately hinder their visitation.

### ***2.6 Prolonged Waiting***

Tammy, a woman in her twenties, highlights some of the more subtle ways correctional officers have stigmatized her:

*(..)They're just so rude to people ALL the time (..) they're ignorant (..) they make everything so difficult. 'Cause (..) they don't let you sign in right away, or they'll take forever or they'll read the persons file, and then they'll sign you in (..) you can see the line up grow while you're there.*

Tammy's comments speak to how the imposition of unwarranted waiting conditions the experiences of women partners of prisoners. This is because it further conveys the message that they bear a discredited status in the penitentiary. According to

Schwartz (1975), “waiting is painful because it involves deferral of gratification by an authority who is at once its source and censor. Waiting is degrading because it reawakens the social context in which these permissions and constraints were originally felt” (p.174). Accordingly, the extended waiting that occurs when going for a visit is yet another manifestation in which prison personnel can reinforce their control over my research subjects.

## 2.7 “Games”

Another conspicuous manner in which correctional officers stigmatize women partners of prisoners is by subjecting them to “games”<sup>18</sup> which impede their visits. In effect, some of my respondents’ exposed how being denied visitation rights is an arbitrary process, propelled by correctional officers’ misuse of authority. Arguably, this injustice torments women partners of prisoners. Further, it was revealed that families and partners feel like powerless pawns in correctional officers struggles with the administration. For instance, at one point, every time Molly called the prison to book a visit she would arrive there only to be told that she had not booked it for that day. Consequently, she would be denied the visit, and this continued to happen for some time. She goes on to explain:

*(..)What it was, is the guards did not like that program, they’ve had it in that system before.. they didn’t like it. It’s too much paperwork. So they were doin’ what they can to frustrate the visitors ‘cause the in-visitors have more right to complain than the guards do.*

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<sup>18</sup> Not ‘games’ in the Goffmanian (1961b) sense but in the everyday sense of deception that brings to light power relations.

Spain (1992) succinctly states that “prisons are the clearest example of space being used to reinforce a hierarchy and to reassert power” (p.8). Indeed, the abuse of power is revealed through my informants’ exchanges with prison personnel, where institutional control and authoritative clout tends to forecast the fate of each visit. According to Link and Phelan (2001) “it takes power to stigmatize” (p.375). Authority figures are by nature, granted additional social power, and in the carceral context, where deprivation of autonomy is their objective, the ability of correctional officers to stigmatize those entering their premises is heightened. Thus, on top of the unpleasantness of visitation detailed by my participants, the abuse of power can further obstruct the accessibility of visits.

That said, the accounts of my participants support the research on women partners of prisoners which asserts that institutional policy and its application symbolizes their devaluated status. Moreover, these women bear their partner’s stigma in this environment (Fishman, 1990, p.150). Notably, rather than facilitating the visitation process, penal policies appear to create tension between women partners of prisoners and corrections staff. Ultimately, this accentuates the uncomfortable experience of visitation, while reinforcing the belief that these are procedures to which they must adapt.

### ***3. Physical Space***

Governmental waiting rooms of all kinds are important physical spaces because it is within them that we gain initial impressions of officialdom. The citizen is officially embraced so to speak, by this physical setting during the often tense period after entering agency premises but before receiving preliminary processing (Goodsell, 1984, p.467).

Not only are the women subject to state imposed tactics and discriminatory behavior by correctional officers, but several of my research subjects spoke of the physical environment of the prison as unwelcoming. Thus, their stigmatized encounters are situated in a space that is excessively austere. For example, Sally mentions the issue of an inhospitable environment:

*(..) I mean it's comforting to see the person. And .. I'm always glad when I can see him, but the environment itself (..) you're sitting down on these cold benches with a bunch of other.. you know, like unhappy, angry, sad people (..) The environment doesn't exactly set the most comforting atmosphere (...)*

Tammy builds upon the former statement:

*It's really cold, and it echoes 'cause all the concrete (..) you can hear everybody talking at the same time 'cause all the sounds echo off the glass and the concrete. And then it's hard to hear, 'cause you only have one phone that doesn't really move very much (..) like everything you touch it's really cold, and (..) the atmosphere there is so (..) depressing (..)*

Jennifer offers a different angle:

*(..) in the maximum security prison (..) on his side- they're in a cage. It's caged all the way around and the door is closed. And the chairs are the worst chairs you ever seen. It looks like stuff they've taken out of the dump and it's probably chairs that have been there for forty or fifty years I'm sure.*

My participants' comments reveal that the physical environment in which their visitation takes place lacks warmth. This is another instance in which components of the carceral appear to reflect the discredited status of this group. Comments such as “*depressing*” suggest that the physical environment women partners of prisoners are exposed to can be internalized far beyond the material level. Consequently, this shapes the experience of their visit. According to Goodsell (1984), the spatial environment is significant to the visitors experience because it serves as the “symbols of the

organizations values, how they perceive the visitors and how they are expected to conduct themselves” (p.467).

The previous discussion has brought to light how the physical space of the prison impacts women partners of prisoners. Considered in the correctional context, all of my participants’ testimonies allude to the many sources of contamination that exist for women who visit their partner in the penitentiary (Goffman, 1961a). Ion scanners, explicit formal policies and procedures, and the physical environment of the institution serve as a venue in which my participants’ agency is reduced and their depersonalized status can be observed. Accounts of feeling ‘dirty’ or feeling like one is being treated like a ‘criminal’ speak to this space being contaminative to these women’s self perceptions.

#### ***4. Resistance: Corrections and the Criminal Justice System***

By outlining the aesthetic conditions of the prison, the presence of structural stigma, and the agents who play an active role in confirming the discredited status of the women in this study, I contend that the experience of visitation is characterized by depreciation and dehumanization. Indeed, these are marginalized, disempowered women situated in a highly punitive and regulatory environment. Nevertheless, I found that my participants were able to exercise agency and develop strategies of resistance to defy their stigma in the correctional context or at least retain a positive sense of self. Although when asked, my participants felt that they had not resisted, their accounts reveal that they engaged in covert and overt strategies of resistance<sup>19</sup>. Thus when reading the narratives, resistance emerged solely in the correctional context, and was alluded to through the women’s various conscious acts of intent that challenged, responded and/or disagreed

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<sup>19</sup> The fact that the women did not feel they had resisted may be attributed to the wording of the question which perhaps caused the participants to misunderstand the concept of resistance.

with dominant forms of power. Resistance was likely restricted to the penal environment given that the stigmatic attribute of women partners of prisoners must be revealed in order to be processed into the institution where they are forced to interact with agents of control.

Covert strategies of resistance include the more surreptitious mechanisms employed by my respondents in response to the carceral and entail: undermining technology; everyday acts of resistance (Scott, 1985); creating an alternate discourse; managing relations; seeking support networks; and escapism. The second body of resistance unearthed in this study concerns overt strategies. These allude to formal means of resistance and will be explored under the following two sub-categories: challenging authority; and humor.

#### ***4.1 Covert Strategies of Resistance***

Several researchers have established that resistance is not limited to “overt challenges” such as protesting, and taking legal action, but can be traced to informal acts, whereby for example, marginalized people reject the negative attributes and stereotypes that society brands them with (Zajicek & Koski, 2001, p.370; Collins, 1991; Riessman, 2000). Building upon this idea, Collins (1991) explains how resistance can include “private spaces of consciousness” (p.92). That said, I will now explore how my participants employ covert mechanisms of resistance.

## 4.2 Undermining Technology

The first tactic of covert resistance deals exclusively with minimizing the problematic readings from the ion scanner, to undermine the prison technology. In other words, this section explicates how my participants challenge their structural stigma. One such stratagem under this sub-category concerns disinfecting personal possessions with rubbing alcohol. To illustrate, Lucy describes how she would disinfect her belongings prior to visitation in the following statement:

*(..) I would stop on the side of the highway, (..) I've got off and right when I got off there, I stopped there and I'd take the alcohol out and I would clean - if I wore jewelry, clean it all, okay. I would clean my hands with it. I'd clean my shoes with it. The zippers on my pants with it.*

Jennifer contributes to the previous statement by detailing her attempts at undermining the ion scanner:

*(..) he's drivin' me up there one time, and I pull the Clorox out, and I start wiping everything all down and he goes "what are you doing?". I said, "Scottie I go through this every time I go up there". And just when we're getting off the highway, going up the road, going into the maximum security prison-that's when I'm doing it all. And he goes like "that's insane". I said "tell me about it". And then I'll go in, I'll come out and I'll go "Scottie, guess what? I tested positive for cocaine". "How?" When I've wiped everything down. I wipe my sunglasses, my reading glasses, all of my jewelry. Wipe everything down. And they're still telling me I'm positive.*

The next strategy adopted by one of my participants concerns thoroughly washing her clothes that would be worn to the visit:

*All my clothes are washed in hot water the night before I go - I've ruined so many clothes - from washing them in hot water (..) (Lucy)*

Lucy explained that as a drug user, she had to take special precautions when going for visits that included removing certain personal possessions, as well as changing the clothing on her person:

*(..) 'bout half the time I couldn't wear my own clothes because (..) they swab your clothing. They're not allowed to swab your skin. So, they'll swab your jewelry. Gold is the worst one for holding on to the.. chemicals of drugs. Okay. So you never wore jewelry. Okay. You take all your jewelry off. I lost so many pairs of earrings (..)*

She continues to explain in another statement:

*(..) one day I stopped a half block from the medium security federal prison, got stark naked on the side of the highway and got dressed in somebody else's clothes because it was like .. I wouldn't wear nothing that belonged to me at the end there (..)*

The former cases establish how the ion scanner alone requires women partners of prisoners to forge inventive strategies to curtail its harmful readings. Arguably, these measures are quite extreme and underscore the importance of visitation in these women's lives.

#### ***4.3 Every Day Acts of Resistance***

The former discussion has outlined how my informants employ covert resistant strategies to undermine the technology in the prison. I will now move on to examine some of the everyday acts of resistance employed by my research subjects to negotiate their interpersonal stigma (Scott, 1985, p.33). Notably, such informal mechanisms can be adapted by marginalized groups to “mitigate or deny claims made by super ordinate classes” (Ibid, 1985, p.32).

#### ***4.4 Smiling***

A tactic of everyday resistance that was discussed by one of my informants concerns smiling:

*(..) we'd watch women freak out on, on the guards (..) and go crazy in there. And he would tell me like "just don't do this." I'm not going to. My mother didn't raise no dummy, my mom always told me, 'smile- you get more done when you smile'. (..) So, I just go up, be fine-smile on my face and walk in. (Jennifer)*

Smiling is an instrumental act of everyday resistance because it allows Jennifer to undermine and negotiate the power of correctional officers. Further, it ameliorates her experience of visitation, while allowing her to escape direct forms of opposition against agents of control (Scott, 1985, p.29).

#### **4.5 Compliance**

Another act of everyday resistance reflected in the stories of my participants concerns that of compliance (Scott, 1985). One such example is the previously detailed story by Jennifer in which, after having to take on and off pieces of her outfit to pass through the metal detectors, she stated to correctional officers: *"well the only thing that is left on me that has metal on it, is my under wire bra, did you want that?"*. The former statement illustrates how by being overtly compliant, Jennifer is reversing the uncomfortable and embarrassing experience of unnecessarily going through the metal detector onto correctional officers.

Another instance in which compliance can be observed is in the following account provided by Molly:

*(..) we were on closed visits when he first went to the medium security prison (..) I go in for a visit. I go through the ION scanner - metal detector - go through the locked doors - go into the other part to sign in - got to stand for the dog - the dog comes – they go “oh, you’re on open visits”. I said, “oh, I didn’t, you know, I didn’t know”. I said “am I allowed to get some change for the machines?”. He said, “yeah”. So, I go get the change out of the locker for the machines, come back, - they bring the dog in. They go “the dog’s hittin’ on you”. I said, “there’s no reason for this dog to be hitting on me - right?”. So, they’re goin’ on-and I says, “you know what?” (..) “You know, let’s just be realistic for one minute here. I’ve been on closed visits forever. I didn’t even know I was on an open visit so- until I came right to this section here. Now, if I was going to be doing anything, why would I be doing it on a closed visit?” (..) “Well, do you want your closed visit?” I said, “of course I want a closed visit .. if that’s the only way I’m going to get to visit him, then that’s how I’m gonna visit him” (..)*

Molly’s story exemplifies the correctional expectation of women partners of prisoners to act submissive and with deference in their exchanges with agents of control. However, in playing the compliant role, we see how she also contests and argues with correctional officers. Molly’s story therefore underscores how women are able to fulfill this obligation while at the same time exercising a form of resistant compliance.

By contrast, compliance can also entail complying with a negative stereotype. To illustrate, Lucy commented that she started to “*act like a criminal*” in her interactions with correctional officers, and consequently “*sort of lost her personality*”. As such, it can be argued that Lucy embraced her ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman, 1963) by ‘playing the role’ (Goffman, 1959) that correctional officers sketched of her. For Lucy, this included behaving in a defiant and confrontational manner. Breakwell (1986) explains that such strategies can prove to be beneficial to the stigmatized, because by conforming to the expectations of the stereotype, power challenges are avoided and tensions are minimized between parties (p.121). Although Lucy’s actions speak to resistance, it is important to acknowledge that they are also reflexive of the process of disculturation which occurs

inside prisons (Goffman, 1961a). In losing her persona, and taking on a deviant role, we see how Lucy has become reconstituted by the institution. Ultimately, this fractures her self concept.

Now that I have outlined some of the everyday tactics of resistance engaged in by my participants, I will now move on to note some of the other manners in which my participants covertly resist their stigma in the correctional context.

#### ***4.6 Creating an Alternative Discourse***

A noteworthy strategy of covert resistance which emerged in the narratives of my participants concerns the formation of an alternative discourse. A discourse concerns a subjective construction of a particular set of ideas and knowledge (Mullaly, 2002). Accordingly, several of my participants forged a discourse that centered upon a failing justice system which sidesteps the needs of prisoners and their loved ones. Thus, by carving a space in which they can debate their stigmatization from a macro, socio-political level of interpretation, my respondents are able to exercise power over their subjugation. This alternative discourse can also be regarded as a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) given that the knowledge produced by this discourse is also speaking to forms of power. As Molly explains:

*People all over the world come to study our jails, 'cause we have one of the best corrections services in the world. And I just howl at that – I mean, yeah right! (..) if this is the best in the world, god help the rest of the world, you know, because (..) it doesn't work the way it's set up. It's at the whim of whoever's in charge. If they wanna go by the rules, they can. If they don't, then they make them up as they go along, or they can change them anytime they want.*

Jennifer further nuances Molly's discourse in the following statement:

*(..) they're all big on saying they want to integrate them back into society (..) They don't. No, I've never been allowed to go to a social. Put in the papers for (..) the trailers, (..) can't even get in there. (..)So, no they don't treat me fairly. I don't think they treat a lota women fairly or visitors fairly.*

Sally offers another vantage point to this discussion:

*I mean, no where in public are you gonna go to the grocery store or you're going to receive a certain service and somebody's gonna be allowed just to, you know, like "sit down" do this, do that. Like it doesn't .. work like that, but for some reason there, it's just (..) the way, that (..) they run it, the way that they do it, and it's accepted like (..) they're allowed.*

These comments reveal how some of my interviewees switch lenses to understand their adversity. By emphasizing the questionable nature of the criminal justice system they elucidate how their sources of stigmatization (namely, the state and society) are themselves problematic. Finally, a resistant discourse of this nature is reflexive of how stigmatized persons attempt to elicit 'consciousness raising' (Mullaly, 2002, p.30). In doing this, the accounts of my participants are providing critical assessments of the 'dominant discourse' (Ibid, p.30).

#### **4.7 Managing Relations**

Another tactic which surfaced in the stories of my participants concerned managing relations. To illustrate, in order to curtail conflict with correctional officers, Molly spoke of minimizing her contacts with other partners of prisoners. By employing this form of selective association, Molly felt that she could evade being implicated in prison gossip.

As she explains:

*(..) a lot of gossip around jails and-she said, he said, we said, they said- kind of stuff. I try to stay away from all that. So, I don't associate with people (..) it's nothing personal. I just .. like to keep that part- this is my home life here (..) I'm at that there to see Bret-that's the only reason why I'm there.*

Goffman (1963) notes that “it is in his affiliation with, or separation from, his more evidently stigmatized fellows, that the individual’s oscillation of identification is most sharply marked” (p.107). As such, Molly chooses to structure her interactions around ‘normals,’ rather than with those who share her stigma. In doing this, she is minimizing her social identity. Reportedly, discreditable persons are less apt to engage in “collective coping strategies” given that in doing so, they would be revealing their stigmatic attribute (Heatherton, Kleck, Hebl, & Hull, 2000, p.261). Molly therefore reveals how some women partners of prisoners actively seek methods to ensure that their stigmatized identity does not dominate over their other identities (such as for Molly, being a mother). Thus this measure can be understood as a form of resistance.

#### ***4.8 Seeking Support Networks***

Covert resistance strategies can also be observed in how some of my participants actively acquired and utilized their support networks. For instance, Molly informed me that she had taken an anger management program and had joined various self-help/mutual-aid groups. On the other hand, Jennifer, recounted turning to her family, and partner (Mark) to help her work through the strains of incarceration. As she explains:

*(..) my granddaughter will phone me and .. I know it's not the same but, she puts a smile on my face. She'll come over and give me a hug, and .. if it wasn't for my grandkids, probably a lot of the times, I'd be worse. And Mark knows too, 'cause there's sometimes when (..) I'm in really rough shape ..he'll phone (..)*

Additionally, Jennifer mentioned having a friend whose partner was also imprisoned. This friendship was helpful because they both had experienced conflicts with

corrections as well as sharing an understanding regarding the pains of enforced separation:

*(..) there's one girl that I've met, from going up there, (..) if we hit rough patches with people, her and I would call each other (..) Because people on the outside don't understand, what we're going through.*

The above statement supports the literature on women partners of prisoners which speaks to how friendships amongst these women can provide a sense of solidarity and an insiders' perspective regarding their stigmatization (Christian, 2005, p.39). For Jennifer, this was a reciprocal space of 'sympathetic others' where her frustrations could be meted out (Goffman, 1963, p.20).

#### **4.9 Escapism**

While the majority of my informants adopted pro-social avenues of resistance, there is one notable exception; Lucy recounted consuming excessive amounts of hard drugs to combat the strains of incarceration:

*.. But eventually what happened was I just took my drug of choice on, just sat at home and did drugs, and waited for his phone call.*

According to Walker (1995), "when an individual comes in contact with the addictive substance or activity, the result is a powerful relief from tension and one which such an individual is likely to pursue" (p.188). Lucy's drug use can therefore be identified as a resistant tactic of escapism.

As we have seen, my participants draw upon various strategies of resistance to defy the stigma they encounter in the correctional context. Taken in sum, the covert strategies of resistance speak to how my participants are engaging in a presentation-of-correctional-self. As defined in Chapter Two, this entails how women partners of prisoners adopt

particular roles which draw upon various scripts in order to foster a positive impression upon correctional officers. For my respondents, this particular presentation-of-self is employed with the broader goal of being granted visitation. In doing this, my informants choose to wear different 'masks' in their interactions with correctional officers; some physical and some behavioral. Finally, in adopting this presentation we are able to observe in its entirety, how my participants are also actively resisting agents of control in the carceral environment. To this end they are resisting in a manner that allows them to challenge power in the prison while at the same time presenting a 'self' that also facilitates their visitation processing experience.

For instance, earlier I detailed how Jennifer smiles around correctional officers because it shows them that they "*aren't getting to her*". While this is clearly an instance of resistance, the act of smiling is also a part of Jennifer's presentation-of-correctional-self. Further, the previously detailed acts of compliance exhibited by Jennifer and Molly, are consistent with Goffman's (1961a) findings that the forced patterns of total institutions are such that "inmates are often required to punctuate their social interaction with staff by verbal acts of deference, such as saying 'sir' " (p.22). For example, while Jennifer is drawing upon various tactics to show her good etiquette in front of correctional officers, she also is engaging in a form of impression management (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, by putting on the 'front' that she is cordial Jennifer is controlling the impression that she is giving to correctional officers who are expecting her to act unruly (Ibid, 1959, p.22).

Not only are the mannerisms altered by some of my participants in their presentation-of-correctional-self, but so are their physical appearances. For example,

earlier Lucy mentioned removing her jewelry and replacing her personal garments with clothing that belonged to a person who was not consuming drugs. In this instance, Lucy is 'passing', by conveying to correctional officers that she is a non drug user. By adopting this particular presentation, Lucy is more apt to be granted her visit and will be processed with less suspicion.

### ***5. Overt Strategies of Resistance***

To this point, we have examined the covert strategies of resistance employed by my participants in the correctional setting and how collectively, this forms the presentation-of-correctional-self. I now move on to examine the overt applications of resistance reflected in the testimonies of my research subjects. Here, I found that my respondents would challenge authority, and even employ humor to negotiate their stigma.

In commencing this section, I would like to first acknowledge the dangers of dissent. Several researchers have underscored the predicament facing partners and families of prisoners who attempt to realize change by contesting the 'integrity' of the system. Invariably, they emphasize how this marginalized group is silenced with criticism, punishment, and stigma (Friedman, 1997; Braman 2002). Molly underlined how formal means of contesting the system can have severe consequences on partners and prisoners, such as suspended visits, harassment, lawsuits, and involuntary transfers to name but some (also see, Friedman, 1997). She reinforces this idea in the following statement:

*(..) if you go to the Ombudsman or anybody out there that helps, then it makes your time even harder 'cause when you come in (..) for visits, they're going to ride you even more 'cause you're disrupting them. You're making them really look bad.. you're having them investigated - they don't like that - you're going to pay for that. So you have to be real careful. You pick and choose your fights .. if you're gonna take on that system, you have to pick and choose .. because you will pay a price for it.*

Molly disclosed that as a result, she had become more cautious about taking on battles with the correctional system. Her comments can perhaps shed light on why prisoners' families and partners have traditionally gone without voice. As Braman (2002) notes, given the hardships confronted by this population, "one might expect social solidarity around and public opposition to incarceration" (p. 129). However, in its place there continues to be a "social silence" around this subject matter (Ibid, p.129). That said, Molly's case throws into question society's drive to "punish criminality" (Ibid, 2002, p.135).

### ***5.1 Challenging Authority***

Another dimension of overt resistance can be traced to how my participants challenge authority. For instance, when Molly and Jennifer were told that they tested positive on the ion scanner they would repeatedly inform correctional officers that their conclusions were false. In addition, Jennifer noted that while some women would scream at corrections personnel in these circumstances, she would simply state that there was something wrong with their machine. By rejecting their findings and placing the onus of error on the staff and their machinery, Jennifer is attempting to shield herself from added stigma by denying its validity.

In keeping with the idea of challenging authority, women partners of prisoners also draw upon more aggressive contentions in the face of stigma. For instance, Lucy

expressed how she would make correctional officers aware of her rights and the limits this imposed on their power:

*(..) “you want to cancel my visits? You don’t have the power to cancel my visits”. And I would tell them that. You don’t have that power, what am I doing wrong?*

She goes on to describe in another instance:

*(..) you get the guards that are .. they’re better than you .. they think .. their shit smells different (..) and I let them know that it didn’t smell any different (..) it’s like, “you want to search me?, come on, let’s go, I’ll have your ass in court in five minutes”. And like, I’ve said that to two of the guards there. “You got a problem with me? What I do here is my business .. as long as I’m not breaking any of the rules. There’s the rules. I’m not breaking them. You leave me alone” (..)*

Lucy’s words serve as a reminder that even in an environment characterized by deprivation, stigmatized people can acquire forms of resistance which empowers them, if not only for a moment, to challenge their oppressors (Bosworth & Carrabine, 2001).

## **5.2 Humor**

Lucy also mentioned that when correctional officers angered her, she would often sing a sultry dance song to them in a tongue and cheek manner. In this instance, we see how Lucy is playfully engaging in resistance. According to Freud (1963), humor can be used as vehicle to “mask aggression” (p. 100). Relatedly, jesting has been used by marginalized groups in distressing situations as a “psychological escape” and form of resistance (Sanders, 2004, p.180).

## ***Concluding Comments of the Correctional Context***

Thus far, I have outlined the perceptions, challenges, and negotiations of my research participants in their correctional encounters. In concluding this section of the chapter, I would like to emphasize that the experiences of my respondents are taking

place within a total institution (Goffman, 1961a). Further, their cases demonstrate how the organizational structures and routines that characterize the prison (a total institution) are unlike those of everyday life. Correspondingly, in this environment, the ability of my informants to act is constrained. This loss is compounded by the rigid visitor screening procedures, hostile agents of control, and the oppressive physical setting. In sum, these components serve as forms of mortification which induce a degradation of self, loss of control and identity. As such, the formers stories of resistance suggest that my participants respond by challenging their 'spoiled identity'.

On a final note, I would like to address one of the central components of the Correctional Services of Canada mission statement which cites the maintenance of community ties for prisoners and their families and partners ("Commissioners directive", 2001). This policy is informed by the widespread research within academe that emphasizes the pertinent role support networks play in the reintegration of prisoners as law abiding citizens (see for example, Silverstein, 2001; Brodsky, 1975; Glaser, 1964 ). Given this, CSC insists that prisoners can be 'encouraged' to foster relationships while incarcerated ("Commissioners directive", 2001). However, the accounts of my research subjects indicates that this rhetoric is not being realized in practice. Rather, my informants underline the multiple barriers of the corrections system that incessantly weigh down the process of visitation. Therefore, it can be argued that negotiating these challenges is by no means simple.

## **Part 2: The Challenges of the Social Context**

Now that I have sketched the correctional context through the narratives of my participants, I will proceed to examine the negotiations and situations that they face in the social context, which entails work, community, friends, and family. My respondents disclose two general challenges within this sphere: social identity and stigma. In the first portion of this section I will contextualize the issue of identity and examine how maintaining a positive identity is a challenge facing some women partners of prisoners. Following this, I will examine the stereotypical assumptions and stigma experienced by this marginalized group. Lastly, I will explore how my participants negotiate their challenges in the social context.

### ***1. Contextualizing Identity***

Contrary to the correctional setting, women partners of prisoners are discreditable within mainstream society. At the outset, their stigmatic attribute remains invisible, and they are able to draw upon various managerial strategies which generally allow them to pass in the presence of 'normals'. Notwithstanding this, my respondents revealed that stigma and stereotypes manifest in their social realities when their discreditable attribute is known or becomes exposed. Thus, to prevent this potentiality they adopt various strategies of information management (Goffman, 1963). Given that personal identity influences the management strategies that people choose to control the information of their discreditable attribute, this section will therefore commence with a brief overview of identity.

Identities vary and are molded in particular interactions (Goffman, 1963). Babad, Birnbaum, and Benne (1983) assert that the concept of identity can include “a complex integration of personality attributes, unique experiences, personal choices, and an individual’s sense of self” (p.37). Identity can be further divided into personal identity and social identity. Personal identity concerns the factual, biographical components of a person that sets them apart from the rest of society (Goffman, 1963, p.57), while social identity concerns the manners in which individuals are marked in their various social interactions (Jenkins, 1996, p.4). Lastly, several scholars argue that social and personal identity are fused, and function in relation to each other. This is because they rely heavily on other’s perceptions and definitions of them (Goffman, 1963, p.57; Layder, 2004, p.87; Babad, Birnbaum, & Benne, 1983, p.37).

### ***1.1 The Challenge of Maintaining a Positive Identity***

The above discussion has contextualized the concept of identity. I now proceed to examine how maintaining a positive identity poses a challenge for several of my research subjects. While my informants appeared self-determined in the correctional context, they clearly grappled with their social identity in their public realities. Moreover, my respondents reveal that for some women, being the partner of a prisoner is contrary to their personal moral code. This is exemplified by the fact that several of my participants disclosed that they felt their status warranted a certain amount of stigma. Given that they found their social identity quite disconcerting, they would continuously re-evaluate their relationship. As Lucy explains:

*(..) because of having experience of having somebody in my family in prison, I had always made a boundary about - I raised my children that if you ever went to jail, phew - forget it. (..) don't even think I'm going to step foot there.(..) I used to drive my mother to the medium security federal prison to visit my relative, and I would sit outside the prison and wait. I would not even step foot on the prison property. And then for me to be .. steppin' over that fence, going into prison, was like who-oo-oh, I still get chills from it.*

Jennifer reinforces this idea in the following statement:

*(..) I think to myself sometimes, like why am I even doing this?(..)*

The former cases speak to the subjective thoughts that my participants hold towards their stigma. Reportedly, stigmatized persons construct and internalize an image of themselves based on the valuations that society passes on them (Mullaly, 2002, p.60). As such, the ego identities of my participants can be observed. Ego identity, in its traditional conceptualization, concerns the crux of one's biological, personal, and social composition that cultivates a person's qualitative sense of self and being (Erickson, 1980; Kroger, 1993). In terms of stigmatized persons, Goffman (1963) describes ego identity as how the individual feels towards their stigma. Further, stigmatized agents are conditioned to embrace the norms that encompass the constructions of their stigma (Schur, 1983; Goffman, 1963). It appears therefore, that several of my informants, subconsciously align themselves with 'normals', "to agree that he [*sic*] does indeed fall short what he [*sic*] really ought to be" (Goffman, 1963, p.3). To this end, it suggests that their identity is nuanced.

## **2. Stigma and Stereotypes**

The former discussion has illustrated how some women partners of prisoners wrestle with their social identity. I will now change the focus of inquiry to examine the

issue of social stigma and stereotypes. More specifically, it was found that my respondents experienced stigma from their friends and families, as well as from the relatives of their partners. In addition, the community and workplace were also spaces where they would be subject to stigma.

### ***2.1. Stereotypes and the Families of Women Partners of Prisoners***

In keeping with the findings of Fishman (1990), several of my participants noted that initially, their families were quite weary of their relationships to incarcerated men.

As Jennifer notes:

*(..) they thought that I would be found in a ditch dead somewhere (laughs). “You just don’t get involved with people in prison” (..) so, it was like, they were afraid for me, my daughter was afraid for me, my son was afraid for me, (..) everybody was afraid for me.*

Jennifer’s story speaks to one of the many social stereotypes that are attached to prisoners, namely that they are ‘dangerous’ individuals. She establishes how some families of female partners of prisoners produce ‘stigma theories’ to rationalize their disapproval towards the relationship. Furthermore, because women who are intimately tied to prisoners bear a moral stigma, these constructions are perhaps used by family members to question and underestimate the ‘good’ judgment of their relative.

### ***2.2 Stigma in the Community and Workplace***

The stigma of female partners of prisoners can also be experienced in the community and workplace. Molly effectively highlights this phenomenon in the following statements:

*There are people that judge you. Especially with Bret with his record (..) you know, there are people that won't let my daughter play with their kids .. because her dad's in jail. (..) you get that kind of prejudicial attitude (..) People look at you differently if they know .. it's like you're bad.*

Later in the interview she stated:

*(..) when I worked at a restaurant (..) the management wasn't to know.(..) people look differently at you (..) if you hang around with somebody with HIV, people are afraid to play with you kind of thing, and you could say I might get HIV from you 'cause your friend has HIV (..)*

The above stories details the 'sticky-ness' of stigma whereby people become 'marked by association' (Goffman, 1963, p.30). Molly speaks to this process and illustrates how 'normals' can build fears around those associated with the stigmatized. Her statement also unveils how the stigma of female partners of prisoners can seep onto their children. Joseph Murray (2007) notes how the children of those we imprison are vulnerable to "social exclusion" (p.55). Moreover, efforts to degrade the families of prisoners through isolation are normalized by the general population, under the assumption that this group fails to share their collective values (Ibid, 2007; Duff, 2001).

### ***2.3 Stigma and Personal Friendships***

On another note, Lucy expressed how her friends and family resented her for being involved with a man in prison stating: "*my son can't stand him, and my daughter can't stand him*". This hostility was amplified by the fact that her partner was convicted of multiple sex offences against minors. The nature of his crimes appeared to exacerbate the stigmatized reactions of others. Lucy highlights this idea in the following statement:

*(..) I lost respect from quite a few people (..) he made me tell my girlfriend, one of my best girlfriends (..) and it was really the wrong person to tell (..) And (..) she likes the person. And I had to tell her where he was. And he was like, "tell her where I am" (..). And when I did (..) and then I had to explain why (..) I lost my girlfriend over it (..) sure we talk once in a while, but (..) she has told me "I do not want this man at my house, I do not want him to know" (..)*

Lucy's story resonates with Goffman (1963), who notes that in the process of disclosing stigmatizing information to friends, the tainted attribute takes on a "deeper meaning" (p.65). These "discovery prejudices" shape how "normals" will foresee and evaluate the character of the stigmatized (Ibid, p.65). Clearly, Lucy's friend was bothered by her disclosure, and thereafter, placed severe restrictions on their friendship. Her account also highlights the consequences of experiencing a status transformation: from discreditable to discredited. In experiencing this incident of stigma, Lucy is given yet another cue that her membership in society is limited to those who share her social identity (Mullaly, 2002, p.56).

#### ***2.4 Stigma and Stereotypes from Prisoner's Families***

The practice of stigmatization is not limited to those devoid of tainted attributes. Indeed, stigmatized groups can develop their own prejudices and stereotypes against other stigmatized persons. As such, it was found that the families of imprisoned men can stigmatize the women who are intimately involved with their relative. For example, Jennifer noted how her partners' family stated that they didn't want to get to know her until he was released. She goes on to explain:

*(..) Yeah, they didn't really wanna know me. They wanted to wait 'till he got out. I think they thought that I was just ..some ..airhead (..) and I have to look at it from their point of view too- I mean, what women in their right mind's gonna get involved with somebody that's been in jail for almost twenty years? (..) so they probably wondered what kind of a person I was. (..) actually, one of his sisters' said to me one time, that (..) she was told I was a stripper. (..) So I mean, like they had (..) misconceptions of (..) people that get involved with guys in jail are strippers.*

The former case serves as yet another example of the types of stereotypes that surround women partners' of prisoners. According to Heatherton et al. (2000), "stereotypes are involved in stigmatization to the extent that the response of perceivers is not simply a negative one, but also that a specific set of characteristics is assumed to exist among people sharing the same stigma" (p.89). As we see, the socially constructed identity of my participants does not stray far from the virtual identity they are perceived with in the correctional context. Character traits such as deviancy, promiscuity, and immorality plague the actual identity of these women and form the basis by which others orient their conduct towards them.

### ***3. Coping with Stigma in the Social Context***

The preceding discussion has sketched the challenges faced by women partners of prisoners in the social context. I will now proceed to examine how they respond to these conflicts. Contrary to the correctional context where my participants engaged in tactics of resistance, what we see in the social context can best be understood as management strategies. Reportedly, individuals will draw upon various measures to negotiate their stigma much like the tactics people employ to manage the stress in other facets of their

lives (Heatherton, et al., 2000, p.265). The coping mechanisms described by my participants support the former statement, and concern the following strategies: constructing positive identities; keeping busy; and insulation/isolation.

### ***3.1 Constructing Positive Identities***

Although several of my participants clearly struggled with their social identity, ironically, one of the most prominent coping strategies which materialized from their narratives entailed the construction of positive identities. More specifically, my research subjects would articulate descriptions that presented them as independent, capable, and strong-willed women. As Tammy states:

*(..) I still, very much speak my mind, that hasn't changed at all. And I'm still very independent, (..) if I wasn't independent (..) and he was to go to jail, I think that would force me to be independent(..)*

Lucy builds upon this idea in the following statement:

*Challenges? yeah. No, I can't say I've had any challenges (..) I'm a survivor (..)*

Molly further nuances this coping strategy:

*(..) I'm not afraid to be by myself (..) I don't need somebody in my home .. with me. I'm not that kind of .. female (..) I'm not afraid to work doing a job.*

Breakwell (1986) notes how when one is coping with a threatened identity, portraying an identity that overshadows their tainted attribute functions as a mechanism to enhance self-esteem (p.99). By constructing positive self images, my participants are playing an active role in constituting their identity. Moreover, my informants reveal how people project various images in light of their interactions (Mokros, 1996; Goffman, 1967). Therefore, in emphasizing their strength through the use of powerful statements,

my research subjects are reconfiguring their stigma as a provisional life obstacle to be faced and surpassed.

### **3.2 Keeping Busy**

Another coping mechanism discussed by my participants concerned structuring their lives to be full of activity. The organizational composition of my participants' day-to-day lives included scheduling their time to be around friends, family, jobs, and or education. For example, Sally was obtaining a post secondary education, working, and spending time with friends and family. As she explains:

*(..) I try to keep myself busy and occupied and surround myself with people who are supportive, and (..) can help me maintain (..) a more positive outlook.*

In keeping themselves occupied, my participants are constructing positive outlets in which they can negotiate their stigma.

### **3.3 Insulation / Isolation**

In addition to keeping structured lives, several of my informants elected to spend their spare time indoors. Furthermore, Molly and Jennifer underlined how they were not 'party people' and that they disliked going to bars, drinking, and doing drugs. For instance, Jennifer described herself as "*a homebody*". Building upon this idea, Tammy expressed how her life generally revolved around her job. In her spare time, she indicated that she preferred to stay in her apartment, catching up on lost sleep from the many long hours she put in as a waitress.

However, Lucy is an extreme example of having a limited presence in the community. In fact, Lucy disclosed that she isolated herself because she was ashamed of

being involved with a man who was incarcerated for sex offences. She explains in the following statement:

*..I think I isolate myself, because I don't want to explain to people, 'cause I'm embarrassed of what he did (...) because I'm such (...) a .. open person, (...) I'm not embarrassed of the things I do in life .. but I've realized, you know what, I have to be embarrassed of the things he's done in life. And I have to learn to keep them a secret, because ..(...) people will judge me because of it. (...) sometimes I just think, oh I can see my house getting egged you know,(..). I've never (...) lived in a life where I've had to (...) be ashamed.*

Clearly, Lucy's sense of shame over her partner's offence is particularly acute and her words delineate how the stigma of prison relationships can fracture one's ego-identity. Her sentiments differentiate from that of my other participants for several reasons. First, their partners' criminal convictions were not sexual in nature, and second, they did not appear to have negative feelings towards their partners' offences. That said, Lucy's interpretations are shaped by her inner struggle towards her own status and is compounded by her partners' particularly devalued status.

Included in Lucy's comments is the act of isolation, which can be an attractive coping mechanism for the stigmatized, because "the individual does not have to confront the rejection, pity or aggression appended to the stigma" (Breakwell, 1986, p.109). By remaining indoors, Lucy is minimizing potentially stigmatizing encounters and is therefore engaging in a form of information control. Lastly, in striving to keep her tainted attribute a secret, Lucy's coping strategy resonates with Goffman (1963) who explains that "the issue is not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing information about his failing" (p.42). Indeed, Lucy's sense of shame has been amplified by her past experiences of information disclosure, in which she was

marked and discarded by others. Thus, she now feels compelled to keep it hidden for fear of incurring added social stigma.

### *Concluding Comments of the Social Context*

Taken in sum, the nature in which my respondents spend their time outside the prison suggests that their social engagement is limited. In addition, my informants reveal that women partners of prisoners exercise discretion and awareness over the spaces they occupy (Glaser & Strauss, 1964; May 2000). Collectively, these strategies allude to my participants' presentation-of-social-self. By portraying a self-determined identity to others, my participants are attempting to avoid drawing attention to their stigmatic attribute. Furthermore, by selectively choosing where and how they occupy their time in the public sphere, they are preserving this identity. Hence, their presentation-of-social-self serves as a tool of stigma management, which unlike the correctional setting, is not intended to challenge power relations but simply to alleviate the strains of stigma. Given this, the presentation of self that emerges in the social setting speaks to a coping strategy rather than a tactic of resistance.

I have underscored how stigma management and identity are not static in the lives of my participants. Moreover in keeping with the studies of Shaw (1991) and May (2000), it is clear that in the face of unpredictability, these techniques help women partners of prisoners to overcome their stigma.

### **Part 3: The Challenges of Intimate Relations Related to Incarceration**

To this point, I have situated and interpreted the challenges of the correctional and the social context, however it is important to acknowledge that the challenges confronted by women partners of prisoners are not restricted to stigma. As such, there are more material, interpersonal, and emotional costs incurred by the enforced separation of incarceration. More specifically, my respondents reveal four obstacles which will be explored in this section of the chapter. These entail the financial costs of incarceration, the uncertainty of the future, the emotional and physical consequences of enforced separation, and lastly, the responsibility of being the ‘caregiver’.

#### ***1. The Financial Consequences of Incarceration***

In keeping with the findings discussed in Chapter One (Carr, 1995, p.1; Carlson & Cervera, 1992, p.73; Fishman, 1990, p.199; Girshick, 1996, p.59; Christian, 2005, p.45; Morris, 1965, p.292; Brink, 2003, p.394) all of the women in this study (with the notable exception of Sally) discussed the economic impact of their partner’s incarceration. Lucy underlines this finding in the following two statements:

*It costs me a fortune going in, okay. (..) I would have to spend thirty dollars just on junk food to eat all day (..)*

*You don’t want them to go without any chips and candies and cigarettes. So when he was in the medium security federal prison, it was costing me a fortune. (..) like I wear this piece of jewelry that he gave me. It’s a three dollar piece of jewelry (..) And he said to me today, he says, “oh, you’re still wearing my piece of jewelry”. I said, “yeah - that piece of jewelry cost me about ten thousand dollars”*

Lucy’s comments also speak to a dimension of the feminist insight, that women are often faced with the difficult task of “managing poverty” (Mandel, 2005, p.203). As

mentioned in Chapter One, the majority of prisoners' families and partners belong to the lower socio-economic strata of society (Girshick, 1996, p.119). In these instances, female partners of prisoners are forced to rectify the crisis of imprisonment unaided. With the deprivation of a partner, spouse, and or father, economic stability can be quickly overturned. As such, my participants emphasize how incarceration worsens the conditions for female partners.

However, this can not be generalized to all of my participants. For example, Sally's finances were not negatively impacted by her partners' incarceration. In fact, it was the opposite. As she explains:

*(..) I guess to some degree, it's given me the opportunity to save more, because I'm not spending as much as I would have, or I haven't (..) pooled my finances or put them towards the plans that we had at this point.*

Sally noted that she was living with her parents and that her financial responsibilities were modest. Arguably, her account differs from that of my other participants who did not live with their parents and whose expenses increased upon their partners' imprisonment.

### ***1.1 Phone Bills from Collect Calls***

Another financial consequence of incarceration concerns the high costs of phone bills from the collect calls that prisoners make to their partners. Tammy explains this challenge:

*(..) phone bills-those were always a challenge. (..) one time I only had my bill for (..) three days but because it was (..) almost four thousand dollars on the third day that I've had it (..) they cut the collect calls. So, I'm like, 'kay well, why? I've paid my phone bill in full all the time every month. So, for like two or three months (..) if I didn't have it paid by the third day that I had it, I knew (..) that everything was gonna be cut off.*

Lucy provides a different angle on this issue:

*(..) Let me see - I don't know one woman that doesn't know .. that has a mate in jail, that does not know what (..) a black line is .. from Bell Canada. There's so many frauds goin' on. (..) I've had (..) at least five phones and, out of those five phones, three of them have not been in my name. So (..) I figure if I was to total them all up, (..) at least ..minimum six thousand dollars, seven thousand dollars in phone bills, okay. And those are all hooked up in apartments that I've lived in. Eventually they're gonna catch up with you.*

Reportedly, calls made from prison cost upwards of four times the regular long distance collect call rates that are charged to the general public (Collins, 2004). While Corrections Canada acknowledges that the collect calling system may be economically difficult for prisoners and their families, they state that “it is not in their mandate to provide subsidies to inmates for telephone calls” (“Response”, 2004). In this sense, it is therefore, an unintended consequence of correctional policy that has real consequences on women partners of prisoners.

Indeed, by employing a system of collect calling, it appears that Corrections strains communication to the outside while contributing to the economic marginalization of prisoners' partners. The draining costs of phone calls serves as a striking example of how “pain delivery is an activity of great economic importance for the providers” (Christie, 2002, p.111). With telephone contact being one of the few forms of maintaining communication to the outside, I argue that this arrangement demonstrates Corrections' lack of consideration in regards to the socio-economic conditions of women partners of prisoners.

My participants' comments have highlighted the high costs of sustaining a prison relationship. However, in dealing with collect phone calls, some of my informants

disclosed that their partners would call them excessively, and alluded to instances of male domination and control. Tammy recalls her partners' behavior:

*(..) he'd always be on the phone calling constantly. From the time he gets up, 'till the time he goes to bed. It's all he ever did was stay on the phone, twenty four hours a day- it would drive me crazy. 'Cause you get like twenty minutes. (..) There's not too much you can say in one day, after twenty minute phone calls all the time (..) so, he had to listen to me serving people at work (..)*

Similarly, Lucy notes:

*(..) there's times (..) I couldn't even go to the bathroom between phone calls. It's like, "Ali, call me back in ten minutes, I've got to go to the bathroom". And before I'm finished in the bathroom, he's callin' me back (..) and it's like, "well, what are you doing?" "Well, I'm wiping my ass", (..) Like give me a break here (..) and if you don't answer the phone, "well where were you? Who were you with? What were you doin'?" And I'd say, "you're being jealous". "I'm not a jealous man, are you crazy?"*

According to Mandel (2005) men's ability to violate and control women is not limited by their socio-economic status (p.141). Further, power and control can take the form of "threats, economic control, intimidation, using children or loved ones, and isolation" (Ibid, 2005, p.142). In adopting this perspective, the former cases elucidate how gendered forms of control can be experienced by female partners of male prisoners despite the latter's incarceration in a penal institution.

## ***2. Uncertainties of the Future***

In the previous section I have underlined the economic impact of imprisonment and the strains it places on the partners of incarcerated persons. I will now switch lines of thought by examining the aspect of uncertainty. All of the women I interviewed wrestled with different concerns regarding their relationship to their partner. The diversity that

they bring to this analysis reinforces the fact that this is a heterogeneous population whose interpretations are shaped by their personal identities and life history.

To begin, Sally's partner had yet to be sentenced and was doing 'dead time',<sup>20</sup> therefore her frustrations revolved around the lengthy procedures of the criminal justice apparatus. More specifically, not knowing the outcome of her partner's trial, his conviction, and how much more time he would have to do was something that concerned her:

*(..) And I think now, I'm more upset at the fact that I still don't really know the outcome. And I know that that bothers him as well, 'cause it's like nobody .. really has the answer. So that makes it difficult for both of us 'cause he's uncertain as to how long, you know he's going to remain in there, and I'm uncertain, you know, as to how long he's gonna stay in there and how much longer we're gonna be apart (..)*

While for Sally, being stuck in a 'grey' area was particularly distressing, Lucy was concerned about her partner's release:

*(..) like I'm starting to wonder, you know, his crimes - because especially his crime, he has to check in where he lives, he has to report to the police and that he had (..) sexually assaulted a minor okay. If this gets out, how long is it before people start finding out (..) like. (..) a couple of people I have told at all to-it's just, "I want nothin' to do with you's". You see, not just with him. Now it's with you's, the two of you. You know, so, how's this gonna affect my life when he's out I'm thinkin' well, why am I (..) burdening myself with all this? (..)*

Another dimension of Lucy's uncertainty pertained to her sentiments towards her partner: "*(..) after close to a year and a half, I'm still thinking should I walk away? should I stay?*". As earlier mentioned, Lucy stated that she didn't love her partner, yet in another instance she stated "*(..) I'm curious about him .. (..) and maybe that's part of my sickness*". By "sickness" Lucy is referring to the fact that she has been clinically

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<sup>20</sup> The term 'dead time' refers to the time a prisoner is in custody while awaiting trial. It is 'dead time' because the prisoner is not yet serving their sentence.

diagnosed with a number of emotional disorders (especially in dealing with confrontation).

Conversely, Tammy, whose partner had just recently been released from prison, expressed concern over his deteriorating attitude. This was particularly worrisome for her as it got worse with each term of custody he completed:

*(..) Like before he would go to jail he was more of a happier person. And now he's not (..) like his attitude isn't as happy, and his personality isn't as happy (..) it's always like angry and his expressions aren't the same like they're more cold.*

In contrast, Molly's uncertainties were centered upon her more recent, conflict-free interactions with correctional officers. As she explains:

*(..) it's like a calm before the storm. I've been around too long (..) you don't have to do anything for them to do anything. That's why it's nerve-wracking. If you know you're up to no good, then you know to expect trouble. But when you're not doing anything and you're still going through all of this, and you know you're not doing anything, you can't exonerate yourself -like you know, you try to offer chest x-rays, cavity searches (..) they won't do it. So you're screwed. Because they say you're guilty that you're under suspicion of (..) you're stuck with doing that. I probably have a federal pen file as a visitor that's probably ten feet thick - suspicion of .. suspicion of .. suspicion of .. I've been suspicious of being suspicious (..)*

Finally, while Molly was worried about her painless visits, Jennifer was mourning the loss of her visits and was anxious for her partner to be released:

*It's hard, because I would go up on either Friday or a Saturday (..) I would look forward, all week to just going up there. And I would say to him "you know how absurd this sounds, that my happy time comes, when I'm comin' to visit you in jail". I look forward to this time, and now I don't have that. So, it's like, I have the phone calls, but it's still not the same thing as seeing him.*

My participants reveal how the uncertainties that plague women partners of prisoners are conditioned by experiences which are neither uniform nor straightforward. I

will now move on to examine the emotional and physical challenges of 'doing time' on the outside.

### **3. Emotional and Physical Challenges**

For Lucy and Tammy, whose partners demanded that they spend a great deal of their days on the phone, the emotional and physical impact of incarceration was especially pervasive. Lucy explains:

*I'm tired all the time (..) you spend six hours on the phone (..) it's exhausting. (..) To always be comforting to- try to make their insecurities not be there (..) you care for them, but (..) you start to hate them.*

Tammy reinforces this sentiment:

*(..) it's very draining, I mean its like, it's emotionally draining, and then it makes you physically tired 'cause it takes all your energy.*

Conversely, given that Molly, Sally, and Jennifer did not allude to their partners as being controlling, their emotional and physical side effects provide a different perspective. As Sally expresses:

*Physically, (..) it's really different. Like a huge part of any relationship is having, you know, the hugs and the kisses and .. intimate time, or even just time when, you guys can go out for a walk or ..um.. like simple things, you know. (..) I feel some resentment towards that. Like it (..) it bothers me. (..) it's difficult cause you know there's actually nothing that you can do to change that. And it's hard like when you go for a visit and you can sit on one side of the glass and see this person on the other side. And you're so close (laugh) but at the same time you're just as far, you know (..)*

Molly builds upon the previous statement:

*(..) emotionally (..) sometimes it's hard (..) the times when you wished there was somebody you could just kinda lean on, to be right there, and they can't. (..) and then be realistic enough to know that I don't take it out on him. He's not here, not because he chooses not to be. He has no choice.*

Jennifer sums up her emotional and physical pains in the following quote:

*(..)haven't had sex in over three years (..) Haven't been held in over three years. So yeah, sometimes you get that .. really a lot lonely.*

On the basis of my participants' accounts, it is clear that the enforced separation of imprisonment causes them to experience emotional and physical discomfort. That said, this undoubtedly compounds the reality of being a female partner of a male prisoner.

#### **4. The Responsibility of Being the Caregiver**

Amidst their many hardships, my participants spoke of having responsibilities to act as the 'caregiver' in their relationship. This role included being responsible for certain emotional duties such as encouraging their partner, and nurturing his concerns. As Sally explains:

*(..) it's hard because, (..) they'll ask you, "well, how are you doing?" And (..) you want to like, you know .. sort of stay strong and maintain you know, a positive attitude. And I know when he has his bad days, and he'll tell me .. I can't. Like you try, to be supportive, and you try to be encouraging and positive. But at the same time, it's hard for me to hear .. when he's down and, you know, not doing well.*

Molly offers another angle in the following statement:

*(..) They have to put their faith in us out here that we are doing the right thing, that we are making the right choices, that we can handle .. whatever's coming. Weak women would not make it through a relationship in jail. You have to have some back bone to be able to do it (..) you have to have some strength to stand alone. Because you are- even though you're not alone - you are. You know, it's like being so close, but yet so far (..)*

Conversely, Lucy spoke of a different type of responsibility which she must face:

*(..) I've committed myself now into havin' him come and live with me (..) because someone has to sign an affidavit saying yeah, he can live with me. And I'm goin', why are you doing all this for this person that you do not know? Okay, and (..) it's their manipulation skills that they learn in there (..) I've been saying I'm his partner for a year and a half. What do I say? No, you can't come live with me?*

According to Mandel (2005), men and women often unknowingly take on gendered duties of “domestic, economic, and emotional labor” (p.196). Men are more apt to provide economically, and occupy their days in the workforce, while women tend to account for domestic duties such as taking care of the home, child rearing, cooking, and cleaning (Ibid, 2005, p.196). In terms of my respondents, the enforced separation of their male partner requires them to take on his gendered role. For example, Molly must act as the decision maker in the relationship, while Lucy has taken on the legal responsibility of housing and supervising her partner upon his release. Further, we see that my participants are required to fulfill the emotional obligations of their own gender status by cheering their male partners, and affording them the confidence to survive their term of custody.

#### **Part 4: The Positive Side to Enforced Separation**

Throughout this chapter the correctional, social, and personal challenges and negotiations have been presented through the voice of my informants. To this point, I have detailed the strains that enforced separation places on the lives of my research subjects. However, this final section of analysis will conclude the chapter by switching lenses to briefly acknowledge the positive side to these circumstances. This inclusion reflects the narratives disclosed by my informants when asked about the positive aspects of having a partner in prison. Although contrary to the normative assumptions of incarceration, this finding has been unearthed in previous studies on female partners of prisoners (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). In acknowledging the positive aspects of incarceration, several of my participants detailed various experiences of interpersonal growth.

For Sally, the limitations placed on the contact with her partner forced them to develop their communication skills. She describes some of the personal transformations that she has undergone since her partners imprisonment in the following exchange:

*Erin: (..) Have you experienced any positive benefits as a result of your partner's incarceration?*

*Sally: Yeah, I've grown a little bit. (..) I've had to become more independent and accept things that I don't necessarily like. (..) it's shown me too, like certain people that I can or can't trust. (..) and who I can rely on for support or not. In terms of the relationship, (..) we've had to develop (..) our communication skills more because that's really the only thing that we have.*

On another note, Molly cited having a relationship to a man in prison as an experience unparalleled to relationships on the outside. For her, the enforced separation stands as a true test of loyalty, love, and trust:

*I think it's made our relationship stronger (..) we work together (..) I think because of what we have coming at us (..) which (..) normally you don't get on the street (..) it's made us stronger as a couple. (..) we don't pull apart- we stand together, beside each other (..) Whereas on the street, we don't have those kinds of battles to deal with. We'd have other things to deal with (..) We know what we both want. We know what we expect from each other (..)*

Molly also explained how they were able to recover from their negative experiences with the corrections system, and have since been working towards building their future. Another positive aspect that was disclosed by Molly concerns her increased objectivity and diplomacy in issues of social and interpersonal conflict. She explains in the following statement:

*(..) people are very quick, I mean in society period (..) We're not so quick to praise. We're very quick to belittle, humiliate, put down, you know, we're very judgmental (..) I find that (..) dealing with the federal pen system, I think you learn to stop being like that. Like you deal with more reality .. of what life's really about. (..) the good guys aren't who you think they are. And the bad guys aren't always who you think they are. A lot of times the bad guys are the good guys.*

In perceiving the positive aspects of incarceration, the former statement highlights how Molly is also employing a technique of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) or more specifically is ‘condemning the condemners’ (correctional officers) to neutralize her stigma and challenge dominant power relations.

Lastly, when asked about the positive benefits of her partners’ incarceration, Jennifer noted that she was grateful her partner was in her life and that he made her happy. Reportedly, the positive aspects of stigma can include, “therapeutic and interpersonal opportunities”, as well as “personal growth experiences” (Herman & Miall, 1990, p.263; Oyserman & Swim, 2001, p.1). The element of personal growth concurs with the statements of Jennifer, Molly, and Sally. It is clear that being in their relationship, albeit constrained, is something which they feel thankful for.

The ability of several of my research subjects to acknowledge the positive elements of enforced separation in spite of the continued difficulties that they endure reveals how stigmatized people are able to carve a space of understanding and optimism. Their words also point to the resiliency of oppressed persons. Sociologists Herman and Miall (1990) remind us that “we so-called ‘normals’ by contrast may in fact be disadvantaged” because in our interactions we do not acquire the depth, insight, or personal growth of the stigmatized (p.265). Despite their injustices, it is clear that my participants did not let this destroy their spirit. It can be said, therefore, that these women did not want to be regarded as victims of stigma, nor regarded themselves in these terms.

### ***Concluding Thoughts and Comments***

Four key findings have emerged in the former analysis which brings us to the conclusion of this chapter. First, we learn that the women are diverse in both personality,

and in terms of their experiences. Second, although participants at times spoke of similar challenges, their narratives indicate that they are clearly situated in different ways. Thus, their commonalities are countered by the various lenses they use to interpret and mediate their social worlds and the resources to which they have access. Third, amidst their challenges, the women consistently emerge as active agents who resist in the correctional sphere and develop management strategies in the social context. Finally, the research unveiled how the role of technology adds a new dimension to the experience of visitation for women partners of prisoners which in effect, reifies their stigma. Not only is it a form of structural stigma, but it removes the human element from this process. This is a significant line of analysis, given that it masks the issue of accountability in the corrections system, and to this end, further subjugates the women.

## CONCLUSION

In criminological discourse, critical social scientists often advocate attending to the voices of those impacted by adversity. In this study, I have strived to realize this goal by acknowledging those who are caught on the fringes of 'the system'. Therefore, in conducting this exploratory study, I have attempted to shed light on a population that is often overlooked within society, and to a great extent within criminology. Thus, the research provided an opportunity for the women to voice their concerns so their life experiences could be acknowledged and their insights appreciated. To this end, the study has drawn upon informed critique in an effort to 'raise the consciousness of the oppressed' (Fay, 1987, p. 28).

Each woman interviewed presented unique stories and points of experience. As such, the narratives of these participants serves as a testament to the complex lived realities of women partners of prisoners. This truth is complimented by the very range of management strategies and acts of resistance utilized by the women in this study. In keeping with the principles of critical social science, singular monolithic explanations to social phenomenon were refuted in this study by emphasizing the diverse experiences of women partners of prisoners.

What also materializes from this research is the pertinent role of structural stigma in the lives of women partners of prisoners and how this conditions their experiences of visitation. Indeed, correctional administrator's belief in the infallibility of search technologies (especially the ion scanner) compounds the stigmatization of the women in this environment. The reliance upon science in these situations is unsettling for several

reasons. First the measurements elicited by the ion scanner appear to establish a hierarchy of deviance in which the women are situated. Second, it removes the human voice of authority of women partners of prisoners and silences their attempts at vindication. Last, the net outcome of the ion scanner is such that it deprives the women of their right to visitation, barring them from the most normative means of sustaining human relationships that is, through use of open visits which permit physical contact.

In effect, using a theoretical framework informed by symbolic interactionism, that begins with Goffman's (1963) insights and builds on them by drawing in more recent theorizing around stigma and resistance, has allowed us to examine stigma as it oscillates between the social and correctional realities of these women. In addition to this, what is learned from this study is that the phenomenon of human resistance is not limited to prisoners.

The need for future research is warranted to further interrogate these findings. Indeed, by conducting a study of a larger sample of women restricted to those whose partners are incarcerated in federal institutions (where structural stigma is particularly acute), a clearer picture could be obtained. At the same time, however, the implications of my research speak to the need for the corrections system to sensitize and humanize their institutional policy and practice, given the actualities experienced by the female partners of prisoners in this study. Also alluded to is the disdain that many correctional officers have towards the women, as well as the various manners in which they can stigmatize them when in the penitentiary. Thus, reworking institutional policy would be ineffective without attempting to re-humanize the agents of control who are the 'gate keepers' in a literal as well as a figurative sense. Further, given the voices documented in this study, a

closer inspection of the systemic structures that cultivate the denunciation of women partners of prisoners is a fundamental requirement in order to begin to take down the frames of stigmatization.

In keeping with the spirit and aim of this study, I will conclude this thesis with the words of one of my participants who speaks of why she participated in the research. In ending with this narrative I seek to remind us all that it is the voices of women partners of prisoners who are the crux of this study.

*This has been (..) a new experience for me, and to sort of shed some light on it I think is important you know, for people on the outside who haven't gone through a similar experience.*

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## APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

**Preamble:** What I am researching is how the lives of women are affected by their partners' incarceration. Recognizing the impact that incarceration has on intimate partners of prisoners, I am interested in how your life has been affected doing time on the outside. I am going to ask you a series of questions that will attempt to shed light on the kinds of situations that women partners of prisoners face and how they respond to them. At the end of the interview I will be asking you a few questions regarding your personal background and demographics.

1) Looking back to when your partner was first placed in custody can you describe how you felt?

- a)-what was going through your mind?
- b)-what did you do to occupy your time?
- c)-where were you living at the time?
- d)-who did you turn to for support?

2) What has happened in your life since your partners' incarceration?

- a)-socially
- b)-employment
- c)-friendships
- d)-physically
- e)-economically

3) How has your partners' incarceration impacted your life?

- a)-economically
- b)-socially
- c)-emotionally
- d)-spiritually

4) How have you seen yourself since your partners' incarceration? Has your self image changed?

5) Since your partners' incarceration have ever been discriminated against? Explain and/or give an example

If yes, how did you manage this experience of bias?

6) Have you ever visited your partner in the prison?

- If yes, how did/do you find the experience?
- Preparing for visits?

7) How were/are you treated by the correctional system?

- 8) Do you feel that the correctional system is sensitive to the needs of partners of prisoners?
- 9) Have you faced any challenges since your partners' incarceration and how have you coped with them? If yes, please expand
- a) stigma
  - b) corrections
  - c) socio-economics
  - d) general problems confronted
  - e) emotional hardships in your relationship/s
  - f) socially
  - g) housing
  - h) financial
  - i) children
  - j) positive implications
- 10) Did you ever have or develop any fears since your partners' imprisonment? If so can you describe them?
- 11) Have resources been available to you?
- a)-correctional resources
  - b) -cultural resources
  - c) -family
  - d)-religious
  - e)-community groups
  - f)-friends
- 12) What resources could you use?
- 13) Looking back at your experiences since your partners' incarceration, do you think that you resisted against the pressures, expectations of the correctional system, of society, of family or friends or anything else? Explain or give an example
- 14) Have you experienced any positive benefits as a result of your partners' incarceration? If yes, please expand
- 15) Do you have sources of strength? If so what are they?
- a)-kids
  - b)-family
  - c)-partner
  - d)-religion

## **Personal Background and Demographics**

1. How would you describe your family of origin?
  - a)-class
  - b)-ethnicity
  - c)-composition
  - d)-religion
  - e)-where did you grow up?
  
2. Can you give me a bit of your personal background?
  - a)-your education
  - b)-work experience
  - c)-interests
  - d)-pivotal events in life
  
3. Can you describe the history of your relationship?
  - a) when and where did you meet?
  - b) how did your relationship start?
  - c) what challenges did you as a couple face?
  - d) what challenges did you personally face?
  - e) were you together during all or part of his incarceration?
  
4. Can you describe your life now?
  - a)-how old are you?
  - b)-leisure activities
  - c)-work
  - d)-living arrangement
  - e)-status of intimate relationship
  - f)-relation to children

## **Research Questions**

Why did you choose to participate in this research?

Were there any important areas that were not addressed?

Would you like a copy of the transcript?

If yes could you please write down the email or regular mailing address where I can send this on to the consent form

Can we contact you if we need clarification on anything?

Can you refer me to other partners who might be interested in participating?

*Thank you very much for participating in this research and for your insights*

## **APPENDIX B: Recruitment Text**

### **Project: “Doing Time on the Outside; Managing Relationships with Federally Imprisoned Men”**

This research conducted by Erin McCuaig under the supervision of professor Chris Bruckert, is examining how the lives of women are affected by their partners' incarceration. Academic research has tended to focus on the experience of prisoners while overlooking the impact that incarceration has on their intimate partners. Consequently, their participation in the criminal justice system is frequently ignored and their needs have been for the most part unexamined. This project is based on the recognition that the experiences of partners of prisoners often involve challenges and adjustments that are emotionally, physically, socially and economically strenuous. This project seeks to address this limitation by acknowledging the challenges and/or changes experienced during their partners term of custody. I am therefore interested in how your life was/is affected “doing time on the outside”. Questions will focus on how your life has been affected by your partners' incarceration (including topics such as coping strategies, challenges, changes, and discrimination)

Should you decide to participate you will be asked to partake in one semi-structured interview with the researcher (lasting between one and two hours). You will be asked if you are comfortable having the interview recorded on an audio tape. If you agree, the interview will be recorded and the interview tapes will be transcribed by the assigned researcher as soon as possible. Should you not want the interview recorded on audio tape, detailed notes will instead be taken by the researcher throughout the interview. In this case, the processed notes will be made available as soon as possible. In either case, you reserve the right to edit or delete any information which you consider to, in any way, endanger yourself or any friends, family or associates. You are entitled to a follow-up interview should you feel that clarification or additional information is required. At any point in the research process should you feel uncomfortable, you are entitled to refuse to answer questions, interrupt or terminate the interview and/or withdraw from the research. Your role in the research is completely voluntary.

The interviews will take place in a comfortable, private setting. At the end of the interview, I will be asking you a few questions regarding your personal background and demographics. Your confidentiality will be respected, all identifying names, places and events will be changed in the transcripts and in any subsequent documents. To ensure that you are positioned to give free and informed consent these forms will be reviewed orally, and you will be given the opportunity to ask questions and receive

clarification regarding research goals, methods, the researcher's obligations and your rights as a participant as well as any other concerns you may have before the interview begins.

The researcher has no formal association with Correctional Service of Canada, Lifeline, or The National Parole Board. Therefore, no correctional or other benefit can be anticipated as a result of participating in the research. Participants will not be paid for their participation in the research however they will be offered an honorarium of twenty five dollars to cover any expenses incurred. This honorarium will be given before the interview starts. Should you wish to withdraw from the project at any time you are not required to pay back the honorarium.

In order to facilitate review and verification of the data, the tapes and/or original notes will be held for two years after the project has been completed. At that point they will be destroyed. Transcripts will be retained for three additional years. Until such time they will be in the sole possession of the assigned researchers (during the research process only).

If you are interested in participating in this research project or have any questions regarding the process, please contact Erin McCuaig or the principle supervisor, Professor Chris Bruckert.

Erin McCuaig  
25 University Street  
Ottawa, ON  
K1N 615  
Email:

Chris Bruckert  
25 University Street  
Ottawa, ON  
K1N 615  
(613) 562-5800 ext 1814  
Email: [bruckert@uottawa.ca](mailto:bruckert@uottawa.ca)

## **APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form**

### **Project: “Doing Time on the Outside; Managing Relationships with Federally Imprisoned Men”**

This research conducted by Erin McCuaig, under the supervision of Professor Chris Bruckert, looks at how the lives of women are affected by their partners' incarceration. Academic research has tended to focus on the experience of prisoners while overlooking the impact that incarceration has on their intimate partners. Consequently, the experiences of partners of prisoners are often overlooked in criminological research and their participation in the criminal justice system is frequently ignored. This project seeks to address this limitation by addressing the social, personal and economic circumstances of this population, while exploring any challenges and/or changes experienced during their partners term of custody.

Should I agree to participate in the interview it will last between one and two hours. I will be asked if I am comfortable having the interview recorded on an audio tape. If I agree the interview will be recorded and the interview tapes will be transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible. If I do not want the interview to be recorded detailed notes will instead be taken throughout the interview by the researcher which will be made available to me as soon as possible. In either case I reserve the right to edit or delete any information which I consider to, in any way, endanger myself or any of my friends, family or associates. I am entitled to a follow-up interview should I feel that clarification or additional information is required.

I am aware that my participation in the interview may cause me emotional discomfort, however I understand that at any point in the research process, I am entitled to refuse to answer questions; interrupt or terminate the interview; and/or withdraw from the research at any time. To ensure that emotional risks are managed and minimized during the interview the researcher will remind me of my right to stop, take a break or withdraw from the research. I will also be given a list of resources that I can access should I feel I need to talk to someone about any emotional discomfort or anxiety I may experience prior to, during and /or after the interview. Furthermore, I reserve the right to delete any information that I find to be troubling or that I do not want to be included in the analysis.

My confidentiality will be respected, all identifying names, places and events will be changed in the transcripts and in any subsequent documents. To ensure that I am positioned to give free and informed consent these forms will be reviewed to me orally and I will be afforded the opportunity

to ask questions and receive clarification regarding research goals, methods, researcher's obligations and my rights as a participant as well as any other concerns that I may have before the interview begins.

The researchers have no formal association with Correctional Service of Canada, Lifeline, or The National Parole Board. Therefore, no correctional or other benefit can be anticipated as a result of participating in the research. Participants will not be paid for their participation in the research however they will be offered an honorarium of twenty five dollars to cover any expenses incurred. This honorarium will be given before the interview starts. Should you wish to withdraw from the project at any time you are not required to pay back the honorarium.

In order to facilitate review and verification of the data, the tapes and/or original notes will be retained for two years after the project has been completed. At that point they will be destroyed. Transcripts will be retained for three additional years. Until such time they will be in the sole possession of the assigned researchers (during the research process only).

Erin McCuaig is a graduate student at the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa and Chris Bruckert (thesis supervisor) is a professor at the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. The interview material will be used as the basis of the ethnographic study noted above and will be accessed by both the researcher and the principle supervisor Professor Chris Bruckert. A professional transcriber will be hired to process some of the interview material and will have signed a confidentiality form. The research will be analyzed by the researchers, used for academic presentations and possibly in the writing of journal articles.

Inquiries about the research process should be addressed to:

Erin McCuaig  
25 University Street  
Ottawa, ON  
K1N 615  
e-mail:

or

Chris Bruckert  
25 University Street  
Ottawa, ON  
K1N 615  
(613) 562-5800 ext 1814  
Email: bruckert@uottawa.ca

Should I need further information regarding the ethical considerations or requirements, have questions about the ethics process/expectations or have any complaints about the ethical conduct during the research I can contact:

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research,  
Room 160, Tabaret Hall  
550 Cumberland  
University of Ottawa  
K1N 6N5  
Phone: 613-562-5841

Two copies of the consent form will be completed. One will remain in my possession while the other copy will be in the sole possession of the undersigned researcher.

## Consent Form

The goals of the research have been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that I retain the right to refuse any questions or withdraw from the project at any time.

I understand that should I choose to withdraw from the research project, there will be no negative consequences for my friends, family, associates or myself as a result. Should I choose to withdraw from the research I understand that I am under no obligation to return the honorarium.

I agree to participate in the interview on the understanding that the above-detailed criteria regarding anonymity, confidentiality and use of interview will be abided by,

I agree to have the interview tape recorded      Yes

No

Date:

Participant:

Signature:

Researcher:

Signature:



# Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Service de subventions de recherche et déontologie / Research Grants and Ethics Services

## SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This is to certify that the University of Ottawa Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (REB) has examined the application for ethical approval for the research project **Doing Time on the Outside: Managing Relationships with Federally Imprisoned Men (File # 10-06-02)** submitted by Erin McCuaig and supervised by Christine Bruckert of the Department of Criminology. The members of the REB found that the research project met appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and in the Procedures of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards, and accordingly gave the research project a Category Ia (Approval).

This certification is valid for one year from the date indicated below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Catherine Paquet  
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For the Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB  
Richard Clément

November 14, 2006

Date

550, rue Cumberland      550 Cumberland Street  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada      Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

(613) 562-5841 • Téléc./Fax (613) 562-5338  
<http://www.uottawa.ca/services/research/rge/index.html>

## **APPENDIX E: List of Resources**

Should you find that you need to talk to someone at any point during the research, the following list of resources should assist you.

**The Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa: 1-800-611-4755**

**Bridgehouse – Kingston : (613) 549-6303**

**Catholic Family Service of Ottawa (613) 233-8478**

**Christian Counseling Ottawa (613) 729-8454**

**Family Services Ottawa (613) 725-3601**

**Nepean Osgoode Rideau Community Resources Center (613) 596-5626**

**YMCA YWCA National Capital Region: (613) 788-5050**

## **APPENDIX F: List of Codes**

### ***Part 1: 1.Challenges of Corrections: (x2: Stigma & Physical Space)***

#### ***1.1 Stigma***

1.2 Structural Stigma

1.3 Interpersonal Stigma (Corrections Officers)

1.4 Physical Environment

#### ***2. Resistance (x2: Covert and Overt)***

##### ***2.1 Informal Covert Strategies of Resistance***

Undermining technology (rubbing alcohol; presentation of self-changing clothes by passing as a non drug user)

Every day acts of resistance (smiling)

Compliance

Managing relations

Drug use

Creating an alternate discourse

Presentation-of-correctional-self

##### ***2.2 Formal Overt Strategies of Resistance***

Dangers of dissent

Challenging authority

Humor

### ***Part 2: Challenges of the Social Context (x2: Stigma/ Stereotypes & Identity)***

#### ***1. 1 Contextualizing Identity***

##### ***1.1 The Challenge of Maintaining a Positive Identity***

## ***2. Stigma and Stereotypes***

Stereotypes and the family of women partners of prisoners

Stigma in the community and in relation to the children of women partners of prisoners

Stigma from co-workers and management

Stigma from close friends and the consequences of information disclosure

Stigma from prisoners' families

## ***3. Coping with Stigma***

Constructing positive identities

Keeping Busy

Insulation/Isolation

Presentation-of-Social-Self

## ***Part 3: Challenges of Intimate Relations Related to Incarceration***

### ***3.1 Financial Costs of Incarceration***

The economic task of providing for their partner

Collect calls and the High Costs of Phone Bills

### ***3.2 Uncertainty of the Future***

Worries

Doubts

Anticipation

### ***3.3 The Emotional and Physical Impact of Enforced Separation:***

With respect to women who identified having controlling partners

The impact of women who did not allude to having controlling partners

### ***3.4 The responsibility of Being the 'Caregiver***

Emotional duties

Legal Duties

Domestic Duties

### ***4. The Positive Side to Enforced Separation***

Personal Growth

Development of Communication Skills

Increased Strength

Gratitude to the Relationship