

Unbroken: Stories of Strength, Solidarity, and Resistance from Canadian Federal Prisons Designated for Women

by

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Abstract

Historically, criminology has taken a deficit-focused or risk and needs-based approach to examining criminological issues (Kewley, 2017). Additionally, criminology has done little to explore how engaging in positive experiences can support criminalized people and prevent further conflict with the law (Ronel & Eisha, 2011). “Correctional” programming and policies employ a psychological lens, portraying women as having disordered thinking, irrational behaviours, personality disorders, along with many risk factors and needs that require “fixing” (Pollack, 2004). In response, there has been a proliferation of critical literature documenting incarcerated women’s harmful coping strategies in reaction to structural oppression and interpersonal harms, such as self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, and substance abuse (e.g., Chamberlen, 2018; Kilty, 2011, 2012, 2014; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Zinger, 2019). Less is known about incarcerated women’s strengths, skills, solidarity, resistance, and resilience. This project provides a more wholistic understanding of incarcerated women and gender-diverse people’s identities by challenging the prevalence of deficit-focused narratives and demonstrating the characteristics of resilient prisoners. A strength-based conceptual framework of prisoner resilience, linked to central features of healing and transformative justice, was developed to guide data collection and analysis. Mobilizing feminist, qualitative, and autoethnographic research methods within the critical paradigm, interviews were conducted with 13 key informants and 20 people who were incarcerated in federal prisons designated for women. Data were interpreted via thematic narrative analysis. This study’s findings reveal that promoting criminalized people’s strengths and fostering prisoner resilience can buffer the impact of the harmful conditions of confinement, support community re-entry, and contribute to transformative social change. The harms of the carceral state are severe and extensive, leading to further exclusion of some of the most marginalized people in society. Rather than interventions targeting the perceived deficits and needs of criminalized people, a strengths-based approach that promotes healing, resilience, and relational connections is needed to build safe, inclusive, caring communities.

Keywords: Gendered confinement; Strength-based Re-entry; Resilience; Resistance; Solidarity; Transformative Justice

Résumé

Historiquement, la criminologie a adopté une approche centrée sur les déficits ou basée sur les risques et les besoins pour examiner les problèmes criminologiques (Kewley, 2017). De plus, la criminologie a peu exploré comment s'engager dans des expériences positives peut soutenir les personnes criminalisées et prévenir d'autres conflits avec la loi (Ronel & Eisha, 2011). Les programmes et politiques "correctionnels" adoptent une approche psychologique, dépeignant les femmes comme ayant des pensées désordonnées, des comportements irrationnels, des troubles de la personnalité, ainsi que de nombreux facteurs de risque et besoins nécessitant d'être "réparés" (Pollack, 2004). En réponse, il y a eu une prolifération de la littérature critique documentant les stratégies d'adaptation nuisibles des femmes incarcérées en réaction à l'oppression structurelle et aux dommages interpersonnels, tels que l'automutilation, le suicide, les troubles alimentaires et l'abus de substances (par exemple, Chamberlen, 2018 ; Kilty, 2011, 2012, 2014 ; Moore & Scraton, 2014 ; Zinger, 2019). On sait moins de choses sur les forces, les compétences, la solidarité, la résistance et la résilience des femmes incarcérées. Ce projet offre une compréhension plus globale des identités des femmes incarcérées et des personnes de genre divers en remettant en question la prévalence des récits centrés sur les déficits et en démontrant les caractéristiques des prisonniers résilients. Un cadre conceptuel basé sur les forces de la résilience des prisonniers, lié aux caractéristiques centrales de la guérison et de la justice transformative, a été développé pour guider la collecte et l'analyse des données. En mobilisant des méthodes de recherche féministes, qualitatives et autoethnographiques dans le cadre critique, des entretiens ont été réalisés avec 13 informateurs clés et 20 personnes incarcérées dans des prisons fédérales désignées pour les femmes. Les données ont été interprétées par le biais d'une analyse narrative thématique. Les résultats de cette étude révèlent que promouvoir les forces des personnes criminalisées et favoriser la résilience des prisonniers peut atténuer l'impact des conditions nocives de détention, soutenir la réintégration dans la communauté et contribuer à un changement social transformateur. Les dommages causés par l'État carcéral sont graves et étendus, entraînant une exclusion supplémentaire de certaines des personnes les plus marginalisées de la société. Plutôt que d'interventions ciblant les déficits et les besoins perçus des personnes criminalisées, une approche basée sur les forces qui promeut la guérison, la résilience et les connexions relationnelles est nécessaire pour construire des communautés sûres, inclusives et bienveillantes.

Mots-clés : Confinement genré ; Réintégration basée sur les forces ; Résilience ; Résistance ; Solidarité ; Justice transformative.

Dedicated to the loving memory of my dear friend Sarah Speight, whose capacity to care for others despite struggling with trauma was inspirational.

And

For my Dad, who instilled a love of learning in me at an early age, launched me on my academic journey, and supported me throughout all the challenges I've faced.

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Anyone who has written a graduate thesis or a book, is aware that such a project is extremely time-consuming and cannot be produced alone. This dissertation is the culmination of over a decade of lived experience within the carceral system, which fortunately included a return to academia. There are hundreds of people I have encountered during my journey through the system and my return to the community, in my personal, activist, and scholarly activities, that have influenced my intellectual development and social justice actions. Everyone I have encountered since my initial arrest in 2011, especially the people I met in prison, have shaped and guided this project. One person I met inside, Bobbie Kidd, was a key inspiration for this research. Bobbie's sense of humour and ability to maintain a positive outlook, despite decades entangled in the system, along with her determination to fight for prisoner justice and her own freedom demonstrated resilience, strength, and solidarity.

I wish to sincerely thank everyone who generously shared their time, personal insights, and experiences with me in an interview. The conversations we had were a rich learning experience for me. I was honoured and deeply humbled by the trust people bestowed on me as they shared deeply personal stories of strength and survival. Obviously, this research would not have been possible without you. I hope that this project has done justice to the rich narratives and wisdom you shared with me.

One of the most significant reasons I was able to even contemplate returning to university following my incarceration is the Walls to Bridges (W2B) program. The brief space I have here does not provide enough room to express my deep gratitude to

everyone who has been involved with W2B as students, instructors, trainees, facilitators, and collective members. Being in the W2B circle has contributed to my listening skills, enabled me to bring my whole self into everything I do, and taught me the value of collaborative learning. I especially wish to thank Shoshana Pollack, Simone Davis, and Victoria Poe, who visited us for years in prison to collaborate, teach, and learn together. The knowledge and compassion you imparted was invaluable. When I discovered the program in 2014 and had the opportunity to take a university course as a prisoner, my life trajectory was forever altered. The experiential, relational, and wholistic learning approach of W2B impacted me on a deep level and helped me to survive the trauma of imprisonment. The W2B classes and opportunities for leadership within the collectives, both inside and outside prison walls, were humanizing and empowering. I also want to thank Tiina Eldridge, Lorraine Pinnock, Denise Edwards, Mellissa Alexander, Monica Freitas, and everyone in the Ontario community collective for catching me when I was released from prison and supporting me during my return to community. All the workshops, trainings, and meetings we've shared and collaborated on have demonstrated the skills, talents, strengths, solidarity, and resilience of criminalized people.

The W2B program is also where I met my doctoral supervisor, Jennifer Kilty, and one of my committee members, Sandra Lehalle, both of whom participated in the W2B instructor training in 2015 that was facilitated by the GVI collective. I connected with Jen during a lunch break on one of the training days. She not only informed me I could return to university once I was released but encouraged me to apply to the criminology program at the University of Ottawa and offered to be my supervisor. We corresponded by mail over the next two years, and once I returned to the community, she assisted with my

application process. Thank you, Jen, for finding me in prison, providing me with hope for a meaningful future, and your steadfast compassion and support over the years. Your guidance through the challenges of navigating a PhD, the opportunities you provided me through RA work and publishing, and your “ruthless editing” of my early drafts of this manuscript have been invaluable. I wouldn’t have gotten here without you.

Sandra Lehalle also returned to GVI for a 2-day advanced instructor training session offered by the W2B collective in 2017, which I co-facilitated just a few days before my release. When I informed Sandy that I’d be attending uOttawa the following September, she offered to serve as a committee member. I want to thank Sandy for her kindness, enthusiasm, and dedication to the W2B program and criminalized people. I’ve appreciated all the conversations we’ve shared and your comments on my work, which helped me think more deeply about my ethics, methodology, and conceptual framework.

Another significant factor that supported my return to academia was the opportunities I had to begin publishing while I was still incarcerated, through the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP)*. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to this journal as a writer or editor. Having a venue dedicated to amplifying the voices of currently and formerly incarcerated people allows us to feel valued and provides an outlet for our insights about and frustration with the carceral system. The *JPP* enabled me to exercise my writing skills and connect with prisoners all over the world. This is also where I connected with Justin Piché, co-editor of *JPP*, and my second committee member. I was fortunate to publish two articles in the *JPP*, while I was incarcerated, which was an empowering experience. My work has benefited greatly from Justin’s insightful comments on earlier drafts of my thesis, the many articles and books he

suggested I engage with, and the conversations we've had about the carceral system and abolition. I also appreciate how you welcomed me into community organizing spaces in Ottawa, and the opportunities you provided to me through TA and RA work.

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she lost most of her family in WWII, was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp from the age of 12 and survived the Holocaust. Years later, she escaped communist Hungary as a refugee with her young family and immigrated to Canada with virtually nothing. After many years of hard work, she and her husband purchased a farm in Beamsville, Ontario, where they established a very successful business. Grandma Vera was always family-oriented and used her wealth to generously support and provide opportunities for her loved ones. I am truly blessed to have so many people who love and support me, unconditionally.

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List of Acronyms

CAEFS	Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
CHRC	Canadian Human Rights Commission
CCLA	Canadian Civil Liberties Association
CCRA	Correctional and Conditional Release Act
CA	Community Assessment
CRF	Community Residential Facilities
CBPR	Community Based Participatory Research
CD	Commissioner's Directive
CSC	Correctional Service of Canada
CIB	Correctional Intervention Board
CM	Correctional Manager
CR	Critical Realism
ERT	Emergency Response Team
FPS	Fingerprint System
FSW	Federally Sentenced Women
GVI	Grand Valley Institution
HTJ	Healing and Transformative Justice
OSL	Offender Security Level
OCI	Office of the Correctional Investigator
JPP	Journal of Prisoners on Prisons
PO	Parole Officer
PBC	Parole Board of Canada
PST	Peer Support Team
PW	Primary Worker
P4W	Prison for Women
P4WMC	Prison for Women Memorial Collective
PJD	Prisoners' Justice Day
PT	Provincial-Territorial
REB	Research Ethics Board
RNR	Risk-Need-Responsivity
RJ	Restorative Justice
SIO	Security Intelligence Officer
SMP	Self-management Plan
SPO	Social Program Officer

SIP	Social Integration Program
Seg	Segregation
W2B	Walls to Bridges
UN	United Nations
SIU	Structured Intervention Unit

Introduction: The Unbreakable Spirit of Resilient Prisoners

The Unbroken (poem by Rashani, 1991)

There is a brokenness
Out of which comes the unbroken,
A shatteredness out of which blooms the
unshatterable.

There is a sorrow
Beyond all grief which leads to joy
And a fragility
Out of which depth emerges strength.

There is a hollow space
Too vast for words
Through which we pass with each loss,
Out of whose darkness we are sanctified into being.

There is a cry deeper than all sound
Whose serrated edges cut the heart
As we break open
To the place inside which is unbreakable
And whole, while learning to sing.

What if justice is about healing from grief and pain, transforming our brokenness into joy and strength? How might we survive the journey into darkness and emerge as whole persons with an unbreakable spirit? How can we nurture the conditions where song and joy emerge from a shattered heart? This poem brilliantly describes the transformation that is possible when we embrace our suffering and draw strength from the place deep inside us, beyond the hollow darkness.

I came across this poem shortly after beginning my doctoral studies in criminology, while I was still under parole supervision. I had barely begun healing from the trauma of imprisonment and was still coping with the challenges of community re-entry. I cried the first time I read this poem. I had constructed a wall around my heart, burying my pain and emotions deep inside after surviving two decades of interpersonal and carceral violence. My true self was hidden behind a hardened yet fractured exterior. This poem's paradoxical words facilitated my healing journey, allowing me to break open and find "the place deep inside which is unbreakable and whole."

Beyond these deeply personal reasons, I opened with this poem because it speaks to the strength and resiliency I observed among my fellow prisoners while I was incarcerated. During my time in prison, I was struck by how much strength many incarcerated people exhibited while dealing with past and on-going trauma. Amidst suffering and perceived brokenness, they still maintained a capacity for joy, laughter, caring relationships, celebration, and hope. These prisoners remain unbroken.

When I decided to pursue a PhD in criminology and became immersed in the literature, I noticed that most research, even within critical feminist studies, focused on

the pain, needs, and vulnerabilities of incarcerated women. There was limited discussion of how people survive imprisonment and the strengths they mobilize as they journey through the darkness of the carceral system. I believe we need a more holistic understanding of criminalized women and gender-diverse people to challenge pathologizing discourse and frameworks that depict this population as vulnerable and needy, or difficult to manage.

Historically, criminology has taken a deficit-focused or risk and needs-based approach to examining criminological issues (Kewley, 2017). “Correctional” programming and policies employ a psychological lens, portraying women as having disordered thinking, irrational behaviours, various personality disorders, along with many risk factors and needs that require “fixing” (Pollack, 2004). In response, there has been a proliferation of critical literature documenting incarcerated women’s harmful coping strategies in reaction to structural oppression and interpersonal harms, such as self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, and substance abuse (e.g., Auditor General, 2017; Chamberlen, 2018; CHRC, 2003; Dell, Desjarlais, & Kilty, 2011; Fillmore & Dell, 2005; Kilroy, 2005; Kilty, 2011, 2012, 2014; Mahoney, 2011; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Neve & Pate, 2005; Zinger, 2018, 2019). Less is known about incarcerated women’s strengths, skills, solidarity, and resilience. Despite experiencing oppressive social conditions which limit their actions and choices, incarcerated women possess various *helpful* coping skills and personal resources that they use to survive (Pollack, 2004). While some literature touching on the strengths of incarcerated women began to emerge in the 21st century, most of this research has focused on developing strength-based “correctional” programming (Fedock & Covington, 2022).

Similarly, there is limited research documenting resistance in women's prisons (aside from a few key studies - Bosworth, 1999; Bosworth & Carrabine, 2001; Carlton & Russel, 2018; Klein, 2024; Law, 2012; Faith, 2011; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Fili, 2013), particularly in the Canadian context. Few studies examine the importance of relational connections for people in prisons designated for women (e.g., Deakin & Spencer, 2011; de Graff & Kilty, 2016; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Klein, 2024; Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002; Pollack & Edwards, 2018). Additionally, most criminological research has focused on men's criminalization and imprisonment, primarily basing theoretical claims on the male norm (Comack, 2014a; Davis, 2003; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; McCorkel, 2003; Moore & Scraton, 2014). There is also a lack of strength-based research with gender-diverse prisoners, beyond a single study of a prisoner-led intervention for federally incarcerated Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in Canada (see Ryan, Ali & Sabourin, 2020).

This project aims to provide a more wholistic understanding of incarcerated women and gender-diverse people's identities by challenging the prevalence of deficit-focused narratives and demonstrating the characteristics of resilient¹ prisoners. Furthermore, a key research goal is to promote the strengths and well-being of criminalized women and gender-diverse people to help shift the societal narratives that

¹ When talking about resilience, I frame this concept within a multi-level analysis. I aim to move beyond an individual, psychological understanding of resilience towards a socio-relational perspective that is outside the prevailing Western-European conceptualization. Resilience cannot be reduced to individual characteristics and choices. Instead, we need a paradigmatic shift, examining resilience through a community-oriented framework. My attempt is to interpret where resilience emerges from and how it is formed and sustained. I explore in detail the notion of resilience in *Chapter 2*.

depict them in predominantly negative ways and research approaches that primarily focus on their pain and suffering. This project highlights the importance of moving beyond an individual or psychological level of analysis to explore the importance of relational connections and inclusive community-building efforts.

In terms of the scope of this project, I have spoken to people who served federal sentences in Canadian prisons designated for women since the year 2000, along with professionals who work with federally sentenced women (FSW) in prison or the community. This study centres on recognizing, supporting, and promoting agency, strengths, hope, resilience, solidarity, and resistance within this population.

The research questions guiding this project include: (a) How do people in prisons designated for women cope with and navigate imprisonment? What positive or healthy coping strategies are most beneficial for them? (b) What is the role of incarcerated people's healthy coping strategies, solidarity, and resistance in their experience of prison? (c) How do Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) policies and practices promote or inhibit solidarity and asset-based coping strategies among prisoners? (d) What are the implications of these policies and practices for prisoners' experiences of community re-entry?

The significance of exploring these research questions and potential contributions to the literature include the development of a conceptual framework for understanding prisoner resilience and illustrating how this relates to healing and transformative justice (HTJ). This framework recognizes incarcerated people's abolitionist organizing and

engagement with HTJ praxis. Furthermore, mobilizing prisoner resilience can contribute to carceral abolition efforts and structures for supporting this work.

Criminology has done little to explore how engaging in positive experiences can support criminalized people and prevent further conflict with the law (Ronel & Eisha, 2011). This study contributes to the emerging sub-discipline of positive criminology using a more critical perspective, by showcasing the positive contributions that criminalized people can offer to their communities and society at large. As a result, this research has the potential to upend socially constructed stereotypes of women's lawbreaking, which may subsequently impact how they are treated as harmful depictions (e.g., of women as unruly, difficult to manage, hysterical) typically result in repressive penal policies and practices, which suppress prisoners' strengths. Employing strength-based interventions are also critical to supporting prisoner re-entry (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004; Burnett & Maruna, 2006; Maruna & LeBel, 2003).

My central assertion throughout this manuscript is that promoting criminalized people's strengths and fostering prisoner resilience can buffer the impact of the harmful conditions of confinement, support community re-entry, and contribute to transformative social change. I argue that the harms of the carceral state are severe and extensive, leading to further exclusion of some of the most marginalized people in society. Rather than interventions targeting the perceived deficits and needs of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, a strengths-based approach that promotes healing, resilience, and relational connections is needed to build safe, inclusive, caring communities.

Recognizing subjectivity is inherent to social research, I mobilize standpoint feminism to prioritize the positionality of criminalized women and gender-diverse people and produce knowledge grounded from multiple standpoints. My epistemological stance for this project is framed within the critical or transformative paradigm, which aims to facilitate radical social change and liberation from oppression, while recognizing social ethics and power relations (Denzin, 2017; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2017). Since this project is also based on my lived experiences of incarceration, I incorporated autoethnography and engaged in on-going critical self-reflexivity throughout the project sharing my story alongside participant narratives.

Research methods were guided by feminist communitarian ethics which centre a moral and ethical commitment to my community of criminalized people grounded in a universal respect for human dignity. I used an iterative approach to qualitative inquiry, with a flexible, emergent research design. Purposeful sampling strategies were employed to invite participants that represent the diversity of people incarcerated in prisons designated for women (e.g., cultural backgrounds, age, length of sentence, different regional prisons, gender identity, sexuality, and security level). I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, conversational style interviews with 20 criminalized and 13 key informant participants. To guide data collection and interpretation, I implemented a hybridized approach to analysis and theorizing that combines grounded theory, thematic narrative analysis, autoethnography, and values from community-engaged research.

Structure of the Text

The first half of this manuscript provides a critical review of the literature, the theoretical concepts used for analysis, and the research methodology employed to explore incarcerated women and gender-diverse people's resiliency. In *Chapter 1*, I begin by presenting background context on the structure of Canada's penal system, focusing on the federal prison system designated for women and governed by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). I provide an overview of some key characteristics shared by criminalized and imprisoned women and then explore the ideological and structural factors that shape women's criminalization.

Next, I examine the gendered experience of people in prisons designated for women, highlighting how these federally sentenced people are pathologized in literature that centres their needs as risks, and deficits. I examine correctional discourse to unpack the nature of "women-centred corrections" in Canada. I discuss the ideological notions of penal paternalism and passive femininity, which frame how the system perceives the 'ideal woman prisoner'. I then examine some of the negative implications of prison policies and practices which suppress positive forms of coping, acts of solidarity, and women's agency while simultaneously enabling harmful coping strategies; these policies and practices ultimately result in precarious community re-entry experiences and outcomes. I continue the discussion by envisioning what changing this harmful, oppressive system would look like if we instead foregrounded the strengths and resiliency of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, and the value of collective resistance.

Chapter 2 presents theoretical reflections on the limitations of penal reformation and the potential of abolitionist efforts for addressing the many inequities and acts of discriminatory violence experienced by people incarcerated in prisons designated for women. By identifying gaps in the literature on criminalized people in prisons designated for women, *Chapter 2* develops a strength-based conceptual framework to guide this research, which I argue more accurately describes the characteristics and experiences of women and gender-diverse prisoners than do the deficit-based terms that are commonly used. I briefly explore its potential as an organizing framework for asset-oriented theories, research, and sociopolitical actions focused on promoting the strengths and resiliency of criminalized people. Ultimately, this is a conceptual framework for understanding prisoner resilience, which I connect to central features of healing and transformative justice (HTJ). I conceptualize asset-oriented terms (i.e., resiliency, strength-based coping, hope and inner strength, agency, resistance, and solidarity), while emphasizing the value of implementing a strength-based approach to research and social interventions with marginalized groups in both the community and institutional contexts.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological framework for this project. Following an overview of the project's guiding research questions, I discuss the philosophical basis of this study including its' epistemological (i.e., standpoint feminism) and ontological (i.e., critical realism) orientations. Next, I provide a detailed synopsis of the critical self-reflexive process and discuss key ethical considerations. I proceed to outline the emergent research design I employed along with the data collection methods, including an overview of autoethnography, participant recruitment, the sample, and interview process. Then, I review the methods of data analysis and interpretation I invoked, and I

conclude the chapter by reflecting on the strengths and challenges of conducting critical criminological research as a criminalized person.

The second half of this dissertation elucidates the findings from this study, organized into three distinct, yet interconnected chapters. *Chapter 4* presents the findings related to the harms of the carceral state, which extend from the prison to the community. The purpose of *Chapter 4* is to illustrate the context in which women and gender diverse people's agency, hope, resistance, solidarity, strength, and resilience is tested and restricted inside prisons designated for women. This foundation is essential because the strength-based findings illuminated in chapters 5 and 6 cannot be understood without first underscoring the oppressive conditions of confinement and carceral controls that prisoners must endure and survive both in the prison and the community.

Chapter 5 presents the findings related to prisoner resilience despite the carceral harms outlined in the previous chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the strengths-based findings in the context of the conceptual framework outlined in *Chapter 2* and thus to explore the characteristics of resilient prisoners. Beginning with the individual as the locus for prisoner resilience, this discussion proceeds from the personal to the relational levels of analysis. I begin by identifying personal agency as a necessary precursor to enacting the strengths discussed throughout *Chapter 5*. Diverse individual strengths are identified as promoting coping and healing from trauma and the oppressive conditions of confinement. I then discuss how prisoners maintain a sense of hope and inner strength despite extreme adversity. Resilient prisoners also possess several relational strengths, contributing to their capacity for resistance and solidarity. Next, I demonstrate how resistance to oppression occurs through individual acts against penal

authority. Resisting the punitive isolation of the penal system coincides with prisoner solidarity and efforts to build caring communities as we work towards prisoner and social justice. Finally, I discuss the notion of relational resilience, which is an outcome of maintaining meaningful relationships and recognizing shared experiences, especially during difficult times.

As the final analysis chapter, *Chapter 6* moves beyond the individual and relational levels of analysis, to the collective level, to explore criminalized women and gender diverse people's potential to contribute to radical social change through collective resistance, political agency, and healing transformative justice praxis. *Chapter 6* begins by examining collective acts of resistance which entails larger scale group organizing that targets carceral harms and injustice. Next, I illuminate the development of political agency among prisoners, which provides women and gender diverse people with opportunities to effect change within the lives of other criminalized and incarcerated people. Finally, in resistance to the punitive carceral state, current and former prisoners engage in transformative and healing justice practices out of necessity and survival. *Chapter 6* ends by showcasing some key roles that resilient prisoners can have in promoting HTJ praxis, along with some ideas for transformative social change.

In the *Conclusion*, I revisit the overall findings to explain the significance of this research and the implications of this study, focusing on the value of fostering prisoner resilience. I argue that enhancing prisoner resilience can mediate carceral harms and support the development of a more healing and transformative approach to justice. Mobilizing criminalized people's strengths and resiliency contributes to our collective healing, transforming our social relations, and supporting efforts to build safer, inclusive

communities. In the concluding chapter, I consider some theoretical and conceptual implications of this project, along with some practical policy suggestions and other recommendations for change. Finally, I consider some of the limitations of this study and outline core ideas for future research directions.

Chapter 1.

Literature Review

In Canada, there is a two-tiered penal system consisting of provincial/territorial (PT) jails and federal prisons. The PT level houses people awaiting trial or sentencing and who were unable to get bail (i.e., they are detained on remand or pre-trial detention), as well as prisoners sentenced to a maximum of two years, less a day for summary conviction offences. Federal prisons incarcerate those who have been convicted of indictable offences and sentenced to a minimum of two years to a maximum of life in prison. All federal prisoners are initially incarcerated in the provincial system prior to being transferred to a federal penitentiary. There are six different federal institutions designated for women located across the country.²

Legislation and operating guidelines for PT jails fall under the jurisdiction of each provincial or territorial government, typically under the Ministry of Justice or Public Safety. In practice, this means that the conditions inside each provincial or territorial penal institution vary, and legal challenges or policy changes must be addressed by that government body. The PT system in Canada has been characterized as a harsh environment of disruption and uncertainty (Pelvin, 2017) with an interpersonal culture marked by punishment, control, and gender discrimination (Bernier, 2010), violence, tension, mistrust, and maltreatment (McKendy, 2018).

² From the east to the west coast of Canada, the locations of each federal prison for women are as follows: Nova Institution in Truro, Nova Scotia; Joliette Institution in Joliette, Quebec; Grand Valley Institution (GVI) in Kitchener, Ontario; Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan; Edmonton Institution in Edmonton, Alberta; and Fraser Valley Institution (FVI) in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Prisoners reside in maximum or medium-security conditions, confined to a range or unit, in cells or dormitories and have extremely limited access to programs or basic resources; this is especially the case for women (Bernier, 2010). Very few programs, services, and supports specifically designed for women exist at the provincial level (Shaw, 1994). Within the PT penal system, women and men are incarcerated in the same facilities, on different units. This means the institutions are based on the security needs of a primarily male population. In 2016, women accounted for just 16% of adults admitted to the PT “correctional” system (Reitano, 2017). Women are most often charged with property crimes rather than serious violent “offences,” (Comack, 2014a) which means they are more likely to receive shorter sentences than men and have less time to engage in programming. Due to economies of scale, the average annual cost of imprisoning women is significantly higher than imprisoning men³. Fewer women, shorter sentences with less “risk” to public safety, and higher costs of incarceration has resulted in women and gender-diverse people’s needs being overlooked.

While conditions in Canadian federal penitentiaries are less than ideal, prisoners do have access to personal items, hygiene and cleaning products, various resources (such as access to outdated computers, musical instruments, sports equipment, hobby craft items, gardening tools) and marginally better living quarters. The federal system is governed by a single body — the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) — and the regulations and policies are universal

³ Data available related to the cost of incarcerating women in the PT penal system across Canada is extremely limited. According to Statistics Canada (2022c), the average annual cost of imprisoning an adult in the PT system is \$119 355. These data are not broken down by gender. In the federal penitentiary system, the average annual “inmate” cost for females is \$222 942, whereas the annual average cost for incarcerating males is \$121 352 (Public Safety Canada, 2023).

regardless of the province in which the penitentiary is located, with the caveat that there are different practices applied to people in prisons designated for women, which I explore below. Due to the complicated and varying nature of the PT jail system, this project examines the experiences of federally sentenced women (FSW)⁴ and gender-diverse people. Additionally, while I have experience with pre-sentence custody inside the provincial system, the bulk of my lived expertise and advocacy/activism efforts have been with the federal system. This focus on CSC facilitates a more in-depth analysis and coherent data set.

I begin my review of the literature by detailing some of the common characteristics of criminalized women in Canada, many of which are shared with imprisoned women around the world. Following this micro analysis, I reflect on various structural and ideological factors related to carceral power and women's criminalization. I then touch on the concept of intersectionality and explore the gendered experience of women in prison. I continue by examining how FSW are pathologized in literature through focused discussions of their needs, risks, and deficits. Next, I briefly review correctional discourse on FSW and unpack the nature of so-called "women-centred" corrections in Canada. I highlight the ideological perspectives of penal paternalism and passive femininity, which frame what the system deems the 'ideal woman prisoner'. I then examine some of the negative implications of prison policies and practices which suppress positive forms of coping, acts of solidarity, and women's agency while simultaneously enabling harmful coping strategies; these policies and practices ultimately result

⁴ In Canada, all federally sentenced people are incarcerated in a provincial-territorial jail prior to their transfer to prison for at least two weeks, even those who were on bail in the community prior to sentencing. Canadian prisoners cannot turn themselves in to a federal prison, so are initially processed by the provincial-territorial system.

in precarious community re-entry experiences and outcomes. I continue the discussion by envisioning what changing this harmful, oppressive system would look like if we instead foregrounded the strengths and resiliency of criminalized women and the value of collective resistance before providing some concluding comments.

1.1. Imprisoning Women

Multiple feminist and critical scholars have identified the relative historical absence of literature on women in prison, especially within mainstream criminology which bases its theoretical claims on the male norm (Comack, 2014a; Davis, 2003; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Moore & Scraton, 2014). This assumption about the universal nature of imprisonment is problematic when considering the experiences of incarcerated women. As Jill McCorkel (2003, p. 71) asserts, “in a model in which masculinity serves as the normative baseline, women’s unique experiences and needs are rendered either invisible or deviant.” However, there is a growing body of literature on criminalized women that acknowledges that women are experts on their own lives and that social science research must adequately consider the forms of oppression that women experience (Comack, 2014a).

On a global scale, criminalized women are most likely to engage in petty law-breaking related to poverty and drug-related offences, while only a very small minority of women are convicted of violent crimes, which are often related to surviving different forms of abuse (Bloom, Owen, Covington, 2004; Brooks, 2015; Comack, 2014a; Kilroy & Pate, 2011; UN General Assembly, 2010). Both nationally and internationally most criminalized women are victims of gendered violence (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Comack, 2014a; UN General Assembly, 2010) and many are survivors of sexual assault (Zinger, 2018), with some estimates suggesting

over 70% of FSW in Canada have survived sexual abuse (Sapers, 2015). Approximately 86% of women prisoners in Canada have experienced some form of physical abuse (Sapers, 2015) and many have histories of suicide attempts (Auditor General, 2017). FSW are also three times more likely than men to suffer from depression and to engage in self-harming behaviours (CHRC, 2003; Sapers, 2013). Based on these histories of violence, trauma, and underlying mental distress, research indicates that violence perpetrated by women prisoners is commonly directed toward the self (i.e., self-harm and suicide), whereas men are more likely to inflict violence on other prisoners or staff (Moore & Scraton, 2014).

The significant trauma that marginalized women have survived has led to large numbers of FSW experiencing mental health issues and substance abuse problems (Auditor General, 2017; CHRC, 2003; CSC, 2018c; Mahoney, 2011; Zinger, 2018). The vast majority of FSW experience psychiatric symptoms (CSC, 2012a; Zinger, 2019), and approximately half of all FSW are prescribed psychotropic medications (CSC, 2015a). Additionally, women with mental health issues are often placed in maximum security or segregation (CSC, 2012b), which exacerbates their distress due to the austere conditions of confinement, social isolation, and lack of therapeutic resources (Kilty, 2006, 2012, 2014; Zinger, 2017).

The federal female prison population is much smaller than the male population, more diverse, and tends to be less involved with lawbreaking (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2001; Mahoney, 2011; Zinger, 2017, 2018). FSW are typically young (under age 35), first-time lawbreakers, and about 75% of federally imprisoned women are single parents of minor children (CHRC, 2003; Kilroy & Pate, 2011; Mahoney, 2011; Sapers, 2014). According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC, 2003), FSW are much more likely than male prisoners to

have primary childcare responsibilities, yet maintaining contact with their children is a significant challenge (Moore & Scraton, 2014).

Over the past few decades, women's lawbreaking has been intricately connected to the feminization of poverty and the "war on drugs" (Bloom, Owen, and Covington, 2004; Comack, 2014a; Roberts, 2017). This makes community re-entry an especially salient issue for FSW who tend to have lower educational attainment than incarcerated men and are less likely to have employable skills, job references, or an employment history, and higher rates of addiction and substance abuse with limited access to appropriate treatment options (CHRC, 2003; Kilroy & Pate, 2011; Mahoney, 2011; Zinger, 2017, 2018, 2019). While these different needs, characteristics, and health issues are important to document, this does not illustrate the entire picture. Women's identities are complex and dynamic, shifting over time and place; this means that women adapt to changing contexts whereby their diverse social, cultural, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual qualities interact to oppress or privilege the individual in different ways.

Indigenous and racialized women are greatly overrepresented in Canada's criminal legal system and are more likely to receive harsher sentences than their white counterparts (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Zinger, 2022, 2024). Recent research into the use of force within federal institutions indicates that racialized prisoners are 2.5 times more likely to be involved in use of force than non-racialized prisoners (Zinger, 2021). According to the Correctional Investigator,

since *Creating Choices*⁵ was released and the new regional facilities for women opened across Canada, the number of federally sentenced women has more than quadrupled from 144 in 1990-1991 to 583 admissions in 2023-2024. During this same time the number of Indigenous women has increased by almost 75%, now making up 46% of all imprisoned women, and 65% of the maximum-security population in Canada (Zinger, 2024).

There is a long history in criminology and other social sciences of minimizing, individualizing, or completely ignoring women's lived realities. Although men represent the vast majority of prisoners, as Angela Davis reminds us (2003, p. 65) "important aspects of the operation of state punishment are missed if it is assumed that women are marginal and thus undeserving of attention." Critical and feminist criminological research over the past few decades has emerged to fill this gap. Prior to surveying some of the relevant feminist literature on criminalized women in Canada, it is necessary to consider the macro-level structural factors that are linked to the feminization of poverty and to the increased criminalization of women that western nations have experienced through the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

1.2. The Importance of the Political-Economic Context: Structural Factors and Carceral Power Relations Related to Women's Criminalization

From a social justice perspective, there are many inequalities in our society that are aggravated by interlocking systems of oppression that function across lines of race, class, ability,

⁵ *Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* was released in 1990 based on a multisectoral collaborative research process to develop a "woman-centred approach" to the federal prison system for women. This report and its implications are discussed in more detail below.

sexuality, and gender. Such obvious disenfranchisement of certain groups is antithetical to democratic principles, especially since disproportionate numbers of people from different marginalized groups are deprived of their liberty and sent to prison. To understand the link between democracy and the prison system it is necessary to examine relevant structural factors, and establish which institutions enable and constrain the pursuit of democratic ‘criminal justice’ ideals. Davis and Mendieta (2005) argue that if we hope to experience authentic democracy in society, it is necessary to enact abolition democracy or “the abolition of institutions that advance the dominance of one group over any other” (p. 14). Punishment provides a complex social function and is entangled in different political tactics (Foucault, 1977) as the law and penal system are used as “tool[s] of profit and power of the dominant class” (Foucault, 1977, p. 280). If we hope to establish an alternative social order by engaging in radical transformative change, it is critical to comprehend and elucidate structural issues to determine targets of intervention and gain the public support necessary for transforming the legal system (Lacey, 2008).

Neoliberal austerity policies are a class project, having especially detrimental impacts on racialized women, who are more likely to end up in prison. The increased criminalization of women since the 1980s (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Bruckert & Law, 2018; Roberts, 2017) is linked to economic marginalization – especially for racialized women – under the rise of neoliberalism (Roberts, 2017). The gender pay gap and shifts in dynamics of social reproduction are other precursors to this trend (*ibid.*). While these structural issues underlying women’s law-breaking are acknowledged superficially in CSC policy, in practice, CSC governance and rehabilitation efforts have been shown to reinforce gendered power relations through neoliberal techniques of governance (Pollack & Kendall, 2005). These governance techniques focus on individual responsabilization of “offenders” via disciplinary practices that prioritize self-

regulation and strive to “correct” or normalize so-called failed citizens (Pollack, 2005, 2007). Prisoners are perceived as being responsible for their own reformation as the key principles of *Creating Choices* such as empowerment and shared responsibility have been co-opted and mobilized by CSC to responsibilize individual prisoners (Hannah-Moffat, 2001). Broadly speaking, the Canadian legal system exacerbates inequalities that contribute to experiences of gendered, structural violence (Bruckert & Law, 2018).

Despite criminal legal systems being subjected to national laws (including constitutional law) and international regulatory structures (e.g., UN Bangkok Rules, 2010; UN Mandela Rules, 2015), these policies are often breached within the dark corridors of the prison. The “power to punish” is therefore unimpeded and only “weakly constrained by standards such as the prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment” (Lacey, 2008, p. 100). Marginalized and racialized communities are subjected to over-policing, surveillance, suspicion, and arrest through practices such as racial profiling, carding, and CCTV monitoring in low-income urban neighbourhoods (Maynard, 2017). Those arrested who do not have access to effective legal representation or qualify for bail are imprisoned in pre-trial detention centres, where many are coerced into plea-bargaining or pleading guilty without a trial to avoid lengthier periods of incarceration (Euvrard & Leclerc, 2017). Once incarcerated, prisoners face harassment, violence, limited or no contact with their families, and time in solitary confinement – all of which can be framed as cruel and unusual forms of punishment. CSC specifically has a long history of lacking transparency and violating their own policies and the rule of law, often leading experts to call for external oversight to ensure they adhere to their governing legislation (e.g., Arbour, 1996; Sprott & Doob, 2021; Zinger, 2018).

As Foucault (1977) found almost fifty years ago, contemporary prisons do not achieve their stated goals to deter or prevent crime (Mathiesen, 2006; Webster & Doob, 2012) or to rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Mathiesen, 2006). Instead, the prison functions ideologically as an abstract site where “undesirables” are hidden behind walls and fences, facilitating our ignorance about the real issues afflicting the impoverished communities from which they disproportionately come. This is the ideological work that the prison performs—relieving us from the “responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society” (Davis, 2003, p. 16).

1.3. The Ideological Nature of Penal Policies and the Role of the Prison

The continued and increasing presence of penal institutions in society despite numerous sources of evidence suggesting the prison is unable to achieve its stated functions (e.g., Davis, 2003; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Mathiesen, 2006; Webster & Doob, 2012) can partially be attributed to the ideological utility of the prison (Cohen, 1985; Mathiesen, 2006). As extant literature demonstrates (e.g., Arbour, 1996; Chartrand & Kilty, 2018; Davis, 2002, 2003; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Liebling, 2011; Pollack, 2009; Zinger, 2018), there is a gap between legislated policy and practice.

For example, feminists and prisoner advocates have different and conflicting perspectives on the meaning of terms such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘healing’ when compared to “correctional” administrators (Pollack, 2000, 2005, 2009). Canada’s federal penal system embraces the ideological policy rhetoric of empowerment and meaningful choices that originated in feminist thought; however, minimal progressive changes have been made in terms of internal correctional discourse or programs as a result of these policy changes (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000;

Hannah-Moffat, 2001). In a similar fashion, Pollack (2005) contends that correctional mental health programs privilege psychological discourse rooted in the medical model, which serves to regulate women's behaviour in ways that often do not empower or support them, as claimed in CSC's mandate. In fact, it is ironic to claim that prisons can be used to empower women when ample evidence shows that imprisonment undermines the espoused goal of rehabilitation, much less empowerment (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Kilty, 2012, 2014; Mathiesen, 2006). Prison is inherently violent. Emotional, psychological, and often physical pain is an intrinsic aspect of the experience of incarceration (Crewe, 2011b), making the prison a less-than-ideal institution for 'empowering women' to live 'meaningful' lives with 'respect' and 'dignity.'

According to Thomas Mathiesen (2006), a well-known prison abolitionist, the ideological role of the prison is to legitimize the system by making it appear meaningful. Incarceration thus serves the ideological purpose of punishment, providing citizens with the "most observable types of sanction in society" (Mathiesen, 2006, p. 142). The contemporary prison has replaced public torture (Foucault, 1977) with an "equally observable... institutional entity" (Mathiesen, 2006, p.142) to ensure that the public has a disciplinary mechanism in place to address issues of law-breaking and public harm. Prison is the "central material, and persistent metaphorical, symbol of the state's power to punish" (Carlen, 2002a, p. 115). According to Cohen, (1985, p. 22) ideology is important "insofar as it succeeds at passing off as fair, acceptable or even just and humane, a system which is basically coercive." Furthermore, Carlen (2002b, p. 83) contends there has been a "huge and widening gap between policy rhetoric and implementation reality" concerning a "women-centred" correctional philosophy. I explore the implications of these contradictions below, and argue that we must adopt an intersectional, holistic perspective to account for the gendered experiences of people in prisons designated for women, which I link to the

pathologizing “correctional” discourses that are commonly invoked to explain and address women’s so-called criminality.

1.4. Intersectionality, Holistic Perspectives, and Gendered Experiences of People in Prisons Designated for Women

While recognizing the significance of gender, it is crucial to acknowledge the heterogeneity of women, so that class, race, sexual orientation, and other differences are not diminished. Hannah-Moffat (2001, p. 191) reminds us that “an emphasis on the commonalities of women results in an insensitivity to the differences among women.” Women’s experiences of imprisonment and criminalization are not homogenous. Rather they are mediated by interlocking layers of oppression and privilege based on the complexity of their multiple social identities related to gender, sexuality, culture, nationality, social class, country of origin, language, religion, ability, and other markers of diversity. Throughout history, the male experience and perspective has been considered the norm by which all people are judged. Commonly, this norm has also been based on western-European cultural views promulgated by privileged, white, heterosexual men. An examination of the historical and on-going regulation and surveillance of women in Canada exposes extensive “gendered, racialized, sexualized, and class-based forms of social control” (Balfour, 2014a, p. 158).

The term *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989) emerged as a theoretical concept to highlight this complex interaction of oppressed social positions and relations that marginalized people experience. The intersections of class, race, and gender are especially salient in the lives of Indigenous women, who are among the most disadvantaged of all groups in Canadian society (Comack, 2014b; 2018). In recent years, Canada’s legal system has resulted in the mass

incarceration of Indigenous and racialized women who are more likely to get harsher sentences than their white counterparts (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Kilroy & Pate, 2011; Mahoney, 2011; Zinger, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2024). Despite this growing concern of the unequal punishment of minority groups, the lived experience of racialized prisoners, especially women, is generally lacking from histories and theoretical accounts of the prison (Moore & Scraton, 2014).

Throughout this project I use an intersectional lens to pay attention to the intersecting layers of oppression that criminalized women face. During the analytical phase I decided not to conduct an intersectional analysis of the interview data because I do not want to impose my interpretations as a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, female, on participant narratives. I am, however, sensitive to intersecting areas of oppression and the over-representation of marginalized groups in penal settings. Similarly, the principle of holism provides a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted lives of criminalized women, by recognizing prisoners as whole persons and acknowledging the physical, emotional, mental, and emotional aspects of who we are. This research explores women prisoners' strengths, talents, resilience, resistance, and solidarity through a holistic lens.

Comack (2014b) asserts that we need to better appreciate the nature of women's involvement in 'crime', the way various layers of oppression intersect in the lives of criminalized women, and how these oppressions contribute to women's pathways into lawbreaking. Women prisoners tend to be socially invisible and exhibit characteristics that are distinct from their male counterparts. Although incarcerated women's experiences are diverse and heterogeneous, prisons are distinctly gendered (Aitken & Heenan, 2004; Moore & Scraton, 2014) in ways that reflect and reinforce socially constructed stereotypes of differences between men and women. As feminist author, activist, and former prisoner Angela Davis (2003, p. 61) points out, the policies

that guide penal practices for men and women are gendered, and “the deeply gendered character of punishment both reflects and further entrenches the gendered structure of the larger society.” Although there are overlapping issues among men and women prisoners (Jones & Schmid, 2003), women experience distinct “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958) that are connected to gendered structures that exist both within the penal system and wider society.

Research with women prisoners has shown that women typically have a higher number of perceived risk factors and tend to describe a more acutely painful experience of incarceration when compared to men (Brooks, 2015; TFFSW, 1990; CHRC, 2003; Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017). As outlined above, the characteristics of women prisoners demonstrate how criminalized women are more vulnerabilized through cis-heteropatriarchy and other structures of domination, thus experiencing significantly higher levels of trauma and various socioeconomic needs than their counterparts in men’s prisons. Shantz and Frigon (2010) found that imprisoned women have higher instances of mental health issues, chronic illness, and infectious disease, which interact with the institutional environment and have different implications for women when compared to men. A key implication for women’s institutions involves CSC’s assessment of women’s needs and risks via actuarial tools. A common result of this practice is the identification of women’s needs as potential risk factors that leads to greater use of isolation and sedation as carceral management practices (Hannah-Moffat, 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2001; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014; Kilty, 2012, 2014; Pollack, 2008).

Most opportunities for employment and skill development in women’s prisons are also highly gendered, often involving menial and domestic work, such as gardening, cosmetology, hairstyling, cleaning, cooking, and sewing (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Law, 2012; McCorkel, 2003; Pollack, 2009; Zinger, 2021). Other examples of gendered experiences include a lack of

preventive and accessible health care (Anonymous Prisoner 2, 2017; Faith, 2011; Law, 2012; Zendo, 2015) especially for those who are pregnant (Deschene, 2017), elderly (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017), or experiencing mental health issues (Bingham & Sutton, 2012; Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Moore & Scraton, 2014). Maintaining access to children is also particularly difficult for incarcerated women (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Law, 2012; Moore & Scraton, 2014) and this loss of contact with loved ones is generally more painful for female as opposed to male prisoners as they are more commonly the primary (often sole) caregivers for their children (Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017).

Other gendered prison pains that are particularly significant for women include a lack of bodily autonomy (e.g., women have been forced to have abortions or maintain unwanted pregnancies), separation from children, and issues with trust, privacy, and intimacy (Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017). For example, most incarcerated women have histories of abuse and sexual assault, meaning that common practices like strip-searching, cell-extractions, and use of force and physical restraints by guards can be especially traumatizing (Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017; Hutchison, 2020; Law, 2012; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Zinger, 2021). Finally, “correctional” officers infantilize, degrade, and treat women prisoners paternalistically in ways that are unique to women’s institutions; women experience stricter supervision when compared to men as evidenced by their elevated rates of institutional misconduct charges for relatively minor infractions. For example, in prisons designated for women, prisoners are frequently punished for intimate contact, getting tattoos, or lending and sharing food or personal items (Brooks, 2015; Deschene, 2017; Faith, 2011; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Shook & McInnis, 2017; Twaddle, Setpaul, Guerrero, Manibusan, & Riddle, 2006). While this gendered experience of suffering in prison is important to acknowledge, I maintain that the

prevalence of discussing women's needs, risks, and deficits in the literature serves to pathologize current and former women prisoners.

1.5. Correctional Discourse and Pathologizing Women: Prevalence of Needs, Risks, and Deficits

Academics have acknowledged that CSC co-opts feminist principles claiming to utilize gender-appropriate interventions, reframing victimization and mental health needs as criminogenic risk factors. Women's law-breaking is framed by the system as individual issues of choice and responsibility, while CSC ignores the systemic and structural conditions that give rise to them (Hannah-Moffat, 2004b). As McCorkel (2003, p. 69) observes during ethnographic fieldwork at an American state prison, "women are considered 'deviant criminals' in the sense that their choice of crimes is seemingly inexplicable. Their crimes are not seen as rational responses to structural conditions in the way that men's crimes are." Ultimately, this a-structural risk and responsibility-oriented discourse obscures the feminization of poverty (Roberts, 2017), systemic racism, and patriarchal violence as genuine risk factors, instead looking to the individual's personal failures as the source of criminalization meaning women must overcome systemic barriers on their own (Balfour, 2011). Canada's "correctional" system largely frames women's lawbreaking in the context of cognitive and psychological deficiencies (Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2004; Pollack & Kendall, 2005). By individualizing and framing prisoners' issues within a risk-need-responsivity framework, criminalized women are pathologized while the structural reasons for their lawbreaking remain unquestioned and intact.

More specifically, Pollack (2012) asserts that standard correctional discourses pathologize criminalized women by focusing on the individual-level psychological impacts of

gender oppression. As I mentioned above, the known structural characteristics that criminalized women face (such as poverty, abuse, racism, sexism) are typically neutralized by the prison system in favour of using individual-level psychological constructs to explain law-breaking (Carlen, 2002b; Neve & Pate, 2005) with labels such as “battered woman,” “drug addict,” “flawed,” “offender,” and “manipulative” (McCorkel, 2003) that depict women as vulnerable or innately deviant. These individual constructs are then interpreted as risks to public safety and the security of the prison (Pollack, 2008) which has implications for women’s security classification and those seeking parole.

Even though the vast majority of FSW have experienced some form of violence (Auditor General, 2017; Comack, 2014a; Sapers, 2015; Zinger, 2017, 2018, 2019), once women are arrested and convicted, they are no longer depicted as victims of abuse or assault, especially if they fought back against their attacker (Pollack, 2012). Instead, they are labelled “offenders,” and their histories of trauma and abuse are reframed as “risks for reoffending” by CSC (Hannah-Moffat, 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b). Women are said to require self-esteem and problem-solving skills, help navigating personal relationships, and assistance in taking responsibility for their “criminal” behaviour (Hannah-Moffat, 2004a; Pollack, 2000). How we, as a society, perceive criminalized women, as explicated in hegemonic “correctional” discourses, directly influences how we treat imprisoned women in policy and practice.

1.6. “Women-centred” Penal Policies and Practices in Canada

The design, policies, and procedures of penal institutions in Canada has historically been based on a male model of corrections, which prioritizes institutional security along with the control and detention of prisoners who are presumed to be inherently violent (Boritch, 1997).

This was supposed to change, when in 1990 the Canadian federal “correctional” system moved to adopt the “women-centred” model outlined in *Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. According to this report, a new philosophy for women prisoners was to be established to encourage a holistic, culturally sensitive approach for addressing women’s unique needs. The guiding principles for change outlined in CSC’s “women-centred” model include empowerment⁶, meaningful and responsible choices⁷, respect and dignity⁸, supportive environments⁹, and shared responsibility¹⁰.

Three decades after the release of this ground-breaking report on women’s incarceration in Canada, the Office of the Correctional Investigator completed a broad evaluation of CSC’s progress and commitment to the issues raised in it. The findings were critical and showed that little has changed in the treatment of FSW; with the security-driven approach taken by “corrections” there has been a significant increase in this incarcerated population as well as the continuation of traumatizing treatment and intervention practices¹¹, leading the Correctional Investigator to conclude that virtually every concern that was raised 30 years ago is still a

⁶ “Empowerment” refers to supporting women to live with respect and dignity by helping them learn how to make pro-social choices (TFFSW, 1990, p. 105-106).

⁷ CSC conceptualizes “meaningful and responsible choices” as providing women with choices that reflect their needs, morals, culture, past experiences and skills (*ibid.*, p. 108).

⁸ “Respect and dignity” refer to the mutual respect that is to be shared among and between prisoners and staff, so women can gain self-respect and “take responsibility for their future” (*ibid.*, p. 109).

⁹ This refers to “a positive lifestyle which can encourage the self-esteem, empowerment, dignity and respect for self and others to live a productive, meaningful life, [and] can only be created in an environment in which all aspects are positive and mutually supportive” (*ibid.*, p. 110).

¹⁰ “Shared responsibility” is said to be encouraged between prisoners and society to foster independence and self-reliance so women can take responsibility for their actions (*ibid.*, p. 111).

¹¹ For example, use of force incidents against women reached its highest level in the previous five years, with 266 incidents during 2018-2019, primarily focused on women with serious mental health issues who are self-harming.

concern today. This fact demonstrates why poor outcomes for FSW remain and thus why they have limited potential for successful community reintegration (Zinger, 2021). The failure of the *Creating Choices* reform project illustrates that even when the prison system recognizes women's needs, the necessary structural arrangements for meeting those needs do not always follow (Hannah-Moffat, 2001). Regardless of the success or failure of *Creating Choices*, I assert that imprisonment is not an effective or humane approach in dealing with women's lawbreaking due to the inherently violent nature of the penal system and its inability to address harmful structural conditions in society which marginalize and oppress women.

1.7. Penal Paternalism and Passive Femininity: The Ideal Woman Prisoner

From the discussion thus far, it is evident that there are structural issues related to women's criminalization, which are based on and contribute to upholding patriarchal ideals of femininity. The rise of a neoliberal responsabilization agenda since the late 1970s (Roberts, 2017) replaced the period of "penal paternalism" (McCorkel, 2004) or "penal welfare paternalism" (Roberts, 2017), however, the paternalistic treatment of imprisoned women is still common practice (Fayter & Payne, 2017). Penal paternalism is characterized by McCorkel (2004, p. 394-395) as an "ideological commitment to reform, administrative reliance on discretionary power, and informal relations between staff and inmates." According to correctional discourse and hegemonic assumptions of femininity, women are considered "monogamous and heterosexual, diligent caretakers of children and the elderly, responsible, clean, and self-restrained" (McCorkel, 2003, p. 70). Any deviations from these patriarchal assumptions and values are met with increased surveillance, as correctional staff maintain detailed reports of any behaviour that is considered "inappropriate" for women (McCorkel, 2003,

p.69). As Mary Bosworth (1999, p.59) explains, “ideas of femininity underwrite the interpretation of women in prison... [and] as a result, the women’s actions, needs, and experiences are understood in light of gender stereotypes.”

In “correctional” reports, women are often labelled as “immature” and are subject to punishment for behaviours such as writing a sexually explicit letter to a romantic partner, styling another prisoner’s hair, and breaking institutional rules around sharing food or passing a note to a friend during programming (Anonymous Prisoner 4, 2017; de Graaf & Kilty, 2016; McCorkel, 2003; Smoyer, 2015). Although women are not allowed to select which CSC programs they participate in, if they refuse or fail to meet program expectations, they face penalties such as delayed parole release or being labelled “at risk” and assigned to a higher security setting (Brooks, 2015; Hannah-Moffat, 1999). Personal relationships – romantic or otherwise – are subject to surveillance and social control, especially same-sex intimate relationships. Among incarcerated women, LGBTQ+ relationships often face a punitive response from staff, such as public shaming and embarrassment (McCorkel, 2003, p. 63), institutional disciplinary charges, and negative reports resulting in a lack of support for parole (Fayter & Payne, 2017).

Like the “ideal victim” trope in law enforcement that has been identified by feminist scholars and activists concerned with violence against women (Bruckert & Law, 2018), and building on Hannah-Moffat and Shaw’s (2000) notion of the ideal prison, I propose the notion of the *ideal prisoner*. The ideal female prisoner is a stereotypical perception of how a woman in trouble ought to behave according to white, male, heteronormative, middle-class morality. In my experience, which is echoed in feminist research (e.g., Dell, Fillmore, & Kilty, 2009; Faith, 2011; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Law, 2012), police, courts, and prison guards expect imprisoned women to be submissive, emotional and tearful, subdued and begging for help from

authorities, while cooperating without critique or being compliant and blindly following directions. This disturbing trend is explicated by Bosworth (1999, p. 56) who observes how, “it would appear that the treatment and understanding of female prisoners rests on and reinforces a notion of dependency which, in turn, reflects an anachronistic ideal of passive femininity.”

Chartrand and Kilty, (2018, p. 117) explain how “women who fail to meet normative behavioural expectations as set out by institutional policy, correctional programming, and their rehabilitative treatment and release plans are considered high risk and high need.” These needs, redefined as risks by CSC, translates into women being treated as undeserving of respect, dignity, meaningful choices, or a supportive environment, and as potentially incapable of empowerment. Instead, contradictory correctional policies and programs aim to reform, regulate, and punish “unruly” populations (Dell, Fillmore, & Kilty, 2009; Garland, 2001; Faith, 2011) and “wayward girls” (McCorkel, 2004). These harmful perceptions of women’s “criminality” have led to myriad negative implications of penal policies and practices, which serve to suppress recognition of the positive characteristics and strengths of women prisoners unless they follow all aspects of their correctional plan. The governing logics of the system involve intake, assessment, and evaluation tools to monitor prisoners by focusing on areas of change related to a perceived “criminal” identity while ignoring prisoners’ strengths. In effect, CSC is not mandated to recognize strengths but rather to protect society from the “dangerous other”.

1.8. Negative Implications of Prison Policies and Practices

Some key implications of the policies and practices of carceral settings involves the suppression of healthy or strength-based coping,¹² solidarity among prisoners¹³, and personal agency.¹⁴ On several occasions during my 3.5 years of incarceration at Grand Valley Institution (GVI), prisoners were given disciplinary charges and taken to the segregation unit for engaging in peaceful protests to challenge repressive penal practices. We experienced similar punishments when sharing or trading food, and requesting a special diet, which are examples of everyday acts of resistance that allow prisoners to exercise personal agency and engage in cultural practices (de Graaf & Kilty, 2016). Resistant actions undertaken by women prisoners can also include politically oriented hunger strikes (e.g., Faith, 2011; Hansen, 2018; Law, 2012).

While prison staff actively suppress these strength-based practices, CSC policies and practices simultaneously facilitate harmful coping strategies. For example, placing women with mental health issues in solitary confinement, isolation from family and friends in the community, the high cost of phone calls and stamps, and an inaccessible visitation program are linked to acts of self-harm, suicide, drug abuse, and over-eating (Chamberlen, 2018; de Graaf & Kilty, 2016; Dell, Desjarlais, & Kilty, 2011; Kilty, 2011; Zinger, 2018). Coping is a highly contextual

¹² Some examples of CSC practices that inhibit healthy or strength-based coping strategies among FSW include the exorbitant cost of phone calls to family and friends, limited access to hobby crafts and loss of craft materials for prisoners to use in their living units, and houseplants being destroyed and removed from living units (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Glaremin, 2011).

¹³ Examples of prisoner solidarity being suppressed by the prison include institutional rules prohibiting prisoners from sharing, lending, borrowing, or giving food, hygiene products, or any other personal items (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Glaremin, 2011).

¹⁴ A few examples of prisoner agency (i.e., the capacity for prisoners to act and make choices in their own lives) and the ways that women resist oppressive penal regimes includes developing prisoner-led programs, peer-support, education programs, and securing external support and resources for prisoner initiatives (Law, 2012; Pollack, 2019).

process, depending on the setting, situation, and the people involved. Coping is “a dynamic process that fluctuates over time according to the demands of the situation, the available resources, and a person’s ongoing appraisal and emotions” (Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias, & Dalton, 2012, p. 263).

As suggested above, feminist and other critical prison researchers and activists have demonstrated how women who resist CSC’s narratives and programming are labelled “unruly” and “difficult to manage” (Dell, Fillmore, & Kilty, 2009; Faith, 2011; Kilroy & Pate, 2011; Neve & Pate, 2005) and are often punished by disciplinary charges, negative reports, and placements in segregation or a higher security classification (Acoby, 2011; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Zinger, 2018). This can affect access to educational programs, institutional employment, contact with family and friends in the community, and parole eligibility (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Hannah-Moffat, 2001). The paternalistic treatment of FSW continues in the community with strict parole stipulations that can make it difficult for women to obtain employment and reconnect with their families and communities (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; O’Brien, 2001).

Strategies of resistance and acts of solidarity are typically suppressed by CSC (Deschene, 2017; Faith, 2011; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Gaucher, 2002a) who distribute and partition bodies in disciplinary spaces to avoid the potential for collective resistance (Foucault, 1977). Interpersonal relationships and an ethic of care are integral for women’s mental health and well-being (Gilligan, 1982), yet these are also stifled by institutional policies and practices as support services are difficult to access in women’s prisons (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017; Deschene, 2017), relationships are highly controlled and structured (Pollack, 2007), and solidarity among

prisoners is repressed¹⁵ (Anonymous Prisoner 4, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Law, 2012). As McCorkel (2003, p. 65) reflects on observations made during a prison ethnography, “staff sought to prevent [prisoners] from being friends with one another.” In fact, to prevent friendships and more intimate relationships from forming between incarcerated women participating in a treatment program, McCorkel (2003) found that prison staff created a culture in which prisoners are rewarded for publicly shaming and confronting one another for any perceived mistakes, which undermines the maintenance of a supportive culture amongst criminalized women.

These observations should not be surprising to anyone who has spent time working, visiting, or being imprisoned in a penal institution. Former prison staff and prisoners have asserted that CSC exercises a culture of indifference (Clark, 2017) and humiliation towards prisoners (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Shook & McKinnis, 2017). Women who ‘absorb’ “correctional” discourse by successfully performing gendered scripts and passively accepting their correctional plans are rewarded with positive reports and extra privileges, while those who resist these labels are punished and perceived as risky (Pollack & Eldridge, 2015). Not only do correctional policies and practices suppress healthy coping and solidarity among women, but

¹⁵ For example, the peer-support program at GVI was cancelled for years. Presently, prisoner-run groups such as the “Indigenous Sisterhood” and “Black Women of Diversity” are now being controlled by CSC and require a prison staff member to facilitate the groups. Another example of penal paternalism is that, while on parole, many women face the condition of having to report all personal relationships to their parole officer (PO) who has the power to send a woman back to prison if she spends time with someone who has not been pre-approved. Furthermore, imprisoned women must receive approval from their PO to add a former prisoner to her phone contact list, even if that former prisoner successfully completed parole.

they also facilitate the use of harmful coping strategies like self-injury among women, which can continue upon their release in the community (Kilty, 2012, 2014).

Along with the needs and perceived deficits of criminalized women, examinations of their harmful coping mechanisms are also prevalent in the literature. The conceptualization of harmful coping is a complex challenge. Some actions and behaviours of criminalized women could be perceived as negative or unhealthy, but in the context of gendered violence, trauma, and abuse, such coping mechanisms enable women to survive. As long-time prisoner advocate and current senator Kim Pate explains, women prisoners “attempt to survive, they attempt to self-medicate, and they attempt to cope with their situations as well as the behaviour that evolves from being in a situation where they are increasingly disenfranchised, criminalized, and imprisoned” (Neve & Pate, 2005, p. 28). In this context, I define harmful coping as any cognitive or behavioural strategy that may buffer the effect of stressors, while potentially leading to long-term problematic outcomes.

These coping mechanisms, while “at the same time as they are self-distracting, are arguably also self-destructing or further generate emotional turmoil” (Chamberlen, 2018, p. 141). Some examples of harmful coping in prison includes substance use and abuse, eating disorders, desensitized emotions, self-harm, and suicide (Auditor General, 2017; Chamberlen, 2018; CHRC, 2003; Crewe, 2012; Filmore & Dell, 2005; Kilroy, 2005; Kilty, 2012, 2014; Mahoney, 2011; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Neve & Pate, 2005; Zinger, 2018, 2019). Within a prison system focused on isolation, surveillance, and social control, limited mental health supports (CHRC, 2003; Law, 2012; Zinger, 2019), and a prisoner culture that values desensitized emotions (Kilroy, 2005) shaped partially in response to how prisoners experience interactions with various

staff members (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b; McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2022a), harmful coping behaviours can be considered “techniques of emotional survival” (Chamberlen, 2018, p. 141) offering a temporary escape from the pains of prison.

Although these harmful coping strategies are an understandable — and in some cases necessary — reaction to the punitive, oppressive conditions of confinement in women’s prisons, they also present barriers to successful community re-entry. Women’s lived experience of incarceration tends to inhibit their capacity to function “pro-socially” in the community, as the carceral system does little to prepare prisoners for their eventual release and virtually nothing to address the structural issues that lead women to be criminalized (Bernier, 2010; Comack, 1996; Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Rather than facilitating and supporting reintegration, CSC policies and practices typically result in precarious community-living situations and extensions of carceral control practices beyond the prison (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018) that are characterized as “doing time on the outside” (Maidment, 2006) or “echoes of imprisonment” (Shantz, Kilty, & Frigon, 2009). To address these concerns, in recent years a strengths-based approach to community re-entry has emerged, which is centred on the potential positive contributions to society former prisoners can offer. Conceptualized as “anti-pathologizing” (Maruna & LeBel, 2003, p. 98) this asset-oriented approach is concerned with strengthening prisoners’ capacities instead of repairing their perceived deficits (Maruna & LeBel, 2015).

There is clearly a need for significant changes to the prison system, however, history has demonstrated the many limitations to penal reform that often have unintended consequences (Clarkson & Munn, 2021). These limitations and the tension between reformist and abolitionist-oriented social change are examined in the following chapter, which outlines the theoretical

framework assembled for this project. Next, I discuss prisoner capacities and the potential of a strengths-based community re-entry approach that is instead based on principles of a healing and transformative approach to justice.

1.9. Envisioning the Strengths, Resiliency, and Resistance of Criminalized People in Prisons Designated for Women

As a field, criminology has done very little to examine positive experiences which can be promoted to support and prevent people from engaging in lawbreaking (Ronel & Elisha, 2011). Despite the prevalence of literature examining the multiple barriers and challenges that criminalized women face or that examines the harmful coping strategies they frequently adopt, it is important to recognize that women prisoners do mobilize strengths and positive coping skills. A positive coping skill consists of any individual or relational action that does not cause women harm and enables them to manage stressors (Nelson & Prielltensky, 2010). While self-harm, drug abuse, or over-eating might help someone cope with trauma and pain, these acts are not healthy in the long-term and have negative implications. Based on my review of the relevant literature on criminalized women, I assert that asset-oriented strengths and qualities can be organized into the following categories: (a) *personal capacities and psychological factors* (e.g., self-confidence, positive attitude, personal care routines, inner-strength, perseverance and determination); (b) *interpersonal and relational factors* (e.g., formal and informal sources of social and material support from others, mentorship, peer-support/mutual-aid, advocacy, sharing meals or other resources); (c) *education and research practices* (e.g., engaging in education, writing, reading, designing and implementing workshops and training programs, participatory research); (d) *cultural and spiritual factors* (e.g., faith, hope, and belief in a higher power, spiritual or cultural

practices, creating and enjoying music, art, and dance)¹⁶ (Allred, Belche, & Robinson, 2013; Bernier, 2010; Chamberlen, 2018; Davis, 2013; Dell, Gardipy, Kirlin, Naytowhow, & Nicol, 2014; Fayter, 2016; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014; Frigon & Shantz, 2014; Law, 2012; Martin & Hesselbrock, 2001; Martin, Korchinski, Fels, & Leggo, 2014; McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1998; Neve & Pate, 2005; Pollack, 2014, 2016, 2019; Pollack & Eldridge, 2015).

Many of these examples of women's strengths and resiliency involve prisoners resisting their oppression by the state and their conditions of confinement. The history of prisoner resistance is as old as prisons themselves, for as Foucault (1978, p. 95) asserted, "where there is power there is resistance". Oppressed groups are compelled to resist their oppression to maintain their humanity and experience a sense of purpose (Freire, 2000). Carceral institutions are arguably the ultimate example of power imbalance and systemic oppression in western societies. Prisoners resist the restrictive conditions of confinement in a multitude of ways, based on differences in the prisoner population (e.g., age, gender, security classification), geographical location, the specific issue at hand, sociocultural, political, and historical contexts, the goals of their resistance efforts, allegiance with like-minded groups, community supports or allies, and access to resources, among other things (Bosworth, 1999; Faith, 2011; Law, 2012; Moore & Scraton, 2014).

¹⁶ While on the surface it might appear that there are quite a few examples of literature exploring criminalized women's strengths, almost half of these sources involve W2B scholarship, others are from outside criminology, in fields such as social work, health promotion, and psychology, and some examples are from brief sections within books or larger studies.

Historically, some of the oldest examples of prisoner resistance include hunger strikes (e.g., Davis, 2003; Faith, 2011; Kershaw & Lasovich, 1991), spiritual practices, and letter-writing campaigns documenting their conditions of confinement (see for example, Bonhoeffer, 1953; Frankl, 1959; House, 2007; King, 1963; McCarthy, 1999; Philippians 1-4 [NRSV]; Wiesel, 1958). For centuries, prisoners have critically reflected on their experiences of incarceration and shared their perspectives with the outside world, most of whom were not familiar with the conditions inside their nation's prisons. For example, during a visit to Newgate prison in London, England in 1813 Elizabeth Fry documented the horrendous, filthy, noisy, and crowded conditions inside the prison where over 300 women spent months or years residing in four small rooms. Fry passed out blankets and used clothes to the women, read Bible verses and prayed with them. The most valuable gift the incarcerated women received was the opportunity to share their stories and experiences with Mrs. Fry, who listened intently for many hours. Documenting their stories, Fry formed an association to improve the conditions inside women's prisons and was the first woman to campaign for legal changes in front of a parliamentary committee, centring the voices of the women she spoke with in her advocacy (House, 2007).

Despite the many risks associated with resistance efforts initiated by prisoners, criminalized people tend to feel a sense of responsibility to their sisters and brothers suffering inside carceral spaces, with many engaging in various acts of systemic resistance and sociopolitical activism. Prisoner writing and the penal press is a key form of resisting carceral oppression that is under-recognized in the resistance literature and typically not associated with

women's institutions (Clarkson & Munn, 2021¹⁷). Popular media and government reports tend to focus on violent forms of resistance such as prison riots, which not only make prison violence appear as though it occurs more frequently than it does, but also results in a lack of recognition of other forms of peaceful resistance. Moreover, most academic literature on prisoner resistance examines events that have taken place in men's prisons (Law, 2012). While violent prison uprisings are rarely the original intention of resistance efforts, they can occur when there is tension over issues that builds up over months and even years. Violence is more likely to occur when prisoner efforts to utilize the legal, institutional avenues (e.g., grievances, petitions, meetings with officials, contacting ombudsman, correctional investigator reports and recommendations, or political appeals to reform) fail to result in change to conditions of confinement. When these attempts are unsuccessful, prisoners then progress to peaceful protest – refusing to work or walking out of work, school, or programs, and refusing lock-up. It is frequently the guards that initiate violence by bringing in a canine unit, an Emergency Response Team (ERT) in full riot gear, using tear gas, pepper spray, Tasers, and rubber bullets to secure and lock down units and take protest “leaders” to segregation (Clarkson & Munn, 2021; Hansen, 2018). These events may progress to a full-blown riot. Prison riots make good news headlines and are interesting, if not concerning, to the general public. They grab the attention of politicians and have been historically successful in leading to meaningful change within individual institutions and sometimes the overall system (Clarkson & Munn, 2021). Riots are most often

¹⁷ In *Disruptive Prisoners* Clarkson and Munn (2021) use archival materials from Canadian prisons and the history of the penal press to document how prisoner writing contributed to penal reform efforts and served as acts of resistance throughout the mid-20th century in federal prisons across Canada.

associated with men's prisons, but they have also occurred inside women's prisons, albeit not as often. Victoria Law (2012) and Karlene Faith (2011) have written about women's acts of resistance, an area of research that is somewhat lacking and requires more attention. They explain that while incarcerated women have long histories of resistance efforts, they are not as well-known as incarcerated men's violent riots¹⁸.

A concrete historical example of prisoner-writing from Canadian women prisoners is *Tightwire* magazine. This was a prisoner-run journal combining essays, articles, and information about prisoner resources, along with poetry, music, and artwork from prisoners around the world¹⁹. *Tightwire* was created and published out of the notorious Kingston Prison for Women (P4W) from 1971 (when it was called 'Voices Inside') until 1993, shortly before the prison finally closed its doors in 2000. This publication is a testament to women's strength and commitment to social transformation. Despite their terrible conditions of confinement within a 19th century prison, the women of P4W resisted their oppressors and promoted ideals of solidarity, liberation, and healing justice. The strengths and resiliency of FSW and gender-diverse people should be supported and promoted as they transition from life in prison to life in the community, which is the focal point of this research.

¹⁸ Similarly, because violent riots are so often associated with men's prisons, attempts by imprisoned men at engaging in peaceful protest are often ignored.

¹⁹ For more information and access to PDF issues of "Tightwire", see: <https://penalpress.com/en/institution/prison-for-women/>

1.10. Supporting Strength-based Community Re-entry and Promoting Wellness

Most community re-entry programs and processes are deficit-oriented focusing on managing former prisoners' risks and needs (Maruna & LeBel, 2003). Risk-oriented strategies are based on increased surveillance, using technology such as ankle-monitoring bracelets, regular urinalysis testing, and on-going check-ins with a parole or probation officer (Maruna & LeBel, 2015). Strategies that are more focused on addressing prisoners' needs involve providing programming and interventions centred around addictions, psychological support, and basic life-skills (Maruna & LeBel, 2003). As aforementioned, needs-based interventions emphasize those that are also commonly considered risks that may lead to lawbreaking. Offering an alternative to the typical needs and risk-oriented approaches to community re-entry are asset-oriented or strengths-based resettlement strategies that have emerged from the restorative and transformative justice movements, and which are founded on notions of reconciliation and community engagement. Fundamentally different from traditional community re-entry approaches, a strengths-based approach conceives of former prisoners as talented, capable individuals who can provide valuable contributions to society (Maruna & LeBel, 2015). According to Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) the intention of an asset-oriented community re-entry strategy consists of projects that address community needs, aim to enhance, and support community capacities, while simultaneously repairing social harms due to lawbreaking. Furthermore, Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) assert that strengths-based work is agreed upon by prisoners voluntarily, as opposed to judicially sanctioned, punitive community-service orders. Burnett and Maruna (2006) explain that most traditional prisoner employment programs cannot be considered strengths-based because they neglect to place prisoners in visible, community-oriented leadership or helper roles, and do very little to make use of or to build on prisoners' strengths. Capacity-building

interventions do not ignore the myriad challenges, traumatic life experiences, and histories of violence, abuse, and mental illness that criminalized women have endured. Instead, a more complex understanding of women's identities is developed which transcends the simple victim-offender dualism.

In recent years, an increasing number of criminalized women have produced literature and contributed to academic research, sharing their stories of strength and endurance, often-times describing situations that are unimaginable to the public. Rather than breaking their spirits, the harsh, degrading circumstances these women have survived has instead made them stronger, enabling their ability to promote a shared experience of solidarity and collective healing (Chamberlen, 2018; Hansen, 2018; Moore & Scraton, 2014). This sense of sisterhood and resiliency is honoured each year by survivors of the Canadian women's prison system on August 10th, Prisoner's Justice Day, when former prisoners and their allies gather in a healing circle on the grounds of P4W to remember the lives of lost loved ones, recognizing our strengths and vulnerabilities (Guenther, 2021). While imprisonment is by no means a positive experience, women can still emerge from the punitive injustice system with a newfound source of strength, resilience, positive memories, and a sense of solidarity despite the trauma endured and ongoing systemic oppression.

1.11. Concluding Comments

From a review of the literature, it is evident that criminalized women are marginalized in society, the penal system, and mainstream criminology. Women face multiple layers of oppression and are pushed to the margins socially, economically, and politically. Many also have histories of violence, trauma, and mental health issues. Within the patriarchal and punitive legal

system that is based upon the needs of male prisoners, women are retraumatized, despite “correctional” rhetoric claiming to have adopted gender-responsive or women-centred programs and practices. Criminalized women are commonly perceived in a negative light as vulnerable and needy or violent and unmanageable, which neglects the strengths and assets these women possess and their many contributions to resisting an oppressive prison system and working toward abolitionist-oriented social change.

By building community supports, transforming community re-entry strategies, and engaging decarceration strategies, abolitionists seek to promote health and wellness among criminalized people including by way of asset-based coping. This can potentially shift public perceptions about criminalized women so that we can strengthen communities by utilizing early interventions, prevention programs, and the reduction of structural barriers that inhibit community integration among marginalized people. These macro-level political-economic structures can be partially mediated by cultural attitudes that assist in developing a more moderate approach to addressing instances of lawbreaking. Establishing an inclusionary and equitable socioeconomic policy plan first requires gaining public support, which can then facilitate obtaining the necessary electoral and political support for developing meaningful legal and decarceral policy reforms (Lacey, 2008). If we hope to gain the widespread support that is essential to abolishing our punitive, retributive legal system and replacing it with a more inclusive approach based on principles of healing and transformative justice (HTJ), we must first shift cultural attitudes about criminalized and imprisoned women and gender-diverse people.

With this project I am attempting a “critical reimagining” (Medina, 2013, p.253) of how we frame criminalized women and gender-diverse people. If we hope to transcend neoliberal capitalism and create an alternative social order, we must make use of our radical, political

imagination (Haiven, 2014, p. 265). To achieve this goal, I am employing a strengths-based, capacity-building research strategy, as opposed to the risk and deficit-oriented perspective of criminalized people that is prevalent in the literature. To this end, I am implementing the “third mile” approach posited by Maruna and LeBel (2015, p. 67) whereby an ex-prisoner such as myself is “involved in direct activism around ending the stigmatization of other ex-prisoners.” One way to achieve this is through promoting a strengths-based approach, which is consistent with models of transformative (Morris, 2000) and healing justice (Sawatsky, 2009, 2018). Concepts such as agency, strengths, hope, resistance, resiliency, and solidarity are consistent with these community-oriented justice models. I explore these concepts in the next chapter, wherein I develop an original conceptual framework for this research that will enable me to provide a more holistic understanding of criminalized women and gender-diverse people.

Chapter 2. A Strength-based Conceptual Framework: In Pursuit of a Healing Transformative Justice

This chapter begins with theoretical reflections on the limitations of penal reformation and the potential of abolitionist efforts for addressing the many inequities and acts of discriminatory violence experienced by people incarcerated in prisons designated for women, as outlined in the previous chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the gaps in the literature on criminalized and incarcerated people in prisons designated for women and to develop a conceptual framework to guide this research that highlights various strength-based concepts, which I argue more accurately describe the characteristics and experiences of women and gender-diverse prisoners than do the deficit-based terms that are commonly used.

Due to a general lack of holistic, strength-based conceptualizations of prisoners in the criminological literature, this chapter develops a conceptual framework based on prisoners' strengths which I link to central features of a healing transformative justice (HTJ) framework. I conceptualize asset-oriented terms (i.e., resiliency, asset-based coping, hope and inner strength, agency, resistance, and solidarity), while emphasizing the value of implementing a strength-based approach to research and social interventions with marginalized groups in both the community and institutional contexts. While some of these concepts originate from or are commonly used in the criminological literature, the discussion that follows is multidisciplinary in nature. It is important to highlight the complexity and overlapping nature of these constructs, while illustrating their interconnection with the notion of HTJ. To effectively demonstrate this developing framework, I constructed a table and conceptual models to clarify the connections among the six central concepts I employ, and the distinguishing features of HTJ. I present this

information below in *Table 1*, along with figures 1 and 2, which I mobilize as a guide to structure the conceptual framework developed in this chapter.

HTJ offers a practical alternative to the current punishment focused, retributive ‘criminal justice’ system that critical prison scholars and activists seek to abolish. Penal abolition along with HTJ initiatives aim to build healthy, well-resourced communities based in principles of equity and social justice. Abolitionist frameworks do not necessarily develop an alternative structure for addressing social harm, although proponents of HTJ such as Ruth Morris (2000) are penal abolitionists. Therefore, demonstrating the value and promise of HTJ, first requires an understanding of penal reform and abolition efforts. I begin by critically reflecting on the tension between penal reform and abolition, the barriers and limitations of each approach, and the concept of a *radical imagination* which is arguably necessary for successful abolitionist efforts. In response to the gaps identified from my review of the literature, I introduce the emerging field of positive criminology. I briefly explore its potential as an organizing framework for asset-oriented theories, research, and sociopolitical actions focused on promoting the strengths and resiliency among criminalized people. I then proceed to introducing my emergent conceptual framework based on six key concepts. The framework begins with an exploration of personal and political agency. Next, I delineate the notions of hope and inner strength. I continue developing the emerging framework by theorizing the concept of resistance, before considering the importance of solidarity and meaningful social connections in the lives of criminalized people housed in prisons designated for women. I then proceed to examine asset-based coping strategies before exploring the concept of resiliency. Finally, I present a brief overview of healing and transformative justice, which I suggest encapsulates all these terms and offers a useful framework for living in a world without prisons.

2.1. Tension Between Penal Reform and Abolition

The movement for reforming the prisons, for controlling their functioning is not a recent phenomenon. It does not seem to have originated in a recognition of failure. Prison ‘reform’ is virtually contemporary with the prison itself: it constitutes, as it were, its programme (Foucault, 1977, p. 234).

Since the penitentiary emerged as the primary form of punishment for criminalized behaviours, there has been a tension in the critical prison literature between reform and abolition. In this section, I discuss the limits of penal reform initiatives and consider abolitionist alternatives that have the potential to overcome these limitations. I contend that radical reforms to the penal system need to be enacted to reduce the harms of imprisonment for people who are currently locked up. Any institutional reforms, however, must develop in conjunction with the long-term goal of prison abolition, beginning with women’s prisons due to the smaller population and lower risk to public safety (Davis, 2003, 2005). Due to the lengthy history of penal reform projects, I focus my discussion on Canadian women’s penal reformation since the mid-20th century.

History shows that prisons are highly resistant to change, and even large-scale legal proceedings have not resulted in provincial or national policy changes, or the enforcement of ratified international treaties pertaining to prisoner justice (e.g., see Arbour, 1996; Archambault, 1938; Balfour & Comack, 2014; CHRC, 2003; UN, 1955). A recent archival study investigating the history of the penal press in Canadian men’s prisons documented prisoner resistance and mid-20th century prison reformation efforts. Reflecting on the findings stored in the Canadian National Archives, dating from the 1930s until the present day, the authors concluded that “in the eighty years since the Archambault Commission Report became the blueprint for changing a

brutal, oppressive, and dehumanizing carceral regime, little of substance has changed” (Clarkson & Munn, 2021, p. 207).

This lack of change is particularly evident in comparisons of contemporary and historical prison conditions. In a special issue of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, in a section dedicated to essays written by incarcerated women, the most frequently expressed systemic concerns included: poor food quality lacking nutritional value (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Pelletier, 2017); limited access to dental, health, and mental health care (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017; Anonymous Prisoner 2, 3, & 4, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017); lack of programming, especially in maximum-security settings (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014); exploitation of prisoner labour (Anonymous Prisoner 2 & 3, 2017; Pelletier, 2017); systemic problems with the Mother-Child Program (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Deschene, 2017); a defective internal grievance system (Anonymous Prisoner 2 & 3, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017); punitive, unsupportive staff and mistreatment from guards (Anonymous Prisoner 3, 2017; Deschene, 2017; Fayter, 2016; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014); lack of access to prison libraries (Anonymous Prisoner 4, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017); lack of cultural programming, especially in max-security units (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Pelletier, 2017); and increased barriers to community reintegration for those serving a life sentence (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017; Anonymous Prisoner 3, 2017; Fayter & Payne, 2017). Notably, most of these prisoner rights issues have existed for almost a century (Clarkson & Munn, 2021). An historical review of prisoner welfare and the conditions of confinement in Canadian prisons vividly “illustrates that the power imbalance inherent in penal institutions, combined with the marginalized status of certain prisoners, makes abuse and suffering an absolute inevitability” (McCoy, 2019, p. 15).

A key problem with much of the activism that focuses on penal reform efforts is that successful reforms tend to strengthen the legitimacy of the system, particularly when these reforms fail to include a decarceral component aimed at reducing the overall prison population. The reform program enhances the perceived efficacy of prisons to reduce recidivism providing sentencing judges with a renewed sense of faith in the effectiveness of the penal system and the perception that prison is a reasonable and appropriate response to women's lawbreaking (Carlen, 2002). The obvious result of such "prison-legitimizing reforms" (Carlen, 2002, p. 80) is that more women are sentenced to periods of incarceration, demonstrated by the rising number of women in prison around the world (Davis, 2005; Roberts, 2017; Zinger, 2018, 2021, 2022, 2024). Despite public assumptions of the prison's rehabilitative capacity, FSW residing in these institutions have clearly articulated that prisons are anything but healing, empowering, or supportive (e.g., Acoby, 2011; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014; Neve & Pate, 2005).

The women-centred therapeutic ideals identified in *Creating Choices* (TFFSW, 1990) as discussed in the previous chapter, have led to some tangible improvements in the material conditions of prisons, such as cottage-style living units where prisoners sleep in bedrooms they can lock, use private bathrooms and showers, do their own laundry, and cook their own food. However, critics argue that these so-called "benevolent" regimes "obscure wider power imbalances and mask the punitive context of imprisonment" (Hannah-Moffat, 2001, p. 190). There are many barriers to meaningful penal reform, and we cannot rely on the prison system to promote equity and justice for women and gender-diverse people.

2.1.1. Limitations and Barriers to Penal Reform

A key problem with feminist reform efforts in Canada is that the ‘women-centred’ philosophy has become “part of an ongoing carceral logic that seizes normative discourses to manage women in prison through therapeutic controls, segregation, and gendered violence” (Chartrand & Kilty, 2018, p. 111). Throughout multiple periods of penal reform criminalized women, gender-diverse people, racialized and other marginalized groups have endured ongoing systemic violence at much higher rates than the white male majority. Indeed, based on an archival study of Canadian women prisoners from the late 19th to the early 20th century, McCoy (2019, p. 109) concludes that “in spite of 150 years of women’s penal reform, incarceration in the twenty-first century continues to be defined by isolation, assault, and psychological restraint, suggesting that the worst elements of prison life experienced by women are permanent” and that the prison continues to be perceived “as a reasonable remedy to women’s social disadvantage”. Despite decades of critiques concerning women’s imprisonment, a carceral response continues to be perceived as the primary solution to social inequities and women’s lawbreaking.

Carlen (2002, p. 78) explicates reform limitations by showing that “because a logical and necessary condition of imprisonment is that prisoners must be kept in... there are logically and necessarily, limits to prison reform.” Any penal reform effort presumes that the prison will continue to exist despite controversy surrounding its effectiveness. The continued existence of prisons via reformation projects and associated critiques indicates that as a society we have been unsuccessful in developing a more suitable model for addressing lawbreaking. Even when reforms are successful at altering the material conditions of imprisonment, administrative and “correctional” staff tend to manipulate newly acquired prisoner privileges to disciplinary ends, such as not allowing a prisoner to work or attend school as a punishment for ‘poor’ institutional

behaviour (Fayter & Payne, 2017) despite policies requiring prisoners to engage in these activities as part of their correctional plan (CSC, 2017). These ineffective and seemingly contradictory punishments do not typically facilitate deterrence. Instead, suspending prisoners from school and/or work increases incidents of institutional charges and the prevalence of mental health issues, resulting in lengthy, unproductive days that can last for months at a time with prisoners constrained to their cells or living units. This limits their ability to earn a legitimate income, leading some to engage with the black market, which has implications for women's capacity to purchase hygiene items, phone cards, and stamps. Such senseless punishment negatively impacts women's potential to earn a lower security-level status, temporary absences into the community, and parole, which leaves them feeling further isolated. Finally, by preventing prisoners from attending work or school they lose out on job skills, training, and educational opportunities making the community re-entry process more difficult upon their release (Anonymous Prisoners, 2017; Fayter, Mario, Chartrand, & Kilty, 2021; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Hansen, 2018; Pollack, 2009a; Zinger, 2018). These punishments and resulting negative implications have significantly worsened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. To prevent transmission of the virus, institutional efforts have concentrated on further isolating an already contained prisoner population through lockdowns, segregation, suspended visits, and program cancellations (Fayter, et. al., 2021). Such restrictive measures resulted in deteriorating mental health among prisoners, disconnection from community supports, and delays to parole eligibility (*ibid.*).

The safety and security of the prison and its staff is always of paramount concern, allowing for loopholes in policy reform projects. Rothman (2002, p. 152) asserts that “the system’s dedication to its own security could not and did not coexist with a rehabilitative

program.” Furthermore, the on-going dialectical relationship between women’s penal policy changes and the “correctional” service’s lack of adherence to these changes indicates the resiliency of the prison as an institutional structure. Prisons are clearly “flexible and enabling institutions that can resist, incorporate, redefine, and absorb critical discourses” (Hannah-Moffat, 2001, p. 190) without substantively altering its structure. Historically, it appears that a common trend with penal reform efforts is that “change [has] never moved beyond the superficial” (Rothman, 2002, p. 134). Instead, recommendations for penal reformation appear in a cyclical manner maintaining an illusion of reform, with the same concerns resurfacing by prisoner activists from one generation to the next as documented by prison writing (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Hansen, 2018; Withrow, 1933), critical scholars (Chamberlen, 2018; Faith, 2011; Law, 2012), social activists (Davis, 2003; 2005), and Royal government commissions (e.g., Arbour, 1996; Archambault Report, 1938; CHRC, 2003). Although most politically oriented prisoners are advocates of penal abolition, after spending years inside a brutal, oppressive regime that has existed for centuries, these same prisoners also tend to see the value in prison reform efforts because there are thousands of prisoners in Canada who are suffering inside at the hands of the state. Reflecting on her many years within the federal system as a political activist serving a life sentence, Ann Hansen explains how she shifted her absolute abolitionist view towards a more nuanced perspective: “Using the harm reduction model as a metaphor, I began to see that the struggle to abolish prisons did not have to be an either-or proposition. Prison reforms could contribute toward revolutionary change” (Hansen, 2018, p. 203). If the proposed reforms do not strengthen or empower the system to build more prisons with bigger budgets, and the changes are what Thomas Mathiesen (2015) refers to as “non-reformist reforms,” which directly benefit

those who are currently incarcerated making their conditions of confinement more bearable, they do not threaten the existing order.

“Correctional” rhetoric claims that prisons are necessary to ‘make communities safer.’ However, there is little evidence to support this claim, and studies have found that carceral responses to social problems do little to deter crime or ‘rehabilitate’ lawbreakers (Cohen, 1985; Mathiesen, 2006; Rothman, 2002; Webster & Doob, 2012). Instead, we need to alter unjust social structures and facilitate systemic change. The safety and promotion of healthy communities requires us to provide people with the necessary resources and supports to live meaningful and healthy lives.

Reflecting on the continued challenges to penal reform efforts in Canada, Hannah-Moffat (2001) concludes that penal restructuring is a systemic problem, not easily tackled by policy changes alone. For women-centred reform efforts to be truly effective, a more structural and preventive approach is needed. Issues such as poverty, homelessness and racism are well beyond the responsibility of the legal system, yet their implications often lead to incarceration. As a society, we need to decentre the prison by challenging the notion that incarceration is a necessary and appropriate response for addressing community-based problems and social harms (Carlen, 2002). A promising alternative structure that has gained increased attention over the past several decades are models of Healing and Transformative Justice (Morris, 2000; Sawatsky, 2009; 2018). Such strengths-based approaches to addressing social harm are grounded in community-building processes that enhance inclusive social relationships while reducing societal reliance on a punitive and vengeful prison system. A conceptual framework for this promising social justice, abolitionist-oriented model is developed below.

Hannah-Moffat (2001) contends that gender-based demands for institutional change have been neutralized in the past so that the appearance of change was maintained, without altering the underlying problems of imprisonment. To facilitate meaningful change, prison reform efforts must be accompanied by real reductions in the number of people being sent to prison and in the lengths of their sentences (Carlen, 2002; Hannah-Moffat, 2001). Society is clearly not reducing its reliance on carceral solutions, apparent from upward incarceration trends²⁰ (Roberts, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2022a; Zinger, 2021, 2022, 2024). Balfour (2014, p. 257) reflects how “feminists struggle to reconcile the tensions between a politics of abolition that questions the very existence of prisons and working inside jails and prisons” in various capacities to provide supports to prisoners who are currently suffering. Decades of feminist critiques concerning Canada’s federal penitentiary system for women demonstrate the continuous failure of the state to provide an ethical and efficient penal system that can meet the unique, diverse needs of this population. The carceral system’s resistance to meaningful, substantive reforms illustrates the need for a broader, long-term abolitionist agenda.

2.1.2. Towards the Abolition of Prisons

With the many barriers to substantive penal reform efforts and extensive examples of systemic injustice, it seems obvious that continuing to reform a broken system is futile. Calls for abolishing prisons have been equally unsuccessful. Bloomberg and Cohen (1995, p. 27) outline

²⁰ While rates of incarceration have continuously been increasing for decades, especially among women, racialized, and other marginalized groups, there was a significant decline in prisoner populations in Canada during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from March to April 2020. This decrease did not last long and has trended upwards since this brief decline (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

the historical resistance of the penal system to engage meaningful change and the prison's dubious persistence on the world stage despite myriad calls for its abolition:

Social critics, reformers, and prisoners have exposed its inhumanity [yet] the prison invariably emerges from this criticism as little more than a crude instrument for punishment and disposal: of dubious utility and near certain harm. Yet prison systems throughout the world not only remain intact, they are expanding. They are seemingly impervious to criticism and resistant to attempts to replace them by alternatives that are more humane, efficient, and cheaper.

Throughout the history of the penitentiary, penal reforms have been unsuccessful in altering the status quo or making prison conditions rehabilitative. Although contemporary prison systems are somewhat more humane than in the past (e.g., in terms of material conditions such as housing), most reformation efforts have presented “piecemeal responses” resulting in “some new cruelty” replacing a previous inhumanity (Rothman, 2002, p. 120). For example, moving from the public spectacle of physical punishment to the penitentiary model (Foucault, 1977). Another example includes the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario which was built in 1934 to avoid imprisoning women on isolated units of male institutions. Within four years, the Archambault Report (1938) called for its closure due to the extremely harsh conditions inside. P4W remained operational until 2000, when all prisoners were transferred to the new regional prisons for women. This prison expansion project led to an increase in the number of women serving a federal sentence, skyrocketing from 250 women in 1991 (Shaw, 1991) to 685 women in federal custody in 2020 (Public Safety Canada, 2022a). A more recent example of cruel, piecemeal responses to calls for prison reform involves the transition from “Administrative Segregation” in federal facilities to “Structured Intervention Units” (SIUs). Responding to successful legal challenges from the Courts of Appeal in British Columbia and Ontario, *Bill C-83* was enacted in 2019 amending the *CCRA* to eliminate the use of administrative segregation, replacing it with

SIUs in an attempt to reduce the harms of prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement (Casavant & Charron-Tousignant, 2019.) However, early reports have indicated that SIUs are not operating in a way that is consistent with this new legislation. According to Public Safety Canada (2022a), from November 2019 to August 2021, 54.8% of prisoners confined in SIUs were there for 16 days or more and in Ontario penitentiaries 30.5% of prisoner stays lasted 62 days or more. Additionally, prisoners inside SIUs are supposed to be provided with “meaningful human contact” and given a minimum of four hours outside their cell (CCRA, s. 36.1), yet 68.9% of prisoners did not receive close to the promised four hours with 28.3% receiving less than one hour outside their cell (Public Safety Canada, 2022a). Continuing to identify and debate the ideological inconsistencies of the prison system and subsequent failures of reform is fundamental to facilitating change.

Considering CSC’s governing principles for women, it is difficult to conceive of a just, supportive, and empowering prison, when the environment is inherently violent. The Arbour Inquiry (1996) raised critical questions about the capacity of the state to successfully ‘empower’ incarcerated women. According to Chartrand and Kilty (2018, p. 112) “progressive change to the penal system is not a matter of finding the right logic, discourse, practice, or reform but rather of moving away from carceral logics that continue to legitimate the prison as a reasonable response to women’s criminalization” or the most appropriate solution for dealing with social problems. Penal policy reforms always operate within the confines of security demands, which encroach on women’s health. Lawbreaking and incarceration do not justify the dehumanizing treatment of prisoners, whose access to basic necessities are considered a privilege, while physical and psychological trauma are perpetuated. Lasting systemic change will never happen while the focus of our legal system is punishment.

With the foundational purposes of the prison being punishment, and public safety and security, reform efforts are often twisted to meet these objectives. It is critical for feminists and activists to challenge the general efficacy of the prison system and to consider alternatives to incarceration, punishment, surveillance, social control, and disempowering solutions to social problems. Chartrand and Kilty (2018, p. 119) argue that “from an abolitionist perspective, any critique of penal practices must also offer strategies that challenge the use of a broader carceral logic and response.” The causes of the failures of penal reform are inherently linked to the perpetuation of a punitive, unjust system. It is therefore important to develop a more inclusive understanding of justice that fosters creative solutions and opportunities for alternative approaches (Mathiesen, 2015). To facilitate the discovery of alternatives, an abolitionist approach requires that we “shift our attention from the prison, perceived as an isolated institution, to the set of relationships that comprise the prison-industrial-complex” (Davis, 2003, p. 106). Instead of strictly focusing on a single substitute for imprisonment, it is necessary to explore a range of alternatives that can lead to radical social transformation. According to Davis (2003, p. 108) any “alternatives that fail to address racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias, and other structures of domination will not, in the final analysis, lead to decarceration and will not advance the goal of abolition.”

Understanding the penal system as a failed historical project makes the case for abolition even more apparent, but it is important to remember that the ideological power of the prison cannot be discounted. Although thinking about the abolition of prisons is daunting, Mathiesen (2006, p. 170) contends that “major repressive systems have succeeded in looking extremely stable almost until the day they have collapsed.” Examples include slavery in the Americas, apartheid in South Africa, racial segregation in the US, and the residential school system in

Canada²¹. Penal reformation and the eventual abolition of prisons is a long-term, dialectical process, which Mathiesen (2015) asserts never ends because finalizing an abolitionist project's framework "is destined to fail" (p. 47). Facilitating the progression of an abolitionist agenda requires an 'unfinished' approach to social change, thus allowing for the goals, mission, and actions to continuously evolve.

According to Brooks (2015, p. 424), if we ever hope to truly transform the system "we cannot limit our discussions to criminal justice or penal reform; rather we have to also query the relationship between law, legislative reform, and social regulation." Avoiding carceral expansion requires active decarceration, dismantling oppressive and exploitative social structures (Davis & Mendieta, 2005), and developing alternative community-based initiatives. This includes the provision of affordable and supportive housing (Wright & Kloos, 2007); a living wage (Brennan, 2012); access to education (Pollack, 2014); mutual aid help groups (Levy, 2000); and, as I argue in this project, healing and transformative justice (HTJ) approaches, while addressing the myriad structural inequalities and human rights abuses that lead people to come into conflict with the law. Penal abolition involves recognizing "the extent to which the prison is deeply structured by economic, social, and political conditions that themselves will also have to be dismantled" (Davis & Mendieta, 2005, p. 68). Any feasible penal abolition efforts must recognize the systemic links between our current social structure and various social problems. Radical social transformation in multiple areas are thus required to de-centre the prison.

²¹ Some social theorists argue that the mass incarceration of racialized communities has replaced these repressive systems (see for example, Alexander, 2020; Davis, 2005; Wacquant, 2002).

Effectively tackling the insidious nature of our carceral culture requires transformative interventions, which refers to altering the fundamental structures that support it (Rappaport, 1977). As Liebling (2004, p. 339) asserts, “prisons operate in broad social and cultural settings.” Therefore, a broad, macro-level analysis is necessary to determine the systemic features that enable and constrain our pursuit of a transformative, socially just system and society to deal with social harms and violence. Although transformative social justice efforts are time-consuming – and practically and conceptually difficult – they are necessary to address issues of inequity, oppression, and discrimination.

Maintaining meaningful changes in an ever-changing society requires continuous adjustments to an alternative system grounded in principles of a healing transformative justice²². We need to actively decarcerate, while improving conditions for prisoners who remain inside in the short-term and maintaining the long-term goal of abolition. Realistically, it could take generations before prisons are abolished. While keeping this ideal in mind, we need to balance ameliorative and transformative interventions in the pursuit of social justice. To move away from the current situation or *the way things are* (reformist thinking) to an ideal, just society or *the way things ought to be* (abolitionist thinking) requires collective visioning and a radical imagination.

A strengths-based perspective is prevalent in other fields such as psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), social work (Pollack, 2019), education (Wehmeyer, 2019), community health promotion (Minkler & Hancock, 2003), and social research and policy development

²² A conceptual modal and more detailed discussion of the principles of healing and transformative justice are provided below.

(Maton, Dogden, Leadbeater, Sandler, Schellenbach, and Solarz, 2004) where the benefits and positive implications of this approach have been well-documented. As I discussed in the previous chapter in sections 1.5 and 1.10, the criminological literature has been slow to incorporate an asset-oriented or strength-based approach in either theoretical or empirical investigations, or sociolegal interventions. Historically, the research, practice, and theoretical claims of criminology have generally taken a deficit-focused or risk and needs-based approach to examining criminological issues (Kewley, 2017).

Connected yet distinct from deficit models is a damage-centred research approach contextualized via social, political, and historical processes of exploitation and colonization that have been used as explanatory frameworks for understanding the challenges faced by oppressed communities (Tuck, 2009). Within a damage-centred project, researchers might engage marginalized people, who are asked to speak about their experiences of pain, loss, and deprivation. While this narrow focus on the harms experienced by oppressed communities can be mobilized to provide much-needed resources to these individuals, the inherent danger of such a pathologizing research strategy is that “the oppression singularly defines a community” (Tuck, 2009, p. 413). Damage narratives can have negative implications for community members who are framed through one-sided depictions that highlight the perceived brokenness of marginalized communities as documented by outsiders. There is a need to integrate existing deficit-focused criminological models with positive ones that support the development of strengths rather than simply trying to eliminate negative characteristics and behaviours (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Marginalized, impoverished, and racialized communities have been calling for a moratorium on damage-centred research for decades (hooks, 1990; Tuck, 2009). Although academics and activists recognize the value of documenting the damage-centred narratives of disenfranchised

communities, those with a lived experience of oppression argue that the harms outweigh the costs of continuing to frame their people in this way (Tuck, 2009). Promoting social inclusion and healing amongst our communities requires exercising our collective radical imagination.

2.2. Collective Radical Imagination

A bold, transformative, abolitionist-oriented agenda is necessary to address widespread social inequalities characterized by an ever-increasing gap between the rich and poor, in a society shaped by powerful surveillance technologies and mechanisms of carceral control. Hateful narratives must be redirected from the racialized and class-based scapegoats (i.e., the “dangerous other”) to those responsible for our contemporary condition – the elite class who has increasingly privatized public commons, polluted the planet for profit (Klein, 2017), and commodified histories of pain and suffering into tourist attractions via penal tourism (Piché, Ferguson, & Walby, 2019; Piché, Walby, & Watts, 2017), while ignoring the historical intersection of state violence, settler-colonialism, and gender domination (Guenther, 2021). Despite these bleak conditions there is hope for the future. These dangerous tendencies are the “product of particular circumstances and specific human decisions” and can therefore be reversed (Chomsky & Polychroniou, 2017, p.195). To resist hegemonic forces, we must exercise our radical imagination (Haiven, 2014) and nurture pockets of resistance into a collective force of solidarity (Hardt & Negri, 2003). According to Haiven (2014), struggles to protect certain social values represent what society imagines to be valuable. How much do we value our freedom, collective well-being, and opportunities for healing and justice for oppressed groups?

Haiven (2014) claims that transformation requires radicalizing our individual and collective imaginations, which are currently in crisis due to the hegemony of neoliberalism.

There has been a “closing off” of ideas creating a society without opposition in which we are unable to imagine alternatives to the current power structures (Marcuse, 1964, p. 17).

Imagination and creativity are critical for establishing empowering institutions and enabling values such as liberty and equality. The success of any radical social movement requires the development of alternative moral values and means of relation (*ibid.*).

Haiven conceives the radical imagination as “a collective process of developing alternative modes of reproducing ourselves as social beings” (2014, p. 19). A salient example of this practice is offered by Guenther (2021) who promotes the concept of relational memory as a means of transforming social relations via a collective practice of remembering historically significant people, places, and events in relation to those who occupy these spaces. This transformative intervention is consistent with HTJ practices, contributing to the development of frameworks for mutual care by transforming relationships between criminalized and non-criminalized populations. A concrete example of relational memory as intervention is the development of a memorial garden and art gallery at the P4W, through which former prisoners are challenging the dominant state narrative regarding the carceral histories of the site by co-creating a space for authentic healing and self-expression. The memorial garden also exercises the public’s radical imagination by transforming the ways prisoners are perceived.

As we challenge the state’s (in)actions in further oppressing marginalized people, we must question our capacity to imagine prisoners as human beings, not the abstracted ‘other’. Popular hateful discourses about marginalized people (e.g., that they are lazy, unfit, unworthy, or violent) are examples of what Davis (2005) refers to as “a crime against our moral imagination” (2005, p. 79). We are not encouraged to see those on the margins of society as children, siblings, parents, students, teachers, or friends. The abstraction of the suffering of ‘others’, is potentially

“killing the moral and emotive dimensions of our citizenship” (*ibid*, p.80). Furthermore, a narrow focus on harm and violence “risks instrumentalizing the suffering of some for the edification of others” (Guenther, 2021, p. 1), while ignoring the complex lives of prisoners who also share acts of resistance, simple joys, and solidarity. This nuanced history is absent from official records and in sites like the CSC operated Kingston Penitentiary Museum (Walby & Piché, 2011).

Drawing attention to the prevalence of damage-oriented research, advocates suggest that shifting towards a positive perspective is required if we hope to accurately document and transcend the social realities of marginalized and criminalized communities. Healing involves not only recognizing the pain and vulnerabilities of oppressed groups, but also honouring the redemptive strength in their resistance of ideological state narratives that do not account for their humanity. Although a strengths-based or positive approach to criminological research is rare, in recent years the sub-discipline of positive criminology has emerged to fill this gap.

2.2.1. Positive Criminology and Promoting Community Wellness

The term “positive criminology” emerged in the 21st century as an alternative conceptual framework to counteract criminology’s focus on problems, risks, needs, and deficits. Based on a review of criminological models and theories that have a positive element and can thus be considered to encapsulate “positive criminology,” Ronel and Elisha (2011, p. 307) define this emergent sub-discipline in the following manner:

Positive criminology is not a theory but rather a broad perspective encompassing diverse models and theories. The definition of positive criminology presented here refers to a focus on the encounter with significant forces and effects that are experienced positively and that distance the individual from deviance and crime, whether by means of formal and informal

therapy programs and interventions (such as self-help organizations), through emphasis on positive social elements (such as human kindness or social acceptance) or based on positive personal factors (such as factors of protection and resilience, positive emotions and subjective attitudes, coherence, faith, and morality).

A key component of positive criminology is that along with psychological strengths-based resolutions, it also incorporates social, moral, and environmental approaches (Ronel & Segev, 2014). The common factor among these approaches is that they are “perceived as positive by those who encounter them” (Ronel & Elisha, 2011, p. 307). Additionally, positive criminology entails recognizing people with a criminal record as an asset to the community rather than a liability. This simple shift in perspective can assist us in reframing the dominant negative thinking and approaches that some people are accustomed to adopting when working with criminalized people (Kewley, 2017), and which better support community integration efforts.

The most frequently identified goal of positive criminology models is the cessation of behaviour deemed criminal or preventing future lawbreaking amongst “offenders.” The language used in in this literature is problematic as it fails to critique “correctional” terminology, such as “offender” and “recidivist,” which emphasize individual responsibility while ignoring the structural factors and systemic problems that lead individuals to break the law in the first place. Rather than focusing on preventing future lawbreaking, my project aims to promote the strengths and well-being of criminalized women and gender-diverse people to help shift the societal narratives that depict them in predominantly negative ways and research approaches that focus on their pain and suffering.

The focus of positive criminology is to shift how people perceive and experience their current situation so that they view it in a more positive light. This is like positive psychology,

which focuses on practices of mindfulness, positive thinking, and therapy to promote optimism and hopefulness over catastrophizing, anxiety-inducing thoughts (Linley & Joseph, 2004). While there are clear benefits to shifting one's perspective in a positive manner, the promotion of personal healing and societal wellbeing is not that simplistic. Instead, we need to fundamentally transform people's living conditions and oppressive social relations based on harmful ideologies such as patriarchy, racism, classism, and other stigmatizing perspectives. Pain and difficulties in living are inevitable aspects of being human. We cannot ignore or gloss over human suffering by solely focusing on the positive or developing enjoyable social interventions. Instead, we must acknowledge the universal nature of human suffering, as well as work in solidarity alongside the marginalized and oppressed to transform socio-structural relations in ways that promote penal abolition, healthy equitable communities, and HTJ.

The concepts within the HTJ framework developed below are strength-based constructs that enhance wellness, prevent criminalization, support community re-entry, and prevent future harms and challenges, at the individual, relational, and collective levels. These critical social constructs must be promoted within marginalized and criminalized communities to facilitate community wellness and strengths-based coping when facing challenging and stressful circumstances. The capacity for people to manage stress effectively²³ by utilizing asset-based coping strategies²⁴ is dependent on risk and protective factors.

²³ Stress involves any type of negative or difficult life event or change that potentially influences individual functioning, such as the loss of a job, a loved one's life, or housing, and experiences of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and other traumatic events (Kloos, et. al., 2012).

²⁴ Asset-based coping is not a value-judgement but runs counter to harmful coping strategies which can lead to physical, emotional, or psychological harm and even death (e.g., unhealthy eating, substance abuse, self-harm, risky

Risk factors²⁵ consist of any individual or environmental stressors or vulnerabilities that contribute to the development of mental, emotional, social, or behavioural difficulties in people and their communities (Rutter, 1979; Werner, 2005). Conversely, protective factors refer to strengths and resources that serve to protect people from experiencing negative outcomes and problems in living, even those who have been exposed to multiple risk factors (Masten & Powell, 2003). To support wellness and safety for marginalized and criminalized people, we need to minimize risk factors – recognizing their structural aspects – while also building protective factors within individuals and their communities. The goal is not simply to reduce negative outcomes, but rather enhance and develop strengths, healthy outcomes, and resiliency so that people thrive, rather than just survive (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

2.3. Towards a Conceptual Framework of Criminalized Women and Gender-diverse People’s Resiliency

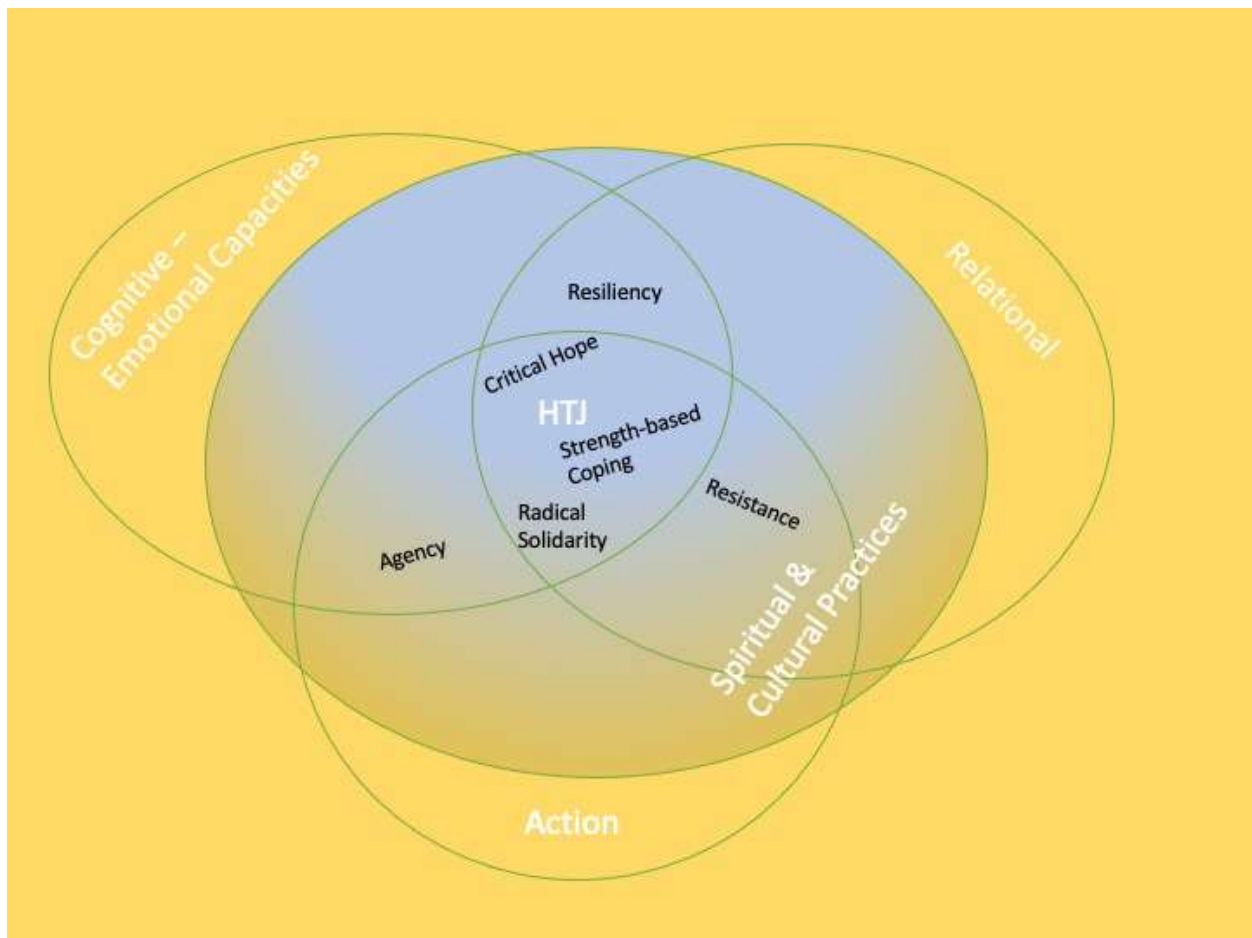
The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the conceptual framework used in this study. Due to a dearth of theoretical literature on the strengths and resiliency of criminalized and incarcerated people in prisons designated for women, and the absence of a comprehensive theory of prisoner resiliency, I needed to develop a conceptual framework to better understand these concepts, while examining their relation to a healing transformative justice approach. Based on a multidisciplinary review of literature highlighting the various

sexual encounters, suicide attempts). While these harmful actions can also be considered a strength, since they enable the person to survive ongoing pain and trauma, the risks associated with these activities cannot be ignored.

²⁵ In talking about risk factors, it is important to highlight that these are not necessarily criminogenic risks or “risks for reoffending” (using correctional language). Instead, these involve risks of experiencing negative outcomes. Additionally, risks do not lie solely within individuals, but can also be found in families, neighbourhoods, and social systems and structures.

strengths and capacities of criminalized and incarcerated people from prisons designated for women, six interrelated concepts consistently emerged: agency, hope, resistance, solidarity, strengths that promote healthy coping and healing, and resiliency. These six strength-based capacities serve as sensitizing concepts in the data analysis process, which I elaborate on in the following chapter. Please refer to *Figure 1* for a visual representation of the overlapping and interconnected features of each of these strength-based concepts.

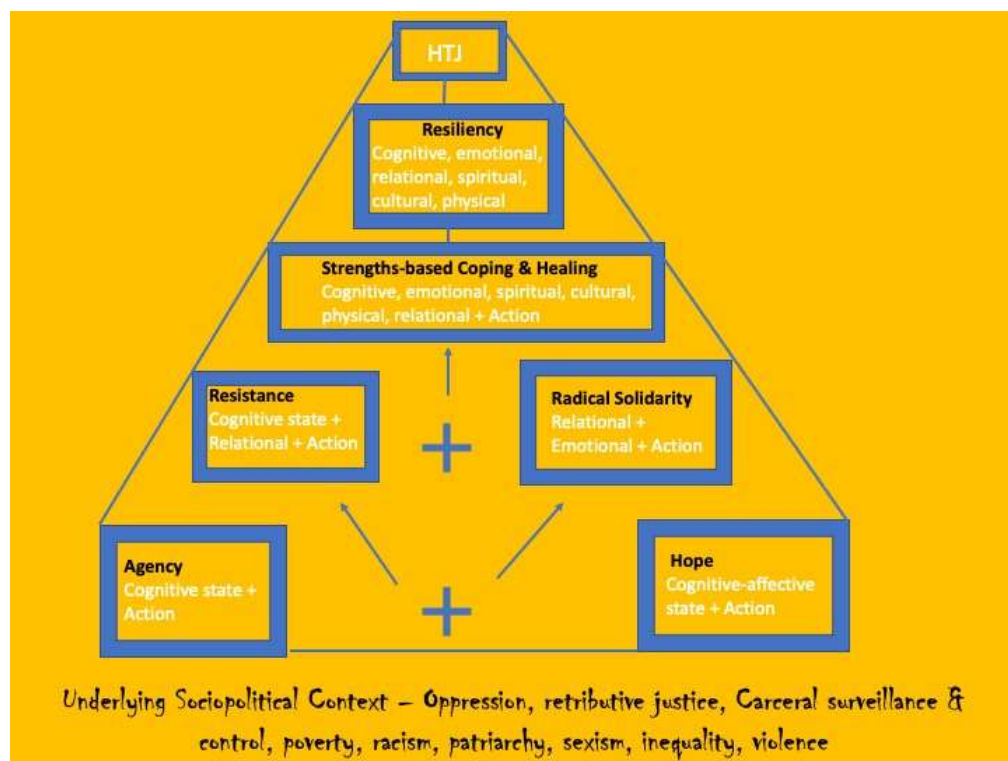
Figure 1: Overlapping and Interactive Features of Strength-based Concepts



Each of the six concepts can be characterized as involving cognitive-emotional capacities, relational processes, action-oriented processes, and spiritual or cultural practices. Each concept encompasses multiple capacities, processes, and practices, with HTJ sharing all

these traits. These concepts are interconnected, overlapping, and have a symbiotic bi-directional relationship. It is somewhat artificial to discuss these concepts separately, as they each influence or are impacted by one another. For the purpose of conceptual clarity, I discuss each term separately, while indicating how they are related. Along with their overlapping and interactive features, these six concepts also have a cumulative effect, with some concepts serving as a necessary precursor to engaging with another, as illustrated below in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: Resiliency Pyramid



The successful negotiation of oppressive power relations, systemic and interpersonal violence, and social inequities in prison and the community requires strength and resiliency from criminalized people. Exerting resilience in the face of adversity requires multiple cognitive, affective, relational, spiritual, and cultural capacities and processes from individuals and their

communities. *Figure 2* illustrates the hierarchy and cumulative impact of the strength-based concepts critical to the process of developing resiliency and implementing HTJ. Starting at the base of the pyramid we see that the exercise of personal agency coupled with a sense of hope are necessary to engage in acts of resistance and solidarity. Without a sense of hope for a better future and the ability to actively exert one's agency, people are less able to resist oppressive power structures or engage in acts of solidarity with their community. Agency, hope, resistance, and solidarity are all examples of, and contribute to strengths-based coping strategies that promote healing from trauma. The combination of these five concepts produces resilient individuals, social relations, and communities, all of which are central components of healing and transformative justice. In the following sections, I unpack the nature of these concepts, highlighting their distinguishing and overlapping features to explore the development of prisoner resiliency and how these contribute to HTJ practices.

2.3.1. Personal and Political Agency

Psychologist Rick Hanson (2018, p. 78) frames agency as an individual capacity to make decisions, express opinions, take initiative and recognize one's ability to actively facilitate change rather than passively being impacted by external factors with no sense of control. As the capacity to exercise free will, agency requires a self-perception or personal cognitive state of being capable of exerting change and acting according to one's own volition. Similarly, with the added recognition of the importance and power of social relations, Bosworth (1999, p. 3) suggests personal agency indicates one's potential to negotiate power, requiring a "self-image as active and participatory" with the ability to create a sense of meaning in social interactions. In the Canadian context, Sylvie Frigon's work on dance and theatre in prison offers an example of doing embodied work with incarcerated women to build self-image and personal agency in a

positive way (Frigon & Jenny, 2008, 2010; Frigon, 2011, 2014; Frigon & Merrill, 2015; Frigon & Shantz, 2014). Additionally, Fili (2013) offers a relational, interactive conceptualization of agency, recognizing how women prisoners negotiate their penal experiences in relation to other prisoners, prison staff, penal discourses, and social structures. This is important because as Bosworth (1999) contends, most prison policies and research are grounded in notions of masculine normativity, which has led to “a universalizing notion of agency and subjectivity that marginalizes or excludes women” (p. 99).

Advocating for an “appreciation of a more complex account of subjectivities that allows space for multiplicity,” Fili (2013, p. 16) argues that agency does not exist independently from context. In the context of a patriarchal culture, women’s agency is suppressed. hooks (2002, p. 134) reflects on the root cause of women’s’ limited political agency, suggesting that “females are rewarded more when we experience ourselves and act as though we are flawed, insecure, or especially dependent and needy.” Elaborating on this pervasive female insecurity, hooks (2002, p. 136) contends that “instinctively [we] know that the more able a woman is to assert agency on behalf of her well-being, the less desirable she may be in patriarchal culture.”

Striving to expand our understanding of women’s agency, Pollack (2000, p. 83) contends that “our concept of agency needs to be redefined and moved beyond an individual analysis.” Suggesting a multi-level analysis of this typically individual-level construct, she asserts that women’s agency consists of two related aspects: internal or *subjective agency* and external or *political agency*. Pollack (2000, p. 83) defines political agency as “the opportunity for effecting change in women’s lives”, noting that women’s subjective agency develops within the context of political agency. To do so, requires moving beyond a strictly subjective, singular analysis to

consider how intersecting layers of oppression suppress political agency and restrict opportunities and choices in women's lives.

Women's agency and resistance have frequently been paired in the literature as coexisting in prison and are conceptualized differently than that of male prisoners (Bosworth, 1999; Faith, 2011; Law, 2012; Moore & Scraton, 2014). Offering a critique of the tendency for scholars to link agency and resistance, Fili (2013, p. 6) contends that feminist scholarship that challenges notions of passive femininity focusing instead on "agentic capacities" of resistant women tends to "reduce agency to resistance, which is only one of the many forms that agency can take." Agency is not synonymous with resistance, but it is a precursor for resistant acts or inaction. People can exert agency without being resistant, however, engaging in resistant practices or processes requires one to exercise agency. Bosworth (1999, p. 130) asserts that "to have agency is to preserve the ability to negotiate power," recognizing that for some prisoners negotiating power may entail following institutional rules and maintaining the status quo to facilitate access to their children, for example. For Bosworth (1999), agency signifies two characteristics of women prisoners: their personal identity and their ability to act (in their own self-interest), thus rejecting expectations of passive femininity even among those prisoners not engaging in resistant actions. Agency and hope have a reciprocal interaction, whereby a sense of personal and political agency enhances one's feelings of hopefulness, and a sense of hope facilitates agentic capacities.

2.3.2. The Nature of Hope and Inner Strength

Hope refers to a positive, cognitive-emotional state that facilitates agency and identifies the means to achieve goals via tangible, actionable processes. Hope involves "a celebration of

human agency and [the] capacity to enact change” (Grain, 2022, p. 24). In this project I explore how people in prisons designated for women draw on feelings and expressions of hope to help give meaning to their experiences. Like most of the other constructs discussed within this conceptual framework, hope has frequently been conceptualized as a personal psychological strength. Some psychologists have framed hope as a positive emotional state indicating a static feeling, while others have emphasized hope as a cognitive process suggesting hope can be better understood as an intellectual practice that positively affects one’s emotions (Snyder, 2002). According to Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1991, p. 287) hope describes a positive cognitive-affective, motivational state that engenders a sense of agency (energy directed toward an outcome) and helps to identify pathways (the ability to enact plans and meet goals). Since the emergence of Snyder’s Hope Theory, research has demonstrated that hope acts as a source of inner strength, serving as a protective factor to mediate the impact of negative life events (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006, p. 393), thus playing a key role in prevention, and has been shown to enhance personal strengths (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, & Adams, 2000).

Empirical research in psychology based on comparisons of individual difference scales has demonstrated that hope is a robust and distinct concept, that is distinguishable from other positive psychological traits such as optimism and self-efficacy (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006). The construct of hope is therefore broader than *optimism*, which is defined as goal-directed thoughts focused on distancing a person from negative outcomes (Seligman, et. al., 1995) and *self-efficacy*, which is framed as an individual’s capacity to achieve a situation-specific goal (Bandura, 1982). Research on hope suggests that hope is malleable and can increase or decrease over time (Brown, 2019). The malleability of hope is important to note because as a dynamic trait shown to enhance positive emotions, personal strengths, and promote healthy coping, it is

possible to increase levels of hopefulness among individuals and communities. For example, in a recent psychological study focused on how women overcome histories of trauma and adversity, researchers found that spirituality significantly contributes to building hope, resilience, and a healing environment (Woods, Larwin, & Allen, 2020).

Judeo-Christian views also distinguish hope from optimism while recognizing its malleable nature. According to theologian James Hawkey (2020, p. 1) “hope is not optimism, nor is it positivity. For a Christian, it’s possible to be deeply hopeful about the future of the world (because of what we believe about creation, redemption and God’s love), whilst not being overly optimistic about the human capacity to look after it properly.” Within this theological framework hope is a multi-level construct, encompassing individual, relational, and collective aspects. A Judeo-Christian conceptualization of hope is thus richer than the psychological framing of hope as a cognitive-affective, motivational construct. While hope includes individual thoughts and emotions, along with the capacity to support goal-oriented behaviour, biblical hope is more robust in that it highlights a *living hope* that is embodied and driven by love. Chilcote and Harper (2020) explain that “hope is not abstract” and humanity is called to “live by hope” where hope is “at work within us and through us” (p. 3). Serving as a witness to the daily struggles of marginalized people and walking alongside them facilitates the creation of communities of hope. Drawing on the expertise of criminalized people thus requires outside researchers to “move beyond safe places into action, vulnerability, and into the streets” challenging us to work for social change and “to stand with those on the margins, and be used by the Spirit to build communities of hope” (Bowe, 2020, p. 32). A theological understanding of hope is central to practices of HTJ, which I return to below.

This conceptualization of hope is consistent with feminist communitarian ethics, which I explore more fully in the methodology chapter. Briefly, Christians (2000, p. 144) asserts the need for hope to be “tangible and actionable” to avoid serving powerful interests, because “hope that merely projects a future redemption obscures abuses of power and human need in the present.” This living, active hope is represented by the ancient Hebrew term *shalom*. Although modern English translations of this word use ‘peace,’ *shalom* signifies something much greater. It includes not just the absence of war and violence, but the presence of justice, along with “the establishment of comprehensive wellness and wholeness” (Christians, 2000, p. 2) throughout all of creation. As I demonstrate below, this is a central aspect of HTJ.

Indigenous spiritualities and pedagogies of hope from traditional communities around the world similarly recognize the interconnectedness of everything in the natural world and the importance of hope in facilitating social transformation by enabling humans to believe in the possibility of a different future based in a healing form of justice (Stewart-Harawira, 2005). Hope is also intimately tied to a biblical notion of justice, which entails that “we seek equity, fairness, and inclusion for all” (Christians, 2000, p. 4). Humanity is called to come together in a community of hope that is guided by an active, *agape* love to be shared with all of humankind to promote inclusion and the healing of exclusion in our divided world.

Hope is linked to faith, which is a kind of knowledge based on trust and belief in the absence of certainty. This means that both faith and hope are not only personal choices, but they also involve the values and commitments of communities. Having faith and hope provides a sense that we are never alone in our suffering, thus affording knowledge of the shared human condition of struggle. Some of the most poignant, inspiring messages of hope come from a place of deep terror and pain illustrating how small moments of hope exist amidst unbelievable

horrors. Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist imprisoned in Auschwitz-Birkenau, a Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Poland. In his reflections on his experiences there, Frankl (1959) developed speculative moral and philosophical conclusions related to hope, ultimately determining that the capacity to live with hope is a choice. Frankl (1959) conceptualizes hope as inner strength and spiritual freedom, along with thoughts, plans, and dreams about the future. The single thing prison cannot take away from the individual prisoner is their inner strength and the way they respond to hardship. Even when everything else is removed, a prisoner's attitude toward their existence, "an existence restricted by external forces" (Frankl, 1959, p. 67), can still be shaped by humour, future goals, and purpose.

Hope can emerge from the darkest times of human tragedy. Zak Amara (2023), a formerly incarcerated person in Canada serving a life sentence, reflected on the importance of hope while he was segregated in a maximum-security Special Handling Unit (SHU) for several years:

It took me 11 years to finally realize what hope actually meant. I used to think that you may only hope when you at least see a glimmer of light; when you at least have the flimsiest of reasons to do so... but that is not what hope is about. Hope is most real when there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Hope is most real when you see no land on the horizon but instead see oceans stretching infinitely in every direction. Hope is most real when you have no tangible reason to hope.

Ironically, for liberation educator and theologian Paulo Freire (1970/2018, p. 91) "the dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not cause for despair, but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice." Through hope, oppression and injustice become catalysts for change, in the same way that a healing justice paradigm views social harms as opportunities for social transformation (Sawatsky, 2009, p. 243). For Freire, hope is a necessary aspect in achieving human liberation. Without hope for a better life and a better

world with less suffering, change is not possible. This is evident from his assertion that “hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 91). While hope alone is not enough to transform the world and collaborative action is needed, “the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion” (Freire, 1994, p. 2). Hope is fundamental to human liberation and the creation of a better world. While he recognizes various historical, economic, and social forces of oppression that breed hopelessness, for Freire (1994, p. 2) hope is an essential aspect of being human: “I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream.” Most importantly, for the purpose of this conceptual framework in pursuit of a healing transformative justice, according to Freire (1994, p. 3) hope is a necessary component for resistance and acts of solidarity:

Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope. Hope, as it happens, is so important for our existence, individual and social, that we must take every care not to experience it in a mistaken form, and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair. Hopelessness and despair are both the consequence and the cause of inaction or immobilism.

Fostering an active, living hope within members of marginalized and criminalized communities can contribute to the process of empowerment among oppressed groups, mobilizing them in solidarity to challenge abuses of power.

The implications of hope are especially powerful for prisoners. In *Arresting Hope*, edited by Martin, Korchinski, Fels, and Leggo (2014), the contributors share stories about a participatory action research project for health in a Canadian provincial prison. The prisoners’

essays and poems indicate that women gained hope and healing through the support of their peers, the ability to engage in cultural and spiritual practices, and being able to share their stories with the world. Similarly, in a qualitative study investigating the role of hope in a jail ministry program, Brown (2019, p. 15) sought to support prisoners in developing “a sense of hope that there is more to life than what they previously understood, that their lives have meaning, that they are not alone, and that they have the agency” to transform their lives. Having and exercising hope, along with personal or political agency, are necessary precursors for engaging in acts of resistance. As Paulo Freire (1970/2018, p. 92) asserted, “hope...does not consist of crossing one’s arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait” for justice and liberation from oppression.

2.3.3. Resistance of Oppression

The resistance literature is robust, with theoretical debates and empirical studies in disciplines such as political philosophy (Medina, 2013), anthropology and political science (Scott, 1985, 1990), liberation theology (Rieger, 2017), feminist penology and sociology (Faith, 2011; Law, 2012), and criminology (Bosworth, 1999; Bosworth & Carrabine, 2001; Rubin, 2015), to name just a few. Resistance is an active process aimed at challenging injustice and hegemonic ideologies, which can entail both individual and collective acts (Moore & Scraton, 2014) and can encompass internal, epistemic processes or objective, external acts (Medina, 2013). However, like power, resistance is relational (Foucault, 1978). Resistance can be framed as an “everyday act” (Scott, 1985) or as “consciously disruptive, intentionally political actions” (Rubin, 2015, p. 24); it can involve passive-aggressive, subversive behaviour or explicitly active, violent responses (Crewe, 2007; Ross, 2009; Scott, 1985, 1990). In perhaps his most well-known quote, Foucault captures the complexity of the notion of resistance:

Where there is power, there is resistance... a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case (Foucault, 1978, p. 95).

With such a plurality of resistances and seemingly incongruent descriptions, how might *resistance* be best conceptualized?

To begin, it is necessary to recognize that strategies and acts of resistance are extremely varied depending on factors such as class, race, gender, sexuality, culture, environmental context, and education. Sometimes this resistance is conscious, while other times it is not (Bosworth, 1999). Recognizing the role of diversity and external social factors, Medina (2013, p. 16) promotes a “contextualist account of resistance” encompassing internal or epistemic resistance (i.e., developing a resistant imagination or dissenting perspective compared to hegemonic norms), along with external resistance (i.e., an objectively political act, everyday act, or acts of solidarity). In this manner, the complex act of resistance “is conceptualized as *contending with*, and not exclusively or fundamentally as *contending against*” power (Medina, 2013, p. 16, emphasis in original). In a similar manner, Moore and Scraton (2014) discuss a plurality of types or forms of prisoner resistance, ranging from the individual acts of isolated prisoners to political or collective, organized forms of resistance. Individual and everyday acts of resistance are generally associated with women, while large-scale, collective resistance are more evident in men’s prisons. These authors caution, however, that “even in the context of political struggle, women prisoners’ experiences of incarceration were different, isolating, violating and a direct consequence of gender” (*ibid.*, p. 46).

Political anthropologist James Scott examines a longstanding debate in the literature about what constitutes *real* resistance. According to Scott (1985, p. 292), some resistance scholars argue that real resistance is “organized, systematic, cooperative, principled or selfless, has revolutionary consequences” and is explicitly political. In comparison, “token, incidental... activities” by contrast are “unorganized, unsystematic, and individual, opportunistic and self-indulgent, [and] have no revolutionary consequences.” Scott argues that both types of resistance should be considered *real* resistance, and we must recognize the danger some oppressed groups face when overtly challenging abusive power structures. Interestingly, decades later, this same debate continues.

Within the field of criminology, Rubin (2015) contends that penal scholars have overused and misused the term resistance, which has diluted the meaning of the concept. One of her key contentions is that the ‘everyday acts’ of resistance have been equated by penal scholars with more overt, political actions like hunger strikes, class-action lawsuits, and rioting against inhumane conditions. These more politically explicit actions, however, are frequently associated with men’s prisons, while women prisoners’ more subversive or covert actions are generally disregarded by scholars and the popular media (Law, 2012). Why must resistance entail explicitly political acts? To suggest that resistance necessitates political intentions diminishes and discounts many prisoners’ acts of resistance; especially those who do not read or speak French or English or who are unfamiliar with the relevant laws and policies.

In a similar line of reasoning, Rubin (2015) argues that scholars have overstated prisoners’ level of political consciousness; although I believe the notion that people require a political consciousness to resist their oppression is problematic. Does a person not know when they are being treated poorly? At its most basic level, resistance is a refusal to accept or comply

with rules and expectations. It is an act of opposition. When people resist oppressive social controls and structures, Downes, Rock, and McCormick, (2013) framed these resistant efforts as inherently political actions, yet these same acts may be framed as deviant by those in power. For example, the Wet'suwet'en protests in 2020-2021 where Indigenous people set up blockades on rail lines and the Coastal GasLink's drill site on unceded Wet'suwet'en and Gidimt'en territory was a political action by Indigenous communities to protect their traditional lands, yet this was framed as an illegal occupation by the Government of Canada, which subsequently resulted in the protesters being violently removed and arrested by the RCMP (Shah, 2022). As Downes and colleagues (2013, p. 9) explain, "naming something as deviant is a political act, and deviance involves conscious resistance by those without power." From this perspective, prisoners who resist are engaging in a political action simply by challenging the dominant social order, regardless of their level of political consciousness.

Rubin (2015) also discusses how "labeling behaviour 'resistance' without clear evidence of intentionality, is thus problematic" (p. 26). However, as Scott (1985) argues, explicitly political intentions can have *unintended* consequences. Also, how can a scholar know what the intentions of the prisoners are unless they interview them prior to the act, which Rubin (2015) did not do. These critiques ignore many acts of resistance that are more common in prisons designated for women, where riots and violence are rare (Law, 2012). Bosworth's (1999, p. 130) notion of resistance is particularly salient, as it highlights small "attempts to disrupt power relations, by drawing attention to a variety of minor acts and rebellions which may otherwise escape notice." Some examples of how women resist oppressive penal regimes include: filing lawsuits and grievances, fighting to maintain access to their children, hunger strikes, developing prisoner-led programs, peer-support, education programs, sharing food and resources, and

securing external support for prisoner initiatives (de Graaf & Kilty, 2016; Faith, 2011; Law, 2012; Pollack, 2019). Such acts of resistance are often driven by critical hope and agency and are integral to prisoner solidarity.

2.3.4. Radical Solidarity and Social Connectedness

Resistance to oppression and solidarity coincide in marginalized communities and repressive settings such as prisons. Medina (2013, p. 21) asserts that he is “interested in practices and habits of resistance because they are the heart and soul of solidarity... it is in and through resistance that relations of solidarity against domination and across different forms of oppression become possible and effective.” This symbiotic relationship between solidarity and resistance is evident in Victoria Law’s (2012) work. Despite the isolating nature of prison and the popular misconception that there is a lack of unity among imprisoned women, Law discusses how women have “demonstrated a willingness to share and help each other in times of need” (p. 19). These “simple actions” (p. 20) of solidarity that she documents include acts of kindness such as companionship for mothers who miss their children or survivors of domestic violence; greeting cards for women sent to medical or segregation units; sharing food; prisoners acting as interpreters for women who do not speak English; supporting new prisoners in understanding institutional rules and routines; facilitating literacy and AIDS awareness programs; advocating for one another; teaching legal skills; and developing prisoner run, peer-support programs. Law (2012, p. 27) explains how imprisoned women’s acts of kindness and solidarity, such as “sharing resources [and] comforting one another” is strangely perceived by the system as a “threat to security” because “the potential power of women sharing and networking undermines the operations of a system that seeks to foster an atmosphere of alienation and isolation.”

These seemingly innocuous acts are repressed by the penal system because solidarity among women is threatening to the patriarchal status quo (hooks, 2002). While studies in men's prisons since the turn of the century have suggested "a decline in the importance and intensity of a shared value system of solidarity, mutual aid and opposition to prison staff" (Crewe, 2005, p. 180) solidarity among incarcerated women appears not only to exist, but serves as a valuable social, practical, and emotional source of support (de Graaf & Kilty, 2016; Deakin & Spencer, 2011; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Law, 2012; Martin & Hesselbrock, 2001). Solidarity has been conceptualized in different ways. Mathiesen (2006, pp. 145-146) defines solidarity as "instrumental–task-oriented–and expressive–empathic emotional–relationships between two or more actors...in a group...or a social class." Other scholars have sought to expand notions of solidarity beyond in-group connections, suggesting a deep or radical understanding of solidarity between-groups, where diversity is respected and celebrated.

Medina (2013, p. 274) advocates for a *radical solidarity*, which entails "the formation of a community of experience and solidarity that can accept and celebrate differences" and requires "a political commitment to create and sustain contexts and practices that foster the flourishing of genuinely plural perspectives and voices that can critically engage each other without having to suppress their differences" (p. 281). Similarly, *deep solidarity* involves recognizing shared experiences of oppression that transcend differences in ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or religion, without ignoring our individual and cultural differences. Instead, "deep solidarity helps us deal with our differences. In fact, differences become an asset when the resources of our different traditions are allowed to make their specific contributions to the struggle" (Rieger, 2017, p. 361). This requires a commitment to actively joining the struggle for liberation of oppressed groups, rather than observing at a distance. Indeed, "solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of

those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 49). True solidarity requires critical reflection, debate, and dialogical action²⁶, rather than a blind acceptance of hegemonic discourse. For Freire and colleagues (2014) oppressed people should be encouraged to challenge dominant beliefs and teachings, while being open to having their own beliefs and assumptions challenged. This is akin to Ahmed’s (2004, p. 189) contention:

Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground.

For this project, solidarity consists of the formation of strong and supportive relationships among prisoners, sometimes in collaboration with an ally, for social, emotional, and practical support, to secure rights, reduce inequities, and contest power imbalances. Solidarity, therefore, is an active process based on an emotional connection and the creation of communities of inclusive care. Meaningful social connections have been shown to be particularly significant in promoting healthy physical and psychosocial outcomes for women prisoners (Smoyer, 2015). This type of solidarity and social connectedness are significant sources of support for women prisoners’ re-entering the community. Deakin and Spencer (2011) found that positive relationships serve as a social resource which assists women in readjusting to life in the community post-prison. Such relationships are more easily fostered in communities that practice

²⁶ In Paulo Freire’s (1970) classic text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he asserts that enhancing the capacity for critical consciousness or *conscientization* among oppressed and marginalized groups requires an active dialogue between teachers and learners. Such dialogue can promote critical reflectivity concerning previously ingrained, popular assumptions about the world and one’s place in it, thus promoting liberation from oppression. Dialogue is therefore conceived as not only a theoretical or reflective activity but is also a precursor to action.

healing or transformative justice, compared to the stigma ex-prisoners typically face when re-entering the community. In terms of promoting healing from trauma and healthy coping strategies, solidarity involves collaboratively building and supporting one another's strengths and assets as opposed to charitable giving (Rieger, 2017). Radical solidarity, resistance to oppression, active hope, and agentic capacities are examples of, and contribute to, the practice of strength-based coping strategies.

2.3.5. Strength-based Coping Strategies that Promote Healing

As an aspect of resiliency, strength-based coping is the capacity to handle multiple life challenges by identifying and mobilizing strengths and available resources (Ferreira, 2013). *Assets or strengths*, in contrast with needs or deficits, can include individual, relational, institutional, community and cultural resources such as education, arts programming, musical talent, spiritual practices, cultural programs and resources, sports, access to family, friends, and social/community supports and services (Bernier, 2010; Bosworth, 1999; Chamberlen, 2018; Frigon & Shantz, 2014; Hartling, 2008; Minkler & Hancock, 2003; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002; Pollack, 2019). A key component of asset-based coping involves the agentic capacity for people to select which resources they would like to mobilize. Indeed, Bosworth (1999) indicates that a critical coping mechanism for women in prison is “the development of a sense of self-determination in which prisoners perceive themselves as agents with some freedom to choose” (p. 133).

Strength-based practices are explicitly enjoyable and rewarding to those involved. Instead of forced obedience as required by most legal interventions, participants are supported in the development of “intrinsic motivations towards helping behaviours” (Burnett & Maruna, 2004, p.

89). Asset-oriented activities are those which utilize prisoners' strengths, while also promoting their dignity. An example of strength-based coping can be found in research on prison foodways. In their study of food in women's prisons, de Graaf and Kilty (2016) discuss how prisoners collaborate to improve the quality of bland prison food and eat together, which represents an "ethic of care" and a "strategy of coping and resistance" (p. 40). Asset-based coping is enhanced through interpersonal relationships and peer-support (Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002). Additionally, research shows that solidary relationships between women in prison help them cope (Bosworth, 1999), decrease isolation, increase self-worth, and facilitate personal healing (Pollack, 2004, 2009b).

Engaging in a religious community and spiritual practices has also been identified as a strength-based, emotional coping strategy that can serve as a resource for people experiencing challenges. For example, based on findings from a qualitative research project with former male prisoners currently residing in a halfway house, Schroeder and Frana (2009) report that religion and spirituality act as a form of emotional comfort and distraction from various stressors for those attempting the transition back into the community. Religion and spiritual practices are also sensual, cognitive, performative, ritualistic, and social activities, affecting the *whole* person. In terms of criminalized Indigenous women in Canada, academics, activists, and politicians are increasingly recognizing the importance of traditional Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices for women's healing and wellbeing. For example, Dell, Gardipy, Kirlin, Naytowhow, and Nicol (2014) describe a collaborative community-engaged research project with criminalized Indigenous women in which the findings were shared with the community through song, which is central to Indigenous spirituality. As the authors explain, "prioritizing the often-silenced voices of women with lived experience, the song and video are intended to convey the

interconnection between the negative impacts of stigma and the resilient benefits of a cultural identity” (Dell et al., 2014, p. 320). Drawing on the experiences of over one hundred Indigenous women’s healing journeys, this collaborative research partnership also developed an interactive workshop that aimed to “offer hope and inspiration” (Dell et al., 2014, p. 323) to women struggling with addiction through a culturally relevant program grounded in traditional spiritual practices.

A more recent example of a community-engaged healing intervention that centres Indigenous knowledges and decolonizing methodologies is the RED Path initiative. Ryan, Ali, and Sabourin (2020) from the Native Women’s Association of Canada collaborated with federally incarcerated Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who were diagnosed with a sexually transmitted blood borne infection (such as HIV and Hepatitis C) to design and implement a culturally and trauma-informed intervention inside several federal institutions. Based on this collaborative initiative, the authors assert that successful interventions with this population “must take a strengths-based approach and focus on healing and resiliency rather than challenges and deficits” (Ryan, Ali, & Sabourin, 2020, p. 108). Altogether, strengths-based coping strategies, radical solidarity, and resistance to oppression, driven by a sense of critical hope and agency combine to facilitate the development of personal, relational, and cultural resiliency within people and their communities.

2.3.6. Resiliency

Resiliency is a characteristic consisting of cognitive-affective, physical, relational, and cultural-spiritual capacities to triumph over adversity. Most commonly, resiliency refers to mental health and personal well-being, which facilitates positive coping with various stressors

and problematic living conditions, thus enabling individuals to overcome adversity across multiple contexts and settings (Martin, Korchinski, Fels, & Leggo, 2014). Indeed, “resilience could be the key to explaining resistance to [adversity] across the lifespan and how people can bounce back” (Woods, Larwin, & Allen, 2020, p. 3). With the appropriate coping resources, people facing hardship have greater opportunities for growth (Cowen, 1994). Some researchers have defined resilience as “a disposition that ameliorates the adverse effects of stress and promotes positive outcomes” (Woods, Larwin, & Allen, 2020, p. 3) or as an “individual choice to resist personal suffering and distress” (de la Tierra, 2019, p. 133). This psychological operationalization of resiliency has been critiqued for being too narrowly constructed, focused on internal traits, and ignoring the role of external, societal factors in favour of a Western-European, Anglo, and male-centric perspective (Jordan, 1992).

Building on Jordan’s (1992) work, which calls for a broader exploration of the relational dynamics that support the capacity for growth, Hartling (2008, p. 56) defines resiliency as a relational activity, specifically as “*the ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in response to hardships, adversities, trauma, and alienating social/cultural practices*” (emphasis in original). Central to this view of resiliency is the recognition that human relationships are socially constructed within a particular cultural context, which can facilitate or impede personal relationships that are critical for enhancing a person’s resilient capacity (Hartling, 2008). This relational-cultural view of resilience is especially relevant to women and gender-diverse people, racialized people, and other marginalized communities because it recognizes the role of dominant-subordinate power structures. For example, a researcher from a dominant group valuing independence and personal achievement may implicitly privilege these resilient attributes as the ideal, disregarding relational factors that enhance a subordinate groups’

resilience and leading to a faulty generalization that anyone lacking these individual traits is not resilient. Acknowledging power relations in this context also recognizes that marginalized groups experience disrupted relationships due to adversities like poverty, displacement, limited educational opportunities, and incarceration. Framing resilience through a sociocultural lens facilitates an understanding of it as a characteristic that can be strengthened in anyone through the development of meaningful, interpersonal relationships. Supporting people's relational development can assist them in transcending hardship and adversity, while promoting healthy growth in the process (Hartling, 2008). Developing relational resilience involves building healthy connections with friends, families, and people in various communities (Jordan, 1992).

More recently, Dijk and colleagues (2016) developed a measure to assess "Native Wellness" and resiliency by conceptualizing Indigenous culture as an intervention. Resiliency is thus conceived as a multi-level construct that includes personal inner-strength, relational support, and community or cultural wellness. The notion of resiliency implies that some people can overcome difficult, challenging, and traumatic life experiences, despite the presence of various risk factors, while continuing to develop and grow throughout their lives in a healthy manner (Cowen, 2000; Kloos, et. al., 2012). Resilient attributes may be personal, relational, or community-wide resources and opportunities such as coping strategies, living in a safe neighbourhood with access to shelter, access to education, health care and social services, and interpersonal connections (Masten & Powell, 2003).

Looking specifically at the nature of resiliency in prison, there is no simple way to determine who will be more or less resilient, or able to resist their oppression in carceral settings. Age, upbringing, social class, ethnicity, belief system, and education might influence one's

ability to adjust to life in prison, where the penal environment is designed to “diminish initiative, punish resistance and undermine potential” (Moore & Scraton, 2014, p. 50). In her opening essay to an edited volume on a participatory health research project in prison, Ruth Martin describes the prisoners she worked with as resilient, tenacious, and possessing a shared desire to improve their lives (Martin et. al., 2014). The women who contributed essays and poems to this collection demonstrate their strength and resiliency by sharing stories about traumatic childhoods, life on the streets, domestic violence, and addiction.

An additional case example of criminalized and incarcerated people’s resiliency and relational capacities was the creation of the first Prison for Women (P4W) Peer Support Team in 1990, after four Indigenous women died by suicide within two years (Stewart, 1997). Within the next few years, three more women died by suicide and many more engaged in self-harm or suicide attempts to escape the pain of life in prison. Six out of the seven women who died were Indigenous (Hansen, 2018). When interviewed about their experiences, women expressed the challenges of healing within a punitive, isolating setting and their feelings of distrust, unsafety, and the unpredictability of the penal environment that led to mental health strain and the inability to heal from past trauma (Pollack, 1993). These significant barriers to healing from trauma spoke to a need for an alternative therapeutic approach based on mutual aid. The Peer Support Team (PST) was a collaborative effort between prisoners and therapists at P4W to address the needs of the prisoners in therapeutic programs with people who have a shared experience rather than strictly white, middle-class professionals. Feminist psychologists began coordinating the PST in May 1990. Based upon feminist principles of empowerment and healing, PST members completed a six-week training session covering a range of issues from racism, homophobia, self-harm, and anger to counselling skills, self-care practices, and gender stereotypes (Pollack, 1993).

Shoshana Pollack (1993) conducted a program evaluation of the PST to assess prisoner satisfaction with it, recommendations for change, and its impact on the prison environment. Her findings indicate that the group training and involvement contributed to building solidarity and self-efficacy among team members, while enhancing feelings of safety, trust, and belonging within the general prisoner population. Reflecting on her years of work with the women inside P4W, Pollack (1993, p. v) highlights their “strength, vision, and ability to persevere” as inspirational, forever shaping her dedication to this community. While the creation of the PST was officially based on the recommendations from an investigation into self-harming behaviour among prisoners at P4W (see Heney, 1989), the study found that prisoners had informally developed a social support network to address this issue without relying on prison staff who responded by isolating women who self-harm in segregation. Beyond their strength and resiliency, these women were clearly exercising their agency, resistance to penal authority and oppression, and solidarity with fellow prisoners. Indeed, another program evaluation of therapeutic services at P4W (Kendall, 1993) found that feminist-based counselling, such as the PST clearly reflected positive social connections based on mutual respect among program participants and key feminist principles such as personal autonomy or agency. The actions of the women at P4W during this time, which include raising public and political awareness of the conditions inside²⁷, also indicate prisoners’ political agency, sense of hope that things can improve, and their capacity to engage in asset-based coping. This program’s success led to

²⁷ Joanne Mayhew, who was incarcerated at P4W when the first of a string of suicides occurred, sought to raise public and political awareness of the conditions inside by writing a letter to the CSC Commissioner and providing a copy to the local newspaper *The Kingston Whig Standard* in January 1989. In this letter Mayhew describes the death, attempted hangings, and self-harming behaviour among prisoners to “provide a record of events from which to gauge future developments” while expressing her hope for change towards “an enlightened path of positive steps” (as cited in Pollack, 1993, p. v).

recommendations for the development of additional peer-support programs for newly released prisoners re-entering the community (Kendall, 1993). Unfortunately, many of these positive recommendations never materialized and this peer-support model did not successfully carry-over to the new regional prisons upon P4W's closure in 2000. The PST's innovative and empowering approach to mutual aid and its strength-based focus shares many overlapping features with HTJ initiatives, while encompassing each of the six strength-based concepts outlined in this developing framework. In the following section, I conceptualize healing transformative justice, while considering how the above sensitizing concepts fit within this emergent framework.

2.4. Exploring Asset-oriented Community-building Processes: A Healing Transformative Justice

The current retributive, vengeful carceral system uses an individual, psychological perspective in all aspects of its work, defining the concepts discussed above in a narrow, reductionistic manner, if at all. The so-called 'justice' system is primarily based on the notion of just retribution or revenge (Mathiesen, 2006), rather than considering issues of distributive and social justice based on principles of equity, inclusivity, and community well-being for *everyone*. Beyond its moral failings, the legal system is also ineffective at meeting its espoused goals in terms of deterring 'crime', enhancing safety, or rehabilitating lawbreakers and reproduces the Eurocentric, patriarchal status quo (Davis, 2003; Mathiesen, 2006). We need to eliminate patriarchal and Eurocentric domination in our society to improve equity and to create safe, healthy living conditions for *everyone*. To counter the dominant perspectives structuring our current criminal 'justice' system, we must expand our understanding of the strengths and capacities of people who are criminalized or were incarcerated in prisons for women using a multi-level framework consistent with Healing Transformative Justice (HTJ). Please refer to

Table 1 below for an overview of the distinguishing features of HTJ and how these features overlap or interact with the six sensitizing concepts outlined above.

Table 1: Overlapping Features of HTJ and Key Concepts

Distinguishing Features of HTJ	Solidarity & Sisterhood	Resistance	Critical Hope & Inner strength	Resiliency	Assets that promote Coping & Healing	Agency
Holistic approach – social, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, & ecological relations - interconnectedness	X	X	X	X	X	X
Multilevel – personal, relational, collective	X	X	X	X	X	X
Builds community	X		X	Relational & Community Resilience	X	Political agency
Incorporates cultural & spiritual practices of the community	X		X	Cultural & community resilience	X	X (when not forced but freely chosen)
Recognition of suffering; Walking alongside those who suffer; shared suffering – witnessing struggle	X	Relational & collective	X	X	X	Relational – negotiating power relations
Biblical form of justice/Shalom – reduce inequity & promote social justice	X	X	X	X	X	X

Collectivist-oriented (vs. individualist focus)	X	X	X	Cultural & community resilience	Relational, community/ cultural resources	Political agency
Challenge notions of order & control – Critique all forms of violence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Recognition of innate human goodness in others	X	Epistemic	X	Relational resilience	X	X
Transformative, radical view of social harms – <i>seen as an opportunity to teach & implement HTJ</i>	X	X	X	Relational & community		X
Strength-based & Capacity-building	X	X	X	X	X	X
Listening is essential – use of Circle processes	X		X	X	X	X
Inclusive	X	Collective	X	X	X	Relational & political
Forgiveness, Compassion, & Love	X	Epistemic & Relational	X	X	X	X
Creative, flexible, & Context dependent	X	X	X	X	X	X
Facilitates Authentic Identity Development	X	X	X	X	X	X
Preventive & Constructive	X	X	X	X	X	X (depends on choice of action)
Empowering	X	X	X	X	X	X

The above table was created to provide a comprehensive illustration of the key shared characteristics of communities that engage in non-traditional healing or transformative justice practices. The content primarily stems from Sawatsky's (2009) international ethnographic research on diverse, traditional communities that practice healing approaches to justice (i.e., an Indigenous community in Canada, a Christian community in Scotland, and a Buddhist community in northern France), and is supplemented by a review of Morris's (2000) work on transformative justice, along with community organizers brown's (2020a, 2020b) and Dixon's (2020) reflections on key lessons and practical steps towards liberatory transformation in the United States.

While each approach to HTJ is context dependent, there are a range of common characteristics shared by communities that have engaged in HTJ in terms of their vision, practices, responses to harm, or cultural dynamics. Following a detailed review of the literature, it was evident that the six sensitizing concepts outlined in the previous section, which consistently emerged in discussions of criminalized people's strengths, were also central to understanding HTJ praxis. After conceptualizing these six capacities and outlining the key features of HTJ, I critically reflected on how each feature is an example of, or requires community members to enact agency, hope, resistance, solidarity, strength-based coping, and resiliency. For example, referring to item five in the left-hand column under distinguishing features of HTJ is the recognition of human suffering and the necessity of community members to witness, support those who suffer, and share in this suffering. Drawing our attention to the six sensitizing concepts, this capacity to witness, support, and share in human suffering is clearly an act of solidarity, resilience, inner strength and hope for change. It is also an example of relational and collective resistance to our individualistic, neoliberal, competitive, fear-based culture that

instead promotes strength-based coping or healing and serves as an example of relational agency in terms of negotiating power relations (i.e., rather than ignoring human suffering through prison reform and incarceration, individuals can support one another in the community or support each other inside without involving prison staff). The example of the first peer-support team at P4W clearly illustrates the interconnection between shared suffering and the strength-based capacities of criminalized women. We can also see how this example encompasses the key features of HTJ in terms of being empowering, preventive, constructive, creative, flexible, inclusive, and compassionate, and sees listening as an essential component of supporting those in pain.

Although healing and transformative justice models have emerged distinctly, the ideas, language, practices, and processes of these approaches overlap significantly and were garnered from international case studies of “traditional” or marginalized communities illustrating the kind of social, structural, and spiritual relationships necessary to sustain a healing view of justice. Additionally, both approaches use a similar language of transformation, healing, community-building, radical social change, sacred teachings and spiritual practices, and the value of all life within creation. Sawatsky (2009, p. 39) defines Healing Justice as:

A collective paradigm or imagination, usually drawing on an ancient wisdom tradition, that seeks to find ways of surviving together by structuring life so that [justice processes]... reflect...[a] respect for life and by treating harms as opportunities to transform suffering and root causes of harm and, at the same time, to cultivate conditions of respectful living within the interrelated aspects of self, other, communities, social structures, environment and Spirit.

In a similar vein, transformative justice aims to facilitate the involvement of people who are most affected by social harms to find creative and healing solutions. This includes the victims, lawbreakers, their families, and communities. It also recognizes our common human struggle in that we all make mistakes and at some point, we each experience the roles of victim and

lawbreaker (Morris, 2000). Essentially, transformative justice involves practices that go “to the root of the problem and generate solutions and healing there, such that the conditions that create injustice are transformed” (brown, 2020a, p. 250).

The principles and approach of HTJ are humanistic and asset-oriented, supporting the concepts within the emergent framework outlined in this chapter. HTJ is focused on preventing and repairing social harms through multi-level interventions, systemic changes, and context-dependent mediation while “building a community of trust, unity, compassion and common vision” (Sawatsky, 2018, p. 193) as opposed to vengeful punishment and further marginalization of certain communities. Healing and transformative approaches to justice have primarily been led by marginalized communities who have developed alternative interventions based on necessity (Dixon, 2020; Page & Woodland, 2023; Sawatsky, 2009; 2018).

HTJ strives to transform individuals’ lives, communities, and ways of relating to one another by using a strengths-based approach and building peace and healing within the community (Morris, 2000; Sawatsky, 2009; 2018). This is achieved with creative interventions²⁸

²⁸ For example, a holistic community healing movement emerged from Indigenous communities in the Canadian Prairies. The First Nation Indigenous community of Hollow Water located in Central Manitoba consists of four neighbouring communities of Anishinaabe and Ojibway peoples. Recognizing the sacred value of communal interconnection and wholeness, Elders in the community began community consultations in 1984 which eventually led to the development of the Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) collective. Their preliminary vision was simply to create a healthy community. Recognizing the complexity and intergenerational trauma experienced by these First Nations communities, they attempted to restore their spiritual practices and traditional governance traditions that were destroyed by centuries of colonialism and cultural genocide (Ross, 1995). Rejecting the fragmented, compartmentalized strategies of Western society’s attempts at community development, the CHCH leadership group quickly established the importance of healing themselves before they were able to support the healing journeys of their community, much less that of the wider society. Community consultations resulted in a 13-step process of a grassroots healing program that was funded and implemented for five years. Using traditional teachings and holistic approaches to community development the CHCH collective addressed a multitude of issues related to addiction, alcoholism, sexual assault, domestic abuse, incest, lawbreaking, marginalized and street-

that are unique to each context, and supporting the whole community to share in grief, responsibility, and reconciliation (Morris, 2000; Page & Woodland, 2023). It is a “better kind of justice rooted in healing, wisdom, and love” (Sawatsky, 2018, p. 7). Unlike the individualistic nature of our current legal system, healthy relational dynamics and the establishment of relationships are fundamental to HTJ. What this means is that contrary to the adversarial nature of the ‘justice’ system, a healing form of justice is communal and concerned with collective, rather than personal interests. Furthermore, rejecting the notion that there must be winners and losers, HTJ is “rooted in relationships with the land and with all of creation [which] leads to a concern for the healing of all” (Sawatsky, 2009). This alternative, context-dependent approach to justice requires a radical departure from our current settler-colonial mindset and ways of relating to one another. Fundamentally, HTJ involves “the transformation from broken people and communities to whole ones...[potentially] yield[ing] deeper trust, resilience, and interdependence” (brown, 2020a, p. 253).

Although there is no singular process of HTJ, researchers and activists have documented some lessons learned based on the types of social, structural, and spiritual relationships necessary to sustain a healing view of justice. Community building practices and accountability (i.e., transforming social structures so that everyone’s needs are met, altering the systems and social relations that lead to suffering, preventing and addressing violence without relying on carceral

involved youth. Some central insights that guided this work included: recognizing that communities must heal from within rather than turning to external supports; a multi-level historical perspective is essential to understand the implications of the behaviours of individuals, families, communities, nations, social structures, and Creation as a whole; healing is a lifelong journey and a collective effort, it cannot be successful if done in isolation from others; the focus of any intervention must be on root causes; and any intervention must be conscientious of potential impacts on future generations (Sawatsky, 2009, 2018). See Lajeunesse (1996) and Ross (1996) for more detailed discussions of the Hollow Water community.

systems) are the most important aspects of HTJ (Dixon, 2020; Morris, 2000; Sawatsky, 2009; 2018). Building healthy relationships with a diversity of people and “the process of building community-based strategies can fundamentally reshape our ways of engaging with each other” (Dixon, 2020, p. 17).

HTJ praxis requires us to transform how we relate to the Earth, engage with spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, dance, music) and sacred teachings (e.g., songs, sacred stories) as sources of healing, and locate community-led interventions or responses to lawbreaking in the communities that are directly impacted by social harms (Dixon, 2020; Morris, 2000; Sawatsky, 2009, 2018). This involves “visionary practices of justice rooted in love, [and] in connection” (brown, 2020b, p. 323). Other examples of shared HTJ practices include acknowledging and witnessing the suffering of others in the world and recognizing our complicity in other people’s suffering; listening to the voices and experiences of marginalized people while building meaningful relationships; relinquishing self-righteousness and harsh judgements; public education on HTJ processes; focusing on root causes of social problems and examining the whole system to determine how existing structures facilitated or allowed harm to occur; exercising a collectivist, inclusive social orientation which frames individualism as inherently responsible for a punitive justice system; shifting from blame and punishment to recognizing our common humanity; and supporting the process of forgiveness (brown, 2020b; Dixon, 2020; Morris, 2000; Page & Woodland, 2023; Sawatsky, 2009, 2018).

Mobilizing criminalized people’s strengths and resiliency can support community re-entry, decarceral interventions, encourage asset-based coping, and facilitate solidarity among those most impacted by unjust social structures and the carceral system, ultimately supporting

penal abolition²⁹ efforts while reducing the need for police and promoting the use of HTJ. To support HTJ processes, interventions are needed at multiple levels. HTJ practices require radical solidarity, epistemic resistance, and resistant imaginations; enhancing personal and political agency for everyone, while building hope and inner strength, along with relational and cultural resilience; all of which contribute to asset-based coping strategies. Transformative changes must be fostered within individuals, our social relations (i.e., ways of relating should be based on justice, equity, and inclusion), and at the systemic, structural, and collective levels. As HTJ processes are distinct to each community, we must value a diversity of opinions, experiences, and practices.

2.5. Closing Comments

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight key gaps in the criminological literature, which typically utilizes a harm or deficit-based approach to understanding the lives of criminalized people. Through an interdisciplinary lens, I sought to develop an asset-oriented conceptual framework that I mobilized to guide the design of this project and the analytical process. This chapter began with some theoretical reflections on the tension between penal reform in the context of imprisonment and abolition, the barriers and limitations of each approach, and the need for a radical imagination to successfully implement abolitionist goals. I

²⁹ Angela Davis (2003, p. 103) advocates for “the abolition of the prison as the dominant mode of punishment” without neglecting the lived realities of millions of prisoners currently behind bars. Recognizing the importance of working in solidarity with prisoners, Davis (2003, p. 103) suggests that a central challenge of the prison abolition movement is the development of “more humane, habitable environments for people in prison without bolstering the permanence of the prison system.” Abolitionist strategies include decriminalization and decarceration, building community supports, and radically transforming a plurality of various structures of domination in society.

then introduced the relatively new sub-discipline of positive criminology as a potential organizing framework for strength-based research.

The central component of this chapter consisted of an emerging conceptual framework of the resiliency of people who were incarcerated in prisons designated for women. Through extensive multidisciplinary reading of literature that highlights the strengths of criminalized people, I introduced six key concepts: agency, hope, resistance, solidarity, strength-based coping, and resiliency. As I highlighted in my discussion, it is somewhat artificial to discuss each of these concepts distinctly due to their symbiotic relationship, as illustrated in *Figures 1* and *2*, and exemplified in the case example of P4W's peer-support team. Agency or the potential to effect change and exercise free-will, is linked to hope for a better future and inner strength. Without free will, how can we possibly hope for positive change? Agency and hope are both necessary precursors for exercising resistance. Without agentic capacities and a sense of hopefulness, resistance is not possible. While people can engage in individual acts of resistance, the resistance of oppression is a relational act and is most effective when exercised in solidarity with one's community. Each of these concepts are examples of and contribute to strength-based coping strategies that promote healing, which combine to create resilient individuals and communities. These six key concepts share common characteristics in the promotion of healing transformative justice, as illustrated in *Figures 1* and *2*, and *Table 1*.

A healing transformative justice approach requires both personal and political agency to enact. It also requires a sense of hope from individuals and the community. HTJ is an example of hope in action and a form of resistance against our current violent, punitive, retributive legal system. HTJ involves radical solidarity with the community, especially with those who are marginalized and oppressed. Essentially, HTJ is a strength-based approach to addressing social

harms and violence, while promoting healing and building healthy communities. Finally, HTJ contributes to fostering resilient communities and people by promoting personal, relational, and cultural resiliency.

Imagine a community that supports the development of these assets in every person, beginning in childhood. Imagine that every social relation is built upon relational processes and every systemic structure is asset oriented. With this emerging model of prisoner resiliency and HTJ, the aim is to prevent social harms from occurring by building community safety and wellness, as well as promoting these capacities at multiple levels. Supporting the development and promotion of these strengths and protective factors within criminalized women, marginalized groups, and the wider community will help prevent future difficulties and mediate risks.

This conceptual framework was used to create the interview guide for this project. During the in-depth interviews I asked participants questions that might capture examples of criminalized people's capacities to exercise agency, hope, resistance, and healthy coping strategies, while engaging in solidarity with one another, thus promoting resiliency and contributing to HTJ praxis. I mobilized this framework throughout the analytical process by using each of these constructs and the distinguishing features of HTJ as sensitizing concepts. A more detailed discussion of this process is explicated in the following chapter where I discuss my methodological framework, ethical considerations, data collection methods and process, and analytical approach.

Chapter 3. Methods and Methodology for Ethical-Reflexive Prisoner Ethnography

I begin this chapter by outlining the project's guiding research questions. I then discuss the philosophical basis of this study including its' epistemological and ontological orientations. Next, I provide a detailed overview of the critical self-reflexive process I utilized throughout this project and discuss key ethical considerations. I proceed to outline the emergent research design I employed along with the data collection methods, including an overview of autoethnography, participant recruitment, the sample, and interview process. The following section covers methods of data analysis and interpretation. I conclude by reflecting on the strengths and challenges of conducting critical criminological research as a criminalized person.

My research questions include: (a) How do people in prisons designated for women cope with and navigate imprisonment? What positive or healthy coping strategies are most beneficial for them? (b) What is the role of incarcerated people's healthy coping strategies, solidarity, and resistance in their experience of prison? (c) How do Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) policies and practices promote or inhibit solidarity and asset-based coping strategies among prisoners? (d) What are the implications of these policies and practices for prisoners' experiences of community re-entry?

3.1. Philosophical Basis

With respect to outlining a philosophical foundation for this project, it was necessary to delineate a methodological paradigm that facilitates a critique of systemic issues, while respecting the diverse and potentially conflicting views of my participants. To avoid tokenism and exploitation, ethical research with marginalized and oppressed communities must be

conducted in a way that honours their lived experiences and includes some type of social action. The population of people in prisons designated for women in Canada is extremely diverse, just as criminalized people's experiences and perceptions of the prison system are varied. There is currently an extensive amount of literature highlighting the widespread systemic injustices of the prison system, and although a structural analysis is not the central focus of this project, it is nevertheless important to leave space for systemic recommendations to emerge from collaboration and discussions with criminalized people. Additionally, I required a research paradigm that can encompass grounded theory, thematic narrative analysis, and autoethnography into a hybridized analytic framework, which Chang (2016) contends is essential for autoethnographic projects. Furthermore, this study is situated within a community-engaged strategy that mobilizes action-oriented methods and prisoner ethnography³⁰. The current project is therefore framed within a critical or transformative paradigm (Denzin, 2017; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2017; Mcilveen, 2008; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

The critical or transformative paradigm emerged from Marxism and critical social theory, and is largely constituted by contemporary areas of study in social justice and activism, by way

³⁰ I provide an overview and definition of prisoner ethnography below in section 3.4.2.

of mobilizing feminism³¹, cultural studies³², critical race theory³³, liberation theology³⁴, and queer theory³⁵ (Denzin, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2017; Mertens, 2009; Rieger, 2017). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.105) define a research paradigm as “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” In this section, I briefly frame the beliefs, epistemology, and ontology of the transformative paradigm³⁶.

The transformative paradigm encompasses the use of positivist, empirical, interpretive and constructivist approaches to research, depending on the nature of the inquiry. The key factor is that research framed by a critical paradigm aims to produce radical social change and the liberation of oppressed groups, while being acutely focused on issues of social ethics and power (Denzin, 2017; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2017; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Similarly, Mcilveen (2008) asserts that transformative research typically extends the social constructionist

³¹ Feminist research challenges the methodological assumptions of positivism and are subjective in nature, allowing for less restrictive, more innovative and inclusive research. Feminist approaches privilege the voices of marginalized groups (Ardevini, 2015).

³² Cultural studies examine the relationship between cultural practices and power structures operating through social phenomena and the wider political context. This involves a critical analysis of policies and practices related to gender, sexual orientation, social class, ideologies, ethnicity, and other sociopolitical phenomena (Sardar & Van Loon, 1994). In this context, culture refers to “a network of embedded practices and representations (texts, images, talk, codes of behaviour and the narrative structures organizing these) that shapes every aspect of social life” (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 316).

³³ Critical race theory critiques systems and structures of power (e.g., legal, social, political, economic, religion, media) for oppressing and failing to protect marginalized and racialized people (Wing, 2003).

³⁴ Liberation theology involves socio-economic inquiry focused on the political liberation for oppressed and impoverished people while addressing multiple forms of social inequalities in an effort to end oppressive class structures (Stenberg, 2006).

³⁵ Queer theory broadly examines how the construction and distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality underpins every aspect of modern Western culture, looking at sexuality as a social and political organizing principle (Gamson, 2000).

³⁶ I use the terms “critical” and “transformative” paradigms interchangeably; while in the literature various authors prefer one term over the other, their descriptions and definitions ultimately refer to the same key points.

stance to emphasize the role of discourse and power relations in shaping reality. A key aspect of this paradigmatic stance is a focus on understanding and critiquing systemic and structural injustices. According to Flyvbjerg (2001) critical knowledge cannot be obtained via constructionist or positivist paradigms alone, yet such knowledge is crucial if we hope to reveal power relations and identify critical moral values and shared interests to facilitate social change. Transformative research methodologies involve participatory and social action-oriented approaches, which are used in pursuit of social justice for oppressed and marginalized groups in society (Flyvbjerg, 2001) such as incarcerated people.

3.1.1. Standpoint Feminist Epistemology

Gender, race, class, and other intersecting identities shape our conceptions of reality. Dominant conceptions and knowledge practices tend to disadvantage women and other marginalized groups. These hegemonic knowledges achieve this by excluding the oppressed from social inquiry, denying them epistemic authority, producing theories that represent these groups as inferior, rendering power relations invisible, and reinforcing social hierarchies (Delanty, 2005; Hekman, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000; Nelson & Prileltensky, 2010). Research findings are mediated through the values of the researcher and participants. Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of research, I employed standpoint feminism, which is one example of the epistemological perspective of the transformative paradigm (Hill Collins, 2000).

Feminist standpoint epistemologies question the alleged neutrality of the researcher and research study, along with the hegemony of research practices claiming to be ‘abstract’ and ‘disengaged’. Emerging from Marxist, Hegelian, and second wave feminist thought in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist standpoint recognizes the relative exclusion and omission of women’s voices

and experiences throughout history (Harding, 1987; Hill Collins, 2000; Rose, 1983). Feminist standpoint is premised on the notion of situated knowledges or that “all knowledge and knowledge-making processes are constituted by the standpoints of both the researcher and the researched” (Doucet, 2018, p. 76) so that knowledge is always produced from multiple standpoints. Feminist standpoint theory emphasizes that women’s lives are the point of entry “to start off knowledge projects” (Harding, 1991, p. 61). By centering the perceptions of oppressed women, feminist standpoint scholars illuminate a wealth of previously hidden knowledge contained within women’s experiences. Another key aspect of this approach involves ‘epistemic advantage’, which prioritizes the positionalities of marginalized groups to best inform social theory (Doucet, 2018).

Borrowing from Marx’s theory of historical materialism, Hartsock (1983) suggests that the material context of one’s life structures and limits one’s understanding of social relations. Reality is perceived differently as material conditions differ. Dominant groups in society tend to understand their perspective as ‘real’ and correct, rejecting other definitions. Hartsock (1983, p. 118) insists that the ruling class’s perception of reality is “partial and perverse”, while the oppressed group’s perspective exposes the power dynamics that structure human relations, thus providing an alternative, differentially situated, understanding of material conditions. Reality is both socially and materially constructed and some perceptions of reality are partial, while others are more accurate and liberatory. For example, prison staff from their position of power may describe women prisoners as vulnerable and needy, while the prisoners view themselves as resilient for overcoming tremendous life challenges and trauma, freeing them from the confines of essentialist framing.

Centering women's lived experiences in the research process is essential to counteracting "the historical trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion" (Brooks, 2007, p. 56) from hegemonic knowledge claims. Women's unique standpoint in society provides justification for the truth claims of feminism, thus providing a method for analyzing social reality (Hartsock, 1983). Feminist standpoint theory can be contrasted with the epistemological and moral relativism of constructivism. Like critical realism (outlined in the following section), Harding (1993, p. 56) asserts that standpoint feminism "claims that all knowledge attempts are socially situated and that some of these objective social locations are better than others for knowledge projects."

Delanty (2005, p. 123) perceives science as "ideologically laden with male values." Feminist standpoint seeks to "transform women's social experience by creating forms of knowledge that can liberate women from patriarchal social relations" (*ibid.*, p. 124) by identifying the centrality of power in knowledge creation and the contemporaneous effects of knowledge-as-power on wider society. Women's narratives and perspectives ought to be situated and analyzed within the context of wider sociopolitical structures or relations (Doucet, 2018) and applied towards social activism aimed at the liberation of oppressed women. Brooks (2007, p. 60) posits that through the authentic representation of women's experiences of oppression, "feminist standpoint scholars and researchers seek to agitate resistance against these experiences of oppression and implement solutions to overcome them."

Feminist standpoint epistemologies shape my approach both to theory-building and to research methodology, which necessitates linking knowledge and practice towards political action (Brooks, 2007). This approach aims to amplify the oft-silenced voices of women and gender-diverse people, reveal hidden knowledges situated within women's experiences, and

facilitate solidarity and social change. As Hartsock (1981, p. 40) asserts, “feminism as a mode of analysis leads us to respect experience and differences, [and] to respect people enough to believe that they are in the best possible position to make their own revolution.”

As a researcher, I aim to work in solidarity with marginalized people in a collaborative process of dialogue, which is central to the community-engaged research design I employed and outline below. Within this epistemological framework, knowledge is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed so that knowledge and society are challenged and transformed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). To facilitate centering the lived experiences of oppressed women, and “to uncover women’s knowledge and skills that are hidden and/or undervalued, feminist scholars often make innovative use of research methods, develop alternative research strategies, and even construct new methodological techniques altogether” (Brooks, 2007, p. 57). These are notions that I aimed to employ throughout the design and implementation of this project, which centres the perspectives of oppressed criminalized people who were incarcerated in federal penitentiaries designated for women.

3.1.2. Ontological Perspective: Critical Realism

Critical realism (CR) has been identified as the ontology of the transformative paradigm (Bhasker, 1978, 1993). According to the ontological perspective of CR, there is an external material reality (i.e., reality exists independent of perception [Maxwell, 2013]), but our knowledge about this reality is socially constructed and what counts as ‘truth’ is context dependent (Pawson, 2013). CR facilitates a critique of the status quo while acknowledging lived experience. For example, prison is objectively oppressive and isolating, yet some people in prisons designated for women have reported positive prison experiences (e.g., Martin,

Korchinski, Fels, & Leggo, 2014). This does not mean that imprisonment is positive, or a good solution for addressing social harms such as poverty, violence, and addiction.

Within the CR perspective moral values both shape and are shaped by social forces (Bhasker, 1978). Therefore, reality is fashioned by historical, institutional, and social structures which are in turn influenced by various social, political, religious, cultural, gendered, sexual, and racial factors, language, power relations, values, and beliefs (Nelson & Prilelltensky, 2010). A central component of CR is that it acknowledges the possibility of a causal explanation for events in society (Delanty, 2005) and allows the researcher to privilege one theory over another based on its explanatory potential (Parr, 2015). Within this framework, social reality is composed of *generative mechanisms* that engender or *generate* various events, although these events may not be clearly recognized in an individual's lived experiences (Bhasker, 1978). For example, neoliberalism is a socially constructed mechanism of political and economic governance that generates a justification for policies that criminalize and imprison people in poverty, disproportionately affecting women and gender-diverse people (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Roberts, 2017). An impoverished mother, for instance, who engaged in fraud to feed her family is unlikely to recognize the 'generative mechanism' of neoliberalism which has resulted in greater surveillance and punishment of people experiencing poverty (Wacquant, 2009).

At first glance it may appear that CR is not consistent with standpoint feminism, which is typically associated with social constructionism, however, "epistemologically, critical realists are very close to constructionists" (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 15). The biggest tension between CR and feminist principles relates to the centering of women's voices and the CR position that some accounts of reality are superior to others (Parr, 2015), although this latter point is shared by Harding (1993) in her description of standpoint feminism, as indicated above. I navigated this

tension throughout the research process via critical self-reflexivity, ethical reflexive praxis, on-going consultations with my community, while recognizing that people who have been incarcerated are best situated to describe and analyze their carceral experiences. According to Satsangi (2013) several standpoint feminists have produced realist arguments (e.g., Harding, 1993). As one of the leading proponents of realism, Bhasker (1978) acknowledges the social production of knowledge, recognizing a dimension of constructivism in knowledge creation. Similarly, Delanty (2005, p. 151) asserts that “the constructivist-realist divide” is a false dichotomy and these two perspectives can be reconciled, concluding that “constructivists who want to retain the possibility of critique are best allied with critical realists.”

Based on my review of the philosophy of science literature, CR was the best ontological position for this project and is consistent with my personal values and perspectives. Framing my research within CR allowed me to acknowledge and respect the diverse experiences and viewpoints of my participants (even those who perceive the prison as potentially healing and positive), while enabling me to critique the broad structural and systemic issues underlying the criminalization of women and gender-diverse people. For proponents of CR, “the social world is inherently transformative and social science must reflect the emancipatory possibilities contained within it and which lie beyond the realm of necessity” (Delanty, 2005, p. 148).

Because values fundamentally shaped my research, it was necessary for me to be self-aware throughout the project and clearly identify my moral values and social position. To facilitate this process, I maintained a research journal that I began in Fall 2018 and continued to engage with throughout the duration of my project. In the following section, I explain the importance and process of critical self-reflexivity, outlining some key influential research values.

3.2. Critical Self-Reflexivity

Critical and transformative research is inherently value driven. A researcher's moral and political position underlies the entire research process and self-reflexivity is a key aspect of the transformative paradigm (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). How we approach and implement our research, interpret findings, and develop theory are all influenced by our personal values, perspectives, biases, lived experiences, and interpersonal relationships (Charmaz, 2000; Christians, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gaudet & Robert, 2018; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Patton, 2015). Therefore, practicing transparency and self-reflexivity helps us to identify the key components that we bring to our research (Charmaz, 2011; Reinharz, 1992). For researchers using autoethnography, especially within the transformative paradigm, it is essential to identify the 'self' in the study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013).

Feminist standpoint epistemology recognizes that what counts as knowledge is not simply socially constructed but is also a transformative process emerging from the reflexive investigation of an individual's social position (Delanty, 2005). In this sense, critical self-reflexivity can contribute to the process of social transformation. Furthermore, Strauss (1987) argues that theory should be developed in relation to the data, with the researcher fully aware of herself as an instrument in the process. This entails clarifying and reflecting on one's assumptions and biases. I was reflexive throughout the project by maintaining a research journal,

identifying my social location, and ‘conceptual baggage’³⁷ (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) as a means of increasing transparency in the research process, which I describe below.

For this project the lines are blurred between researcher and participant, and in terms of the stages of fieldwork, with no clear beginning, middle, or end due to my social location as a member of the community (of criminalized and formerly incarcerated women and gender-diverse people). ‘Before the beginning’³⁸ (Sarason, 1974) of this project I was a federal prisoner serving a five-year sentence, exercising personal agency and resistance inside the prison system, studying policies, filing grievances, and challenging authority. When I decided that I would return to graduate school following my release, I began planning for the current project while still incarcerated. This involved collecting CSC documents and reports, maintaining a personal journal for the final year of my imprisonment, researching policies and literature, participating in human rights advocacy training, while building a personal and professional network. Although these were instrumental actions, they were not purely based in self-interest. I have long been angered and motivated by social injustice and power imbalances. As a result of my imprisonment, I witnessed severe injustice and frequent human rights violations, and experienced powerlessness and oppression at the hands of the system. During my incarceration

³⁷ “Conceptual baggage” consists of a record of the experiences and reflections of the researcher, related to the focus of the project. This includes both intellectual thinking and emotional reactions. Documenting one’s conceptual baggage requires maintaining a research journal and includes reflections on the topic, content, and process of the study. This activity can be used throughout the project to help focus research and interview questions, methods, and analysis (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

³⁸ A comprehensive understanding of the origin of most social phenomena requires us to reflect on the historical context that led to the implementation of a research project or social intervention. “Before the beginning” is a term coined by psychologist Seymour Sarason (1974) to refer to the general contextual factors and characteristics at the individual, relational, and collective levels that coalesced prior to the formal start of a research project or intervention, providing the impetus for that particular endeavour.

and later community re-entry (with a period of 21 months on parole) I also experienced a deep solidarity with my fellow prisoners and criminalized comrades, a sense of hopefulness when there was no tangible reason to hope, engaged in acts of resistance to systemic oppression, and witnessed the immense strength and resiliency of people in prison *despite* the harmful conditions of our confinement. These experiences served as the catalyst for this research project.

My experiences within the penal system and carceral continuum³⁹ were life-changing and resulted in ‘conceptual baggage’ (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) that influenced the overall research process while also guiding my commitment to advocacy and activism related to prisoner and social justice. Since my release from prison and return to academia, I have also engaged in a multitude of prison-related research projects, public talks, media interviews, publications, advocacy efforts, activism, and collective projects with other criminalized people and our allies (e.g., W2B, Carceral Studies Research Collective, P4W Memorial Collective, Criminalization and Punishment Education Project, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies). While engaged in this work and research I was also watching documentaries and immersed myself in critical criminology literature, which prompted frequent reflexive journaling to work through my intellectual and emotional reactions to the deeply personal issues these practices raised for me.

³⁹ The notion of the carceral continuum was initially proposed by Foucault (1977, p. 297) who observed how “the frontiers between confinement, judicial punishment and institutions of discipline...tended to disappear and to constitute a great carceral continuum that diffused penitentiary techniques into the most innocent disciplines, transmitting disciplinary norms into the very heart of the penal system and placing over the slightest illegality, the smallest irregularity, deviation or anomaly, the threat of delinquency.” This continuum can include prisons, hospitals, foster care, group homes, treatment centres, schools, halfway houses, shelters, and other institutions that contain and manage people who are intersectionally oppressed. In my case, the carceral continuum included house arrest, bail supervision, jail, prison, parole, mental health facilities, addiction treatment, police surveillance, and the courts.

To increase the authenticity and trustworthiness of my research process, and interpretation of the findings, I maintained a journal throughout the development and implementation of this project. I started this journal at the beginning of my doctoral studies (which included a remaining seven months of parole supervision) to document and reflect on how I was affected by my immersion in criminology and return to academia following prison, critical reflections on what I was learning and experiencing, and how the on-going stigma of criminalization impacts my research and sense of community inclusion. Some of these entries also included my parole experiences, which were coded and integrated with the project data related to barriers and challenges of community re-entry.

Following Richardson (2000), I view writing as a method of inquiry⁴⁰ which means that I engage different styles of writing (e.g., journaling, poetry, academic essays, popular media content, personal narratives, and autoethnography) to facilitate critical reflections of various topics, contribute to self-understanding, and enhance the quality of my writing. By examining my written contributions over the past several years, I can trace the development of my research focus and ethical considerations regarding conducting research with criminalized people, particularly as I reflected on the many challenges I experienced as a criminalized and formerly

⁴⁰ Richardson (2000) frames the writing process as a dynamic, creative process of discovery and analysis. When a writer engages with multiple writing formats or styles, this enables them to explore fresh and diverse perspectives of their topic and their relationship to it. Writing as a method of inquiry is therefore “a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science” (Richardson, 2000, p. 924).

incarcerated woman conducting criminological research⁴¹. Excerpts from my research journal are integrated where relevant in the remainder of this chapter and throughout the findings' chapters.

The central moral and philosophical values that influence my approach to research include social justice⁴², community engagement and inclusion⁴³, research *with* people rather than *on* people⁴⁴, equity, respect for diversity⁴⁵, and empowerment for marginalized groups⁴⁶. Each of these values are interconnected and support or reinforce one another. Additionally, I believe that research should be directed towards the goal of social change, and findings should be communicated in an accessible format to all stakeholders involved and the wider community.

⁴¹ Some of the key themes that materialized through my journaling include commentary on the following: systemic harms and hypocrisy within the system; structural violence; political ideologies; the prevalence of trauma or damage-centred research; prisoner resistance; showcasing prisoners' talents and skills; the value of sharing stories and personal narratives; the nature of resilience; emotions in prison; the value of social and political movements that bring people together while working across differences; community-building, defunding police, penal abolition, and mutual aid; research ethics and challenges related to prisoner ethnography; barriers to community re-entry; factors that support or inhibit healing; interview reflections, data management, analysis, and use of autoethnographic data; participant feedback; and theoretical reflections.

⁴² Social justice refers to "the fair and equitable allocation of bargaining power, resources, and obligations in society" so that everyone has their basic needs met and human rights are protected (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997, p. 168). Social justice also entails freedom from oppression, sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Equity and distributive justice are also intimately tied to social justice.

⁴³ Marginalized communities should not be stigmatized by mainstream culture for not conforming to hegemonic norms. Overcoming discrimination to promote community engagement and inclusion requires interventions at the individual, relational, and collective levels. Reclaiming a positive identity requires individuals to develop an awareness of systemic and structural conditions that oppress and stigmatize people. Self-help and mutual-aid organizations can contribute to community engagement and inclusive social relations. Structural policies that address issues such as poverty, homelessness, and access to education, meaningful employment, and health care can promote equity for marginalized groups and create a more inclusive society (Nelson, Lord, & Ochacka, 2001).

⁴⁴ Contrary to the predominant expert-driven model of research, research done in collaboration or partnership with disadvantaged groups involves sharing power, consulting with local community-based experts, and facilitating research and interventions that promote community members' self-determination and control over their own lives.

⁴⁵ The guiding value of human diversity entails a "respect and appreciation for diverse social identities and for people's ability to define themselves" (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997, p. 168).

⁴⁶ Empowerment can be conceptualized at multiple levels of analysis and refers to both processes and outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is also a mechanism by which individuals and communities achieve mastery over their lives (Rappaport, 1981). More recently, Maton (2008, p. 5) defines empowerment as "a group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization."

Finally, I believe the current prison system needs to be abolished (along with the abolition of police and court systems). However, while working toward this long-term goal it is necessary to advocate for prisoner-led reforms within the system to support people inside and reduce the harms of imprisonment. Critical self-reflexivity and the autoethnographic component of this project are shows of solidarity with my participants. Rather than allowing them to carry “the burden of representations as we [the researchers] hide behind the cloak of alleged neutrality” (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, p. 109), I share my story alongside theirs.

Recognizing myself in terms of researcher-as-instrument⁴⁷, and to enhance the transparency of this project, it is also necessary to identify personal biases that have inevitably influenced the direction of this research and my interpretation of the data. As a survivor of domestic violence, I harboured a lot of anger and indifference towards male prisoners, until November 2022 when I visited a group in a minimum-security prison designated for men and later connected with a group of male long-term prisoners in the community. These interactions with male prisoners occurred in an educational context, which allowed me to see beyond my pain and prejudice to recognize our common struggle and humanity. Due to my experiences and involvement in the penal system, I have also struggled with prejudice against people who have acted as police informants or were convicted of harming children. As someone who has experienced poverty, precarious housing, and employment barriers, I am highly critical of people

⁴⁷ Anselm Strauss (1987), a sociologist who was one of the founders of grounded theory, posited that the researcher should be fully aware of herself as an instrument in the research process. This entails continuously clarifying and reflecting on one’s assumptions and biases. For this reason, I recognize myself in terms of “researcher-as-instrument” which rejects positivist assumptions of objectivity and value neutrality. I acknowledge that the research data and findings are filtered through my own perspectives, values, and research approaches.

with capitalist values and wealth; particularly when they do not use their privilege to help marginalized people. I have a deep sense of loyalty and respect for people who have been marginalized, oppressed, and criminalized, leading to biases against those who hold socially conservative and neoliberal values. I also find it difficult to relate to people who have been harmed by penal and carceral systems that blindly accept “correctional” rhetoric and criticize acts of resistance. Based on my experiences of violence and harm at the hands of police and prison guards, the most salient personal bias related to this project is my anger and distrust of anyone working within the Canadian carceral state, particularly those whose job entails keeping people locked in cages (e.g., judges, prosecutors, police, prison guards, parole board members, and parole officers). Critical reflexivity facilitated extensive ethical considerations related to research with criminalized people, which I discuss in the next section.

3.3. Ethical Considerations: Feminist Communitarian Ethics and the Research Relationship

I wish to differentiate between procedural ethics (Chiumento, Rahman, & Frith, 2020; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; McEvoy, Enright, & MacPhail, 2017; Tolich & Tumilty, 2020), which is a minimum standard, and social ethics, which encapsulate broader ethical and moral concerns. Procedural ethics mainly consists of a checklist of documents and tasks to consider at the beginning of a study and throughout data collection, based on institutional research ethics board (REB) guidelines. These guidelines include issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, minimizing potential risks, and storage of data.

Beyond the utilitarian ethics of institutional REBs are social and feminist ethics, which transcend the individualist focus of canonical ethics to consider moral issues arising from human

relations and social structures in the research process (Christians, 2000). My research process was guided by feminist communitarianism, which centres social relations and morally appropriate actions that are determined dialogically with community members (Denzin, 1997). Social values that are divisive and exclusive are considered unethical (Christians, 2000). I begin with an overview of procedural ethics.

3.3.1. Procedural Ethics

Issues related to procedural ethics were addressed throughout participant recruitment and data collection following approval from the REB at the University of Ottawa on March 2, 2022 (see *Appendix A – Certificate of Ethics Approval*). Since preparations for data collection emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, a ‘Safe Research Plan’ (see *Appendix B*) was approved by the institutional REB on July 7, 2021, to address public health restrictions and ensure the safety of everyone involved. Due to various challenges and delays related to the pandemic lockdowns, data collection did not begin until April 2022.

All participants were provided with a physical or digital copy of the informed consent statement, which I reviewed with them prior to their participation. To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, verbal informed consent was obtained prior to commencing each interview so that participants did not need to document their name or signature. This verbal consent process also ensured that participants were not excluded from participation due to technological barriers related to conducting online video interviews (e.g., no access to a printer/scanner, unfamiliar with electronic signature software). Audio files of the interviews were maintained on an encrypted hard drive until they were transcribed, anonymized (aside from those who indicated they would like their names used), and any identifying characteristics of

participants were removed, at which time the audio files were deleted. I took this extra precaution because several participants were on parole supervision (some of whom have a life sentence), which raised the potential risk of police attempting to access data due to my own ongoing criminalization, and because the population of people in prisons designated for women in Canada is a relatively small group. If one is familiar with this community, as many parole officers and CSC employees are, it may be possible to recognize a participant's identity from mundane aspects of their story such as the year(s) and location of their incarceration in conjunction with their age, ethnicity, or institutional job. For this reason, I use pseudonyms to identify participant quotes (aside from a few criminalized participants who requested to use their real names), without any reference to their location. Participants were informed of the option to review their interview transcript prior to data analysis and provide any changes within six to eight weeks. Only one participant requested this option, and no alterations were made to the original transcript. Additionally, while writing the findings, I contacted each participant who wished to use their legal names to confirm the wording of their quotes and whether they still wanted their names associated with the quotes used in this manuscript. Participants were contacted via email and provided with excerpts from each findings chapter in which their quotes appear. They were given three weeks to respond with any changes and anyone who did not respond was given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Based on participant feedback indicating that some wanted me to use their legal names to identify quotes, and my decision to include select photographic images of prisoners in the findings, an ethics modification request was submitted and subsequently approved on March 1, 2023. This modification included obtaining verbal or signed informed consent for the use of participants' names linked to specific quotes that they approve prior to inclusion in this

document or any future publications. Informed consent was also obtained from anyone appearing in photographic images that are included in the findings' chapters. Notably, the formerly incarcerated people in the photographs did not necessarily participate in an interview, and no names or quotes are linked to these images. All photographs were viewed by participants in advance who determined how and where these images can be used (i.e., written dissertation, future publications, project website, presentations of findings). A summary of this project's findings will be shared with all participants in an accessible format upon completion of this monograph.

3.3.2. Social Ethics: Beyond Institutional Research Ethics Board Guidelines

While procedural ethics are arguably important, the main concern of institutional REB's is minimizing risks – to participants, researchers, and the institution. Beyond risk mitigation and legal liability, I have a moral and ethical commitment to my community of criminalized people, which entails the promotion of healing, wellness, and contributing to transformative social change. The ethical framework of *feminist communitarianism* integrates and builds on social, feminist, and Judeo-Christian ethics and “serves as an antidote to individualist utilitarianism. It presumes that the community is ontologically and axiologically prior to persons” (Christians, 2000, p. 144). This ethical framework “resist[s] those social values that are divisive and exclusivist” (*ibid.*, p. 145) and is grounded in a *universal* respect for human dignity regardless of age, gender, religion, ability, sexuality, ethnicity, or other markers of difference. In terms of research practices, feminist communitarianism calls for participatory action-oriented approaches where participants have a say in how the research is conducted, multiple voices are represented, moral discernment is enhanced, and social transformation is promoted. Ideologically, feminist communitarian ethics value narratives that resist and challenge “the dominant cultural ideologies

connected to nation, race, class, family, and gender” (Denzin, 2014, p. 73), while facilitating the development of a critical consciousness or what Paulo Freire (2000) calls *conscientization*.

Through conscientization, oppressed people are positioned to share their lived expertise, exercise personal agency and resistance, while contributing to social transformation and community empowerment. Recognizing that “multiple moral and social spaces exist” (Christians, 2000, p. 145) in each community, this ethical framework requires “ongoing moral dialogue” based on an “ethic of care,” “communal responsibility,” and an “ethic of empowerment” (Denzin, 2014, p. 73). The shared moral values include love, kindness, shared governance, nonviolence, respect for human life, cooperation, and non-hierarchical relationships (Christians, 2000; Denzin, 2014), which are consistent with a healing and transformative justice approach. This framework served as the ethical foundation for how I designed and conducted this research, engaged with participants, and how I intend to mobilize the findings.

Qualitative, community-engaged research is inherently ‘messy’ and unexpected challenges often emerge (Patton, 2015). Since it was impossible to plan for every potential ethical challenge, I reflected on the research process and engagement with participants through journaling and dialogue with criminalized people and non-criminalized allies. Due to my lived experience of criminalization and imprisonment, I am sensitive to potentially harmful situations or conversations that should be avoided and have experience providing support and care in these circumstances. Revealing personal experiences and emotions related to trauma can be painful for participants, some of whom may be experiencing mental health issues. Although the focus of this project is on strength and resiliency, participants were asked about their experiences of incarceration which can be painful to recount.

Responding to this concern, the questions I asked criminalized participants were strength-based and purposefully avoided asking about histories of trauma, pains of imprisonment, or any aspect of what led them to be criminalized. Instead, questions focused on their social relationships, how they passed time meaningfully inside, opportunities for education and skill-building, enjoyable programs, solidarity, resistance to oppression, and what gave them hope (see *Appendix C* for a copy of the interview guide used with former prisoners). Despite this positive focus, it is impossible to escape the trauma and violence of incarceration which impacts prisoners long-term and affects their community re-entry. For example, several former prisoners spoke about horrible experiences they had in prison, completely unprompted. During one interview, a participant expressed that she was struggling with depression after a recent miscarriage and spent most of the interview talking about the many challenges she's faced as a criminalized person in the community and how difficult her daily life is. It was obvious that she was not in a good space to continue with the interview⁴⁸, so I spent the remainder of our time together listening, as well as providing care and support. When we were finished talking, she thanked me for my time and said that she felt much better after speaking with someone who understands how difficult life is for criminalized people.

Unlike typical ethnographic research, prisoner ethnography is not limited to a specific time or place since the researcher may experience ongoing criminalization, stigma, and carceral surveillance (I expand on this below in section 3.6) and our friends or participants are also

⁴⁸ I made the decision to include this interview in my data set, despite the participant's emotional state, based on my relationship with this individual and a follow-up conversation a few days later. I inquired whether she would like me to delete the interview and she emphatically insisted that she wanted her narrative included. She valued the opportunity to share her story with a wider audience and requested to be invited to participate in any future studies related to women's criminalization and incarceration.

criminalized. The continuous nature of this work beyond the time constraints of a specific project resulted in years of critical reflections before data collection began. The discussion that follows is based on the ongoing reflections documented in my research journal.

In March 2020, I was collaborating with producers from the CBC's radio documentary show *Ideas* to develop an episode showcasing my doctoral research. One of the producers spent over a year speaking with me, some criminalized friends, and my colleagues about this project. During this time, I reflected on the significant risks posed to people on parole for publicly speaking out about their experiences due to CSC's censorship and lack of transparency and accountability. The following journal entry from March 12, 2020, accurately captures these concerns:

My friend told her PO that she was doing this interview with CBC; because it will air nationally and the PO or someone else within CSC might hear it, she could get sent back to prison for talking to the media. Her PO basically gave her a passive-aggressive threat by "encouraging her not to do the interview." My friend is resilient, strong, and stubborn, so she's going to do it anyways. While we were on the phone discussing this, her PO called and said she must get the CBC producer's business card and my friend is not allowed to discuss any CSC policies. She also must inform her PO when this episode airs...she thinks CSC is doing this because she knows so much from being in the system for over 45 years.

Around this time, I also reflected on my good fortune of having avoided media coverage of my case, which enabled me to shape my own public narrative. By developing an online presence, participating in public talks, media interviews, and publishing on my experiences, I was able to frame my own story without having to counter sensationalist media representations.

Since my release from prison in June 2017, I have been involved in several critical prison research projects as a consultant or research assistant. Most of these projects have focused on the trauma and harms of imprisonment and criminalization. Through these experiences at different

stages of research, I learned that the topic of the study matters, and a trauma-focused approach can have severely negative implications for criminalized participants and researchers. Beginning in January 2021, I assisted with participant recruitment and data collection on a research project focused on carceral geography and emotions. Although I had contributed to the ethics application and developing an interview guide for formerly incarcerated participants, I did not consider the implications of this study on myself or other criminalized people until data collection began.

This project was implemented amid COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, which made participant recruitment and interviews extremely challenging, amplified by social disconnection and isolation that is common to the prison experience. Everyone was struggling during this time, but criminalized people seemed to be suffering the most with resurfacing addictions, unhealthy relationships, mental health issues, precarious or lack of housing, and barriers to employment. These challenges made recruitment difficult. When I was able to facilitate an interview, it required significant emotional labour and often resulted in retraumatizing participants, along with myself. After a lengthy, highly emotional interview lasting more than two hours, I documented the following entry in my journal:

I think the focus of this project – specifically emotions – makes it more difficult. Many of us survive prison by actively suppressing our emotions and putting up walls. This project is asking us to recount repressed emotions linked to an extensive, traumatic experience. It's like opening floodgates. He knew what's involved in the interview, but that still didn't prepare him (or me) for how revisiting these emotions would affect him...I don't like the fact that these discussions cause some people terrible anxiety and pain in recalling their prison experiences. It's also emotionally difficult talking to people who are currently dealing with serious shit like homelessness, addiction, and mental illness.

Even with informed consent people are not prepared when asked to dredge up their repressed emotions. Throughout the data collection phase of that project, I heavily engaged in care work

and solidarity with my criminalized community, which involved many phone calls and check-ins with participants. Following these interviews, a few participants reported struggling with insomnia and nightmares about prison for weeks after, and two participants were arrested and detained for drug-related activity. I spent time reflecting on whether it is ethical to interview someone who is struggling with addiction. While there are concerns, if I excluded everyone who has an addiction or mental health issue, I would not have any participants since these are such common experiences among criminalized people.

My involvement with penal-related research projects helped shape my own study in terms of its focus and approach. Two ethical concerns stood out – the collection and use of demographic information and the difficulty of de-identifying transcripts to protect anonymity. At the beginning of each interview, I invited participants to share demographic information in their own words. For key informant participants this simply involved asking them about their professional roles, years of experience, and which institutions they have visited. Formerly incarcerated participants were asked a different series of questions including their age, sexuality, gender identity, cultural background, and some information related to when and where they served their sentence⁴⁹. I invited criminalized participants to share their responses to these identity questions in their own words and skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. These demographic questions were posed in an open-ended manner so participants could select how they would like to be identified rather than having a researcher do this for them.

⁴⁹ Initially, I also asked former prisoners about their parental status. After several interviews, however, I reflected on how this might be a harmful question since so many mothers lose contact or custody of their children while incarcerated. Following this insight, I stopped asking this question and only recorded information about parental status if they voluntarily disclosed it.

I provide a summary of this below using descriptive statistics in the discussion of my participant sample in section 3.4.3.

While I do not believe that people should be labelled or placed in boxes based on any identifying characteristic, it was important to highlight the diversity of people incarcerated in prisons designated for women. My sampling strategy purposefully sought to capture this diversity to illustrate the heterogeneity of prisoners and challenge essentialist, reductive labels that have historically been applied to people in prison. While I purposely sought a diverse sample of participants, no one who was interested in participating in this project was denied an interview. Although I collected demographic information (see *Table 2* below for an overview of the demographic characteristics of formerly incarcerated participants), I did not conduct an intersectional analysis because this would require me to impose my interpretations (as a white, able-bodied, heterosexual female) of their diverse experiences. In future research, I will ask participants how they perceive their intersecting identities as impacting their penal experiences and strength-based capacities.

During the interview process and after conversations with friends and colleagues, it became apparent that even with a pseudonym and the removal of identifying characteristics some participants could potentially be identified by someone familiar with the federal penitentiary system for women in Canada. For example, several key informants have worked for decades in various roles with incarcerated women and gender-diverse people, dating back to when there was only a single prison for women in this country. Based on the small number of people doing this type of work, some participants are easily identifiable which could jeopardize positive programs and their access to entering prisons in the future. To address this ethical issue, I used a discontinuous identity (van den Hoonaard, 2019) for certain participants, which entails using two

pseudonyms for the same participant interview. This process was also used for participants who wanted me to use their real name but did not wish to be identified with certain quotes.

A final ethical consideration involves my interpretive authority as the researcher (i.e., retelling other people's stories and extracting excerpts from their narratives). I explicitly acknowledge the power imbalances between researchers and participants, and the privileged position I hold as a doctoral candidate (despite my criminal record and shared experience of imprisonment). This issue was addressed through my engagement and on-going dialogue with criminalized people, which I adopted as a form of "member-checking" and elaborate upon further below in section 3.5.

3.4. Emergent Research Process and Methods of Data Collection

In this section, I describe the flexible, emergent research design I employed by incorporating multiple methodological approaches, including a detailed overview of prisoner ethnography and my autoethnographic approach. I also outline the various methods that make up my research design (e.g., sampling procedures, recruitment processes, and data collection and analysis methods) and explain why they are important for this study.

3.4.1. The Art of Qualitative Inquiry

I used an iterative approach to qualitative inquiry, with a flexible, emergent research design. According to Gaudet and Robert (2018) qualitative research designs generally progress

in an iterative fashion, beginning with abduction,⁵⁰ then integrating inductive reasoning. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3) describe qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.” Both qualitative and feminist research methods challenge the assumptions of reductionistic and mechanistic social analyses that are typical of positivism, instead favouring a more holistic and subjective understanding of human behaviour, considering interactions between people and their environments within the broader cultural and sociopolitical contexts (Ardovini, 2015; Gaudet & Robert, 2018; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Patton, 2015). Four methods were implemented to guide my data collection, analysis, and interpretation. These methods include a hybridized approach to analysis and theorizing that combines grounded theory, thematic narrative analysis, autoethnography, and community-engaged research values.

There are several different schools of thought on grounded theory methodology, ranging from post-positivism (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to post-modern pluralism (Clarke, 2005). In the middle of the grounded theory spectrum lies the critical realist approach, which emphasizes abduction (Oliver, 2012). Grounded theory includes a set of principles and practices that can be adapted by researchers to guide them through the research process. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), the central components of grounded theory involve asking theoretically oriented questions, theoretical coding, open coding, and theory development, which were essential for developing a conceptual framework of prisoner resilience. The data-theory interplay is a major feature of this methodology, distinguishing it from other qualitative approaches, and making it

⁵⁰ Abduction refers to a form of reasoning that consists of making an inference of the best explanation, based on one’s available knowledge and observations concerning the phenomenon of interest (Gaudet & Robert, 2018).

ideal for exploring an emergent area of research. I utilized the key aspects of grounded theory outlined by Charmaz (2011, p. 364), including an iterative process of simultaneous data collection and analysis; the construction of analytic codes and categories from the data; and the use of open coding and memo-writing, while emphasizing theory development. I elaborate on my approach to data analysis and interpretation below in section 3.5.

My research design also integrated community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles, such as: “starting where the people are,” “building on strengths,” and “using the power of dialogue” (Minkler & Hancock, 2003, p. 138). A CBPR approach was maintained throughout this project via on-going critical dialogue with many criminalized and formerly incarcerated people about the research topic, ethical concerns, approaches taken, knowledge dissemination, and potential social interventions. Notably, this on-going dialogue did not involve every participant in the study, but rather included those formerly incarcerated people in my personal network. A more inclusive and formalized approach to member-checking was not possible due to time and financial constraints. Participatory and action-oriented research is an important method for promoting praxis with marginalized groups such as former prisoners (Kilty, 2014) and is the defining methodological feature of the critical paradigm (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

3.4.2. Prisoner Ethnography and Critical-Analytic, Evocative Autoethnography

Prisoner ethnography can be defined as ethnographic research conducted by current or former prisoners that integrates their carceral experiences within qualitative research by way of observations, field notes, interviews, and prisoner writing that reflexively discusses the realities of life inside and upon release from prison (Piché, Gaucher, & Walby, 2014). While this research

did not officially begin until the proposal was accepted and ethics approval was obtained, unofficially, ‘fieldwork’ began in 2015 while I was incarcerated, shortly after meeting my doctoral supervisor. As indicated above, I maintained a journal from 2016-2017, collected thousands of pages of institutional records, documents, and photos⁵¹, reviewed relevant policies (*Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms, Corrections & Conditional Release Act, Commissioner’s Directives*, federal and provincial human rights legislation, UN Mandela Rules, and UN Bangkok Rules), and published two academic articles about the conditions of confinement in federal prisons designated for women (i.e., Fayter, 2016; Fayter & Payne, 2017) prior to my release. I also collected prisoner artwork, writing, poetry, and music.

Autoethnographic researchers differentiate among *analytic, evocative, and critical* autoethnography. Analytic autoethnography refers to a more traditional approach focused on developing theoretical explanations for broad sociopolitical phenomena (Anderson, 2006), and is aligned with the post-positivist and constructivist paradigms (Mcilveen, 2008). Conversely, evocative autoethnography is a more flexible approach (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) centred around the presentation of narratives that evoke emotional responses and facilitate critical conversations regarding the phenomenon of interest (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). This evocative process entails writing that is not simply academic, but also artistic, personal, vulnerable, and has practical, ethical, and emotional significance to human wellbeing (Bochner

⁵¹ Photographs were taken inside GVI during my incarceration between April 2014 – June 2017, by a prisoner photographer. The images are of myself and other prisoners in various areas of the compound and during special events. Ethics approval was obtained for use of these images and consent was provided by each person appearing in the photo. Some people were cropped out if I was not able to obtain consent. Some of these images appear in the relevant sections of the findings’ chapters below. To ensure anonymity, names and/or quotations are not directly linked to any photos.

& Ellis, 2016). According to Mcilveen (2008) the evocative approach is closely aligned with the critical paradigm. Reed-Danahay (2017) asserts that critical autoethnography should incorporate analytical and empirical details, along with critical questions concerning power relations. Critical autoethnography thus acknowledges the context and nature of personal narrative and identity, while determining whose interests are served through this endeavour (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Furthermore, critical autoethnography is situated within the transformative paradigm sharing three key components of critical theory: “to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, p. 20). This study’s findings are therefore written *critically*, *analytically*, and *evocatively*. Merging these approaches can produce a narrative account that opens conversations and evokes emotional responses in the readers, while critically developing a conceptual framework centred on criminalized women’s experiences of imprisonment and resiliency within an oppressive system, thus connecting “the personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Indeed, it is impossible to separate my lived experiences of criminalization and incarceration from my research on these sociopolitical issues.

Since my return to academia, I often employ an autoethnographic approach in my writing and research, which I have found to be a cathartic and healing process of value for criminalized scholars (Fayter, 2023). Like Richardson (2000), I view writing as a process of discovering the story and meaning of one’s life experiences. Autoethnography requires honest critical self-reflection, while writing with vulnerability and emotion (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). This approach is a powerful methodological tool for criminalized researchers since it facilitates acknowledging the authority of our personal narratives in the context of our social environment (Reed-Danahay,

2017). Writing in this authentic, open, and subjective manner can be therapeutic, and unlike most academic writing, does not disconnect the researcher from their lived experiences and emotions. Lastly, the flexible nature of autoethnographic writing allows for the creative presentation of narratives in an accessible format that can evoke emotional responses from its readers, while facilitating critical conversations concerning the topic of interest (Ellington & Ellis, 2008).

3.4.3. Participant Recruitment, Sample, and Interviews

Participants were recruited purposively to ensure a diverse sample that is representative of people incarcerated in Canadian prisons designated for women, considering ethnic and cultural background, gender identity, sexuality, age, institution, region, length of sentence, and security level. I recruited participants using convenience and snowball sampling procedures (Patton, 2005) through my extensive personal and professional network, which stretches across the country and includes people from each region housing a federal women's prison. Despite my efforts to include former prisoners from multiple regions and institutions, most participants (75%) served all or part of their sentence at GVI in Kitchener, Ontario. GVI is the largest penitentiary designated for women in Canada with a capacity of 215 beds (Government of Canada, 2023) while Ontario is the most populated province. More significantly, GVI is where I served my federal sentence and since I am a resident of Ontario I am connected with more former prisoners in this province, which facilitated recruitment. Interestingly, there is also an overrepresentation of former prisoner participants who identified as being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community (50%). This could be due to my purposive and snowball sampling approach, or people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ could represent another marginalized population that is commonly criminalized and incarcerated. As far as I know, CSC does not collect data on the sexuality of prisoners, so these statistics are unavailable. More research in this

area is necessary before drawing any conclusions. Key informants were recruited in a similar manner to former prisoners and included professionals working in a variety of capacities inside prisons (see *Appendix D* for a copy of the key informant interview guide). Recruitment posters were posted on social media and shared with groups working towards prisoner justice and sent directly to known potential participants via email or in-person. Inclusion criteria consisted of anyone who was incarcerated (criminalized participants) or worked or volunteered (key informants) in a federal prison designated for women or federally sentenced people in the community since 2000.

I faced several challenges during the recruitment process. It was extremely difficult to recruit current or former CSC staff since I did not go through the CSC research office to obtain approval for this project. I have maintained contact with several CSC employees since my release, but most declined the invitation to participate in an interview. There is an extreme lack of transparency from CSC and the organization forbids its employees from speaking with media or researchers without prior approval, which is generally not given to critical prison scholars (Kilty, 2014; Mario & Kilty, 2024). Recruiting formerly incarcerated participants also presented unique challenges. Due to the trauma of imprisonment, lack of transitional supports, and structural or systemic barriers to social inclusion, many people I know from prison have been re-incarcerated, died, or are struggling with addiction, mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, and other challenges that make them difficult (if not impossible) to reach or unable to participate. People serving a life sentence and who are on parole are understandably apprehensive about participating in research due to the precarious nature of their freedom and the potential risk of their data being apprehended by the authorities. Although I am trusted in my community, most of these individuals were not comfortable doing an interview by phone or online and I was only

able to interview several ‘lifers’ in person, while financial and COVID-19 lockdown constraints limited my capacity to travel.

Ultimately, the sample includes 20 formerly incarcerated participants and 13 key informants. As aforementioned, due to the small population of people who live and work inside federal prisons for women in Canada, to ensure anonymity I aggregated the demographic data (see *Table 2* below). Instead, quotes are identified with a pseudonym (aside from people who wanted their names used) and their role (former prisoner or profession). Key informant participants were asked about their profession, years of experience working with prisoners, and which institutions they have worked in or visited. Key informants represent five professional sectors including legal advocacy, prison education, CSC employees, chaplaincy, and peer-support. These participants have experience working in all six federal regional prisons for women including the Indigenous Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, as well as Pinel Psychiatric Institution, and the Regional Psychiatric Centre, the now-closed P4W, and various provincial jails, youth detention centres, and even American prisons. On average, key informants have worked with prisoners for 20.5 years. Their years of experience range from 10-40 years, with a total of 266 combined years of experience.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Former Prisoner Participants

Gender	Sexuality	Age Range	Cultural/Ethnic Background	Institution & Region	Dates of Incarceration	Sentence length	Security level
80% female 10% cis-gender woman	40% heterosexual 50% 2SLGBTQ+	19-29 (n=1) 30-39 (n=9) 40-49 (n=4) 50+ (n=6)	30% Indigenous 25% white 25% Canadian 15% French	75% GVI 10% P4W 5% Pinel 15% Nova	Ranged from 2001-2020 20% began sentence 2000-2004	Ranged from 2 years – Life Average sentence: 8.1 years	All security levels (n=5) Medium & max (n=4)

10% Trans-man	10% skipped question	Median age: 35 years	20% Black-Caribbean 5% Sikh 5% Hispanic 5% Ukrainian (Percentage > 100% due to mixed heritages)	15% FVI 5% EIFW 10% Joliette (Percentage > 100% due to serving time in multiple prisons) All five regions covered (East Coast, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, & B.C.)	5% began sentence 2005-2009 75% began sentence 2010-2015 25% began sentence 2016-2020 (Percentage > 100% due to multiple periods of incarceration or multiple sentences)	110 years total federal incarceration experience. 210 years total sentencing experience with CSC (including on parole)	Medium (n=4) Medium & minimum (n=11)
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In-depth, semi-structured, conversational style interviews began in April 2022 and ran through July 2022 and were conducted in-person or via Zoom depending on the participant's location and scheduling constraints. Prior to each interview participants received a copy of the informed consent statement, which I reviewed verbally with them before questions began. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, then anonymized. Interviews ranged from 1-2.5 hours, with the average interview lasting 90 minutes. Criminalized participants were each provided with a \$50 honorarium.

It is important to note that most participants consisted of people I know from my time in federal prison or my activism, advocacy, and research in the community. Several formerly incarcerated participants whom I did not personally know had participated in previous interviews with me for other research projects. Based on my personal connections with participants, these interviews were typically longer and more in-depth than interviews with people I did not have a relationship with. Interviews with former prisoners that I was incarcerated with also allowed for a discussion of shared experiences and more specific questions. Additionally, in terms of the

selection process, a large portion of my sample included people connected with the W2B program (n=10) which promotes engaged, experiential education and relationship-building in penal settings. I also connected with criminalized people engaged in activism, advocacy, and prior research on carceral experiences. Due to this selection bias, data for this project reflects the views of participants who are more open to learning, sharing, expressing ideas, more vocal about their lived experiences, and more likely to be involved in leadership positions.

3.5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Interview transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO data management software and files were classified by participant group (i.e., former prisoner or key informant). Autoethnographic data such as photos, journal entries, artistic creations from inside prison, and select institutional records and documents were digitized and uploaded to NVIVO where these files were also classified by type. I reviewed each transcript prior to coding, paying attention to the overall narrative presented in each interview by considering which topics or issues repeatedly emerged. For example, systemic harms and the value of social support were prevalent themes in each interview. Participants' demographic characteristics were coded as attributes in the case classification feature, which can allow for comparisons of data between different participant groups (e.g., "How do former prisoners understand solidarity compared to key informants?").

I implemented a hybridized approach to data analysis, like the process employed by Gaudet and Robert (2018, pp. 168-174) who created a mixed approach combining grounded theory and narrative analysis. My analytic strategy was inspired by grounded theory as adapted by Charmaz (2014), thematic narrative analysis (Hartel, 2020; Riessman, 2005), and Chang's (2016) autoethnographic analysis. I have selected a hybrid approach because as Chang (2016, p.

130) asserts, a “custom-tailored approach is absolutely necessary in autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation.” I mobilized several sensitizing concepts as tools to group data, which emerged from an interdisciplinary literature review with insight from my lived expertise. The conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter provided operational definitions of agency, hope, resistance, strength-based coping, solidarity, resilience, and healing transformative justice, which were used as the sensitizing concepts throughout the analytical process.

I used these sensitizing concepts during the first round of coding along with open coding (a grounded theory technique), which allowed new codes to emerge from participant narratives. Open coding consists of identifying concepts (that are later developed into themes) based on the properties and dimensions of the data, including the participants’ own words, without focusing on what seems relevant to my research questions (Charmaz, 2014). This process requires speed and spontaneity to spark creative thinking, being open to learning new ideas from the initial coding, and critically reflecting on how past experiences shape our worldview and understanding of the data (van den Hoonaard, 2019). By extracting and collating quotes coded in a particular manner, theoretical possibilities emerge (Charmaz, 2014). Using thematic narrative analysis meant that large portions of each transcript were coded to maintain the participant’s narrative, which was typically coded into multiple thematic categories.

Thematic narrative analysis facilitates the development of “a typology of narratives organised by theme [a]s the typical representational strategy, with case studies or vignettes providing illustration” (Riessman, 2005, p. 2), which is also common to autoethnographic analysis (Chang, 2016). With thematic narrative analysis, the emphasis is on a text’s content – *what* is being said rather than *how* it is being said (Riessman, 2005). A thematic narrative involves “a gradually unfolding descriptive account that relates vivid pieces of field data to

relevant concepts in the scholarly literature” (Hartel, 2020, p. 1). According to Riessman (2005, p. 2), a foundational aspect of this approach is the notion that “language is a direct and unambiguous route to meaning. As grounded theorists do, investigators collect many stories and inductively create conceptual grouping from the data”. Also, in line with grounded theory, thematic narrative analysis is particularly beneficial in terms of theorizing across multiple sources by “finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report. A typology can be constructed to elaborate a developing theory” (Riessman, 2005, p. 3). My decision to use a narrative approach in this study emerged from a research journal entry from November 1, 2018, before the project was fully conceptualized:

I’ve been thinking a lot about the power and value of personal narratives among criminalized people. T is a Canadian citizen incarcerated in Jakarta, Indonesia and he heard an interview I did on CBC Radio, then looked me up online and found my W2B essay published in JPP. He sent me a message, quoting my paper and said it really connected with his experience and he thanked me for my work. He also shared his very difficult story of imprisonment overseas. Another criminalized friend, J, said something similar to me in a recent email after I reached out and empathized with him about going to jail while in university. J said that my similar situation helped ground him in reality. If my story alone can have this impact, imagine the positive impact from a collection of many diverse stories. It could ripple out and impact hundreds of criminalized people, providing hope and belonging.

Following the initial coding process, I reviewed each transcript again to ensure consistency, so that quotes in each category presented a similar narrative. I also recoded some data to incorporate codes that emerged later in the process and were pertinent to previously coded transcripts. This process of reviewing the data multiple times and coding with a thematic narrative approach was repeated with the autoethnographic data.

According to Chang (2016, p. 125) autoethnographic analysis, involves “shifting your attention back and forth between self and others, the personal and the social context.” Chang

(2016, p. 126) explains how ethnographic data are used to support the researcher's arguments rather than "stand[ing] alone to tell the story." Like grounded theory, analysis and interpretation require the autoethnographic researcher to "review, fracture, categorize, rearrange, probe, select, deselect, and sometimes simply gaze at collected data in order to comprehend how ideas, behaviours, material objects, and experiences from the data interrelate and what they really mean to actors and their environments" (Chang, 2016, p. 126-127). Finally, autoethnographic analysis mobilizes vignettes and excerpts from the data set, which are "trimmed and blended into the picture as a whole so that they can tightly hang together within the overall structure of cultural analysis and interpretation of self" (Chang, 2016, p. 126). Vignettes and case examples are integrated throughout the findings to highlight key issues and provide additional context by linking my lived experience to participant narratives.

The next analytic step involved extracting the codebook from NVIVO, which documents each code and its description, to facilitate axial coding or the organization of codes into larger thematic categories that draw connections between codes. This step brings details together to help make sense of the data with respect to the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014). Reviewing my coding framework allowed me to merge similar codes or shift codes to different thematic categories, ensuring conceptual clarity. For example, I differentiated between 'challenges prisoners face' due to the pains of imprisonment and 'harmful prison policies and practices' that are more directly attributed to the actions of correctional staff. Within each category I examined the codes and related quotes carefully to determine larger thematic groupings. Certain themes had many codes requiring further organization to make sense of the data. For example, 'challenges prisoners face' had 36 different codes which were then grouped into five thematic categories during axial-coding: social and interpersonal pains, psychological pains, physical

pains, material or financial pains, and emotional pains. Due to the large amount of data that focused on the harms of the carceral state and pains of imprisonment, these findings were later re-organized into themes linked to my conceptual framework illustrating how the system restricts agency, diminishes hope, punishes resistance, inhibits solidarity, and stifles strengths. Additionally, carceral harms unique to women's institutions were highlighted such as sexual exploitation, pregnancy in prison, and surveillance of personal relationships. Based on an abundance of data compiled for this project, the thematic focus within each findings chapter includes issues (i.e., codes) that were frequently discussed and highlighted by several participants rather than topics that only came up in a few interviews. I also created tables to illustrate how the codes and thematic categories fit together along with a comparison chart looking at the characteristics of HTJ versus the carceral system (see *Table 3 in Chapter 6*), which are presented in the findings chapters. Following data analysis, I reviewed relevant CSC policies (Commissioners Directives, CCRA) that are connected to various themes that emerged from the data, which I integrate in the findings to support participants' narratives and provide additional context.

3.5.1. Establishing Trustworthiness of Findings & Psychopolitical Validity

To establish evaluative criteria for rigour in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four concepts for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. Credibility refers to accurately reflecting the multiple perspectives of participants; transferability questions if findings can be transferred to other settings; dependability is the extent that the findings are consistent; and confirmability of the data is strengthened by including others in the analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The combination of multiple methodological approaches (e.g., grounded theory, thematic narrative analysis, autoethnography) and

perspectives (e.g., former prisoners, key informants, and myself) in a single project contributes to the rigour, breadth, depth, and complexity of any inquiry (Flick, 2006). Incorporating CBPR principles into my research design and consulting with other criminalized people throughout this study strengthened the trustworthiness of my findings. While various practical and financial constraints prevented the creation of a ‘research advisory committee’ and facilitating a data interpretation workshop with former prisoners as I initially intended, I did maintain on-going consultations with my community as an informal approach to ‘member-checking,’ which I documented in my journal:

This is the first research project I’ve been involved in where participants are excited and eagerly anticipating the interviews....After each interview is over, I’m getting extremely positive, unsolicited feedback...The former prisoner feedback is not only flattering, but also indicates I’m tapping into something valuable and powerful in my efforts to gather stories of hope, strength, solidarity, and resistance.

As I mentioned above, practical and financial considerations limited my capacity to engage in a comprehensive member-checking process with all participants. Instead, throughout the project I consulted with criminalized and non-criminalized allies within my personal network to discuss my research approach, conceptual framework, emergent findings, and how these findings might be shared with a wider audience. I also engaged in what Bochner and Ellis (2000, p. 751) refer to as a “reliability check,” where I shared portions of the analysis with several participants and gave them “a chance to comment, add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations.” This reliability check was done via email while writing the findings and focused primarily on participants who chose to use their real names instead of a pseudonym. After selecting which quotes would be used in writing the findings, I shared excerpts from the findings’ chapters with their quotes for each of these participants, inviting their edits and feedback. This process ensured I was interpreting their narratives correctly and that participants

using their real names were satisfied with the wording of their quotes. I also shared the strengths-based concepts and HTJ framework with several participants in my personal network who used a pseudonym to solicit feedback. While some critical insights were shared and incorporated into the findings (e.g., that the W2B program incorporates principles of transformative justice), no substantive changes were made, signalling the credibility and confirmability of the findings.

Since my research is situated within the transformative paradigm, I also assessed the ‘psychopolitical validity’ (Prilleltensky, 2008) of my research, which is constituted by ‘epistemic’ and ‘transformational validity.’ Epistemic validity involves an analysis of power relations at multiple levels of analysis. Transformational validity considers the potential for the research project to contribute to transformative social change. To assess the epistemic validity of my project, I reflected on the role of power relations in formerly incarcerated people’s lives. Furthermore, I invited criminalized participants to share their recommendations for meaningful social and policy changes to support transformational validity. In the final chapter of this manuscript, I consider future research directions and propose strategies to mobilize my findings in support of abolitionist-oriented social change and the promotion of a healing and transformative approach to justice.

3.6. Concluding Comments: Reflections on the Benefits & Challenges of Conducting Critical Criminological Research as a Criminalized Person

The carceral system is not conducive to critical criminological research, especially when the researcher is a current or former prisoner. Carceral surveillance inside penal institutions and in the community, along with the stigma of imprisonment creates unique challenges for the criminalized scholar. At the same time, our insider status allows us insights that most critical

prison scholars do not have and grants a certain level of trust from participants with whom we share this experience. Essentially, this is double-edged sword; there are both positive and negative consequences of holding insider status, and you must be cautious to avoid harming yourself throughout the research process. Many current and former prisoners stand in solidarity to resist systemic injustice and are committed to emancipatory research and action. For many, a commitment to social justice outweighs the risks and challenges of engaging in this work.

My lived expertise of criminalization and incarceration is a strength that has allowed me certain benefits in my scholarly research. A key asset is that I am acutely aware of gaps in the literature, which led to the creation of this strengths-based project. When I read literature about life inside Canadian jails and prisons designated for women, experiences with police, courts, or community re-entry, I can quickly relate to what is being reported and identify inaccuracies. My insider status helps me to recognize gaps in research design, potential ethical concerns, identify harmful topics or questions for criminalized participants, and devise strategies for addressing these issues. This takes ongoing critical reflection. The most significant benefit I have as a criminalized and formerly incarcerated scholar-activist is the intrinsic trust criminalized people and our allies place in me, which facilitates relationship-building. Trust is elusive among criminalized people who have been harmed by professionals, researchers, and the carceral state. Many people who have experienced imprisonment are apprehensive about meeting someone new and extremely cautious about sharing their story. I spent years developing trust and respect within my community, which has facilitated my capacity to engage in this work.

My insider status also carries risks and challenges that I have had to navigate over the years, starting in prison where preparations for this project began. I reflected on the challenges of prisoner ethnography in a journal entry:

Prisoners have absolutely no privacy. Anonymity and confidentiality are essential. Staff frequently go through our personal belongings, reading any documents they find. When I maintained a journal in prison, I avoided using any names or identifying information because I knew I was vulnerable. Despite my caution, I did not anticipate my journal would be seized when I was sent to segregation for 32 days. After one week staff opened my cell door to pass me personal belongings I had requested, including clothes, books, letter writing materials, and my journal which was unexpectedly included. Staff made a point of handing me the journal separately saying, "Look what we found" in a confrontational tone. I immediately noticed the first few pages were ripped out. I still have no idea what was written on those pages. When I questioned staff, I was informed that Security Intelligence Officers had seized my documents, placing them in my security file. I was using this journal to record instances of unprofessional staff behaviour towards prisoners and their families including harassment, policy breaking, human rights abuses, and any situation potentially requiring advocacy or support. I was recording these events almost daily.

The power and control the system exerts over prisoners discourages dissent, inhibiting free speech and solidarity. Those of us who resist this injustice face severe repercussions. The trauma of imprisonment continues long after our release, creating barriers to social inclusion which present challenges to conducting criminological research in the community as well.

There is a huge amount of emotional labour that goes into critical prison research. I have found that studying issues related to policing, court processes, detention, and community re-entry can cause emotional distress as repressed feelings or memories about these traumatic experiences resurface. These triggering events are insidious and often emerge unexpectedly. When I first began my doctoral studies in criminology, I had been released from prison about 14 months earlier and was still on parole. My first semester in the program was particularly difficult, especially when sitting in classes where presentations and topics focused on people I know and traumatic experiences I have survived and witnessed, such as lengthy periods of solitary confinement, deaths in custody, or imprisoned women being assaulted by guards. While the

intensity of these post-traumatic stress responses subsided over time, they re-emerged during the research process and continued to impact me on an unconscious level.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns throughout 2020-2021, I felt isolated, unfocused, had difficulties concentrating and sleeping, and at times I felt depressed or anxious. I had friends who were incarcerated at this time, so I was extremely worried about how they were coping and was grateful for my freedom. In March 2021 I reflected in my journal how creating a PowerPoint presentation on issues of segregation and the impacts of COVID-19 on prisoners gave me a minor panic attack, which I had not experienced for some time. Initially, I was not conscious of how the isolation and disruption to my routine was affecting me until a friend pointed out that my basement apartment in student housing was very similar to a prison cell. This realization led to me securing new housing, which was not easy due to mandatory criminal record checks requested for most apartments. Having a record presents multiple barriers to social inclusion that make it difficult to focus on my work and education as I must also fight for basic human necessities. The pandemic lockdowns caused past traumas of incarceration to resurface, delaying my research.

The emotional labour of conducting critical prison research as a criminalized scholar is particularly salient. As discussed in a publication I co-authored with my doctoral supervisor during the pandemic lockdowns (see Kilty & Fayter, 2022), my lived experience of incarceration resulted in an in-depth approach to interviewing and extensive preliminary and follow-up contact with criminalized participants. As I highlighted above, criminalized people have a general distrust of researchers and facilitating interviews over Zoom rather than in-person where rapport is more easily established makes meaningful dialogue challenging. To address these challenges, I dedicated a lot of time to checking-in with participants before and after interviews to manage the

difficult emotions related to pandemic isolation and feelings that arose as we discussed our penal experiences. While I consciously engaged in care-work for my participants, I did not always practice the same level of care for myself.

A final challenge relevant to this discussion is the risk of on-going criminalization. Having a federal prison record has made me vulnerable to police surveillance and suspicion from authorities, especially when my work involves regular contact with other criminalized people, some of whom I was incarcerated with. In the spring of 2021, a participant I recruited for an interview for a project on which I was a research assistant, was under police investigation for drug trafficking, unbeknownst to me at the time. When I was seen with her in public on multiple occasions and due to my own history of addiction and convictions for drug trafficking, I became a target of their investigation. This resulted in my mental health deteriorating and eventually to being arrested and detained in a mental health facility for 10 days in August 2021. It took me two years of criminal court proceedings before these charges were dismissed. Although I was concerned with facing new charges and possible re-incarceration, one of my biggest worries was the risk of sensitive research data being confiscated by police. I no longer store interview data or participant contact information on my phone, but rather in a secure locker outside of my apartment.

The formerly incarcerated scholar faces distinct practical and emotional challenges when conducting critical prison research. Despite these risks to our safety and freedom, many current and former prisoners remain committed to resisting systemic injustice and raising public awareness to promote transparency and accountability. In the following chapters, I present the research findings which highlight the strengths, resiliency, resistance, and solidarity of people

incarcerated in prisons designated for women, despite carceral harms, and map out a healing and transformative approach to justice.

Chapter 4. Findings on the Harms of the Carceral State: From Prison to Community

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the context in which women and gender diverse people's agency, hope, resistance, solidarity, strength, and resilience is tested and restricted inside prisons designated for women. The findings outlined in the following two chapters cannot be understood without first highlighting the oppressive conditions of confinement and carceral controls in the prison and community that prisoners must endure and survive. As noted in the previous chapter, none of my interview questions⁵² directly asked about the pains of imprisonment or the trauma of incarceration and community re-entry, yet following transcription and analysis, I discovered that approximately half of the data (which included personal journal entries) focused on these themes. Each key informant and criminalized participant spoke about systemic harms and the trauma of imprisonment, without being directly prompted to do so. Reflecting on this trend, it now seems obvious that participants cannot discuss topics such as resistance and solidarity without indicating why or what they are resisting, and why solidarity is essential to surviving imprisonment. Indeed, resilience is about people's capacity to overcome adversity. Logically, participants discussed some of the adverse circumstances they were forced to traverse. Therefore, prison pains and the trauma of incarceration forms the baseline for prisoner resilience. Although I have problematized criminology's tendency to concentrate on the negative, it is understandable why so much

⁵² It is important to note that former prisoner participants were asked about barriers to community re-entry, in terms of what supports they required. They were also asked if there were any institutional policies or practices that they believe were unjust or unfair. I also inquired what gave prisoners hope during the most difficult times.

criminological research emphasizes the trauma and vulnerabilities of criminalized and incarcerated people since the harms and violence of carcerality are impossible to ignore.

These findings are not novel; there's an abundance of literature on the pains of imprisonment and horrible conditions of confinement that prisoners face (e.g., Balfour & Comack, 2014; Bingham & Sutton, 2012; Chamberlen, 2018; CHRC, 2003; Crewe, 2011; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Fayter, et. al., 2021; Moore & Scraton, 2014). However, the pains discussed below are presented in a unique way; I mobilize a thematic narrative approach (Hartel, 2020; Reissman, 2008) and my framework of prisoner resilience to illustrate how prisons limit resilience, while promoting dependency and weakness. Furthermore, it is impossible to talk about prisoner agency, hope, resistance, solidarity, strengths, and resilience without first understanding the struggle in which these necessary assets emerged and were tested in relation to the oppressive penal environment. With this discussion I aim to elucidate how institutional policies and practices have negative implications for prisoners, both individually and collectively and inside and outside prison walls.

I begin this chapter by highlighting how carceral harms restrict agency, which continues while on parole. The literature (e.g., Balfour, 2014a; Byrd, 2016; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2008) demonstrates that people inside have limited choices, which continues after release from prison (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; Maidment, 2006; Munn & Bruckert, 2013; Pollack, 2009b; Shantz, Kilty, & Frigon, 2009), often leading to re-incarceration (Comack, 2018). It is important to note that prisons are part of our communities, and not distinct from them. Separating prison and community settings is a false dichotomy, but I distinguish them below for conceptual clarity, highlighting how the carceral network expands from prison to the wider community, effectively entangling those caught within. This analytical

approach illustrates how penal policies and practices transcend the physical boundaries of the prison wall with a “multitude of physical and symbolic connections that make up the contested, fluid border between being either ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ prison and general society” (Turner, 2016, p.2).

Throughout the chapter, I integrate my ‘ethnographic record’ (Spradley, 1979) including personal narrative accounts of my experiences via journal excerpts and poetry, in addition to considering CSC policies and participant quotes. Following a discussion of how carceral logics restrict agency, I outline how a sense of hope for a better future is diminished inside prison and following release and how prisoners’ resistance is punished. I demonstrate how simple acts of caring for one another via prisoner solidarity is inhibited. Finally, I discuss how prisoners’ loss of agency, hope, resistance, and solidarity leads to institutional ignorance of our personal and collective strengths, which in turn promotes harmful rather than strengths-based coping. I close the chapter by returning to the ‘prisoner resilience pyramid’ outlined in the previous chapter, to illustrate how prisoners’ resilience is negatively impacted through these harmful carceral conditions and environments.

4.1. Carceral Harms Restricting Agency

Agency involves a person’s capacity to exercise their subjective identity and act according to their free will, enabling them to negotiate power dynamics (Bosworth, 1999; Pollack, 2000). It might seem logical that prisoners’ agentic capacities are restricted since we have been convicted of breaking the law based on our so-called “poor choices.” However, Canada’s regional prisons for women were designed and built in light of *Creating Choices* principles, which emphasize the importance of dignity, respect, and personal rights while

providing prisoners with a sense of empowerment along with opportunities to make meaningful and responsible choices (TFFSW, 1990, pp.70-74).

Following a discussion of how carceral harms restrict agency in prison, I proceed to discuss how a lack of agency carries over into the community following release. This extension of carceral controls beyond prison gates has been conceptualized as transcarceration, which refers to carceral net-widening that extends surveillance and social control “to encompass health, welfare, social services, child protection, education, and housing” (Lowman, Menzies, & Palys, 1987, p.9). Each of these social institutions are spaces that formerly incarcerated people must access during their transition from prison to the community. Transcarceral governance strategies allow the state to exercise social control of criminalized people outside the penal system by infiltrating multiple state institutions, amplifying their capacity for surveillance and cross-agency reporting (Maidment, 2006). Transcarceral harms and barriers to re-entry documented in this study include navigating new communities due to displacement or forced relocation in halfway houses, restrictive parole conditions which can interfere with employment options, financial barriers, a lack of transitional supports, and required CSC programming. I begin this section with a personal narrative account from a journal of my time in segregation when my agency was most restricted.

Restricting agency vignette

I'm standing alone and naked in an empty cell. It's sometime before dawn on October 15th, 2016. I was brought to segregation last night, and after 10 minutes in the hole the guards dry-celled⁵³ me. They turned off all the plumbing and told me I need to press my call button anytime I need to use the bathroom, so they can observe. A few minutes ago, I was violently woken up by the guards taking all my clothes, including my underwear and socks. They even took my mattress, sheets, and blanket. All I have now is a canvas "baby doll dress"⁵⁴. Basically, it's like wearing a burlap sack with armholes. I've never felt so vulnerable and powerless.

Surrounded by concrete and steel, without clothing or anything on my feet, it's absolutely freezing in here. The cell is about 6 feet by 9 feet, with a metal bed frame, a metal desk and stool bolted to the floor across from the 'bed,' and a stainless-steel sink and toilet, which is currently useless since they shut off my water. Beside the sink and toilet is a solid steel door with a slot for mail and food trays near the bottom and a small observation window for the guards to watch us. There's a CCTV camera in the corner of the ceiling. At the other end of the cell is a window covered in thick wire mesh and bars. The window is so thick and dirty that it's impossible to see outside. The entire cell is filthy, and the air is stale. The ever-present fluorescent lights continuously hum from above, interrupted only by intermittent clanging and yelling outside my cell.

I have no idea why they stripped me of everything and kept me on dry cell when I gave the screws the miniscule amount of weed I had on me within an hour of being here. Suddenly, a guard appears at my cell window, snapping me out of my reflections. I quickly inquire, "Hey, can I please have that CD (Commissioners' Directive) on dry-celling like I asked for?" He rolls his eyes. I try again, "what are my rights in here?" The guard retorts, "none, except maybe you can call a lawyer," as he walks past my cell. "Hey," I bang on the cell door as he walks past, "can I at least have some water?" I don't know if he ignored me or didn't hear me, but the water did not appear. I try to curl up with a canvas blanket they left me, which is all I have besides the baby doll gown. It's impossible to get comfortable on a cold metal slab. Every time I tuck my

⁵³ Under Section 51 of the CCRA the institutional head/Warden may authorize use of a 'dry cell' in cases when they have reasonable grounds to believe a federal prisoner has ingested or concealed contraband in a body cavity or digestive tract. This involves strip-searching the person and placing them in solitary confinement inside a barren cell without plumbing, while under constant surveillance. According to a court ruling in November 2021 (Adams v. Nova Institution) the provincial Supreme Court of Nova Scotia determined that dry-celling "women suspected of concealing contraband in their vagina unlawful" since they can be subjected to potentially indefinite periods under these horrendous conditions (Zinger, 2022). Presently, CSC is considering proposed changes to this practice based on legal actions several current and former prisoners are involved in via pressures from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), John Howard Society, CAEFS, PATH Legal, and the East Coast Elizabeth Fry Society.

⁵⁴ The "baby-doll dress" is a slang term used inside to describe the canvas anti-suicide smock used by federal prisons and psychiatric settings to prevent prisoners from ripping the material. Although they are designed for people at-risk of dying by suicide, they are frequently used in a punitive fashion by prison authorities for people placed in 'administrative segregation' and/or 'dry-cells.'

hands under the blanket trying to get warm, within seconds a screw is yelling at me over the loudspeaker “Fayter, show us your hands!” I reflect on how multiple women were able to take their own lives on this very seg range while on suicide watch with guards watching the cameras so intently.

Time seems to almost come to a halt. The only indication of the passage of time is when a guard walks down the range on rounds, which is supposed to happen every 20 minutes in seg. It feels more like 20 hours. With the constant overhead lights and inability to see outside, I begin to lose track of the days and time. I have a general idea based on the rhythm of the institution; nurses come early in the morning and meals are served three times a day. I stopped eating two days ago and have barely drunk any water. It’s completely dehumanizing going to the bathroom in a bucket with two guards standing over me. I’m curled-up, shivering in the corner staring blankly at the concrete wall. I haven’t been able to shower or use a phone in days. Refusing food is the only choice I’m able to exercise, but eventually they’ll force-feed me. How did I get here?

4.1.1. In prison: “We give them the illusion of choice”

Prisoners have described the experience of prison as “having no identity and no voice” (TFFSW, 1990, p. 4), both of which are essential to agency (Bosworth, 1999). Despite the moniker of this report, people in prisons designated for women are given little to no choice in their ability to navigate punitive prison requirements while exercising their personal agency. My segregation vignette presented above provides a severe example of how CSC restricts prisoners’ agency. In solitary confinement, prisoners are removed from their living units, personal belongings, regular routines, and are completely isolated from their peers while being dependent on the guards for everything. As noted in my vignette, the guards are often indifferent about prisoner requests, refusing basic rights such as access to showers, phones, Commissioner’s Directives, or legal counsel. Being locked in a segregation unit is a clear example of penal power that limits prisoners’ choices. In the above vignette, CSC took this to the extreme. The experience of being dry-celled, having my clothing removed, and plumbing disconnected was not only dehumanizing, but also a quintessential example of CSC’s power to restrict prisoners’ options. The harmful implications of solitary confinement will be discussed at multiple times throughout this chapter, in the form of personal vignettes and participant quotes. CSC’s use of

segregation encompasses all of the harms of the carceral state outlined below, including restricting agency, diminishing hope, punishing resistance, inhibiting solidarity, and stifling prisoners' strengths.

During a key informant interview with Mark, a CSC employee, he describes how prison expectations come from the administration and management while prisoners are given the *illusion of choice*, rather than any meaningful opportunities to choose how they spend this time.

A correctional plan... is very much a top-down type of document. And a lot of what we do in the prison system is top down where we tell them, this is what you need to do... we give them the illusion of choice. We tell them programs are a choice, but not really. I mean, if you want to get parole, you got to do the programs, right?... Who wants to stay to their warrant? Not very many people do... even in school, we tell them school is a choice, you know, and it is. But if you don't do it ... it'll hurt your parole recommendation, hurt your pay level. It hurts all these other things, right? So, either we have to be honest and stop saying it's a choice... because it's really not, or we need to... listen and include them more in those decisions and if somebody is playing the game more or less by the rules, then give them a bit more choice and a bit more ability to decide their path... I think that the default should be "what do you think you need to do?"

These penal practices can be confusing especially for those who may not be used to surveillance and scrutiny. With limited choices in terms of programming, education, employment, and other penal requirements, prisoners are punished when they do not follow the rigid expectations of the system. When they do challenge the oppressive nature of the institution, "correctional" security staff often respond by censoring and controlling complaints in ways that can make prisoners feel powerless, threatened, and as if they have no choice, voice, or power.

This contentious issue was captured by Jacob, a former prisoner who served on an Inmate Committee⁵⁵ who describes the challenges of expressing agency in prison.

It's hard to have a voice inside. Even if you've got a voice, you know like if you write a grievance, everything has to pass through them [guards]... they [guards] would stop people's grievances. And there was someone who submitted a grievance against a guard. And the grievance didn't even make it...to the CM (Correctional Manager) because the guard ended up intercepting it and saying to this person that, 'I noticed you sent a grievance against me, and if you send another one, you're not going for parole.' Right. Like she came and told us this and it was just like, you know, what do you do in that scenario? And of course, he [the guard] wasn't accountable for seeing a grievance. It never made it anywhere. So, I just think you can want to do good, but in prison, everything has to pass through CSC. You can't call someone without them knowing. Things can be monitored. Mail can be monitored. Like everything goes in and out through them, right? So really, you're trapped in there.

Trapped with no voice, limited options, constant surveillance, and a lack of accountability in terms of how guards treat prisoners, it comes as no surprise that one of the most significant ways women's agency is restricted in prison is during pregnancy, labour, and the loss of one's child. As former prisoner and mother Sofia explains,

There's no support at all [for mothers in prison]. I mean, there were women, they were pregnant, and they had their babies and they had to give their babies up right away. Nothing. They've got zero support having to... [give birth] in cuffs. I don't know, what are we, animals? Like she's pregnant, she's having a baby. Like, what the hell do you think, she's gonna do?

The sense of powerlessness Sofia describes highlights how the system is not only unsupportive for mothers and their children, but also dehumanizing and inhumane in the way they treat

⁵⁵ An Inmate Committee consists of democratically elected prisoners that are approved by the penal administration to represent the needs of the 'inmate' population. The Committee attends meetings with the Warden and other prison management to bring forth prisoners' concerns and act as an intermediary. The Committee has limited power to exert meaningful changes, since power ultimately rests with administrative authorities.

pregnant women. The rights of a pregnant woman to experience giving birth with dignity along with her right to keep her child, is transformed into a privilege granted by the system. This lack of support and dehumanizing treatment of mothers in prison was further explicated by Kerry, who gave birth while incarcerated after breaching her parole conditions.

I think one [policy] that's ridiculous is, if you're an inmate regardless of what your institutional record is, regardless of anything, it does not fucking matter. If you go to jail pregnant and you have a Schedule 1 offence⁵⁶ [you lose your child]. I got out on parole because I was a good inmate. I did everything I was supposed to do. I was revoked because I had a relationship that I didn't report, right. I wasn't violent. I didn't hurt anybody. I didn't even really break any laws. I broke a stipulation. But I didn't break laws. Anyway, I get [back] to jail and when I gave birth, I wasn't allowed to have my daughter with me because I am a Schedule 1 offence. It doesn't matter that I had a perfect institutional record. I was never [institutionally] charged, I was never bad. Based on my initial offence, I can't have my kid. I don't think that's right.

The separation of children from their mothers due to maternal imprisonment has devastating effects for the family and wider community, which continues long after the mother is released (Richie, 2002). Incarcerated mothers are often the primary or sole caregivers of their children (Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017), which leaves these mothers vulnerable to losing custody. Since Indigenous, racialized, and low-income women are incarcerated at higher rates with harsher sentences than white, middle-class women (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Zinger, 2021, 2024) marginalized communities and entire sectors of society face further stigma and intergenerational trauma as their families are disrupted through the loss of their parental rights. Children of incarcerated mothers face long-term socioeconomic, educational, emotional,

⁵⁶ According to the CCRA under subsections 107(1), 129(1 and 2), 130(3 and 4), 133(4.1) and 156(3) a Schedule 1 offence in Canada involves a wide range of convictions processed by way of indictment ranging from treason, piracy, terrorism, prison breaches, kidnapping, various firearm offences, and sexual offences, to arson, robbery, manslaughter, murder, and various types of assault. Available online at: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-44.6/page-22.html>

behavioural, physical, and mental health challenges, due to the loss of a parent through imprisonment, the instability of state supervision (i.e., foster care), material deprivation, and a lack of support and services (Arrondelle, Gadian, & Plugge, 2024; Richie, 2002). Upon release from prison, mothers may experience considerable barriers to regaining access to their children, including navigating parole requirements (e.g., travel restrictions, non-association conditions, securing housing and employment), expectations of child protection services (e.g., parenting classes), and/or dealing with family members who have custody of their children (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021a).

The federal institutional mother-child program is governed by CD 768⁵⁷ (CSC, 2020) which aims to foster “positive relationships between federally incarcerated mothers and their child, by keeping them together where appropriate, and providing a supportive environment that promotes stability and continuity for the mother-child relationship”. Essentially, this program allows certain women (only those in minimum-security) to have their young children (age five and under) reside with them full or part-time, while in custody (CSC, 2020; Zinger, 2022). As evidenced from the quotes above along with extant literature (Fayter & Payne, 2017; Paynter, Martin-Misener, Iftene, & Murphy, 2022; Zinger, 2022) mothers in prison are limited in their capacity to engage in this program, especially for racialized prisoners who are frequently placed in higher security settings (Zinger, 2021, 2024). Incarcerated mothers are not automatically allowed to keep their children and ‘program availability’ is determined by ‘institutional capacity’ (Zinger, 2022), which means this program is highly underused (Paynter, et al., 2022; Zinger,

⁵⁷ This Commissioner’s Directive falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government’s CCRA sections 2, 46, 58, 76 and 77 along with the CCRR, sections 51-53.

2022) leading children of incarcerated mothers to face an increased risk of intergenerational trauma and future criminalization (Mussell, 2020).

This poor treatment and restriction of agency extends to all federally sentenced people, as peer-support worker and former prisoner Jolie explains: “It wasn’t just me. I think that there’s a lot of situations where especially women, and trans women who are beat up, coerced, and threatened into situations and choices, that end up in jail and then they end up back there [again] because they have no options.” When prisoners attempt to exert their agency in ways that are not consistent with institutional expectations, they face punitive repercussions such as disciplinary charges, loss of employment, and segregation which is the ultimate restriction of agency, as Brielle discusses.

I was in seg for a long time... eight months, in and out... I’d be out for a day or two, and then I’d get in trouble again and get put back. So, from max and seg, I was back and forth a lot... They started changing the rules in seg after a while... they stopped allowing us to have certain things. So, it was basically like I was just dry-celled in there. We couldn’t have anything. They took everything. It was just basically an empty cell. It was just boring honestly. I would just sit there and stare at the walls a lot... You don’t even have a clock. On the outside of the seg where you do have your windows, a lot of times they would close those. They put the boards there so you couldn’t see out of them... There’s nothing there.

Brielle’s narrative mirrors my own experience of segregation, as outlined in the vignette presented at the beginning of this section. Like my own experience, Brielle reflected on the challenges and mental health implications of being trapped in an empty cell, with a limited awareness of the passage of time and no access to fresh air or ability to connect with the outside world. Prisoners trapped in these dank segregation units have no way of tracking the passage of time, beyond the rhythm of the institution. Blocking access to the outside world by not allowing prisoners to see the sun, sky, or trees adds another layer of torture, truly making solitary

confinement feel like one is living in a “hole”. Like Brielle, I also felt isolated, disoriented, and a significant absence of options during my time in segregation.

The egregious harms experienced by segregated prisoners have recently been acknowledged by the Canadian government. In a 2019 Court of Appeal for Ontario ruling, the court noted that “the distinguishing feature of solitary confinement is the elimination of meaningful social interaction or stimulus. It has the potential to cause serious harm which could be permanent” (CCLA v Canada, 2019, pp.1-2). I expand on the multitude of harmful penal practices that CSC employs against prisoners to limit their choices in solitary confinement in a continuation of my vignette below.

Restricting agency vignette continued

Two more weeks pass as I’m trapped in this liminal space, trying to fight an involuntary transfer to maximum-security. It’s a cold morning on November 2, 2016, and the guards drag me from my cell without allowing me to shower or change out of my pajamas, locking me in the tiny visitation room to speak with psychology through plexiglass. Next, a CM takes me directly to court and tells me, “Don’t bother waiting for a lawyer to help you with your transfer to max. It won’t make a difference.” Later that day I go outside for fresh air in the tiny seg yard, which is a concrete box topped with razor wire. The guards seem to forget about me since they locked me outside for an hour or so without a jacket. I bang on the window to get their attention.

It’s sometime after breakfast on November 4 when the CM visits my cell to try once again to convince me not to wait for a lawyer: “The warden’s been patiently waiting for you to get a lawyer Fayter, and it won’t help you for this meeting. You’re wasting our time.” I quickly reply, “I’m the one in seg here and it’s my right to have a lawyer. Besides, this would move a lot faster if his number was added to my PIN list⁵⁸ so I can call him. I submitted the paperwork over a week ago.” The CM yells back, “Why should I move heaven and earth to have your needs met when there’s 200 inmates here? It’s not possible to have your scale reviewed before the meeting, so just bring it up then.” It’s hard to figure out what to do from seg because I’ve never been through this and have no one to ask. I certainly don’t trust the guards or management. I’m not even sure what my options are at this point, much less whether I have a choice in the matter. It’s difficult to have a voice, choice, or sense of safety inside, or consider options for my future after

⁵⁸ A phone PIN list is a Prisoner Identified Number list for prisoners to access telephones using the Bell Canada Phone system.

being incarcerated for years. I anticipate that not much changes once we are released to the community.

In this second portion of my “restricting agency” vignette, I share some of my experiences after spending 17 days in solitary confinement, which constitutes “torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment” according to Rule 43 of the Nelson Mandela Rules (UN General Assembly, 1955/2015). Closer to home, a 2019 Court of Appeal for Ontario ruled that segregation over 15 days is considered cruel and unusual punishment, violating s.12 of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (CCLA v Canada, 2019). Despite these clear legislative violations, CSC continues to use solitary confinement as a punitive intervention (Sprott & Doob, 2021).

The torturous conditions of segregation are evident from my narrative above. In this space I experienced a loss of control over my *self-identity* and my *body*. I lacked autonomy regarding access to a phone, shower, and fresh air. I had no choice of movement during this time. Guards would come to my cell without warning, restrain my hands and legs, then drag me to meetings with various prison staff, locking me in tiny ‘interview’ rooms, or the seg yard, or in the shower. I experienced frequent threats and intimidation from guards attempting to coerce me to relinquish my rights. I felt unsafe in a constant state of powerlessness and confusion. This space is incomprehensible to anyone who has not experienced it. Solitary confinement truly condemns prisoners to a “social death” (Guenther, 2013). As Guenther (2013, p.xi) asserts, when prisoners are “deprived of meaningful human interaction...not only psychological or social identity but the most basic sense of identity is threatened by prolonged solitary confinement.”

My reflection towards the end of this vignette concerning a lack of hope for my future is akin to other prisoners’ experiences who have been confined in similar units. For example, Zak

Amara (2024) explains that being in segregation “feels like your world is shattered,” there is a sense of “nothingness,” and you are the “furthest from freedom that you can be.” Experiencing such intense isolation, lack of agency, and forced dependency on the institution, makes exiting prison and returning to the community an extremely daunting task.

4.1.2. In community: “We need to be able to articulate what we need”

One’s incarceration experience makes re-entry a difficult process, in part because personal agency is so restricted inside. Rather than create choices, CSC’s approach is better described as *restricting choices*, which continues in the community via transcarceration and the carceral continuum. The process of transcarceration was conceived by Lowman, Menzies, and Palys (1987) who developed a “transcarceral model of control” (p.9) based on Foucault’s (1977) discussion of the “carceral archipelago” (p.297), Cohen’s (1985) discussion of carceral netwidening, and Garland’s (1985) notion of the ‘penal-welfare’ complex. This transcarceral model of control highlights the role of structural power exerted through “cross-institutional arrangements and dynamics” linking the carceral, penal, and judicial systems with welfare, mental health, and educational systems (Lowman, Menzies, & Palys, 1987, p.9).

Upon their release from prison, formerly incarcerated people typically face additional forms of social control when they access different halfway houses, substance use treatment centres, ‘psy-care’, child protection services, welfare, and other professionals that they are mandated to visit (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2008, 2009b). Navigating this “help-control continuum” (Maidment, 2006, p.267) is extremely challenging for ex-prisoners who have been limited in their capacity to make their own decisions, resulting in a precarious existence upon release. As former prisoner Jolie stated:

Imagine being in solitary confinement and released to the community where you have to get on a bus, you have to get on a subway, you have to go talk to people. You have to go talk to a PO. You have to go talk to an OW [Ontario Works/welfare] worker. You have to start making decisions. Like, even your decision-making process is stagnant inside because everybody's doing everything for you. You don't have to make decisions inside, right? But then you get released and you have to plan to get a job. [Learn] how to do a resume. You have to do all these things and that creates anxiety, depression.

The anxiety and depression former prisoners such as Jolie experience is linked to the lack of support inside prisons *and* the carceral continuum (Foucault, 1977) that sees carceral interventions continue in the community by way of community parole officers and welfare workers. Barriers to re-entry, such as familiarizing oneself with a new community and its' transit system, are added stressors. As Jolie expresses, "you don't have to make decisions inside," so how can ex-prisoners effectively make decisions following their release?

Some prisons for women have 'discharge planners' to assist with the transition to community living, but this position is not always filled, and it typically consists of a CSC staff person reviewing highly restrictive parole stipulations⁵⁹. As Jacob describes:

⁵⁹ Parole stipulations or conditions are requirements placed on federally sentenced people by the Parole Board of Canada when they are released from prison on parole. Conditions typically speak to non-criminal acts such as being prohibited from using legal substances, frequenting establishments where the primary source of income is alcohol, missing one's curfew as set by a halfway house, or associating with other criminalized persons. Additionally, FSW often must disclose any personal relationships, have significant others approved by their parole officer, find employment, attend programs, and housing immediately. If a prisoner is applying for early release via Day Parole to a halfway house (prisoners are eligible for day parole at 6 months before 1/3 of their sentence completion), they must establish a relationship and secure a spot with the halfway house prior to their release, which can lead to longer periods of incarceration. Prisoners also have the option of applying for full parole at 1/3 of their sentence, which means they can be released to their own residence upon completion of a community assessment (CA). Based on my experience and conversations with many federally sentenced people, this option is rarely supported by the institution. After serving 2/3 of their sentence all prisoners who are not serving a life sentence or designated as a "dangerous offender" are released on statutory release (i.e., they do not need to apply for parole). People leaving prison on statutory release typically are not eligible for a bed in a halfway house and do not require housing to be secured prior to their release. There are many instances of ex-prisoners going to shelters, hotels, and other precarious forms of short-term housing when released on their statutory release date. Parole eligibility dates vary for those serving a life sentence. While there

So, the discharge planner we did some safety planning, right? I was very confused. Not once did they ask me what I needed to feel safe. You know what I mean? So, discharge planning, it's all like stay out of bars, stay out of establishments where the primary source of income is from alcohol. Don't hang out with people with a record. And then I have to have gainful employment or that kind of stuff. Financial disclosure for being a drug dealer... It was like, stay away from here, stay out of here. It's like... this prison of loneliness... What I needed was ...a home. I needed to know I had somewhere to go. I need supports because things are going to happen. I need people to walk this journey with me, you know?... they say, reintegration starts the first day we enter prison and it's like, gosh, people are just so unprepared to leave that. There's nothing.

As Jacob describes, federally sentenced people are not active participants in their release planning. This is consistent with Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, and Turnbull's (2018) findings, which demonstrate that most prisoners' reentry experiences are precarious due to a lack of pre-release planning. The geographic displacement prisoners face due to forced relocation, along with a lack of transitional supports, and restrictive parole conditions make reentry particularly challenging. Prisoners have few choices concerning where they are released to since there are a limited number of halfway houses designated for women, typically in highly policed major urban settings (such as downtown Toronto and Vancouver), which are not necessarily located near the prison (e.g., there are no halfway houses for women in Kitchener, Ontario where GVI is located). Formerly incarcerated people who participated in this study frequently described the importance of having their needs met and being able to choose how their return to community unfolds.

The need to foreground prisoners' agency in terms of their capacity to negotiate power (Bosworth, 1999) was highlighted by a former prisoner named Tiina:

are rare cases of a prisoner securing educational placements or finding employment prior to their release, most often prisoners returning to the community must navigate the challenges of finding employment, housing, and meeting other parole requirements immediately after their release.

We need to be able to articulate what we need. We've done all of this programing and you've given us the tools and helped us to understand our triggers. So why can't we make and create our own plan? [...] So, my plan needs me to have full time work and an ability to exercise and a library card. Do you know what I'm saying? And then how about you create all of your CSC needs around what I need to be successful? I will get them done. I've already done SMP [Self-management program]; two times at that point, I'll get it fucking done. But why is there a need to do it [again] in the first 12 weeks of my release when it's so important to me to do these [other] things that I've identified? We need to have creation of our own plans and they need to be honored and individualized, and they need to be supported for sure.

Tiina's reflections echo the comments from key informant and CSC employee Mark who agreed that prisoners should have more say in their correctional plans and release planning, particularly if CSC claims to empower women to make meaningful choices, to treat them with respect and dignity, to provide a supportive environment, and to share responsibility for their "rehabilitation" (TFFSW, 1990). According to former prisoners, CSC does the opposite of supporting women and gender-diverse people upon their release from prison, making life outside "near impossible because of parole conditions" (Anastasia, former prisoner). As Tiina further explains:

CSC did the opposite [of supporting my re-entry]... I finally got a job, and they called me that morning saying, 'you have to come to a piss test right now. You've got to go to SMP, two and a half hours in transit, once a week for three hours. You have to see a psychologist. You have to see a psychiatrist.' You had to do all of these call-ins [to the halfway house]. I identified in my SMP program [that] financial instability [w]as the biggest trigger for me. Please, just let me find a job. Please let me get some security. I have the clothes on my back and \$200, right. Like, I have nothing. So, the only thing I cared about was building up some type of bank [account], hoping to be able to move out of the halfway house. I failed at parole before because I started doing crime right away because I couldn't work, and I couldn't make money, and I couldn't make myself feel financially secure. That's been a trigger my entire life. And you're asking me what my trigger is, I'm telling you, and then you're preventing me from doing it. I was working like 12 hours a week at Subway, and you're fucking that up for me every single week... It was taking what I told them and forcing me to do what I told them was setting me up for failure. They did the opposite of support me.

Rather than assisting federally sentenced people, the restrictive parole conditions from the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) and CSC make the transition from prison to community overly challenging (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021a, 2022a). Indeed, “setting up for failure” is a common sentiment among women on parole (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021a) and the constant threat of being sent back to prison for violating a parole condition, leaves some women feeling like “community corrections” is worse than being in prison (Pollack, 2009b). Those leaving federal prisons for women experience intersectional and carceral oppression, while conditions of poverty, addictions, histories of abuse and violence, along with state controls combine to create a “culture of dependency” (Maidment, 2006, p.281) that does not support formerly incarcerated people’s empowerment or re-entry experiences. It is difficult for criminalized women and gender-diverse people to exercise agency, much less have a sense of hope, when CSC does “the opposite of supporting people”.

4.2. Carceral Harms Diminishing Hope

If hope is an active cognitively-affective process (as asserted in *Chapter 2*), by restricting prisoners’ agency and capacity to exercise free will, the prison system also acts to diminish our hope. Participants described a setting where they feel deserving of punishment (based on the essentializing and stigmatizing labels imposed on prisoners such as “offender,” “criminal,” “drug addict,” and “prostitute”), intimidation from guards, and where they experience uncaring, sometimes traumatizing treatment that results in a reduction in confidence and self-esteem. This lack of support and indifference continues in the community as prisoners are set-up for failure due to unrealistic expectations and barriers to employment and housing that leave ex-prisoners feeling stigmatized and overwhelmed. I begin the discussion of hope by once again turning to my personal narrative to highlight how a sense of hopefulness deteriorates inside prison over time.

Diminishing hope vignette

It's a warm and sunny afternoon on June 15, 2016, and I return to my living unit after the monthly search. I walk upstairs to my room, immediately frustrated because it has been destroyed by the guards. I'm so tired of constantly being targeted; this destruction of property does not happen to every prisoner here. Immediately, I notice that the only items they seized were artistic creations made by friends and given to me as gifts for my birthday in March: a few magnets and a scrapbook which have been displayed on my shelf for months. Little did I know that this seemingly minor incident would lead to a series of events culminating in solitary confinement, making the final year of my incarceration virtually soul-crushing.

Five days later I'm suspended from my institutional job at Food Services where I've been working for more than two years. I feel confused, angry, and frustrated. Food Services is somewhat of a refuge for me in prison. I enjoy the work environment, which is air-conditioned in the summer, has decent (non-security) staff who respect us and let us play music, and there's rarely any guards in the building. I also like my job and fellow workers, which helps the time pass. Reviewing my paperwork on the short walk back to my unit I read that I've been suspended from work due to "having other inmate IDs in a scrapbook" which they claim, "is a breach of trust." I shake my head in disbelief. On two of the pages in the middle of the scrapbook a bunch of friends had glued their prison ID cards under the heading "The New Med Line" as a joke. The allegations are laughable; management assumes someone accessed a computer and colour printer either at A&D [Admission and Discharge] or outside the warden's office to photocopy and laminate stolen prisoner IDs. Neither me nor my friends have been questioned about this and I haven't been given any charges. They claim I broke institutional policies and procedures but have not indicated which ones.

4.2.1. In prison: "They try to break you"

Participants described an environment in which they face significant barriers to their personal empowerment and capacity to envision a hopeful or meaningful experience. As I discussed in my vignette above, guards target certain prisoners who they perceive as problematic or not following institutional expectations. In my example, guards destroyed and seized some of my personal property during a monthly search, which resulted in my suspension from an institutional job that I enjoyed. The arbitrary nature of this incident and the ridiculous accusations made against me, highlight CSC's power to punish, which caused me to feel frustrated, exhausted, angry, confused, and a general lack of hope.

Like my own experience, criminalized participants identify the penal system as a place where they face frequent intimidation from guards who believe prisoners deserve punishment and often engage in corrupt practices to mete out this punishment. Similar to my experiences outlined in the above narrative, Billie, a former prisoner with a life sentence, explained:

They try to break you down. Never mind bring ya down, they try to break you. You know what I mean? Because they're sitting there saying, 'Oh, I know you did it', but you didn't really do it. But they're going to find you guilty. You're going to have all of your [negative] reports when you go to the parole board, and you are not getting parole.

The constant fear of punishment within such a dehumanizing setting can lead women and gender-diverse prisoners to be in a state of hopelessness, especially when prison staff are uncaring or indifferent. Former prisoner Denise suggests staff do not view those inside as whole persons: “What challenged me was the coldness, the aloofness, and the distance of staff. 90% of the staff, they looked at you as basically just a number or they looked at their job as a paycheck. They didn't realize that there were real people there with real feelings and real value.” Like Denise's observation, in Elaine Crawley's (2004a) research with British prison guards she found that this emotional distance of staff in their interactions with prisoners was a common form of emotion management. This “coldness” and “aloofness” experienced by prisoners, serves as a mediating factor allowing prison guards to conduct the more difficult (i.e., harmful) aspects of their job, such as strip searches and segregation. Robert Clark, who worked for federal ‘corrections’ for 30 years, described it as a “culture of collective indifference” in which “too few prison employees care about the prisoners under their care” (Clark, 2017, pp.16-17); as he said in an interview, there's a “don't give a damn mentality” within CSC. Indeed, almost every participant discussed the lack of dignity or respect in the prison system as “cruel and inhuman” (Fiona, Key informant), full of staff who are uncaring, and/or indifferent towards prisoners' well-

being. For example, Tracy (former prisoner) described the guards as “cruel” and aiming to “humiliate and degrade you.”

One of the most harmful ways that security staff perpetuate an indifferent culture is through the sexual exploitation of prisoners. Multiple participants spoke about sexual assault and/or exploitation from/by male guards in women’s prisons. Sexual exploitation can involve taking advantage of federally sentenced people’s sense of isolation, loneliness, and/or addictions. Due to the power imbalance from such an asymmetrical relationship, I assert that prisoners who experience these sexual misconducts typically feel a loss of hope. Based on prison research from the United States, women prisoners often underreport incidents of sexual assault and coercion by abusive guards due to fear of retaliation, a lack of confidentiality, and women being confined with their abusers. When women prisoners do file reports against abusive guards, their grievances are vigorously scrutinized, which can deter further reporting and make criminal charges against guards difficult to sustain (Stern, 2019). According to CAEFS advocates, sexual violence and coercion inside women’s institutions is a well-known systemic issue, yet incarcerated people’s accounts are not believed by “correctional” authorities who defer to the accounts of their colleagues (Wakefield, 2023). Ex-prisoners spoke about witnessing sexual assaults or exploitation by guards at the federal Grand Valley, Edmonton, and Nova institutions, as well as in provincial jails, with one case resulting in the pregnancy of an incarcerated woman. As Shyanne (former prisoner) recalls:

Something really messed up happened at this prison I was at. There was this one guard...he ended up having to quit his job because he was having sex with her [a female prisoner] there and then they started having a relationship and everything...there was another guard in Newfoundland provincial [jail] that had sex with an inmate. When she came to Nova, she found out she was pregnant.

While Shyanne does not frame these incidents of male guards having sex with female prisoners as examples of sexual assault, per se, she does indicate that this was “really messed up.” I define these situations as sexual assaults or exploitation due to the significant power imbalance between prisoners and guards, and between men and women in a patriarchal culture. Even if these sexual encounters were consensual, female prisoners are confined and isolated in a vulnerable position.

As discussed in the previous section, incarcerated women experience significant oppression and have few available choices. In addition to potential pregnancies, prisoners who are sexually assaulted face further harms to their confidence and self-esteem when they make formal complaints and are not believed by a system that claims to support their well-being. As former prisoner Jay testifies, “The girls [in Edmonton prison] were complaining about sexual assault in Edmonton for years and nobody believed them. And then they [guards] all got charged not too long ago...but the girls were complaining about it since like 2001.”⁶⁰

With extensive histories of violence, abuse, addiction, mental health issues, and poverty (Balfour, 2014a; CHRC, 2003; Chamberlen, 2018; Comack, 2014a, 2018; CSC, 2012a; Sapers, 2015; Zinger, 2018) many prisoners are retraumatized by a system that claims to focus on rehabilitation. Jacob found prison much like the abusive environment he grew up in:

I think for me, being in prison was just like being in the same hostile and frightening environment I grew up in as a child, right? So then again, we’re all

⁶⁰ A news report from the *Edmonton Journal* in 2023 indicates that a “correctional” officer at the Edmonton Institution for Women was charged after a female prisoner asserted that she was forcibly confined and sexually assaulted by a staff member in 2022 (Wakefield, 2023). Additionally, in 2022, a former prison guard from Nova Institution plead guilty to three counts of sexual assault against three women prisoners, which occurred on a weekly basis for six months in 2018 (Rhodes, 2022). Unfortunately, these cases reported in the popular media do not provide an accurate portrayal of the widespread, systemic nature of sexual assault inside women’s prisons based on a “culture of silence” perpetrated by CSC, who fails to track instances of sexual violence inside federal prisons (Zinger, 2020).

in survival mode. We've all got trauma, mental health [issues], like, most people have addiction, we're all battling this thing. And then we've got this system that's just further harming us. It's like a paradox, right? Like where we say we're supposed to rehabilitate ourselves in a system that's geared towards punishment.

Such paradoxically poor treatment in a prison system supposedly structured on feminist and Indigenous principles (TFFSW, 1990) can lead to “an unexplainable feeling and experience... it's just like this totally different place of loneliness and darkness, and just feeling that you literally don't fucking matter” (Jolie, former prisoner). Experiencing a sense of loss and hopelessness is common; as Denise (former prisoner) explains: “We all go through it. Like a short-sentenced woman for her, that's like a life sentence because she won't forget it. A medium sentenced woman, you're further removed from a sense of normalcy and a sense of self-worth. And then the long-term women, they feel hopeless.” Some prisoners even describe crying, “to the point where I burnt my face, my cheekbones, with the salt from my tears. That's how much I cried in there... it hurts, and it's very scary. I was very suicidal. I didn't want to live anymore... It was brutal, just brutal” (Lucy, former prisoner). Brutal or uncaring treatment of people with histories of trauma and violence can lead to harmful coping mechanisms such as self-harm and suicide (Chamberlen, 2018; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Hansen, 2018; Kilty, 2011, 2014).

Indeed, key informant Lindsay described the “hopelessness and being bullied inside, being told you're worthless. Being conditioned to believe that you're inherently bad, inherently violent...[as] verbal and mental abuse.” Lindsay goes on to reflect that,

If people actually cared, and our government officials actually cared about the treatment of people inside, maybe things would change... that's where I think the powerlessness and the hopelessness, and the burnout comes when you're trying to just keep people alive and sane and talk through things and get people a chance at life again. The systems and politicians, all the way down to the abusive and violent culture of correctional officers, don't help either. Their

lack of action over decades, proves that they just don't give a fuck. Humans who are incarcerated, are still humans!

Despite submitting formal complaints of their treatment inside, which are typically ignored by prison officials (e.g., CHRC, 2003; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Fayter & Payne, 2017) there is a lack of transparency and accountability concerning how CSC treats its' prisoners (Arbour, 1997; Kilty, 2014). It is well documented that the CSC lacks transparency in the implementation of their policies and practices, the conditions of confinement, and what information they are willing to share publicly. For example, CSC's lack of transparency is a recurrent theme in the *Annual Report of the Correctional Investigator* where "problems with transparency and accountability in terms of policy implementation" are routinely identified (Zinger, 2021, p. 56) with respect to use of force (Zinger, 2020), the treatment of Indigenous prisoners (Zinger, 2022), access to mental health supports (Zinger, 2019), ensuring health care standards (Zinger, 2017), solitary confinement (Zinger, 2021, 2022), and deaths in custody (Zinger, 2017, 2020, 2021, 2022). This lack of transparency was highlighted in an interview with former CSC employee Robert Clark, who worked for three decades inside seven federal prisons at every security level, eventually rising to the rank of deputy warden:

And the other thing is that everything that happens inside the walls stays inside the walls because of the culture of secrecy where nobody rats on anybody. So, any time you get a crowd together they're like minded and don't have any fear of getting found out...People who wouldn't normally behave badly can be induced to behave badly, when they see everybody else doing it. And there's no accountability. If you get people at the top who came up through the system and are equally invested in hiding the truth, what chance have you got holding people accountable? Yeah, huge lack of transparency and accountability. It's always been that way, and it still is.

Some government officials are transparent and caring, such as long-time prisoner advocate Senator Kim Pate, who shared a recent experience she had with a woman imprisoned in solitary confinement for an indefinite period:

I was on a call over a month ago and they said, you know, this person wants to access [MAID], wants to die. And...basically they wanted me to support them, letting her die in prison...so I said, I need to talk to her. I can't just do this over a Zoom call or whatever. I have to go lay eyes on her. Sit with her. Talk to her. Just the fact that we were going to have a meeting, within less than 5 hours she decided she didn't want to die. That told me volumes. I thought, who the hell is talking to her? Well, a whole battery of psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists. Some of her own family had been there, and they all determined that she was clear. She was cogent. She's sectioned under a mental health legislation. She's no longer under sentence. But she's in a prison because no psych hospital will take her because they determined the way Corrections has described her, they deem her so dangerous and violent that she can't be in any psych hospital... Anyway, so the sum total is she had decided she wanted to die. Now, do I blame her? That's the life circumstance she was in... I don't like when people commit suicide. I've got lots of people I care about deeply who have committed suicide. Do I want to see anyone in that situation? Not a chance. Did I fight against the medical assistance in dying for people with mental health? Yes. And people with disabilities. Because when you provide people with no ability to actually live, they might choose death. But is it a real choice if we haven't actually interrogated what their life circumstance is? Like I said, within 5 hours...The hope that something different might be possible than living in a seg cell in restraints for the rest of her life is all it took for her to not want to die.

Senator Kim Pate's narrative highlights the brutal and deadly impacts for incarcerated women who experience hopelessness and powerlessness at the hands of the federal prison system. It is not surprising that a prisoner who has been restrained and confined in solitary confinement for years under an indeterminate sentence, and no foreseeable release date, would want to take her own life. CSC's treatment of FSW is so effective at diminishing prisoners' hope, that a simple visit from an advocate offering a transfer to a psychiatric facility was enough to provide this prisoner with a reason to live.

4.2.2. *In community: “My whole entire life is shit now”*

Upon release, formerly incarcerated people are pushed further to the margins of society based on stigmatizing labels and discrimination flowing from their status as a criminalized person. As Billie (former prisoner) recalls, the lack of housing options is particularly troubling:

I remember them releasing people to a park bench in Toronto. Not even an address, not a halfway house. Nothing. Because once you do your time, they can't hold you so, they don't give a shit what happens...they [ex-prisoners] have to live on the street because they have nobody. And they [CSC] don't give a shit. They don't tell you nothing.

With limited options and a lack of support from an indifferent system, some prisoners describe being transformed by their carceral experience, but not in a positive or healthy way. As Anastasia (former prisoner) recounted:

I was always pretty happy and positive and cheerful...I don't think I really am anymore. My whole entire life is shit now. Getting out... I don't really have any friends anymore. I can't really return to my career. And I don't really work very often because now I work in fast food. I don't know, things negatively impacted me all around... I have three college degrees, and I can't return to that line of work with a criminal record...And not having anybody that I could talk to anymore because I was on parole at first, so unless they were approved by your parole officer and got the police background check and everything else...it was a bit of like jumping through hoops.

This social isolation and the lack of employment opportunities or transitional supports, not only limits former prisoners' capacity for success, but also leads people to feel overwhelmed and confused, as Jacob (former prisoner) discusses in detail:

I don't want to go back to [the city I'm from] because I just want to stay sober. I don't want to sell drugs. That's all I know there, right? I decided to stay here not knowing really anybody...So, when I got out, like, I didn't have a job, I didn't have a place to stay. They were actually going to send me to a shelter, but yet I have to abstain from drugs and alcohol... So, my sister came down and we ended up staying in a hotel together...then, we had to leave, right? I'm in a crisis now. I've got my stuff; I've got my sister. At this point, I'm not even out [as trans] to my sister. So, we may have to go to shelters, but she's going to be going

to the women's shelter. I would be wanting to go to the men's shelter. But at the same time, I don't want to leave her alone ... I was ready to pack up my stuff and just head on back [to prison]. Like what comes first, the job, the place? Plus, I'm on parole. I have conditions to work...Like, that's why people go back. I realize we go back to what's familiar. It's comfortable even though it's unhealthy because we fear the unknown. Like, look at me wanting to start off new[ly] sober. Oh my God, it was so challenging, you know, even someone as resilient as me, it was like, I can't do it out here.

A lack of hope for a better future and feeling like a return to prison is inevitable or easier than life in the community is a common sentiment among recently released prisoners. Recidivism-based and reintegration programming are closely tied to risk epistemes that overshadow and minimize the resilience and personal strengths of criminalized women and gender-diverse people (Hannah-Moffat, 2004a; Pollack, 2012; Pollack & Kendall, 2005). Logics of punitiveness, risk, and intense surveillance also inform community "corrections" and post carceral experiences and contribute to the perpetuation of a cycle of recriminalization and reincarceration from which it is difficult to escape (Byrd, 2016; Comack, 2018).

Most community re-entry programs are based in deficit models aimed at managing former prisoners' perceived risks and needs (Maruna & LeBel, 2015). This deficit-oriented approach compounds the well documented barriers already faced by criminalized people, such as challenges securing employment, education, and housing, along with feelings of marginalization, stigma, anxiety, and isolation (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; Pollack, 2008, 2009b; Shantz, Kilty, & Frigon, 2009). These findings on restrictive parole conditions limiting ex-prisoners' potential for success are echoed by Maidment (2006) who reported that some formerly incarcerated women found community controls "worse than being in prison" (p. 273). Similarly, the "pains of release" experienced by women on parole leads to some recently released prisoners feeling that it would be "easier to go back to prison" (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021a, p. 13).

4.3. Carceral Harms Punishing Resistance

With their needs not being met in prison or the community, a lack of choices, and feelings of diminished hope leads some currently and formerly incarcerated people to resist systemic oppressions. Resistance, however, is swiftly punished, resulting in some criminalized people feeling that resistance is futile. As outlined in *Chapter 2*, resistance is a multi-faceted concept involving one's cognitive state and some form of action or inaction aimed at challenging injustice and oppression (Bosworth, 1999; Rubin, 2015; Scott, 1985, 1990), highlighting how resistance is always relational to power (Foucault, 1977). In this section, I demonstrate how the carceral system punishes individual and collective acts of resistance, including prisoners' internal epistemic processes, external "everyday acts" (Scott, 1985), and their intentionally disruptive political actions (Crewe, 2007; Rubin, 2015). I begin this discussion by returning to my personal narrative, highlighting the difficulty of challenging carceral power and how prisoner resistance faces punitive repercussions.

Punishing resistance vignette

It's a warm summer day on June 21, 2016, and I'm trying to fight to get my job back at Food Services after being suspended for having a scrapbook. I've spoken with the Office of the Correctional Investigator and a CAEFS advocate and am documenting everything. Additionally, I've got five letters from my friends who put their IDs in the scrapbook and are still at GVI. They explain they did this as a joke, that I wasn't aware of it beforehand, and which meds they're on, if any. The other five IDs belonged to friends who were released since March. I sent a request to an SIO (Security Intelligence Officer) with a letter explaining my situation and requesting a meeting. My attempts to fight this constant systemic injustice would prove futile.

When I check my mail on July 21, 2016, I find a request from the Warden stating I need to speak with CIB (Correctional Intervention Board) staff after filing a first level grievance against the CIB decision. I submit another request to the warden for a meeting. Several weeks later, on PJD (Prisoners' Justice Day-August 10th) I'm sitting in my PO's office on the phone when the guards suddenly barge in claiming they've been looking for me for an hour. They drag me up to the warden's office without any explanation. I was totally taken off guard and was unprepared. Upon arrival I quickly realize this is in lieu of a meeting scheduled for tomorrow

morning at 10am. I had a folder of information, and a member of the inmate committee was going to attend. My PO was going to send an email. The acting warden along with a staff person from CIB both met with me. I expressed that I was not prepared and would have liked to bring my PO whose office I was just escorted from. They said if they need more information, they'll contact her. This was an obvious abuse of power.

On August 31, 2016, I receive a report from my PW indicating that my interpersonal relationships, attitude, motivation, behaviour, effort, productivity, and level of responsibility are all poor. On this report, my PW writes: "Offender does not take any responsibility for her actions. Two inmates were found in her closet that do not reside in her unit. She disregards the rules and regulations of GVI and has been warned and counselled several times. When asked about what can be done to better follow the rules, she stated that other institutions allow visiting other units and therefore GVI should change the rules." They clearly are not impressed with my resistance against their ridiculous policies and practices.

4.3.1. In prison: "Don't fight the system, it's not worth it"

In the above vignette I provide a case example of how difficult it is to resist carceral power from behind prison walls. In this narrative I discuss how I was fighting to get my institutional job back after an arbitrary suspension, by using every "legitimate" option available to me (e.g., contacting prison advocates, documentation, witness statements, filing requests and grievances). These efforts were generally ignored by the system or met with an abuse of power. The negatively skewed report from my primary worker (PW) illustrates how meaningful and responsible choices or behaviours "are limited to those deemed by the administration, and not necessarily the prisoner" (Hannah-Moffat, 2000, pp. 32-33). For example, on this report my interpersonal relationships were framed as "poor" from the prison's perspective, yet on this same report they highlighted that I disagreed with the institutional policy of not allowing prisoners to visit other living units and allowed my friends to hide in my closet when guards came through, so they could avoid a disciplinary response. I think my friends would identify my solidarity and relationships with them as excellent.

The abuse of power by CSC staff against people incarcerated in prisons designated for women is omnipresent in their policies and practices, resulting in some prisoners feeling powerless to resist their unjust treatment. For example, Lucy, a wrongfully convicted prisoner now in the community suggests that federally incarcerated people should follow all the rules due to the punitive nature of the system:

Just follow along. Don't create more trouble for yourself. You know, a lot of girls in there, they fought the system. They fought every single thing. They were negative towards the guards...The guards pick it up, you know, and you got to remember, they're in leadership...like just follow the rules. Like, unfortunately, we can't change them [inside] and we're going to change them on the outside. Like through your work, your advocacy...We as inmates inside, we can have our say. But there's time for that. And when you're serving, it's kind of not the right time...I don't think there's a lot of support for us in there, but don't fight the system, it's not worth it.

Although Lucy's comments suggest she acquiesced to penal power, acts of resistance can also be conceptualized as subversive acts (such as following institutional rules) that contend with power (not exclusively against) to ensure prisoners' freedom (Medina, 2013). While some prisoners such as Lucy, believe that fighting against systemic oppression is not worth the trouble, other participants shared strategies they employed to reduce CSC's abuse of power, including avoiding applying for parole. Unsurprisingly, prisoners who resist tend to serve lengthier periods of their sentence inside. As former prisoner Jacob describes:

So, when I got there, I decided, since it was only a three-year sentence, not to go for parole, right? Because I was only in on three years and I'm someone that wants to challenge things, right? And I've heard so many people in there, it's sad because people are in there [hoping for] parole being mistreated, yet they can't say anything because they feel like they're going to lose their [chance at] parole if they do.

Jacob's words echo the reality that challenging one's conditions of confinement may result in punishment or may jeopardize one's freedom. Participants described how compound

punishments are facilitated by disciplinary hearings⁶¹ or “Kangaroo court”⁶² as many prisoners such as Billie describe it: “When they take you to the kangaroo court... You go in there with one charge, you know, like for something, and they’re giving you 15 days [in seg] for just something stupid, you know what I mean?” Following an institutional disciplinary hearing or breaching a “position of trust,”⁶³ prisoners’ face having their visits, schooling, and employment restricted, being moved to a new living unit, being subject to a monetary fine, and potentially being moved to segregation. Facing multiple punishments for a single transgression makes resistance in prison extremely difficult, as one person with a life sentence reflects:

⁶¹ Governed by Commissioner’s Directive 580: Discipline of Inmates (CSC, 2021).

⁶² In a study conducted at two Canadian federal prisons designated for men, Jackson (2002) outlines a series of problems with institutional disciplinary hearings in which both staff and prisoners expressed dissatisfaction. Jackson observed that guards were not trained and lacked experience in writing evidence-based reports and were not trained in penal policies or jurisprudence. There was also a lack of legal representation for prisoners, and prisoners perceived the disciplinary process as unfair. In his analysis of disciplinary hearings, Jackson argues that the process for serious disciplinary charges seems to prioritize the rights of prisoners over the rights of staff, based on the presumption of innocence and the need for proof beyond reasonable doubt. He also asserts that a verdict of not guilty for serious offences was common practice. However, he does describe a veritable kangaroo court process for minor disciplinary hearings, which are staff-run. An Independent Chairperson (i.e., adjudicator external to CSC) is used for serious disciplinary charges, but not minor. In the minor disciplinary hearings Jackson observes that a plea was often not taken from the accused, there was an underlying assumption of guilt, the accused were excluded from portions of the proceedings, and prisoners were not allowed to question the institution’s witnesses. While I agree with Jackson’s observations of minor hearings and some aspects of his analysis for serious institutional charges, some of his findings do not hold up in the current carceral context, at least within prisons designated for women. By the time I was incarcerated, at disciplinary hearings (both minor and serious) prisoners were almost always presumed guilty, with little evidence and no concern about reasonable doubt or due process. Finding prisoners not guilty was extremely rare. The differences between my observations and Jackson’s could be attributed to his research being conducted prior to the Harper Conservative government’s “tough on crime” agenda, or these could be due to alternative forms of governance for men’s versus women’s institutions.

⁶³ Certain institutional employment positions (e.g., working in the library, canteen, food services, Inmate Committee, as House Representative, or cleaning staff offices) held by prisoners are considered “positions of trust”. To the best of my knowledge, there is no explanation within the Commissioner’s Directives concerning what a “position of trust” entails. Based on my lived expertise, almost every prisoner employment position is considered a “position of trust” except for certain cleaning positions and working in CORCAN. The most coveted prisoner employment placements are deemed “positions of trust,” presumably to ensure prisoners in these positions are following institutional rules and all aspects of their correctional plans. If they fail to do so, they can lose their employment. Any institutional job that allows prisoners to work in commonly restricted spaces (such as staff offices), allows prisoners to work in areas where items could potentially be stolen (e.g., library, canteen, food services), or places prisoners in an advocacy role (e.g., Inmate Committee), is deemed a “position of trust.”

It's funny, people always ask about resistance in prison. But in the years I was there, I never really saw that happening. And I can understand why because, you know as well as I do that the repercussions sound like nothing, right? I went to the hole for 15 days [for supporting another prisoner], but the side effects of losing your trailer visits with your child is a huge one. Or losing your job in the kitchen or perhaps being moved to another cell, another area. The repercussions and consequences were so extreme, considering it could have been because you had an orange in your pocket. (Betty, former prisoner)

Since people inside prisons designated for women are more likely to resist in covert or relatively peaceful ways such as visiting another living unit, refusing lock-up, mutual aid, taking extra food and sharing, or filing complaints and grievances rather than engaging in violent riots (Bosworth, 1999; de Graff & Kilty, 2016; Hansen, 2018; Horri, Parkes, & Pate, 2006; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Law, 2012), it is easy for the system to overlook their unique needs (Davis, 2002) and punish seemingly minor issues. I expand on how incarcerated women and gender-diverse people exercise peaceful resistance and provide detailed examples of these acts in the next chapter. I return to my personal narrative to highlight the severe repercussions prisoners are faced with when they resist the oppressive penal system.

Punishing resistance vignette continued

It's now October 27, 2016, and I'm still sitting in segregation. I just received my OSL (Offender Security Level) this evening and my scale is at 14.7 (super-max!). This is conducted using the SRS-W 2.0⁶⁴ (Security Reclassification Scale for Women). Just one year ago I was

⁶⁴ The SRS-W Version 2.0 (CSC, 2018a) requires a score at or above 8.70 to automatically classify someone as maximum (with discretionary classification and override options available to increase or decrease a prisoner's security level).

Possible value	From	To
Minimum	-10.10	-2.65
Medium	-2.60	+8.65

classified as minimum. How does my score go from -3 to +14.7 in a single year when I've never been violent and the main institutional rules I've broken involve visiting friends, not peeing on demand, and smoking weed? My lifer friend said that she's never seen anyone with a score this high unless someone gets killed or a guard is seriously injured or something. It sure seems like they're using their 'discretionary' power to alter my score.

It's a cold and snowy winter morning on December 14, 2016, and I've been out of segregation for about a month, yet still face institutional charges. I walk through the compound to court for my 'failure to provide' from September 22. I explain everything to the independent judge who surprisingly agrees with my defence. However, he says the policy is clear: failure to provide for ANY reason, within the 2-hour timeframe is treated the same as a positive urinalysis. He gives me a \$20 fine (which is equivalent to almost 2 weeks wages). This policy clearly needs to be changed! It feels impossible to win against the system from in here, and the more we fight back, the more we're punished.

In this vignette, I highlight some additional problems with CSC's disciplinary process, including their discretionary power to inflate a prisoner's security classification and unjust penal policies. The incident of my "failure to provide" prior to my time in segregation was based on guards grabbing me for a urinalysis as I was walking out of the bathroom. As I describe, the Independent Chairperson agreed with my defence, but was limited by CSC policy. This event was one of many that contributed to my stint in segregation and the prison's attempt to transfer me to the maximum-security unit. My frequent challenging of penal authority illustrates how "resistance often results in higher security classification" (Hannah-Moffat, 1999, p. 83) because resistance to institutional expectations is framed by CSC as criminogenic risks (Hannah-Moffat, 1999). These oppressive carceral conditions continue after prisoners are released to the community.

Maximum	+8.70	+22.40
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4.3.2. *In community: “You’re still under carceral surveillance”*

The constant surveillance and suspicion of federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people extends to the community where former prisoners experience difficulties with authority figures (such as police and parole officers) and believe their freedom of speech and advocacy efforts are restricted. This fear is heightened for people who feel isolated and disconnected from their community, as former prisoner Brielle asserts: “All we really have is our parole officers, and most girls are scared to actually talk to them or tell them the truth, because they’re scared [that] they’re gonna get sent back.” Fear of returning to prison for speaking the truth is not unfounded as professor and prisoner activist Lisa Guenther (key informant) explains:

Even when someone leaves the prison, that doesn’t mean that they’re free from that kind of carceral network of surveillance by parole officers, by other people who are projecting stigmatized images on them as former prisoners... I know another former prisoner who has actually been hauled back into prison because of engaging with community social justice groups in a public library and had to go through a very traumatic arrest and abduction, basically, because this whole network of surveillance that she’s subjected to misunderstood what was going on in that situation. So, it means that you’re still under carceral surveillance. You’re still always subject to being clawed back into that institution. So how are you supposed to get on with your life and connect with people in the community? She was doing everything that she should be doing from a kind of ‘pro-social’ perspective, but she was punished for it – completely unjustly, but in a way that she still had to bear the consequences of reincarceration.

As convict criminologist Kris MacPherson (2022, pp. 21-22) posits, how can society expect criminalized people to lead a ‘pro-social’ life “if they are marginalized and stigmatised in the very communities to which they return?” Betty (former prisoner) shared how CSC and its’ transcarceral network of controls restricted her freedom of speech, advocacy, and right to engage in a peaceful protest, resulting in her reincarceration in a maximum-security unit:

They put me right away into the max unit. Even though the [parole] suspension was over my participation in a public meeting at the library in [city]. He

publicized for the world to see; it was a lawyer who had organized this meeting to go over what people's rights are in a mass civil disobedience action because people were blockading the entrance to [a local federal prison for men] to protest the expansion of the prison system.

Even less political, intentional acts of resistance such as speaking with the public about the harms of the system to prevent others from going to prison are restricted while formerly incarcerated people are on parole. Former prisoner Denise described the pushback she faced from CSC when attempting to speak about her own experiences as a federally sentenced woman, with high school students in a low-income neighbourhood:

I've offered to, for free of charge, to go to, you know, schools that are based in at-risk communities to not glorify it [prison], but to just send the clear message that a lot of you, you don't know it, but anything can happen, and you can end up in one of these places. I really wanted to go and be that difference, save one person from experiencing that, and CSC denied me. So, when you want to do good work, they don't allow you to... I figured that we can make that [positive] impact. We can make the difference. But CSC knows that, too. I don't think they want us to do that. That's not their goal.

Along with stopping criminalized people on parole or community supervision orders from engaging in public-speaking events, the transcarceral system of controls can also stop prisoner justice advocates from organizing together. One key informant named Olivia who worked for years as a legal advocate for currently and formerly incarcerated women and gender-diverse people explains how fear of the carceral system's power extends to community organizations:

That [stopping strip searches for women] became a major campaign at one point. And, you know, what's so fucked up too, is like the pushback not only from, like, CSC, but from other organizations that are supposed to advocate for women, because it's uncomfortable to talk about strip searching. And so, you see how the system has so much power. It's funding all of these organizations. And all of a sudden...when you start to talk about abolition or ending harmful practices like strip searching, It's like, Oh, no, that's too much. Like people want to tiptoe. And while that campaign's going on, a lot of [regional] EFrys, were

like, ‘No, thank you. I’m not going to participate in the national events on strip searching’, which was like a day where there was media. You know, I think it just speaks to how ingrained CSC is within a lot of institutions that it funds, even outside. It’s like dangerous if you get too close, you can’t get too close.

The federal prison system in Canada, inclusive of the transcarceral controls that exist in the community, constitute a punishment apparatus that makes resistance a potentially dangerous endeavour. In rebuking individual and collective ‘everyday’ and intentionally political acts of resistance, the system also acts as a barrier to prisoner solidarity.

4.4. Carceral Harms Inhibiting Solidarity and Social Connection

Since prisons are spaces of social control, prisoner interactions are constantly under surveillance by prison staff. Any congregation of prisoners who act in solidarity with one another to oppose unjust rules or support a fellow prisoner are intensely scrutinized by penal actors and subject to punishment. In this way, prisoner solidarity is effectively inhibited. Solidarity can be defined as an instrumental, action-oriented, affective relationship between two or more people with a commitment to secure rights, reduce inequities, and challenge what they believe are unjust structures of domination and power (Mathiesen, 2006; Medina, 2013). While solidarity is typically defined as occurring within a group or social class (Mathiesen, 2006) a radical or deep solidarity can occur across social differences with allies who share concerns of oppression that transcend differences in ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and social class (Freire, 1970/2018; Medina, 2013; Rieger, 2017). Prisons and other carceral settings are places of punishment and isolation (Chamberlen, 2018; Foucault, 1977; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Mathiesen, 2006; Moore & Scraton, 2014) which disrupts the formation of strong, supportive, collaborative relationships among prisoners and between prisoners and their allies, family, and wider communities, making healthy social relations challenging to maintain.

If resistance is the “heart and soul of solidarity” as Medina (2013, p. 21) argues, then CSC’s efforts to neutralize resistance will also negatively impact prisoners’ capacity to act in solidarity with one another. Simple acts of solidarity, mutual aid, and kindness among prisoners such as visiting a friend’s living unit, sharing food, or lending clothes and books are consistently punished inside federal prisons designated for women. The corpus of data demonstrates various scare tactics and abuses of power by staff (through threats, use of force, and weaponizing ‘reliable sources’⁶⁵), which seek to isolate and invisibilize prisoners, further disconnecting them from their communities. This breeds distrust among prisoners and can facilitate lateral violence so that imprisoned people challenge one another rather than challenging systemic power. Released prisoners also face restrictions to their social connections due to parole stipulations, including access to peer support since parolees are typically not allowed to associate with anyone with a criminal record (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2022a; Pollack, 2009b).

4.4.1. In prison: “They prevent solidarity big time!”

Essentially, solidarity involves building relationships and meaningful social relations. As various feminist prison scholars have shown, personal relationships are difficult to establish and

⁶⁵ A reliable source is a prisoner informant who is willing to provide information to prison authorities about another prisoner’s institutional behaviour or motivations. This can include information about contraband, physical altercations, or plans to break an institutional rule. Often, reliable sources receive benefits from the prison administration, and it does not matter if the information is completely accurate. People acting as “reliable sources” benefit by avoiding punishment for similar behaviour, being allowed to keep contraband or even gifted contraband (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, drugs) from guards, promises of support for parole, along with other perks such as selecting their living unit and institutional employment position. Prisoners serving as reliable sources are disliked by their fellow prisoners and known as “rats,” which can lead to lateral violence and retaliation from other prisoners. In my experience, prisoner informants are not respected by the guards who solicit and reward the information gained from reliable sources. Although an informant’s identity is supposed to remain confidential, guards will often inform other prisoners who the reliable sources are, risking the prisoner informants’ safety. The pervasiveness of these exploitative practices in prison and during periods of community supervision can lead to a lack of solidarity among criminalized people since they are not sure who they can trust.

maintain in prison due to the punitive, isolating nature of confinement (e.g., de Graff & Kilty, 2016; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Fayter, et. al., 2021; Law, 2012; Pollack, 2008). For example, participants spoke frequently about how acts of kindness, particularly when it comes to sharing food or celebrating holidays are consistently punished by the prison authorities. Anastasia (former prisoner) explained that inside federal prison,

You're not supposed to share food, and you're not supposed to like, give other people snacks or chips and stuff. But you literally have to because you only get a small budget each week and you have to buy all the supplies...you only have like, I think it was \$37.50 [per week]. And then I think during COVID it went up to \$40⁶⁶...without pooling together and kind of doing that, there's no way possible that we would have been able to make enough meals to last a week.

Anastasia's point highlights how mutual aid among prisoners is actively discouraged by staff who use scare tactics, including institutional charges (which impact parole, visits, pay level, and security level) and even throwing prisoners' food on the ground as a show of force. As Billie (former prisoner) discussed:

You couldn't even have a birthday party or anything for anybody. I mean, there were women that come from countries [far away] that didn't have family [nearby]. So, they didn't get to see their family at Christmas. They didn't get to have family days. So, you know, if you wanted to bake this poor lady a cake or give her something, you know, for a present and make her day a little bit better, they [guards] throw it in the garbage, [or] they come over, charge you and pick it up and throw it on the ground.

It can be extremely difficult for prisoners to build community and work together in solidarity to survive the punitive carceral system when simple acts of kindness, such as caring for others, are

⁶⁶ From 2020-21, overall food prices increased in Canada by 5%, greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., labour and food supply chain disruptions, closed borders). Average grocery expenditures for a single woman aged 19-50 was estimated at \$62/week (Canada's Food Price Report, 2020).

punished. Rebecca (former prisoner) highlights the repercussions prisoners face when engaging in “illegal” acts of solidarity and mutual aid:

As we know, charges will result in disciplinary court. And they fine us money, money that we do not have, which they automatically deduct from our pay⁶⁷. So, then that means that we have less money to put on our phone cards. We have less money for envelopes and stamps. So that takes away from our ability to communicate with our family, our supports, and our children.

Rebecca’s narrative points to the collateral consequences of imprisonment that prisoners’ families face, which include “severe economic and emotional hardships” (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002, p. 2) when trying to rebuild or maintain familial relationships. These consequences serve to isolate prisoners even further from their community supports and personal relationships.

Some participants described the experience of incarceration as other-worldly or unreal. As Lona (former prisoner) explains, “They prevent solidarity big time! And I’m sorry, but their policies or their rules is bullshit. I feel like, you guys know that even though you charge me for bringing out food, you know, I don’t get charged like that in the real world, right? This is not the real world...these rules make no sense.” There is a clear incongruity between CSC objectives of promoting rehabilitation and reintegration and how CSC practices fail to mirror what prisoners will experience in the community. How can CSC possibly claim to facilitate reintegration when

⁶⁷ According to CD 730 s. 15 (CSC, 2014) Inmate payments for employment or basic program allowances are provided according to the following daily rates: Payment level A (\$6.90); Payment level B (\$6.35); Payment level C (\$5.80); Payment level D (\$5.25); allowance (\$2.50); basic allowance (\$1.00). These are paid to prisoners bi-weekly, with various deductions taken off. These pay levels have been in effect since 1981 and have not increased with inflation. Furthermore, pay levels A and B are extremely difficult to attain, with less than 5% of the federal prison population receiving the maximum pay level. Over 50% of the federally incarcerated population is at pay level C (Zinger, 2023).

prisoners are punished for sharing? Jacob (former prisoner) claimed it is antithetical to our human instincts and wellbeing to discourage and punish the sharing of food:

It's a power struggle, right? The power dynamic, power imbalance between guard and inmate. And I think a lot of guards are power tripping. I think it's ridiculous. It's like going against human instincts. To give, to eat. It's like that connection again. That's what I mean. In prison, it's like a whole new set of norms and these rules and like you want us to reintegrate back into society. But here you take away all of these things we need to be human...Everything is discouraged. It's almost like you're meant to be, like, alone. Which is not healthy for anybody. It's almost like you're not allowed to be human.

The power imbalance between guards and prisoners is particularly evident in CSC's arbitrary rules that aim to curtail mutual aid, prisoner solidarity, and social connection. Notably, abuses of power and dehumanizing treatment in response to acts of solidarity were common topics of discussion amongst participants. Unsurprisingly, the carceral settings in which prisoners' capacity to "be human" is most inhibited are segregation and maximum security. In the vignette below I provide an example of how I attempted (and failed) to support a fellow prisoner while in solitary confinement.

Inhibiting solidarity vignette

On a chilly November morning I'm reflecting on being in the hole during my last few months of incarceration. I feel like it was inevitable that I'd end up here; from constantly pushing back against the powerful system that is CSC. I'm beginning to get exhausted from the ongoing power struggle against the carceral system. Prisoners are constantly being transferred in and out of segregation from other institutions or max, while I sit here patiently waiting. Within a few hours of this poor woman who was incessantly crying and screaming, another woman with serious mental health issues is placed in the cell next to me. She immediately begins banging on the metal cell door for 45 minutes straight while screaming and pressing her 'cell call' button for the guards. Apparently, she's diabetic and has low blood sugar. Of course, the guards refuse to give her anything, so I yell out to the screws as they pass by quickly on their rounds. "Hey, I have an extra bagel, some peanut butter and jam and an apple she could have." Unsurprisingly, they deny her any food or medical attention.

The ways in which the prison system inhibits solidarity were also frequently discussed by professionals who work with federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people. Key informants described how the system “dissevers” prisoners from their social relations. Critical prison scholar and educator Fiona, spoke about the fundamental nature of social relations as an essential aspect of being human, in contrast to the dehumanizing nature of the carceral system

I think that they’re [social connections] fundamental and I think that they’re so important and ultimately, I think that maybe one of the reasons why dissevering is a typical form of punishment... is that those connections actually undermine the logic that says to someone, “you’re only a prisoner”.

Fiona’s comments speak to the isolating stigma born from the labels of prisoner, “inmate,” or criminalized and incarcerated person. Through this labelling process, the criminal legal system reinforces an “us versus them” mentality, differentiating the general population of free citizens in the community from the criminalized other. This process suggests to the public that criminalized women and gender diverse people are deserving of punishment and ought to be locked up or separated from the wider community of which they are a part (Balfour, 2014a; Comack, 2014a; Faith, 2011; Law, Mario, & Bruckert, 2020; Moore & Scraton, 2014).

I think one very basic thing is that prisons operate by invisibilizing people or making them disappear. Taking them out of the world that we share together, but then isolating them in another part of the world that seems more separate than it actually is. I think if you're not directly impacted by criminalization, you might not realize how deeply interwoven the prison system is with society on the outside, with all of its logics and emotional dimensions or whatever. All of this shapes our own assumptions about what a safe community is, what accountability means. So, if prisons operate by silencing and disappearing and removing people from the community, then the community itself will be shaped by that silence. This is how the community itself reproduces stigma and narrow ideas about what justice is and what safety means. (Lisa Guenther, key informant)

Guenther's reflections suggest that the isolating nature of the system is a core aspect of carceral logic, which aims to silence, segregate, and remove the "criminalized other" from their communities, in the name of justice or "public safety." Once in prison, people face further marginalization and social controls that inhibit solidarity and personal relationships. Olivia (key informant), a legal advocate, provided examples of how this plays out in prison.

It's us versus them, the way they do a search of an entire institution, put everyone in lockdown. It gets you looking around like who's to blame for this. And that's how power works really, is like instead of looking up, you're looking around, right? Because you feel powerless to challenge the authority here... I think a lot of times that lateral violence that happens is like resistive. It's actually resistive to the prison environment. And it comes out in those ways because of the dynamics of power. But obviously it serves to disrupt any relationships that are being built or to seed distrust among women.

Olivia's comments reflect the carceral reality that people (staff and prisoners) inside the system are difficult to trust, especially as their interests are often in opposition. Prisoners often mistrust one another and the staff, while staff rarely trust the prisoners. The lateral violence that occurs among prisoners is often facilitated by prison staff, who encourage their 'reliable sources' to inform on fellow prisoners, or lockdown the institution while blaming an individual prisoner for "having to take" this extreme measure. Prison educator and ally Cookie expressed the challenges of trust inside, particularly when the system intervenes to sow the seeds of distrust.

Well, obviously, it's hard to trust people... But if you know that the system is picking the "reliable sources" in quotes, it makes it even harder to have any solidarity among people inside...you're part of a community, but you've become an informant in that way... You couldn't trust anyone because you never knew who was working for the government. So, these are kind of to me classic strategies of divide and conquer, and it absolutely works against solidarity. And without solidarity, nothing can change. If you keep the prisoners unsettled and uneasy and unable to trust one another and you get fed information from certain kinds of people, true or not, it keeps people from rallying together and complaining about the treatment that they're getting.

It is difficult to resist oppression, much less maintain a supportive community among prisoners inside a system built on abuses of power, oppression of solidarity, and a clear disruption of social connections, which is one of the most significant and lasting impacts of incarceration, affecting people's capacity for engaging in community(ies) upon release. This point was driven home by key informant Fiona:

If the punishment system is based on disappearing people from relations and thus from their own sense of, I mean we are all formed in relationship as we're sisters, we're neighbors, we're mothers, we're friends, we're fellow professionals, whatever it might be. And so, when the punishment system dissevers people from their role in a relationship that's like, it's big. That's the big gun. That's basically the response to whatever the conviction is. And so that is the harm that is society-wide in its impacts because those people are removed from there. Anyone who had that happen to them is being told you're not allowed to fulfill your obligations to each other, and to yourself. And you're not allowed to receive the benefits that others have to offer you.

How can formerly incarcerated people engage meaningfully with their communities after leaving prison, when all efforts to build community and solidarity inside were disciplined? I attend to this question in the next section.

4.4.2. *In community: "I'm not going to have friends"*

Threats of violence, bullying, belittling, neglect, and indifference inflicted on prisoners by staff, can leave prisoners in constant fear of one another and of staff, which can negatively impact their transition to community and capacity to lead a "pro-social" life (Whitley, 2022). That former prisoners felt isolated and unable to make new friends or reconnect with old acquaintances was frequently discussed by participants. One former prisoner named Tiina described how transcarceral social controls make it difficult to lead a "pro-social" life outside prison and how she faced restrictions to building social connections in her post-prison life.

It extends out into the community too when we're released. And even though we're living in halfway houses, like you can't go to Shoppers Drug Mart with someone you've lived with and shared meals with for the last fucking four years. You know, you're not allowed to communicate like that. That is the difficult part. Well, it's all difficult, but that also now extends out into the community controlling who and how we get support and reach out for supports, right? And them labelling who is pro-social and who isn't.

Along with the carceral controls imposed on ex-prisoners by CSC and the PBC, the overall experience of prison as isolating, can make building new relationships with people outside prison extremely challenging, especially when one's peers are considered "criminals" and "deviant" rather than "law abiding citizens" (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; Pollack, 2008, 2009b; Maidment, 2006; Munn & Bruckert, 2013). A participant named Billie (former prisoner) explains how her community social skills were negatively impacted by her carceral experience:

Getting out and trying to talk to somebody, you don't want to talk to nobody because you don't know nothing. Because they've taken everything away from you, you know, like you said, you can't have a coffee with your friends, so then it's harder for you to make friends out there because you don't know how to make friends because you just did five years.

Regardless of a formerly incarcerated person's social skills or capacity to build and maintain social connections, people on parole regularly face additional barriers and challenges due to their parole officers and residency in a halfway house. Many FSW are required to report all relationships and not engage in dating activities without first obtaining approval from their PO, who engages an invasive "community assessment" vetting process of the potential partner. This leads some parolees to decide not to date or even have friends, as Tiina (former prisoner) asserts:

I was like, well, fuck it, I'm not going to date. I'm not going to have friends... then you have to be dishonest with your parole officer, but when you're living in the halfway house, it all gets reported back anyways. So, I didn't have any money. I think there were days where I would just stay inside for days and read

books because I didn't want to reach out to any friends. I didn't want to have friends become criminalized just for being my friend and I didn't have money to do stuff because I didn't have a job. It was really horrible.

Another formerly incarcerated person (Laura) spoke about how she decided to try dating while on parole, despite the many restrictions and harmful repercussions. Unfortunately, in this instance she faced a breach of parole conditions despite following all the rules set out to her by parole.

I met a guy on Facebook dating and went for a coffee with him, told my PO his name and everything, then she gave me a CPIC for him. It didn't work out with him, so I went out with friends and met a new guy. I gave him my number, met him for coffee and told my PO, except my PO changed and this new PO says she's breaching me over it 'cause I should've reported it sooner. How the fuck could I when I didn't even know his full fucking name? I'm trying to fight it by talking to her supervisor, but I could easily be sent back [to prison]. I already did it once with no breach, this makes no sense!... It's complete bullshit that my one PO was okay with it, then my PO changed without my knowledge and during this change I was trying to notify someone, anyone, and this new PO called back saying, 'I'm your new PO and that's a breach.'

Although many formerly incarcerated women and gender-diverse people have similar parole stipulations upon their release (e.g., proof of employment, financial records, phone records, report all relationships, no alcohol, programming requirements, etc.) the way these restrictions are followed and implemented differ based on the geographical location prisoners are returning to, which halfway house (if any) they reside in, and who their parole officer is, as Laura found out the hard way. Educator and prisoner ally Fiona (key informant) also reflected on these issues.

If you have experienced a forced rupture from your other forms of connection, those associations with people who you know from inside could be really, really, important...I also feel that sort of speaks to a larger question about parole conditions that end up being cruel and inhumane...the conditions that are set on people when they're out... Who you happen to get as a parole officer seems to have this unbelievably outsized impact on every aspect of your life so that if you

happen not to luck out, you could be having personal relations and personal decisions made by a parole officer that is extraordinarily constricting of your freedom.

As Fiona and several other participants mentioned, parolees are restricted from spending time together outside of the halfway house or programming, and they cannot associate with people they were incarcerated with, even in a peer support role (Pollack, 2009b). Restricting peer support in the community is ironic since CSC allows peer support teams inside their prisons⁶⁸. This isolating restriction is particularly harmful for anyone serving a life sentence, making collaboration and solidarity a significant challenge. Professor and critical prison scholar Lisa Guenther describes a situation where she invited several people with a life sentence to speak on a podcast about their time in solitary confinement, but they had to strategically navigate different people's parole officers and conditions.

It should be no big deal for people who have an experience of solitary confinement in the federal prison system for women, to get together and share their memories and their experience and critique of that system. But some people were still on parole and had different parole officers with different levels of experience, different levels of familiarity with the former prisoner, and they also had their own kind of back channels for communicating with each other. All of this made the podcast so much more complicated and stressful to make. Even just the simple act of sitting in a room together could have negative consequences for participants, so we had to be very careful about organizing this conversation because of this web of surveillance that tracks federally sentenced women, sometimes for the rest of their lives if they have been given a life sentence. So that is definitely a barrier to reconnecting with people you have very deep relationships with, forged in a place that is designed to separate and segregate people. It's amazing that women have

⁶⁸ While CSC has facilitated peer support teams inside women's prisons at various times, the capacity for prisoner peer support workers is highly restricted and controlled by staff. Additionally, these peer support roles, including prisoner positions such as Grievance Coordinator and Human Rights advocate are often not filled, or the programs are cancelled. During my period of incarceration at GVI there was no peer support team, and the Grievance Coordinator position was not filled for two years. There were also lengthy periods lasting several months in which we did not have an Inmate Committee.

managed to sustain these relationships for decades, when even their parole conditions make it so difficult for them to gather and to share their experiences with each other.

The dehumanizing and isolating carceral system is designed and implemented in ways that reduce the development of meaningful social connections for prisoners and inhibit solidarity efforts among prisoners and their allies. As key informant Lindsay asserts: “They’re deliberately silencing everyone, people incarcerated and people trying to do the solidarity and activism work, 100%.” Feeling isolated and alone in the fight for justice, within a dehumanizing system leads to individual prisoners’ strengths (e.g., kindness and compassion, generosity, advocacy, determination, self-confidence) being ignored or stifled, which can in turn promote harmful coping methods.

4.5. Carceral Harms that Ignore or Stifle Strengths

As outlined in *Chapter 1*, the carceral system for women tends to individualize explanations of lawbreaking, while ignoring structural or systemic factors that lead people to come in conflict with the law (Balfour, 2011). In this manner, women’s incarceration is framed as an issue of choice and responsibility (Hannah-Moffat, 2004b) that emerges due to cognitive and psychological deficiencies (Pollack, 2012; Pollack & Kendall, 2005). People in prisons designated for women are typically described in negative terms such as “deficient,” “deviant,” “drug addict,” “dangerous,” or “manipulative,” (McCorkel, 2003; Pollack, 2012; Neve & Pate, 2005). As discussed in the previous chapter, prisoner strengths are conceptualized as active, positive coping strategies that promote healing. These strengths or capacities can be individual or relational. For this project, individual prisoner strengths were organized into four categories: educational and research capacities (e.g., writing, awareness of prisoners’ rights, critical reflection); instrumental and physical capacities (e.g., athletics or physical activity, cooking,

keeping busy); psychological and emotional capacities (e.g., independence, assertiveness, fortitude); and cultural and spiritual capacities (e.g., creativity, listening to or creating music, spiritual practices). Prisoners' relational strengths include capacities such as communication skills, public speaking, conflict resolution, and generosity. A more detailed discussion and examples of prisoners' strengths will be provided in the following chapter.

CSC ignores or stifles prisoners' strengths by primarily documenting negative interactions, behaviours, and institutional disciplinary charges in prisoner files. By reporting prisoners' perceived limitations and negative behaviours (i.e., not following institutional rules), their capacities related to educational pursuits, artistic creations, motivation to improve their life circumstances, or simple acts of kindness and compassion are buried under negative institutional rhetoric. When prisoners are described solely within adverse frameworks, their self-esteem and confidence can be negatively impacted leading to anxiety, depression, and potentially harmful or avoidant coping practices, which includes self-harm, unhealthy eating, substance abuse, and even death by suicide (Chamberlen, 2018; Kilty, 2014; Moore & Scraton, 2014).

In this section I discuss how CSC ignores or stifles prisoners' strengths through institutional concentration on negative labels, stereotypes, and assumptions about prisoners that are documented in harmful reports (e.g., intake reports, institutional records, case files, assessments for decision, pay scale reviews), which can lead to restricting access to non-CSC generated programs and services. This harmful treatment by the carceral system continues after one's release where community "corrections" staff treat people on parole in paternalistic and gendered ways that can discourage educational and vocational pursuits, in part due to a reliance on official institutional reports to determine a person's character. I begin with an autoethnographic vignette that highlights this deficit-focused process.

Ignoring or Stifling Strengths Vignette

This prison is systematically taking away every positive gain I have in my life. It's a crisp autumn morning on October 13, 2016, and as I'm walking out the door for some fresh air, I receive a call informing me that I can't work as the W2B Teaching Assistant (TA) anymore due to a 'failure to provide' (for urinalysis testing) a few weeks ago and the seizure of my meds for 'improper storage.' Now my PO is telling me I have to move to a new living unit, again, due to these incidents. In the 2.5 years I've been here they've moved me five times so far. I'm getting tired of constantly adjusting to new units.

It's now November 14th and I just received my 30-day seg review, and of course there's more lies in my paperwork. They claim I haven't had any visitors since I've been in seg, despite my parents coming to see me recently. My behaviour is described as "fair" (why not excellent? What more can I do, locked in this cell? I'm quiet, polite, keep busy as much as possible, and do what I'm asked). They also say I haven't continued with school or programs, meanwhile they kicked me out of W2B, won't bring the book, and I've done all my required programs.

My prison experience continues to worsen the longer I'm here. It's now February 2, 2017, and I have an appointment with my PO to discuss my correctional plan for my upcoming release in July. This will be sent to my community PO. I assert that there's way too much focus on deficits and every mistake I made inside (according to CSC), with no discussion of my positive attributes, skills, and contributions. She claims in my report that I've focused too much on my educational pursuits and gaining job skills, but not enough on programming or substance abuse. This makes no sense and is factually wrong. For one thing, how can I be penalized and chastised for wanting to improve my education and gain job certifications? Secondly, I've done every program under the sun – WEP⁶⁹, WOMIP⁷⁰, SMP⁷¹ twice, and SIP⁷². Plus, I got off methadone on my own during my first 8-months here, along with completing a substance abuse program. Additionally, I went to AA every Friday for 2 years, NA, and did Celebrate Recovery for a year including a six-month step study. My PO even had the nerve to ask me, "Why do you want to get a PhD? Why can't you be a Regular Joe and work at McDonalds or something like everyone else?"! It's like the system is trained to ignore our strengths but then constantly punish us for any minor infraction of their ridiculous rules.

The vignette for this section begins with a phone call from my institutional PO, two days before the incident that resulted in my solitary confinement. The compound punishments meted

⁶⁹ Women's Engagement Program

⁷⁰ Women Offenders' Moderate Intensity Program

⁷¹ Structured Management Program

⁷² Social Integration Program

out by the system prior to any disciplinary hearing or conviction made me feel angry and depressed. I felt like CSC perceived me in purely negative terms, ignoring my personal strengths. I continue this narrative by jumping ahead to my 30-day segregation review, where I note multiple falsifications documented in this paperwork. Fast-forwarding again by 2.5 months, I end this vignette by sharing another example of false paperwork and a contentious meeting with my PO about my institutional behaviours and plans for my future following my release. Their continuous ignorance of my positive attributes and actions demonstrates several examples of how CSC stifles prisoners' strengths.

4.5.1. In prison: "Prison makes people worse"

Aligned with my narrative, participants also spoke about dehumanizing treatment by the carceral system and the harms of being described in purely negative terms in required programming and institutional reports, leading some former prisoners to assert that prison just makes people worse. For example, ex-prisoner Jacob discusses how ineffective "correctional" programming is when people are treated as a number or "convict".

I often think of, like, *Creating Choices*, right? I've done the women's programing and I've done the men's programs. So, the women's programing focuses a lot on like self-esteem, empowerment, dignity, self-respect, self-image... but then the way that you treat us like convicts, you referred to us as offenders, convicts, inmates. We're like an FPS [Fingerprint System] number... you just feel like a number. I find that if I had any self-esteem when I went there, when I left, I had very little, you know what I mean? Like anyone's self-worth would deteriorate, anyone's overall well-being... So, I think prison makes people worse.

Jacob's narrative suggests that rather than being helpful, CSC programs essentialize prisoners as "criminals" or "convicts," while effectively ignoring people's strengths. The way prisoners are

treated by security staff and the prison administration is harmful to our overall well-being since social connections are restricted and opportunities for self-actualization are non-existent.

Restricting access to outside programs was another key issue that emerged in this study. When prisoners participate in non-CSC created programs (e.g., prisoner-led music and athletic programs or post-secondary education programs like W2B) they can suddenly be extracted from the program for minor, unrelated institutional charges. Well-known Canadian author, University of Guelph professor, and key informant Lawrence Hill describes how uncomfortable it made him when incarcerated students were suddenly removed from his W2B class.

I was troubled to see that, at the whim of a prison administrator, a student could be quickly yanked from the creative writing workshop I was leading. It was heartbreaking for the student, and for the others in the class – me included. You form a bond in a course like that, and when it is going well, it adds a really positive note to the life of a prisoner and to all others in the workshop. So, if something arises outside the class that leads to the prisoner being summarily removed from the class, it's devastating for the incarcerated student and disappointing for all of us, and there's nothing that the other students or I can do about it.

The sense of powerlessness that Lawrence Hill highlights in his narrative is a common sentiment for many prisoners and their allies. Because W2B is a collaborative partnership between a post-secondary and “correctional” institution, program facilitators must engage in a “challenging dance” (Pollack, 2019, p. 11) to maintain accountability to the inside collective and other incarcerated students, university regulations, external funders, and prison rules. W2B is fundamentally a post-secondary educational program that builds bridges between incarcerated people and outside communities; it is “not an activist or abolitionist group” (*ibid.*). To ensure access to education for imprisoned students and maintain the program in carceral spaces, “the inside alumni in the W2B collective play a central role in determining the risks and benefits and in protecting the inviolability of our classes” (*ibid.*). During the annual 5-day instructor training,

future W2B facilitators are taught about the risks of advocacy in prison. These risks include the loss of access to the prison for instructors, cancellation of the program, and the potential for prisoners to be punished by the institution.

Participants described how even doing art projects and crafts in their living units or cells was discouraged and penalized by having their art supplies seized, projects destroyed during searches, and not having access to hobby craft items, such as yarn, scissors, and glue. A former prisoner named Rebecca shared that when she learned how to knit in prison and began making hats for newborn babies in a local hospital, this positive pro-social activity was punished and prevented by the prison.

I really got into knitting, I was making baby hats and donating them to the NICU [Natal Intensive Care Unit]. But it's like, I always have to do everything illegally because like, ordering off the [CSC prison] catalogue you're waiting months, and it costs so much money. It's like if I know how to knit and I want to do this, and it keeps me out of trouble, give me the supplies... They're like, 'well, where did you get the yarn? That's not your yarn. We can't allow that to leave the institution because it's not on your property list'... I got like one out, and I had to jump through hoops.

This is but one example of the ways in which prisoners' strengths and accomplishments are ignored, unappreciated, and stifled by the carceral system (Fayter, 2023). Unfortunately, the intense scrutiny and negative labels applied to incarcerated people continues upon their release.

4.5.2. In community: "Already you've got a stigma on you"

Community re-entry is already a difficult process, and many prisoners feel like they have the label of "ex-convict" or "criminal" following them like a "dark cloud hanging over [their] release" (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018, p. 16). When prisoners are released on parole to a halfway house, their institutional files and records follow them. The 'top-down'

correctional plan document that was discussed earlier in this chapter is a key tool used by the institutional parole officer to share information with the community parole officer and halfway house staff about a prisoners' behaviour and overall character. As one person with a life sentence explained, "written information forever on your record and file starts instantaneously, and you will forever after always have to answer to this" (Yvonne Johnson, 2006, p. 285). Reflecting on their transition from prison to a halfway house, Billie discussed the lingering implications of these negative reports on their life in the community.

When you go to the halfway house, that's the worst thing because they read everything that comes from [prison], all your reports and that's what they think about you. And that is totally wrong because already you've got a stigma on you. So, if one guard said, 'oh, she does drugs every day in here.' Right, just to lie about you because you challenged them for some reason. They're going to be watching you at the halfway house like a hawk. So, you're going to feel like you're in jail anyways because they read everything that's said to them, and they believe it. I think that's totally wrong.

Billie's narrative highlights the transcarceral harms of institutional reports, which can be written by vindictive guards who aim to dampen prisoner resistance. According to Gayle Horri, Debra Parkes, and Kim Pate (2006, pp. 314-315) the carceral system perceives that "a woman is not taking responsibility for her criminal behaviour if she is filing grievances or human rights complaints, resisting arbitrary or punitive exercises of power, or otherwise claiming her rights...these activities can be used to assess a prisoner's 'institutional adjustment' as poor."

With these negative labels and harmful reports following formerly incarcerated people into the community, the reentry process becomes even more challenging. Ex-prisoners are often discouraged from pursuing post-secondary education and are instead encouraged to work in menial, low-paying jobs, as Denise attests.

So, I got my parole. And she [PO] said, 'So what are you gonna do now?' I said, 'I'm going to write.'... So, I decided to return to school. When that happened, they [CSC and parole] didn't like that. They were like, 'No!' They kept telling me, 'Don't do this. Flip burgers and pour coffee.' They want you to settle for anything.

Denise's experience with her PO mirrors my own as described in the vignette presented at the beginning of this section. The carceral system seems determined to keep formerly incarcerated people in a state of dependency by discouraging creative and educational ambitions and creating barriers for gaining meaningful, well-paid employment. Another formerly incarcerated woman named Lorraine, articulated how the carceral system actively ignores and stifles people's personal and relational strengths, which impacted her employment and ultimately her freedom.

Part of my parole mandated release required for me to report and prove any sort of employment that I have. So, I had to show them the letter of employment when I got it. I received it and I took it to the halfway house, and I showed my worker and I'm telling you, Rachel, it was like night and day. Like, suddenly I went from being the darling of the halfway house to the pariah. My PW (Primary Worker) called in the manager, she called in another PW who was not part of my support team. She showed them the letter. She called the PO right away, told her about the letter, and they got it in their heads that I manipulated this interview somehow so that I could get the job or, I must know the person who interviewed me and [that's] why I got the job. Or I must have used a false name or something and got the job. So, it was those three scenarios that they presented... I heard them making snide remarks about, 'oh, she thinks that because now she's making more money than us, that she's better than us.' I'm thinking, what? Like, it's not that I came to you guys and just flashing it, because I had to do it, or else that would have been a strike against me and now I do it [shared my job contract] and I'm getting backlash from it. Apparently, my salary would be a bit more than my PO, so she was against my newfound employment as well. She called my boss and told her that I had a record for fraud and was not suitable for the job. My boss said, 'no, no, no. I think that people deserve second chances. I know about her criminal record. She told me about it.'...I think they only support you if you're making minimum wage and, you know, not in any high paying position.

Lorraine's detailed narrative highlights the injustice of the carceral system labelling ex-prisoners as "manipulative" or "fraudulent," characterizations which follow prisoners throughout their sentence and parole, thus impacting their capacity to maintain employment. Unfortunately, in

Lorraine's case, when she challenged her community PO with the support of her employer, she was temporarily sent back to prison on a parole violation for a "deteriorating attitude" and "suspicious behaviour" which are catch-all terms used by CSC to violate federally sentenced people's rights and liberty via the parole system⁷³ (Jackson & Stewart, 2009).

4.6. Concluding Comments: Carceral Harms Limit Prisoner Resiliency

Federal carceral policies and practices work against the prisons' stated objectives in terms of creating choices for federally sentenced women and gender diverse people to support their rehabilitation and community reintegration. Participants clearly demonstrated how carceral practices isolate people, invisibilize social problems, and lock up the marginalized "other," while continuing to oppress them in the community. Returning to the Prisoner Resiliency Pyramid (*Figure 2*) from *Chapter 2*, agency and hope make up the foundation of this framework and are necessary precursors to resistance against carceral oppression and enacting prisoner solidarity. Altogether, these four concepts utilize and enhance prisoners' personal and relational strengths, thus creating the conditions for imprisoned people's resilience.

As I argue in *Chapter 2*, resiliency encompasses all these terms, meaning that by restricting prisoners' choices and agency, diminishing their hope, punishing or preventing acts of resistance, inhibiting solidarity, and ignoring or stifling women and gender diverse people's strengths, prisoner resiliency is also limited. By systematically restricting these critical

⁷³ According to section 135(1)(a) of the *CCRA* a community parole officer has the power to suspend a federal parolee's conditional release if they believe it is necessary and reasonable "to prevent a breach or to protect society." This policy means that a person on parole can be returned to custody without breaching any parole conditions or breaking the law. The parole officer simply has to believe the former prisoner *might* do something wrong.

capacities, the carceral system effectively reduces prisoner resilience, individually and collectively. As Jacob expressed when talking about the challenges of community reentry, “even someone as resilient as me, I was like, I couldn’t do it.” When you have a population that is traumatized, dehumanized and isolated, they are much easier to control.

Despite the plethora of carceral harms and the noted negative impacts of incarceration, women and gender diverse people are still able to resist, survive, endure, navigate, and even thrive in prison and the community. How this is accomplished in the face of such significant barriers is the focus of the next chapter. The following chapter explores findings related to prisoners many strengths, their capacity to exert agency, resistance, and solidarity despite the oppressive powers of the carceral system. Before proceeding to the next chapter, I include a poem I wrote several months before my release from prison in 2017 that captures many of the themes from this chapter. While this poem highlights carceral harms and a sense of hopelessness, it is also an example of a personal strength and act of resistance against the system.

Ironies (2017)

They say we should be grateful
We’re not living behind bars
Instead, they call it cottages
We even have front yards.

Sleeping in a bedroom,
a private shower too
A garden and a kitchen
Where we can cook our food.

They say we should be grateful
Making two dollars a day
Who ever said slave labour
Really went away?

Pregnant mothers giving birth
While they are in chains

Newborn babies snatched away
Mom's given nothing for her pain.

They say we should be grateful
For TV, books, & phones
To get these meagre things,
How many died alone?

Resisting state oppression
Is a punishable offence
That's why we're all surrounded
By this razor wire fence.

They say we should be grateful
They saved us from ourselves
If we weren't in prison,
We might still be in hell.

Poverty, addiction,
violence & rape
Now that we're in prison
It means we must be safe.

They say we should be grateful
They'll teach us how to think
Change our harmful thoughts
And alter our beliefs.

We're told crime is just a choice
To neglect abuse of power
Never mind intimidating guards
Causing some women to cower.

They say we should be grateful
The state won't reproduce the harm
How many inquiries & advocates
Have sounded the alarm?

Mental illness & trauma
Creating "risk" that comes from needs
As the marginalized among us
Are punished for misdeeds.

They say we should be grateful
Our families can visit
Who cares that after seeing them

We're then all forced to strip?

Constant carceral surveillance
To stop us smoking any dope
While prisoners pushed to suicide
Are handed their own rope.

They say we should be grateful
For one day we'll be free
I doubt that the community
Will ever welcome me.

Chapter 5. Prisoner Resilience Despite Carceral Harms

Considering the myriad severe and on-going harms of the carceral state, many currently and formerly incarcerated people demonstrate resilience. As we have seen from the discussion thus far, they need to be resilient to survive the harms and violence inflicted on them by the trauma of incarceration and barriers to community re-entry. To be clear, not everyone survives these challenges. According to the Tracking (In)justice project⁷⁴ (September 4, 2024), across Canada 67 women have died while federally and provincially incarcerated since the year 2000. The average age of these women who died in custody was 34.5 years. Those who do survive imprisonment and re-entry demonstrate incredible strength and resiliency.

The harms of the carceral state discussed in the previous chapter are prevalent in the lives of criminalized women and gender-diverse people before, during, and after their incarceration as people fight for their very survival. As I demonstrate throughout this chapter and the next, current and former prisoners do not do this survival work alone. They require social connections and support from within and outside carceral systems. Where the carceral state aims to invisibilize people, pushing for individual responsabilization and a neoliberal, isolating notion of self-care, resilient prisoners in prisons designated for women⁷⁵ resist this hyper-individualism by

⁷⁴ This online database is a living data set that is updated as new information is incorporated, and tragically, as more people continue to die while in custody. For this search of the database, conducted on September 4, 2024, the search variables I entered included: “Gender” – Woman, Trans woman; and “Type of Custody” – Breach of conditions, Remand, Sentenced. I downloaded and saved an Excel spreadsheet of these data, which listed 69 people who identified as women. I then removed two people from this list because they were in youth detention centres (under the age of 18), and this project is focused on adult prisoners.

⁷⁵ While I cannot definitively state that every person incarcerated within prisons designated for women survive their carceral experience by developing relational connections with others, I do believe that caring, interpersonal

building social connections, caring communities, and relational resilience. This expansive view of resiliency can allow current and former prisoners to heal from their traumas while fighting against systemic oppression. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the strengths-based findings in the context of the conceptual framework outlined in *Chapter 2* and thus to explore the characteristics of resilient prisoners.

Prisoners exercise their free will to the extent possible to survive trauma and overcome adversity. Personal agency involves decision-making, the capacity to express one's opinions, a self-perception of being able to facilitate change, negotiate power, and create a sense of meaning in social interactions (Bosworth, 1999; Hanson, 2018). One's capacity to actively participate in decision-making that impacts one's life runs contrary to a passive acceptance of external forces over which people feel no sense of control (Hanson, 2018) and personal agency is a necessary precursor to enacting the strengths discussed throughout this chapter. As aforementioned, all the sensitizing concepts mobilized in this study are interconnected, overlapping, and mutually

relationships are necessary for coping with the conditions of confinement and navigating the system. We know that social isolation leads to and exacerbates mental health issues, and lengthy periods of solitary confinement has been known to cause "isolation-induced schizophrenia" (Pate, 2021). The discussion throughout *Chapter 4* underscores many of the harms of social isolation people experience in prison and the community. The Office of the Correctional Investigator has recently documented a proliferation of isolating conditions throughout federal prisons and outside of SIUs, including maximum-security, therapeutic ranges, and secure units (Zinger, 2022). SIUs were implemented via *Bill C-83* to replace solitary confinement (unsuccessfully – see Sprott & Doob, 2021), emphasizing opportunities for "meaningful human contact" following a court ruling that segregation over 15 days is unconstitutional and recognized as torture (CCLA v Canada, 2019). Recall the example shared by Senator Kim Pate in section 4.2.1 concerning a prisoner in long-term, indefinite isolation who requested MAID. By visiting this woman for a few hours and advocating for her transfer from segregation to a psychiatric facility, this prisoner gained hope and decided to live. Neuroscientists have demonstrated that the human brain requires social interaction, and conditions of isolation cause severe, permanent brain damage. Brain imaging studies have shown that the hippocampus (the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning) physically shrinks after long periods without human interaction (Lobel & Akil, 2018). I cannot speak to the experiences of people in prisons designated for men, however, based on this research, my lived experiences traversing the women's prison system, and my prisoner-solidarity organizing work with many different criminalized women and gender-diverse people from across Canada, building caring and supportive relational connections enables our survival and facilitates our capacity to thrive in prison and the community.

reinforcing. For example, relational resilience and solidarity build personal resilience and facilitate active, strength-based coping.

I begin with the individual as the locus for prisoner resilience, moving from the personal to the relational level of analysis. Despite CSC's policies and practices that suppress incarcerated peoples' strength-based capacities (see discussion in section 4.5, e.g., discouraging post-secondary education; penalizing prisoners' arts projects in their living units; deficit-based institutional reporting; restricting access to non-CSC generated programs), many diverse individual strengths were identified in this project. These include psychological and emotional, instrumental and physical, education and research, and spiritual or cultural capacities. The resilient prisoners described in this study also exhibit a sense of hopefulness and inner strength in the face of extreme adversity. These individual assets do not occur in isolation from connections with other prisoners and their wider social networks. Resilient prisoners also possess several relational strengths, contributing to their capacity for resistance and solidarity. Resistance to systemic oppression occurs through individual and collective acts against penal authority, each of which can involve mundane, everyday acts of resistance or more exceptional, consciously disruptive political actions. Resisting the punitive isolation of the penal system coincides with prisoner solidarity and efforts to build caring communities in collaboration with allies fighting for prisoner and social justice. Intimately connected to solidary practices is the notion of relational resilience, which is an outcome of maintaining meaningful relationships and recognizing shared experiences, especially during difficult times.

5.1. Personal Resilience: *“We are very resilient”*

At the individual level, resiliency is typically defined as a psychological characteristic that involves a series of traits which promote mental health, personal well-being, and the capacity to overcome adversity and recover from traumatic experiences (Jane Addams Collective, 2019). Resilience has also been framed as a process and identity composed of actions chosen and implemented by the individual “to feel accomplished” extending from “their personal philosophies on survival” (Payne, 2011, p.429). Mobilizing resilient traits following a traumatic event can mediate adverse impacts while promoting positive outcomes (Woods, Larwin, & Allen, 2020). Some examples of individual level resiliency traits include agency or “autonomy and the belief in one’s ability to control or influence events” (Jane Addams Collective, 2019, p.31), finding meaning in one’s suffering, along with a sense of humour (aspects of hopefulness), strengths-based coping, and an internal moral belief system (Jane Addams Collective, 2019). With the appropriate resources, surviving trauma and hardship can make a person stronger and increases their capacity for overcoming future challenges and navigating life difficulties across multiple contexts and settings (Cowen, 1994; Martin, Korchinski, Fels, & Leggo, 2014).

Contrary to the damage-centred narrative prevalent in the criminological literature, participants reflected on the trauma they endured as examples of their resiliency and capacity to cope with adversity. As Olivia (key informant) asserted, “they are truly some of the most resourceful and resilient women you’ll ever meet. I don’t know women any stronger than the women I’ve met inside for the things that they’ve endured and survived.” Participants spoke about the importance of mental health, self-efficacy, confidence, and autonomy in developing personal resiliency. Jennifer (former prisoner) observed that many criminalized people “are extremely independent. We’ve had to survive situations to get through things on our own, not

having very much support. So, independence is definitely key to resilience. If you can go through some of that stuff and still wake up one day and have a smile on your face and just live [life].” This capacity to survive trauma and various life challenges with a positive attitude is bolstered by opportunities for self-development including access to knowledge and other resources. Another former prisoner named Jacob highlights this point by explaining, “today I feel like I’ve got so many resources for like homelessness, addiction, mental health, prison, [and] when you get out housing. Like I feel very, very resourceful and that makes me feel more resilient, more well-equipped to deal with stuff.” Since resiliency involves “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties” (Jane Addams Collective, 2019, p.37) it makes sense that knowing where and how to get assistance for different challenges would make a criminalized person “feel more resilient.”

Opportunities for growth after facing hardship requires access to appropriate coping resources (Cowen, 1994). Problem-focused coping or the ability to conceptualize problems and identify solutions is therefore essential to developing resiliency. An example of prisoners’ resourcefulness, flexible adaptability, and problem-focused coping in managing stressors was provided by Lisa Guenther (key informant) who shared her experiences of organizing healing circles for PJD in collaboration with the P4W Memorial Collective: “I have noticed that the former prisoners in the group are way better than the people who don’t have an experience of incarceration at rolling with things.” Lisa goes on to describe various examples of unexpected challenges (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, Indigenous Elder cancelling, lack of funding and resources) that have occurred in the context of PJD organizing citing the resilient capacities of women with lived experience as central to reducing anxiety, problem-solving, and the successful coordination of this annual event.

From the findings outlined in the previous chapter, which is consistent with other studies on women's imprisonment (e.g., Bosworth, 1999; Chamberlen, 2018; Moore & Scraton, 2014), it is evident that agency in terms of exercising choices and autonomy is highly restricted and often denied in carceral settings. Current and former prisoners must be resilient, clever, and determined to avoid feelings of helplessness, and restore (or develop) a sense of efficacy and power. This creative determination and self-efficacy in the context of prisoner resilience was captured by Kerry (former prisoner) who asserted, "we are very resilient. We will find a way. Whatever it is we want to do... We are very strong people. And going through what we went through, like prison, if it doesn't break us, we do really get stronger from it." Kerry's reflections on resilience and developing strength through survival mirrors Chamberlen's (2018) research with women prisoners in the UK who "endured and survived damaging circumstances and experiences that made them stronger" (p. 58). Other criminalized women have similarly attributed their ability to cope with and navigate the challenges of the court and prison systems with making them a stronger person (Neve & Pate, 2005). Payne's (2011) "sites of resilience"⁷⁶ theory is useful here to recognize how inequitable social contexts can lead to creative forms of resiliency and strengths-based outcomes. "Sites of resilience" is a

conceptualization [that] takes into account [individuals] personal and subjective construction of resiliency and resilience; examines it in relation to issues of race, gender, and social class; and identifies psychological and/or physical spaces or "sites" for evaluating more relevantly the ways in which [individuals] cope and become resilient (p. 429).

⁷⁶ Although this theory was developed to reconceptualize and better explore understandings of resilience among street life-oriented Black men (with and without criminal records), it is also helpful in examining notions of women and gender-diverse prisoners' resiliency.

From this perspective, paradoxically, prisons and other carceral settings can be considered a “site of resilience” where those who survive the harms of the carceral state can develop a resilient identity. Sites of resilience theory can be understood as a framework for perceiving how people organize meaning around feeling well, satisfied, or accomplished and how they choose to survive in relation to adverse structural conditions (Payne, 2011).

Kerry proceeded to explain how lived experiences of carceral harms leads many former prisoners towards advocacy and education surrounding the legal system: “we come out wanting to, you know, have the answers. A lot of the people come out of that wanting to change the system, right...Because we are a very resilient people. We don’t give up.” Kerry’s comments point to incarcerated people’s belief in their ability to effect change (i.e., political agency) and a recognition of learning and developing opportunities to do so. These characteristics are examples of personal resiliency traits (Jane Addams Collective, 2019) linked to hope and inner strength, which I further elaborate upon in a subsequent section.

Prisoners’ dedication to learning and education (a resilient capacity) was also observed by key informants. A CSC employee named Mark was impressed by imprisoned women’s determination and ability to engage in abstract school assignments despite the trauma they have endured and their conditions of confinement.

Resiliency is definitely what I’ve seen. I mean, they’ve been through a lot. Most of them have been through a great deal of trauma in their lives. And they are able to come into you know, a grade 11 math class and do an assignment... Or come and write an essay or whatever, you know, like this ridiculous stuff that is fairly abstract and separate from their day to day lives and really not immediately connected to what is important to them.

Based on the findings related to the harms of the carceral state, prisoners’ “day to day lives” are clearly marked by instability, isolation, limited choices, and the on-going trauma of

imprisonment. “What is important” to most prisoners is maintaining social ties, surviving prison, and planning for their eventual release, all of which requires individual strengths like flexibility, adaptability, resourcefulness, and determination.

5.2. Individual Strengths that Promote Coping and Healing

Despite the CSC’s efforts to ignore or stifle prisoners’ strengths as documented in the previous chapter, incarcerated people possess a diversity of personal strengths that they exercise to cope with and heal from the trauma of imprisonment and criminalization. Strength-based practices are enjoyable, rewarding, and promote the dignity of criminalized people (Burnett & Maruna, 2004). Notably, this thematic category had the largest number of codes related to the resilient capacities of prisoners with 35 distinct strengths emerging from the data. For this reason, individual strengths were organized into four categories: psychological and emotional capacities; education and research capacities; instrumental and physical capacities; and cultural and spiritual capacities. This categorization of healthy coping strategies is important because “incarcerated women’s views of health and healing incorporates physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health and healing” (Martin, et. al., 2014, p.138). Several capacities or strengths that build relationality were identified, including communication skills, consciousness-raising and public speaking, generosity, hospitality, kindness and compassion, and facilitation skills. These relational strengths will be discussed in subsequent sections that focus on prisoner resistance, solidarity, relational resilience, and political agency.

5.2.1. Psychological and Emotional Capacities: “*We are tenacious. We are nurturing*”

As Ruth Martin, a medical doctor who worked for years in a women’s prison, indicates “mental health and wellbeing are fundamental to resilience and coping” for criminalized women (Martin, et. al., 2014, p.195). Several psychological and emotional strengths documented in this project are directly linked to the personal resilience traits discussed in the previous section, including tenacity and perseverance, adaptive capacity, and fortitude (i.e., strength and courage in the face of adversity) or bravery.

While “correctional” discourses and interventions employ a risk-need-responsivity framework that often pathologizes criminalized women as cognitively and psychologically deficient (Maidment, 2007; Pollack, 2004, 2007, 2012; Pollack & Kendall, 2005), participants highlighted the psychological and emotional strengths of prisoners. Contradicting popular media depictions and stigmatizing stereotypes of people inside prisons for women as manipulative, unruly monsters in need of ‘fixing’ (Bosworth, 1999; Faith, 2011), a legal advocate who has worked with women prisoners for the past 15 years expressed that “some of the sweetest, most thoughtful women I’ve known are sitting in prison cells right now” (Olivia, key informant). In a similar sentiment, responding to a question about what the world ought to know about criminalized women, former prisoner Denise asserted, “criminalized women were not born criminalized... We are funny. We are tenacious. We are nurturing.” The nurturing, thoughtful, caring capacities of current and former prisoners is explored further below in the section on building solidarity and caring communities, as well as establishing relational resilience.

To navigate the confusing labyrinth of penal bureaucracy and the culture of indifference (Clark, 2017) emanating from staff, prisoners must be resourceful, adaptive, perseverant,

assertive, and self-confident. For example, several former prisoners described having to educate prison staff about “correctional” policies, with some even completing institutional reports on behalf of guards. For example, a former prisoner named Rebecca shared:

They gave me a primary worker who is a maximum-security guard who works nights. Why would you give me a max security guard that work nights when I’m on medium compound? So, trying to get in contact with him to get my paperwork and stuff approved was next to impossible. I used to have to go to the max door and buzz and buzz and buzz and buzz and annoy the living shit out of them to be able to even see my primary worker. I was doing his 45-day reports because he wasn’t even contacting me to find out what I was doing. So, I was typing them up and sending them to him. I was doing his job for him. Then because he’s also the union rep, he’s busy, he doesn’t have time for me. Then he’s losing my paperwork and I have to resubmit it.

To be eligible for parole, obtain a lower security status, leave the prison on temporary absences, and gain other privileges (or rights), institutional paperwork must be completed, signed, and submitted by a prisoner’s case management team. This process can be complicated and takes months. For prisoners who do not have an effective case management team, it is necessary for them to be aware of their rights, know how to navigate the bureaucratic hoops inherent to the system, and have the literacy skills to complete the paperwork.

Often, prisoners who have been entrenched in the system for some time will support their peers who are unfamiliar with the challenges of self-advocacy or experience other barriers. However, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, women organizing together in solidarity face increased surveillance and punitive repercussions. Seemingly innocuous acts such as

assisting other prisoners with filing institutional paperwork⁷⁷ can be threatening to the penal status quo (Law, 2012). Peer advocacy and standing up for prisoners' rights is especially challenging and requires significant confidence, assertiveness, and tenacity, as Tess (former prisoner) explains:

They [CSC] were constantly trying to correlate my advocacy with violence. So even when I got out, they were like... "what's all this violent anarchism that you do?" And I was like, "no, no, no, let's unpack this a little bit." And then I had to demonstrate in all circumstances that my advocacy was not only working against violence, but also working to achieve the things that people in positions of power say that they want or are mandated to want in society... So, they saw advocacy or... what I just call being a person who cares about other people in the world, they saw that as a real threat. And I had to spend lots of years educating the staff [about] this is what the law says, this is what you work for. I'm doing your job. And through that narrative, I've been able to create a lot of safety for myself and also with the peer advocacy position. Then it became at least legal to stand up for people's rights.

Tess's narrative mirrors Rebecca's comment about having to do the job of prison staff who are often ignorant about relevant laws and policies. The example shared by Tess illustrates the psychological and emotional strengths of incarcerated people, particularly their kindness and compassion, despite the potential for these caring practices to be met with punitive consequences that may further jeopardize their freedom. Advocacy efforts aimed at challenging systemic oppression requires some level of education, as Denise suggests:

I figured the only way to fight CSC is you have to have the praxis, and you have to have the theory. And most times we have either or... And now I can

⁷⁷ An example of how CSC inhibits prisoners from supporting one another with institutional paperwork can be observed in the case of Ashley Smith. Sapers (2008) reports on the failure of CSC's complaint and grievance system, indicating how their lack of response played a role in Smith's death. Sapers found that while Ashley Smith was in the segregation unit at Nova Institution in August 2007, she was not provided with paper or writing instruments and was unable to submit a formal complaint about her overly restrictive conditions of confinement. Another prisoner offered peer-support by writing the complaint on Ashley's behalf, yet CSC refused to accept this document because Ashley had not written it herself.

say that I have both. So that's the only way that I can go and make a difference. Because I have navigated the system from both sides of the fence. I went to school. I got a degree during my parole. I figured, if that's not tenacious, [what is?].

The tenacity and motivation towards fighting for prisoner justice that Denise exemplifies was gained through her lived experiences traversing the penal system and educating herself.

Education contributes to building one's psychological and emotional capacities, including independence, self-confidence, assertiveness, and emotional expression (Faith, 2011; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014; Law, 2012).

5.2.2. Education and Research Capacities: “*Empowerment comes from knowledge*”

There are a multitude of benefits to education programs in prison, for incarcerated people, the institutional climate, and the wider community. Engagement in post-secondary education in prison reduces the likelihood of future lawbreaking by 45-75% and completing a post-secondary education program decreases ‘recidivism’ by 50-100% (Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2019). Prisoners who participate in education programs have fewer disciplinary infractions, more positive relationships with one another, and improved mental health (Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2019). CSC’s evaluation of its education program found \$6.37 in direct savings for every \$1 spent on education due to reduced ‘recidivism’ (Public Safety Canada, 2022b). Education in prison places former prisoners in a better position to secure meaningful, long-term employment (Public Safety Canada, 2022b) with significantly higher employment rates compared to prisoners who did not engage in education programs (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013), thus facilitating their successful re-entry. Many other benefits to education in prison, including an increased awareness of power relations, oppression, and social justice issues, and the development of deep relationships among program participants, are

revealed in a special issue of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, (2023, volume 32-1), focused on the Walls to Bridges (W2B) program.

Although people incarcerated in prisons designated for women tend to have less education when compared to incarcerated men (CHRC, 2003; Mahoney, 2011; Zinger, 2018) and face many barriers to accessing post-secondary education in prison (Fayter, 2016; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Piché, 2008; Zinger, 2020, 2022), participants highlighted the various education and research capacities of prisoners. The intelligence and skills of incarcerated people were captured by Lawrence Hill (key informant), who asserted “there are all sorts of people behind bars who are teeming with intelligence and abilities and compassion.” The kindness, compassion, and intelligence of prisoners was highlighted by multiple key informants. Expanding on the links between prisoner advocacy efforts and education discussed above, Quinn (key informant), who began working with incarcerated people at P4W in the 1980’s described prisoners’ strengths in the following way:

I would say what folks know about the system, like how to navigate, how to get shit done and what the rules are and what you can’t do. What works. What doesn’t work. And you figure that out how? Like, given the amount of powerlessness and invisibility that you have and [lack of] rights that you have. I was just amazed by the smart advocacy... This is what will work and that kind of thing. So, yeah, intelligence, bravery, kindness.

Quinn’s reflections speak to prisoners’ resilience in circumventing barriers to develop an awareness of their rights, policies, and systemic issues inherent to effective advocacy.

Learning about prisoner rights and how to challenge systemic oppression typically begins when people enter the system. Prisoners learn how to file grievances (Law, 2012) and gain first-hand experience about unjust prison policies along with strategies for organizing to fight back (Horri, Parkes, & Pate, 2006). Education and opportunities for learning, whether these are formal

or informal, are empowering for oppressed people. As one formerly incarcerated woman named Lorraine expressed, “empowerment comes from knowledge.” Furthermore, involvement in prison education programs such as W2B sparks students’ commitment and capacity to contribute to social change (Pollack, 2016) while facilitating resistance to oppressive and dehumanizing systems (Davis & Roswell, 2013).

Some prisoners learn how to read, write, and interpret the law during their incarceration (Law, 2012). For example, an Indigenous woman serving a life sentence named Yvonne Johnson shared in her memoir that she spent many years inside reading widely and developing her writing skills, despite entering the system with a grade eight education (Wiebe & Johnson, 1998). The autodidactic capacity of incarcerated people was observed by a former prisoner named Sofia who worked in the prison library: “some people were looking at the law books and really learning about the law. So, there’s just a lot of misconceptions about what people do when they’re in prison and how we judge them based on where they are versus who they are.” Sofia’s comments disrupt negative stereotypes and assumptions that proliferate about people in prison.

Along with self-directed learning and peer support to challenge unjust penal policies and practices, there are also formalized educational programs. Federal prisoners in Canada who have not finished grade 12 prior to their incarceration, are required to complete a high school equivalency program referred to as “Adult Basic Education” as part of their correctional plan (CSC, 2018b). Incarcerated women demonstrate a strong desire to pursue education and a dedication to their studies and to developing their academic skills (Faith, 2011; Law, 2012; Pollack, 2019). This motivation for learning was observed by CSC employee Mark, who shared how during his initial tour of the prison, prior to commencing his employment there, several women prisoners approached him since they had been without a teacher for six months. Mark

was surprised by this enthusiasm, exclaiming “I never experienced somebody who wanted school that badly, that they were accosting a complete stranger and begging them to come in to teach them so they could get their high school diploma.”

Beyond the required high school diploma, opportunities for pursuing post-secondary education are extremely limited and wrought with barriers. However, there are some non-CSC generated post-secondary programs available to prisoners including Inside-Out and Walls to Bridges⁷⁸. As noted in my methodology chapter, many participants are engaged with the W2B program, as students, instructors, facilitators, and collective members. Involvement in this program enabled participants to witness the intelligence, writing abilities, academic skills, and capacity for critical reflection that incarcerated people possess. These strengths are often stifled by the system as documented in the previous chapter and are not readily apparent in the regular penal environment. As Tiina (former prisoner) noted: “Walls to Bridges allowed me to see those talents and skills and knowledge and how smart the people I was in the classes with were that I wouldn’t have seen otherwise.” Sofia (former prisoner) emphasized the “mind blowing” intelligence and writing skills of their peers, expressing: “the people that were in our [W2B] course that were with us in the prison, I mean, the things that they would write in their essays and their projects, just mind blowing.” Many women survive and cope with imprisonment via writing and creativity (Davies, 1990) exemplified by the multitude of publications written by current and former prisoners, including in personal memoirs (e.g., Hansen, 2018; Wiebe & Johnson, 1998), W2B literature (e.g., Fayter, 2016, 2023; Freitas, McAuley, & Kish, 2014; Kish,

⁷⁸ Please see Davis (2013), Fayter (2016), and Pollack (2014) for an overview of these programs.

2013; Pollack & Edwards, 2018; Pollack & Eldridge, 2015), *Tightwire* magazine that was published inside P4W from 1970-1993, and the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*.

5.2.3. Instrumental and Physical Capacities: “*Anything you can do to keep yourself busy*”

“Doing time” is boring and monotonous, and prisoners cope by finding ways to keep busy. I use the term instrumental and physical capacities to refer to healthy coping strategies that are useful distractions (e.g., watching TV, cooking, personal care routines), that assist people in meeting a goal (e.g., organizational skills, keeping busy with work or voluntary programs), as well as athletics and physical activity. For example, in response to a question about coping with imprisonment, a former prisoner named Zaida shared: “it really was just keeping my days busy and then coming home and sleeping and then starting the day again. I just felt that it was better than being depressed. I couldn’t *not* focus on the negativity, when you got nothing else to do.” Zaida’s comments illustrate the importance of keeping busy as a distraction from the pains of imprisonment. Other healthy distractions include going “for walks, read[ing] books, cook[ing], you know, anything you can do to keep yourself busy” (Brielle, former prisoner). Cooking food and eating together was a common coping strategy cited by criminalized participants, which is reinforced in other studies of women’s imprisonment (Chamberlen, 2018). Sharing food is also an act of resistance demonstrating an ethic of care among prisoners (de Graff & Kilty, 2016). Learning how to cook from scratch and sharing healthy eating habits contributes to imprisoned women’s healing journeys (Martin, et. al., 2014).

Along with walking, formerly incarcerated people spoke about engaging in sports (e.g., baseball, volleyball, basketball) and other physical activities such as yoga or fitness programs. These athletic activities were primarily prisoner-led or volunteer-led programs, rather than being

organized by CSC. One former prisoner named Lorraine expressed how her involvement in fitness was an effective coping strategy in prison because physical activity was something she was passionate about prior to her incarceration:

I think what helped my time pass was I was involved a lot with the social program in the gym where you sign people up who wanted to do a workout on the exercise machines and fitness classes. Before going in, I was into fitness. And so going in that didn't change...I think for me, being active and keeping busy was always something that would mean self-care and especially in a place like [prison], it was something that I definitely took advantage of. I mean, we had nothing but time, right? I think I delved into it even more than when I was outside because I had all my time to do that. Also, fitness for me was resilience.

Exercise has been identified as an effective coping strategy for women in prison, allowing them to keep their bodies in motion to resist their confinement (Chamberlen, 2018). Likewise, carceral calisthenics has been identified as a “site of resilience” for incarcerated Black men, whereby physical exercise enables them to better cope with and survive the challenges of incarceration (de la Tierra, 2019). Running, walking, biking, and playing sports are all beneficial to imprisoned women’s health and facilitate coping with addictions and mental health issues (Martin, et. al., 2014), showcasing the importance of physical activity as a form of self-care.

Personal care routines are another common strength-based coping strategy that allow incarcerated people a modicum of control within an institution that limits options. It also enables prisoners to feel a sense of normalcy and express their personal identities. As Shyanne (former prisoner) explained: “I used to dress up in regular clothes everyday [instead of institutional clothing] just to feel normal and maintain my individuality.” Similarly, Zaida (former prisoner) expressed how going to the hairdresser in prison “every so often so we can get a haircut” allowed them to “feel a little bit normal.” Chamberlen (2018) similarly found that self-care and bodily-

care activities were a helpful coping strategy that enhanced women's self-esteem while retaining a sense of individuality.

5.2.4. Cultural and Spiritual Capacities: *"I embraced the Native path"*

The final category of individual prisoner strengths that promote coping and healing consists of cultural and spiritual capacities, including creativity and art, dance, music, and engaging in various spiritual and cultural practices. Creative and artistic expression in prison can facilitate the exploration of sensitive issues while allowing prisoners to share their passions and express personal learnings (Frigon & Shantz, 2014; Martin, et. al., 2014; Merrill & Frigon, 2015). Denise (formerly prisoner), who began her educational journey in prison and finished her degree while on parole, shared her passion for writing stories related to social justice issues.

I'm working on some short stories, and it's based off of basically decolonization and embracing Indigeneity and showing when people are not allowed to bring their truth to a situation, how it can get all flustered and the richness is lost. So, I want to bring back that richness because like I said, we're all knowledge producers.

Involvement in the arts for imprisoned women is therapeutic, allowing them to explore their feelings and emotions, express their identity and sexuality, reduce tension and anxiety, and promote a positive self-image (Dunbar & Shepard, 2023; Frigon & Shantz, 2014). Participation in theatre programs for criminalized women is a transformative experience and a tool for personal growth (Merrill & Frigon, 2015). Additionally, engaging in dance programs can facilitate critical new understandings for participants and observers to challenge previously held conceptualizations of the legal system by interpreting "movements, emotions, and visceral reactions" (Frigon, 2014. p.31). Creative expression is also humanizing, enjoyable, empowering, provides a break from prison life, and can increase women's self-esteem and communication

skills (Caulfield & Wilson, 2010; Merrill & Frigon, 2015). Inside the hostile, oppressive penal environment artistic creations also offer a space for resistance (Frigon & Shantz, 2014). Writing and artistic expression can be “a means of survival and a testament to surviving the dislocations of prison life” (Gaucher, 2002b, p.12). The combination of these positive impacts, along with the time prisoners have to develop their skills, has led to a plethora of prisoner artwork emerging from a place where “everybody was talented” (Lona, former prisoner). Another former prisoner named Sofia expanded Lona’s sentiment by exclaiming: “the artwork that comes out of there is just phenomenal! I mean, I’ve never seen anything like it. I’m like, you really need to do something with that talent. And then poetry [and] the stories that people were writing.”

Examples of art, poetry, and writing from people in prisons designated for women can be observed in *A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times* created by the inside W2B Collective in 2020, portions of which were reprinted in volume 32(1) of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*. The W2B Collective at GVI also collaborated with students from the University of New Brunswick to create a lengthy erasure poem⁷⁹ of text and artistic images entitled “I or Us” based on Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. This project aimed to challenge public perceptions of incarceration and was shared in various public exhibitions, publications, and a project website (Effinger, 2022). Recently, the P4W Memorial Collective curated a collection of artworks created by women prisoners across Canada that was shown in an exhibition entitled “The Art of

⁷⁹ An erasure poem consists of starting with any written document (e.g., newspaper article, books, speeches, government reports) and then erasing or blacking out and colouring over portions of the text, leaving specific words visible to create a new message or story.

Survival” at the Pumphouse Museum in Kingston, Ontario from July 4-September 2, 2023. This exhibit highlighted themes of prisoner survival, resistance, and resilience.

Song-writing and musical performance are other creative outlets prisoners use to mediate and challenge hostile penal environments (Urie, et. al., 2019). Beginning in 2016, there was a prisoner-led music program that was established by Nyki Kish and other prisoners at GVI where imprisoned people collaborated to learn, teach, and create music together. Prisoners taught one another song-writing skills and how to play different instruments. They also practiced music together and performed their musical creations at various events inside the prison. An example of a prisoner’s musical performance and how this is resistant to the harsh penal setting can be observed in *Image 1* below, where a young woman is clearly enjoying playing an acoustic guitar. The handmade jewelry that she is wearing is another example of prisoners’ artistic skills. The prisoner-led music program partnered with an organization called “Pros and Cons⁸⁰” that had professional musicians visit people inside to share their knowledge, resources, and musical production skills. The culmination of this collaboration was the production of an album released in 2018 called “Undisclosed Location” consisting of 10 original songs, written, and performed by prisoners. *Image 2* below shows the cover of this album. Below the album cover is *Image 3*, which is an example of artwork created in prison and made with found materials. Along with promoting strength-based coping, art, music, dance, and storytelling are essential to spiritual practices which also support prisoners’ healing.

⁸⁰ The Pros and Cons Program recently produced a second album at GVI released on May 15, 2020, featuring music created and performed by incarcerated people. This album is called “Private Town” with 11 original songs. See www.prosandconsprogram.com for more information and to gain access to prisoners’ recordings.



Image 1: A female prisoner playing a white acoustic guitar. August 2016



Image 2: "Undisclosed Location" album cover



Image 3: A framed scene of a tropical island, made entirely of hand-dyed feathers. Created inside prison.

Participants spoke frequently about the enjoyment and benefits of participating in cultural and spiritual programs and activities in prison. These actions can be considered positive interventions since they are experienced positively by prisoners and involve positive social and personal elements (Ronel & Elisha, 2011). While several participants expressed the value of engaging with church volunteers in programs and Christian practices such as Bible study and prayer, the most significant learnings and contributions towards prisoners' healing emerged from their involvement with Indigenous culture and spirituality. Lona (former prisoner) expresses the transformative impact of learning about and participating in Indigenous spirituality during her incarceration:

I loved drumming, you know, learning the songs, learning what it means, learning the way how Indigenous people, you know, use the medicines and why they use medicines. It helped me to love myself. And even the sweat lodge like me doing the sweat lodge actually helped me to even forgive myself. So, learning the Indigenous lifestyle was like the best thing that ever happened to me inside.

Lona's reflections about how her involvement in these activities allowed her to love and forgive herself is consistent with literature on criminalized women that highlights the importance of traditional Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices for women's healing (Dell, Desjarlais, & Kilty, 2011; Dell, Gardipy, Kirlin, Naytowhow, & Nicol, 2014; Ryan, Ali, & Sabourin, 2020). Learning about Indigenous culture was particularly valuable for prisoners who have lost touch with their cultural roots or who never had the opportunity to connect to their heritage. Anastasia (former prisoner) shared her enthusiasm for this cultural education in the following way:

They had different ceremonies and stuff... We created some corn stock, and they explained about how a lot of things in the Native culture are linked together by trees. So, one for the creator, one for like the plants and animals and one for the people and just how they're all intertwined and stuff. And we also learned about how when they plant, I guess like a farmer, how they always plant with the corn in the middle. And then they have the squash surrounded on the other side, I believe, and then beans... The Three Sisters... It was just kind of learning fun facts about the way that my culture, I guess, looks at things, and I totally could relate, but I just never really had somebody before to explain all these things.

Traditional Indigenous healing practices and spiritual guidance from an Elder – including drumming, singing, sweats, prayer, ceremony, and spiritual education – is empowering and healing for incarcerated women (Martin, et. al., 2014; Ryan, Ali, & Sabourin, 2020). Another former prisoner named Zaida underscored the importance of the relational connection with Indigenous Elders:

I embraced the Native path and clicked in with the Elder and it was that motherly love... Having, you know, the women embrace the Elder so closely and then be able to just be around women and to know that everybody sharing

their story is sharing a similar type of grief or loss or fear...that comfort level that I felt with the Elder was completely different and I was able to really understand myself and understand the barriers that I face, not even knowing that I was facing them until I was able to really speak my truth.

Zaida's narrative indicates the healing potential of compassionate interpersonal relations in the context of spiritual and cultural practices to promote strength and self-understanding. Utilizing one's cultural and spiritual capacities also contributes to building hope and inner strength.

5.3. Hopefulness and Inner Strength: *"They'll never be able to take away your mind"*

In carceral settings where the system acts to restrict prisoners' agency and diminish their hope, resilient prisoners can maintain their inner-strength and a sense of hopefulness. For this project, hope refers to a positive, cognitive-emotional state that facilitates agency and identifies the means to achieve goals via tangible, actionable processes. In other words, a person who feels hopeful is positioned to use their agentic capacities to problem solve and actively work towards achieving their goals. Essentially, hope involves "a celebration of human agency and [the] capacity to enact change" (Grain, 2022, p. 24). Hope is thus necessary to mobilize political agency, which I discuss in the following chapter. Due to the broad, somewhat abstract nature of hope, the coding framework for this concept consisted of the following topics: focus on the positive, future-oriented, gratitude, inner strength, and a sense of purpose or finding meaning in one's suffering.

Psychological research on hope has demonstrated that hope acts as a source of inner strength, serving as a protective factor to mediate the impacts of negative life events (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006). This inner-strength or unbreakable spirit is present in many prisoners, and its capacity to buffer the harms of the carceral state was captured by Billie (former prisoner),

who stated: “well, they [prisoners] have inner strength, because they know what these people [CSC] are doing is wrong. They’re trying to repress you. They’re trying to, like, make you into robots... So that’s what keeps me strong, is to know that these people are just trying to break me.” Ironically, CSC efforts to ‘break’ prisoners can instead encourage them to become stronger by resisting the internalization of the harmful penal discourses. The notion of refusing to be ‘broken’ by an oppressive system is a common sentiment among resistant prisoners. Tapping into my own inner strength and sense of hope, I wrote a song called “Can’t Break Me” shortly after my release from segregation, that I was able to perform in a musical showcase inside GVI on April 7, 2017. The lyrics of this song are below, followed by a picture of my performance (*Image 4*) and a copy of the flyer advertising this special prisoner-led event (*Image 5*).

Can’t Break Me (2017)

Chorus: You wear me down, you wear me down, ‘til I don’t give a fuck anymore.
You wear me down, you wear me down, but it only makes me stronger.

Verse 1: Empowerment in prison? That’s an oxymoron.
Who do you think I am? I’m not an idiot or moron.
You say you want to offer help and rehabilitation.
All you really give is stress and more frustration.
You can’t break me.

Chorus

Verse 2: You’ve taken everything, you can’t take my heart, soul, or mind.
The only thing that’s happened is, I’ve become less kind.
I’m more jaded now than I was before.
You’ll never find me curled up, crying on the floor.
You can’t break me.

Chorus

Verse 3: In the past few years, I’ve been through hell and back.
Always feeling on edge, like I’m ready to attack.
Finally getting my life on track, no thanks to you!
I like who I am today, to myself I’ll stay true.
You can’t break me. You’ll never break me!



Image 4: A picture of me performing my original song “Can’t Break Me” at an event in the prison chapel.



Image 5: The cover of a flyer distributed in prison, advertising “The Last Showcase”, prisoner concert.

I wrote the lyrics to “Can’t Break Me” shortly after spending over a month in segregation where I was fighting an involuntary transfer to maximum-security. To remain in the medium compound, I had to follow a strict “reintegration plan” that was highly punitive. While I was no longer allowed to work or attend W2B classes, I was fortunate to be invited to a song-writing workshop as part of the prisoner-led music program. In this space I felt supported and was able to funnel my anger and resentment in a healthy way. A positive outcome from my involvement in this program was this song and an opportunity to perform it in a prisoner concert. This process bolstered my confidence, hope, and inner strength. It was also an act of resistance.

Hope and inner strength play a key role in the prevention or exacerbation of mental health issues and harmful coping strategies and have been shown to enhance personal strengths (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, & Adams, 2000). It is not easy to maintain hope and strength inside such an oppressive environment. Sofia (former prisoner) shared some strategies as she reflected on how to remain hopeful in prison: “I just try to really focus on the positives. You know, if you

focus on the negatives, there's lots of negatives. You know, just focus on the positive stuff as much as you can." Positive thinking and trying to make the best out of a horrible situation are relevant to building and maintaining hope. Sofia continues by explaining, "you know, unfortunately, you're in a situation and in a place that a lot has been taken away from you. But *they'll never be able to take away your mind*, your creativity, or the support that you can have between the people that are surrounding you." In other words, mindfulness, choosing how one thinks about or internalizes difficult situations, along with exercising creativity and building social connections with those around you are central to maintaining hope in a very dark place. Sofia's remarks are reminiscent of Viktor Frankl's (1959, p. 66) insight on imprisonment, namely that "everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."

Lona (former prisoner) illustrated this metaphor of hope bringing light to a dark space, in her remarks concerning the overall prison experience: "between the seven years [in prison], there were good, bad, ugly. But then there was light, and that light helped me to be where I am today, but also to keep advocating." Lona's comment about how embracing this "light" facilitated her advocacy, is an example of what Chilcote and Harper (2020, p. 4) call "living hope" where "hope inspires us to work for the common good. It has collective as well as an individual sense." The notion of finding light in the darkness as a means of maintaining hope, is a common sentiment and coping strategy among prisoners. For example, reflecting on his time in extermination camps during WWII, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, in his Days of Remembrance remarks on April 9th, 2002, explains:

People say occasionally that there must be light at the end of the tunnel, but I believe in those times there was light in the tunnel. In a strange way there was

courage in the ghetto. And there was hope, human hope, in the death camp. Simply an anonymous prisoner giving a piece of bread to someone who was hungrier than he or she; a father shielding his child; a mother trying to hold back her tears so her children would not see her pain—that was courage.

Wiesel's remarks suggest the malleability of hope (Brown, 2019), whereby even in the darkest most despairing places (such as prisons and death camps), glimmers of hope emerge and can amplify hope in others. As a dynamic trait hope enhances positive emotions, personal strengths, and interpersonal relationships thus promoting healthy coping (Brown, 2019). However, it is important to note that "hope is a discipline that we have to practice every single day" (Kaba, 2021, p. 27).

The positive impacts of maintaining hope and inner strength among imprisoned people was observed by Fiona (key informant) who asserted: "I have learned the most I've learned in my life about dignity and strength from people who have survived incarceration and found ways to support each other and themselves and to expand and learn and grow despite where they are when they're in prison." Supporting one another through difficult times such as prison is akin to Hayes and Kaba's (2023, p. 176) assertion that hope requires "us to reject indifference" facilitating our ability to care for ourselves, others, and the world around us. In this sense, hope and care work are intimately connected. Fiona's comment also connects the capacity for personal growth to overcoming adversity, thus enabling imprisoned people to maintain a sense of hope for the future. As theologian James Hawkey (2020, p. 1) contends, "hope is a choice, at every moment of every day. It will be closely linked to precisely what we value, and what ultimately inspires us. Hope is an activity of the human will, directed to the future, convicted by deep truth, which is not contingent on other indicators, and not reliant on what is seen."

Sociopolitical discourses often position criminalized and incarcerated people as inherently bad and/or undeserving of basic rights and freedoms. Participants challenged these harmful assumptions through expressions of hope, such as:

A lot of us are very good people that just messed up in life and went down the wrong path because maybe our hearts led us that way or whatever it may be. But we are still great people. We can still, you know, do amazing things, go to school, open our own businesses, do whatever. There's so many of us out here doing amazing things with our lives. (Katie, former prisoner)



Image 6: Photo taken in prison gym after a high school graduation ceremony in October 2016. Two prisoners who graduated are celebrating with their friends.

Here, Katie recognizes that even when people make mistakes (which everyone does) they still have the potential to grow and make positive contributions to society. Rather than being a passive feeling, hope is therefore an active process directed towards realizing a positive future (Friere, 1994; Grain, 2022). For many

incarcerated people, a positive future entails getting an education. The inner strength, hope,

and perseverance to achieve one's educational goals in prison, along with the satisfaction of success can be observed in *Image 6*. In the oppressive penal environment where CSC policies and practices tend to diminish prisoners' hope, when incarcerated people join in solidarity to celebrate each other's success, they actively resist harmful stereotypes through their efforts to build a better future.

The findings in this section are consistent with those from a qualitative study with provincially sentenced women in Atlantic Canada. Bernier (2010) found that self-confidence and a positive attitude are helpful for women prisoners to navigate the challenges and barriers they

face in prison and the community. These capacities also include inner strength in the face of adversity, which contributes to perseverance and resiliency. Maintaining a sense of hope inside carceral settings and mobilizing hope into action is a form of resistance. Focusing on the positive and finding meaning or a sense of purpose in one's suffering is resistant to carceral logics and discourses that frame prisoners in largely negative terms.

5.4. Individual Everyday Acts of Resistance: “*The small ways we support each other*”

As discussed in *Chapter 2*, the concept of resistance is multifaceted and its' strategies and tactics vary depending on intersecting social and identity locations including class, race, gender, sexuality, culture, educational background, environmental context, and other markers of difference (Bosworth, 1999; Medina, 2013). Resistance to oppression is an active process aimed at challenging injustice and hegemonic ideologies, which can entail both individual and collective acts (Moore & Scraton, 2014). Most acts of resistance identified in this study are also examples of solidarity, except for some exceptional individual acts such as when an incarcerated person fights for freedom, basic rights, and survival. Although I did not ask participants about their intent, the implications of these exceptional individual acts are often political since the outcomes can improve the conditions of confinement for other prisoners, thus serving as a solidarity practice. These individual exceptional acts are highlighted in the next section.

Resistance has been conceptualized by scholars as passive-aggressive, subversive behaviour or explicitly active, and sometimes violent responses (Crewe, 2007; Ross, 2009; Scott, 1985, 1990). Violent resistance is rare in women's prisons (Law, 2012) and only three examples of this were described by participants – an unplanned, failed escape attempt; comments from a

key informant framing lateral violence (i.e., violence against another prisoner) as resistive to penal conditions; and a key informant who spoke about self-harm and suicide in response to the conditions of confinement at P4W. Goffman's (1961) notion of 'secondary adjustments' is useful here, which consist of prisoner actions that can disrupt the penal regime and violate its' rules (e.g., mutual aid, visiting another living unit) or involve actions that are technically allowed but result in frustrating the penal authority (e.g., advocacy, filing grievances, peaceful protests). Essentially, resistance entails "prisoners exercising free will in ways that are contrary to the prison regime's demands or expectations" (Rubin, 2015, p. 24).

A key informant and long-time prisoner ally named Fiona accurately conveys the complexity of prisoner resistance, while underscoring its' importance within the penal system:

The system will be working to bring you down to just prisoner. And we are here to not only help you survive, but to make sure that you can. We're already creating unity or a sense of being united. And that resistance can be small and kind of under wraps. Or it can be organized resistance, which also obviously happens, and it can make a really big impact... I have never been incarcerated, but I believe it based on conversations and things I've seen, that the groundwork for acts of resistance that are more organized is that daily, small acts of caring which are resisting the logic of the institution and resisting the individual harms of the institution. Like making sure that we know the first premise is they're [carceral institutions] not here to help us.

Fiona's narrative suggests that small, everyday acts of caring amongst prisoners forms the basis of both prisoner resistance and solidarity. Fiona's comments also indicate that women and gender-diverse prisoners engage in these resistant acts out of necessity and survival, since prisoners are aware that the carceral system does not exist to help them. This critical awareness of surviving outside carceral structures forms the basis of transformative and healing justice, which I examine in the next chapter.

Criminalized participants frequently highlighted “the small ways we support each other” (Tiina, former prisoner) as acts of resistance, “like, when your friend would be in max and you would go to the area and you would try to yell and send them a message, right? Like we’re here. We love you. Like ways that people don’t think of, that is resistance. We’re not supposed to do it, but we did it anyways.” Since the carceral system aims to isolate and invisibilize, especially those who are confined in maximum-security or solitary confinement, attempts to connect with and support these prisoners are acts of resistance that face a punitive response.

The primary examples of individual, everyday acts of resistance offered by participants include sharing food and resources, advocacy efforts, and ensuring prison officials follow their own policies. Sharing food, cooking, and eating together are common forms of mutual aid and resistance inside prisons designated for women (de Graff & Kilty, 2016; Law, 2012; Smoyer, 2015), despite the CSC’s “no-sharing” policy⁸¹. For example, Kerry (former prisoner) explained, “myself and a friend of mine, when there were new people coming in off the trailer, we would pick two people, we’d make them a dinner.” Kerry is referring to newly arrived prisoners from the intake unit (i.e., a trailer serving as temporary housing) who recently transferred to the federal prison from the provincial system. After weeks or months of consuming reheated “cook-chill⁸²” food in detention centres, a freshly cooked meal is a welcome treat.

⁸¹ According to Commissioner’s Directive 566-12 s. 20 “Inmates are not permitted to give, trade, loan, rent or sell personal or other property to other inmates directly or indirectly. Unauthorized exchange of property between inmates may result in a disciplinary charge.” (CSC, 2015b)

⁸² According to Commissioner’s Directive 880 (Food Services) definitions, “cook-chill” is a “food preservation method in which food is prepared, cooked, and then chilled to 1°C in a central kitchen” (CSC, 2019). The frozen, bagged food is then shipped to various prisons for reheating. This food preparation method is prevalent in provincial-

Participants also spoke about supporting other prisoners through advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring prison staff are following their own rules and policies. A formerly incarcerated person named Billie provided an example of resisting penal oppression to support a friend:

If one of my friends went to seg, I would go up to the front and say, “okay, like, you know, they’re allowed to have this. My friend got a message to me and said, they’re not giving me paper. They’re not giving me a pencil; they’re not giving me stamps.” I would go up there and fight them and I tell them, or I would grieve them... And that’s what I call solidarity and that’s what I call supporting each other.

Billie’s example points to the severely isolating nature of segregation, where prisoners in these units depend on guards for everything and are often denied access to basic necessities, such as writing materials and stamps. This is consistent with Bosworth’s (1999, p.135) finding that “despite their limited choices the women in prison constantly endeavored to resist the restrictions placed upon them inside.” Billie’s comments also highlight the direct link between resistance and solidarity inside carceral settings.

Another example that illustrates this connection between prisoner solidarity and resistance can be found in my personal journal entry from January 19, 2017:

A woman in my living unit has been getting screwed around by the institution since she arrived just over a month ago. Today, her PO informed her she needs to transfer to Joliette in Quebec if she wants to get parole, simply because French is her first language and English is her second language. She signed the papers because she wasn’t sure what she was supposed to do. When she told me, I informed her that she does not have to transfer, but instead the institution must provide all her paperwork in French, her parole hearing should be in French, and they should get her a translator, if necessary. We are a multilingual country with two national languages. It is unbelievable to me that in a federal institution someone who speaks French is being screwed around simply because she’s seen as an inconvenience. This woman speaks

territorial jails and men’s maximum and medium-security federal prisons. Fortunately, people in federal prisons designated for women are not served this disgusting, overcooked, high-starched, low protein, nutrient-deprived food.

English fairly well but would prefer official communications to be done in French, which is her right as a prisoner in a Canadian Federal Prison. I informed her of her rights and got her a CAEFS Human Rights Handbook in French. She hasn't really understood what's going on, so I've helped her look at her paperwork. She's eligible for deportation parole, which means that at 1/3 of her sentence (or one year since she has a three-year sentence) she'll be sent back to French Guyana via paper decision (automatically without a parole hearing). She doesn't want to transfer to Quebec because she likes our living unit and is comfortable here.

This journal entry provides a case example of the unjust nature of Canada's penitentiary system, while drawing attention to the necessity of prisoner resistance and solidarity. In this example, a young Black woman who was not a Canadian citizen and spoke French in an English-speaking prison, was perceived as an inconvenience by penal authorities who decided it would be easier to transfer her to another prison rather than accommodate her language needs in place. Supporting a fellow prisoner to navigate the system and exercise her rights is an "attempt to disrupt power relations, by drawing attention to a variety of minor acts and rebellions which may otherwise escape notice" (Bosworth, 1999, p. 130).

5.5. Individual Exceptional Acts of Resistance: *"I fought the system all the time"*

Resistance is ubiquitous in carceral settings because "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978, p. 95) and one might argue that any resistant act is 'exceptional' due to the significant power imbalance between prisoners and penal authorities. I distinguish between everyday and exceptional acts to highlight the diversity of prisoner resistance. In this framework, exceptional acts of resistance are defined as "consciously disruptive, intentionally political actions" (Rubin, 2015, p. 24) or acts that are "organized, systematic, cooperative, principled or selfless, [and] has revolutionary consequences" (Scott, 1985, p. 292).

At times, exceptional individual acts involve rejecting the carceral discourse of obtaining an early release on parole for "good behaviour." In the previous chapter under section 4.3.1, I

indicated that one strategy of prisoner resistance is not applying for parole and choosing to remain incarcerated until one's statutory release date⁸³ or two-thirds of the sentence, which is when CSC must release the individual (unless they have a life sentence or are designated as a 'dangerous offender'). In that discussion, I shared Jacob's (former prisoner) reflection that he chose to avoid an early release because he observed how people hoping for parole were mistreated by the system. Jacob elaborated on his line of reasoning by explaining, "I don't like having that power over me. So, I kind of wanted to... stay till my stat, you know, I don't want someone threatening me... it's sad that some people feel like they can't even advocate for themselves because they get reprimanded [and lose] privileges." Jacob *chose* a lengthier period of incarceration to mediate the power imbalance between himself and CSC, so he could self-advocate, but also advocate for and support other prisoners through his role on the Inmate Committee and via acts of mutual aid.

Other criminalized participants clarified that they had to challenge the system and self-advocate, despite the CSC's punitive response, because it was the only way to get released on parole when serving a life sentence. For example, Billie (former prisoner) explained how she navigated this carceral minefield:

I fought the system all the time. I would write grievances. I would send them right to regional. I would go to the higher ups. I would go right over the warden's head because there's not even any use going to the warden. So, I would go over the warden's head, go right to regional and I would grieve it. And if they didn't accept it, I would do it again. And if it was a really bad thing that they were trying to put on me, then I would get a lawyer from the street,

⁸³ According to the CCRA (S.C. 1992, c.20) section 127(3): "the statutory release date of an offender sentenced on or after November 1, 1992 to imprisonment for one or more offences is the day on which the offender completes two thirds of the sentence."

and I'd pay for it. Because I'm a lifer. I'm going to be in there forever if I don't fight or if I don't challenge them.

Billie's narrative illustrates the perseverance required to survive prison, and how incarcerated people mobilize the internal grievance system (despite its' ineffectiveness and the risk of repercussions), often escalating the process to involve costly lawyers and other legal advocates. This requires a great deal of resourcefulness and personal agency, akin to Bosworth's insight (1999, p. 127) that "the capacity to define oneself as an agent is crucial to surviving imprisonment." This necessity seems particularly critical for long-term prisoners such as people serving a life sentence. These findings are consistent with Munn and Bruckert's (2010) research with former long-term male prisoners who frequently challenged the boundaries of carceral power relations to gain a modicum of control, aiming to exert their agency within the existing legal framework.

Non-criminalized participants also observed how resilient prisoners were able to resist their confinement in the context of repressive power relations. A lawyer and prisoner advocate named Carrie (key informant) who has worked with people inside prisons designated for women across Canada for 15 years, exclaimed:

[Incarcerated people are] so resourceful, so incredibly resourceful. And then to be making these coherent, cogent, well-articulated, like brilliant, brilliant legal advocacy arguments...So, you've got those women who are like doing that nitty gritty work. And then you've got the women who've been fucked with, and I'm thinking of a couple of lifers as well. They've got lawyers on the outside, they're in it with them while they're facing shit because they're appealing a parole suspension and making [case] law with their lives, and they've got the strength to stand up while that's happening.

Carrie illustrates the intelligence and strength of incarcerated women and gender-diverse people who are willing to challenge the prison system within the parameters of the law, even though the criminal legal system is responsible for their imprisonment. These prisoners are mobilizing their

own experiences of injustice to fight for their freedom while essentially creating case law⁸⁴ that will improve conditions for others.

Carrie continues her narrative by explicating some of the barriers imprisoned people face when challenging the penal status quo via the grievance process.

We were talking about women having to fight hard, right?... To be able to recall the details, keep them recorded, not lose them. Put them in your grievance. Recall when your grievance is due. Then be able to escalate your grievance. Then be able to check in on your grievance because it's already fucking 90 days late and then be able to take the answer and appeal it and take that beyond [CSC] and write letters to members of Parliament and committees and the Correctional Investigator and the Canadian Human Rights Commission. To have those skills like, wow... To be able to do that while... you're trying to fucking survive, like that's insurmountable... And these women are figuring out how to [do this], where to find the law, the policy, where to find a fucking case law in an old, outdated library where it's not even open half the time, you know, while you've got guards stopping you.

The focused determination of resistant prisoners in the context of extremely limited choices and opportunities is evident in Carrie's quotation and is mirrored in Victoria Law's findings (2012, p. 14), where she writes that "despite fears of administrative reprisals and a lack of outside support, women in prison have found ways to individually and collectively challenge, resist and organize

⁸⁴ Some examples of Canadian case law that have been established and initiated by federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people include *Kavanagh v. Canada* (2001) and *Twins v. Canada* (2016). In light of *Kavanagh v. Canada* (2001), the court ruled that the CSC must consult with the Canadian Human Rights Commission to formulate a health service policy that accommodates the needs of trans prisoners. Additionally, the court ordered CSC to suspend s.31 of their health service policy which prohibits any access to sex reassignment surgery and create a new policy in collaboration with the CHRC. Considering *Twins v. Canada* (2016), the court ruled that *Gladue* (1999) principles must be applied to Indigenous people beyond sentencing and extend to parole decisions, including interpretation of the *CCRA*. Finally, this court ruling asserted that *Gladue* principles may be incorporated into principles of fundamental justice protected under s.7 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. It is important to note that both of these cases emerged from people serving life sentences.

around their conditions of confinement.” Another strategy of resistance that prisoners employ to challenge carceral conditions is through building solidarity and caring communities.

5.6. Solidarity and the Creation of Caring Communities: “*An ethic of care*”

Building on the findings outlined above, this discussion is now moving from the personal to the relational level of analysis. As I have mentioned previously, resilient prisoners resist the isolating nature of carceral systems by building solidarity and caring communities. Solidarity is an active, instrumental, task-oriented process based on emotional connections that require commitment and work, along with a recognition and respect for differences in the struggle for liberation (Ahmed, 2004; Freire, 1970/2018; Mathiesen, 2006; Medina, 2013; Rieger, 2017). As conceptualized in *Chapter 2*, prisoner solidarity involves the development of strong, supportive relationships, sometimes in collaboration with non-criminalized allies, to promote social justice and challenge carceral power. The ways in which solidarity is framed in the literature is consistent with how many criminalized people perceive this concept. For example, a former prisoner named Sofia defined solidarity in the following way: “when I think of solidarity, I think of everyone coming together for one common goal. I think of advocacy. I think of people standing up as a team, as a group. Standing up for misconceptions. Standing up [against] atrocities. You know, things that are not right.” Said differently, prisoners join in solidarity to fight injustice and resist their oppression. Key informant participants observed solidary practices in a similar manner; for example, Tori reflected that “every time there is a barrier, a challenge, a hurdle. When folks look for different ways around it, over it, under it. But they stick together until something shifts. That’s solidarity and that’s change.”

Framing solidarity as sticking together, overcoming barriers, and challenging injustice illustrates the intimate connection between solidarity and resistance within oppressed and marginalized communities. This symbiotic relationship should be evident from the discussion above concerning everyday acts of resistance in prison, which frequently involve mutual aid, advocacy, and the provision of practical and social supports, each of which are central to solidarity. Below, I highlight these actions in the context of prisoners' relational capacities and how these build meaningful social connections based on an ethic of care.

An ethic of care entails both a moral framework and a political idea, "that the practice of care describes the qualities necessary for [people] to live together well" (Tronto, 1993, p. 162). Care involves empathy or the ability to recognize and understand the suffering of people in need, along with a responsibility to provide care with openness and flexibility (Tronto, 1993). Furthermore, "an ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 174) namely, that *no one* should be intentionally harmed. Caring practices within carceral settings involve survival work and mutual aid. Where mutual aid is practiced it can produce "social spaces where people grow new solidarities... new ways of living where people get to create systems of care and generosity that address harm and foster well-being" (Spade, 2020, p. 2).

The dedicated compassion, empathy, and generosity among prisoners attempting to create caring communities is evident from Tiina's (former prisoner) remarks: "no matter what you're going through, when you know, a friend of yours, like something bad happens to them, you're able to show up for them and be there for them. So, you can be an excellent, excellent friend and support person in spite of the trauma that you're struggling with." Tiina underscores the relational capacities of people in prison who, in the face of ongoing trauma inflicted by the carceral state, support their peers in crisis with kindness and care. According to strength-based

Indigenous wellness models, a key aspect of healing involves practicing care and compassion for oneself, along with caring for all those we are in community with (Linklater, 2014). The caring capacities of criminalized people consist of “examples of kindness which can be not only supporting someone in a moment of crisis, but also an overarching commitment to *an ethic of care* so that’s how people show up day in, day out” (Fiona, key informant).

The on-going ethic of care practiced by incarcerated people through acts of mutual aid and the provision of practical, emotional, and social supports was often expressed via compassion. As Kerry (former prisoner) stated:

When I was pregnant, I was really sick and people that I didn’t know were able to take care of me... [Another prisoner who was a mother] was also in prison doing the same thing I was doing. It was very rewarding to see it and be close to that, she was taking care of me. So, I felt very, very well looked after then. I’m very, very grateful.

Kerry’s reflections showcase the importance of a caring community, especially during difficult times in an unsafe environment like prison, and the value of being around people who understand what you are going through. Kerry’s gratitude for having peer-support while she was pregnant facilitated her capacity to care for others, such as when she would cook meals for newly arrived prisoners. Living in a cooperative social context typically increases cooperative interactions within a group (Servigne & Chappelle, 2022). Additionally, relationships are deepened through the sharing of resources, along with “time, space, emotions, and labour” (Maynard & Simpson, 2023, p. 131). When people are under stress, facing the unknown, or experiencing a crisis, spontaneous acts of mutual aid emerge because “individuals rely on their past experience, which has shown them that helping each other was often the best strategy” to survive (Servigne & Chappelle, 2022, p. 52).

Another example of prisoners' solidary practices and their commitment to an ethic of care can be observed in a personal journal entry from February 5, 2017:

There's a woman in my living unit who told us a few days ago that she wanted to kill herself. She's a long-term prisoner with serious mental health issues, and she's clearly been depressed lately. When she informed some of us that she felt suicidal, we decided to make a plan to look after her together and advised her not to let any staff know how she was feeling. They don't help you, and if you're trying to hurt yourself, they just make it worse. The death of Terry Baker last year is still fresh in our minds. Anyone who has been in for a while knows what CSC's response will be. If they find out a prisoner has or is planning to hurt themselves, they'll take that person to an observation cell in seg, strap them to a table, and inject them with drugs. It's basically a fucking torture chamber. I saw it first-hand myself a few months ago. The wall is made of plexiglass so the guards can see in at all times, and the fluorescent lights are always on. When I was locked in the seg unit, at one point there was a prisoner strapped in a four-point restraint to a metal table for at least two days straight. This is the same unit where Ashley Smith died, where Terry Baker died, where too many people die.

We didn't want to see that happen to anyone again. So, we made a plan and coordinated to ensure someone was with her at all times. To just sit with her, listen, provide support, and ensure she didn't harm herself. For the past couple days, everyone in our unit took turns staying with her, even at night. Aside from count (when we have to be in our own cells), someone was always with her. When she showered, we'd sit outside the door and chat with her, checking in that she was okay. After a few days, she seems to be feeling much better. It was a difficult time of year for her. If we hadn't taken care of her and let the system deal with it, she could be dead.

This journal entry provides another case example of the harms of the carceral system as well as the dedication prisoners show in caring for one another. CSC's typical response in addressing prisoners' needs is often punitive, even in cases of self-harm (Kilty, 2014; Pollack, 1993, 2012). Incarcerated people rely on one another to survive this injustice through mutual aid practices which "directly meet people's survival needs, and are based on a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust" (Spade, 2020, p. 7).

Prisoners also exhibit a political commitment to supporting their peers with a generous and selfless dedication. For example, a formerly imprisoned woman named Tess expressed her allegiance to prisoner solidarity by explicating her sociopolitical values.

I never like selfishness. So, rather than using my voice to raise information about my own [wrongful conviction] case, I just found it more important to talk about the problems of everybody being in prison... I always just think if you stick up for other people, then other people will stick up for you. Or it wasn't a moral possibility to see that kind of suffering and not do anything.

The intersection of mutual care, solidarity, and resistance among incarcerated women in the context of nurturing political advocacy for imprisoned survivors of gendered violence has recently been illuminated by feminist scholars (Klein, 2024). The horrors of incarceration are not readily apparent to people who have not had contact with the carceral system. Prisoners experience and witness widespread suffering behind prison walls, which can be a transformative experience and can mobilize people to action. The resiliency required to survive imprisonment often necessitates resistance and solidarity, which can result in a lifelong commitment to prisoner justice. This dedication was exemplified by Billie (former prisoner) who shared that she wants to “keep helping others and trying to fight the system and change the system so other people behind us will have an easier time. So, they don't have to go through what we've gone through to be out... my goal, is to make people's lives a little easier.” These findings related to prisoners' steadfast dedication to ending harm and suffering in carceral settings by mobilizing their own experiences are consistent with Dean Spade's (2020, p. 15) insight that “solidarity and an ever-expanding commitment to justice emerge from contact with the complex realities of injustice.”

A final example of how prisoners build solidarity and caring communities, is through prisoner-led actions to raise awareness and challenge systemic oppression, such as PJD, along with the development of prisoner-led programs. Tess (former prisoner) underscored the significance of self-determination for incarcerated people in building caring communities: “definitely, across all of the programs that I think were led by us were really helpful to us surviving and building climates of solidarity and support for one another.” Along with the



Image 7: A group of prisoners pose in front of a rainbow mural at an annual Pride event in the prison gym, demonstrating their solidarity. The prisoners are clearly happy and enjoying the event. June 2016.

prisoner-led music program and W2B, other examples include the Native Sisterhood which began at P4W, the Lifers' group, Black Women of Diversity, and the 2SLGBTQ+ for Change group that began in GVI in 2015.

These groups were initiated and led by prisoners who aim to build solidarity. Many of these groups organize special events inside prison, such as the annual Pride event. The positive psychosocial impacts of prisoner-led

programs can be observed in *Image 7* where

a group of prisoners are posing in front of a huge mural at the Pride event and are clearly very happy. It is important to note that incarcerated women and gender-diverse people fought for years to establish this group, and there are now 2SLGBTQ+ for Change groups in five federal prisons designated for women (CAEFS, Personal communication, 2024a).

Tess (former prisoner) explained the value of prisoner initiated and facilitated programs:

Because you've got the prison staff telling you that you're a piece of shit and isolating you and not letting you share and instilling you with social practices that will harm you and then harm society. And then in those spaces, you were communicating and being with other people in a way that was not only good for you, but then also good for a society where people are empathetic and care about each other. Like, you know, you have people collaborating, co-decision making, co-learning, working [together].

Prisoner-led programs demonstrate solidarity among incarcerated people and are resistant to carceral logics and practices that diminish, isolate, and harm people. Tess's reflections indicate that prisoner-led program spaces, where imprisoned people can build their caring capacities

through collaboration and shared decision-making, are rare in the penal environment which tends to punish acts of care, because “the state sees communal care as an ideological threat” (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 32). Tess’s comments also suggest the positive implications of these collaborative spaces for building caring communities beyond prison walls.

The significance of people with lived expertise working in solidarity to mediate the harms of the carceral system was also observed by key informants. For example, Cookie who has worked with incarcerated women and gender-diverse people for over three decades, asserted:

It’s a different thing when the folks with the lived experience do the organizing, whatever the organizing is, whether it’s meet in the park for sandwiches, whatever it is. But the conversation goes in certain directions and through conversation ideas emerge. Whether that’s about resistance or advocacy or just regular social support. But it comes from the people with the lived experience. And I can’t stress that enough as being the key.

Prisoner organizing and solidary actions, including peer-support, mutual aid, and advocacy, are essential strategies for surviving the harms of imprisonment and challenges of community re-entry (Davis & Fayter, 2020; Deakin & Spencer, 2011; Klein, 2024; Law, 2012; Pollack, 2008, 2009b). By mobilizing their strengths and capacity for solidarity and resistance, incarcerated people develop relational resilience, positioning them to better overcome adversity through their collective power.

5.7. Relational Resiliency: “*Women are very resilient...especially when they stick together*”

Since people do not develop the individual strengths typically associated with resilience (such as those highlighted at the beginning of this chapter) in isolation from their sociocultural environment (Hartling, 2008), a more expansive framing of this concept includes “relational dynamics that encourage the capacity for connection” (Jordan, 1992, p. 1). Relational resilience

therefore emerges by developing people's capacity to build healthy connections with others, such as through the creation of caring communities and solidarity practices among prisoners and non-criminalized allies. While solidarity is an active process, relational resilience is a characteristic people possess as the outcome of solidarity practices and the development of caring communities. As Hartling (2008, p.69) emphasizes, "strengthening resilience is all about relationships." Basically, relational resilience is the notion that *we are stronger together*. The essence of this concept was expressed by Billie (former prisoner) who noted, "we are very resilient and very strong for dealing with everything. It's true, women are very resilient and very strong, especially when they stick together."

Developing meaningful relationships in a carceral setting can be challenging. This difficulty is linked to histories of trauma and the subsequent erosion of trust that many incarcerated people experience, along with the isolating nature of prison where restricting social connections is part of the system's punitive logic. Despite these barriers, people in prisons designated for women establish relational resilience through their proximity to people from diverse backgrounds when they are grounded in a mutually empathic relationship that seeks to understand and honour each other's struggles. The resilient capacities of prisoners to cultivate joy and build meaningful connections with others in such an oppressive environment can be surprising to people who have never been imprisoned. Lisa Guenther (key informant) reflected on this key learning:

Before I started volunteering in prison and with former prisoners in the P4W Memorial Collective, I imagined prison as this unrelentingly bad and violent and horrible place of suffering. And structurally, it is that. Like, it's designed in that way. But what I didn't realize was the amazing creative capacity of people to create and sustain a sense of life and joy and love and beauty in that place. That's what I've learned from people who have an experience of incarceration, from women in particular.

Lisa's comments illustrate incarcerated people's strength and determination to maintain their humanity and wellbeing in a space that is designed to inflict punishment and suffering. Central to sustaining one's humanity and building relational resilience is one's creative capacities to endure a sense of life, love, joy, and beauty within dark prison corridors. Mobilizing life-giving joy and love is essential to our collective liberation because, "the moment we choose to LOVE we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to LOVE we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others" (hooks, 1994, p. 298). In a place like prison where systemic violence and ongoing trauma is the norm, relational resilience is a salient concept because "healing from trauma is not an individual project, but a communal process" (Theisen-Womersley, 2021, p. 129). Furthermore, the creation and maintenance of solidarity is essential to developing resilience, "given the importance of social support and material resources for one's sense of safety" (Jane Addams Collective, 2019, p. 18).

Criminalized participants expressed the value of relational connections to surviving prison. A former prisoner named Brielle shared how the people she was incarcerated with helped to alleviate the boredom and monotony of prison life: "honestly, there's nothing to do, right? So, part of it is your interactions, the friends, the people you meet, how you connect with them and how you guys pass time together, really. You got a good group of girls that you live with, or you hang around with, it just makes it a lot easier." Brielle's experience highlights the importance of meaningful social connections and friendships in prison. Her remarks also indicate that the quality of one's social supports matter. This is critical in a penal environment because "in a state of stress, personal vulnerability increases as does the need to enter a more supportive relationship" (Jordan, 1992, p. 4). The significance of having quality supports to help mediate stress and vulnerability can be observed in Jacob's (former prisoner) narrative:

Being at [prison], like just being around all women and stuff, it made me realize that I was never a woman and that I never considered, like, I didn't know anything about being transgender until we started getting transwomen there and stuff like that... I just know I felt uncomfortable... I always say that that was a huge piece to my inner freedom. It was the people there, the women there. When I think of supports, I tend to think of women, right? Because that's kind of where I transitioned. And to me it was around mostly women. And I find just having that support and stuff like that and then of course battling my identity with the system and feeling like, you know, that was very challenging for me. I'm so grateful that I had so much support from the people inside.

Jacob's experience of learning about transgender people and transitioning in a prison designated for women, underscores the importance of positive social supports when someone is going through challenging life circumstances. His reflections also indicate the connections between personal strengths, social relations, and systemic oppression. While Jacob was incarcerated and "battling" the system to respect and honour his gender identity, his sense of "inner freedom" was enabled by the supportive relationships he established with other prisoners. Indeed, building meaningful social connections and growth-fostering relationships can facilitate people's ability to grow through and beyond adversity (Hartling, 2008).

Another former prisoner, Sofia, likewise discussed the supportive, empathic nature of women in prison and how this assisted her to cope with hardship.

I think through their stories and their adversity... You're learning through people's eyes and their experiences versus what you can read or what someone tells you. I think that women naturally are more maternal and more caring, and so they tend to help one another in that aspect. They don't want you to repeat the same things that they went through if it was a bad experience. I think that the nurturing side of women tends to help people adjust to a really shitty situation and helps you kind of get through it as best as you can... I think that those types of characteristics really are the characteristics that help. At least for me, that's what helped me get through the more difficult times.

Sofia's reflections suggest that her personal growth and capacity to cope with the challenges of imprisonment were directly linked to the caring support system she developed amongst prisoners

she spent time with. Sofia also highlights the value of relational learning and sharing stories or experiences to help others navigate challenges and overcome adversity. Storytelling and narratives are relational tools that support critical engagement and creative healing solutions within harmful environments and social structures (Klein, 2024; Theisen-Womersley, 2021).

Sofia continues her narrative by expanding on how storytelling and making connections to people from diverse backgrounds facilitated her growth and resilience.

People come from different walks of life and their minds are not all the same and they're not coming from the same place, you know what I mean? So, actually spending time with women and learning their stories, I mean, I honestly came out of there a much better person, I have to say, not because of the prison, but because of the women I spent time with...I think they're my lifeline, honestly. From a personal, psychological, mental, spiritual, physical, financial, and every way, shape, or form. They were my main support system and still are in that aspect.

Anishinaabe scholar Renee Linklater (2014) discusses how Indigenous wellness models (as opposed to Western medical models) highlight the strengths and resiliency of people using a wholistic approach, considering spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental aspects of the person's identity. Linklater (2014, p. 25) asserts that, resilience is "the ability to withstand trauma and turmoil and be able to proceed with living and engaging in a productive life." This involves looking beyond the self to our relationships with other people, communities, and all aspects of life as we seek to understand our place and purpose in this world. Although not every incarcerated person experiences the high level of care amongst their fellow prisoners that these examples illustrate, these findings are consistent with Jordan's (1992) assertion that the quality of one's social supports can lead to greater connection and mutual growth. More specifically, resilience can be bolstered "through engagement in relationships that enhance one's intellectual

development, sense of worth, sense of competence, sense of empowerment, and, most importantly, sense of connection” (Hartling, 2008, p. 51).

Meaningful social supports and resilience in prisoners are clearly interrelated. Relational resilience develops through prisoner solidarity and the creation of caring communities which can support incarcerated people’s capacity to effect change on a larger scale.

5.8. Concluding Comments: Fostering Prisoner Resilience to Build Transformative and Healing Justice Praxis

This chapter explored the key actions and characteristics that constitute prisoner resiliency at the individual and relational levels of analysis, including personal agency, strengths that promote coping and healing, hope in the face of adversity, resistance, solidarity, and relational resilience. Each of these concepts are necessary for developing resilience, and they are characteristics of resilient prisoners. The capacity for resilience to develop among incarcerated people is circumscribed by their sociopolitical context and the extent and nature of the harms of the carceral state. For these reasons, mutual aid, social connections, and meaningful supports from within and outside carceral settings are essential to prisoner resilience and building inclusive, caring communities. Indeed, relational connections were a common thread woven throughout these strength-based findings. Furthermore, enhancing collective care is fundamental to prisoner solidarity and resistance. This expansive view of resiliency beyond the individual-level demonstrates how strengths can develop in the context of oppressive power relations based on incarcerated people’s sociocultural environment.

The findings outlined in this chapter illustrate the interdependent, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing nature of the key concepts mobilized in this study. Reflecting on these

findings in relation to my conceptual framework outlined in *Chapter 2*, along with the resiliency pyramid (*Figure 2*), perhaps a better image or metaphor would be a tapestry, quilt, or web to show the interconnecting features and cyclical interaction of prisoner resilience and HTJ⁸⁵. The notion of resilience is central to promoting transformative social change that conceives of justice as healing. As Cara Page and Erica Woodland (2023, p. 152) assert:

Resilience is a key healing justice practice; it's not only surviving or *bouncing back* from the harms caused by our current socioeconomic systems. Resilience *is about taking the time and committing ourselves in our work to the project of building enough bandwidth to feel what bleak possibilities are in front of us, without withering our relationship to joy, possibility, and purpose and to making meaning.* (emphasis in original)

Page and Woodland's (2023) reflections suggest that people's capacity to survive adversity and heal from trauma offers a baseline understanding of resilience as it relates to healing justice. Building resilience is essential to HTJ and perceiving oppressed individuals and communities as sources of agency, rather than trauma because "*how you manage your agency in crisis really affects how much you are traumatized*" (Gallant, 2020, p. 197, emphasis in original). In dealing with crisis people must manage their own reactions, the overall situation, and the source of the crisis (Gallant, 2020), whether this involves structural disadvantages, interpersonal violence, systemic harms, or natural disasters. As this project's findings have revealed, resilience also

⁸⁵ These concepts do not always have a unidirectional cumulative impact, and can be framed at the individual, relational, and collective levels of analysis (which I also discuss in *Chapter 2*). Testing this conceptual framework in relation to the data was not the goal of this research, but as I mobilized it for my analysis, I found that the connections among the concepts were more complicated than I had initially anticipated. I am not sure how I could effectively illustrate this in a graphic design. I think further research would be required to specifically examine the interrelationship and mutually reinforcing aspects of these concepts as they relate to HTJ.

entails collective caring, a dedicated commitment to challenging carceral power structures, and finding a sense of meaning or purpose in the struggle towards liberation and abolitionist futures. In the final analysis chapter, I extend this discussion to consider how criminalized women and gender diverse people engage in more collective forms of resistance and how they work together to try to foster radical social change and healing transformative justice praxis.

Chapter 6. Resisting the Punitive Carceral State: Stumbling Towards Healing and Transformative Justice

The previous chapter outlined the key characteristics of resilient prisoners, many of which are central to HTJ praxis. Supporting and fostering incarcerated people's strengths that promote coping and healing, facilitating their agentic capacities for resistance to oppression based on an ethic of care and radical solidarity through active, critical hope coincides with the distinguishing features of HTJ as presented in *Chapter 2 (Table 1)*. Moving from the individual and relational levels of analysis as discussed in the previous chapter, I now turn to the collective level to explore criminalized women and gender diverse people's potential to contribute to radical social change through collective resistance, political agency, and healing transformative justice praxis.

This chapter begins by examining collective acts of resistance, which involve larger scale group organizing that aims to challenge carceral harms and improve conditions for future prisoners. As current and former prisoners enhance their personal and relational resilience by demonstrating their agentic capacities within the restrictive prison environment and resisting carceral oppression, their political agency develops. Political agency provides women and gender diverse people with opportunities to effect change within the lives of other criminalized and incarcerated people. Finally, in resistance to the punitive carceral state, current and former prisoners engage in transformative and healing justice practices out of necessity and survival. Many of these practices were discussed in the previous chapter (e.g., care work and mutual aid, solidary practices, acts of resistance, mobilizing strengths, building hope by finding meaning or purpose through struggle). Most of these prisoners' acts of resistance, political agency, solidarity, and strength-based practices discussed in *Chapters 5 and 6* offer short-term solutions to the

harms of the carceral state. However, short-term reformist work contributes to abolitionist struggles by reducing carceral power, challenging harmful conditions of confinement, and improving conditions for future prisoners without expanding or further enhancing the legitimacy of the system. Carceral abolition is a long-term, revolutionary vision that requires targeted, continuously shaping or ‘unfinished’ short-term goals as steps on a path towards abolition, across “unbuilt ground” as we “transition to something which is unknown” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 59). If the long-term goal is abolition, “short-term goals should also have an abolitionist stance and ‘negate’ the system rather than be ‘positive’ and build the system” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 23). However, as long as prisons exist, it is “important to try to provide a more decent life for prisoners,” such as improved health care, educational opportunities, humane living conditions, increased temporary releases and visitation, and an expansion of prisoners’ rights (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 24), each of which were suggested by study participants.

An abolitionist vision is about creating a “restructured society in a world where we have everything we need” and developing approaches “where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it” (Kaba, 2021, p. 2). A key strategy for the abolitionist struggle is implementing “non-reformist” reforms, which “is not geared to whatever is possible within the framework of a given system, but to that which should be realizable in view of human demands and needs” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 25). A central human need is to belong to a community based on trust and reciprocal care, where everyone has “a role to play, so that there’s an equal feeling of belonging” (Cullors, 2021, p. 220). Since prisons are designed to isolate, punish, and inflict pain, building community in prison is a revolutionary act. Creating abolitionist spaces means being in a place where we are cared for. By practicing care, we create spaces to practice safety (Cullors, 2021). Valuing interpersonal

relationships chips away at carceral logics that are isolating and dehumanizing. As Patrisse Cullors (2021, p. 233) reminds us, “interpersonal relationships are important because they are how we build our communities, and healthy connections to other human beings help build strong societies.” The abolitionist struggle is inherently relational and requires a collective response.

Social transformation starts with transforming ourselves. Reflecting on adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy* text, Cullors (2021, p. 105) discerns that abolitionists must “practice at the most personal level what we want to see at the systemic level. This is where the most powerful transformation begins – how we move toward right relationships with our families, friends and community.” In what follows, I present key examples that illuminate the role resilient prisoners can have in the promotion of HTJ and participants’ ideas for transformative change on the road to abolitionist futures, “rooted in our collective healing” (Cullors, 2021, p. 87).

6.1. Collective Exceptional Acts of Resistance: “*We just need the power of our voices*”

To cope with the poor living conditions in a punitive environment, prisoners either adapt to (i.e., prisonization) or resist carceral policies and practices (Ross, 2009). As outlined in the previous chapter, exceptional acts of resistance refer to consciously disruptive, organized, cooperative actions that can have political or transformative implications (Rubin, 2015; Scott, 1985). Key examples of collective exceptional acts of resistance that emerged from this project include prisoner organizing to improve conditions inside prison through petitions, direct actions mainly in the form of peaceful protests, participatory defense campaigns, group grievances, and human rights complaints.

Formerly incarcerated participants shared their organizing strategies to challenge penal authorities concerning the conditions of confinement. One successful tactic that prisoners employed was gathering signatures for petitions, such as when demanding healthier and culturally appropriate food and canteen items. As Kerry (former prisoner) recalls:

I remember when we wanted different food at Food Services, and everybody was going around signing a petition for that food and we got it. So yeah, I mean we learn that as women we can work together no matter the situation and get what we want. We don't need anything else. We just need the power of our voices.

Kerry's recollection of imprisoned people's resistance against carceral logics that frame prisoners as "undeserving" of healthy and diverse food options illustrates how collective self-determination among prisoners can be empowering. By successfully collaborating to improve access to alternative food items, prisoners experienced the power of solidarity in action.

Although conceding to prisoner demands concerning food options might be considered a small win, through witnessing prisoners' collective strength Kerry learned that by working together to raise their voices, incarcerated people can leverage power and demand more from the carceral state. Prisoner organizing can be empowering because "when we experience a taste of collective power, our courage will grow, as we recognize that we are stronger together and that we are not alone" (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 33). When prisoners experience success in their resistance efforts, they can gain confidence in their ability to effect change by building collective self-determination, facilitating their capacity to make further demands. Moreover, engaging in prisoner solidarity campaigns strengthens the abolitionist struggle from behind prison walls, potentially leading imprisoned organizers along a "pathway to greater involvement in the movement" (Herzing & Piché, 2024, p. 39).

Likewise, participants described engaging in peaceful protests as a form of direct action; for example, refusing to return to their living units for lock-up during non-movement times and count. This (in)action is risky and requires a collective response because if too few prisoners are involved, the guards will simply charge the resistant individuals and take them to segregation. An example of this tactic was provided by a formerly incarcerated woman named Tiina:

There was one time, it was before a Family Day⁸⁶. Someone got like a pretty small [disciplinary] charge, like a minor charge. And were told that they wouldn't be able to attend Family Day. And so, we all sat in the gym. We're like, "No, we are not going back to our units until this person can see their family tomorrow."

The Family Day socials are a special occasion that prisoners look forward to since they have an opportunity to spend time with their loved ones. These events are typically scheduled during a weekday, so visiting family members often must take time off work to attend. If the family lives a far enough distance from the prison, they are likely going to have to pay for hotel accommodations for at least one night. Due to the disruption families experience when a loved one is incarcerated and the challenges of maintaining connections, family members of incarcerated people are sometimes referred to as "hidden victims...of the criminal justice system who are neither acknowledged nor given a platform to be heard" (Martin, 2017). Moreover, "having an incarcerated family member affects multiple domains of life, including economic hardship, family dynamics, and emotional well-being" (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014, p. 46).

⁸⁶ Family Day refers to a social event that typically happens two or more times a year in federal penitentiaries, where prisoners' families can visit for most of the day rather than a two-hour time limit. This is particularly important to those whose families live far away. These socials occur in common areas of the prison instead of the visitation room and families can share a meal together, which is paid for from Inmate Committee funds.

The forced separation of family members and intimate partners due to incarceration creates colossal strains on these relationships, altering family dynamics and often ending relationships (Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2005). When a prisoner is suddenly informed that they cannot participate in the event, this can add further disruption to their familial relationships.

Additionally, if the family has already travelled to be in the area and the incarcerated person they are visiting receives a charge and is prevented from seeing them, it is a big financial loss for the family. Tiina's reflection illustrates how prisoners challenge the CSC's capacity to restrict access to their families as a form of punishment.

A peaceful sit-in to resist carceral harms is critical to prisoner solidarity, regardless of its' success because the individual(s) being punished recognize that their peers are supporting them. This point was mentioned by a formerly incarcerated person named Jay who shared: "once when we were [sent to] seg in [prison], when we were [with the] Inmate Committee, they [other prisoners] did like a little peaceful protest outside of seg, which is cool." Jay is referring to an action that I was present for, whereby a group of prisoners organized a peaceful sit-in to protest the solitary confinement of two well-liked, effective Inmate Committee members, for no apparent reason. As documented in *Chapter 4*, prisoner solidarity and resistance are punished. Many prisoners agree that the Inmate Committee program has been institutionally co-opted (e.g., prison administration controls the use of Inmate Committee funds, which are donated by prisoners, inhibits advocacy, and restricts prisoner initiatives) and is not as autonomous as it was in the past. For example, a formerly incarcerated woman named Alice, who spent almost a decade in prison and served on the Inmate Committee at one time shared her reflections about this so-called democratically elected prisoner led group.

I wouldn't call Inmate Committee prisoner led, or prisoner run any more. I found that to be a really contentious space...it's like how effective it is to get stuff done with the management, I found questionable...many prisons too now, I think across the board, the qualifications of who could be Inmate Committee⁸⁷ really preclude most people from being able to [run for office]. So, if you were running [for Inmate Committee] and they [CSC] thought that you would be effective, they would find a reason to charge you and then you would no longer be eligible. So, I feel like that's the erosion of democratic structures in Canadian prisons.

Alice's thoughts about and experiences with the Inmate Committee illustrate how many incarcerated people are disillusioned with the efficacy of this forum to facilitate changes and improve the conditions of confinement for the prisoner population they serve.

Inmate Committee members who advocate and fight for meaningful change to support their fellow prisoners, can be targeted by the penal authorities through disciplinary charges⁸⁸, involuntary transfers, and/or false allegations made by "reliable sources" to stifle their positive impact. Alice elaborates on her narrative by sharing, "when I was [on the] Inmate Committee, somebody lied about me and then said that I assaulted somebody and then I had to spend all these weeks in seg and then like I was fired." In the case shared by Jay and Alice, false

⁸⁷ According to Commissioner's Directive 083: Inmate Committees, section 15 – Criteria to serve on the Inmate Committee, "any inmate is eligible to be a candidate for the Inmate Committee who: (b) has been residing at the institution for at least three consecutive months within the last year prior to the date of the elections; (c) has at least four months to serve prior to their release date or, if known, approved transfer date; (d) has not resided at the Special Handling Unit during the past six months; (e) is compliant with their Correctional Plan; (f) is not a member of or associated with a...Security Threat Group" (CSC, 2023a).

⁸⁸ According to Commissioner's Directive 083: Inmate Committees, section 38 - Criteria for Dismissal, "The Institutional Head may dismiss a member of the Inmate Committee where: (a) the committee member's activities pose a threat to the safety and security of the institution, staff, inmates or the public; and (c) the committee member fails to adhere to their Correctional Plan or demonstrates behaviour that is inconsistent with their Correctional Plan" (CSC, 2023a). As documented in the previous chapter, correctional plans are created from an institutional perspective of prisoners' perceived needs and risks; institutional paperwork can be falsified, and the CSC has "discretionary power" to alter prisoners' security classification. Additionally, penal authorities often perceive any disciplinary charges as posing "a threat to the safety and security of the institution".

allegations were made against the chair and vice-chair of the Inmate Committee to justify removing them from office and locking them in segregation. To protest this injustice, approximately 30-35 prisoners participated in a sit-in outside of the segregation unit and refused to lock up or return to their units, demanding that the two Inmate Committee members who were being segregated be released. Many involved in this peaceful protest received disciplinary charges. One of the prisoners was released from segregation a couple weeks later and the other was transferred to the maximum-security unit. Although this action had limited success, Jay felt supported by his fellow prisoners.

A final example of a peaceful prisoner protest was provided by Jacob (former prisoner):

When Terry Baker had passed away, I remember a bunch of people made signs and stuff like that and just kind of walked around. But I remember everyone saying that we could potentially get in trouble for that, you know? And I just found that very odd. It's like, okay, we're grieving someone who passed away, and she passed away in segregation. Meanwhile, we have no idea what happened to her. And like, how do you pass away in segregation? So, I remember we were just walking around the compound, but the fear of like, we could get in trouble for this. And I just found that very odd because we're just honoring someone.

The lack of transparency and accountability by CSC to accept responsibility for deaths in custody, is an added layer of trauma for prisoners. When Terry Baker died by suicide in 2016 while in solitary confinement, the entire prison was locked down. Initially, we had no idea what was going on, which heightened anxiety. CSC staff went to each living unit to inform us that Terry had died, without any explanation. We were also told that we could not contact the Correctional Investigator, CAEFS, or the media to speak about this tragedy. Restricting prisoners from contacting an outside advocate or members of the media is in clear violation of our *Charter*

*Rights*⁸⁹ and violates our right to make a complaint to the Correctional Investigator (CAEFS, 2008, p. 80). Once the lockdown was lifted, many prisoners wanted to share their grief together and protest the harmful treatment of people with mental health issues, as Jacob described above. These examples of solidarity and peaceful protests could be framed as “a resistance of desperation”, which Angela Davis (1990, p. 52) describes as being designed as a sort of protective mechanism “to shield themselves from the open and covert terror designed to break their spirits”.

When peaceful protests and other collective actions are unsuccessful in addressing carceral harms, prisoners must work in solidarity with legal advocates and allies outside the system. One strategy that prisoners employ are participatory defence campaigns, which involves “efforts to pressure authorities, [to] attend to prisoner needs, and raise awareness” (Kaba, 2021, p. 110) about the harms of the system. While these campaigns are typically aimed at releasing individuals from prison and are often mobilized through grassroots efforts in the community, incarcerated people can likewise organize to garner legal support so prisoners can defend their rights and meet their needs outside prison walls. A former prisoner named Billie explained how a woman with an undiagnosed neurological condition was neglected by CSC health services, which forced prisoners to seek help outside the system.

I was in a house with someone that had a lot of seizures. Nobody knew why, because she just started having seizures. They [CSC] never sent her to the hospital for, like, fucking six months, you know? And she was kind of like losing her mind. She didn't know how to play cards after a while and forgot

⁸⁹ According to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) section 2(b), everyone in Canada (including prisoners) has a fundamental “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication.”

people's names. And they didn't send her because they thought she was on drugs and that's why she was having seizures. But the poor girl, she was from England. She had no family here, you know, to help her, to fight for her, to go out to the hospital to get checked. Because when a nurse says, "oh, she's just doing drugs or whatever, there's no reason for her to have seizures," you know, because she just started having them. So finally, the girls got together and got a lawyer, and they got her out to the hospital and then they found out there was something wrong inside her brain.

Inadequate healthcare within prisons designated for women is well-documented in the literature, and prisoners report that they need to be assertive to even access necessary healthcare (Pollack, 2009b). For example, each *Office of the Correctional Investigator Annual Report* from 2010-2021 has included sections critiquing the CSC's healthcare services and providing recommendations for change, often focusing specifically on problems inherent to women's institutions. Billie's example is representative of common healthcare issues raised by incarcerated people and their advocates and illustrates why criminalized people may come to have a general mistrust of healthcare service providers. Namely, they experience unprofessional staff conduct, a lack of gender-specific services, lack of confidentiality, denial of medications, and prisoners with severe diagnoses often wait years to see specialists (Anonymous Prisoner 2, 2017; Besney, Angel, Pyne, Martell, Keenan, & Ahmed, 2018; CAEFS, 2022; CHRC, 2003; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Pollack, 2009b; Sapers, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2016; Zinger, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021). Until human caging is no longer a reality, prisoners ought to have access to health services in the community, by getting temporary passes to appointments, at least for annual check-ups and specialists. Billie's narrative above provides a case example that illustrates the deficiency of CSC health services, the need for access to community healthcare, and the importance of prisoner solidarity work.

A final example of prisoners' collective resistance efforts described by my study participants involves filing group grievances, class-action lawsuits, and human rights complaints,

a finding that is consistent with Victoria Law's (2012) research. A key informant and legal advocate named Carrie discussed how imprisoned women and gender-diverse people collaborate to challenge carceral oppression through these legal avenues.

I've seen many examples of group grievances where women come together because they're like, if one of us complains about this very serious issue, it might fall on our heads. But if all of us do it together, that sort of spreads it out. And you know, leveraging their contacts outside, like copying the Correctional Investigator, copying the Senate, copying EFry to make sure there's other oversight as well...I think it was the Black Women of Diversity group that wanted to do the human rights complaint. And that was about all Black women, that was about our hair care products on our canteen. And we get designated as gangs at higher rates and we experience these other systemic issues. And we're going to challenge this not just for us women who are here now, but for the women who come after us.

Carrie's narrative indicates that imprisoned people are aware of the failures inherent to the grievance process. Prison administrators rarely take internal grievances seriously. Their response is often indifference or punitive, as documented in *Chapter 4* and other studies of women's imprisonment (CHRC, 2003; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Horri, Parkes, & Pate, 2006; Law, 2012; Pollack, 2009b). Group grievances can positively impact penal practices or prompt "prison officials to change policy before a court or outside agency can order them to do so" (Law, 2012, p. 114). When internal grievances prove ineffective, prisoners escalate the process by seeking outside support to challenge their conditions of confinement, such as appealing to the Canadian Human Rights Commission⁹⁰. Carrie's comments above demonstrate how resistant prisoners

⁹⁰ For example, the CHRC (2003) published their findings from a "broadly based review of the treatment of federally sentenced women on the basis of gender, race and disability" (p.7). This investigation was conducted after the CHRC was approached in 2001 by CAEFS, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Canadian Bar Association, the Assembly of First Nations, the National Association of Women and the Law, along with several other organizations. This 92-page report offered 19 recommendations concerning how the Government of Canada, and the CSC

challenge carceral harms to improve conditions for all incarcerated women and gender-diverse people, which is also an example of political agency.

6.2. Political Agency: “*It’s like lifting the veil of oppression*”

Political agency refers to the capacity for someone to participate in a collective exercise of political power. Agency is constituted by a reciprocal interaction between internal psychological factors and external sociopolitical conditions, whereby political agency “provides the context in which *subjective* agency evolves” (Pollack, 2000, p. 83, emphasis in original). For this project, political agency entails mobilizing opportunities to effect change within criminalized and incarcerated people’s lives. However, “the more a person is isolated from other people [such as in prison], the more her political agency diminishes” (Sanchini, Pongiglione & Sala, 2019, p. 10). Social context and relationships are therefore central to understanding how people experience and build their capacity to exercise personal and political agency (Pollack, 2000).

Implementing political agency is not an individual pursuit, but involves practices carried out within solidarity networks (Venditti, 2019). The ability to effect sociopolitical change in the lives of other criminalized people is an act of resistance against the carceral state requiring various strengths, hope, solidarity, and relational resilience. Key examples of participants

specifically, ought to change various policies and practices regarding the treatment of FSW to comply with the principles outlined in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. Like the annual recommendations provided by the *OCI*, the *CHRC* lacks enforcement power to implement these changes. A more recent and relatively successful example of the *CHRC*’s work involves a collaboration with the CSC and Prisoners’ Legal Services following Parliament’s change to the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, adding “gender identity or expression” to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination (CHRC, 2018). This collaboration resulted in policy changes concerning how federally-sentenced transgender and gender-diverse prisoners are accommodated (see Commissioner’s Directive 100 – Gender Diverse Offenders, CSC, 2022).

exercising their political agency include strategic voting campaigns, addressing human rights violations, advocacy, political education, and facilitating structural analyses among other prisoners to question power relations.

The regressive reforms implemented by Stephen Harper's Conservative government (from 2006-2015) had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of federally sentenced people. Some of these harms have been documented by people in prisons designated for women and published in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (see for example Acoby, 2011; Glaremin, 2011; Fayter, 2016; Fayter & Payne, 2017). The legislative and policy changes introduced in Bill C-10 *Safe Streets and Communities Act*⁹¹ and the *Deficit Reduction Action Plan*⁹² by the Conservatives in 2012 as part of their "tough on crime" agenda were particularly concerning and impacted my carceral experience directly as I was imprisoned from 2013-2017. As a result of this agenda,

⁹¹ Bill C-10 *Safe Streets and Communities Act* received royal assent in 2012 and implemented hundreds of policy changes, including amendments to the *Criminal Code*, the *CCRA*, and the *Criminal Records Act*. These reforms included introducing mandatory minimum sentences for various sexual convictions; mandatory minimum sentences for drug-related convictions and increased maximum sentences for certain drug trafficking convictions; new exceptions to eligibility for conditional sentences served in the community; and increased restrictions on applying for pardons (now termed "record suspensions"), by extending the ineligibility period and making certain convictions ineligible for a record suspension. Additionally, in March 2011, the Conservatives successfully passed two key crime bills which greatly impacted federally sentenced people. Bill C-59 *Abolition of Early Parole Act* abolished Accelerated Parole Review (APR) which entitled first-time, non-violent "offenders" a chance at early release after serving 1/6 of their sentence. Since I was initially arrested in April 2011 on the charges that eventually sent me to federal prison, and this first-time conviction was non-violent, the loss of APR resulted in me serving a lengthier period of incarceration. Bill S-6 repealed the *Faint Hope Clause* from the *Criminal Code*. Before this legislation was repealed, people serving a life sentence with a parole eligibility period of more than 15 years could apply for a judicial review in the hope to gain permission from the court to apply for early parole. Under this new legislation, if parole is denied for prisoners serving a life sentence, they must wait five years to reapply instead of the previous two-year waiting period. Some of the impacts of this "tough on crime" strategy for prisoners includes overcrowded prisons and jails, federal prisoners being kept in custody past their release eligibility dates, and increased barriers to community re-entry based on a lack of supports and resources, increased stigma, and criminal records checks (Comack, Fabre, & Burgher, 2015). Additionally, between 2005-2015 the number of FSW increased by 77 percent (Sapers, 2015, p. 2).

⁹² The *Deficit Reduction Action Plan* was introduced as part of the federal budget in 2012. Some key aspects related to federal imprisonment consisted of increasing prisoners' payment costs for room and board; increasing costs to prisoners (and their families) for telephone use; and eliminating the incentive pay for prisoners working in CORCAN facilities.

prisoners across Canada mobilized to organize a strategic voting campaign for the 2015 federal election aimed at removing this government from power. A formerly incarcerated woman named Kerry recounts this prisoner solidarity work.

There was a time where the Prime Minister [Stephen Harper] was trying to mess around, and so the *Cell Count* [newsletter] came out, which is like a book that goes around to all the jails federally and provincially. And during the federal election, it was discussed basically among the inmates to vote against the Conservative Party and vote Liberal. So, everyone voted. Everyone was like, vote Liberal. Get Stephen Harper out of the system. Justin Trudeau, he's not that great. But you know it's better than Stephen Harper. Harper was trying to make natural life sentences at the time. And, yeah, it was pretty cool. Everyone voted... Yeah, they're saying, like, your vote matters, your vote counts. Like you can vote. Just because you're an inmate doesn't mean you can't. They made it very known what Stephen Harper was doing, like about what he was planning to do, [and] about what he's done.

Exercising political agency “implies taking part in those processes that constitute decision-making moments or that set the future debate” (Repetto, 2019, p. 70). Kerry's reflections point to how people inside exerted political agency by utilizing their communication network, including the prison zine *Cell Count*⁹³, to connect with other prisoners, raise awareness and encourage people to vote strategically in the federal election. Incarcerated people in Canada have only been eligible to vote since 2002⁹⁴, and still face many barriers to electoral participation (Mussell & Evans, 2022; Mussell, Fayter, & Piché, 2022). Despite these concerns, Kerry's narrative suggests the value of political engagement for incarcerated people and how

⁹³ *Cell Count* is a Canadian prison zine that features art, poetry, and writing by prisoners, along with health and harm reduction information that is produced and distributed by PASAN (Prisoner HIV/AIDS Support Action Network) several times a year since the 1990s. Subscriptions are provided for free to currently incarcerated people.

⁹⁴ A supreme court ruling in 2002, *Sauvé v. Canada*, provided all Canadian prisoners the right to vote in provincial and federal elections. This landmark decision occurred thanks to the efforts of Richard Sauvé, who is a former federal prisoner serving a life sentence.

participating in this process increased prisoners' political consciousness, sense of empowerment, and hope. The positive implications of democratic participation have a positive feedback loop, whereby prisoners' political awareness and hopefulness increase, empowering them to contribute to social change. Hayes and Kaba (2023, p. 153) underscore this point in their assertion that "hope is essential to social change because in order to make change, someone must first imagine that it can be so."

Formerly incarcerated people also spoke about effecting change through advocacy work regarding the rights and responsibilities that people and institutions have towards each other. For example, Jacob (former prisoner) expressed:

I'm someone that's huge on human rights. Like even just with my own struggle. Actually, [a mutual criminalized friend] and I have recently been in contact. We met last week, and she had a couple of things she wanted me to join, [including] the CAEFS Regional Advocacy Program. And so, I would be the only one right now that is local, right, to be able to go back into the prison and just kind of address like human rights violations and stuff like that, which I find is very, very exciting.

Jacob's comment illustrates the importance of solidarity and the reciprocal interaction between personal and political agency, where connecting one's own struggle with the carceral system to one's concern for currently imprisoned people who are experiencing human rights violations at the hands of the state helps facilitate one's desire and capacity to effect positive change.

Consistent with Pollack's (2000) work on reconceptualizing agency by exploring the role of interpersonal and political relationships, this expansive view considers how an individual's choices and ability to exercise them is "either fostered or enhanced by one's *relationship* to sources of political and social resources and power" (emphasis in original, p. 85). As a well-established organization with a lengthy history of fighting for prisoners' rights in collaboration with criminalized people, CAEFS has access to social capital and political power. By working

with CAEFS, Jacob is using his personal and relational assets to facilitate change and challenge injustice within the carceral state.

This political work happens inside and outside prison walls and is facilitated by having access to meaningful educational opportunities. The significance of education in building prisoners' political agency is evident from the following reflections offered by Tess (former prisoner):

Walls to Bridges really helps people who didn't understand prisons as a structural, oppressive force, to see that they are. And, you know, it's like lifting the veil of oppression so that oppressed people stop accepting their oppression. And I think while lots of folks were largely hesitant to work in really concrete ways in prison against oppression, what you see with Walls to Bridges is them being equipped with that analysis and lived experience. You're seeing the majority of us who were substantially involved in that program going on to do real, concrete advocacy against the nature of the effects of the prison system as it is today.

Tess's comment about prisoners' reluctance to challenge systemic oppression, indicates the importance of access to outside material resources and the sense of safety that is required to exercise political agency in the carceral context. As documented in *Chapter 4*, CSC restricts incarcerated people's choices. Yet, "even under conditions of oppression individuals function as agents; they make choices. It is the conditions that circumscribe and delineate the options and nature of the choices" (Pollack, 2000, p. 85). While some resistant prisoners choose to contest systemic harms during their time inside, others prefer to wait until they are outside of the system to do so.

Regardless of when and how prisoners might choose to act against injustice and oppression, access to educational programs like W2B that promote critical analysis and active, experiential learning fosters political agency. Building oppressed people's capacity to express

themselves politically and work towards social justice begins with questioning power structures (Repetto, 2019). This can be a tumultuous process for people, especially when the “veil of oppression” is lifted within a carceral setting. A CSC employee named Mark (key informant) shared his observations related to political empowerment among prisoners:

What I’m seeing more is that outside of the class, those conversations of learning, and that piques the interest of other people who aren’t even in the class, right? More people want to do it because they hear these conversations. And I mean, it can get scary because when you learn these new things, it causes you to question everything you know and question power and question who has power. And I mean, prisons are all about power and control. So, it doesn’t take long before you start seriously challenging things that are going on in the prison that you wouldn’t have before.

Mark’s narrative illustrates the powerful ripple effect of dialogical action (Freire, 1970/2018) in building critical consciousness among oppressed and marginalized people. When incarcerated people question and discuss previously ingrained, hegemonic assumptions about society, they begin challenging carceral power relations. This process of *conscientization* (Freire, 2000) positions prisoners to mobilize their lived experiences for political ends, which enhances their capacity for political agency and potential contributions to social transformation.

The strengths-based findings discussed above contribute to building justice practices that are healing and transformative, aiming to transcend the punitive, retributive carceral state. Coming together in solidarity to address social harms outside the current punishment system allows us to “reimagine justice and healing...political organizing, advocacy, and peer-led training are tools of collective healing and transformation” (Gallant, 2020, p. 204). A transformative and healing approach to justice is necessary to “interrupt and abolish these harms and abuses toward our collective care and liberatory futures” (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 64).

Reflecting on prisoner resilience as it relates to HTJ praxis indicates that incarcerated people can provide valuable contributions to society and support transformative change.

6.3. Building Community through Healing and Transformative Justice

Understanding and working towards healing and transformative justice requires an ecological framework⁹⁵ of individuals and groups in relationship to one another within broader social systems and structures, which I have employed in my analysis. Such a framework rejects neoliberal notions of individual responsibility, instead looking at social responsibility and collective care. The current so-called justice system is based on the notion of just retribution or revenge (Mathiesen, 2006), placing blame on individuals regardless of their social conditions, rather than considering issues of social, distributive, and environmental justice based on principles of equity, inclusivity, healing, and wellbeing for all life. The final discussion I offer about my findings attends to the question: How do we think about a different kind of justice?

As outlined in *Chapter 2*, HTJ is a broad political and moral framework for living based on an ethic of care, typically drawing on an ancient wisdom tradition⁹⁶ that seeks to find ways of

⁹⁵ An ecological framework examines the relationship between individuals and the various social systems in which they are embedded. Within an ecological framework, human problems and competencies are perceived in the context of individual characteristics (e.g., personal strengths, coping skills), micro-level analysis (e.g., friends, family, neighbourhood), meso-level analysis (e.g., employment settings, legal systems, educational institutions, community organizations), and macro-level analysis (e.g., culture, social class, social norms, political ideologies, legislation, social policies). These levels of analysis are interdependent, with the smaller systems nested within larger systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

⁹⁶ It is critical to acknowledge the rich traditional roots of HTJ within diverse cultural groups including Black liberation movements (Page & Woodland, 2023; Williams, Owens, & Syedullah, 2016); Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and around the world (Hansen, 2012; Huntly, 2020; McCaslin, 2005; Page & Woodland, 2023; Ross, 1996); Engaged Buddhist communities (Sawatsky, 2009, 2018; Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, 2023; Williams, Owens, & Syedullah, 2016); Christian communities and organizations (Canadian Friends Service Committee, 2018; Mennonite

surviving together by structuring life so that justice processes reflect a respect for all life with love, empathy, and compassion (Dixon & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020; Page & Woodland, 2023; Sawatsky, 2009, 2018). HTJ aims to facilitate the involvement of people who are most affected by social harms to find creative and healing solutions grounded in the traditions and culture of the community where it is implemented (Kaba, 2021; Page & Woodland, 2023). It also recognizes our common humanity, namely that we all make mistakes and, at some point, we all experience harm and cause harm (Cullors, 2021; Kaba, 2021; Morris, 2000; Shank, 2020). Transformation requires transcending the conditions that make harm and violence possible, and healing the wounds that caused these harms (Kim, 2018). HTJ practices target the root causes of social problems aiming to transcend the conditions that create injustice while collectively generating solutions and healing (brown, 2020a). These practices can include deescalating violence, intervening to resolve conflicts, respectful processes to hold people accountable without punishment and shame (Dixon, 2020; Kaba, 2021; Shank, 2020; Thom, 2020), facilitating healing processes (Page & Woodland, 2023; Sawatsky, 2018), and efforts to transform individuals and society to build safer, caring, healthy, inclusive communities.

Central Committee, 2024; Sawatsky, 2009, 2018); Jewish communities (American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, 2020); and Muslim groups (Malikah, 2023; Muslims for Just Futures, 2024). Much of this HTJ work being done in North America is led by marginalized and racialized communities, such as Black feminists and other women of colour (Bonsu, 2020; Dixon, 2020; Hayes & Kaba, 2023; Maynard & Simpson, 2023; Page & Woodland, 2023; Kaba, 2021); 2SLGBTQ+ communities (Bonsu, 2020; Dixon, 2020; Page & Woodland, 2023; SOS Collective, 2020; Trans Lifeline, 2020); Disability justice activists (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, 2020a); Sex-workers (Gallant, 2020); and low-income communities (Dixon, 2020; Kaba, 2021; Page & Woodland, 2023). It is important to note that HTJ interventions and strategies are context dependent and differ based on the community's needs, wisdom, history, and cultural traditions. We can learn from one another, sharing knowledges and experiences, and even adopt different practices from other groups, while acknowledging their cultural roots with gratitude. Many marginalized communities have been engaging in HTJ practices for generations, without necessarily labelling their work as such or using this specific language.

Importantly, “transformative justice is inherently outside the state” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020b, p. 278). This framework and practices are important because as Dixon (2020, p. 16) asserts, “these strategies are some of the only options that marginalized communities have to address harm.”

To support my analysis and reflect on the key features of the carceral system compared to a transformative and healing justice framework, I created *Table 3: Comparing characteristics of HTJ and the Carceral System* (see below). The common features of the carceral system outlined in the right-hand column are all the codes that emerged from the data related to the harms of the carceral state. The left-hand column, which outlines the distinguishing features of HTJ, comes from my review of the literature along with thematic categories I used to organize the data. *Table 3* clearly illustrates how the characteristics of the current carceral system are diametrically opposed to the central features of HTJ. For example, referring to the first row in this table, a key feature of HTJ processes is that it builds community. If we look to the right-hand column, we can see that rather than building community the carceral system blocks peer support and mutual aid, inhibits healthy relationships, prevents sharing, facilitates lateral violence, punishes solidarity, and isolates people.

Table 3: Comparing Characteristics of HTJ and the Carceral System

Distinguishing Features of HTJ – From literature & data	Common Features of Carceral System – from data
Builds community	Blocking peer-support/mutual-aid, inhibits healthy relationships, divisive practices, facilitating lateral violence, no sharing, restricting intimacy among prisoners, unnecessary living unit moves, reliable sources, isolating, punishes solidarity

Advocacy & Trust-building	Restricting advocacy, punishing acts of kindness, no transparency or accountability, punishes resistance of oppression & systemic harms
Inclusive	‘Us vs. them’ mentality, discrimination, negative labels
Social support – community-engaged	Barriers to social support, community assessments, lack of concern for families, blocking access to family, friends, and community supports, visitation restrictions, sabotaging prisoner freedom, lack of transitional or release support
Challenging carceral & punitive logics	Punitive & discriminatory ideologies, surveillance & suspicion, multiple punishments, lockdowns, Kangaroo court, security-focused, restrictive parole conditions
Respecting confidentiality & anonymity	Lack of privacy, media sensationalism, public access to institutional records
Challenging hegemonic discourse – Critiquing all forms of violence	Patriarchal treatment, infantilizing women, colonial & capitalist ideologies, misogyny, racism, homophobia,
Empowering	Culture of scarcity, restricting choices, manipulation, abuse of power, breaking policies & laws, corrupt practices, twisting reality, constant fear
Accessible education	Barriers to education, job training, and meaningful programs
Respectful & humanizing treatment	Disrespectful & dehumanizing treatment, lack of dignity, destruction of property, seizing property, erosion of boundaries, overcrowding, strip-searching, segregation, traumatizing treatment, poor health & mental health care
Strength-based	Deficit-focused, risk-oriented, discourages educational & vocational pursuits, setting up for failure, reducing prisoner confidence & self-esteem

Valuing uniqueness of individuals	“one-size-fits-all” approach, negative & stereotypical assumptions of prisoners, 2 yrs in max requirement for lifers
Flexible, creative, context-dependent interventions	Punitive response (charge, imprison, fine), co-opting & appropriating positive programs, restricting access to positive programs, programs not connected to lived experience, lack of treatment options
Focus on root causes	Responsibilization, neutralizations – no structural or systemic accountability
Holistic approach	Psychological reductionism/focus on harmful thoughts & individual behaviours
Preventative interventions & building community resources	Reactionary interventions, released to nowhere (penal interventions increase recidivism), lack of resources, barriers to employment, housing, technology, & other community resources
Process-oriented	Outcome-oriented
Allowing time for healing	Forced treatment, over-medicating, interventions & programs imposed on prisoners according to correctional timelines, unresolved trauma, prisonization & institutionalization, PTSD, overwhelmed, constant fear
Compassion over violence	Lack of support, culture of indifference, use of force, psychological & emotional harms, aggressive, bullying, harmful rhetoric, fear-based culture, scare tactics, sexual exploitation, deaths in custody & on parole
Conflict mediation (w/o state intervention)	Punitive, retributive, state interventions
Recognizing shared human struggle of suffering & brokenness	Othering, gaslighting prisoners, stigmatizing, blame the victim
Non-hierarchical	Hierarchical, top-down approach
Space for recognizing true identities	Institutional clothing, uniform approach, eliminating prisoner led programs

Using privilege to support marginalized people	Notions of undeservingness, limited employment opportunities
Valuing & incorporating cultural & spiritual practices	Disrespecting spiritual or cultural practices
Connection to nature	Disconnection from natural world
Multi-level/ecological approach (personal, relational, collective); Collectivist-oriented	Individual focus
Reduce inequity & promote social justice	Arbitrary rules, corrupt practices, gendered slave labour, invisibilizing people, lack of access to needed community resources, financial issues, marginalizing & oppressing anyone not conforming to mainstream/any markers of diversity
Listening is essential – circle processes	Restricts freedom of speech, censorship
Radical view of addressing social harms	Conservative, neoliberal, punitive, & retributive views of addressing social harms

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore every component of HTJ as it relates to federally sentenced people; instead, the following discussion highlights key examples and ideas that participants raised for transformative social change. It is important to note that examining healing and transformative justice was not one of this project's core research questions, and participants were not asked directly about HTJ, yet many of their responses were aligned with an HTJ framework. Formerly incarcerated participants were asked to reflect on the most important things criminalized people require to survive hardships and have a meaningful life; what do people require in terms of community supports; and what their dreams are for the future. Key informant participants were asked how incarcerated people's strengths can be supported and nurtured; what more can be done to assist criminalized people in the community;

and their hopes for the future concerning Canada's carceral system and their vision of transformative change.

6.3.1. Disrupting Stereotypes and Challenging Stigma: *"Everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn"*

Transforming social relations, along with healing individuals and communities that have been ravaged by structural inequities and systemic violence requires a collective response. While marginalized, oppressed, and primarily racialized communities have been leading the work in this area, they cannot do this alone. To abolish our current carceral system and replace it with an approach that is transformative and healing, widespread popular support is required so that the voting public will put pressure on elected government officials to enact policy changes⁹⁶ and directly fund community groups who support HTJ praxis. If we hope to create a world where police and prisons are unnecessary and no longer exist, at least in their current formations⁹⁷, and

⁹⁶ While I acknowledge that transformative justice is inherently outside of state intervention, I argue that within our current context it is also necessary to engage government officials to enact progressive policy changes as we strive for decarceral futures.

⁹⁷ My position is aligned with healing and transformative justice literature which envisions creating a world that is free of carceral and structural violence, where communities are empowered to resolve instances of social harms without state intervention, and police and prisons are no longer required. However, I acknowledge that this vision of an ideal society is not possible in our current context. It is important to note the difference between abolitionist visioning and the pragmatic steps that are required to realize this vision. I believe that it is possible to implement transformative and healing justice praxis to prevent and address violence or harms in communities, without relying on carceral systems (e.g., sex-workers sharing a "bad date" list; prisoners engaging in mutual aid and resolving conflicts without informing guards). However, these HTJ interventions are primarily practiced within small, marginalized communities and might not be possible to expand to the level of a city, region, or nation. HTJ is inherently relational and requires the development of meaningful, caring relationships within the community in order to do this work. To effectively reduce or eliminate violence in society it is necessary to eradicate structural harms and ideologies that privilege one group over another (e.g., patriarchy, misogyny, white supremacy, racism, neoliberalism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, etc.) along with violent, oppressive systems such as the military, the medical industrial complex, police, and prisons. HTJ theory involves a philosophical orientation aimed at envisioning an ideal society. It is about building alternative worldviews and possibilities. HTJ practices are implemented on a smaller scale. Some examples include Indigenous communities organizing to address the lack of government response to the

our socioeconomic and political relations are based on an ethic of care, it is necessary to collaborate with people from all walks of life. As discussed throughout this manuscript, negative stereotypes pertaining to criminalized women and gender-diverse people are endemic. For example, “correctional” authorities frame women as ‘deviant criminals’ (McCorkel, 2003) and use labels such as ‘manipulative,’ ‘battered woman,’ ‘drug addict,’ ‘offender,’ ‘unruly,’ and ‘difficult to manage’ (Faith, 2011). A key step in working towards abolitionist futures involves disrupting stereotypes, dispelling myths, challenging stigma, and raising awareness about criminalized and incarcerated people as complex whole-persons (Fayter, 2022, 2023).

Unfortunately, the public and politicians rarely seem moved by the horrible trauma criminalized people endure, evidence of which has been available four years after the first prison for women opened (see Archambault, 1938), with many subsequent reports highlighting the egregious harms and injustice of Canada’s penitentiary system⁹⁸ (e.g., Arbour, 1996; CHRC, 2003; MacGuigan, 1977; TFFFSW, 1990). Evidence of this collective indifference to the

multitude of missing and murdered women, girls, and Two-Spirit people (Huntly, 2020); Cree nation communities responding to lawbreaking using traditional Indigenous approaches to justice (Hansen, 2012); racialized communities intervening in cases of sexual assault (Shank, 2020); and racialized trans communities supporting survivors of violence (Trans Lifeline, 2020).

⁹⁸ The Archambault Report (1938) called for the closure of P4W just four years after it opened due to “disgraceful” conditions. Decades later the MacGuigan Report (1977) declared P4W “unfit for bears, much less for women.” This report also stated, “there is a great deal of irony in the fact that imprisonment...the ultimate product of our system of criminal justice, itself epitomizes injustice.” Following the inquiry into the 1994 conflict at P4W, the Arbour Report (1996) noted, “the Rule of Law is absent, although rules are everywhere.” Shortly after P4W was closed and the regional prisons for women were opened, the Canadian Human Rights Commission conducted “a broadly based review of the treatment of federally sentenced women on the basis of gender, race, and disability” (CHRC, 2003, p. 7). The CHRC (2003) report offered 19 recommendations for changes within CSC, concluding that “systemic problems continue to affect the correctional system and the treatment of federally sentenced women” (p. 71). Additionally, there is no oversight or enforcement in terms of CSC following ratified international treaties, such as the UN (2010) Bangkok Rules for the treatment of women prisoners, and the UN (1955/2015) Nelson Mandela Rules. The most salient example of CSC’s indifference to the law is the continued use and expansion of solitary confinement via SIUs (Sprott & Doob, 2021), despite federal legislation (i.e., *Bill C-83*) that committed to ending solitary confinement in Canada following a court ruling that segregation over 15 days is unconstitutional and recognized as torture (*CCLA v Canada*, 2019).

suffering of incarcerated people is clear from the lack of action or enforcement of the hundreds of recommendations that emerged from these reports. As discussed in section 2.1, parliamentary inquiries and government commissions or task forces that investigate the conditions of confinement and injustices inherent to the federal penitentiary system, rarely lead to meaningful changes. Recall the discussion in *Chapter 1*, section 1.6 concerning *Creating Choices* (TFFSW, 1990) which was intended to serve as a blueprint for “women’s corrections” and create community-oriented responses to address the social causes of incarceration. Rather than addressing structural issues related to women’s imprisonment, the closure of P4W in 2000 led to a proliferation of women’s prisons and the number of FSW increased by 405% between 1990 and 2024 (Zinger, 2024). Thirty years after *Creating Choices*, the Office of the Correctional Investigator found that the key issues raised in this report have not been addressed, and in fact, the conditions inside prisons designated for women have gotten much worse (Zinger, 2021). If the public and politicians truly cared about the systemic violence and trauma endured by people in prisons designated for women, then these prisons would no longer exist.

This history suggests that continuing to solely focus on raising awareness about the harms of the system or the vulnerabilities and needs of women and gender-diverse prisoners, does not appear to be an effective avenue towards facilitating change. The public is often indifferent to or unknowledgeable about conditions of confinement within jails and prisons, often advocating for harsher conditions (Roberts & Stalans, 1998). For example, according to research on public opinion in criminology, the public frequently “underestimate the severity of the justice system” and the “general public ideology with regard to crime and punishment... [is] that crime can be prevented or offenders deterred if the system would simply impose harsher penalties” (Roberts & Stalans, 1998, p. 8). Survey data during the Harper Conservative’s reign suggested

that Canadians outlook towards “crime” was hardening as respondents prioritized punishment over deterrence or rehabilitation (Mallea, 2010). These harmful perspectives are common since it is typically the most marginalized, racialized, and oppressed people in society – or those deemed “undesirables” (Davis, 2003, p. 16) – who are incarcerated. Politicians who argue for “tough on crime” policies while spreading sensationalist stories of law-breaking in the popular media and playing on people’s fears, seem to engage in these tactics to justify the ongoing egregious violence of the carceral state (Mallea, 2010; Pratt, 2007; Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, & Hough, 2003), acting upon draconian ideology rather than evidence-based facts (Mallea, 2010).

Recognizing the harmful nature of stigma and stereotypes about criminalized people, and how these negative assumptions can act as barriers to transformative change, study participants suggested that alternative narratives and political education are required. For example, Lawrence Hill (key informant) discussed the value of challenging prejudice from multiple angles.

Prejudice, you know, it’s so deeply woven into our society that I guess there are 100 avenues. Whether it’s dealing with children and then rethinking the way we talk to children about incarceration and about prisoners. Whether it’s the way we perpetuate these stories in media and in fiction and in the arts, in the educational system, and in places of worship. You know, there are many ways in which we can either make things better by attacking stereotypes and trying to do something positive or reinforcing them and making things much worse.

Lawrence Hill’s reflections suggest the importance of providing alternative (i.e., more accurate) stories to children about the realities of imprisonment and the people who are confined in prison. Expanding on this sentiment, Hill proceeds to highlight other sources of stereotypes and settings where these negative stories ought to be reframed, including the media, fiction, the arts, educational systems, and places of worship.

According to Goffman (1963) social stigma and discrimination is a relational phenomenon. People with a stigmatized attribute, such as the “criminal other,” are perceived in society as being abnormal or less than human, disqualifying them from social acceptance. The stigmatized attribute does not reside within the individual, but is contextual, based on the social environment and the audience who views this characteristic as undesirable. By disrupting dominant stereotypes about incarcerated people, and looking at them as whole persons rather than reducing them to stigmatized labels, we can begin to transform the social conditions that lead people to become criminalized and excluded.

Mobilizing counternarratives about criminalization is important because “to inspire constructive behaviors...we must embrace storytelling that centers support and inspiration not just fear” (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 29). Mobilizing people for transformative change requires us to move beyond fear of the “dangerous other” while providing support and inspiring people to transcend oppressive social conditions. As Sawatsky (2018, p. 69) notes, “when we ‘other’ or distance people, we create the conditions for violence.” Therefore, it is important that as a society who claims to value community safety, we must critically reflect on our beliefs and assumptions, while leaving our minds open to being challenged and changed. Indeed, a key goal and follow-up action of this project is to contribute to shifting societal perceptions of criminalized women and gender-diverse people through political education and the popular media, which is an issue I have written about before (see Fayter, 2022). I will expand on this point and potential next steps in the concluding chapter.

Raising awareness about current and former prisoners should begin with speaking to criminalized people themselves. Several participants proposed that upending stigma requires

people to visit folks inside prisons and get to know them on a human level. As former prisoner Jacob stated:

It's stigma. And so, my thing is like volunteer... go into the prison, actually meet people. You know what I mean? That's why when I do these things, I always leave my name out there because I want people to contact me, right? Because I find like there needs to be this education...once I'm done speaking it just goes to show, they have no idea that I'm someone from prison. It's like, why? Why would you not have thought that? Because you have this idea that people in prison can't speak, can't write... So, I'm all about dismantling systems, stereotypes, [and] dispelling myths.

In his narrative, Jacob asserts that stigma is responsible for many of the barriers criminalized people face in society, suggesting that volunteering in a prison to meet and speak with people inside contributes to disrupting negative stereotypes. It is easier to question media depictions of prisoners and markedly more difficult to reduce people to stigmatizing labels, after getting to know them as whole persons. Promoting HTJ requires that we nurture people's understanding of others in ways that lead to compassion (Sawatsky, 2018). Since a primary goal of HTJ involves relationship-building to repair severed community ties where violence and oppression have sown seeds of fear and distrust, a process of meaningful encounters with diverse people "can fundamentally reshape our ways of engaging with each other" (Dixon, 2020, p. 17). Jacob also mentions the need for popular education on issues of criminalization and imprisonment. When he does engage in public speaking about incarceration, the audience is typically not aware that he is a former prisoner until he discloses this information, due to their preconceived notions about incarcerated people. As I have previously asserted, "stereotypes are dehumanizing and incomplete, reducing our identities into a single choice or action" (Fayter, 2022, p. 141), or to a single characteristic or social location.

Altering people's existing worldview can be challenging because "if the information does not fit their sense of reality, people will often let it go or even forcefully reject it...When a fact or set of facts prompts people to change course, it's usually because someone or something has interrupted the narrative they knew and told a story that feels more true – one worth making changes over" (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 21). Jacob's example about changing people's minds through public speaking and encouraging people to visit folks inside is an effective way to interrupt harmful narratives and alter how people interact with and think about criminalized people.

Illustrating how changing people's worldview can be facilitated by spending time in prisons, Cookie (key informant) spoke about the political and cultural education they received from a group of Indigenous women incarcerated at P4W:

We spent a day with the Native Sisterhood, with Elders in circle, drumming, feasting, learning about how colonization has impacted Indigenous people and over-criminalized them. And different people shared their own backgrounds, and how colonization and colonizing policies like residential schools really shaped their path towards imprisonment. And kind of making those parallels between residential schools and prisons and people going in between them.

Cookie's reflections of primarily white, middle-class professionals spending a day in prison with the Native Sisterhood engaged in ceremony and teachings, demonstrates the value of suspending preconceived notions by truly listening and learning from people with diverse backgrounds and experiences. This full-day event inside the prison involved popular education whereby imprisoned Indigenous women shared their experiences of intergenerational trauma due to the

impacts of settler colonialism⁹⁹ and residential schools. By engaging with Indigenous ceremonies, Elders in circle, drumming, and feasting, this event was not just about consciousness raising. It was also humanizing and healing. Opportunities such as the one described by Cookie are rare in penal settings, yet when facilitated well these prisoner-led events can be healing in the sense that people get to interact, converse, and promote mutual understandings of harm and justice (Page & Woodland, 2023). Learning about and developing a shared consideration of the traumatic legacy of colonization and witnessing its continued impacts as expressed by incarcerated Indigenous women, provided Cookie with a visceral experience. This event also allowed the women in the Native Sisterhood to exemplify their humanity by transcending their ascribed roles of vulnerable victims and prisoners, to sisters, teachers, and knowledge-keepers.

Although incarcerated women, especially Indigenous prisoners, have endured significant trauma throughout their lives, simply casting them as “victims” or “survivors” portrays only a partial image of their identity. This simplistic view “fails to adequately encompass their incredible resilience in being able to contend with the ongoing, socially created sources of trauma in their lives” (Comack, 2018, p. 28). The resilience of the Native Sisterhood is evident from their ability to organize this meaningful, healing event within the dark prison corridors of P4W. In the previous chapter, criminalized participants expressed how their engagement with Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices was transformative and healing. Learning about their

⁹⁹ The significant harms experienced by Indigenous peoples and the genocidal destruction of their culture, traditions, and way of life via settler-colonialism is not simply an historical fact. Instead, settler colonialism is “a living phenomenon...The past impacts on the present, and today’s place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society cannot be understood without a well-developed historical understanding of colonialism and the present-day trajectories of these old relationships” (Monture, 2007, p. 207).

culture and participating in ceremonies facilitated self-compassion, forgiveness, and connected them to a rich history and cultural community. Where carceral logics are inherently dehumanizing, isolating, and reductive, HTJ praxis focuses on transforming our relationships to ourselves and others to facilitate the creation of alternative conditions in which police, prisons, and surveillance are no longer needed or desired (Dixon & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020).

The value of this type of engaged pedagogy (i.e., raising public awareness of systemic injustice and promoting meaningful dialogues between criminalized and non-criminalized people) requires reciprocal communication. As Lisa Guenther (key informant) stated:

I think more communication is key, grounded in the basic principles that everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn. These conversations need to happen in prison, but they also need to happen on the outside to reduce the weight of what is basically a kind of systemic ignorance on the part of most people who have not been criminalized. An unawareness of how the world actually works...I think we're not going to dissolve those structural barriers without completely reorganizing the way we deal with harm and accountability in our society.

Lisa's remarks upend Western notions of expertise and who is qualified as a knower and teacher. The idea that incarcerated people with little access to formal education have valuable insights and critical knowledge to impart might be challenging for some non-criminalized people to accept. As Lisa's narrative indicates, most people who have never been incarcerated or had direct contact with the carceral system, are ignorant about the realities of prison and the people confined there.

This ignorance, which is partially linked to the opaque nature of the penal system, facilitates opportunities for the carceral state to shirk responsibility or be held accountable for the widespread harm and suffering inflicted upon prisoners. To address this chasm in popular consciousness and to "create a world in which conflict and trauma aren't the center of our

collective existence, we have to practice something new, ask different questions” (brown, 2020a, p. 253), and respectfully explore our curiosity about each other. From this perspective, which mirrors Lisa’s comments above, “communication and working together is the most important thing” (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 53) if we hope to transform society and realize healing justice. Engaging in meaningful and often difficult conversations with people whose life experiences may be vastly different than our own, is a critical step on the road to abolition and building the world we all deserve. Although this is a challenging endeavour with no clear roadmap “the work of doing justice transforms people, relationships, and the dynamics between people over time. In those transformations, there is a great deal of joy and meaning to be found” (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 222). Transforming ourselves and our relational dynamics, contributes to building healthy communities and the eventual abolition of the carceral state.

6.3.2. Towards Carceral Abolition and Radical Social Change: “*Prison doesn’t keep anyone safe. Healthy communities do*”

We live in a world of carcerality and oppressive social structures which benefit the wealthy and privileged few, to the detriment of many (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Klein, 2014; Reich, 2012; Palast, 2002; Raphael, 2007; Roberts, 2017; Wacquant, 2009). With militarized borders, immigration detention, inflated police budgets, the prison industrial complex (PIC)¹⁰⁰, the

¹⁰⁰ The PIC is a term used to denote the interconnection of prison expansion and operations with capitalism, much like the military industrial complex (Davis, 2003). Corporations are profiting from the incarceration of marginalized people through their involvement in constructing new prisons and units, providing goods and services (e.g., Bell Canada, Amazon), and utilizing prisoner labour (e.g., CORCAN).

medical industrial complex (MIC)¹⁰¹, racial capitalism¹⁰², punitive education systems, and the prevalence of CCTV cameras in public and private spaces, we are surrounded by carceral violence. This systemic violence, surveillance, and social control disproportionately impacts the most marginalized people in our communities.

In their prescient text *Let This Radicalize You*, Hayes and Kaba (2023, p. 31) effectively argue that oppressive sociopolitical conditions produce violence and harms in society by generating fear and mistrust among the population.

We know that governments maintain conditions that generate despair and therefore produce interpersonal violence. And we know that under changed conditions, we would have far less to fear in the world, both from the system and from other people. We know that in a society where everyone's needs are met, we would no longer need to fear being unable to pay for our health care, or losing our jobs and going hungry, or being hurt by desperate, disillusioned people. Yet many of us accept the violence, limitations, and boundaries imposed by the system as though they are natural laws...and view everyday people as an existential threat to control, contain, and manage.

The intersecting struggles of poverty, violence, inequities, and oppressive institutions highlighted by Hayes and Kaba (2023) above, were likewise raised by participants. Clearly, the way things are is not the way things ought to be. In a country such as Canada, where there are more than

¹⁰¹ Like the PIC, the MIC is a for-profit corporate system prioritizing profit over the provision of care. As an extension of capitalism, state control, and the exploitation of racialized, queer, and disabled bodies, “the MIC is rooted in ideologies and systems of colonization, population control, slavery, and eugenics” (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 57).

¹⁰² Racial capitalism is a term coined by Cedric Robinson (1983/2000) to illustrate how racism and capitalism are mutually reinforcing. As the dominant global market system, racial capitalism is dependent on imperialism, colonialism, violence, slavery, genocide, and racial hierarchy. The accumulation of wealth within the structure of capitalism necessitates inequality among different groups. According to Robinson, capitalism is inherently structured by racialism. By extracting social and economic resources and wealth from marginalized people, “racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires” (Melamed, 2015, p. 77).

enough resources to meet everyone's needs, radical social change requires addressing the root causes of violence, oppression, and criminalization to fight for liberation and social justice.

Participants spoke about the importance of shifting social values to transform relationships and build a caring society. This involves recognizing how systemic violence and widespread social inequities exclude people from accessing basic needs and can potentially lead to criminalization. To address structural harms, participants advocated for preventive approaches that reallocate resources from carceral systems to communities and dismantling harmful institutions. Building healing, restorative, and transformative values in society can enhance communities' capacities to tackle social harms without the need for carceral interventions.

A formerly incarcerated woman named Tess argued for the need to examine social problems from a structural analysis and build community-led spaces that promote collective caring and a sense of belonging.

I think we really need to move the needle from looking at resolving social problems from the individual unit to the social unit. So, if we looked at communities and institutions and societies as the producers of both health and harm, then prisons wouldn't exist. As long as we try to fix things on an individual scale, we're going to be unhappy as a society. So, I think that we need to look at, you know, like community-led farms, community-led ownership spaces where we value being together, just like those same things that Walls to Bridges and the music program had. We need to be in spaces where we're just concerned about each other, just like a basic level of care. And if we weren't fundamentally concerned with ourselves but [rather with] others, then we would have much more capacity and resources to deal with actual social harm...if we had communities that were strong and cared for each other, how much better would we be able to respond to those kinds of situations?

Tess's comments capture some of the problems of living in a society governed through neoliberal notions of individual responsibility and competition over cooperation. The primary values of neoliberalism are individualism, freedom of choice (for those who can afford how and

where to live, or what to buy), minimal state involvement in the economy (aside from corporate bailouts), and market dominance over social welfare (Brown, 2015). Under these conditions, individuals and families are responsible for addressing their own problems and wellbeing, replacing social or collective values that were more prevalent following WWII until the 1980s (Comack, 2018). In this manner, “neoliberalism seriously undermines all forms of care and caring that do not serve its agenda of profit extraction for the few...Neoliberalism is uncaring by design” (Chatzidakis, Hakim, Littler, Rottenberg, & Segal, 2020, p. 10). The creation of caring communities does not refer to “using people’s spare time to plug the caring gaps left wide open by neoliberalism. It means ending neoliberalism in order to expand people’s capacities to care” (*ibid.*, p. 57).

Tess presents an abolitionist argument based on a collective ethic of care that recognizes our current social structures are not meeting the population’s needs. To counter this “caring gap” Tess asserts the need to develop more community-led spaces where interpersonal relationships are valued, and people experience a sense of belonging. Building these inclusive spaces can promote a hopeful vision for transformative change, as Hayes and Kaba (2023, p. 39) contend: “What becomes increasingly possible in spaces where people experience belonging, imagine new ways of living, and practice those kinder, more just beliefs in relation to each other, is the cultivation of hope.” As indicated in previous chapters, hope is a precursor to change, allowing people to envision alternative ways of living. Imagining beyond the status quo is one of the cornerstones of abolition. As we oppose the current economy of punishment we must also envision “an economy of care that is grounded in love and compassion for true imagining of public safety” (Cullors, 2021, p. 92). The creation of a caring world requires “avowing our

interdependencies and cultivating a far-reaching ethics of care and solidarity in all our relationships” (Chatzidakis et. al., 2020, p. 94).

Like Tess, a key informant named Fiona offered reflections that recognize the prevalence of institutional and systemic violence, along with the need to transform relationships and ways of thinking about justice:

In terms of justice, I do profoundly believe not just in restorative justice, but also transformative justice principles. The difference being obviously that transformative justice understands that there wasn't a fair place to restore to prior to harm having happened. So, we really need to transform relations and make them sturdier and make it more possible for people to flourish in response to a harm that's happened... Transformative justice doesn't always work well because everyone's new and stumbling towards it. But I am nonetheless a believer in doing the work that's required to think about it and also start to always address the institutional and systemic violence that is shaping and structuring people's relations in people's lives and people's possibilities and choices. That seems that should be transformed.

According to Mariame Kaba (2021, p. 148), “restorative justice [RJ] is focused on the importance of relationships. It is focused on the importance of repair when those relationships are broken, when violations occur in our relationships...It asks the community to step in fully, to be less of a bystander and more of an actor in trying to repair harm.” Although in many ways RJ has been co-opted by the carceral system, the roots of RJ consist of “an ideology and a way of living that is interested in making sure that we remain in right relationship with each other, with the land, with the environment” (*ibid.*). Expanding on the significance of relational interactions, transformative justice is founded on the belief that “what happens in our interpersonal relationships is mirrored and reinforced by the larger systems” (Kaba, 2021, p. 149). Recognizing this interconnection between people and their social environment is necessary to transform the underlying conditions that lead to interpersonal harms, violence, and criminalization (Hayes & Kaba, 2023; Kaba, 2021).

Fiona continues her narrative by expanding on what a caring society free of carceral violence might look like:

What I'd want to see is people being able to flourish. I would like to see the possibility of mutual care that is supported, not just because they're [carceral systems] not looking out for us, but actually society where people are looking out for each other. And so, prison abolition also has to include food for people. It has to include education that is loving and respectful of all different kinds of learners. And that is based on the idea of collective and multiple forms of knowledge, multiple ways of knowing and collective creation of learning circles. It includes health care that is respectful and free and readily available. And it includes a much more expansive idea of mental health challenges and how best to address them, which steps away from the stigmas that get folded right into that. And we can't just look only at changing modes of addressing justice. It is a global set of conditions [that] create the current situation. So, it's a global set of conditions that [we need to change to] allow people to flourish.

Fiona's detailed insights present a framework for a caring society where we are genuinely concerned about the needs of the most vulnerable by addressing food insecurity, promoting access to meaningful education, along with providing physical and mental health care at no cost. Fiona also suggests the need to transform these systems, so they are more inclusive, accessible, and respectful of people's different needs. Fiona's vision of a society based on mutual care is consistent with an HTJ framework, which involves "creating new structures outside the state...and is rooted in politics of dismantling that which is no longer serving us" (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 108). The collective healing of society requires us to acknowledge our interdependency with other people and the environment, because "our wellness and safety are inextricable from our ability to care for our most vulnerable" (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 108). This mutual care work encompasses "a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life. Above all, to put care at centre stage means recognising and embracing our interdependencies" (Chatzidakis et. al., 2020, p. 5).

Abolition entails that we change everything, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore asserts: “Abolition is deliberately everything-ist; it’s about the entirety of human-environmental relations. Where [all] life is precious” (cited in Kushner, 2019). Aligned with Fiona’s narrative and Gilmore’s assertion that we “change everything,” Senator Kim Pate (key informant) presented a similar argument for promoting equity through systemic changes:

What we need to do is create a more substantively equal starting point socially, economically, and health wise. And what I mean by that is housing, things like guaranteed livable income, universal pharmacare, dental care, health care, all of the things that provide a basis for people to be able to have their needs met. But then also be able to self-actualize in a way, whatever that means for them, whether it’s getting an education, whether it’s a certain type of work they want to do, whether it’s caring for kids or elderly or people with disabilities in their family or in their circle or whether it’s wanting to further their own thinking and learning on different aspects. If we don’t have ways that people can be housed, fed, clothed and educated, and we’re a rich country, there’s no reason every person in this country can’t be in that situation. We can’t then say, just pull yourself up by your nonexistent bootstraps in your nonexistent boots, because not everybody starts that equal.

Senator Pate’s reflections concerning how to build a more equitable, inclusive society rejects neoliberal notions of individual responsibility where people are expected to pull themselves up by their “nonexistent bootstraps.” Like Fiona, Senator Pate also recognizes the fundamental importance of providing people with equal access to material, social, economic, and environmental resources in our efforts to build caring communities free of carceral violence.

Senator Pate’s assertions are consistent with transformative and healing justice, which aims to “address the ways events or conditions impact entire communities...and envision ways for us to hold each other together” (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 126). Building a more just and caring society requires the provision of everyone’s basic needs and “cultivates everyone’s capacity to care by providing relevant education and the necessary conditions for mutual thriving” (Chatzidakis et. al., 2020, p. 63). Collective liberation and communities founded on

reciprocal care can only be achieved “by building something entirely different that offers people something that the oppressor cannot” (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 38).

Formerly incarcerated people also suggested the need to build something completely different, beginning with abolishing prisons, decriminalizing drugs, and dismantling other harmful institutions. They also stressed the importance of reallocating resources from prisons to communities to facilitate building community capacities to address social harms through healing, restorative, and transformative values, along with holistic care and (re)connecting people with nature. For example, Jay (former prisoner) asserted that, “we don’t need the prisons, number one. I think prisons obviously perpetuate harm. But I think, you know, they need to decriminalize drugs. You shouldn’t be throwing addicts in prisons.” The harmful nature of imprisonment is well documented in the literature (e.g., Acoby, 2011; Arbour, 1996; Archambault, 1938; Bingham & Sutton, 2012; CHRC, 2003; Chamberlen, 2018; Crewe, 2011; Davis, 2003; Faith, 2011; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Glaremin, 2011; Law, 2012; Moore & Scraton, 2014) and was further evidenced in *Chapter 4*. Jay’s insights concerning penal abolition also indicate the importance of decriminalization strategies targeting substance use and addiction prior to imprisonment, so people can get assistance in the community. By decriminalizing drug possession and use, police power could be restricted, thus limiting the number of people sent to prison and reducing the need of imprisonment as a response to these particular social harms. While the decriminalization of illicit drugs is a contentious issue¹⁰³, “we must not allow the

¹⁰³ For example, on January 31, 2023, the Province of British Columbia was granted an exemption by Health Canada to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, effectively removing criminal sanctions for the possession of less than 2.5 grams of certain illicit substances for personal use by adults in public and private settings. This pilot program was

frameworks of the powerful to define the bounds of morality in our politics and our action. The elastic concepts of criminality and violence, as controlled by the powerful, will always be bent against us” (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 128).

Echoing Jay’s comments, another formerly incarcerated person, Tiina, affirmed that, “we needed prevention. We needed to not go to prison in the fucking first place. You know, money should be spent on the front end, on community resources and supports as opposed to police and punishing and isolating afterwards. I think it would be cheaper to do that in the long run.” Here, Tiina is presenting an abolitionist argument founded on building community capacity to care for marginalized people rather than employing expensive¹⁰⁴, punitive carceral interventions. Essentially, abolition and HTJ are about “knowing that the current systems we have put in place to address harm are actually causing additional harm. It is about realizing that we have a responsibility to align the ways we relate to each other with our values – from the most intimate relationship up to larger systems” (Shank, 2020, p. 27).

The need for preventive interventions and the reallocation of resources from prisons to communities were acknowledged by several participants, including Rebecca (former prisoner):

They could have taken that money and put it into our communities to develop healthy communities because prison doesn’t keep anyone safe. Healthy

designed to address the toxic drug supply and overdose epidemic, which should be viewed as a public health crisis as opposed to a criminal legal matter. In response to public and political backlash (CBC News, 2024) as of May 7, 2024, the federal government approved a request to exempt public spaces from B.C.’s decriminalization policy, restoring police power to seize illegal drugs possessed in public and arrest people (Provincial Health Services Authority, 2024). Critics of this recriminalization strategy argue that this policy shift will negatively impact Indigenous and other racialized communities, along with unhoused people (CBC News, 2024).

¹⁰⁴ According to Public Safety Canada (2023) the annual cost of federal “corrections” in 2019/2020 was \$2.53 billion and the cost of provincial/territorial “corrections” was \$2.7 billion. Additionally, across Canada the total operating expenditures for all police services in 2021/2022 was \$18.5 billion (Statistics Canada, 2023).

communities do. And we need to work on our communities instead of just mass incarcerating people and spending all of this money. We need detox, we need treatment. We need advocacy workers, we need counsellors, we need trauma informed approaches.

Rebecca's comments, which echo Jay's and Tiina's, offers further examples of how communities can be transformed through healing justice interventions that centre recovery from addictions, mental health issues, and underlying trauma. These ideas are critical to carceral abolition and building inclusive, caring communities because "by standing for everyone's need for healing, we challenge the dehumanizing logic that is central to systems of oppression, domination, and abuse. By standing for everyone's need for healing, we maintain our commitment to a vision of true liberation" (Haines, Laviña, Lymbertos, Maccani, & Shana, 2020, p. 118). Strengthening marginalized communities and promoting HTJ praxis can have positive ripple effects throughout society, challenging carceral logics that isolate, punish, and oppress people. As Dixon (2020, p. 17) contends, "the process of building community-based strategies can fundamentally reshape our ways of engaging with each other."

A final vision for transforming society and our interpersonal relations was provided by a peer-support worker named Lindsay (key informant) who has lived experiences of homelessness, violence, addiction, criminalization, and incarceration.

I would dismantle all institutions. And I would have like, acres of land, and I would have, like restorative and rehabilitative programs, like, animal rescue, people learning [together]. I would get people back into nature and back into, like, finding jobs that are [meaningful]. Finding self-esteem and empowerment. I would take it from a place of people with lived experience. I would want to hire strictly people with lived experience and get people to come out and to work back into the organization. But it would be very, very holistic and there wouldn't be institutions, there wouldn't be courts, there wouldn't be judges, there wouldn't be lawyers ... I actually would want to like get communities trained to handle their own situations and restorative processes and circles... I really do believe that there is a lot of things that can be just solved through communication and circles and restorative and

transformative processes, animals, nature, healing. And so, yeah, I would dismantle justice systems, court systems, jails, and have it really based on healing practices, restorative and transformative values.

As the quotes presented throughout this section reveal, “violence and oppression break community ties and breed fear and distrust. At its core, the work to create safety is to build meaningful, accountable relationships within our neighbourhoods and communities” (Dixon, 2020, p. 17). Lindsay’s dream of dismantling harmful institutions and strengthening disadvantaged communities to promote healing and wellness, is based on transforming our social relations. According to Anishinaabeg society and teachings, “if you build systems based on relationality, reciprocity, consent and diversity, if you refuse hierarchy and authoritarian power in both collective and intimate settings, if ‘laws’ are practices embodied in deep relationality rather than rigid authoritarian rules, if ‘justice’ repairs and restores and if your practice of living is also a practice of consent, you eliminate policing” (Maynard & Simpson, 2023, p. 181), along with the need for prisons.

Lindsay’s vision for transforming and healing society, which is linked to Indigenous teachings and cultures, echoes Tess’s comments concerning the need to develop community-led spaces based on an ethic of care, where people value being together, and decision-making is collaborative rather than hierarchical. From this perspective, building caring communities entails “amplifying the spaces that are public, that are held in common, that are shared and co-operative, rather than those designed for or highjacked in the interests of private capital” (Chatzidakis et. al., 2020, p. 51). Furthermore, the findings in this section suggest that it is possible to create “co-operative communities: communities that are coproduced, that enable us to connect, to deliberate and to debate, to find joy and to flourish, and to support each other’s needs amidst the complexities of our mutual dependencies” (Chatzidakis et. al., 2020, p. 58). Radically altering

our sociopolitical and economic relations is no easy task, but ultimately, as adrienne maree brown (2020a, p. 253) asserts, “we are responsible for our own transformation...from broken people and communities to whole ones. I believe transformative justice could yield deeper trust, resilience, and interdependence.” Personally, I could not agree more.

6.4. Concluding Comments: Collective Resistance and Political Agency amongst Prisoners Facilitates Healing and Transformative Social Change

Based on the findings outlined in this chapter, it is evident that challenging the power of the carceral state requires engaging in collective acts of resistance inside and beyond prison walls, along with building and mobilizing political agency among oppressed and marginalized groups. The value of collective resistance and political agency for current and former prisoners, and how this contributes to social change can also be observed from the work of KROM (the Norwegian Association for Penal Reform), which is a grassroots action research group established in 1968 (for more information see: <https://krom.no/aktuelt/arkiv>). According to Thomas Mathiesen (2015) - who was involved in the initial development of KROM and worked intimately with the group until his death in 2021 - KROM was founded on the notion that involving “prisoners themselves in political action” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 9), as active participants within the organization, is essential to “unmasking and documenting concrete practices and activities in the prisons” (*ibid.*, p. 13). KROM placed a “strong emphasis on the abolition of prisons” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 9) by incorporating “theoretical concerns based on broad questions of political action, and concrete issues” (p. 15) viewing “political work as a learning experience” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 10). Members perceived this education in political activism as an end in and of itself, recognizing that mistakes and setbacks are part of the work,

allowing them to critically analyze their efforts and develop “principles of strategies and tactics” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 10) for collective resistance.

The benefits of political education and how this contributes to activism efforts were likewise raised by my participants, who suggested that an increased political consciousness is “like lifting the veil of oppression,” empowering prisoners and facilitating their capacity to contribute to “concrete advocacy against the nature of the effects of the prison system” (Tess, former prisoner, section 6.2). Engaging in political education and social action has a positive ripple effect by building critical consciousness and networks of support within entire communities, from oppressed prisoners to student activists and established scholars. Participating in social movement meetings, conferences, and community organizing activities contributes to forging supportive networks of likeminded people, which are crucial to the abolitionist struggle (Mathiesen, 2015) and central to HTJ praxis. Furthermore, bridging academic analysis with prisoners’ lived experiences is the crux of this project (and my ongoing academic and activist work), and foundational to the action research efforts of KROM and its’ members.

Mathiesen (2015, p. 5) identifies KROM as “the starting point” of his research, theory development (e.g., ‘the unfinished’), and sociopolitical action. This humble acknowledgement from a world-renowned scholar, crediting incarcerated people’s wisdom and shared experiences as the point of departure for his eminent career and legacy underscores that “everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn” (Lisa Guenther, key informant, section 6.3.1). Another intersecting aspect of this study’s findings and KROM’s efforts involves the recognition of prisoners’ strengths, intelligence, analytical skills, and positive contributions to the abolitionist struggle. The work of KROM demonstrates that social change can happen from

the bottom-up and has inspired other prisoner justice activists across Europe and beyond (Mathiesen, 2015).

The development of political agency within members of KROM and celebrating “small victories” (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 32) related to prisoner justice and political organizing, built their capacity to challenge powerful prison administrators. It can be empowering for prisoners, who are often silenced and dismissed, when they mobilize opportunities to exercise their voice and raise awareness about injustices. Recall the discussion in section 6.1, in which prisoners successfully petitioned CSC’s Food Services to provide culturally appropriate and healthy food options. This small win galvanized prisoners to effect further changes by recognizing that, “we just need the power of our voices” (Kerry, former prisoner). The central activities of KROM as documented by Mathiesen (2015, pp. 12-15) included amplifying prisoners’ voices through annual conferences in penal policy (from 1968-2013); seminars or “teach-ins” multiple times a year on concrete and emergent topics; producing and distributing penal press newsletters (i.e., the “KROM-NEWS” journal published intermittently between the 1970s-2007); newspaper articles to raise public awareness; along with several books “on prisoners’ experiences of prison, preventive detention, strategies of political action” and similar topics (Mathiesen, 2015, p. 15).

Empowering people who have been harmed by carceral violence to enact positive change can contribute to building stronger, safer, and inclusive communities through transformative and healing justice. This process is facilitated by disrupting harmful stereotypes about criminalized people. Humanizing those who have experienced incarceration and recognizing underlying criminogenic social conditions are crucial steps in working towards carceral abolition and transformative change (Fayter et al., 2021). Addressing the root causes of harm, oppression, and

criminalization requires the recognition of systemic violence and endemic social inequities through targeted structural and preventive interventions.

Returning to *Table 3*, we observe that many of the HTJ characteristics that participants practiced or suggested would contribute to transformative social change by replacing the standard features of the carceral system with something radically different. Participants employed many aspects of HTJ praxis including: advocacy and trust-building; inclusive, holistic, empowering, strength-based interventions; challenging carceral logics; accessible education; respectful and humanizing treatment; building community resources; focusing on root causes; compassion over violence; and collective approaches to reduce inequity and promote social justice. If incarcerated people can achieve and envision this much under such oppressive conditions, imagine what they could accomplish if they were meaningfully supported in society?

Chapter 7. Conclusion: The Value of Fostering Prisoner Resilience

The creative power of the oppressed will always exceed that of the oppressor, because it is the oppressed who must exercise creativity to navigate and survive a world that is set against them. It is the oppressed who create art and poetry and revolutionary ideas to cultivate hope in bleak places, so that people might galvanize and make change. It is the oppressed who...have demonstrated what the bonds of solidarity can accomplish for the common good (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 78).

Oppression and injustice can serve as catalysts for change and may paradoxically enhance people's resilience to overcome adversity. Indeed, creative forms of resiliency can and do emerge from inequitable social conditions (Payne, 2011). As Hayes and Kaba (2023) so aptly describe in this chapter's epigraph, marginalized people exercise their collective creative power, building hope and solidarity amidst oppressive social conditions to survive and ultimately transform an unjust world. While it is possible for people to find meaning in their suffering, "cultivate hope in bleak places", and begin healing through creative expression, there is no doubt that carceral punishment and isolation damages people (Acoby, 2011; Arbour, 1996; Bingham & Sutton, 2012; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Heney, 1989; Kershaw & Lasovich, 1991; Klein, 2024; Liebling, 2011; Moore & Scraton, 2014).

Imprisonment is also criminogenic. Incarceration can increase people's propensity towards violence (Caputo-Levine, 2013) and harsh prison conditions can lead to increased 'recidivism' following release (Chen & Shapiro, 2007). Even short periods of incarceration results in the likelihood of people losing their jobs, housing, and disruption to their social networks, which makes future lawbreaking more likely (King, Sprott, & Doob, 2024). A recent meta-analysis of 116 studies found that imprisonment has either *no effect* on future lawbreaking or can *increase* the likelihood of 'recidivism' when compared to "community alternatives" such

as probation (Petrich, Pratt, Janson, & Cullen, 2021). The myriad harms born from imprisonment entrenches people in a cycle of recriminalization and reincarceration (Comack, 2018), thus strengthening the perception that prisons are necessary to protect “law-abiding citizens” from the “dangerous criminal other.”

Although criminalized people can transcend their oppression, the typical response of our punitive injustice system (i.e., punishment, isolation, surveillance, and social control) serves as a barrier to healing and social inclusion. Conversely, a healing and transformative justice approach conceives that working with people who are in conflict with the law from a place of compassion, love, and inclusivity is a better avenue to facilitating positive changes in individuals and society than perpetual punishment, surveillance, and social control (Dixon, 2020; Hansen, 2012; Hayes & Kaba, 2023; Kaba, 2021; McCaslin, 2005; Morris, 2000; Page & Woodland, 2023; Sawatsky, 2018). Furthermore, strength-based approaches aimed at nurturing, mobilizing, and rewarding (or positively reinforcing) people’s strengths is a more effective strategy to alter behaviour because “positive reinforcement works exceedingly better and faster than punishment” (Scott, Jain, & Cogburn, 2023, p. 1).

A comprehensive appreciation of federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people’s resiliency and strength-based capacities is poorly understood by the public, policymakers, and mainstream criminology, given the common tendency to depict this population in derogatory, sensationalist, or overly simplistic terms. For example, CSC employs a risk-need-responsivity framework, situating women’s lawbreaking in the context of cognitive and psychological deficiencies (Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2004; Pollack & Kendall, 2005), and reframing women’s histories of trauma and abuse as “risks for reoffending” (Hannah-Moffat, 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b). Popular media depictions of incarcerated women, such as the

television series *Orange is the New Black*, tend to simplify women's identities through narrow cultural and gender stereotypes (Chernoff & Touches, 2018; Fayter, 2022). Research about mainstream Canadian news outlets demonstrates that media narratives frequently normalize the violence that criminalized street level sex workers and substance users experience, producing narrow, unidimensional perceptions of these women, thus reinforcing their perceived deviance (Hugil, 2014). There is also a marked absence of strengths-based re-entry programs or research on this topic for formerly incarcerated women and gender-diverse people. Additionally, there is a paucity of research examining what solidarity and resistance look like inside prisons designated for women (Bosworth, 1999; Bosworth & Carrabine, 2001; Carlton & Russel, 2018; Dillavou, 2023; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Klein, 2024; Law, 2012; Faith, 2011; Fili, 2013), with only a single study exploring these issues in the Canadian context (i.e., Fayter & Kilty, 2023).

In this doctoral thesis, I argue that prisons deplete incarcerated women and gender-diverse people's resilient capacities while promoting system dependency and discourses about their inherent weaknesses. These carceral harms inhibit successful re-entry, making meaningful community inclusion difficult to attain. Despite these harms, prisoners can and do resist, survive, endure, navigate, and even thrive in prison and the community. This Herculean task is facilitated through meaningful social connections based on an ethic of care and the development of relational resilience. By fostering prisoner resilience behind and beyond prison walls, it is possible to mediate carceral harms, as well as envision a more healing and transformative approach to justice. Mobilizing criminalized people's strengths and resiliency contributes to our collective healing, ultimately transforming our social relations and building safer communities.

7.1. Reflections on Resilience and the Crucible of Carceral Confinement

Resilient prisoners are both the subjects (or active participants and focus of this project) and the central finding of this project. This study did not involve conducting a comparative analysis of resilient versus non-resilient prisoners. Instead, this was an exploratory project seeking to challenge dominant discourses both inside and outside of academia that frame women and gender-diverse prisoners especially as vulnerable to adversity (Coughlan, 2019; Martin & Hesselbrock, 2001), having disordered thinking (Maidment, 2006; Pollack, 2004; Pollack & Kendall, 2005), and as engaging in risky, irrational behaviours (McCorkel, 2003) and unhealthy coping mechanisms (Chamberlen, 2018; de Graaf & Kilty, 2016; Dell, Desjarlais, & Kilty, 2011; Kilty, 2011, 2012, 2014; Mahoney, 2011; Moore & Scraton, 2014) in response to life challenges and trauma. These deficit-focused narratives place the onus on the individual to develop resilient capacities and overcome oppressive social conditions, adversity, and trauma. However, without interrogating the structural and systemic constraints that circumscribe criminalized people's lives or recognizing the significant barriers they face to social inclusion and how they survive, large aspects of their identities are ignored. By mobilizing a strength-based framework, this research acknowledges and foregrounds the personal, relational, and collective potential that people incarcerated in prisons designated for women can contribute to society as we build resilience.

What does it mean to be resilient in a carceral setting? Resiliency entails the ability “to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions” (de la Tierra, 2019, p. 133). Given the widespread harms of the carceral state, women and gender-diverse prisoners are resilient when they navigate, cope with, and survive histories of trauma and abuse, oppressive social conditions, and carceral violence. The development of resilience in prison is facilitated through meaningful

social connections and involves exercising personal and political agency, building hope and inner strength, mobilizing strengths that promote coping and healing (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, and educational capacities), and by engaging in acts of solidarity and resistance which build more caring communities.

As a capacity that can be exercised, resilience is a dynamic and malleable characteristic of individuals and communities that occurs on a spectrum or continuum based on their sociocultural environment. People can therefore be more or less resilient at different times and in different spaces, depending on various contextual factors. For example, someone who is in poor physical health (perhaps their immune system is compromised) might have difficulty recovering from injury or illness but can still be spiritually and emotionally resilient. Conversely, someone with poor mental health may struggle to cope with difficult emotions or social situations but can be physically resilient. Likewise, considering different life experiences, unhoused people might fare better in prison than someone who has never struggled to survive and have their basic needs met (i.e., they are more resilient in that context)¹⁰⁵.

Understanding resilience requires a wholistic perspective, balancing people's physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual needs (Linklater, 2014). Based on this research, I assert that meaningful, inclusive social supports strengthen resilience across all domains through a politic of mutual care. When we are struggling mentally, emotionally, physically, financially, or spiritually, it is easier to cope with, recover from, and grow through adversity, if we have

¹⁰⁵ Some unhoused people have been known to purposely break the law to obtain a prison sentence to escape violence in the community and gain access to food, shelter, and health care (see Schneider, 2023).

people that we can count on. Being a part of caring communities builds resilience at the personal, relational, and collective levels.

Resilience can increase or decrease based on various internal and external factors; it is a process and series of actions linked to both social context and identity development that can lead to feelings of accomplishment (Payne, 2011). There are individual strengths and characteristics that promote resilience, but these personal assets cannot be developed in isolation. Resilience is cultivated and enhanced in relationship with people and one's sociocultural environment. As the capacity to grow through and beyond adversity, resilience is facilitated by meaningful social connections (Hartling, 2008; Jane Addams Collective, 2019; Jordan, 1992). A social-relational understanding of resilience recognizes that humans are interdependent and that relationships are vital to our health and wellness.

A crucible is “a place or situation in which people or ideas are tested severely, often creating something new or exciting in the process” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). In this sense, a crucible involves a challenging or severe situation, test, or trial (such as imprisonment and community re-entry), where different elements interact (e.g., conditions of confinement; interpersonal interactions; past experiences; health; personality; length of sentence; access to supports and resources), leading to the creation of something new. Since oppression and violence are inherent to carcerality (Chamberlen, 2018; Comack, 2018; Crewe, 2011; Davis, 2002; Faith, 2011; Foucault, 1977; Klein, 2024; McCoy, 2019; Moore & Scraton, 2014), the prison environment can be considered a crucible (Kilty, 2018). One could argue that *prisoner resilience is forged within the crucible of confinement*. An analogy could be the intense heat and pressure that over time turns coal into diamond, wherein one's resilient identity is the diamond.

Harkening back to Rashani's (1991) poem which opened the introduction to this manuscript, this is the place deep inside us "which is unbreakable and whole".

Resilience is a paradoxical concept. Brokenness and suffering can make us more resilient, compassionate, and empathetic with others, but they could also destroy us. With the necessary supports, however, surviving trauma and challenging life difficulties can make a person stronger (Chamberlen, 2018; Cowen, 1994; Martin, Korchinski, Fels, & Leggo, 2014). In this sense, resilience can emerge from the crucible of confinement. However, resilience can also atrophy when people are isolated and confined, particularly in maximum-security settings and segregation units.

It is difficult to pinpoint specific moments of prisoner resilience due to the complexity and malleability of this concept. Instead, the entirety of participant narratives outlined in *Chapter 5* encompass the characteristics of resilient prisoners. *Chapter 6* expands this analysis to the collective level by considering how criminalized people contribute to building resilient communities behind and beyond prison walls. In the context of incarceration, resilience equals survival; however, I want to avoid placing people in boxes. I do not claim that people who take their own life or dissociate from their pain via substance abuse, self-harm, etc., are not resilient. Resilience cannot be reduced to individual choices. Some people do not have access to the resources (psychological, emotional, material, relational, spiritual) necessary to mobilize strength-based coping or to heal from trauma. Yet, even in cases where a criminalized person appears to lack resilience (e.g., suicide in prison; reincarceration following community re-entry), we must consider the impact of systemic failures to care for them as eroding and inhibiting it.

This project's findings mirror my lived experiences, suggesting that the critical variable that facilitates resilience in challenging situations is relational connections. Increased meaningful social supports can enable people to survive and heal from trauma. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that resilience consists of personal, relational, and collective characteristics, resources, and actions. Prisoners can feel resilient and/or engage in resilient actions by finding ways to cope with and survive the challenges of imprisonment and community re-entry.

7.2. Significance and Implications of this Study

Criminalized and incarcerated people are members of the community. Since Canada does not implement natural life sentences without the possibility of parole, most prisoners will eventually be released. It is therefore in the public's best interest to support incarcerated people's healing and reduce pathways to criminalization by addressing issues of poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental health issues, racism, sexism, and settler-colonialism, among other things.

This study's findings suggest the importance of identifying structural and systemic issues to determine targets for intervention, along with the necessity of preventive interventions so the conditions that propagate violence and social harms in society no longer exist. Rather than deterring lawbreaking, the carceral system is criminogenic, finding "criminals" by increasing surveillance in marginalized and disenfranchised communities (Gilmore, 2007). Instead of rehabilitating "offenders" and supporting reintegration, the prison system further oppresses and traumatizes some of the most marginalized people in society. This discrimination is evident from the demographics of the federal prison population where 46% of people in prisons designated for women are Indigenous (Zinger, 2024); 86% of FSW report histories of abuse (Sapers, 2015); Over 75% of FSW report a lifetime or current mental illness (CSC, 2018c); 75% of FSW are

single parents of minor children (Sapers, 2014); and almost 100% of people in federal prisons experienced poverty at the time they were criminalized (Segal, 2011). Supporting criminalized women and gender-diverse prisoners' healing journeys involves recognizing the pain and honouring the strength of those who have survived carceral and systemic violence.

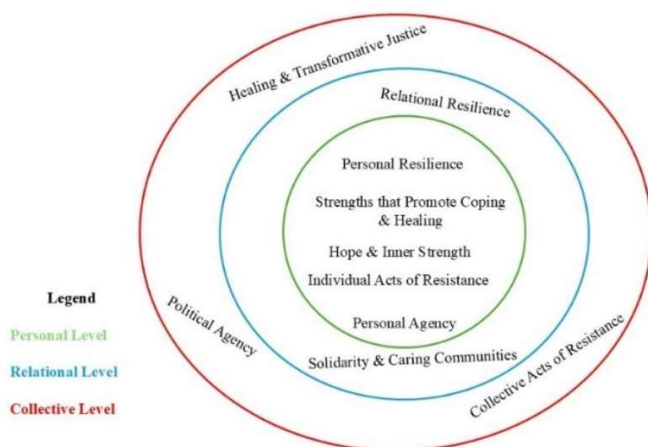
This project's findings also indicate that transforming our social relationships based on an ethic of mutual care and promoting incarcerated people's strengths can support community re-entry. By illustrating prisoners' agentic capacities, strengths-based coping strategies, active hope, resilience, resistance, and solidarity – which occur despite system efforts to stifle these assets – this study suggests that we need to think differently about justice. These characteristics of resilient prisoners are central to healing and transformative justice (see *Table 1*). HTJ provides a useful framework for developing healthy, well-resourced communities based on equity and social justice as we strive for abolitionist futures and a world free of carceral violence.

As discussed throughout this manuscript, there is a paucity of strength-based research concerning criminalized women and gender-diverse people. In terms of an empirical contribution, I have examined my autoethnographic record and participant narratives in relation to CSC policies and practices to demonstrate how people in prisons designated for women navigate and survive their experiences of incarceration and community re-entry. In terms of a conceptual contribution, I have developed a framework for prisoner resilience by showcasing the strengths, solidarity, and resistance of people in prisons designated for women along with exploring how criminalized people envision and contribute to transformative social change. *Figure 3* below presents a nested, ecological model of prisoner resilience. Proceeding from the centre circle outwards are the individual level traits, relational characteristics, and finally the collective aspects that promote prisoner resilience and the development of resilient communities.

As I noted previously, these concepts are mutually reinforcing and interdependent, interacting within and between each level of analysis. This model illustrates characteristics that we ought to foster within individuals, interpersonal relationships, and our larger communities.

The symbolism of circles is important because, according to Cree scholar Jean Stevenson (1999), the circle is a sacred symbol of the interrelated connections of all forms of life. There is no beginning and no end to the circle, and it is perfectly balanced. Indigenous ceremonies, gatherings, and dances require a circle formation, and the Medicine Wheel is round. Additionally, healing and talking circles which are “symbolic of the cycle of life” (Stevenson, 1999, p. 9) are key practices of healing and transformative justice (Page & Woodland, 2023; Sawatsky, 2018).

Figure 3: Nested Ecological Model of Prisoner Resilience



By documenting the harms of the carceral state and comparing these to data and literature concerning healing and transformative justice praxis (see *Table 3*), this research underscores how CSC policies and practices are diametrically opposed to building safer, inclusive communities based on healing and social transformation.

In terms of contributions to the study of gendered confinement and resilience, this project builds on previous research on the gendered pains of imprisonment for people in prisons designated for women (e.g., Bingham & Sutton, 2012; Carlen, 2002a,b; Carlton & Russell, 2018; Chamberlen, 2018; CHRC, 2003; Faith, 2011; Fayter & Payne, 2017; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Hutchison, 2020; Kilty, 2014; Law, 2012; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Pollack, 2005, 2012), documenting the harms of the carceral state in relation to a framework for prisoner resilience to illustrate how the system stifles people's strengths, promoting system dependency and discourses about their inherent weaknesses. This project's findings highlight carceral harms that are unique to or particularly painful for people in prisons designated for women, including: a lack of accessible and appropriate physical and mental health care; pregnancy in prison and maintaining access to children and loved ones; paternalistic or infantilizing treatment and parole supervision (e.g., report all relationships; parenting classes); punishing acts of care and mutual aid; sexual assault and exploitation; and punishing or challenging prisoners that resist patriarchal and heteronormative gender norms, such as passive femininity. This study explored how criminalized women and gender-diverse people cope with, navigate, and survive this carceral minefield by mobilizing their personal, relational, and collective strengths. Payne's (2011, p. 433) "sites of resilience" theory (introduced in *Chapter 5*) expands on traditional psychological conceptualizations of resilience to incorporate analyses of structural conditions and social context from a strength-based perspective, asserting that "*all individuals, groups, and/or local communities are resilient!*" (emphasis in original). This is the first study to mobilize the concept of relational resilience (Jordan, 1992; Hartling, 2008) for research on criminalized and incarcerated people.

This project also contributes to studies concerning the gendered nature of solidarity and resistance in prison. Based on research from men's prisons, there has been a decline in mutual aid, opposition to prison staff, and shared values of solidarity among prisoners in the 21st century (Crewe, 2005), with overt, collective resistance being exceedingly rare (Crewe, 2007, 2012). However, recent studies on solidarity and resistance inside women's prisons indicates that incarcerated women form communities of mutual care, engaging in solidarity as a form of emotional coping, survival work, and in resistance to systemic oppression (Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Klein, 2024). This study's findings are consistent with this recent scholarship and expands our understanding of the nature, process, and types of resistance and solidarity that are practiced inside prisons designated for women. Where resistance is swiftly punished and solidarity is inhibited due to "correctional" policies and practices (see *Chapter 4*), "forging collective care in this setting is insurgent" (Klein, 2024, p. 2) and a revolutionary act that can contribute to radical social change.

According to David Scott (2020, p.188) "the aim for abolitionists is not just about dismantling the prison but also about generating a philosophy of hope, building communities and fostering a widespread commitment to acknowledging the common humanity of all." This research contributes to the abolitionist struggle by acknowledging prisoners' humanity and challenging harmful stereotypes and stigmatizing assumptions about this population (elaborated upon in the next section). Additionally, prisoner-led reforms can contribute to abolitionist efforts in the short-term by reducing carceral power, along with reducing the harms of imprisonment and barriers to re-entry without further legitimating or expanding the system. Some examples of abolitionist-oriented prisoner-led reforms which influenced penal policies, practices, or programs that were documented in this study and revealed to me throughout the research process include

peer-support¹⁰⁶ and prisoner-led programs¹⁰⁷; 2SLGBTQ+ reforms¹⁰⁸; policies related to employment and education in prison¹⁰⁹; along with re-entry and parole issues¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁶ In section 2.3.6, I provided a case example of the first P4W peer-support team that began in 1990 as a collaboration between prisoners and social work therapists in response to a suicide epidemic. The social workers who visited the women inside learned that the women had already developed an informal support system based on mutual aid to assist their peers in crisis (Kendall, 1993; Pollack, 1993). These therapists provided formal training to the women on the peer-support team and helped coordinate it, but this was a prisoner-led initiative that allowed prisoners to “do some of the work under the radar, so that the people wouldn’t have to tell a guard or one of the counselors. It was a way to have a support system that could be out of the huge scrutiny of the system, although the system would know it was happening, of course, and would facilitate it. But the details didn’t need to be all transmitted” (Jade, key informant). As one of the social workers who contributed to the development of the P4W peer-support team, Jade shared how prisoners practicing mutual care among their peers “allowed a certain amount of safety for the women who were struggling. And our philosophy at the time was that the women are going to be safer if they can talk to someone that they trust.” Unfortunately, this peer-support model did not translate to the regional prisons following the closure of P4W.

¹⁰⁷ In section 5.2.4, the example of a prisoner-led music program at GVI illustrates a strength-based prisoner initiative that allowed incarcerated people to share their talents and skills with each other. Prisoners learned how to write songs and play various instruments, then showcase their musical talents at events in the prison. Additionally, in section 5.6, I highlight several other prisoner-led programs that aim to build solidarity and mutual aid among incarcerated people, including the Native Sisterhood, the Lifers’ group, and Black Women of Diversity group. These peer-led initiatives met regularly to discuss relevant issues and organized events and fundraisers in the prisons, providing incarcerated people with an opportunity to engage in positive events, build social connections, and have a break from prison life.

¹⁰⁸ In section 5.5, under footnote 72, I shared the example of *Kavanagh v. Canada* (2001), which established case law requiring CSC to change their health service policies related to trans prisoners and sex reassignment surgery in consultation with the CHRC. This reform emerged from a complaint to the CHRC filed by Synthia Kavanagh in 1993, who argued that she was being discriminated against based on her sex (her hormone therapy had been discontinued three years prior, she was being held in a men’s prison and was denied gender reassignment surgery). Another 2SLGBTQ+ related reform was the creation of prisoner-led 2SLGBTQ+ for Change groups in every federal prison designated for women (except for the Indigenous Healing Lodge). As noted in section 5.6, the first 2SLGBTQ+ for Change group for women and gender-diverse prisoners began at GVI in 2015. Nyki Kish, who is one of the formerly incarcerated people that established this initial 2SLGBTQ+ group reported that they had to file two grievances to CSC National Headquarters before they were granted permission to launch this peer-led group.

¹⁰⁹ During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, linked to complaints and grievances filed by thousands of federal prisoners, including a national group grievance that was facilitated by CAEFS, the 30% fee deductions from incarcerated people’s income for food, accommodation, and telephone access implemented by the Harper Conservative government in 2013, were waived. The OCI was concerned because CSC had indicated that these changes were only temporary (Zinger, 2023). However, according to a confidential email excerpt obtained through government sources, as of March 20, 2023, “the 30% deductions imposed by the previous government for food, accommodation, and the Prisoner Telephone System have been abolished”. This policy change came into effect on September 11, 2023, permanently removing the 22% deduction for food and accommodation, and 8% for the administration of the phone system (CSC, 2023b). In terms of access to education in prison, on June 20, 2024, the John Howard Society of Canada and an incarcerated applicant serving a life sentence, Ghassan Salah, filed a motion with the Ontario Superior Court of Justice against the Attorney General of Canada, asserting that CSC’s Internet ban is unconstitutional and causes unnecessary barriers to obtaining post-secondary education in prison (Kennedy, 2024).

One prisoner-led initiative that I would like to showcase is the creation of the W2B collectives¹¹¹. The first collective was formed in 2012 at GVI as part of the final project for the first W2B course (Pollack, 2019). Based on the relational, collaborative learning approach of W2B classes (Gallivan, et. al., 2023; Kilty, Lehalle, & Fayter, 2020; Pollack & Edwards, 2018), the inside and outside students, along with the professor, wanted to maintain contact following the completion of the course¹¹². The GVI collective is comprised of program alumni (approximately half of the members are currently incarcerated) and meets biweekly inside the prison, serving as the steering committee for W2B classes, while also developing and facilitating annual 5-day instructor trainings for educators interested in teaching W2B courses (Pollack, 2019). The W2B program privileges the insights and voices of people with lived experience of incarceration, especially those who are currently imprisoned (*ibid.*).

Additionally, W2B has an Ontario community-based alumni collective that was initiated by formerly incarcerated people who were members of the GVI collective and subsequently

¹¹⁰ The case law example of *Twins v. Canada* (2016) referenced in section 5.5, within footnote 72, led to a supreme court ruling that *Gladue* (1999) principles for Indigenous people must be extended to parole decisions, stipulations, and supervision. The applicant in this case, Joey Twins, is an Indigenous woman serving a life sentence. In terms of housing and community re-entry, between 2022-2023 the CAEFS Transformative Voice and Systems Change committee, consisting of people with lived experiences of incarceration, developed a “Better Practices” manual for “Community Residential Facilities” (CRFs) or halfway houses. This manual emerged from a recognition that CRFs across Canada do not have any consistent policies or practices, and staff were generally unaware of the harm formerly incarcerated people endure due to a lack of release planning, limited transitional supports, along with highly restrictive parole conditions and supervision. This manual was compiled and written solely by people with lived experience and includes many case examples and suggested changes for CRF operations. Portions of this manual were incorporated into the CAEFS (2024b) *Community in Action: Understanding Conditional Release and Parole* handbook for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people, and this information will be shared with CRF’s across Canada.

¹¹¹ For more information on W2B collectives, see: <https://wallstobridges.ca/w2b-collectives/>

¹¹² CSC maintains a rule for student “visitors” and any volunteers who provide educational services (and other volunteer-led programs) to incarcerated people, that prohibits them from maintaining contact with current prisoners following the completion of the program activity (e.g., via phone calls, letters, or visits).

released on parole (Pollack, 2019). Due to the “non-association” condition that restricts people on parole from connecting with anyone who has a criminal record (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2022a; Pollack, 2009b), the W2B community collective enables formerly incarcerated people to continue working together to raise awareness about the realities of the prison system and the importance of education. The community collective provides opportunities for temporary absences from the prison so ‘inside’ collective members can join community-based workshops and presentations. Furthermore, while encouraging access to education inside prison and upon release, “the leadership and dedication of formerly incarcerated community-based collective members [of] W2B has been able to provide some opportunities for paid employment, skill building, and social connections” (Pollack, 2019, p. 9), offering much-needed support during the difficult transition from prison to community. Along with the Ontario community collective, there is a W2B British Columbia collective (The Walls to Bridges BC Collective, 2023) that was established by Nyki Kish, a formerly incarcerated member of the GVI collective. The community-based collectives are coordinated by W2B alumni with lived experiences of imprisonment.

Instead of interventions and research solely focused on addressing the perceived risks/needs of FSW and gender-diverse people, greater efforts need to be dedicated to “understanding and improving what it takes to develop and maintain human strengths, social capital, and happiness” (Olson, 2023, p. 4). Building prisoner solidarity and fostering resilience can mediate the harms of the carceral state, contribute to prisoners’ healing, and promote transformative social change. What might be possible if more people were aware of the positive contributions criminalized people can make in society?

7.3. Practical Applications and Recommendations for Change

Since this research was situated within the critical or transformative methodological paradigm (see *Chapter 3*), I strove for transformational validity of the findings or the potential for this project to contribute to transformative social change (Prilleltensky, 2008). This process began with inviting study participants to share their suggestions and insights for social and policy changes that could positively impact criminalized people. Some of these ideas were presented in *Chapter 6* (within section 6.3) and were discussed in the context of healing and transformative justice. In this section, I expand the discussion to explicate the practical application of this work, suggesting changes to prison and community “correctional” policies and practices.

This research provides a new framework for understanding federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people that is linked to HTJ praxis, which is a much-needed intervention in criminology. As aforementioned, one key application of these findings involves challenging the dominant stereotypes and stigmatizing assumptions about criminalized women that proliferate in society. While this aspect of the research will be incorporated into my undergraduate teaching duties¹¹³ and communicated via conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications, it is essential that this information be shared with a wider audience outside of academia¹¹⁴. Popular consciousness-raising could occur via a variety of venues and formats including the development

¹¹³ In the winter term 2025, I am teaching a third-year course on women’s criminalization and gendered confinement. I have already invited several former prisoners to speak in this class and share their successes with the students.

¹¹⁴ I have begun this work through my activism and advocacy efforts, including a radio documentary about this research on CBC *Ideas*; a recent podcast recording with the Ottawa Transformative Justice Collective on an Ottawa radio station (CHUO FM) broadcasted on September 13, 2024; W2B workshops; organizing work with the P4WMC (art show, public speaking, PJD events, development of a memorial healing garden); participation in federal policy discussions; speaking at my church; and various other speaking engagements and outreach activities.

of a website where criminalized people can showcase their strengths, skills, and talents; podcast and radio conversations; community gatherings or workshops; hosting a community dinner and dialogue; magazine and newspaper articles; arts-based events (e.g., art installation, musical showcase, poetry reading); digital storytelling¹¹⁵; a collection of prisoner poetry, essays, and short stories; a film documentary; and/or a non-academic book. For each of these examples, it is essential that current and formerly incarcerated people are involved in planning and implementing the activities so they can share their strengths with and continue to develop leadership skills amongst the wider community. As Graveline (1998, p. 152) asserts, “to continue to learn and grow as individuals we need a supportive community environment. Sharing and mutuality builds individual and community strength.” In collaborative and egalitarian spaces, we are better positioned to “recognize our immanence and interconnectedness. These are essential understandings if we are to build community across diversity” (*ibid.*). In the future, I hope to have access to resources that could support criminalized people in co-creating research and interventions that are meaningful to them.

7.3.1. Suggested changes to prison policies and practices

I have previously discussed the limitations of penal reform initiatives (see *section 2.1*) and the need for abolitionist alternatives. Nevertheless, this project’s findings underscore the widespread harms of the carceral state and the need to reduce the harms of imprisonment for

¹¹⁵ Digital storytelling is a critical arts-based research and social action process that allows participants to create their own multimedia stories based on their lived experiences and personal narratives, as a means of decolonizing knowledge creation and mobilization to advance social inclusion, well-being, and justice (<https://revisionstorymaking.ca/>).

currently incarcerated people through targeted, short-term reforms. In this section, I explore potential changes to prison policies and practices that could alleviate prisoners' suffering and isolation without strengthening the legitimacy of the system.

At the very least, prisoners require training and uninhibited access to the relevant laws and policies that impact them, so their fundamental human and constitutional rights are upheld and respected. This important work has been spearheaded by CAEFS, in collaboration with the Native Women's Association of Canada, and Strength in Sisterhood since 2008 with the first edition of the *Human Rights in Action* handbook (updated in 2021), which provides incarcerated people with the tools to defend and advocate for their rights. In 2015, CAEFS established a *Human Rights and Advocacy* peer training program in the regional prisons to provide prisoners with further resources to advocate for themselves and their peers¹¹⁶. Unfortunately, spots in this program were limited and the training was only offered once a year. Human rights and policy training should be made available to all federally sentenced people as part of the intake process. This could be facilitated through a peer-led program whereby previously trained prisoners can share this information with new arrivals. Likewise, to support access to information and facilitate post-secondary educational opportunities for incarcerated people, Internet access must be made available to federal prisoners. Education and learning opportunities are crucial for oppressed people because, "empowerment comes from knowledge" (Lorraine, former prisoner, section

¹¹⁶ Currently, there is a peer advocacy program, overseen by CAEFS, that provides employment to people in prisons designated for women based on the human rights training initiative. Every prison designated for women now has an active team of peer advocates who are empowered to create change from within the system. Along with advocating for prisoners' rights, these peer advocacy teams share knowledge with other currently incarcerated people to assist them in creating their own prisoner-led committees and programs (CAEFS, personal communication, 2024a).

5.2.2). The current CSC Internet ban has recently come under scrutiny and was identified as unconstitutional in a *Charter* challenge submitted by the John Howard Society and an incarcerated person serving a life sentence to the Attorney General of Canada on June 20, 2024 (Kennedy, 2024).

Some of the most harmful and traumatic penal practices employed against incarcerated women and gender-diverse people include strip-searching and confinement in isolation units. Strip-searching inside prisons designated for women ought to be eliminated due to high incidents of physical and sexual assault among this population (Hutchison, 2020, 2024) and sexual exploitation of prisoners perpetrated by guards (see section 4.2.1). Maximum-security units where Black and Indigenous women and gender-diverse people, along with people struggling with serious mental health issues are grossly overrepresented (Zinger, 2021, 2022), ought to be abolished. This restructuring of the system is aligned with the “least restrictive measures” principle of the *CCRA* (1992, s. 4.c) and the initial vision of *Creating Choices* (TFFSW, 1990) where the regional prisons for women were supposed to provide “non-intrusive security measures” (p.84), no perimeter fencing, and no maximum-security or segregation units, replacing the austere, draconian conditions of P4W. Likewise, due to CSC’s unfulfilled promise to end segregation and the failure of SIU’s which have perpetuated and expanded its use (Sprott & Doob, 2021), all forms of solitary confinement and isolation units should be eliminated in accordance with *Bill S-230 - Providing Alternatives to Isolation and Ensuring Oversight and Remedies in the Correctional System Act (Tona’s Law)*. Additionally, Canada should sign on to the United Nations (2002) *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, which underscores the need to eliminate SIUs and strip-searching practices in prison.

Along with Internet access and the abolition of secure units, other measures that would reduce isolation and enable prisoners to maintain social connections behind and beyond prison walls should be implemented. CSC’s “no-sharing” policy (CSC, 2015b) should be eliminated along with the practice in most prisons designated for women of not allowing prisoners to visit other living units. These changes would limit CSC’s power to inhibit acts of solidarity and mutual aid among prisoners (see section 4.4.1) so that incarcerated people would not risk disciplinary charges for supporting their peers and building community. Allowing prisoners to build social connections, sharing meals and resources, and supporting their friends when they are struggling, would reduce lateral violence among prisoners and facilitate the development of “pro-social” skills, which CSC aims to support. Additionally, reducing barriers¹¹⁷ to the development and implementation of prisoner-led programs can reduce isolation, promote wellbeing, resilience, and self-determination for incarcerated people, and contribute to “building climates of solidarity and support for one another” (Tess, former prisoner, section 5.6). By fostering an ethic of care inside prison, people are better positioned to create communities of care outside prison walls.

7.3.2. Potential policy changes in the community “correctional” landscape

Formerly incarcerated people face a wide range of barriers to re-entering the community, (see discussion throughout *Chapter 4*) along with having to navigate a transcarceral network of

¹¹⁷ Current barriers to the development and implementation of prisoner-led programs include incarcerated people obtaining approval from CSC National Headquarters; securing program space and a time slot in prison (so that prisoner participants have permission/movement passes to attend); a lack of funding and resources; and a non-security staff (usually a Social Programs Officer – SPO) required to support the program. If the SPO leaves this position, the newly assigned staff person might not be supportive of the program.

social control and surveillance actors and practices. For example, these include parole conditions (e.g., being mandated to see ‘psy’ professionals and/or take psychiatric medications), halfway house rules, child protection services demands, maintain housing, criminal record checks, social assistance requirements, and difficulty securing affordable and accessible health and mental care and education (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; Lowman, Menzies, & Palys, 1987; Maidment, 2006; McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021a, 2022a; Pollack, 2009b). Exiting prison with a criminal record, parole stipulations, and a lack of transitional supports, leaves many former prisoners traversing the same pathways to criminalization (e.g., poverty, addiction, mental health issues, homelessness, stigma, social exclusion) that led to their imprisonment in the first place. In this section, I offer recommendations for policies and practices that could support prisoner re-entry, reduce pathways to criminalization, and contribute to building more inclusive and caring communities.

Formerly incarcerated women and gender-diverse people with a residency condition that they reside in a halfway house face geographic displacement due to forced relocation to an unfamiliar community (see section 4.1.2). Coupled with restrictive halfway house rules guided by “risk management thinking” and the passive role prisoners play in their pre-release planning, results in creating pains of release (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021a, 2022a) that make community re-entry precarious (Balfour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018), contributing to further isolation and marginalization of former prisoners (Pollack, 2009b). These barriers combine to make the transition from prison to community unnecessarily challenging.

Incarcerated people should be active participants in the creation of their “correctional” plans and reintegration planning, rather than having the “illusion of choice” (section 4.1.1). As former prisoner Tiina expressed, “we need to be able to articulate what we need” (section 4.1.2).

Allowing prisoners to exercise agency concerning how their return to community unfolds is humanizing and consistent with a strength-based re-entry approach (Burnett & Maruna, 2006; Maruna & LeBel, 2003, 2015). This process begins by inviting the individual to share their goals, capabilities, and resources across various domains (e.g., education, housing, employment, health, social supports), and then tailoring interventions to their particular needs and strengths (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Hunter, Lanza, Lawlor, Dyson, & Gordon, 2015).

Aligned with a strength-based re-entry approach is the need to remove the parole stipulation and halfway house policies that restrict peer-support and mutual care practices among criminalized people and those who are currently under parole supervision (see section 4.4.2). Opposed to this isolating carceral practice, strength-based models promote social connections and the use of informal helping networks (Brun & Rapp, 2001). This can facilitate successful re-entry through engagement in roles and activities that allow formerly incarcerated people to support others and give back to their communities (Burnett & Maruna, 2006). The value of peer support and connecting with people who have a shared experience to assist with the difficult transition of returning to the community has long been recognized by critical feminist scholars (Pollack, 2009b), yet CSC continues to discourage and penalize peer-support. As a formerly incarcerated participant (Jacob) described, the restrictive parole stipulations made him feel like he was in “this prison of loneliness” and what he required upon his return to the community was “people to walk this journey with me” (see section 4.1.2).

Recently released prisoners who are not required to reside in a halfway house and are not able or willing to return to the community where they were criminalized, often face a housing crisis. When people leave prison on their statutory release date or warrant expiry, CSC is not required to provide housing support and has been known to release “people to a park bench in

Toronto” (Billie, former prisoner) or “we may have to go to shelters” (Jacob, former prisoner section 4.2.2). With requirements to abstain from drugs and alcohol, maintain employment, and not associate with other criminalized people, former prisoners are forced into situations where reincarceration is inevitable or easier to cope with than life in the community. To better facilitate re-entry, we need a significant increase in social and affordable housing options so that former prisoners are not forced to stay in an emergency shelter, live on the streets, or (re)turn to lawbreaking to survive.

Obtaining safe housing, meaningful employment, volunteer work, and even access to education, is extremely difficult for ex-prisoners due to the common practice of criminal record checks. Even for those who have employment experience and post-secondary education, a criminal record can prevent them from working in their field. As Anastasia (former prisoner) indicated: “I have three college degrees, and I can’t return to that line of work with a criminal record” (section 4.2.2). To reduce some of these barriers to social inclusion and community re-entry, policy changes in the form of *Bill S-212: An Act to amend the Criminal Records Act* must be legislated. Indeed, I appeared as a witness at the Senate Standing Committee meeting on Constitutional and Legal Affairs on June 1, 2023, in support of this legislation. *Bill S-212* “aims to remove current criminal records barriers that perpetuate punishment, particularly for the poor, and that exacerbate obstacles to successful community integration” (Pate, 2023a). This bill calls for a record expiry, not suspension; the elimination of application fees; and automatic record expiry (i.e., no application process) “after two years (for summary convictions) or five years (for indictable offences) without new convictions or pending charges” (Pate, 2023a).

Another important avenue for supporting prisoner re-entry, reducing pathways to (re)criminalization, and fostering transformative social change involves creating legislation that

guarantees a livable income, such as *Bill S-233: An Act to Develop a National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income*. Promoting our individual and collective resilience necessitates systemic changes based on the principle of equity, so we can “create a more substantively equal starting point socially, economically, and health wise” (Senator Kim Pate, key informant, section 6.3.2). Providing people with the necessary resources to have their basic needs met is essential to our collective healing, liberation, and building a more just and caring society (Chatzidakis et. al., 2020; Hayes & Kaba, 2023; Page & Woodland, 2023). As Hayes and Kaba (2023) remind us, in a society based on reciprocal care where everyone’s survival needs are met, feelings of despair, fear, and interpersonal violence would be reduced.

Given the clear links between poverty and incarceration (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2014; Segal, 2011; Schneider, 2023), along with the significant cost of poverty and homelessness in Canada¹¹⁸ (due to reduced economic growth, people’s increased reliance on health and social services, as well as the exorbitant costs in the criminal legal system), investing in a guaranteed livable income would *save* governments and taxpayers money (Pate, 2023b). Such an approach would also reduce the likelihood of lawbreaking as a means of survival (Edelman, 2017), thus reducing the number of people sentenced to prison. A report from Stanford University’s *Social Innovation Review* advocates for “a minimally conditional cash transfer with traditional reentry interventions” to be provided to people exiting prison, which would reduce some of the challenges of this difficult transition and facilitate successful reintegration. The conclusion of the report asserts that by, “directly confronting the poverty that

¹¹⁸ A conservative estimate of the cost of poverty in Canada is approximately \$80 billion per year (Pate, 2023b).

underlies many cases of recidivism, we can build on the successes of existing reentry programs and begin to dismantle” the carceral system (Edelman, 2017).

In addition to providing people with a basic livable income and ensuring their housing needs are met, fostering healing and transformative justice entails the provision of people’s physical and mental health care needs (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Page & Woodland, 2023; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sawatsky, 2018). Universal free pharmacare and dental care should be made available for low-income people and those on parole, along with “health care that is respectful and free and readily available” (Fiona, key informant, section 6.3.2) for everyone.

Further progressive policy changes include prohibiting the incarceration of pregnant women and mothers of young children (see section 4.1.1) by developing alternative, community-based solutions. This is important because incarcerated mothers are often the primary or sole caregivers of their children (Crewe, Hulley, & Wright, 2017; Sapers, 2014) and approximately 90% of incarcerated mothers lose their children to the child welfare system (Pate, 2022). Additionally, the separation of parents and children due to imprisonment leads to intergenerational trauma, further stigmatization of marginalized communities, and a range of long-term socioeconomic, educational, behavioural, physical, and mental health challenges for these families (Arrondelle, Gadian, & Plugge, 2024; Mussell, 2020; Richie, 2002).

Finally, by reducing the number of people being sent to prison and supporting marginalized and disadvantaged people’s needs in the community, we can begin to dismantle carceral institutions and redirect public spending from the criminal legal system to invest in building safe, caring communities. Divesting from policing and imprisonment, and redirecting

the money saved from a reduction in poverty costs¹¹⁹ generated by a guaranteed basic income could be used to fund community groups that utilize transformative and healing justice approaches, as well as develop more community-led and community-owned spaces that promote collective caring and a sense of belonging (Tess, former prisoner, section 6.3.2).

Overall, this project's findings and the suggested policy changes outlined above underscore the need for carceral abolition. A healing and transformative justice framework indicates the importance of addressing various intersecting systemic and structural issues (e.g., poverty, homelessness, racism, patriarchy, lack of access to education, health care, employment) to reduce social harms and violence in society. These preventive, healing, and transformative interventions would reduce the need for police and prisons while building caring communities.

7.4. Project Limitations and Future Research Directions

Situating this research within the federal penitentiary system neglects the voices of women and gender-diverse people within the provincial-territorial (PT) penal systems. Although every federal prisoner in Canada has been incarcerated in a PT institution (on remand custody or following their sentencing and prior to transfer), and some participants shared their experiences in these jails, this aspect of participant narratives was not incorporated into the analysis. As I discussed in the opening of *Chapter 1*, the legislative and operational guidelines for PT jails is under the jurisdiction of each provincial or territorial government. People imprisoned in PT jails

¹¹⁹ According to a recent study from the Community-University Institute for Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan, it is estimated that every dollar invested in a livable basic income program generates \$1.06 in savings (Findlay, Kalagnanam, Rheume, Pham, Plante, & Christopherson-Cote, 2023).

also serve shorter sentences (under two years) and PT institutions have high rates of population turnover due to the frequency of admissions, discharges, and transfers (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2021b), which complicates research in this setting. Furthermore, legal challenges and policy changes must be directed to each specific government body. Due to the complex nature of the PT system, a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of provincially or territorially sentenced people and the respective policies and practices of these institutions would be challenging. Future research investigating the strengths, resistance, and solidarity of PT prisoners and their experiences of re-entry could yield alternative and rich insights on prisoner resilience.

The sample of criminalized participants consisted solely of former federal prisoners, because I did not attempt to obtain ethics approval from the CSC Research Office to connect with currently incarcerated people. Due to time constraints, along with my criminalized status and the CSC's practice of restricting access for critical prison scholars (Kilty, 2014; Mario & Kilty, 2024), it was not feasible to invite current prisoners to participate in this project. Future research should examine how currently incarcerated people understand carceral resilience, resistance, and solidarity as they are experienced in real time.

As indicated above, there is a dearth of research examining solidarity and resistance inside prisons designated for women, especially in the Canadian context, and there is no literature on these topics that has been generated about or from the perspective of currently incarcerated people in Canada. Involving current prisoners could yield a more robust and in-depth understanding of prisoner resilience. Such an approach could also facilitate a wider diversity of perspectives due to the challenges of maintaining contact and working with formerly incarcerated people in the community, as outlined in section 3.4.3. Future research could also test and further develop the framework of prisoner resilience, by asking incarcerated people to share

their perspectives concerning what it means to be resilient in a carceral setting (which is a question I did not ask of participants).

It is also important to note that this study's findings are not representative of all federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people's experiences and insights for multiple reasons, including a small sample size (n=20). As discussed in section 3.4.3, most study participants (75%) served all or part of their sentence at GVI and were recruited within Ontario. There was also an absence of criminalized participants who were incarcerated in the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan, despite 30% of the participant sample identifying as Indigenous. There were also no participants who served time in the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatchewan. Future research should aim to include a more equal representation of incarcerated people's perspectives from every CSC institution that houses women and gender-diverse people. Lastly, half of the criminalized participants (n=10) were recruited through W2B and/or activist spaces, which highlights a selection bias. Given the myriad positive impacts of W2B (Pollack, 2016), along with the sense of community, meaning, and solidarity experienced in prisoner-led activist groups (e.g., P4WMC¹²⁰, CAEFS Transformative Voice and Systems Change team¹²¹, Strength

¹²⁰ The P4W Memorial Collective is a group of formerly incarcerated women, most of whom served time in P4W prior to its closure. This collective organizes healing circles every year for Prisoners' Justice Day on the grounds of P4W since the early 2000s. The main purpose of the group is to develop a memorial garden at P4W to honour the lives of women who have died in federal prisons across Canada. See www.p4wmemorialcollective.com for more information.

¹²¹ CAEFS' Transformative Voice and Systems Change committee was a two-year project (2022-2024) aimed at addressing and raising awareness about five key areas that impact criminalized people: housing, employment, research, the law, and media. This team engaged in media outreach, housing advocacy, and developed a "Better Practices" manual for "Community Residential Facilities" (i.e., halfway houses), and consisted entirely of criminalized and formerly incarcerated people across Canada.

in Sisterhood¹²²), prisoner resilience and strength-based capacities were a logical outcome of this research. One could argue that this study aimed to locate resilient prisoners, so that was what was found. However, this project sought to expand our understanding of criminalized people's identities by showcasing their resilient capacities, as a counterbalance to the prevalence of deficit-focused research, literature, and media depictions of this population. This is a story that needs to be told.

Notably, there was an overrepresentation of former prisoner participants who identified as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities (50%). As I mentioned in section 3.4.3, the CSC does not collect data on prisoners' sexual orientation and there are no survey or other data available exploring the overrepresentation of 2SLGBTQ+ people in Canadian prisons or jails designated for women¹²³. Research from the United States indicates that LGBTQ+ people are arrested, imprisoned, and given community supervision orders at significantly higher rates than heterosexual and cisgender people, particularly for trans people and queer women (Jones, 2021). Data from the US National Inmate Survey indicates that 6.3% - 9.3% of incarcerated cisgender men self-identified as LGBTQ+, while 35.7% - 42.1% of incarcerated cisgender women self-identified as LGBTQ+ (Meyer et al., 2017). Transgender people also experience higher rates of

¹²² Strength in Sisterhood (SIS) was originally founded by Gayle Horri along with other incarcerated women to highlight the problems and carceral violence inherent to the women's prison system. SIS is a prison abolition group primarily consisting of women who have survived imprisonment, working collaboratively with allies to end imprisonment for women. See <https://www.strengthinsisterhood.net/> for more information.

¹²³ There is a single Canadian survey study that examined the incarceration rates of transgender men, gender non-binary people, and Two-Spirit individuals indicating that 5.7% of transgender men, 10.6% of gender non-binary participants, and 19.7% of Two-Spirit respondents have been incarcerated at some point, compared to 3.7% of cisgender men non-Two-Spirit respondents and 7.1% of Indigenous men non-Two-Spirit respondents (Jacobson, et. al., 2023). Additionally, a Canadian legal study examines case law related to gender identity and the implementation of *Bill C-16 – An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code*, asserting that gender-diverse people experience overly harsh conditions of confinement compared to cisgender people (Nadarajah, 2023).

incarceration than cisgender people in the US; one survey reports that 16% of transgender and gender non-conforming respondents had a history of incarceration (Grant et al., 2011).

There are challenges to collecting data on prisoners' sexual orientation and gender identities or expression, since incarcerated people may not want to disclose this information out of fear of discrimination or abuse. Future research could explore whether this population is also over-criminalized and overrepresented in Canadian prisons, and how their experiences of imprisonment and re-entry unfold compared to heterosexual and cisgender identifying people. Considering the intersecting layers of oppression that criminalized women and gender-diverse people face (Balfour & Comack, 2014; Zinger, 2017, 2018, 2021), another limitation of this project is the lack of an intersectional analysis (see section 1.4). Future research should aim to nuance intersectional variation in the HTJ framework and in terms of how differently located participants experience and understand carceral resilience, resistance, and transformative social change.

Building on the findings of this project and prisoner re-entry scholarship in Canada (e.g., Bafour, Hannah-Moffat, & Turnbull, 2018; Maidment, 2006; Munn & Bruckert, 2013; Pollack, 2009b; Shantz, Kilty, Frigon, 2009; Shantz & Frigon, 2010), future research could explore how strength-based approaches guided by principles of mutual aid and transformative justice can support prisoner re-entry and social inclusion. By examining prisoners' resilience through a framework of strength-based re-entry efforts, such a project could explore potential strategies that could be used to reimagine community support systems. Future research on this topic would produce empirical data and an alternative conceptual framing of how an asset-oriented approach to prisoner re-entry built on principles of transformative justice, mutual aid, diversity, equity, and inclusion contributes to community wellness. This could provide empirical knowledge on the

value of resilience in desistance and re-entry, reframing our understanding of how criminalized women and gender-diverse people succeed in the community. A strength-based approach can transform social relations and generate healing solutions by addressing the root causes of social harm and injustice, such as access to safe affordable housing, education, a living wage, and health care.

Future research could also explore alternative interventions outside of the carceral system for addressing violence, lawbreaking, and social harms, in support of abolitionist-oriented social change and the promotion of a healing and transformative approach to justice. For example, community-engaged research could examine and evaluate the processes, benefits, and impacts of HTJ initiatives. This process could begin by distributing surveys to community organizers across Canada whose organizational mandates espouse the principles of transformative justice, inviting respondents to reflect on HTJ strategies and systemic barriers impeding their work.

7.5. Final Reflections

Federally sentenced people who have opportunities to develop and exercise their strengths, build solidarity and caring communities, and resist carceral oppression are better positioned to survive imprisonment and thrive in the community. *They are resilient.* As a democratic society professing principles of equality and “the right to life, liberty and security of the person” (*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, 1982, s.7), we need to build resilience at multiple levels – beyond the individual – to create resilient communities, starting with those who are most disadvantaged and marginalized. Given that 46% of people in prisons designated for women are Indigenous (Zinger, 2024), and the country known as Canada was built on stolen land, it is incumbent on us to consider Indigenous worldviews, wellness, and healing models as

we strive for a different kind of justice. Fostering inclusive, mutually caring communities is a radical act of love within our individualistic, market-driven, carceral society. Our collective liberation and healing require practices rooted in “a radical kind of love that refuses to settle for meanings of justice, safety, and independence that re-create the shackles, borders, color lines, and other punitive forms of policing and surveillance” (Syedullah, 2016, p.184). I believe our collective liberation requires creating cultures of resistance, resilience, respect, and reconciliation.

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Appendix A. Certificate of Ethics Approval

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL
Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-07-21-6821

Titre du projet / Project Title

 Stories of Hope from Federally
Sentenced Women in Canada:
Promoting Resiliency and
Reducing Barriers to Community
Re-entry

Type de projet / Project Type
Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

02/03/2022

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

01/03/2023

Équipe de recherche / Research Team
**Chercheur /
Researcher**
Affiliation
Role

Rachel FAYTER

Département de criminologie / Department of
CriminologyChercheur Principal / Principal
Investigator

Jennifer KILTY

Département de criminologie / Department of
Criminology

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Kim THOMPSON

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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Appendix B. Safe Research Plan

Safe Research Plan

- a) Consult your Faculty's Research Remobilization Plan.
- b) Complete and submit this form to your Vice-Dean Research to ensure your plan is aligned with the Faculty's research remobilization plan.
- c) Once your plan is finalized and your Faculty has signed off, append a copy of the form to your ethics application (in Question 2.6 of the eReviews form).
- d) Please note that if you require more space to answer the questions, a Word version of this form can be requested to the Office of the Vice-Dean, Research of your faculty.

Name of the PI: Rachel Fayter	
Name of the Supervisor (if applicable): Jennifer M. Kilty, PhD	
Department / Faculty: Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Science	
Title of the Project: Stories of Hope from Federally Sentenced Women in Canada: Promoting Res	
Ethics File Number (if known):	
Proposed date when in-person contact with participants will start or resume: August 15, 2021	
In-Person Research Activities (It is preferable to conduct as many activities as possible remotely.)	
1. Indicate the type of research activity that will be taking place.	
☐ Recruitment ☒ Interviews ☐ Focus Groups ☐ Observation ☐ Participant observation ☐ Questionnaires ☐ Physical testing ☐ Community-based research (provide details): ☐ Other (provide details):	How & where: Number & duration: 15-20 interviews with former prisoners, 5 Number of participants per group & duration: Number & duration: Number & duration: Completion time, format (computer, paper): Number of sessions, duration:
2. Indicate if research activities require close contact with participants, whereby physical distancing cannot be maintained.	
Physican distancing will be maintained throughout all data collection. Individual interviews can be conducted by maintaining physical distancing and placing the digital audio recording device between the researcher and participant. The RAC meetings will have 3-4 participants max and will be held in a room where physical distancing can be maintained. We will sit at a large square table with 1 participant at each side so we are 6 feet apart. The researcher and participants will wear masks at all times and a plastic partition will be placed between the researcher and participant.	

Participant Information.

3. Describe the targeted participant sample and include the number of participants.

I will facilitate 15-20 conversational, semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated women who served time in a Canadian federal women's prison (i.e., sentenced two years plus a day) at some point since 2008. I will also conduct 5-10 semi-structured, individual interviews with key informant participants who consist of staff or volunteers who have worked/volunteered in a women's prison for a minimum of 6 months. Finally, I will facilitate 3-4 half to full-day workshops with a Research

4. Indicate if the target participant population have physical or physiological factors that make them more vulnerable to becoming seriously ill if exposed to COVID-19 (e.g., age, underlying medical conditions).

The participant group does not share a higher vulnerability to COVID-19 related illness than the general population. During recruitment, participants who express interest in participating will be asked if they face underlying health issues which increase their risk of becoming seriously ill if exposed to COVID-19. If a participant expresses such concerns alternative accommodations will be made (ie. video interview via zoom).

5. Indicate if participants will be recruited from a site where the population is considered highly vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 (e.g., long-term health care facilities, homeless population). If yes, provide details.

We are recruiting former prisoners currently living in the community. Some individuals may be experiencing homelessness, addiction, or mental health issues which could potentially increase their vulnerability.

Project Jurisdiction

6. In what geographical location will the project take place (name the community/province/state/country)?

In-person interviews will be conducted in Ottawa, Kingston, Brantford, Toronto, Barrie, H

7. Who is the local health authority for your research area?

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care/Public Health Ontario and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs)

8. Provide a website link for the local health authority and/or other relevant government site.

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/>

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Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care/Public Health Ontario and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs)

8. Provide a website link for the local health authority and/or other relevant government site.

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/>

9. Provide confirmation that:

- ☒ You will be able to enter the region or country (if applicable).
- ☒ You are prepared for any mandatory quarantine period (away and home) and all associated requirements.

10. Indicate if permissions or agreements will be required to access the region/community/country. If yes, provide supporting documentation.

As a resident of Ontario who has not travelled outside of the province, I am able to travel within it.

Travel and Accommodation

11. Does the project involve travel (outside of your current location)?

- ☐ No – Skip to Question 12
- ☒ Yes – Answer the questions below

a) Who is required to travel?

The RA who will be conducting in-person interviews.

b) How are they travelling (e.g., car, train, plane)?

By car.

c) Does the travel require overnight or longer stays?

Overnight stays will be required in certain municipalities.

d) How often will travel be required?

Once approved, interviews will be conducted over a 4 week period during early fall 2021.

e) Provide information on COVID-19 measures that will be considered during travel and lodgings.

Local Public Health guidelines will be observed.

9. Provide confirmation that:

- ☒ You will be able to enter the region or country (if applicable).
- ☒ You are prepared for any mandatory quarantine period (away and home) and all associated requirements.

10. Indicate if permissions or agreements will be required to access the region/community/country. If yes, provide supporting documentation.

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Travel and Accommodation

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- ☐ No – Skip to Question 12
- ☒ Yes – Answer the questions below

a) Who is required to travel?

The RA who will be conducting in-person interviews.

b) How are they travelling (e.g., car, train, plane)?

By car.

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Overnight stays will be required in certain municipalities.

d) How often will travel be required?

Once approved, interviews will be conducted over a 4 week period during early fall 2021.

e) Provide information on COVID-19 measures that will be considered during travel and lodgings.

Local Public Health guidelines will be observed.

Project Setting

12. In what physical space is the project taking place?

☐ uOttawa (lab, classroom, office). Provide details:

☐ Institution with its own COVID-19 regulations (school, hospital). Provide details:

☒ Outdoors. Provide details: A yard or park if weather and privacy perm

☒ Indoors. Provide details: Library, office, hotel room, or apartment

13. Indicate if permissions or agreements will be required to conduct in-person research activities at the research site/organization. If yes, provide supporting documentation.

No.

14. Indicate the number of individuals (researchers + participants) that will be in the same physical space at any given time.

For all interviews, only 2 people - 1 researcher and 1 participant. For the RAC meetings there will be 1 researcher and 3 participants.

15. Indicate if the physical space will allow for physical distancing between individuals whenever possible, in accordance with applicable guidelines (including the faculty remobilization plan). If no, provide details.

Yes, physical distancing will be maintained.

16. Indicate if there is adequate ventilation in the space.

☒ Yes

☐ No / Don't know

☒ N/A (outdoors)

Surfaces and Equipment

17. Indicate if the research activities will be conducted in a physical space that has surfaces that people may touch often (e.g., doorknobs, elevator buttons, chairs/benches). Provide details.

All high touch surfaces will be disinfected before and after the interview. A plastic physical barrier will be placed between the RA and interviewee, physical distance will be maintained and both individuals will wear face masks.

18. Indicate if the research activities involve sharing any equipment/tools/documents between researchers and/or participants. Provide details.

There will not be any sharing of any equipment or documents.

19. Explain any sanitization, decontamination, and/or cleaning measures that will be used.

The RA will use disposable disinfectant wipes and disinfectant spray, and have hand sanitizer available as well as extra face masks.

Safety Protocols

The following resources may provide guidance in establishing your safety protocol:

- [uOttawa Campus Health and Safety Resources](#)
- [Public Health Ontario Public Resources and Safety Measures](#)
- [Government of Canada Measures to Reduce COVID-19](#)

20. Select the measures that will be integrated into the research protocol in order to reduce risks of person-to-person or surface transmission.

- ☒ Regular handwashing and/or hand sanitizing
- ☒ Supplying hand sanitizer
- ☒ Physical distancing (as recommended by the local health authority)
- ☒ Sanitizing of high-touch surfaces and shared equipment between individuals
- ☒ Screening measures for participants (e.g., complete the COVID-19 self-assessment)
- ☒ Screening measures for research team members (e.g., complete the COVID-19 self-assessment)
- ☒ Limiting sharing of pens/paper (i.e., written vs. verbal consent, data collection activities)
- ☒ Scheduling sessions ___ minutes apart
- ☐ Escorting participants throughout the visit (when on uOttawa campus)
- ☒ Wearing of face masks/face coverings
- ☐ Wearing face shields or goggles
- ☐ Wearing gloves
- ☐ Wearing lab coats
- ☒ Supplying participants with any needed Personal Protective Equipment (masks, shields), even though participants should be asked to come with their own mask.
- ☒ Using Plexiglas barriers
- ☐ Other (provide details):

21. Provide any additional information that may be relevant for the assessment of risk for this project, including when the researchers may not be able to comply with local public authorities recommended precautions. N/A - In-person interviews will not be conducted unless all local public health guidelines can be implemented and followed.
Communications 22. Describe how all research team members will be informed of the Safe Research Plan requirements. Rachel Fayter is the PI and this is her PhD dissertation research, so she is the only one who will be collecting data. 23. Describe how participants will be informed of COVID-19-related safety measures that will be taken. A checklist outlining all of the safety measures will be maintained and shared with participants if requested along with verbal confirmation. 24. Indicate if signage will be used (e.g., physical distancing, travel patterns, use of common areas). ☐ Yes ☒ No
As the Principal Investigator: ☒ I take responsibility for ensuring that all necessary COVID-19 protocols are in place, including, but not limited to cleaning, screening and PPE requirements, as per uOttawa and other applicable health authority guidelines. ☒ I will ensure that all research team members will complete the mandatory online training "<u>Preventing COVID-19 Infection in the Workplace</u>" prior to their involvement in the project. ☒ I have a plan in place to collect personal contact information for contact-tracing purposes (by health authorities), in the event that members of the research team and/or participants may have been exposed to COVID-19 at the research site. ☒ I will provide the necessary COVID-19 information to participants in the Consent Form Addendum (see template). ☒ I have a plan in place to shut down the project in the event of public health directive (e.g., tightening of restrictions related to pandemic status in the control of COVID-19).

Appendix C. Interview Guide: Former Prisoners

Preliminary Information

First, I am going to turn the recorder on so that I can get your verbal consent. I need to confirm that the goals of the research were explained, you saw the consent letter and had it explained orally, were given a chance to ask questions and quit the study if you choose. Please state [YES or NO]

We're going to begin with some general personal information. Feel free to answer in whatever way is most comfortable.

- 1) In your own words, how would you describe your (a) gender; (b) sexuality; (c) age; (d) parental status; (e) ethnicity (Are they Indigenous?) (f) What was the length and dates of your most recent federal prison sentence? (g) What was the name and location of the institution where you were imprisoned? (h) security level (might change over time)

Entering and Navigating Prison

- 2) What was it like when you first walked onto the prison range/compound/living unit? How did you get along with the other prisoners?
- 3) There are many shows and movies about prison which contribute to public assumptions about life inside and who prisoners are. Was there anything that surprised you or challenged your assumptions when you first went to prison?
- 4) What advice would you give to someone who was about to serve a federal prison sentence for the first time?

Experience of Prison

- 5) What kinds of activities did you do inside to keep busy? What helped the time pass quickly or meaningfully for you? Describe any opportunities you had to build skills or develop special talents. [Probe: Activities and programs that addressed various facets of prisoners' well-being, including their physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing, spirituality, and social/community connections.]
- 6) What was your favorite or most enjoyable program, group, or activity? What was it that you liked about it? Was there anything that you wish had been more accessible? [Probe: education or trades programs, employment, temporary absences, Family day/socials, treatment programs.]

- 7) Did you encounter other prisoners who you thought were talented or skilled at various things?
- 8) Based on your experience, describe the general social interactions among other prisoners. (Probe: helping newcomers navigate the system; bullying behaviours; friendly and sociable or sticking to one's own crowd)
- 9) Describe any experiences in prison that were positive, enjoyable, made you laugh or happy.
- 10) During the darkest, most difficult times in prison, what gave you hope? What helped you to get through your sentence?

Healthy Coping, Solidarity, and Resilience

- 11) What are some strengths shared by women who have survived trauma? What gave you strength?
- 12) Who helped or supported you (and other prisoners) to build or promote personal assets/strengths?
- 13) What does ***solidarity*** mean to you? Can you describe any times when women prisoners stood together in solidarity to fight for an issue they believed in? Do you perceive solidarity and sisterhood as the same idea or different? Please explain how they are the same or different.
- 14) How important were friendships with other prisoners to your ability to cope with the trauma of being in prison? Was there a sense of solidarity, sisterhood, or comradery?
- 15) *Mutual-aid and peer support programs are designed, organized and implemented by prisoners and facilitate the development of trust, providing employment for prisoners while developing a network of community support.* Were you involved in any prisoner-led programs, groups or activities [Probe: recreation programs, inmate committee, Lifers Group, Black Women of Diversity (BWOD), Native sisterhood or Strength in Sisterhood (SIS), LGBTQ2S group, Music program, Peer support.] Please describe any kind of mutual-aid or peer-support programs or activities that you found beneficial.
- 16) Describe staff's level of support for prisoners' friendships. Can you provide an example?
- 17) There have been many instances of guards shutting down and confiscating items from prisoners for a birthday party, good-bye dinner, holiday event, football or other sports game, dancing, etc. What are the impacts of these actions on the prisoners?

- 18) What positive coping strategies or healthy activities were most useful to you in prison?
- 19) In your opinion, what were the differences between prisoners who were able to cope well with prison and those who had a more difficult time inside?
- 20) In your view, what are the most important things that prisoners need in prison and the community so that we can survive hardships and have a meaningful life? What do you personally value or need? [Probe: equal opportunities, personal values/morals, tangible and intangible necessities, rights, privileges, personal, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs.]

Institutional Policies and Practices

- 21) Describe the general relationship between prisoners and guards. What were your interactions with guards like? [Probe: positive and negative interactions]
- 22) In your view, explain how CSC policies and practices support or prevent solidarity and positive coping strategies among prisoners. [Probe: Stories of situations/confrontations with guards in which the prisoner thought she was doing something positive but was instead punished for this behaviour (e.g., helping a friend move; buying her friend some shampoo, body wash, razors, stamps, or coffee for her birthday but the guards seized the items and charged the women.)]
- 23) Were there any institutional rules or policies that you believe were unfair or unjust? Please describe.
- 24) During your incarceration did you engage in any form of resistance against the system or challenge the system in any way? [Probe: peaceful protest, sit-in, labour strike, refuse lock-up, file a grievance, get a lawyer to challenge the system, fight an involuntary transfer, speak to the media.] How do you resist systemic injustice?

Prisoners' experiences of community re-entry

- 25) Describe any kind of support or preparations the prison assisted you with to get ready for your release.
- 26) What kinds of supports did you require, or do you believe other prisoners require when leaving the prison system to re-enter the community? Probes: [Practical items women

need upon release; Employment support, volunteer work, or job/skill training in the community? Assistance obtaining ID, affordable housing, bank account, apply to jobs and education programs, access medical care or a dentist?]

- 27) What were some barriers to community re-entry? What made things easier? What helped you to succeed on parole? [Probe: suspensions or revocation, success on parole, conditions, what the PO was like, halfway house]
- 28) What did you most look forward to following your release? What were some goals and dreams you had/have for the future?
- 29) Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview!

Appendix D. Interview Guide: Key Informants

We're going to begin with some general reflections on your work with federally sentenced women. Feel free to answer in whatever way is most comfortable and pass on any questions you do not wish to answer. How would you like to be identified if I use any quotes in my writing?

- 1) How would you describe the work you have done with criminalized and imprisoned women? How long have you worked/volunteered in this context?
- 2) What do you believe is the value of this work? Please describe any barriers to your work.
- 3) What led to your involvement in working with prisoners/criminalized people? What is your favorite part of working in this capacity? What is your least favorite?
- 4) How has this work impacted you on a personal and professional level?
- 5) What have you learned from your work with criminalized women?
- 6) How do you get along with the institutional staff members you interact with? What about the prisoners? How do you connect or build relationships with prisoners?

Entering and Navigating Prison

- 7) What do you believe is the role or impact of the prison on society? What are your views of the prison system?
- 8) How would you describe the social interactions among prisoners and between prisoners and community members?
- 9) What is the value of social support and community connections for prisoners? (Given that many institutional policies and practices are designed to inhibit these connections, including loss of visits, ETAs, Family Day as punishments along with the challenges people face visiting prisoners.)

- 10) While prisoners are typically described in negative terms or perceived as a vulnerable and needy population, many prisoners are also highly skilled, talented, intelligent, compassionate, and resilient. What are some strengths, talents, skills, and positive traits or actions that you've observed among prisoners and criminalized women you've worked with?

Healthy Coping, Solidarity, and Resilience

- 11) Has your work with prisoners challenged any societal stereotypes or media biases? Without framing criminalized women as a homogenous group, in general, how would you describe us?
- 12) Please describe any kind of mutual-aid or peer-support actions that you have witnessed amongst prisoners. What is the value of an official peer-support program both in the prison and the community?
- 13) What kinds of topics, issues, or challenges do prisoners speak most often with you about?
- 14) How do prisoners challenge institutional policies or actively resist systemic injustice? Can you provide any examples? [Probe: Examples of peaceful protests, self-advocacy or advocating for other prisoners' rights, grievances, contacting the Correctional Investigator or Ombudsman, Elizabeth Fry Society or John Howard Society, speaking to the media, etc.]
- 15) Can you describe a time when women prisoners exhibited solidarity or stood with an ally to fight for an issue they believed in? What is the value of engaging with people with lived experience to advocate for social change?
- 16) How could FSW's strengths, talents, and skills be better supported and nurtured?

Institutional Policies and Practices

- 17) Are there any institutional policies and practices the prison staff engage in that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not agree with?
- 18) In your view, how do CSC policies and practices support or prevent solidarity and positive coping strategies among prisoners?
- 19) One of the policies the security staff often use when they are searching for contraband on the compound involves speaking with and rewarding 'reliable sources.' A reliable source is any prisoner who is willing to speak out about another prisoner and inform the guards that this prisoner is doing something illegal (Whether it is true or not). How do you think this policy impacts prisoner relations?

Implications of policies and practices for prisoners' experiences of community re-entry

- 20) Upon release, most women must live far away from their home community where they have social support and are familiar with the community. How might this impact prisoners' experiences of community re-entry? How should this be addressed?
- 21) What can we as a community do to disrupt or prevent institutionalization/prisonization and support prisoners better?
- 22) Are you aware of any community supports that assist prisoners with navigating the challenges of community re-entry? What more could be done?
- 23) If you had a magic wand that could transform the prison system, what would you do? What are your hopes for the future concerning Canada's carceral system?
- 24) What should the media and general public know about criminalized women? If you could share a message with the world, what would it be?
- 25) Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview!