

“Circuits of Exclusion”: Criminalized Women’s Negotiation of Community

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, relatively little research has been conducted on the post-prison experiences of women returning to the community. This paper examines how women experience community and reintegration after leaving prison. Interviews were conducted with 68 women across Canada who had served time in federal institutions. The findings indicate that “risk thinking”—the discursive narrative of the correctional system—contributes to the isolation and marginalization of this group of women. The paper concludes with recommendations from participants for the development of peer support networks to help them negotiate “circuits of exclusion” (Rose, 2000).

Notions of *community* are central features of penal discourse and practice. Prisons are supposed to protect the community, prisoners reintegrate into the community, and parolees are subject to community supervision. For women prisoners in Canada, the trope of community is further activated as penal policy calls for community involvement in federal women’s prisons (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990), and recent government reports have argued for community alternatives to imprisonment for drug-addicted women (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2003). Although much research has been done on the conditions and experiences of women in federal prisons in Canada, with the exceptions of Lasovich (1996) and Maidment (2006) relatively little research has been conducted on the post-prison experiences of women. This paper examines how women experience community and reintegration after leaving prison. Based on interviews with 68 women across Canada who had served time in federal institutions, I show that “risk discourses”—the discursive narratives of the correctional system—contribute to the isolation and marginalization of this group of women. The paper concludes with recommendations, from study participants, for the development of peer support networks to help them better negotiate “circuits of exclusion” (Rose, 2000, p. 324).

WOMEN IN/OUT OF PRISON, COMMUNITY, AND RISK DISCOURSES

Despite decreasing crime rates, the rate of women federally incarcerated in Canada is steadily increasing. Between 1997 and 2006, the population of women in Canadian federal prisons jumped

22% (Correctional Service of Canada, 2006). The rate of imprisoned Aboriginal women jumped 72.5% between 1996 and 2004 (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2006). Although Aboriginal people comprise 3% of the Canadian population, 32% of federal female prisoners are Aboriginal (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2006). Similar trends are seen in other industrialized countries. In the United States, for example, Chesney-Lind (2002, p. 80) states that there is a “women’s imprisonment boom.” Australia and Great Britain are also experiencing an increase in numbers of women being imprisoned (Balfour & Comack, 2006). Overall, minority and racialized women are the hardest hit (Sudbury, 2005).

Feminist activists and researchers have expressed great concern about the worldwide “women’s imprisonment boom,” and many have pointed to globalization and neo-liberal policy changes as contributing to this dramatic increase in the imprisonment of women (Sudbury, 2005). Increased policing of immigration, the creation of a precarious low-wage job market, and cuts to social assistance, social services, addictions treatment, and mental health services all contribute to the erosion of the social safety net. These neo-liberal socioeconomic policies have most affected the already disadvantaged members of our communities, resulting in “the increased criminalization of the most marginalized and vulnerable members of our communities” (Neve & Pate, 2005, p. 27).

Following the lead of the United States, other Western countries such as Britain and Canada are diverting funds from community resources into correctional facilities. As a result, some women have been given prison sentences because judges feel they are more likely to get services and treatment in prison than in the community (Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, 2003; Maidment, 2006). One of the reasons for this is that Canada is being hailed as the world’s most progressive, gender-sensitive, and supportive jailer of women (Maidment, 2006, p. 14). Both the judiciary and women in conflict with the law are requesting federal time for women with provincial¹ sentences because they believe that women will receive mental health and addiction treatment in federal institutions. However, the myth of therapeutic prisons has been amply exposed (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000; Hayman, 2006; Pollack & Kendall, 2005). Contrary to women’s prisons being healing and supportive spaces, women’s human rights are routinely violated on the basis of culture, ability, and gender (Amnesty International, 2007; Arbour Commission, 1996; Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2003). The recent death of 19-year-old Ashley Smith in a Canadian federal prison for women underscores the point that Canadian prisons are far from empowering.²

Once released from prison, women confront a number of challenges in the community. Studies reveal that women face inadequate treatment for substance abuse and mental health; lack of affordable housing and daycare; family reunification issues; underdeveloped job skills and lack of employment that pays a living wage; violence from male partners; and the stigma of having been incarcerated (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Lasovich, 1996; Maidment, 2006; O’Brien, 2001; Petersilia, 2001; Richie, 2001; Richie, Freudenberg, & Page, 2001; Severance, 2004; van Olphen, Freudenberg, Fortin, & Galea, 2006; Wilson, Quinn, Beville, & Anderson, 1998). Maidment’s (2006) study of former female prisoners in Newfoundland dispels the myth of the “benevolent community” and illustrates how processes of transcarceration keep women enmeshed in

networks of social control. Her work also highlights the role played by non-profit organizations, most of which rely upon correctional funding, to do the work of supporting women released from prison. This close tie with the correctional apparatus constrains advocacy efforts and can perpetuate the control mechanisms of the correctional system. As Maidment writes, non-governmental organizations “must stick close to the control talk and behaviouralist agendas of the state in order to sustain their funding” (p. 32).

A central feature of “control talk” is the risk-management paradigm, which is the discursive framework for correctional practice and policy. Contemporary crime-control discourses no longer construct criminalized people as “clients in need of support” but instead as “risks who must be managed” (Garland, 2001, p. 175). In his analysis of neo-liberal governance, Rose (2000) states that there are various networks for regulating social inclusion and exclusion. He refers to “circuits of exclusion” as networks of strategies targeting people who are thought to be unable or unwilling to properly manage their own freedom—those who are homeless, jobless, addicted, have mental health problems, and/or a criminal record. Risk management and risk control form the organizing frameworks for circuits of exclusion:

Control workers, whether they be police or psychiatrists, thus have a new administrative function—the administration of the marginalia, ensuring community protection through the identification of riskiness of individuals, actions, forms of life and territories. Hence the increasing emphasis on case conferences, multidisciplinary teams, sharing information, keeping records, making plans, setting targets, establishing networks for surveillance and documentation of the potentially risky individual on the *territory of community*. (Rose, 2000, p. 333; emphasis added)

Correctional perspectives are premised on the assumption that an individual’s behaviour can be targeted to eliminate the risk they pose to self or others. In prison, a correctional plan is developed for the prisoner that is supposed to change the “dynamic contributing factors” (Correctional Service of Canada, 1999, pp. 11-12), such as thoughts and behaviours that are believed to be statistically linked to crime. The following excerpt from the Correctional Service of Canada’s *Standard Operating Practices* manual states:

In institutions, the purpose of intervention is to control or neutralize the dynamic contributing factors, that is, those factors contributing to criminal behaviour. . . . This implies a regular review of the offenders’ progress through analysis of observations, the casework record, program report, specialist’s assessments and discipline file in case conferences. . . . On conditional release, just as in the institution, the purpose of the intervention is to control or neutralize the dynamic contributing factors through strict implementation of the *Correctional Plan*. (1999, pp. 11-12)

One can see from this excerpt the priority placed upon “neutralizing” the specific factors deemed to be linked to crime. The workers within the system—those who observe, document, and assess—are clearly at the centre of the neutralization process. Within circuits of exclusion, “control professionals” develop technologies for watching and containing risky people and construct knowledge that makes the criminalized subject knowable and thus governable (Rose, 2000, p. 333). It is interesting to note that the *Standard Operating Practices* manual does not distinguish between criminalized men and women and thus does not acknowledge gender-based differences.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of women released from federal prisons in Canada by exploring reintegration from their point of view. Two central research questions guided this study:

1. What are women's experiences of programming and pre-release planning in the federal prisons for women?
2. What are women's experiences of returning to the community? What is helpful and what are barriers to reintegration?

Sixty-eight women who had served federal prison sentences were interviewed for this study between 2004 and 2006. An early draft of the interview guide was piloted with a group of women with experience of imprisonment who were living in the community. Insights from key informant interviews with women who had been incarcerated also helped to formulate questions for the interview guide and to develop recruitment and sampling strategies. The interview questions were open-ended and semistructured. Women were asked about prison programming and services (including release planning), and about their experiences of being released back into the community. Interviews were between 1 and 1.5 hours and were tape recorded with the permission of the participants (two women did not wish to be tape recorded, and so the interviewer took hand-written notes). The interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, a community research partner, and graduate students involved with the project and took place in halfway houses, individual homes, shelters, treatment centres, and community organizations in eight provinces and 19 cities and towns across Canada.

Participants were recruited through individuals and organizations (such as local Elizabeth Fry Societies) that work with women who have spent time in prison, as well as through some of the participants themselves, who following their own interviews referred their friends. Flyers advertising the study were posted in halfway houses and community agencies. Potential participants were asked to call the principal investigator or the research assistant for information. Participants were paid an honorarium of \$40 for their time and expertise.

The study was approved by a university ethics review board, which ensures that participants' identities remain confidential and that no harm comes as a result of participating in the study. Copies of the final report of this study were mailed to all participants. Every effort was made to ensure that women who saw the flyer within the context of service delivery agencies were aware that participation (or not) in the study would in no way affect the services they were receiving. This point, as well as assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, was clearly articulated in an information letter and consent form.

Thirteen key informant interviews were also conducted with community workers with expertise in the areas of women's imprisonment, criminalization, and parole. Some key informants had themselves been incarcerated. These interviews were not taped but were used to help shape the research design and to understand the policy and practice context in which criminalized women find themselves after being released from prison.

The Sample

Participants came from a variety of backgrounds and had different types of experiences with the correctional system. In recruiting participants, efforts were made to obtain diversity in living arrangements (e.g., halfway houses, treatment centres, living on own), racial and cultural backgrounds, age, lengths of prison sentences (2 years to life), time out of prison, and types of parole (e.g., day, full, completed parole). Forty-one participants identified as Caucasian (60.3%); 22 (32.3%) as Aboriginal, Métis, or Inuit; and 4 (5.9%) as Black. The racial/ethnic background of 1 participant is unknown. Fifty participants (73.5%) were sentenced to 2–5 years in prison, 4 (5.9%) were sentenced to 6–9 years, 4 (5.9%) were sentenced to 10–18 years, and 9 (13.2%) had life sentences. The sentence length for 1 participant is unknown. The age range of participants was 20 to 63 years with a mean age of 38 years. Participants were interviewed in British Columbia (10), Alberta (11), Manitoba (1), Saskatchewan (3), Ontario (18), Quebec (10), Nova Scotia (10), and New Brunswick (5).

Data Analysis

There were three phases to the data analysis. The first phase involved reading the hard copy of the transcripts in their entirety and making handwritten notes about significant concepts and themes. The approach was similar to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) open-coding techniques. By comparing concepts and themes across interviews, I began to see the emergence of various categories of experience such as barriers to community inclusion. In the second phase of coding, I used qualitative data management software called NVivo to compare and contrast categories as I developed them. In the first coding and analysis phase, I examined data within the context of a whole narrative, while in this second phase I compared and contrasted data categorized under the same heading. During the final data analysis phase, I travelled between the data, the coding, and the relevant scholarly literature. This paper reports on one of the central themes emerging from this analytic process: community (in)exclusion and the role of parole supervision in women’s experience.

RESULTS

Expert Discourses and Risk

A key finding of this study is the effect that the risk-management framework (the process of “neutralizing risk”) has on women’s post-prison lives and their relationships with professionals supervising their release. There are several types of conditional release from prison: day parole, full parole, and mandatory release. A woman released on day parole is required to reside in a facility where she has 24-hour supervision, such as a halfway house. Thirty-seven (54.4%) women in this sample were on day parole, and most were living in halfway houses. Their parole was being supervised by halfway house staff, parole officers, and correctional psychologists. The function of these workers is both to monitor the women’s release and to provide transitional support to assist them in establishing post-prison lives. However, participants in this study found that this dual role of social control and support undermined confidentiality and trust, and thus the supervision was experienced predominantly as

punitive rather than as helpful. In fact, for some women, “doing time” in the community after serving a prison sentence was “*worse than jail*” (Sandi)³ because of the constant threat of being returned to prison for violating a condition of parole (for example, late for curfew or missing a meeting) and the surveillance of all aspects of their lives—including their finances, relationships, and whereabouts.

Participants pointed out that correctional ideas about risk carry deficit-based meanings. Because risk discourses pay scant attention to social context and instead focus upon individual (often racialized and gendered) deficits (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2003; Silver & Miller, 2002), women are always considered “at risk” of breaking the law or violating parole. One participant, who called herself Quinn, captured this sentiment:

It’s like, no respect . . . like I’m not important, because I’m the offender. I’m the parolee. . . . And it’s this constant theme from the PO [parole officer], the workers at [the halfway house], the psychologist . . . You’re not valuable, because you’re always at risk of reoffending. And it’s that constant theme of being treated that way. They’re always suspicious.

Participants were acutely aware of how their actions, behaviours, and subjectivities were evaluated in terms of risk and that these evaluations were made by “experts.” As is illustrated by Julie 2’s observation, risk discourses activated by professionals are not about “knowing” individuals but about invoking the notion of community protection.

I mean, they’re going to rely on the report from the psychologist, the report from the psychiatrist, the probation officer, but basically they don’t really know you. Their job is . . . is to determine whether you represent a risk to society.

Despite the obstacles to “being known” and, as Quinn noted above, the deficit-based associations that often are tied to risk frameworks, women sometimes sought support from those managing their parole, largely because they were connected with few other supports. The need for support was particularly felt by women who were struggling to abstain from drugs or alcohol after release from prison. Yet the dual role of staff as both support workers and agents of social control compromised confidentiality and trust. For example, Julie 2 explained that her parole officer urged her to be “*transparent*” about how she was doing; she was told to be open about drug use, finances, and with whom she was socializing or being intimate. Julie 2’s attempts at “transparency” backfired, however, when she admitted that she had used drugs and was then sent back to prison:

I had confessed to her [her parole officer] that I had relapsed. . . . I decided to get help. Then my probation [*sic*] officer said . . . “I can’t leave you outside in your condition . . . but we’ll go back to the board [National Parole Board] and we’ll request treatment. . . .” I thought that when I asked for help, that she would take me through the transition; that she would take me directly to treatment. But I thought when you relapse you’re supposed to ask for help. I didn’t realize that that’s a no-no.

In this example, Julie 2 did not commit a crime but she did violate a condition of her parole (to abstain from drug use), which resulted in her return to prison. Her attempts at acquiring “help” (she was hoping for addiction treatment within a community facility or service) resulted in further punishment.

The issue of confidentiality and trust arose in relation to living in halfway houses as well. Many of the halfway houses available for women (some are co-ed) in Canada rely substantially upon the Correctional Service of Canada for funding. Therefore the staff are closely allied with and accountable

to the correctional system. These close connections influenced the level of trust women felt they could place in workers, specifically around issues of confidentiality. Rachael said,

You’re going to somebody in the halfway house—a staff member—and they’re gonna go and tell your parole officer anyways. I don’t think that’s right. Ya know, you gotta feel safe with that person to be able to talk to them. . . . So I don’t think they should be telling everything.

In addition to feeling as though they had limited spaces to be open and honest about their struggles with drug use and other issues, the documentation and files developed about the women contributed to a sense that they were always being watched and assessed. Each woman arrives at a halfway house with a prison file that contains, among other things, reports about programming and institutional behaviour, psychological assessments, police reports, and a correctional plan. Because this file relies upon “expert” discourses, many women felt that their own perspectives, subjectivities, and knowledge were transformed or ignored. They felt that parole officers, halfway house staff, and the psychologists they were mandated to see on release considered their file to be “the bible” in relation to their history, experiences, and needs. The “filing” of their lives contributed a sense of mistrust and isolation from supports. As Winn said,

I’m surprised that there isn’t more support in the community for people reentering, where you can be absolutely honest, and not be worried that, “oh my god, someone’s going to write a report now that’s going to be archived forever and ever.”

The weight given to expert discourses and the women’s feeling that their own understandings of themselves (which may lie outside the boundaries of correctional discourses) were given little credibility contributed to feelings of disconnection and exclusion from the community.

Community Disconnections: The Non-Association Clause

A further barrier is the common parole stipulation that prohibits contact with other criminalized people. When a woman has this stipulation placed on her by the National Parole Board, it can mean that she is unable to associate with certain or all people who have a criminal record. This prohibition often means that women are cut off from receiving and giving support to other women on parole.

They’re trying to make sure they don’t associate with nobody . . . who can do something criminal. I guess they figure if there’s two people, both criminals . . . they might think up something to do another crime. Whereas a lot of times they just want support, two women, helping each other, support each other. (Tanya)

Parole prohibitions against associating with anyone known to have been involved in illegal activities often means that relationships established while in prison can no longer be officially maintained while on parole.⁴ At the same time, it is difficult for women to forge new relationships in the community. For example, Blue, a single mother of a toddler, was living in a halfway house and was looking for a job. While on day parole women are provided with about \$28 a week for living expenses and are often not eligible for provincial social assistance. Finding affordable child care—on an income of about \$112 dollars a month—is impossible, and so many women turn to friends for support. In Blue’s case, the non-association clause was particularly ironic since while she was incarcerated with

her son, she had plenty of child-care support from other prisoners. Once living in the halfway house in the community, however, she was no longer permitted to utilize the support of other women living with her. The non-association clause was making it very difficult for her to move ahead with finding employment.

I have no money. I can't afford to pay a babysitter while I look for work. And then all the people that I know here that offered to come out with me and job search—like, just stay with him while I was in the store, while I went in and handed in a resume or go for an interview—we're not allowed to associate together outside of the house.

For many women, particularly those who had been locked up for many years, getting released from prison was an overwhelming experience. Many were unsure how to find their way around the community or where to look for community resources. Sherri talked about the fact that she was not allowed to help another woman living in the halfway house to find her way around her new community or to go with her to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting.

There was a woman [in the halfway house] . . . She didn't know how to get to a corner store. . . . But where I had an association clause—listen to this one now . . . I wasn't allowed to show her how to get to the mall, or we weren't allowed to go to an NA meeting together, ok? But she didn't know how to get to a corner store!

In addition to being unfamiliar with community resources, women attempting to find employment, child care, and counselling face the stigma of having been in prison. Stigma is often a barrier to obtaining employment since people are required to disclose criminal convictions and may be asked to explain gaps on their resume resulting from a period of incarceration. Moreover, women spoke of how stigmatization affected their sense of self and contributed to feelings of disconnection and “otherness.” Suzie explained her feelings when she was released from prison after a long period of incarceration:

Well initially, the biggest challenge was my own self-perception and walking out of the institution feeling as though everybody that looked at me knew where I came from, and I often say that it's like I had *ex-con* stamped on my forehead. But I mean, again, that was just my own perception. I recognize now that the world, I mean how would they know unless I tell them, right? But, it's still, ya know, having that knowledge still didn't diminish feeling uncomfortable and feeling like an alien, really.

Feeling alone, stigmatized, and unsupported can have serious consequences for women, especially those with a history of mental health issues. Jess said she tried to kill herself when she first was released from prison:

It was kind of rough when I first got out. You know, you're kind of nervous to be around people and you feel everyone's looking at you. Like it's as if you have the word *con* written on your forehead, right?

The feeling of being marked as a *con* was exacerbated by having few social connections or supports in the community. There are several reasons for this, including being alienated from family, being prohibited from maintaining or developing friendships with other people who have a criminal record, and living in an unfamiliar community. As a result, women said that their primary connections were often with workers employed by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Winn and Dawn both observed the irony of this:

The only friends I have are CSC-related. We’re not friends, but you know what I’m saying, they’re the supports. (Winn)

So I’ve come to a community I don’t know. I have no friends. I haven’t talked to my family in years. . . . In this community I have nobody, only professionals. . . . I think CSC expects me to be best friends with them, because when I got out, I had nothing. (Dawn)

The parole requirement that women are unable to associate with others who have been criminalized compounds isolation by preventing them from gaining support and companionship from those with whom they may feel most comfortable. Criminal justice policy and practice that at best discourages, and at worst forbids, these contacts was seen as a serious impediment to reintegration and mental health.

Connecting With Community: The Need for Peer Support Networks

The importance of peer support and friendship was a common theme when women were discussing the challenges of returning to the community.

But I mean, it’s hard . . . especially with me, because I was in so long. . . . Like, two girls that I hang around with quite a bit both have criminal records. They’re both on parole right now, you know, but they both have jobs, and . . . they live at home with their parents because it’s cheaper (laughs), and they’re making better lives for themselves. . . . Sometimes those kinds of people can be supportive to be around, if you’re struggling, because you can see somebody else making it. (Cassandra)

The utility of peer networks and organizations has been long recognized within the field of community mental health. Within the correctional system, however, there is relatively little emphasis placed upon the role of peers, and as data from this study illustrate, connection with peers is often discouraged. Although not specifically asked about it, participants in this study suggested the need for peer support services in a variety of capacities. One of the main reasons women wanted access to peer supports was the fact that their lives were heavily populated with correctional professionals whom they felt could not really understand their experiences. Women repeatedly underscored the need to connect with others with shared experiences because, as Selma asked: “*How could you understand a person if you didn’t walk in their shoes?*” The need for peer support was particularly pressing for those struggling with addictions, and several women advocated for prison and community programming that was delivered by women with the lived experience of addictions. Selma, for example, remarked,

I go up to a person who just has that black and white from the book, taught from the book. I’d rather have someone with thick life experience than the person who had been taught by university. . . . Because the recovering person understands where that sick person is, you know, because they’ve been there before, and they know what it’s like to go through what they go through.

Reinforcing Selma’s comment, Caitlin suggested that it would be helpful to have a program facilitator with the experiential knowledge of being in prison.

It would have to be an ex-druggy, or an ex-alcoholic, that would give those programs. . . . Because you can have all the diplomas on the wall . . . it doesn’t mean you’re a good one. You have to have really the feeling by going inside the jail, by going in the metal detector, by being [strip] searched even.

Abstaining from drug use was identified as one of the biggest challenges of being released from prison. Although participants found some of what they had learned in prison about relapse prevention to be helpful, many felt that it did not explore deeply enough the root causes of their addiction, such as childhood sexual abuse, or adequately reflect the challenges they faced in the community. For example, many halfway houses and methadone clinics are located in areas with a high concentration of drug activity. As well, parole supervision does not allow for a harm-reduction approach: any “slip” is grounds for return to prison. These factors contributed to the need to have a confidential, supportive space for women with experiences of addiction and criminalization. A key component of this type of support is autonomy from the Correctional Service of Canada in order to allow for confidentiality.

Participants also identified peers as playing a very important role during their initial release and orientation to the community. Many women do not return to their home communities and thus are unfamiliar with their new place of residence. Unfortunately, in some areas of Canada, women said that parole officers and halfway house staff were not well informed about the community resources available for women leaving prisons, such as location, and schedules of Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, gender and/or culturally specific counselling services, child-care provision, and employment centres. Sherri suggested that a woman with lived experience of addictions and criminalization be hired in the following capacity:

So somebody that knows the city really well that's going to know where all the resources are, where everything is. . . . I think that would be the ideal thing to have for women that are coming out. But that would be solely their job, like [names of two community agencies supporting criminalized women] are there, but that's not solely their job. They have to be able to squeeze in an hour here or there . . . but to make that solely somebody's job—that would be the ideal! That would be awesome.

Women highlighted the need for advice and guidance in negotiating both the prison and the parole system. In relation to being in prison, many women spoke of needing to be assertive in order to obtain required programming, health care, and paperwork. They commented that it was complicated to find out what their rights were as prisoners: what they did and did not have to sign; what health care they were entitled to receive; when their rights were being violated; how to file a grievance; and how to access community advocates. Women spoke of the importance of “speaking up” but noted that those who felt unable to fight for their own rights could easily get lost in the system. However, assertiveness within the context of imprisonment can have serious consequences. Several women referred to themselves as “political” when describing their resistance to prison injustice and mistreatment. They felt that being “political” often resulted in such things as denial of privileges, delays in paperwork, institutional charges, and other abuses of power. As White Rose stated,

There's a lot that goes on inside those prisons that nobody knows about, and there's so many people that are afraid to talk about it, because these guards in there, they'll retaliate. And they do retaliate.

A Human Rights in Action project initiated by the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, and Strength in Sisterhood works to strengthen the advocacy capacity of women prisoners. Dirty D supports this initiative: “If you teach these women in the jail what their rights are, you know how much power they would have?” Women underscored the significance of having peer advocates who would come in from the outside to help with promoting

prisoners’ rights, negotiating the prison bureaucracy, and planning for their release. This role would also function as a connection between the institution and the community and help with women’s transition from prison.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study indicate that women require confidential spaces of support to help them establish post-prison lives. Currently, women are connected to professionals who monitor their release, and although these people may also provide support services, they are nevertheless accountable to the correctional service. For many women, this poses challenges to being open and honest about their struggles because of the risk of being sent back to prison or experiencing increased surveillance and control. Participants in this study spoke emphatically about the need to develop an array of peer support services—advocates, mentors, addiction counsellors—in order to create trusting relationships in the community and support their release from prison.

Although no longer locked behind bars, criminalized women continue to be governed in the “territory of community” in ways that exacerbate their exclusion. Parole policies and practices—which hinge upon the risk management meta-narrative—place women in a space of perpetual riskiness, privilege expert discourses of control professionals, and prevent friendships with other women who share similar experiences, thereby discouraging solidarity and support. Circuits of exclusion activate technologies “to manage dangerous sites and dangerous peoples on the territory of community, under the threat of being held accountable for any harm to the ‘general public’—normal people—which might result” (Rose, 2000, p. 333). The establishment of peer networks, as recommended by many participants in this study, carries the potential to disrupt governing technologies and to reorient exclusionary trajectories. By centring the knowledge and subjectivities of criminalized women, peer networks (organizations, supports, and advocates) carry the potential to redefine spaces of community for women leaving prison.

NOTES

1. A provincial jail sentence is 2 years or under whereas a federal prison term is anything over 2 years. Therefore women are getting longer sentences in the hopes of receiving treatment.
2. In October 2007, Ashley Smith, a young woman with a history of mental illness, was found dead in her Kitchener, Ontario, segregation cell where she had lived for the past 2 years. Five Correctional Service of Canada employees were charged with criminal negligence in connection with her death.
3. All participants chose pseudonyms for themselves.
4. Exceptions to this stipulation appear to be occasionally made when a woman’s partner and/or close relatives have been criminalized.

RÉSUMÉ

Un nombre plutôt restreint d’études ont été faites au Canada sur ce que vivent les femmes qui réintègrent la communauté après une peine d’emprisonnement. Dans cet article, j’examine donc ce retour à la vie en société après une incarcération. J’ai interviewé 68 femmes canadiennes qui ont passé un certain temps dans des prisons fédérales. Mes observations indiquent que la « réflexion reliée aux

risques » – le type de discours véhiculé par le système correctionnel – contribue à l'isolement et à la marginalisation de ces femmes. C'est pourquoi, en conclusion, je recommande, comme l'ont fait des femmes ayant participé à l'étude, qu'un meilleur réseau de soutien par les pairs soit mis en place pour aider les femmes qui réintègrent la communauté à gérer les problèmes d'exclusion (« *circuits of exclusion* », selon Rose 2000).

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