

A Gender-Based Analysis of the Good Lives Model's Primary Goods: Exploring  
Women's Reintegrative Experiences

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## Dedication

To the women who graciously let me into their world, inspired me as a person, and truly changed my life—this is for you. I hope I can do your stories justice.

To Emma, whose help got this thesis off the ground and who saw something in me professionally, I will never forget your dedication and passion to help women involved in the justice system. You have changed countless lives, including my own. Thank you.

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Abstract

Given our justice system's use of services designed specifically for men, I consider the appropriateness of an alternative model: The Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation (GLM). Specifically, the gender-neutrality of its theoretical assumptions about reintegration. I explore if the GLM is suited to address the gendered nature of women's reintegrative experiences, how relevant the GLM's primary goods are to women's efforts to reintegrate, and how the women's experiences seeking these goods are gendered. This qualitative work involves open-ended interviews with previously incarcerated women who have lived in a transition house. Their stories were analyzed using a feminist criminological perspective. Findings suggest the GLM's strengths-based approach and primary goods *are* relevant in these women's lives. The goods are, however, only germane because the women have surpassed the difficult process of achieving life's basic necessities. Without the transition house, the women would likely not be achieving success to the same degree.

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## Introduction

### “The invisible woman”

The relatively low number of incarcerated women means that researchers typically neglect to focus their studies exclusively on criminally-involved women, ultimately labelling their needs as insignificant. Indeed, because women represent only 5% of the federal prison population in Canada (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2017), research has paid little attention to women’s criminal justice system involvement (Kong & AuCoin, 2008). We therefore know little about women’s experiences transitioning back into society after being released from prison or jail and women “become masked by the larger male population” (Kong & AuCoin, 2008, p. 2). Kong and AuCoin (2008) explain that criminal justice involved women have faced a “system designed for the predominantly male offender population,” meaning that women are mainly offered services, crime prevention strategies, and assessment tools originally designed for men, and that women’s needs have been overlooked (p. 2).

Studies surrounding women’s experiences entering their communities after being incarcerated—in other words, reintegration— have identified which factors predict reoffending (Andrews et al., 2012; Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Less research has clarified *how* such factors influence the process and outcome of this transition (Cobbina, 2010). Cobbina (2010) notes that reintegration “is a gendered phenomenon, as women’s exposure and response to life-circumstances post-release are distinct from men’s” (p. 211). But, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) prepares women for their release, and supports them upon their release, with tools and services specifically designed for men (Hannah-Moffat,



2015). This hinders a woman's ability to successfully re-enter her community when her sentence is complete (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

My thesis explores reintegration for previously incarcerated women<sup>1</sup> by analyzing whether their experiences align with the theoretical underpinnings/assumptions of the Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation. Note that rehabilitation is a process of restoration “by therapeutic means to an improved condition” (Merriam-Webster.com). The Good Lives Model focuses on reducing risk while simultaneously promoting human goods in individuals who are preparing for their release back into the community (Ward, 2002). In other words, the model suggests an alternative form of *rehabilitation* that will improve *reintegration* altogether. Reintegration is the focus of my thesis, and it occurs when men and women are released from a correctional institution and resume their lives in the community. To date, there has not yet been a gender-based analysis of the Good Lives Model with female adults, which raises an important policy question: Do the Good Lives Model's theoretical underpinnings apply to women who are released from correctional institutions? How does the model incorporate gender differences?

The Good Lives Model makes four assumptions designed to overcome “significant conceptual issues facing individuals working in the correctional domain” (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 244). Firstly, the model asserts that by adopting a positive, strengths-based approach to treatment (as opposed to a negative approach that attempts to “fix” an individual's way of thinking), those who leave prison or jail can secure human goods and

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my observations, “previously incarcerated women” is how the participants liked to identify. I respect this choice and used it throughout my thesis when describing my sample and the larger population.

“flourish” in the community (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 246). Secondly, the model “conceptualizes dynamic risk factors as distortions in the internal and external conditions required for the acquisition of human goods” (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 244). In other words, the Good Lives Model assumes that individuals commit crimes because they face barriers achieving some of the eleven primary human goods. The model proposes helping individuals first identify and subsequently achieve the missing goods in non-criminal ways to make reintegration successful. Thirdly, the Good Lives Model argues that correctional staff must take time to ensure incarcerated folks possess “treatment readiness” (Ward & Brown, 2004). Those who are incarcerated must have the necessary competencies and values to *enter* or *engage* in treatment. By taking the necessary time to assess each individual, correctional staff can assign each person to treatment that will be actually be beneficial rather than wasting time and resources on those who do not trust the process and “may contaminate therapy and greatly reduce the chances of individuals being able to acquire the skills necessary to implement their [Good Lives Model]” (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 250-251). The final assumption is that “motivating offenders and creating a sound therapeutic alliance” are essential factors of effective treatment, regardless of the type of offence committed by the individual (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 252). The model endorses a “constructive view of offender rehabilitation as it is based on a more positive view of human nature and the intrinsic value of human beings,” whereby creating a bond filled with trust and respect between counsellor and the incarcerated individual is pivotal for rehabilitation (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 254).

I chose to explore the Good Lives Model, even though it is not guiding CSC’s work, because some research shows potential for its applicability to the female population as well as improvement to the system as a whole (Fortune, Vandavelde, & Vanderplasschen, 2017;

Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007). Consider the following: CSC currently uses the Risk-Need-Responsibility (RNR) model to prepare men and women for release from jail/prison. In a study conducted by Fortune et al. (2017), the authors suggest that the Good Lives Model can aid in overcoming the RNR model's "ethical, etiological, and clinical limitations, thereby improving rehabilitation and effective practice" (p. 179). Furthermore, the authors argue that the Good Lives Model's "holistic and relational approach may help [previously incarcerated women] overcome social disadvantage and exclusion" (p. 181). Although Fortune et al.'s (2017) study specifically assessed the Good Lives Model with female adolescents, it nevertheless shows potential applicability to women of all ages. Both adult women and adolescent girls have similar histories of abuse, stigmatization, and offending patterns (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b; Fortune et al., 2017).

#### Research questions

Two main questions guide this research. I explored one central analytic question: Is the Good Lives Model suited to addressing the gendered nature of women's reintegrative experiences? My research has also been led by two empirical questions: How relevant are the Good Lives Model's eleven primary goods to women's efforts to successfully reintegrate? And, how are women's experiences seeking these goods gendered?

#### Overarching goal and specific objectives

My overarching goal was to produce a gender-based analysis of the Good Lives Model's theoretical assumptions based on interviews conducted with women making the transition out of correctional institutions and into the community. A gender-based analysis

“is an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives” (Status of Women Canada, 2017). It looks beyond biological and socio-cultural differences, and considers individual factors (such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, mental or physical disability) that “intersect to make us who we are” (Status of Women Canada, 2017). For my thesis, I analyzed how a group of women with various backgrounds and individual differences experience reintegration. I then analyzed how my participants’ stories align with the Good Lives Model’s assumptions –specifically, how/if they sought out the primary goods. Finally, I assessed what made the women’s experiences seeking the goods gendered.

I chose to perform a gender-based analysis of the Good Lives Model as the rehabilitative model has become increasingly supported by various empirical studies (Willis & Ward, 2013), however, it has yet to be studied with adult women involved in the criminal justice system. Given the empirical support for the model, there is the possibility it could be implemented as a framework within Canadian jails/prisons (Fortune, 2018; Purvis, Ward, & Willis, 2011). Therefore, the model’s supposed gender-neutrality must be assessed beforehand to ensure women’s unique needs are not overlooked, and to ensure that the Good Lives Model has the ability to successfully prepare women for their release (Van Damme, Fortune, Vandeveld, & Vanderplassen, 2017).

This thesis also achieved specific objectives. I gathered and documented stories from women who are currently reintegrating into the community after spending time in correctional institution. I applied a gendered lens to their stories and then analyzed whether the Good Lives Model could accommodate their gendered experiences. I also reviewed the literature surrounding women’s reintegration, including the procedures taken within the

institutional setting and the steps taken in the community once they are released. This literature helped me ground my data in existing research.

## Background/Context

### Two-Tiered System

In Canada, incarcerated women carry out a criminal sentence in either a provincial/territorial or federal institution. Provincial jails hold men and women who are sentenced to two years less a day while federal prisons hold individuals whose sentences exceed two years (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). These institutions are very different from one another in terms of the physical spaces, the environments, and day-to-day workings. Alternatively, if someone is not sentenced to a term in custody, they receive what is called a community-based sentence. This means they do not serve any time in an institution but rather in their community under a number of restrictions (Corrections in Nova Scotia, 2019). Until someone receives an official sentence, they are held in a provincial jail on remand. Remand is “the detention of a person in custody [who poses a risk] while awaiting a further court appearance” (Statistics Canada, 2017, p. 6). Potential risks in this case include: a risk the individual will not appear for their court date, that they will reoffend, or that they are a danger to themselves or others (Statistics Canada, 2017).

While all provincial jails house individuals with sentences under two years, each province has its own unique set of legislation and policies pertaining to their facilities. I will only focus on the Nova Scotia Department of Justice procedures. Correctional Services, the core business area of the Nova Scotia Department of Justice, encompasses both custody- and community-based programs for adults and youth. The government of

Nova Scotia claims to provide “comprehensive, collaborative, and culturally responsive programming and services by assessing risk, needs, and strengths; intervening using programs/services and supervision to reduce recidivism; and [promote] the successful reintegration of persons from custody to community” (Corrections in Nova Scotia, 2019). In the 2017 to 2018 fiscal year, the average time men and women spent in sentenced custody in Nova Scotia was 69 days. The length of probation orders average anywhere between 454 to 478 days. Lastly, women constitute a mere 15% of admissions into custody in the province of Nova Scotia (Corrections in Nova Scotia, 2019).

Community corrections refers to the supervision of adults and youth on probation, conditional sentences, custody and supervision, conditional supervision, and intensive rehabilitative custody and supervision. Probation officers also supervise individuals after they are released from custody on conditional releases. Over the past five years, the number of cases with conditional releases has “fluctuated,” with overall adult criminal court cases decreasing by 9% (Corrections in Nova Scotia, 2019, p. 3). Because more people are serving their sentences in the community rather than in a facility, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice must dedicate their time and resources towards improving the community-based programming. The ultimate goal of corrections is to safely and effectively integrate individuals to the community where they can excel.

According to Maidment (2006), a “most disturbing trend” emerging across Canada is women appearing in court to request a federal, rather than provincial, sentence (p. 83). For a variety of reasons, provincially-sentenced women are asking for harsher sentences in order to serve their time in a federal prison. Prisons offer an array of programs that, beyond offering a service, provide opportunities for women to spend their free time. Federal institutions also have more job opportunities, allowing women to pass their time

productively. Conversely, in provincial jails, women have limited control over their time and space. Jails offer little to no programming for various reasons such as overcrowding and lack of staff (Comack, 2018). One of Comack's (2018) participant's serving time in a provincial jail mentioned, "you feel like you get really stupid in here and real slow" (p. 190) as the women face overwhelming boredom daily. Instances of gossip and drama are heightened among the women due to such close quarters and spending hours doing virtually nothing. Furthermore, Maidment (2006) notes "the discriminatory workings of the two-tiered penal system in Canada" as provincial settings offer little in terms of mental health services (p. 83). It is indeed disturbing that women actively seek a longer sentence because the provincial institution is so damaging.

In addition to the fact that federal prisons are "favourable" and less tedious, women may actively seek longer sentences because they have very little urging them to stay within their hometown. As Maidment (2006) notes, many criminally-involved women lack family supports in the community, which "effectively excludes any desire they might otherwise have to remain in a provincial [jail] based on its proximity to their places of origin" (p. 84). Because so many of the women in question are in and out of jail repeatedly, their familial relationships become strained. Comack (2018) comments that incarceration becomes "another part of [the women's] idea of "normal"" as they are continuously being released, forced to "start all over again," and rebuild their lives in the community (Comack, 2018, p. 179). The incessant disruption in their lives causes an undeniable stress on the bond between a woman and her companions.

The female prison population

The most readily available statistics for incarcerated and previously incarcerated women in Canada are on the CSC website, thus, covering the federal population. However, only 8% of women in the correctional system are given a federal sentence (Statistics Canada, 2017). Provincial data is less readily available, likely because only 13% of all women entering the Canadian correctional system actually get sentenced to custody (Statistics Canada, 2017). As a result, statistics regarding the female provincial population are scarce and lacking in quality. It is important to take this limitation into account as I describe the provincially- and federally-sentenced population of women.

Women make up a very small portion of all individuals in the correctional system. Less than 20% of adults admitted to provincial correctional services are women. Twenty percent of those women receive a community-based sentence, while 14% are on remand (Statistics Canada, 2017). These numbers have remained relatively steady over the past few years with one exception: the number of women in provincial jails on remand. Gartner and colleagues (2009) “found evidence of substantial growth in the population of unsentenced female prisoners” (p. 188). Very little research is dedicated to this population, which the authors find concerning. Remanded women are typically considered high-risk, which causes a number of “significant operational problems for criminal justice agencies” (e.g., the cost of building and maintaining maximum security bed space) (Gartner et al., 2009, p. 188). Researchers and prison advocates speculate that “the police may not be making full use of their powers to release,” as the time to bail hearings and trials have both increased over time (Gartner, 2009, p. 188).



Despite representing such a small portion of those in the correctional system, the demographic of female provincial institutions is disturbing. Specifically, the growing overrepresentation of Indigenous women. Indigenous women make up only 4% of the total female population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Yet, in 1998/1999, Indigenous women made up 13% of female adults admitted to provincial-sentenced custody. By 2007/2008, that figure rose to 24%. Data from four years ago indicates that Indigenous women represent a shocking 38% of women's provincial correctional populations (Comack, 2018). In her analyses, Comack (2018) points to the role of colonialism and "its continuing impact on the lives of Indigenous women, their families, and their communities" when she explains Indigenous overrepresentation (p. 27).

In her research exploring women's initial (and continued) involvement with incarceration, Comack (2018) interviewed a number of women serving time in a provincial jail. Her research identified three specific pathways to jail for women: "a pathway from childhood victimization to mental illness and substance abuse; a relationship pathway in which women's "dysfunctional intimate relationships" facilitated their victimization, reductions in self-efficacy, and mental illness and substance abuse; and a social and human capital pathway in which challenges in education, family support, and self-efficacy as well as "relationship dysfunction" contributed to their imprisonment" (Comack, 2018, p. 23). In nearly all of these cases, histories of unstable family homes and dysfunctional relationships are the root cause of women's mental illnesses, feelings of inadequacy, and ultimately, their incarceration. One of Comack's (2018) participants noted that when coping with abuse, "you live with all the shame, and the resentment and everything" and that it builds up so much so, that one day you might "snap" and end up incarcerated (p. 11), just as she did.

While it is widely known that criminally-involved women are plagued by histories of abuse and trauma, Comack's (2018) recent research identified another significant feature in these women's lives. That is, an overwhelming presence of "incredible losses:" deaths of parents, siblings, partners, and children, many of which were the result of suicide or spousal violence (Comack, 2018, p. 27). With that being said, the author proclaims that to understand these women's lives and their troubles with the law, we must utilize a framework that not only acknowledges women's experiences of abuse, but also how experiences of loss fits into their lives, as well (Comack, 2018, p. 27).

Within the Canadian federal population, CSC currently houses 37% more women in federal corrections than they did ten years ago (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2015). The steady increase in the number of incarcerated women has created numerous problems within prisons. In 2015, the increase in number of female inmates led to an 11% increase in double bunking, a 16% increase in segregation admissions, a 54% increase in incidents involving use of force, and a 5% increase in incidents of self-injury (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2015). More women entering prisons means that correctional staff, policymakers, and program administrators need to understand their specific needs so that further harm does not arise.

Incarcerated women have particular needs that differentiate them from both the general and male offender populations. Incarcerated women are less educated, have less work experience, and are typically younger than women in the community. In addition, women are often the sole caregiver of children prior to their incarceration, which further impacts their socio-economic standing (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b) and contributes to an undeniable level of stress. Compared to men, federally-incarcerated women are twice as likely to have a diagnosis of a serious mental illness; they are twice as likely to be serving

time for a drug-related offence; are more likely to serve a shorter sentence; be supporting dependents in the community; and have a higher motivation to change their criminal behaviour (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2015).

Criminally-involved women in the federal system have different offending histories than men. Almost half of the offences women commit are property crimes while 28% are violations against another person. In comparison, 39% of male offences are property crimes and 34% are violations against another individual. Seventeen percent of women's charges are against the administration of justice and 7% are for 'other Criminal Code offences', such as weapons offences and prostitution. Lastly, multiple charges and criminal histories are less common among women than men, and the seriousness of female offending does not seem to increase over time for most repeat and chronic offenders (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Incarcerated women are often victims of crimes themselves. CSC's Correctional Investigator Report from 2016 indicates that at least half of all Canadians who are incarcerated have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in their childhood, however these numbers are higher for women (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2016). Sixty-eight percent of women in prison report having been sexually abused, and 86% report having been physically abused (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2015). Oftentimes, significant others are women's main abusers. Other times, the abuse occurred in the woman's childhood, making both experiences that much more traumatizing due to the breach of trust. Additionally, a woman's involvement in crime often begins by association with another offender, such as through romantic or familial relationships (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b). Therefore, in one way or another, a woman's pathway to crime often begins with someone else's wrongdoing.

The majority of women in prison have a mental illness, when broadly defined. Seventy-four percent of federally-incarcerated women report that they have a substance abuse problem that contributed to their criminality (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b). Compared to their male counterparts, women have a higher rate of mental health needs: nearly 80% of women who are in prison meet the criteria for a current mental disorder (Correctional Service Canada, 2017a). Forty-three percent of women in corrections engage in self-injurious behaviour, with 75% of those having attempted suicide at some point. There is also accumulating evidence that eating disorders, major affective mood disorders, and histories of abuse or trauma are highly prevalent in women with a co-occurring substance abuse disorder, meaning that a high number of women possess concurrent diagnoses (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b).

Incarcerated women are a unique and vulnerable group with a variety of needs that often overlap. The correctional system must acknowledge these needs prior to sentencing by recognizing the likelihood that abuse and addictions led to their involvement in crime in the first place. More so, though, corrections must incorporate this knowledge to their rehabilitative practices and *support* women upon release in their attempts to overcome these obstacles. By failing to recognize this, corrections is refusing to address the root cause of crime, ultimately restricting women's efforts to succeed once they return to the community.

As I noted earlier, statistics on provincially-sentenced women are inadequate, especially compared to what is known about women in the federal system. Nonetheless, after carefully reviewing the available information for both populations, it is clear that there are some overlapping themes amongst the two groups of women. For example, Comack's (2018) research on provincially-sentenced women reiterates many of the themes presented in the literature on women in the federal system (e.g. histories of trauma, similar pathways

to crime). What is unique to women with provincial sentences, however, is their requests for federal time. Criminally-sentenced women are desperate to partake in programs and activities that are only, unfortunately, only available in federal prisons. Researchers and policymakers alike must recognize and appreciate women's desires to spend their time productively.

Correctional practices in Canada: Entering the institution

The Nova Scotia government claims to have a “people-centred justice system” (Nova Scotia Department of Justice, 2016, p. 1). Each individual upon entering jail is assigned a case management officer who will, among other things, complete a risk/needs assessment, develop a case plan and, if they are leaving custody, a release plan to address individual needs (Nova Scotia Department of Justice, 2017). Similarly, CSC requires that all federally-sentenced individuals go through a risk assessment process upon intake, more formally known as the offender intake assessment (OIA), to help prepare them for their eventual release (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). The OIA identifies which specific factors led to that individual's offending, the level of risk the individual poses (in terms of risk that they will reoffend), and what needs should be addressed through correctional services. With this information, CSC develops a correctional plan that lists required rehabilitation activities and programs (Correctional Service Canada, 2013a). Correctional programs aim to address the factors identified as contributing to criminal behaviour. CSC states that participating in correctional programs will teach incarcerated people how to apply skills and strategies to avoid committing future crimes. By learning these skills and strategies, CSC posits that the individual will also be able to reintegrate into the community

successfully. Correctional programming aims to make those who are in prison be accountable for their own criminal behaviour, change criminal attitudes, reduce the risk that they present to the community, and target risk factors that, once changed, claim to have been proven to reduce reoffending (Correctional Service Canada, 2014).

CSC relies on the RNR model during the OIA to identify individual level of risk. The RNR model has formed the basis of offender classification since 1990 and is considered the most influential model for the assessment and treatment of incarcerated individuals (Andrews & Bonta, 2007). The model follows both a general personality and cognitive social learning theory of criminal behaviour. The principle of *risk* refers to matching level of service to offender's risk of reoffending (those with a higher risk will receive more intense treatment, and vice versa) (Andrews & Bonta, 2007, p. 1). *Need* involves assessing the individual's criminogenic needs and then targeting them in treatment (Andrews & Bonta, 2007, p. 1). *Responsivity* refers to maximizing the individual's ability to learn from that treatment/service by providing cognitive behavioural treatment, and tailoring it to the learning style, motivation, ability, and strengths of that specific offender (Andrews & Bonta, 2007, p. 1). The responsivity principle involves two different segments: general and specific responsivity. General responsivity uses cognitive social learning methods to influence behaviour; these methods are seen as most effective regardless of individual traits (e.g., gender, indigeneity). Core correctional practices, such as prosocial modeling, reinforcement and disapproval techniques, and problem solving, highlight the specific skills represented in a cognitive social learning approach. Specific responsivity "fine tunes" the cognitive behavioural intervention and considers individual factors such as personal strengths, learning styles, personalities, motivations, and bio-social factors (e.g., gender, race) (Andrews & Bonta, 2007).

Risk assessment tools inform programming assigned to individuals while they are incarcerated and while they are back in the community (Correctional Service Canada, 2012). Risk assessment instruments help correctional staff determine a person's probability of reoffending and the areas contributing to their risk for reoffending. This is measured by screening the individual's electronic file regarding their offence and sentence, their record information, and then conducting a structured interview with the individual afterwards (Latessa & Lovins, 2010). Risk identifying tools allow correctional personnel to know which individuals pose the most risk, who needs the most help overcoming this risk, and which interventions each person needs (Latessa & Lovins, 2010). More on risk assessments, such as scholars' critiques of their use, will follow in the literature review.

Leaving the institution: Formal correctional practices in Canada

An individual is permanently released from federal prison under one of the following conditions: full parole or statutory release. Statutory release refers to when someone is released because their custodial sentence is two thirds complete. The exception to this two thirds rule is when CSC believes an individual is likely to cause serious harm to another person. Incarcerated men and women can also leave prison temporarily if they apply for day parole or a temporary absence. Temporary absences are limited to medical treatments, family matters, counselling, or community service. Full and day parole are both granted (or not granted) by members of the Parole Board of Canada, who base their decision on that individual's level of risk. Day parole allows someone to leave the prison during the day, however they must return to a custodial facility (e.g., community correctional centre) in the

evening. With full parole, an individual does not have to return to the facility (Government of Canada, 2019).

Generally speaking, individuals serving time in a provincial jail can also apply for parole, although specific practices and procedures do vary by region. After serving one-sixth of their sentence, they can apply for day parole, or full parole after one-third of their sentence is complete. If someone's application for parole is granted, they will be assigned a parole officer. The officer will create a supervision plan based on that individual's needs and level of risk. Parole conditions may include living in a halfway house, participating in programs, seeing a counsellor, or finding employment (Government of Canada, 2018b).

Probation is exclusive to the provincial correctional population. A judge may impose probation instead of, or in addition to, a term of incarceration. Similar to parole, probation allows an individual to serve their sentence in the community so long as that individual follows their assigned probation conditions (Government of Canada, 2018a). Everyone on parole or probation must meet regularly with their parole or probation officer. If the individual fails to attend these meetings or follow their conditions, they risk returning to jail or prison to carry out the rest of their sentence.

Leaving (and coming back to) the institution:

Once a woman is incarcerated in a provincial jail, it is likely that it will not be her only experience serving time in custody. Indeed, recidivism or "coming back to jail," is a defining feature in many of these women's lives (Comack, 2018, p. 12). Of all the women Comack (2018) interviewed, 71% had a history of previous incarceration. Though it is difficult to truly measure recidivism (because of the wide variety of methods and



measurement approaches used by researchers), consider the following: in Ontario, recidivism is defined as the “return to provincial correctional supervision on a new conviction within two years of completing a jail sentence of six months or more” (Comack, 2018, p. 17). In 2013/2014, the recidivism rate for adults in Ontario was 37.4%. However, before the year 2012, recidivism rates in Manitoba were calculated by whether someone received “new criminal charges in the two years following release from custody” (Comack, 2018, p. 17). When measured in that regard, recidivism rates reached a startling 72% (Comack, 2018). No matter which definition of recidivism is used, Comack (2018) notes this data suggests that incarceration “does not reduce the risk of an individual encountering further charges and more time in custody down the road” (p. 17). Maidment’s (2006) book reiterates this point, by recognizing that the revolving door (cycling between correctional and community settings often because of individual challenges) present in the provincial setting is “exacerbated by the lack of supports in place for women to handle the underlying issues” that brought them to jail in the first place (Lambdin, Comfort, Kral, & Lorvick, 2018; Maidment, 2006, p. 87). Indeed, it is the sad reality that many criminally-involved women only gain access to resources needed to resolve their troubles upon being incarcerated (Comack, 2018).

Though it is difficult to measure, statistics demonstrate a fairly high likelihood that women will return to jail or prison after being released. The following section goes into further detail about women’s experiences whilst incarcerated, as they re-enter their communities, and the struggles women face that may contribute to their return to custody.

## Literature Review

Literature on the transition from incarceration to community is complex and covers an array of intersecting and overlapping concepts. Across the literature, authors choose from a variety of terms which concepts they will implement based on their own preferences, values, and intention. To ensure clarity, I will define my choice of terminology.

My thesis explores women's experiences *post-release* (any moment in time following custody). I am looking at their *transition*, the process of moving from custody to independent living, specifically from jail to the Dartmouth area (Borzycki, 2005). I use the term *reintegration* broadly to describe “the desired aims of *throughcare* –independent and productive community membership –as well as the process required to achieve this aim” (p. 11). Borzycki (2005) defines throughcare as “the process of delivering continuous care” (p. 11), but I want to clarify that I did not only look at how professionally-delivered care affects women’s reintegrative experiences. Rather, I considered how any sort of support, whether it be from professionals or not, in conjunction with other factors (e.g., relationships, substance abuse, motivation to change), and individual steps taken during this transition, influenced my participants’ own perception of their reintegration altogether. I ensured that the women I spoke to defined reintegrative success in their own words.

In a more concrete sense, reintegration-planning and reintegration itself encompass various stages within the correctional system. The previous section explained that post-release planning begins while someone is incarcerated. It involves assigning programming, treatment, and interventions based on that person’s level of risk that they will reoffend. It involves identifying (and linking people to) services, supports, and relationships to help them settle into life in the community. Upon release, previously incarcerated women (and

men) will be on parole or probation conditions that require participation in more services or programs, on top of finding employment, support, and somewhere to live. Thus, my literature review examines all aforementioned stages of reintegration for women. I am simultaneously analyzing whether the Good Lives Model's theoretical assumptions about reintegration align with women's lived experiences as well as questioning the RNR model's supposed gender-neutrality. Accordingly, my literature review focuses on research conducted on both these models, as well.

It is important to note that "reintegrative success" is subjective and largely depends on individual values and/or societal expectations. For example, CSC assumes that previously incarcerated men and women who desist from crime, develop pro-social habits, and have a job are successful. Conversely, previously incarcerated women report that having positive relationships with family, being engaged in social activities, and being healthy constitute success (Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009). Thus, my analyses pertaining to "successful reintegration" cover a broad range of indicators and should not be taken in a "one size fits all" manner.

Research on correctional programs for women

For clarity purposes, I will provide a brief description of CSC's women's correctional programs. Insitutional programs are distributed into six different categories: the engagement program is available for all women and is aimed at increasing their motivation to make positive changes. The moderate intensity program is offered for women who are designated as moderate to high risk of reoffending, and it focuses on teaching skills to address their problematic behaviours through problem solving and conflict resolution

exercises. The high intensity program builds off of both previously mentioned programs but puts particular emphasis on the importance of positive and healthy relationships. The self-management program focuses on three particular things: enhancing strengths, solidifying coping strategies, and increasing self-awareness. This program is also offered for women in the community to serve as a “refresher”. Women’s modular intervention is only offered for those who are housed in secure units (therefore have been assessed as having moderate to high risk of reoffending). The program involves fifteen different modules aimed to identify and address the individual’s own risk factors, and it is designed to address individual needs to a greater degree than the other programs. Finally, there is a women’s sex offender program for those who have been convicted of a sexual offense and are deemed moderate to high risk of reoffending (Correctional Service Canada, 2014). It is important to note that for each of the six programs previously mentioned, there is also a slightly altered program offered for Indigenous women that incorporates help from Indigenous Elders.

CSC states that their programming is based on research proven to reduce risk of reoffending. Programs are professionally-delivered within the institution and are not independent of each other (i.e., “programs build off one another for different levels of intensity”) (Correctional Service Canada, 2014). Programming intends to promote “successful reintegration,” which, according to CSC, means a reduced chance of reoffending.

An American literature review examining gender differences in re-entry identified the following aspects of “reintegration efforts” as indicative of success: a) administered early on in a sentence; b) responsive to individual needs; c) comprehensive; and d) committed to long-term assistance (i.e. continue even after the individual is released) (Spjeldnes &

Goodkind, 2009, p. 327). Results from a nation-wide study on promising correctional programs for women in the United States found that programming with a continuum of care and individualized and structured treatment plans, that is holistic, or emphasizes skill-building, is the most “promising” because it addresses the “complex and intersecting problems of women offenders” (Koons, Burrow, Morash, & Bynum, 1997, p. 521). Additionally, the authors found that interventions targeting substance abuse problems are the most promising type of programs for reducing recidivism (Koons et al., 1997). Incarcerated and previously incarcerated women across nations (the United Kingdom, the United States) have reported in surveys and in-depth interviews that caring staff members are crucial for program success (Koons et al. 1997; McDermott, 2014). Furthermore, the same two groups of women reported that services administered in a “safe” environment that promotes “healing”, (Koons et al. 1997, p. 527) where women feel “humanize[d],” and able to safely share their feelings (McDermott, 2014, p. 360) are integral to program success.

Scholars suggest that programming for women should always be gender-responsive (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009). Gender-responsive programming has “the ability to consider the demographics and histories of the women offender population in delivering interventions, programs, and services as well as recognize how their various life factors have impacted their overall patterns of offending (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b). Researchers note that gender-responsive programs take larger social issues such as poverty, abuse, race and gender inequalities into consideration (Covington & Bloom, 2007; McDermott, 2014). Similarly, scholars also recommend that all programming for the female population is women-centred. Women-centred refers to the “empathetic, accepting, supportive, encouraging, challenging, and non-

confrontational approach used to recognize the social, political, and economic contexts of women's lives as well as their unique individual needs in relation to the world in which they live" (Correctional Service Canada, 2017b). In their theoretical paper, American authors Covington and Bloom (2007) suggest that if correctional facilities implement gender-responsive policies and programs, "all criminal justice phases" will be improved (p. 12). The authors posit that programming is most effective when it incorporates gender and culture and emphasizes support. Additionally, programs should focus on building on each woman's specific strengths and limit isolation from her social support networks (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Koons et al., 1997). Covington and Bloom (2007) proclaim that comprehensive, gender-responsive approach to services following the criteria listed above successfully provide a "sustained continuum of treatment, recovery, and support services" to women even after being released from the institution (p. 30).

*Creating Choices*, a report published by the Task Force for Federally-Sentenced Women in 1990, led to a dramatic shift in women's federal corrections from one that was solely gender-neutral to one that claims to put women's specific needs at the forefront. However, some scholars remain skeptical of CSC's "women-centredness." Pollack (2009) finds that a women-centred approach is "not evident in regard to job skills development as prisoners are predominantly utilized for feminized jobs such as hairdressing, cooking, and cleaning the prison" (p. 112). The author argues that individual correctional facilities affect how programs are implemented and that the prison environment is greatly affected by cultures of punishment and control. She argues that the prison experience is far from empowering, and that "the actual realities of prison do not reflect [CSC's] mission statement, about creating choices and empowering women" (p. 126). Pollack (2009) critiques CSC for "simply inserting women into male-based criminological theories about

crime and “what works” with prisoners,” stating that it has offered little substantial change (p. 126). Canadian correctional facilities for women have been “touted as a progressive model for incarcerating women,” however Pollack’s (2009, p. 112) findings indicate the opposite is true.

Further studies suggest that women’s correctional facilities do not follow the principle of empowerment that *Creating Choices* requires. In Pollack's theoretical paper (2005) examining Canadian corrections for women, the author proclaims that CSC “conflates social marginalization with mental health issues... [and that] by translating social disadvantage into mental health needs, CSC pathologizes a significant portion of federally sentenced women and subjects them to a greater degree of control” (p. 83). She argues that CSC recasts structural oppression as a mental health issue and defines “the consequences of gender, class and racial discrimination as mental health needs” (Pollack, 2005, p. 83). Pollack (2005) urges corrections to offer women the opportunity to attend counselling services in the community in accordance with the recommendations listed in *Creating Choices*. In her qualitative study, Pollack (2009) interviewed nearly 70 previously incarcerated women in Canada. The findings from her in-depth interviews indicated that though some program facilitators aim to empower incarcerated women, “the coercive, hostile, and inflexible prison environment often undermine[s] the good intentions of individuals” (Pollack, 2009, p. 125). Her findings coincide with Koons et al.’s (1997) finding that programs are only successful when their facilitators are not correctional staff. Additionally, both author’s studies’ found that when prison counselors are aware of power and control issues and counselors are inherently respectful to incarcerated women, programs run much more effectively (Koons et al., 1997; Pollack, 2005; Pollack, 2009).

The literature indicates several problems with the current state of programming administered to incarcerated women. Research has found that certain aspects of Canada's "women-centred" programming lack the ability to empower women—an especially important concept when preparing women for release (Pollack, 2009). Despite occasional support from program administrators, the hostile, demeaning environment of a correctional facility will often undermine any sense of "empowerment" or "healing" for women. Thus, the problem may lie in the execution of programming itself and the measures taken to make women feel comfortable or supported. Given all that this literature says about the failings of CSC's current models and what a good model must include, my reason to explore an alternative model (the Good Lives Model) is justified.

Research on gender and recidivism

Andrews and Bonta (2006) report that the RNR model has reduced rates of reoffending. The authors explain that focusing on criminogenic needs (instead of those that are non-criminogenic), has improved predictive validity and treatment of individuals leaving jail/prison (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Rettinger and Andrews (2010) proclaim that the Level of Supervision Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), an instrument that incorporates the eight main variables used in the RNR model, is "the single best predictor of recidivism" (p. 31). Andrews and Bonta (2006) provide three guidelines for correctional institutions to follow to maximize the potential of the RNR: agencies must "embrace a general vision that it is in the best interest for all to provide cognitive behavioural services to offenders" (p. 16); provide proper training and supervision to correctional staff responsible for assessing and delivering services that adhere to the RNR; and provide policies and organizational support



for the model. The authors assert that facilities achieving this level of commitment have significant reductions in recidivism rates compared to agencies that do not follow the RNR's principles (Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

Since men and women are both measured for risk using the same process and instruments, some scholars criticize CSC for not creating one that is gender-specific. For instance, Hannah-Moffat (2015) dislikes actuarial risk assessment tools in determining a risk level. Firstly, she takes issue with our ability to predict, stating: "Before committing to determining how needs can cluster, it seems reasonable to ensure that knowledge about the needs of offenders can even help distinguish which offender will or will not reoffend" (Hannah-Moffat, 2015, p. 114). She indicates that this issue is still up for debate, "which itself usually ignores issues such as how race and gender can affect criminogenic needs" (Hannah-Moffat, 2015, p. 114). In other words, she does not think we are fully capable as of yet to predict who will reoffend and who will not. Secondly, she states that most studies looking at accuracy and predictability of risk-identifying tools and treatment approaches do not use representative samples of women and racialized groups. Even more concerning for the author is the tendency for researchers to generalize findings that have used white male correctional populations, to non-white, non-male populations. In addition, she argues that these studies have ignored methodological problems that could affect the assessment tools' validity (Hannah-Moffat, 2015). The next step for correctional services is to integrate elements of race and gender to improve the construction and predictive validity of assessment, to ultimately enhance treatment options and make them more significant. If more complex assessment methods are implemented at women's correctional facilities, there will be more precise interventions and reductions in recidivism (i.e., reoffending) (Hannah-Moffat, 2015).

Hannah-Moffat (2006) speculates that “a serious consideration of gender requires examining socioeconomic structures, relationships, the context of offending, and the inter-relatedness of women’s “issues,”” and RNR fails to do just that. Morash and colleagues (2017) agree that the RNR ignores “state-created recidivism risks,” particularly women’s diminishing access to economic safety net benefits (p. 441). The authors argue that the model ignores structural causes of women’s offending by not including economic stress (Morash et al., 2017).

Andrews et al. (2012) maintain that the risk/need variables measured in the RNR model are gender-neutral. The authors insist that individual factors measured using the RNR accurately predict male and female reoffending to the same degree (Andrews et al., 2012). Though gender specificity does exist in some circumstances, Andrews et al. (2012) argue that “when found, the gender-specific effects tend to be minimal to mild in magnitude” (p. 127). For example, the authors believe that substance abuse is predictive for both men and women; however, it is more strongly related to recidivism for women (Andrews et al., 2012). Findings from Rettinger and Andrews’ (2010) study indicate that “risk factors derived from a gender-neutral social cognitive theory of crime [such as the RNR] are relevant for adult females and...perhaps gender-specific concerns may be best viewed as specific responsivity factors” (p. 29).

Conversely, scholars suggest there may be issues with the model’s supposed gender neutrality. For example, research suggests altering the model’s Big 4 (most predictive factors in reoffending) to the Big 5 for women: studies show that substance abuse is more strongly predictive for female reoffending than male reoffending (Andrews et al., 2012). Additionally, it appears as though the RNR model inflates risk levels for women. This means that the model designates women as requiring higher custody levels than warranted

by their actual behaviour (Van Voorhis, Salisbury, Bauman, Holsinger, & Wright, n.d.). Hence, the model does not appear to be as gender-neutral as its creators claim it is (Andrews et al., 2012). Finally, Hannah-Moffat (2006) argues that the RNR does not account for gender because studies on RNR are almost exclusively done on white male populations (Hannah-Moffat, 2006). However, one study that did use female participants did not find that the gender-specific factors had incremental validity over gender-neutral factors in predicting reoffending for women. A lack of incremental validity means that gender-specific factors were *not* significantly better than the gender-neutral factors at predicting women's reoffending (Rettinger & Andrews, 2010).

Some scholars suggest that victimization should be added to risk assessments tools for women. Gender-responsive scholars recommend adding histories of child abuse within risk assessment tools, as abuse "is a critical starting point for developing delinquent behaviour and continues to influence the likelihood of criminal conduct among women throughout their lives" (Doherty, Forrester, Brazil & Matheson, 2014; Van Voorhis et al., 2010, p. 263). Being victimized as an adult, either before or after serving time in prison/jail, has also shown to play a critical role in women pursuing criminal acts (Scott, Grella, Dennis & Funk, 2016; Van Voorhis et al., 2010). Another study suggests positioning trauma within the RNR model as an additional risk factor for criminality in women (Matheson, Brazil, Doherty & Forrester, 2014).

Risky relationships should be added to risk assessment models for women. Women's identities, self-worth, and sense of empowerment are defined by the quality of relationships they have with others (Van Voorhis et al., 2010). Studies suggest that many women engage in relationships that facilitate their criminal behaviour (DeHart, Lynch, Belknap, Dass-Brailsdord, & Green, 2014; Van Voorhis et al., 2010) and that certain relationships can put

women at risk for involvement in violence and drugs (Matheson et al., 2014). Furthermore, women who persist with their criminal careers are exposed to more violence and experience more adversarial interpersonal relationships compared to women who do not persist criminally (Cauffman, Monahan, & Thomas, 2015).

Correctional staff responsible for assessing women's risk levels should consider financial concerns as a predictor of future offending. Many women involved in the criminal justice system are plagued by poverty (Van Voorhis et al., 2010). Poverty is linked with limited educational and vocational skills, drug/alcohol dependence, and child care responsibilities. Because financial concerns are considered a minor risk factor, they are not included in risk assessment tools, despite scholars agreeing that poverty affects men and women differently and that public assistance reduces odds of reoffending by 83% (Morash et al., 2017; Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

Different factors predict reoffending for men and women. Van and colleagues (2012) found that problems finding accommodation and work post-release are both strongly correlated to recidivism in men but not in women. Additionally, less education and relationships with friends are also more strongly correlated to recidivism in men than women (Van et al., 2012). Studies find that young age predicts re-arrest for men but not for women, while parental status, risky sexual behaviour, and trauma exposure post-release significantly predict reoffending in women (Lapham, Skipper, Hunt & Chang, 2010; Scott et al., 2016). Scott et al. (2016) found that having more children and recovery capital (involvement in recovery activities, cognitive processes related to treatment, environmental support) increases women's chance that they will not reoffend. Finally, Jung and Lalonde (2016) found that women who go through the foster care system as kids and teenagers are more likely to reoffend.

Previous research on gender and risk assessment tools seems to be split: on one hand, proponents of the RNR model insist that the same factors predict reoffending in men and women. Feminists, on the other hand, take issue with the model's supposed "gender-neutrality," given that research has typically studied the model with entirely white-male samples. This disagreement justifies the direction of my thesis, as it is evident that further research is needed to fully comprehend woman's experiences reintegrating, and to get a better picture of what makes the experience gendered.

#### Research on women's reintegration

Women leaving jail or prison are thrown into a world in which they are ill-prepared, ill-informed, anxiety-ridden, and scared. They face major challenges and obstacles that directly impact their ability to succeed in the community and not recidivate. These obstacles vary and are often contingent on individual, social, and structural factors. It is important to note that these categories are not so linear in that factors may fit into more than one category (e.g., stigma is considered both a social and structural barrier because stigma is both a social product and process). The reason behind such categorization is for clarity purposes.

#### Individual barriers

Individual barriers to reintegrative success are obstacles unique to each person based on an individual's socio-demographics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, substance use, criminal thinking), events in their childhood, their criminal history, or any major life event. In the jail population, "women with mental health problems are at a greater risk for poor re-entry outcomes than men" (Bakken & Visser, 2018). For example, Bakken and Visser (2018)

interviewed and surveyed reintegrating men and women in the United States with mental health problems. The authors found that mental health problems negatively affect three out of four re-entry outcomes for women (including housing, employment, and criminal behaviour), but only one re-entry outcome for men: employment (Bakken & Visher, 2018). In her Australian study that involved interviewing previously incarcerated women, Lackner (2012) notes that reintegrating women have higher rates of mental health issues compared to both their male counterparts and women in general. Mental disorders impact reintegrating women's attempts at rehabilitation and can prevent access to services, programs, and supports that may have helped with their transition into the community. Bakken and Visher (2018) note that the distinctive pathway women take to incarceration (history of abuse, trauma, antisocial relationships, economic/social marginality, homelessness) may explain the higher prevalence of mental health issues as well as the relationship between poor re-entry outcomes for women compared to men. Unfortunately, mental health issues are rarely if ever effectively treated during incarceration. In gathering the perspectives of over 35 jail staff members in the United States, Belknap, Lynch, and Dehart (2016) recognize "it is important to understand that most women exit incarceration with the same unmet needs they had when they entered" (p. 82).

Substance abuse affects women's reintegration to a greater degree than men's: A higher percentage of incarcerated women meet the criteria for drug dependency (Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009). Stigma affects all individuals who leave prison or jail. However, van Olphen and colleagues (2009) found after conducting interviews with this population in the United States that stigma impacts women with substance abuse problems more so "because of gender-based stereotypes that hold women to a different standard" (p. 2). For example, a standard that assumes women exist to undertake "domestic and sexual roles" and any

behaviour outside of these roles is considered “deviant and immoral” (O’Brien, 2001, p. 8). Findings from in-depth interviews with previously incarcerated women in Canada and the United States indicate that having an addiction is a significant barrier in not reoffending. These empirical studies both note the importance of post-release services for successful reintegration (Cobbina, 2010; Doherty et al. 2014).

The literature consistently states that unresolved trauma is one of the biggest barriers to reintegrative success (Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009; Doherty et al., 2014). Furthermore, substance abuse and trauma often go hand in hand. According to Doherty et al.’s (2014) interviews, experiencing childhood trauma often triggers substance abuse as a way to deal with low self-esteem endured from abuse. In addition, experiencing a traumatic childhood, reinforcement of the ‘prisoner’ identity, as well as lack of access to treatment, collectively “influence a woman’s ability to engage...internal resources for self-improvement” (Doherty et al., 2014, p. 572-573). Trauma, substance abuse, and diminishing self-esteem collectively decrease a woman’s willingness to change her behaviour, which may lead to re-incarceration. Huebner and Pleggenkuhle (2013) report their American statistics which show that trauma has devastating effects on a woman’s physical health (addictions) and well-being (self-esteem) and it is often what led to her initial incarceration. Childhood trauma and victimization are both gendered phenomena: Spjeldnes and Goodkind’s literature review (2009) shows that more than 50% of incarcerated women report being sexually abused prior to being incarcerated, compared to only 10% of incarcerated men.

Trauma brought forth from being incarcerated impairs women’s reintegration. This particular type of trauma mainly refers to parents separated from their children, and the associated anxiety from worrying about their children’s wellbeing. In fact, a study conducted with incarcerated women indicated “the psychological impact of

prisonization/deprivation...is equally, or possibly more, substantial than “importation factors,” such as women’s mental health problems and trauma prior to incarceration” (Belknap et al., 2016, p. 85). Because trauma created in prison/jail is significantly connected to parental duties, it has a greater impact on women than men, since mothers often have primary custody (Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009). Interviews with previously incarcerated women in the United States and Australia identified further collateral costs of imprisonment, including: diminished investment in self and others created by incessant internal and external shaming, severed ties with children, loss of financial assets leading to acute worry, and depression (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Lackner, 2012). There appears to be a vicious cycle of trauma, addictions, low self-esteem, and incarceration present in these women’s lives.

Services, programs, and professional support are integral components of reintegration, but merely participating is not enough. To succeed in the community, women must actively engage in the relevant services, and possess a readiness to change. Readiness to change is *vital*, and women will not re-enter their communities successfully or avoid future crime without this aspiration (Doherty et al., 2014). After interviewing reintegrating women, Doherty et al. (2014) explain “creating a shift in attitude, or a desire for a new life script” is a critical factor in desistance for women (p. 563). Readiness to change is highly dependent on several other factors in a reintegrating woman’s life. For example, “the perceived, insurmountable challenges that women parolees face when adjusting to parole can negatively impact their abilities, desire, and motivation to succeed” (Johnson, 2015, p. 786). Context-specific factors (such as access to treatment, family and professional support), and person-specific factors (such as self-esteem) are interconnected and make up a person’s individual level of readiness. Therefore, not one specific factor defines women



as “ready” or “not ready” to succeed, rather, it is an interrelationship between these various components (Doherty et al., 2014).

A unique study using participatory action research found that the stigma pertaining to being formerly incarcerated “reduces the likelihood that [women] will be empowered to make desired changes in their post-[incarceration] lives” (Fortune, Thompson, Pedlar, & Yuen, 2010, p. 23). The source of someone’s desire to change is also gendered: using narrative research, Hersschaft and colleagues (2009) found that reintegrating women attribute positive change to a relationship they possess (such as friends or family) while men attribute positive change to a status-related goal (such as gaining employment).

Individual factors affect men’s and women’s experiences post-release in different ways. Women’s initial and continued contact with the criminal justice system often stem back to substance abuse, mental illness, and trauma. Women are often stuck in this cycle until they are overcome by a readiness to change, which is often contingent on support from family and friends.

### Structural barriers

Structural barriers are engrained in the context or environment lived in. They can impact people differently depending on their gender. In the context of my thesis, one of the major structural barriers that reintegrating women face is poverty. Poverty is often an issue in these women’s lives before even being released. According to Shantz, Kilty, and Frigon (2009), “criminalized women are released into the community only to confront many of the same impoverished and difficult circumstances they left behind years before” (p. 103). Upon being released, many women return to the same “difficult socio-economic life

circumstances that contributed to their initial conflict with the law” (Shantz et al., 2009, p. 104). Nearly all women transitioning back into their community share a number of specific needs (e.g., finding housing, health care, substance abuse services). However, poverty affects access to resources required to address these individual need areas (e.g., education, employment, leisure, health) (Belknap et al., 2016).

Additionally, poverty has a negative impact on a reintegrating woman’s sense of inclusion. In Fortune and Arai’s (2014) study, previously incarcerated women in Canada expressed feeling “pushed out” by community-members when attempting to “belong” (p. 88). However, these feelings appear to be present prior to prison/jail and persist once released. Due to a lifetime of dealing with poverty, addictions, and incarceration, women feel like they were never a part of mainstream society, and having limited money and scarce resources available makes the process significantly worse. Furthermore, reintegrating women report not feeling included by society because they often do not measure up “to a normative ideal;” that is, by having a family, money, social support, and good health (Fortune & Arai, 2014, p. 90). The authors conclude that “deep societal change is needed for women to truly experience social inclusion upon their release” and that community plays an essential role in this change (Fortune & Arai, 2014, p. 79).

One of the major structural barriers women face is stigma surrounding their criminal history. Reintegrating women face devastating effects from social stigma. A criminal history prevents women from gaining employment (Fortune & Arai, 2014), getting proper housing (Gobeil, 2008), and leads to what is known as self-shame: internalized feelings derived from embarrassment or guilt, combined with perceptions of negative community attitudes (Lackner, 2012). According to Lackner (2012) who interviewed previously incarcerated women, “women are more affected [than men] by labelling and the negative

stigmatisation attached to imprisonment, as well as self-shame, which is often a major issue during the reintegration process” (p. 28). Stigma and self-shame lead to social isolation, diminished confidence to change, and ultimately, further deviance. Furthermore, Pickering’s (2014) participatory research found that stigma is usually already present in the woman’s life before prison/jail, and significantly increases once they return to the community. Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) also conducted interviews with previously incarcerated women and note: “as a consequence of society’s labeling and the mechanisms of self-shaming, it appears that women...often experience a degradation process” (p. 43). A degradation process is when “the public identity of an actor is transformed into something looked on as lower in the local scheme of social types” (Garfinkel, 1956, p. 420). Stigma is even more severe when children come into play. Fortune and Arai (2014) note that stigma is “even more pronounced” when a woman is a mother because “marginalization that ensues from having committed a crime is deepened when the idea of motherhood comes with normative cultural expectations associated with being wholesome and responsible” (p. 84). Thus, the stigma that surrounds being labelled as deviant and irresponsible not only prevent women from obtaining some of life’s basic necessities, it also contributes to a decrease in their self-esteem, which may lead to future criminal behaviour.

Similar to stigma, women’s unique histories of marginalization influence female criminality (Huebner & Pleggenkuhle, 2013). Indeed, marginalization is often present before women become incarcerated and increases significantly once released, hindering reintegration. Pickering’s (2014) participants identified that marginalization (often combined with stigma) interferes with a woman’s chance of finding a job, housing, reconnecting with social supports, and re-joining her community. Women who have been

incarcerated are marginalized by race, class, and gender. In fact, black women are nearly eight times more likely than white women to be incarcerated (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004). While CSC offers support to help women transition back into their lives, “this support hardly makes up for the structural discrimination that criminalized women commonly experience” (Shantz et al, 2009, p. 104). Prison or jail merely serves as an interruption to women’s lives and creates challenges rather than choices. (Shantz et al., 2009).

A fourth structural barrier to women’s reintegrative success is access to resources in the community. According to both Johnson (2015) and Kellett’s (2011) qualitative interviews, most women who leave prison return to impoverished urban and rural communities where housing, employment/educational opportunities, transportation, infrastructure, and health care services are inaccessible, limited, or non-existent. Furthermore, these communities tend to lack wraparound services, as in services with various forms of coordinated assistance (Kellett, 2011). Overall, there is a lack of community-based programs to help people transition back into their communities, regardless of their gender. However, because a higher percentage of women face multiple health and reintegration issues, lack of programming may negatively affect women more than men, even though a higher number of men are affected (Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009).

Even when services are available in the community, women feel that correctional staff do not effectively explain what to expect upon release or how to reach out to services (Doherty, Forrester, Brazil, & Matheson, 2014; Kellett, 2011). The correctional system’s lack of effective communication and information-sharing is an issue at the structural-level. Research indicates that CSC does not prioritize the system-to-community transition, putting women in a difficult position upon release (Doherty et al., 2014). The literature

consistently states that Canadian correctional institutions must do a better job at providing incarcerated women with more practical assistance. They must improve their strategies for informing women what to anticipate after she is released, and offer better coordination of services (such as mental health or substance abuse) (Doherty et al., 2014). Spjeldnes and Goodkind's (2009) literature review recognized that "women's success upon their return to the community is contingent on their ability to support themselves financially," and for this to happen, treatment after incarceration is "necessary" (p. 328).

Lack of information-sharing also impedes reintegrating women's daily lives. Reintegrating women often have problems with addictions; therefore their parole or probation conditions will reflect that and include any appropriate interventions (e.g., attending drug testing or substance abuse treatment), in addition to finding employment, housing, meeting with her parole/probation officer, and parental duties (Ontario Ministry of Justice, 2018). Learning how to juggle so many competing demands can be extremely challenging for women who became accustomed to living in an environment as structured as jail or prison. Oftentimes, incarceration is the only form of stability these individuals have ever experienced (Doherty et al., 2014; Lackner, 2012). The overwhelming feelings associated with such demands point to the problematic nature of Canadian parole/probation conditions. Thus, the way our parole/probation is structured creates barriers for women attempting to transition back into the community. Indeed, this particular challenge is gendered: research on an American pilot project hoping to reduce recidivism in Pittsburgh's jail population found that incarcerated women (compared to their male counterparts) "experience greater levels of homelessness prior to incarceration" (p. 78) and present with "greater...re-entry needs in nearly every area," (p. 89) such as their need for services, finding housing, education, etc. (Spjeldnes, Jung, & Yamatani, 2014). Women are more

affected than men by the change in structure and competing demands due to their histories of homelessness.

While attempting to reintegrate back into the community, women often face difficult challenges that stem from being imprisoned. These challenges are gendered. Shantz et al. (2009) spoke with women in Canada who are transitioning back into their communities after being incarcerated. The authors argue that CSC is systemically sexist in multiple ways. CSC uses androcentric risk assessment instruments that were designed for men, which inherently conflate notions of risk and need, ultimately designating women as higher risk than necessary and penalizing women for being higher in need (Shantz et al., 2009). As a result of this improper designation, Shantz et al. (2009) argue that women do not receive “appropriate” or “concrete” assistance throughout their sentence (p. 86). Furthermore, incarcerated women lack access to temporary absence passes, hindering their ability to make community connections (for example, to gain employment) before their release (Shantz et al., 2009). Additionally, the authors take issue with CSC’s definition of ‘successful’ reintegration. CSC defines success as the ability to desist from crime and develop pro-social habits and employment, while Shantz et al. (2009) criticize this perspective for “responsibilizing women for structural inequalities and for ignoring their needs” (p. 87). Alternatively, the authors note that previously incarcerated women do not define success in the same manner as CSC. Rather, women explain that “short periods of independent living followed by further involvement with the justice system” is considered “success” (Shantz et al., 2009, p. 87).

Social network

A previously incarcerated woman's social circle is perhaps the biggest predictor of her reintegrative success. Certainly, having a positive support network during the reintegration process often leads to success. In fact, previously incarcerated women have defined successful reintegration as "levels of stability with family, social activities, mental and physical health, and employment" rather than the expected "avoidance of future crime" (Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009, p. 318). Reintegrating women explain that support from family and friends is integral to their well-being. Family and friends may support women in any of the following areas: emotional, financial, childcare, or helping find employment and housing upon release (Clone & Dehart, 2014; Cobbina, 2010; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Doherty et al., 2014). Supportive and encouraging friends help previously incarcerated women with daily challenges and reduce their levels of stress (Clone & Dehart, 2014).

Unfortunately, statistics show that "women are less likely to receive support from family than are similarly situated men... [because] the stigma of incarceration hindered [her] positive prosocial relationships," which is less apparent in men's experiences (Huebner & Pleggenjuhle, 2013, p. 821). For women leaving jail or prison without the help of a supportive family, "having a support group in the community [is] critical for helping [them] make the transition to community" (Fortune & Arai, 2014, p. 92). This form of support refers to groups, sponsors, volunteers, or professionals who help with reintegration without judgment (Fortune & Arai, 2014; Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002). During their interviews, incarcerated women in an American jail expressed that support from other formerly incarcerated women is most helpful (Clone & Dehart, 2014). Conversely, interview findings from women already in the process of transitioning into their Canadian communities show that women prefer to distance themselves from the population (Fortune & Arai, 2014). Perhaps the setting in which women seek help has an impact on who can

provide the most help. Furthermore, when women trust their parole/probation officer and feel encouraged and supported by them, reintegration is much more successful (Cobbina, 2010). In considering gendered differences, women on parole are overall less likely to fail than men (Huebner & Pleggenkuhle, 2013).

Conversely, having a negative support network often impedes success. Qualitative research with current and formerly incarcerated women found that when women have negative support networks, such as criminally-involved family members or former partners, their reintegration is more difficult (Cobbina, 2010). The literature on desistance from crime consistently finds that contrary to men, romantic relationships women have prior to their incarceration are “often part of the problem rather than part of the solution” (Brown & Ross, 2010, p. 42). Reintegrating women are put in a difficult position upon their release as they choose between staying connected to their anti-social network, which poses a risk to their desistance, or feeling socially disconnected by cutting out those individuals (Brown & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, a longitudinal study with female parolees shows the relationship between non-supportive, punitive parole officers and subsequent reactance and anxiety, ultimately making women more susceptible to reoffending (Morash, Kashy, Smith & Cobbina, 2016). Taking this into consideration, scholars suggest developing relational policies, practices, and programs that promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others, and the community (Bloom et al., 2004). According to Alvarez and colleagues (2018), who conducted focus groups and case studies with formerly incarcerated women, “the most efficient programs are those that provide strong community support networks and comprehensive services” (p. 1047).

Based on current literature, one can assume that reintegration is indeed a gendered phenomenon. Men and women do not experience reintegration in the same way nor are



they influenced by the same factors in the same way. After identifying some of the ways reintegration is gendered, and acknowledging scholars who have critiqued the RNR for not appropriately accounting for gender, it is evident that the Good Lives Model also needs a gender-based analysis that draws on women's lived experiences.

#### Research on the Good Lives Model

The Good Lives Model posits that all individuals (including those involved with the criminal justice system) are goal-directed and predisposed to seek several primary and secondary human goods. Primary goods are states of mind, personal characteristics, or experiences intrinsically beneficial and sought out for the individual's own sake (Ward et al., 2012). Ward et al. (2012) drew on various psychological, social, biological, and anthropological research to identify eleven classes of primary goods: life (both healthy and functional living), knowledge, excellence in play, work, and agency, inner peace, relatedness,<sup>2</sup> community, spirituality, happiness,<sup>3</sup> and creativity. Though all individuals seek out these primary goods, the actual extent that each are sought out varies depending on each individual person. Thus, primary goods represent an individual's core values and life priorities (Ward et al., 2012). In addition to primary goods, all individuals require instrumental or secondary goods in the form of *approach goals* to help them secure primary goods. Secondary goods are specific roles, practices, or actions that provide routes to the primary good (Ward et al., 2012). For example, the primary good of "excellence in play"

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<sup>2</sup> Occasionally referred to as "friendship."

<sup>3</sup> Occasionally referred to as "pleasure."

may be achieved by being involved in a sports team or other hobbies. In terms of rehabilitating incarcerated individuals, secondary goals represent a “socially acceptable” way of securing the primary good that is incompatible with offending (Ward et al., 2012, p. 96).

The main premise of the Good Lives Model is that all humans seek a *good life*. A good life, as defined by Ward (2002), is when “an individual possesses the necessary conditions for achieving primary goods, has access to primary goods, and lives a life characterized by the instantiation of these goods” (p. 515). The model does not presume that there is only one way to live a good life. Rather, the Good Lives Model suggests that it is possible to succeed in life in a variety of ways. The chance of living a good life depends on “the degree to which the facts of the body, self, and social life are established in human beings” (Ward, 2002, p. 515). An individual’s basic well-being is met when the three following conditions are evident: the facts of the *body* relates to our physiological needs being met; *self* refers to establishment of psychological capacities required to function in the world; and *social life* means having arrangements that facilitate the achievement of primary goods (Ward, 2002). Humans require certain capacities (such as the ability to plan, make decisions, and implement plans that embody fundamental commitments) to conceptualize a good life. Each individual’s primary goods are derived from the facts of the body/self/social life, and these facts “basically reflect fundamental human needs and the institutional arrangements necessary to meet these needs” (Ward, 2002, p. 515).

The Good Lives Model assumes that offending results from flaws in an individual’s life plan and relates either directly and/or indirectly to their pursuit for primary goods. An example of a direct way that this pursuit can lead to criminality is when primary goods are explicitly sought through offence-related actions (Ward et al., 2012). In other words, the

individual used an inappropriate secondary good to achieve a primary good. For example, if someone is unable to achieve intimacy with another adult, they might attempt to meet this good by sexually offending a child. In this example, the criminogenic need of intimacy deficits is associated with the secondary good of seeking intimacy through sex with a child. The indirect route is implicated when the individual did not specifically want to offend, but had an issue pursuing a primary good which led to their offending (Ward et al., 2012). There are four types of difficulties that an individual might experience when attempting to obtain primary goods that ultimately lead to crime: use of inappropriate or harmful strategies (secondary goods) to achieve primary goods, lack of scope (the omission of several goods in one's good life plan), conflict in the pursuit of goods (leading to acute psychological stress and/or unhappiness), and lack of internal and external capabilities to satisfy primary goods in the environment an individual lives (Fortune, 2018; Ward et al., 2012). Internal capabilities refer to knowledge and skill sets. In contrast, external capabilities refer to environmental opportunities, resources, and supports (Ward et al., 2012).

The Good Lives Model is a strengths-based rehabilitation theory that aims to provide incarcerated individuals with internal and external resources to live a good or better life upon their release. In this model, criminogenic needs, or factors contributing to one's criminal behaviour, are conceptualized as internal or external barriers toward living a good life. Hence, the Good Lives Model views criminogenic needs as "obstacles blocking goods attainment" (Ward et al., 2012, p. 96). The first step of this model involves assessing the individual during their sentence and asking them what their core commitments in life are, what their valued day-to-day activities and experiences are, and identifying the goals and underlying values that are evident in their offence-related action. Once the individual's

conceptualization of a good life is understood, the case worker can create (with the individual) a good lives treatment or intervention plan, listing future-oriented goals that satisfy primary goods in socially acceptable ways (Ward et al, 2011). In sum, the Good Lives Model helps people lead a better life after their release by making a plan to achieve what is important to them through crime-free actions. The model posits that in order to rehabilitate, it is necessary to invoke the skills, knowledge, competencies, and strategies that will create opportunities to live a better life (Ward, 2002).

The Good Lives Model focuses on risk reduction and goods promotion, whereas the RNR focuses only on the former. The Good Lives Model's interventions for reintegration add to the "client's repertoire of functioning through strengthening his or her capacity to achieve valued goods in socially acceptable and legal ways" (Ward et al., 2012, p. 97). Hence, the Good Lives Model involves identifying the individual's personal strengths/values, and then creating a plan that will achieve these values by building on the identified strengths (Fortune, 2018). The Good Lives Model incorporates the three main factors from the RNR (risk, need, responsivity), however it also includes a plan of action to live a more personally meaningful and fulfilling life upon the individual's release.

The Good Lives Model focuses on approach goals whereas the RNR only focuses on avoidance goals (Fortune, 2018). In an approach-goal-focused intervention, individual behaviour "is instigated or directed by a positive or desirable event or possibility" (Elliot, 1999, p. 170). In an avoidant-goal-focused intervention, individual behaviour "is instigated by a negative or undesirable event of possibility" (Elliot, 1999, p. 170). Ward (2002) suggests certain criteria for correctional staff to follow when conceptualizing a "good life" for someone preparing for release. Staff should have a concrete understanding of how that individual can *realistically* live, and of their capabilities, temperament, interests, skills,

deep commitments, and support networks (Ward, 2002). The Good Lives Model incorporates components into treatment “that are not satisfactorily addressed by the RNR model, such as the need to build a strong therapeutic alliance, role of agency, motivation to commit to treatment, and desistance from further offending” (Fortune, 2018, p. 24). Therefore, the model does not disregard the RNR model whatsoever, the Good Lives Model simply expands on the RNR to include factors that are empirically shown to improve reintegration (Fortune, 2018). Overall, the Good Lives Model approach is much more client-based as it focuses on helping individuals achieve “personally meaningful goals in prosocial ways” (Fortune, 2018, p. 21). Additionally, unlike the RNR, the Good Lives Model promotes happiness for those attempting to reintegrate into the community *as well as* desistance from future crime, rather than only the latter.

The Good Lives Model suggests that for an individual to successfully rehabilitate, certain factors must be met. Ward (2002) explains that those who want to desist from crime seek primary goods or valued outcomes, and that securing these goods is a crucial component in successfully reintegrating. The Good Lives Model asserts programs that focus on changing behaviours must teach reintegrating individuals how to achieve primary goods through different means, or change/broaden the ranges of goods they seek. By doing so, reintegrating individuals will successfully desist from crime when they are back in the community (Ward, 2002). Rehabilitation needs to be guided by “a conception of good lives that incorporates the primary human goods and specifies how they are to be achieved for a given offender” (Ward, 2002, p. 525).

The creators of the RNR model and the Good Lives Model disagree on the value of each other’s models. On the one hand, proponents of the RNR model “do not discount [the Good Lives Model’s] value,” however do not see substantial worth in its substance

(Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2011, p. 737). These authors are skeptical of how applicable the Good Lives Model truly is because of its limited empirical findings. Additionally, the authors are of the view that the RNR “already subsumes many of the features of the [Good Lives Model],” and that it does not provide any significant value (Andrews et al., 2011, p. 737). Proponents of the Good Lives Model counter these statements by noting three significant weaknesses in Andrews et al.’s article (2011): substantial “omissions of their characterization of offender rehabilitation and the degree to which it is underpinned by values of different types” (Ward et al., 2012, p. 94), the authors’ incomplete and incorrect summary of the Good Lives Model, and the authors’ misleading and inaccurate assumptions and conclusions regarding the application of the Good Lives Model to practice (Ward et al., 2012). Ultimately, proponents of the Good Lives Model criticize Andrews et al. (2011) for not fully understanding how the Good Lives Model works. Its creators insist that the Good Lives Model appropriately addresses risk, need, responsivity; provides professional discretion and a comprehensive framework to help guide practitioners in their work with offenders; but beyond that, is able to appreciate “the obligation to assist offenders to live better lives once they have completed their punishment” (p.108), an important contribution lacking in the already established RNR model (Ward et al., 2012). Hence, Willis and Ward (2013) argue that the Good Lives Model “retains the merits of the RNR while addressing its limitations;” that is, by including an additional focus on helping people live a happy life (p. 309).

The limited empirical research on the effectiveness of the Good Lives Model is promising. For example, one study compared treatment engagement in an approach-goal-focused intervention (such as the Good Lives Model) and an avoidant-goal-focused intervention (such as the RNR model). The authors found participants in the intervention

matching the Good Lives Model were more engaged in treatment and were more genuinely motivated to live a crime-free life after treatment (Willis & Ward, 2013). Therefore, when staff implemented the Good Lives Model's concepts, participants were more inclined to live a prosocial life compared to participants in the intervention with RNR-related concepts. Furthermore, a prison-based sex-offender treatment program implemented changes to reflect the Good Lives Model. Preliminary findings of this change are positive in multiple ways (Willis & Ward, 2013). For example, treatment drop-out rates went down, staff report feeling more effective and positive in their work leading to greater therapeutic relationships, and participants report being able to "exercise greater autonomy in the rehabilitation process through working towards treatment targets at their own pace" (Willis & Ward, 2013, p. 311). Once again, the strengths-based approach proved to be effective in the eyes of the treatment-goers and the staff administering the treatment.

While it is true that the Good Lives Model did not specifically incorporate gender into developing its approach, its proposed ability to tailor to individual needs justifies my rationale for suggesting the possibility that the model can offer women substantial support with their reintegration. According to researchers in this area, effective reintegration programming uses gender-responsive training. In their chapter on gender-equitable community supervision, Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2013) refer to an assessment tool used in the state of Maine. The instrument "focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses and, subsequently, case management around these strengths" (p. 178). The tool uses "domains that are relevant to gendered reentry and needs," and has successfully reduced rates of recidivism (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013, p. 178). This knowledge has justified my rationale for examining the Good Lives Model as it also uses a strengths-based approach. However, given researchers' tendencies to assume models tested on men are applicable to

women, as is the case with the Good Lives Model, it is crucial to analyze real-life experiences with the model's theoretical assumptions to ensure accuracy.

The Good Lives Model shows promise for the future of women's reintegration. It is a strengths-based approach that researchers believe is more effective for women as a whole. While the RNR model is historically effective at reducing recidivism, the Good Lives Model has potential to add even more value by including personally-appealing objectives that align with happiness and a will to live crime-free.

## Feminist Criminology: Using Women's Voices

I am writing my thesis from a feminist criminological perspective. Feminist criminology asserts that "women's voices are important for directing... [analyses] and strategies," therefore their narratives are crucial if we want to both gain a better understanding of, and ultimately improve, how women experience reintegration (Balfour, 2006, p. 742). I am using the stories my participants share with me to further understand what makes reintegration gendered.

I have situated myself within the range of liberal feminism. From this perspective, women's positions in society are attributed to "unequal rights or 'artificial' barriers to women's participation in the public world, beyond the family and household" (Beasley, 1999, p. 51). For liberal feminists, it is of utmost importance that women achieve equality with men in the public sphere through equal access to opportunity (Beasley, 1999). In contrast, *radical* feminists believe the solution to inequality is to challenge patriarchal power, violence, and control, by dismantling the system altogether (Powell, 2013).



Liberal feminism helped shape my research questions. For example: Can an alternative model of rehabilitation (that promotes individuality and autonomy) provide women with equal opportunities to succeed upon release from jail? I approach my topic with the liberal belief that *justice* and *equality* are both attainable goals for women “within the same social structures that we now have” (Finlayson, 2016, p. 90). In contrast, a radical feminist may say it is impossible to achieve equality within our existing structures, and the only answer is to transform or revolutionize these structures. Radical feminists want to “reconceive public life and private life entirely” while liberals seek “to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of [society]” (Finlayson, 2016, p. 90). As such, liberal feminism framed my approach to women’s experiences leaving jail. I explore how adjusting tools and services, rather than tearing down the whole criminal justice system, influences women’s journeys re-entering their communities after being incarcerated.

Feminist theory, when analyzing crime and justice, allows researchers to examine how various factors such as race, age, social standing, oppression and patriarchy influence the relationship between women, crime, and social justice. Feminists argue that current criminological theory, “is premised on a male model of criminal justice and does not capture the impact of mechanisms of social control on women nor the unique life histories, risk predictors, or needs of women in the criminal justice system” (Van Gundy, 2014, p. 1). This knowledge leads me to believe that gender-specificity is essential when examining female reintegration. Hence, it is important to examine the gender-neutrality of a proposed model before it is incorporated into our criminal justice system.

Feminist criminology evolved from one major complaint: because women constitute only a small proportion of prisoners, female crime has been virtually ignored by mainstream criminology (Walsh, 2011). This has led to the problem of “generalizability:”

assuming theories of men's crime apply to women (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1998). For quite some time, mainstream criminology has not equally accounted for the criminal behaviour of both genders, as it has overlooked women's needs by only testing theories with men (Flavin, 2001; Walsh, 2011). Conversely, feminists argue that despite the small number of women involved in the criminal justice system, there is a need to obtain women's "ways of knowing" to explain female criminality, since criminal behaviour and the circumstances around it are gendered phenomena (Walsh, 2011, p. 11). Thus, feminist criminologists "want to put women on the criminological agenda" to develop an understanding of female crime from a female perspective (Walsh, 2011, p. 11). I further our understanding of women's reintegrative experiences by incorporating their voices, "ways of knowing," and first-hand experiences –the core of feminist criminology.

Feminist theorists, especially in the social sciences, "begin with the assumption that gender is essentially socially created and reproduced, not innately determined and immutable" (Renzetti, 2013, p. 7). Gender socialization begins at birth. Not only are members of society taught the norms of both masculinity and femininity that become engrained in our personalities, feminists believe that this learning "as well as the content of gender norms themselves are social products generated within the context of the social structure in which we live" (Renzetti, 2013, p. 7). The personality traits, behaviours, and patterns of social interaction that we learn as masculine or feminine are then embedded in society's institutions, including that of the government and legal systems, creating what feminists refer to as "society's gender structure" (Renzetti, 2013, p. 8). In turn, these conflicting traits are not valued equally, in that men and women do not receive equal access to society's resources and rewards (Renzetti, 2013). If one wants to challenge the gender hierarchy, the investigation must involve the affirmation of the feminine within sexual

difference. By failing to include sexual difference, we will “unconsciously perpetuate the gender hierarchy under which the feminine is *necessarily* devalued” (Naffine, 1996, p. 143). Hence, it is critical to acknowledge gendered differences in real-life experiences and subsequently incorporate these differences to promote systemic change. For that reason, my research questions revolve around, and assume, reintegration experiences differ for men and women.

Within criminology, there are an array of feminist perspectives rather than one specific point of view (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Renzetti, 2013). However, at the forefront is a focus on gender. Feminist criminology involves theorizing and studying both masculinities and femininities (Renzetti, 2013). Being a feminist criminologist means studying and explaining criminal offending and victimization, as well as institutional responses to these problems, as fundamentally gendered. Feminist criminologists emphasize the importance of using our acquired knowledge to implement policies that will alleviate oppression and contribute to an overall more equitable social structure (Renzetti, 2013). As Flavin (2001) notes, “feminist insights [are] not just helpful to understanding the relationship between gender and crime, [they are] essential” (p. 68). In terms of a general focus, feminist criminologists want to answer the question: what accounts for gender differences in criminal offending (Renzetti, 2013)? Regarding my own thesis, one of my research questions asks: what accounts for gender differences in reintegration? More specifically, what is gendered in a woman’s search for primary goods?

Feminist criminologists fight for equality regardless of an individual’s race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc. I recognize that legislation and policies have an important role when promoting and forcing changes regarding women’s oppression. As such, my main research question examines whether or not the theoretical underpinnings of

a proposed policy for reintegration is capable of incorporating gender differences. If the Good Lives Model does have the capacity to account for these differences, criminal justice personnel should consider implementing some of the model's ideas.

Moreover, feminist criminology has components of labelling theory, as well. Criminologists in the area assume gender differences in what gets labelled deviant and that these labels differentially impact women and men (Renzetti, 2013). This is not to say that women do not take advantage of gender stereotypes. As an example, when women rob men, they often "play on gender stereotypes of women as weak and sexually available so as to manipulate their targets into situations in which the robbery is more easily accomplished" (Renzetti, 2013, p. 44). In my analyses of women's search for primary goods, I considered the notion that women may play on gender stereotypes in trying to achieve these goods.

Furthermore, according to Naffine (1996), "feminist criminology must always function in two directions if it is to effectively challenge patriarchal knowledge:" it must have a reactive, anti-sexist goal, and form some type of critique. It must also be a positive, constructive project that creates alternatives and produces feminist –not simply anti-sexist –theory. Ultimately, "feminist theory must exist as *both* critique and construct" (Naffine, 1996, p. 142). In order to understand female crime, feminists recommend engaging in a positive act of creation, something that involves invention and imagination. Overall, "the feminist criminologist is not simply reporting on the phenomenon of crime, but positively constructing that body of knowledge" (Naffine, 1996, p. 122). As such, my research questions and approach promote learning from, and building new knowledge about, women's reintegrative experiences *from* women themselves. In other words, I use women's stories and their lived experiences to create a new understanding of how reintegration is gendered.

CSC's tools are not capable of accurately identifying and addressing women's unique needs, largely because they focus objective "facts" rather than situational context (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). For example, consider that many reintegrating women are unemployed, living on social assistance, and/or are in treatment. The LSI-R –the primary tool CSC uses for reintegration-planning –considers mental health treatment as a risk factor. The tool fails to take into account that for many women, participating in this type of program is required to keep their housing, abide their parole conditions, or to prevent criminal behaviour. Evidently, these factors are actually *protective* and crucial to sobriety, independence, or being able to work. Therefore, "while the LSI-R is able to identify criminogenic risks for women and alcohol and drug abuse, the lack of *contextual* understanding renders this problematic for treatment purposes" (Chesney-Link & Parko, 2013, p. 169). Due to the problematic nature of CSC's approach, I consider the possibility that the client-centred method the Good Lives Model takes in reintegration-planning may incorporate gender differences to a greater degree.

Feminist criminology, at least in part, represents the creation of knowledge based on women's experiences. My thesis contributes in a small way to our understanding of female reintegration by gathering and analyzes the stories women share with me. The feminist framework's ideas about gender and patriarchy provide substance to my analyses and influenced my approach to conducting this research as a whole.

## Methods

### Research design and Data Collection

I used qualitative methods for my thesis research, meaning “non-quantitative methods to contribute new knowledge and to provide new perspectives” (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007, p. 350). Qualitative research explores complex phenomena encountered by a range of individuals, such as consumers of, and those involved in, policy. Therefore, qualitative research is well suited exploring the experiences of women involved in the criminal justice system. Qualitative methods allowed me to achieve my goal of understanding reintegration from the perspectives of those actually experiencing it.

Qualitative research offers many “positive attributes” and “distinctive strengths,” with “interdisciplinary investigations into webs of complex and interacting individual, social, and contextual factors –especially those that affect marginalized populations” (Sprague, Scanlon, & Pantalone, 2017, p. 717). Women re-entering their communities after incarceration fit into this description. Qualitative work lets researchers engage in “multilevel social processes” (Sprague et al., 2017, p. 717). For instance, instead of exploring *why* women succeed or not when re-entering their community, I explored *how* women reintegrate. I wanted to see how social processes, individual factors, and the context in which these women live affect reintegration. The nature of qualitative methods allowed me to preserve “the context for the data, rather than eliminating such information as extraneous variables” (Ivey, 2012, p. 319).

I conducted open-ended, in-depth interviews with previously incarcerated women to explore their transitions from jail to the community. In-depth interviews “explore the experiences of participants and the meanings they attribute to them” (Tong et al., 2007, p.

351). I encouraged participants to talk about issues pertinent to my research question through prompts and open-ended questions (Tong et al., 2007), but ultimately, my participants brought up topics *they* identified as relevant, rather than the interview revolving around rigid, pre-determined questions. Open-ended interviews allowed me to understand *how* women experience reintegration, instead of gathering opinions, attitudes, or beliefs about the topic, as is more commonly sought out in quantitative work (Hammarberg, Kirkmann, & de Lacey, 2016).

I did not conduct a focus group mainly because the method is more difficult to organize, and group rivalry or other types of tensions may ensue (Fox, 2006). I was especially concerned about group rivalry because I interviewed three women who live in the same house. I used individual interviews to avoid disrupting their home dynamic or putting my participants in an uncomfortable position of being afraid to say something personal in front of a fellow housemate. If one of my participants had an issue with a housemate or with the transition home altogether, they might have avoided divulging this information in front of another participant. I wanted to ensure that my participants felt safe to tell me both negative and positive stories about their day to day lives, without worrying about any consequences.

I incorporated narrative criminology into my work. According to Woodiwiss, Smith, and Lockwood (2017) “narrative forms of inquiry have gained their hold...because people and their lives matter” (p. viii). Narrative research assumes narratable subjects help form research activities, rather than only influence it (Woodiwiss et al., 2017).

I invited women to share their stories about reintegrating into the community. Narrative research has “the potential to validate the knowledge of ‘ordinary’ people, especially ‘ordinary’ women who are liable to be omitted from many research projects” (Fraser, 2004, p. 184). Narratives “can help uncover underlying social processes of stability and change”

(Presser, 2016, p. 142). My goal was to understand the journey from jail to community through the eyes of women themselves. My research questions explore women's day-to-day lives reintegrating and how applicable the Good Lives Model's primary goods are to this experience. The open-ended nature of narrative research allowed themes – and any mention of the goods –to emerge naturally (Bell, 2003). It allowed me to obtain each individual's perceptions of reintegration and their unique ideas of "success" that possibly aligned, or did not, with my preconceived ideas. I offered "some measure of moral and political triumph" and let an oppressed population "make a bid for change by telling their own stories" and giving them a voice (Presser, 2016, p. 142).

Using my interview guide (Appendix A), I asked my participants to tell me about their journey since being released from jail. I asked to hear stories about how they have spent their time in the days, weeks, and months following their release. I asked the women to describe where they went, who else was present, what led them there in the first place, and what happened there. After sharing their stories, I asked my participants to describe the experience in a few words, explain if the story was a negative or positive experience, and how that story made them feel. I designed my interview questions in a way that allowed participants to bring up topics they deemed relevant, therefore soliciting their narratives (Bell, 2003). Furthermore, I used a "conversational style of interviewing;" engaged in an "informal and friendly way;" asked questions such as "how did it begin? And then what happened?" By following these steps, I ensured the interviews were "interviewee-oriented" rather than "instrument-oriented" (Fraser, 2004, p. 185), an especially important concept in narrative work.

At the end of the interview, I asked my participants to look over a list containing a variation of the eleven primary human goods. I invited them to identify which factors they



found the most and least relevant for themselves at this point in their lives. I used their choices to later analyze how they align with the Good Lives Model's assumptions.

Tong et al. (2007) explain the importance of reflexivity for qualitative researchers. For example, qualitative researchers must "recognize and clarify...their identity, credentials, occupation, gender, experience and training" to improve credibility (p. 351). Reflexivity allows readers to "assess how [certain] factors might have influenced the researchers' observations and interpretations" (Tong et al., 2007, p. 351). Tong et al. (2007) explain that qualitative researchers cannot avoid bias completely, therefore they must acknowledge it upfront.

Firstly, I must acknowledge my education and personal beliefs. I have completed nearly six years of post-secondary education in criminology, therefore have some preconceived ideas of lawbreaking in general. For example, after completing one year of graduate studies at Saint Mary's University, I learned about crime from a more holistic and theoretical point of view. I believe no one should be defined merely by their adherence to the law. Understanding crime is a complex phenomenon and requires looking at both individual and societal factors at play. Furthermore, I possess preconceived ideas about the Good Lives Model and the RNR model, as well. After researching both models, I generated opinions and a belief that the Good Lives Model shows incremental value over the RNR model. Thus, it is evident that while I do not agree with the way the correctional system currently functions, I acknowledge that not everyone shares this point of view. Nonetheless, this bias is present in my research analyses.

I must also acknowledge my gender, race, and class. Because I am a woman, I understand sexism on a more personal level than if I were male. However, my experiences of sexism are mitigated by my race (Caucasian) and class (middle-class). I have never fallen

victim to racism nor suffered through poverty. Going into my interviews, I was wary to avoid empathizing with my participants on a personal level if they shared an experience of racism or poverty. I certainly sympathized and showed compassion but did not want to minimize their hardships by insinuating I have experienced the same things.

I have volunteered with incarcerated women in the past and worked for five months at the transition house from which I recruited my participants. I was hired *after* conducting the interviews. Due the nature of the job, I established both professional and personal relationships with my participants. I had to ensure I did not change my perspective of their stories from new knowledge or ideas developed after the interviews were complete. Additionally, because of my experience working for CSC and volunteering with incarcerated women, I have my own distinct point of view about the individuals and organization in question. While I possess more knowledge than most do on the complexities of Canada's federal prisons, I have also seen firsthand the derogatory, condescending ways guards treat jail inmates. I have also seen the guilt, regret, sadness, and isolation women feel during incarceration. I now have a very negative view of Canada's justice system, which my participants likely picked up on. I believe my participants were more inclined to share their stories with me because of this.

#### Sample and recruitment

I used purposive sampling: selecting participants who share particular characteristics and are able to provide relevant and diverse data about reintegration (Tong et al., 2007). My sample included women who live or have lived at Maia House. Maia House (name has been changed) is a transition house located in the Halifax area. A transition house is distinct

from a halfway house, in that its residents voluntarily choose to live there because they are seeking support. While Maia House offers residency to all women, the majority of its residents are women who have spent time in a provincial or federal institution or are otherwise involved in the correctional system. All women are looking for support to eventually move into their own living space. The House's staff and volunteers provide education and employment exploration, housing search support, referrals to resources in the community, and personal development programming. The House has room for up to eight tenants whose rents are based on individual income. While each resident has her own room, the other areas are communal (Elizabeth Fry Society Mainland Nova Scotia, n.d.).

The House also works as an office for its umbrella organization. The non-profit organization provides rehabilitative and comprehensive programming and support for women involved in the criminal justice system. Women become involved with the House and the organization via outreach (in jails and prisons). Staff and volunteers of the organization visit correctional facilities to offer programming, services, and support and coordination for long-term housing options. Beyond that, the organization encourages public awareness and understanding of issues related to criminalized women. Their mandate is "to address the systemic issues that criminalize women and girls in Mainland Nova Scotia through housing supports, comprehensive programming initiatives and justice system reform" (Elizabeth Fry Society Mainland Nova Scotia, n.d.).

Qualitative research does not require a specific number of participants, however Sandelowski (1995) recommends about six participants for work "directed toward discerning the essence of experiences" (p. 182). My sample includes four women who spent time at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility, a provincial jail in the Halifax region. All four women were Caucasian, ranging in age from early 20s to early 30s. None of the

women were mothers, nor were they charged with any violent offences. Most women have spent time in custody more than once, and had been back in the community for at least one month. Generally speaking, my sample lacked diversity in that the women were similar in age, offending history, race, and ethnicity.

Because my interviews were rich and filled with stories, I judged my sample size sufficient. Since qualitative research depends on experiences or events rather than the number of people, I recognized after four interviews that I had achieved an appropriate amount of data saturation for a Master's thesis. Saunders et al.'s (2017) define data saturation as "when the researcher begins to hear the same comments again and again" (p. 1896). This means it is "time to stop collecting information and to start analysing what has been collected" (Saunders et al., 2017, p. 1896). Surely, new information would have been learned had I been able to conduct more interviews. However, I was constrained by the parameters of the Master's program; it is a two-year program with few resources (i.e., funding) that limited my capacity to wait for more participants or reach a broader population.

The Executive Director of Maia House's organization helped me with recruitment by putting up my recruitment flyer (Appendix B) at Maia House. The flyer explained participants would receive a \$20 gift card to Tim Horton's and that I would compensate parking and travel expenses to express my gratitude. Within two days of the flyer being posted, I had two interviews scheduled. Thankfully, the women I spoke to were very eager to share their stories and I had no issues with recruitment.

## Research procedures

To ensure I followed the Saint Mary's Research Ethics Board's (REB) guidelines, I created a document (Appendix C) that indicated the following: the purpose of the study, that participation is voluntary and participants can drop out at any time without consequence, the steps taken to ensure the data is confidential and anonymous, why participants were invited for an interview, and finally what will happen with the data after the interviews (Fox, 2009). The document clarified that no identifiable information I collect will be shared with the organization that runs Maia House. The consent form also indicated that I would record the interview if the participant agreed (Fox, 2009) and that it would be conducted in an environment where they would not feel restricted or uncomfortable (Turner, 2010).

I mitigated potential risks by ensuring I noted them on my REB application. For example, I acknowledged that I would be interviewing a marginalized, vulnerable group of people (formerly incarcerated women) which poses its own risks. I indicated my participants could feel uncomfortable, worried, or anxious about sharing personal stories with me. I noted a potential social risk of privacy or fear of losing their reputation. Finally, I included the possibility my participants would fear being arrested for telling me a crime-related story, such as for breaching their conditions. The Saint Mary's REB approved my project in approximately six weeks. After getting ethics approval, I contacted the Executive Director about the recruitment flyer and then began my interviews.

After I conducted the interviews, I followed Davidson's (2009) approach to transcribing. I used conversation analysis (CA), which involves transcribing in rounds. CA recommends transcribing what the recording actually said and then addressing how the

words were said, such as gaps in talk, intonation, etc. I moved back and forth between recordings and transcripts, creating my own transcript of what I felt and noticed during the interviews as well (Davidson, 2009).

## Data Analysis

Data analysis involved two steps: a thematic analysis of the interviews/stories followed by a gender-based analysis of the stories. More specifically, I applied a gendered lens to the women's pursuit for primary goods.

I performed a thematic analysis by analyzing my data inductively. According to Maine and colleagues (2017), "an inductive method guides a data driven approach in which the participants' experiences are represented" (p. 77). I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally, producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) first step involves: "transcribing data...reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas" (p. 87). I transcribed my interviews as soon as they were finished. I then actively read the data by searching for meanings or patterns, becoming familiar with all its aspects. During this first step, I used a marker to highlight particularly meaningful stories, wrote initial ideas about the stories and overall content, and how I perceived the interviews went.

The first step of my analysis was data-driven, as in, solely based on the data gathered from the interviews. Therefore, the themes I developed after coding were based on the *data* from the interviews rather than a *theory* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second step involved

“coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). I read through my transcripts and wrote a code next to each line, idea, or paragraph, depending on the relevancy of what was spoken. After I coded all four interviews, I went through them once more and then wrote each final code on a post-it note.

Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) advice, I used a visual representation to help sort the codes into themes. After writing the codes, research questions and objectives on post-it notes, I stuck them onto my bedroom wall. This stage involves thinking about how the codes connect with each other and subsequently how the themes connect with each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, I played around with the post-it notes several times by grouping and re-grouping them together based on their content. I then came up with initial themes for each grouped set of codes.

Step four involved “checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts...and the entire data, generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). To capture “the contours of the coded data,” I moved, removed, and re-named several codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). The researcher can move to the next step once they have a good idea of the different themes, how they connect, and the overall story they tell about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I judged this part of the analysis complete once all my themes accurately told a story of reintegration from a female perspective.

Step five involved “defining” and “refining” the “essence” of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). The authors explain that themes should not be too diverse or complex, and to create sub-themes if the theme is too large. Sub-themes give structure and demonstrate the hierarchy of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the authors recommended, I split up two larger themes and then made sub-themes. When

finalizing, I avoided simply paraphrasing the information. Rather, I identified “what is of interest about [it] and why” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). For example, I ensured my themes represent what my participants told me about each topic, instead of summarizing the topics.

Once I finalized all of my themes, I began writing up the findings. The sixth step involves choosing “vivid, compelling extract examples” to include in the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). For me, this step involved re-reading the transcripts several times as I went through each theme. I marked down the most compelling stories from each interview. Finally, I compared all the stories and decided which ones I would use in my thesis

After I finished the thematic analysis, I followed some of Steffensmeier and Allan’s (1996) ideas to performing a *gendered* analysis. Within my analysis, I explained how female reintegration is influenced by the concept of “gender.” For example, how social norms, identities, arrangements, institutions, and relationships transform gender into something physical and socially different. I considered the ways in which women’s pathways to reintegration differ. I explored the extent that complex social, historical, cultural, biological, and reproductive factors affect reintegrative experiences (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). In sum, I analyzed what makes the stories I heard gendered by following the elements listed above.

Lastly, I performed a deductive analysis to look for the ways my participants’ narratives aligned with the Good Lives Model’s primary goods. Deductive analyses “[evaluate] an existing theory in a different population” (Maine et al., 2017, p. 77). I analyzed the extent that my participants describe reintegrating as proposed in the model, to see if its assumptions apply to women’s real-life experiences. Using their stories, I analyzed which



goods, if any, are sought out during reintegration, and determined if the model is missing any crucial concepts.

## Limitations

According to Sandelowski (1995), “determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgment and experience in evaluating the quality of the information collected” (p. 183). As a Master’s student, I have little experience conducting research. My lack of experience, combined with the smaller-than-average sample size, means that my research could lack content validity. Content validity is “the extent to which one can generalize from a particular collection of items to all possible items in a broader domain of item” (Brod, Waldman, Christensen, 2009, p. 1263; Fusch & Ness, 2015). However, since qualitative research does not aim to generalize, but rather provide deep insight into a population, the small sample size suits my research purpose (Sprague et al., 2017).

Furthermore, I exclusively spoke to women involved with Maia House’s organization. My participants offer a distinct point of view that does not resonate with all previously incarcerated women. For example, all the women I spoke with have somewhere to live, food to eat, and support available nearly all hours of the day. In reality, most reintegrating women are much more isolated, unsupported, and homeless or living in a shelter. The group of women I did not reach has a very different perspective of what it means to return to the community after being incarcerated.

## Findings/Results

The following section is the result of my thematic analysis. I generated five themes based on the women's stories that represent their reintegrative experiences: i. People, places, and things; ii. Stories of growth; iii. Being "so beat down;" iv. Culture shock; and v. Destined to fail. Within this section also includes my application of a gendered lens to the Good Lives Model's primary goods after I matched the suitable goods to the women's stories.

- i. People, places, and things: "I went back to what I knew."

Women are vulnerable to revert to their old life immediately after release. Because all my participants struggle with substance abuse, a large portion of the discussions revolved around the women's experiences avoiding—or attempting to avoid—using substances. The Good Lives Model refers to these experiences as the search for (the primary good) *knowledge*: seeking information about oneself, other people, the environment, or specific subjects. Broadly speaking, the women were in the early stages of learning how to thrive in the community *sober* after spending time in, and adjusting to, life in jail. Looking back, one participant described the first few days after release as "crucial." She told me the best thing is to "do the opposite of what your brain is telling you" because "all that's talked about in jail is drugs." Another participant described the first few days as "tumultuous and easily triggering."

Unfortunately, the reality is not as clear-cut as "learning how to abstain from substances." All the women I spoke to used substances repeatedly after their release to cope with, among other things, the overwhelming change in environment. The women's use of

substances post-release can be explained as the instrumental good in their search for the primary good *inner peace*: the experience of emotional equilibrium. The participants resort to their drug use in the community to overcome their anxiety rather than taking the time to identify what it is they need to flourish. One woman spoke about immediately going to the bar with “a big bag of cocaine” the day of her release because she was so disappointed in herself for having been in jail at all.

Despite leaving jail with the intention of staying sober and avoiding crime, the women explained that is extremely difficult to do when associating with former friends. Yet, within days of returning to the community, all the participants reunited with their social circles. In other words, the women achieved both the primary goods *relatedness* (sharing close and mutual bonds with other people) and *community* (being part of, or belonging to, a group of people who share common interests). Unfortunately for these women, the “common interest” was ingesting substances. Returning to former friends upon release from jail is not especially surprising; certainly, abandoning old friends and building an entirely new network is not easy. As a consequence, though, this meant that many women were interacting with other substance abusing or criminally-involved individuals. Unfortunately, all my participants had relapsed into their addiction(s) within days of leaving jail:

You just get so into this zone, in this comfortability with using, and plus it’s really true what they say: people, places and things, you start seeing people around you used with, or friends you used to hang out with.

The participants mentioned battling with their addictions every moment of the day. Unfortunately, their old lives, their old friends, their neighborhood, whatever it may be, are

more than “people and things.” They are triggers, and it takes a tremendous amount of willpower to not be provoked into doing something with your friends (e.g., drinking, smoking) that, in reality, feels comfortable, enjoyable, and *normal*. Indeed, a life consumed by substance abuse and partying is the norm for most previously incarcerated women. Therefore, it is not especially surprising that they continue to use once they are released; life *without* substance use is foreign to them. Yet, each participant mentioned it is challenging to “find themselves” or learn who they are because of the consuming effect addictions has on their lives—financially, mentally, and emotionally. Thus, even if women are eager to learn about themselves or about the world, they are often consumed by external factors like addictions or lasting effects of incarceration that make the search for knowledge, and reintegration itself, difficult.

All the women I interviewed expressed appreciation for the services and resources at their disposal since coming in contact with Maia House and its organization. The staff have helped clients make plans prior to their release, they have provided legal direction, they have been “someone to talk to” in stressful situations and have helped with mental health problems. The staff connect women to external services as well, such as mental health or substance abuse counselling or income assistance. According to my participants, having easy access to resources has changed their lives. The women have taken advantage of this accessibility, exemplifying what the Good Lives Model refers to as the search for *life* (healthy living and functioning). The model proclaims that previously incarcerated individuals in their transitions to the community look for ways to improve their physical health and stay alive. By addressing their substance abuse or mental health issues through counselling (an example of an instrumental good), the women are actively trying to stay healthy. One woman explicitly noted how appreciative she was for the organization’s

referral to counselling, where she had addressed childhood trauma, the root cause of her criminal behaviour, and learned how to be more confident: "...just from being in [Maia] House...I think I've really gained a lot of self-confidence...I'm going to keep the supports I have...I mean like they really saved my life." Because she connected with the organization, this woman has accessed resources she otherwise would not have accessed.

In addition to attaining a functional life, this example also shows how the woman used professional help (an instrumental good) to seek out knowledge (about her own behaviour) and *excellence in agency* (independence and autonomy, making one's own way in life). For example, the staff, the other tenants at Maia House, and the medical professionals in her life have taught this woman how to address her trauma while instilling into her a sense of self-confidence, ultimately keeping her out of jail for an impressively long time. The trauma-informed counsellor Maia House connected her with has played a major role in this woman's new-found strength and independence. The counselor helped her realize that many of her behaviours, such as alcoholism, are triggered from trauma in her past. Knowing this has allowed her to take a look back on her life, accept her past, and move on, ultimately putting her in control. Thus, both the individuals and service-providers women choose to associate with have a major impact on their ability to succeed in the community.

While one participant successfully transitioned out of Maia House into her own apartment, the rest currently still live there. Many participants attributed their new-found independence to the organization's services: "Their services have really taken control most of my life. I'm all about the [organization] and using their services and advocating...It's been a good thing for me that way." Another woman explicitly told me that paying rent at Maia House "gives [her] a feeling of independence." Paying some amount of rent had a significant effect on the women's sense of self-worth. These experiences exemplify the

women attaining the primary good excellence in agency: by being responsible enough to support themselves in this one area of their lives, the women gained confidence and a sense of control, which furthered their ability to believe in themselves and succeed. The women actually *enjoyed* the fact that they were required to pay a certain amount of money rather than it being rent-free because it made them feel powerful. For many women, their previous “homes” were not theirs at all (e.g., friends’ couches, the back seat of a vehicle, their parents’ homes) which made them feel helpless. The woman who previously lived at Maia House also felt a sense of independence having transitioned out of supportive housing into her own apartment. Being able to live independently or provide for themselves gave all the women hope.

Though family was brought up in several interviews, for the most part it was not in a positive manner. Many participants had broken relationships or limited contact with their families—not because they chose to, but because of their criminal pasts. Most of the participants’ parents are “tired of [their] shenanigans” and have stopped nearly all contact. Regardless, the women hoped to change their behaviour in part for their family: “[I want] to turn around for my mom. And my cousin’s pregnant...she’s getting the happiness she deserves, and I want to be able to be a part of that child’s life.” Despite not being able to achieve relatedness or community (two primary goods) from their families, family members *did* represent a major source of inspiration to change.

Women succeed in the community when they receive valuable emotional support. This is best described in the Good Lives Model as achieving relatedness and community. The participants told me that Maia House plays a key role in this process. For example, one woman mentioned that since moving in, she feels lighter, hopeful, loved, safe, and that a weight has been taken off her shoulders. When telling me about first meeting Maia House’s

staff, another participant explained that “instantly there was a connection, and [she] felt supported;” in Good Lives Model terms, she felt like she belonged to a group with whom she shared a mutual bond. It was reiterated throughout *all* the interviews just how special the other tenants and staff at Maia House are for the women’s sense of belonging and success. In fact, one woman is currently out of jail for the longest she has been in eight years and she associated this success with the organization’s love and care philosophy. Nonetheless, all the women believed that a stress-free life is impossible. Regardless, the women did discuss multiple ways they seek inner peace (a primary good). For example, one participant was in the process of finding out how to certify her dog as an emotional support animal (an example of an instrumental good). Thus, emotional support can be found in a variety of ways.

I want to further address the two most prominent ways the women sought inner peace: firstly, by using illicit drugs, and secondly, by attending trauma-informed counselling. In the latter, women were actively searching for ways to *improve* emotional distress with long-lasting results. This is very different from using drugs to seek inner peace: substances offer an immediate and temporary escape from daily stressors whereas counselling encourages healing over time. Interestingly, all the participants mentioned using *both* of these techniques to seek inner peace. Indeed, all the women mentioned using substances immediately after (often the day of) their release from jail and gradually over time have started to use more effective approaches that offer long-term results. Not only does this emphasize the criticalness of that first day, it also shows how merely forcing sobriety during incarceration does not deter from future use since nothing is being done to target the underlying reason *for* the use. The transition from seeking the quick, immediate results substances provide to the long-lasting but time-consuming benefits of counselling, is likely

attributed to the persistence and encouragement from the staff at Maia House. Without the organization's help, these women would likely not have progressed into seeking help in such a way.

Furthermore, I want to mention that the overall notion of learning to deal with emotions is a gendered experience. Society's age-old gendered beliefs have enforced the idea that it is acceptable for women to express their emotions but that men "do not have emotions." Previously incarcerated women *and* men frequently have unaddressed trauma and highly stressful lives, inevitably leading to emotional distress in both cases. Yet, men struggle to share their worries or concerns with others out of fear they will be criticized for not being "manly" enough. Thus, women may seek help for emotional distress to a greater degree than men since it is more socially acceptable.

As noted previously, all the women agreed that being part of a community has kept them out of jail. One participant who transitioned into her own apartment told me, "If I had advice for anyone coming out of jail, it's to build a support system and be involved with your community." She reminds herself to "remain calm and focused and [continue] on pushing forward no matter what the situation" to avoid "failing" her friends. It appears as though the people she chose to associate with kept her accountable. Furthermore, Maia House successfully provided a sense of community, something its tenants greatly appreciated:

It's great that I'm here...I don't understand why there aren't more places like this for lower income people, people who are at risk, people who have been sexually abused...all over the city to make everybody be able to come together and where it's a community.



Maia House is a community of likeminded individuals attempting to steer their lives in new directions. The ability to access such a community has positively impacted my participants' reintegration. The house provided a safe haven and people to turn to, which are especially important when cutting out previous networks of friends.

Role models are a source of motivation. One woman mentioned that she has a group of "cheerleaders" that she turned to whenever she had a problem. They are what pushed her to succeed:

Yeah, they really have been, like, really *on* me and advocating for me to change my life and keep going with life and stuff. So, it's been really great. They're definitely, like, my entourage of cheerleaders cheering me on, and if I have an issue or a problem, they aren't far for me to call them and ask them for help. So, it's a really good support system I've created for myself since being out... When I'm having a bad day, they try to boost my spirits like that. They just kind of remind me what my goal is and where I'm going... I look up to them.

Pro-social relationships help women in the community by keeping them accountable for their actions and giving them someone to look up to. Role models provide insight, encouragement, and ultimately hope, which together promote success.

One woman expressed that having a "great" probation officer has been extremely impactful on her life. Consider the following story:

I have a really great probation officer...I ended up spending money on drugs, and so that's a breach...So he asked me how much I spent that night, and wrote down how

much I spent. And he put it on a post-it note, and he put it on me, and he said, “so is that how much you’re worth?” ‘Cause he asked me what the price of my life is worth... When he put that price tag on me, it really made me think. I was like no, I’m worth more than a hundred dollars. So, things like that is what makes him great.

Instead of punishing her for breaking her conditions, her probation officer helped her realize her self-worth. A small gesture had a lasting effect that now makes her think twice about her actions. He clearly saw her potential, her strength, and her worth, and it had a positive, lasting effect on her life. Furthermore, this example showed how representatives of the criminal justice system *can* play a positive role in previously incarcerated women’s lives if they show care and support.

In contrast, when women do not receive adequate social support, they often return to their previous behaviours and end up back in jail. One participant explained to me, “You want to put yourself back in [jail], because fuck it, no one cares about you.” It is difficult for women to change their way of life when they have limited support or people rooting them on. Reintegration is alienating, and considerably harder without proper support from family or friends. During a discussion about how her transition could have been more successful, one woman told me:

Just coming out and knowing I had stable housing, knowing that I had somebody who would take me in right away until I got back on my feet. Just having somebody to be there for you wholeheartedly while you’re making that transition... Imagine being a woman who, you know, you get out of those gates after doing years or months or anytime at all, and having nobody out there waiting for you and wanting to stay clean,

and wanting to change your life, but feeling that lonely when you get out, and not knowing what to do.

Reliable and supportive family and friends not only help with tangible aid, such as housing, they give women reason to continue on with their journey towards success instead of giving up.

When we discussed formal support systems, one woman brought up how important it is to be able to connect on some level with counsellors, psychologists, or other medical professionals. When she first met her current counsellor, she could not open up to him for several sessions. It is difficult for women to connect emotionally with counsellors when they do not share a similar history. After learning he was a recovering addict as well, their relationship progressed, and she was more willing to talk freely without inhibition:

It's meaningful for me because, you know, and this is just my personal view, people who are academically educated and stuff, they only know so much. And lots of people are in the field for many, many years and know a lot, but you can't say you understand fully if you haven't been in that position. And especially trying to help people, like I relate more to people who have kind of walked in my shoes a little bit, right? ... I just find the connection is better.

In this example, merely having someone to talk to (professionally) was not especially effective. The relatability factor was highly apparent in relationships the women brought up, which leads me to believe that the two primary goods of community and relatedness are mutually-exclusive.

Similarly, one participant told me about a friend she made in an educational program: “We connect on a lot of different levels, and just...on the recovery side, and she’s kind of been helping me.” It is important for reintegrating women to have some commonality with people in their lives.

Many women I spoke to still have friends who are in jail or homeless, and they attributed staying out of trouble with wanting to make those individuals proud and to not disappoint them. One woman told me that having friends in jail who “push her forward” could be stressful, but more importantly are what motivated her to stay out of jail:

I really don’t want to fail them at all... It’s kind of stressful, but it has a lot of motivation. If I mess up, I know they’ll understand, you know? They know what it’s like. So, I’m not too worried about them being disappointed in a way, but I just don’t want to disappoint them... I just got to remember to get my work done and stay focused and remember what I’m doing it for. That’s kind of what keeps me going.

In this example, the woman’s friends who are still incarcerated provided encouragement. Their encouragement was perceived as highly valuable to my participant due to their similar histories, and it appears as though she is their role model.

A women-centred, holistic philosophy is present in both women’s correctional facilities and at Maia House. Indeed, Maia House and female correctional institutions (at least claim to) promote pro-social relationships, healing, and supporting others. In fact, many of my participants miss the women who are still incarcerated as they consider them family. Evidently, these environments and philosophy are exclusive to women. Overall, my participants’ experiences seeking connections in the community mainly consisted of

developing close bonds with women in similar positions rather than with their biological family.

- ii. Stories of growth: “I’ve really grown in a lot of ways, just from being at [Maia House].”

Reintegration is a period of self-growth and self-reflection. Many women I spoke with have sought independence and a “purpose in life” and mentioned that reintegrating is really about “figuring out who you are.” By using Maia House’s services, they have been able to navigate the challenges around finding housing, employment, and struggles with addictions. My participants told me that they believed in themselves and were proud of their accomplishments. Several women proudly shared that they were currently sober or out of jail for the longest they had ever been, but that every day remained a challenge:

I find it’s a rollercoaster sometimes. I’ll go from having really good days to really bad days. There’s no in between, it’s just either really good or really bad...You’re never going to be stress free. Like no matter how hard you try there’s always going to be something that stresses you.

Reintegration and all that it involves (e.g., recovery, making new friends) is a long, slow process with many obstacles. The women took it day by day but were mindful to acknowledge their accomplishments, downfalls, and challenges, and that exemplifies growth.

An important step towards growth is taking accountability for previous wrongdoings. All the women I talked to expressed regret and took responsibility for their past criminal behaviour—a skill many of them learned through counselling and attending programs at Maia House. One participant, whose mother had her arrested, told me:

I'm my biggest enabler...It's a really tough position for [my mother] and that's why I don't put any blame on her for this...Some things have to change so you can go to better places, right? I'm sorry, it just makes me upset about what I did.

This participant was very emotional as she shared her story. However, she was able to acknowledge the pain she had caused her mother and accepted her mother's actions—even though they caused her to go to jail. She displayed immense strength by taking accountability for her actions and staying positive.

One participant wanted to change the way society perceives “addicts.” She used this goal as a source of motivation to change:

I want to be an active, productive person. I want a career, I don't want society to look at me and think just because she smokes crack or because she drinks liquor, she's an idiot, and the epitome of people on Intervention and stuff like that. 'Cause not all addicts are idiots.

Sources of motivation to change can vary. For this woman, the label that society has of women with addictions as “idiots” actually inspired her to grow as an individual, in an effort to prove them wrong.

Intrinsic motivation is absolutely essential for women to change their behaviours, especially for those with addictions. One participant explained when she reached a breaking point: “You know, I’m 30 years old. When am I going to get it together? I’m sick of waking up every day with the shakes. I’m sick of waking up every day feeling like shit.” She was not able to pinpoint the exact reason for this breakthrough. Her experience does, however, align with what scholars describe as the crystallization of discontent: when “the costs of crime and a criminal identity are beginning to become too great and that being conventional might provide either greater satisfaction or at least a lower price” (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, p. 1121). Thus, the negative side effects of abusing substances no longer outweighed the positives and she was ready to make a change. Additionally, throughout the interview, the woman continuously emphasized the role that Maia House’s staff and tenants have played in her life. Specifically, the abundance of love and support. Staff have reiterated to the tenants that regardless of how severe an issue is, they are merely a few steps or phone call away. Staff are friendly, inquire about everyone’s physical and mental health needs, and overall show support in a variety of ways. For many women I spoke to, this is the first time in their lives they have ever truly felt supported.

Alternatively, personal growth is dependent on individual readiness. Several of my participants were forced to attend a detox program that had virtually no effect on their substance abuse. These women relapsed within days of completing the program:

I don’t think I was ready for detox, I was kind of forced into it. It was either I go, or I lose my housing, so... If you’re not ready to do it...if you’re not mentally ready, you’re not going to succeed.

Relating to the Good Lives Model, participating in detox is another example of an instrumental good to seek out the primary good of life (healthy living and functioning). However, while many participants attended counselling as a means to healthy living on their own accord, the stories around detox were different. The women were forced into it, thus, did not *actively* seek out a means to overcome their addiction or improve their health. It is important to recognize that each woman is unique in her journey to success. There is no saying when—or if—someone will be “ready” to move on from their old life or grow from their experiences. However, based on the stories I heard, constant reminders that support *is* there, and will stay there until the time is right, may help speed up this process by reassuring women that there is hope.

All the participants mentioned at least one unique coping mechanism that gets them through the day. Positive coping mechanisms help women grow to overcome their addiction(s), and in turn, stay out of jail. For example, one woman used a mood chart app on her phone to track her daily mood. She used this app nearly every day since moving into the transition house. The app has shown her that when she is using substances, her mood is very inconsistent and sporadic, with days of deep depression. This visual has promoted self-reflection and acted as a main source of motivation for her to abstain from alcohol and other substances. Furthermore, that same participant shared a story about how she sees signs: she had a jar full of dimes that she has found over the city in particularly monumental moments. For example, she found a dime outside of Maia House the first day she inquired about living there. She believed her father, who passed away, sends her signs to affirm she is following the right path. Relating to the Good Live Model, this is an example of seeking *spirituality*: having meaning and purpose in life; being a part of a larger whole, with the collection of dimes being the instrumental good.



Having a purpose, or something to look forward to every day, sustains personal growth and keeps women out of jail. For example, one woman was part of an art piece that explored women's transitions from jail to the community. She told me that being involved has "definitely been something to keep [her] grounded." Art gave her life meaning because she was able to share her story of being incarcerated and struggling with addictions. Another woman had two positive events in her life: an audition for a visual arts piece and her work program. She told me: "I really like [the program]. It gives me something to look forward to. Like I wake up in the mornings looking forward to going. So that's a positive." A third participant was taking a full-course load at school on top of her part-time job. She explained that school and the competing demands were very stressful, but that enrolling was a "good decision and [she's] happy that [she] took the chance." One could argue that these women attend school (an instrumental good) in order to obtain some type of formal knowledge (a primary good). From my perspective, the women attended school because they were ready to live a conventional life and conform to the "ideal" notion of success. In this case, they were going to school to learn how to be a contributing member of society; thus, knowledge about the environment, so to speak.

Furthermore, one woman described liking school and her job because school "keeps [her] focused" and the job allowed her to advocate for prisoners' rights. She described her job as noteworthy because she was able to tell her story and advocate for women in similar situations. Another participant was getting paid to work on an art piece that was meaningful to her because she was also offered an opportunity to tell her story of being involved in the justice system. These experiences represent what the Good Lives Model refers to as the search for *excellence in work*: mastering work. The women are excelling and boast confidence in their positions, exemplifying mastery, as well as helping them succeed in the

community. In addition, advocating for women's rights could be described as what the Good Lives Model refers to as the search for *creativity*: the desire to create something, do things differently, or try new things. The women hope to create change for others exposed to similar circumstances.

iii. Being "so beat down."

Initially, returning to the community can be exciting. However, excitement can quickly turn into disappointment, which can lead women to their former ways of living. The participants described being so disappointed in themselves for having been incarcerated, that they followed a path of self-destruction. Immediately after release, one woman "was so beat down" that she "drank for about four days" and "wanted to kill [her]self." Additionally, one participant recalled being disappointed that living in the community was not as rewarding as she hoped:

Sometimes you can become too comfortable, like you know the first couple of days you get out you appreciated everything too, right? Like fresh air, using a real fork, using a real toothbrush, little things like that. And then the longer you're out you become...not as filled with gratitude about the little things you missed when you were in, right?... It's like, you've spent how much time in jail, and then you get back out here, and you have it, and you get to be free, and you just take it for granted after some time.

Ultimately, this woman felt lost. Without a job and attempting to steer clear of her old friends, this woman had few ways to spend her time in the community besides trying to

avoid substances. Women may use incarceration as an excuse to not have a job or work on their sobriety whereas in the community it is less excusable, thus making them feel more disappointed in themselves when those goals were not achieved.

Many participants felt misunderstood, that society does not fully understand the extent of their struggles:

So many people don't understand, and don't understand how hard it is out here. Like every day we're trying to be strong. Everyday you're just trying to not pick up drugs or alcohol. You're trying to not go to jail, and you're exhausted by just trying to be strong.

Women feel "beat down" as they fight to overcome their addiction(s) and the very real chance they will return to jail. Pressure from society to succeed in these areas on top of feeling misunderstood, only makes the process that much more difficult.

Women's sense of disconnect from the community is debilitating and leads to marginalization. Reintegrating women, in turn, have less opportunity to succeed. One participant told me how difficult it was to find employment, despite having the necessary experience, due to committing one offence.

Marginalization precedes a period of self-deprecation. My participants mentioned feeling nervous, anxious, empty, overwhelmed, and like burdens. While this period was most apparent in the first few days after release, it could persist for several months:

I just feel like...filled with anxiety....even after a year of being out I still feel like I have that look about me like I just got out [of jail] or like people look at me and know I have addictions.

After being incarcerated, women in the community sense society's disapproval. This can be debilitating on their mental health and contributes to feelings of being "beat down."

All the women told me they were treated very poorly by law enforcement, including guards in jail. They reported being physically, verbally, and emotionally abused by individuals in power. Now, in the community, several participants became involved in some sort of advocacy for prisoners' rights. They thought it would be important to raise awareness so other women will not go through the same things:

I'm actually starting to do some advocacy work for [women] going through the justice system. I just...I want to see a change in the justice system, like the staff definitely need to be more educated. And they should have all the proper stuff that we need.

In this case, "being beat down" occurred whilst the participant was incarcerated. Now, in the community, she is advocating for change on women's behalf.

Many women used substances as a coping strategy. After release, reintegrating women are scared, anxious, and defeated, and do not know how to deal with the challenges they face. They can become so helpless and overburdened, they resort to alcohol or drugs to numb their pain. This is one of the main reasons the participants resumed using substances in the first week after being released. Alternatively, one could argue that women use substances to seek the primary good *happiness*: the desire to experience happiness and pleasure. Though none of the women said it explicitly, it is safe to assume that women may use drugs to feel happy given they are at a highly stressful place in their life with few other means to happiness. For example, many previously incarcerated women cannot acquire life's most basic necessities, like housing or food. Upon being released, each one of the

participants were homeless without any money, which is not uncommon for formerly incarcerated individuals. In fact, a recent study found 59% of Canadians admitted to homeless shelters have a history of arrest (To et al., 2016). To make matters worse, the Halifax area appears to have a housing issue as shelters are always at capacity (Campbell, 2018). One woman told me, “When I first got out, I was homeless, I went to literally every shelter in Halifax and they were all full.” Because she could not find housing, this woman resorted to sleeping on couches of criminally-involved friends, which ultimately led to her re-arrest. Despite struggling to eat and not having anywhere to sleep, all the women remained hopeful. This showed strength and resilience:

I do try, like I do want to better my life...It's hard man, you know, it's starting over, you're like where am I going to go? How am I going to eat? I have no money. Things like that. I can't even imagine being somebody with absolutely nobody or nothing you know? I have lucked out in ways.

In the paragraph above, the participant was referring to Maia House's services and her “mostly” (in her words) supportive family when she mentioned “lucking out.”

Every single day, my participants struggle with substance abuse. All the women I talked to intended on being sober after their release; however, they lacked the necessary support to overcome their addiction(s). Insufficient support while overcoming an addiction makes reintegration extremely difficult. Consider the following quote:

People think, “Oh, they're adults, they can find their own way,” you know? But especially when people are getting sober, I mean most people when they become sober

and they've been addicts for so long, once they get sober, they're like a stranger to themselves, right? So, you're trying to figure out everything to do with yourself, and then have housing, money, food, and all that on top of that.

Many participants intended to find employment upon their release. Unfortunately, criminal records prevent women from finding stable jobs. Without employment and consequently housing and money, on top of a criminal record, the women became extremely stressed trying to make ends meet. This caused many women to turn to less pro-social activity: selling illicit drugs, stripping, and escorting (examples of instrumental goods) to "get by," and obtain basic survival needs (the primary good of a functional life). One woman also mentioned that women commonly sleep with men so that they have somewhere to sleep. These are examples of what the Good Lives Model refers to as using inappropriate or harmful strategies to achieve a primary good. It is worth mentioning that all the participants originally started living at Maia House for the sole reason of having a home. Hence, they did not initially become involved with the organization to utilize their programs or services, but rather because they were homeless. When I asked the participant to describe the time in her life when she sold illegal drugs to survive, she told me:

I kind of in a way felt ashamed because I was just like I shouldn't be doing this. I've had so much clean time in, and I was doing so good, and I had such a positive mind state, and when I got released it was just all thrown out the window. I went into survival mode.

A positive state of mind is not always enough to overcome the struggles women face during reintegration. In order for this woman to survive, and ultimately obtain the primary good

of life. she found no other way than to commit further crimes. Selling drugs, though it was her last resort and ultimately made her feel like a failure, became the instrumental good in her search for a functional life.

iv. Culture Shock: "Jail's easier."

The participants were aware of society's expectations for themselves and their reintegration. For example, they understood and appreciated the importance of finding a job and contributing to society upon being released. However, attending to these responsibilities was often difficult. After spending time in a confined, monitored, and lifeless area, the outside world was overwhelming:

It's just too much. It's like...like colours are bright, everything's just "bam!" and you're just like, you're nervous. You just don't know anything, like you're excited too, it's just everything's a lot...everything's just overwhelming.

Evidently, something as simple as colourful physical features can be stressful for previously incarcerated women. Correctional institutions and the community are clearly very different environments, causing women to feel overwhelmed upon their release.

After days, weeks, or months of virtually no freedom, reintegrating women find it very difficult to resume their independence. They become accustomed to constant direction (e.g., being told where to go, what to do, what to eat, when to sleep). The women explained that the abrupt change from set rules to full self-sufficiency was challenging, that transitioning

from an extremely structured environment to one with a reasonable amount of freedom was very difficult:

...when I was institutionalized, like you have everything just brought to your light. You never had to worry about bills, you never had to worry about turning off the lights, they just did everything for you. You're just being taught how to be dependent on something again, when you should be taught to be independent.

Thus, it is not only the physical features of the community that can cause culture shock, the change in structure of daily life and lack of direction also contributed to women feeling overwhelmed.

Despite being in the community, the women explained that it is difficult to escape the mindset of incarceration:

Your first few days out of jail are crucial because you're still, in your mind, you're still incarcerated...when you're incarcerated, you're secluded by four walls. You get told what to do and when to do it...and then coming out to the street it's not so much structured anymore. So, you're still kind of thinking back to being incarcerated, what that structure was.

Incarcerated women rely on others to structure their lives, down to the minute. Women in the community must learn how to cope once that structure disappears, which is evidently a difficult process.



Most of the participants have spent time in jail more than once. They explained to me that this occasionally happens out of choice, a willingness to return. Many women told me that being incarcerated was easier than living in the community because jail provided stability. Being in jail ensured they had somewhere to sleep, something many of my participants were not promised in the community:

I just wanted to go out and commit another crime and say, “fuck it” and be in jail. ‘Cause at least I have a bed, at least I have somewhere to go, at least...you have structure, and now when I look back, I think, I can’t believe...that that’s what I wanted.

Learning how to cope without pre-arranged structure can be too much for women who are simultaneously looking for shelter and food. They may intentionally return to jail to put off overcoming these stressors.

One participant explained that many people struggling mentally or with their criminal behaviour will purposefully commit a crime to return to jail. For one, incarceration is more sustainable than being homeless and can act as an escape. Relating to the Good Lives Model, jail also serves as way of achieving food and shelter (the primary good of a functional life), albeit in a more harmful way:

I do appreciate jail in some ways. Just ‘cause...sometimes it’s a hard thing like going in and feeling like that, like not having anything to worry about...but sometimes it’s a good thing. ‘Cause you know so many of us are out here even and we’re stressed about how to make ends meet, kids, partners, jobs, this and that, when you’re in there you actually get that soul searching time.

Women may use jail to avoid real-life stressors that they, as a marginalized population, face to a greater degree than women in general. This is an excellent example of the revolving door phenomenon.

For one participant who rarely sees her family, jail provided a community and a sense of purpose –two important, but not commonly present factors, in reintegrating women’s lives. Consider the following quote:

I’ve had a lot of positive experiences from being in jail though. Like I wrote my GED in jail, I never would have did it on the street. I’ve met some wonderful women, you know, I learned how to keep humour, to help people through with nothing.

This quote emphasized the universal need for community and purpose, wherever one might find it. I was shocked to hear just how grateful this woman was for her time in jail, while at the same time I realized her life in the community (lack of family, addictions) likely prevented her from obtaining some of these “positive experiences.” Thus, jail can serve as an interruption from complicated and difficult lives, while simultaneously providing women with opportunities that were otherwise unobtainable.

v. Destined to fail: “They don’t set you up for success.”

The women I talked to believed that jail did not adequately prepare them for their return to the community:

I just don't understand...jails weren't made for you to pent and think about what you did, it's to fix your issue. What made you do what you did. It doesn't do that, so, you just got to figure a way in real life to do that without the whole jail thing.

The participants were very critical of our justice system in general and question the approach taken to "correct" criminal behaviour. Upon release, many of the women reverted back to the initial reason for their incarceration and eventually ended up back into jail, creating a cycle.

The women described correctional programming as laughable, sporadic, and ineffective. Because it is merely something to "pass time," there was some discussion about implementing more effective release-planning programs. But for the most part, my participants believed that the problems around reintegration are much more complex. One woman explained that our justice system failed to address her alcoholism, which created a never-ending cycle of incarceration. By ignoring substance abuse issues, the criminal justice system fails to address the root cause of criminality for many women, which leads to recidivism:

I've adapted to [jail], it's been such a big part of my life...this is what it becomes for people. How can anybody be surprised...if they just keep putting people back in there constantly... the courts and the system have known that I suffer from alcoholism...and have made mistakes being drunk, is that, like what's just throwing people away going to do? It's just buying your time.

This quote emphasized the women's general frustration towards the criminal justice system. The participants felt their needs were overlooked, that the system failed its citizens, and that nothing is being done to actually promote success.

## Discussion/Analysis: Looking through a gendered lens

Feminists argue that “we need to craft instruments from the ground up, beginning with a gendered lens from creation through validation and ultimate use” (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013, p. 180). Criminologists have repeatedly called for research, policy, and practices that start with females first, and method practices that do not simply “add gender and stir” (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013, p. 180). Feminists concede “fourth generation instruments” that incorporate strengths and protective factors, seem more appropriate for women especially given their lower risk relative to men (Daly & Chesley-Lind, 1998, p. 180). While the Good Lives Model was certainly not designed using a gendered lens, the model's strengths-based approach aligns with the feminist criminologist belief that focusing on an individual's unique needs and skills is beneficial. Based on this knowledge and the interviews I conducted, I believe that by incorporating concepts from the Good Lives Model (particularly its strength-based philosophy) we could help women succeed in the community more efficiently so that they are not simply leaving jail without any idea of what they want or need. By engaging women and helping them identify their values, hopes, and dreams, rather than focusing on their struggles or what to avoid, perhaps their reintegration would be more positive. Much like giving the women a chance to pay rent instilled a sense of independence and ultimately led to success, happiness, and deterrence

from crime, providing women with opportunities and resources to build on their own strengths towards something that matters to them will promote success.

I incorporated feminist criminology concepts into my research analyses. Social feminist criminologists recognize the “dual importance and interactive effects of social class and gender inequalities” (Renzetti, 2013, p. 44). For that reason, during my analyses, I considered social class as a mitigating factor in my participants’ efforts to reintegrate. I also challenged the idea of home as a “safe haven” and the legal system as a “protector.” I recognize that women’s lives prior to incarceration often involve victimization, physical and sexual abuse, and addictions. Unfortunately, incarceration merely *suspends* this part of a woman’s life, and when she is released, she returns to the same circumstances that initially led her to being incarcerated. As evidenced in my findings, the justice system by itself rarely—if ever—protects women from future victimization or crime-involvement.

Using feminist thought, I challenged our justice system’s approach to female reintegration. According to Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2013) the instruments used in our criminal justice system “have been crafted based upon knowledge of male offending; thus, gendered factors have been largely neglected, ignored, or discounted” (p. 158). Because “factors that are not assessed will not be targeted for programmatic services,” women are at a disadvantage (Chesney-Link & Pasko, 2013, p. 158). According to Hannah-Moffat (2000), CSC’s approach to risk management does not recognize the significance of gender, race, or social disadvantage. She takes issue with the instruments’ “inability to view problems holistically or in the broader context of women/minorities’ lives” (Hannah-Moffat, 2000, p. 170). For quite some time, scholars have pointed out the problematic nature of “gender-neutral” tools that do *not* accurately incorporate gender differences. Despite years of feminists encouraging CSC to reconsider their approach, very little has

changed systemically. My thesis attempted to respond to this request at the micro-level by analyzing how the Good Lives Model's theoretical assumptions align with gender differences.

In order to fully conceptualize reintegration through the eyes of the women I spoke to, it is absolutely essential that I acknowledge the significance Maia House had on their reintegrative experiences. Had I interviewed a sample of previously incarcerated women who have never lived in a transition home, the women would not have contemplated reintegration in the same manner. In fact, they would still likely be facing barriers in attaining basic survival needs. Simply put, the sample of women I spoke to have the capacity to reintegrate to this level of success because of having access to shelter, food, and support. I am aware that by interviewing this particular group of women, my data is skewed. As I have reiterated throughout my thesis, the reality for *most* previously incarcerated women involves addictions and poverty which together make “creating new beginnings seem nearly impossible, especially for women who have few resources and few social supports or connections” (Shantz et al., 2009, p. 99).

Though I was not attempting to only examine the house and its role in reintegration, it did become evident that Maia House's supportive role and its offerings of food and shelter are the very basic foundation of post-release success, and the women *consistently* attributed their success to the organization, the other tenants, and the house's staff. These observations coincide with Mcquaid and Dell's recent survey findings (2018) on the gendered nature of addictions and recovery. The authors found that women who participate in recovery programs (e.g. 12-step mutual support groups, Alcoholics Anonymous) benefit specifically from the opportunity to develop close bonds with other substance-abusing individuals. In other words, women excel in their recovery journey when they are able to cultivate strong

bonds with other people in similar situations, especially other women (McQuaid & Dell, 2018). Maia House provides my participants' and the other tenants with an opportunity to do just that, and the quality of these relationships played a huge part in their recoveries. Thus, I could not analyze these women's stories without recognizing how significantly the setting shaped the ways in which the women framed reintegration. I noticed in the early stages of my thesis that the participants would not be on this path nor feel capable of attempting to change their lives had it not been for the house and its support system.

That being said, I believe that if corrections were to implement more transitional programs that assisted with practical aid and the attainment of basic necessities (e.g., access to temporary housing, job placements, health care, referrals to treatment) reintegration would drastically improve (Cobbina, 2010). As Lackner (2012) notes, "the acquisition of an independent, safe and secure home represents the foundation from which returning prisoners can access possibilities for positive experiences of constructive change, personal development and reintegrative success" (p. 164). However, access to practical resources is not enough: the women's stories emphasize the crucialness of the *supportive* role Maia House's staff and tenants played in their reintegration. That is, the undying and encouraging emotional support offered to women at the house. Indeed, "healthy connections [promote] a woman's emotional growth, selfhealing, and success at constructive change;" thus, support initiatives must recognize and "attend to their distinct relational needs" (Lackner, 2012, p. 164) *in addition to* providing life's basic necessities, at least until the individual is back on their feet.

The criminal justice system enforces the idea women can succeed alone by limiting connections to community-based programs. The act of seeking help, guidance, or services is not normalized enough in our society. There is this idea that women need to have it all

together, that they are the ones in charge of keeping the family intact, so when this is not the case, they hesitate to ask for help. Having support, supportive housing, counselling, whatever that individual needs, should be *assumed* and a normal step during reintegration, rather than an option or systemic obligation (e.g., to abide probation orders or to keep housing).

## Analytical limits

The most significant limitation of my study is that the Good Lives Model is a rehabilitation model that proposes a new way of preparing individuals for release. Given resource constraints, I was not able to truly test the model's applicability to women: as a researcher, it is difficult to get permission from jail and prison officials to access those who are incarcerated. Instead, I chose to analyze the extent that the model's underlying theoretical assumptions about reintegration align with the experiences of women who are already out of jail. This thesis provides new knowledge about previously incarcerated women's reintegration experiences and the concepts women consider relevant in their lives now that they have spent time in a correctional facility.

## Conclusion: What is missing from the Good Lives Model?

After analyzing the search for primary goods through a gendered lens, I believe two crucial components are missing. Firstly, based on my interviews, reintegrating women seek opportunities to *advocate*: they possess a desire to spread awareness, goodness, positivity, and a need to prove to society they are not "idiots." The women I talked to are fully aware



of the label society has of criminalized women. They feel judged and marginalized so much so that they start to believe what society claims. Through the support from Maia House, its organization, and other counsellors/services, my participants have begun to understand their worth, creating a desire to prove to society they are worthy. This is a gendered phenomenon: women are more affected by labelling, stigma, and marginalization than men (Lackner, 2012; van Olphen et al., 2009). Previously and currently incarcerated women “have been victimized through multiple stages of patriarchy,” and “structure, oppression, economic exploitation, and marginalized social opportunity explain almost all of women’s crime” (Fortune & Arai, 2014). Marginalization plays a huge factor in women’s initial and continued conflict with the law.

Finally, the Good Lives Model needs a primary good called *encouragement*: women possess a desire to feel loved, needed, worthy, and supported. All of my participants had virtually no one waiting for them on the outside the day of their release. They continuously mentioned that reintegration would drastically improve with guaranteed support in the community. The reality is that women find it hard to ask for help because of gendered stereotypes. We are brought up to believe that women can succeed with limited help. In fact, women are regarded as caretakers who not only succeed on their own but help others around them succeed as well. This has become so engrained into our society that women risk being shamed if they do ask for help. Evidently, women involved with the law are then shamed by their social circles, family members, or criminal justice personnel if they end up back in jail as if staying out is a simple or easy task. Upon release, once again women often feel too much shame to ask for help. It is a cycle of being expected to conform to society’s expectations, being shamed when this is not the case, internalizing this shame, and then hesitating to ask for help to avoid further shaming.

Based on my analyses, providing women with opportunities to expand their knowledge and spend time working on things that *they* have identified as important, has been productive and effective. The women I spoke with have excelled in areas in their lives when the subject excites them and because they have the necessary support. Thus, I believe the Good Lives Model's strengths-based approach and primary goods are relevant in these women's lives. The goods are, however, only relevant because the women have surpassed the difficult process of achieving life's basic necessities. It is very probable that without Maia House, the women would not be succeeding to the same degree.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thanks for agreeing to chat with me. Our interview will start with a very general question about your experience. I am interested in hearing your stories of what leaving prison has been like for you so far –both good and bad experiences.

But first off, can you tell me a bit about what happened that led you to be a part of the [organization]?

How long have you been out of prison or jail?

Thanks for that.

[Interviewer note—how many of these questions are asked will depend on how long the woman has been out of prison/jail]

1. Now can you tell me a bit about your journey from getting out of prison until now?

- What happened during your first few days of being out? Where'd you go? Who'd you see? What happened?
- Interviewer note: identify specific incidents or stories in what they said and ask the following questions about each one
  - Was this a positive or negative experience? What about this experience made it positive/negative? How did this experience make you feel? What might have made this experience better? Or worse? Who are the main people involved?
  - What title or hashtag would you use to describe your experience?

2. Let's talk a bit about what happened during your first few weeks of being out?

- Interviewer note: identify specific incidents or stories in what they said and ask the following questions about each one
- Was this a positive or negative experience? What about this experience made it positive/negative? How did this experience make you feel? What might have made this experience better? Or worse? Who are the main people involved?
- What title or hashtag would you use to describe your experience?

3. Now let's look more recently—What has been happening in the last few weeks?

- Interviewer note: identify specific incidents or stories in what they said and ask the following questions about each one

- Was this a positive or negative experience? What about this experience made it positive/negative? How did this experience make you feel? What might have made this experience better? Or worse? Who are the main people involved?
- What title or hashtag would you use to describe your experience?

[interviewer note: if all stories were described as positive, ask to hear a negative one, and vice versa]

4. The last thing I will ask you to do is to pick from this list, which things you find the most and least helpful for yourself at this time in your life (you can pick as many as you want and add anything you find important).

- Living a healthy or functional life
- Having knowledge/skills/education
- Being great at a sport/activity/hobby;
- Being great at a job;
- Being independent
- Being stress-free
- Having friendships/relationships
- Feeling like you're part of a community
- Having purpose in life
- Being happy
- Being creative

Thanks so much for your time. Do you have anything else to add? Or any questions for me?

[Review interview notes to identify anything that the participant may not want reported, or that may identify them and finish the last step of the consent form]

# Do you want to share your story about leaving prison or jail?

*Do you have stories to tell about your experiences coming  
back into the community?*

I am a student from Saint Mary's University who would like  
to hear your story.

If you would like to take part in a 1-hour interview, please

contact Andrea at:

819-661-4767 or

[andrea.boucher@smu.ca](mailto:andrea.boucher@smu.ca)

A \$20 gift card will be provided to each volunteer as a gesture of  
appreciation.

Thank you!



## Appendix C: Consent Information

### Step One (A): Invitation to participate from researcher

In any contact with potential participants, which may be over telephone or email, the researcher will:

- Identify herself
- Refer to the research project and the person/organization that made the referral
- Invite any questions
- Include the full consent form
- Set up a time and place to meet (I will suggest that interviews take place in a private room at the Halifax Central Library, but if the participant prefers a coffee shop or other public meeting area, that is fine)
- Remind the potential participant that:
  - I am inviting her to do an interview, in person
  - I will give her a \$20 gift card
  - It's voluntary, and I will not tell the person who referred her (or the [organization]) whether she participated or not
  - I will not share any of the information gathered from the interviews with the [organization]

### Step One (B): Information for the Executive Director of the [organization]

- Andrea is a graduate student at SMU working with Diane Crocker, a Criminology professor
- The interview will focus on experiences after leaving prison/jail
- It's completely voluntary
- Andrea will do everything she can to protect participants' identity

## Step Two: Consent Information Sheets



**This form tells you about the study, the kinds of questions I will be asking, and how I will protect your identity. It will also ask your permission to participate.**

### **Would you like to be part of this research?**

I invite you to be part of a research study to better understand the experiences of women who are reintegrating into their community after serving time in a prison.

### **Who is the researcher?**

Andrea Boucher, a graduate student in the Department of Criminology at Saint Mary's University. She is working with Diane Crocker, a criminology professor.

### **What is the research about?**

The research project will explore women's experiences after leaving prison.

### **Who is being included in the research?**

Adult women in Halifax who are in the process of reintegrating after being in prison.

### **Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at any time, prior to the interview, without any consequences. If you don't participate, you don't have to tell me why.

### **Will I be compensated for my time?**

Yes. I will give you with a \$20 gift card to Tim Horton's and cover all parking/travel costs on the day of the interview in cash.

### **What are you asking me to do?**

One face-to-face interview.

### **What kinds of questions will you be asking?**

I will be asking you to tell me stories about what leaving prison has been like, both positive and negative experiences.

### **Will you be recording the interview?**

Yes, but only if you agree. Otherwise I will only take notes.

### **How long will it take?**

About 60 minutes.

**What if I decide that I don't like the questions?**

You can decide not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable but still participate in the interview.

**What if I do not want to finish the interview?**

You can leave at any time and you don't have to give me a reason. There is no penalty for stopping the interview. If you don't want to be included in the study I can delete any audio recording I have made and you can take my notes.

**Is there any reason why the interviewer would stop the interview?**

Yes, if you are visibly distressed or if what you are talking about falls outside the scope of the research. If this happens, there is no penalty and any information collected will be destroyed.

**What if I decide later that I don't want to be included in the study?**

Once you have left the interview you can contact me or my superior and request to be withdrawn. But, there may be a time where it becomes impossible to withdraw after I have written up my findings.

**Are there any risks to me doing the interviews?**

The risk is low. But you may feel uncomfortable sharing parts of your story. Remember, you do not have to share things that make you uncomfortable. Privacy is another risk as there is a possibility that someone reading my findings may recognize you from the stories you tell.

**Are there any penalties if I refuse to participate or finish the interview?**

No. I will not share with anyone your decision to participate or not to participate in this research. Even if you decide not to finish the interview, you can keep the gift card.

**Why should I do the interview?**

Taking part in the study will probably not help you directly, although we may be able to improve how the justice system works, and this may help you in the future.

**What will I do with the information I give you?**

I will mainly use the information for my thesis and thesis defence. I might use it in other academic reports or present it to policy makers to improve our justice system. I will not share any information gathered with the Elizabeth Fry Society. They are in no way involved with my research.

### **How will you protect my identity?**

I will protect your identity in several ways:

- I will store the signed consent forms in locked filing cabinets;
- I will store paper records in locked cabinets at the university;
- Anything stored on a computer will be password protected;
- I will destroy records of these interviews five years after I have completed my thesis;
- I will hide your identity in anything I write or say about these interviews;
- I may change small details of your story to further hide your identity (for example, the number of children you have and their sexes, your employment or marital status, etc.);
- I will not circulate any data that includes identifying information about you or anyone else;
- I will erase audio recordings after I have transcribed the interview and no longer than two months after the interview has taken place.
- At the end of the interview, you and I will look over my notes together and you can identify aspects of the story that may identify you and I will be sure to remove or alter these details from anything I report

You should know that I will do everything I can to make sure that the details that I report from your interview will not identify you. Having said that, it may be possible for someone to identify you based on details you have provided. We can follow up on how this might happen at the end of the interview and I will check to see if you would like me to remove any particular details.

### **Are there limits to confidentiality?**

Yes. I am required to report any disclosures of child abuse that indicate a child is in need of protection to the relevant authorities.

### **Who do I contact if I have complaints?**

Dr. Diane Crocker

Diane.Crocker@smu.ca

902-420-5875

Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board

Ethics@smu.ca

902-420-5728

### **Who do I contact if I need support after completing this interview?**

Mobile Mental Health Crisis Line: 902-429-8167 or 1-888-429-8167 (toll free)

**This research has been cleared by the  
Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board  
REB file #19-015**

## Consent Checklist

Before the interview:

Please review the following and put checks in the boxes indicating your agreement and consenting to participate in the research.

- The researcher has described this study and has answered my questions to my satisfaction
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may end the interview at any time or I may choose not to answer any questions
- I agree to have the interview audio taped
- I understand that the researcher will remove any identifying information from notes
- I agree to participate in the interview under the terms outlined on the consent form.
- I understand that by consenting, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm

After the interview:

- I agree that the researchers may use direct quotations from this interview, but they will use them in a way that protects my identity
- I have identified aspects of the stories that might identify me

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Name

Signature

Date

## Appendix D: Permission to Re-Contact Research Participants

I would like to receive ongoing information about this project and its results

I would like to be invited to events related to this project

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Name

Signature

Date

---

Email address

Phone number

## Appendix E: Research Ethics Board Protocol Table

### Identifying Information:

	<b>Contact Information</b> Name, phone and/or email	<b>Recordings</b> Participant may say something that identifies herself or someone else	<b>Signed consent form</b> Signature
<b>Research Phase</b>			
Recruitment	I will seek consent from potential participants to release this information to my supervisor. I will send it her SMU email with subject line “research interviews”	n/a	n/a
Data Collection	n/a	Recordings on digital recorders may include some identifiers	Participants will sign the form
Data transcription	n/a	When I am transcribing I will not include any information that identifies in an obvious way, I will listen to the end of the recording and remove anything as per discussion with the research participant about her wishes to remove anything. I will review the transcript and further de-identify as needed	n/a
Data analysis	n/a	n/a	n/a
Reporting	n/a	n/a	n/a
Storage	Dr. Crocker will store this information on an Excel spreadsheet on an encrypted memory stick backed up on her SMU computer.	I will email Dr. Crocker the recordings within one week of interview via SMU email then delete from recorder. Files will be stored on her SMU computer and encrypted memory stick	Paper consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in Dr. Crocker’s office.

Destruction	Once transcripts are complete: 1. Dr. Crocker and I delete all emails with subject line "research interviews."2. Dr. Crocker will delete Excel spreadsheet off the memory stick and will consult with ITSS on fully removing the file from her computer.	Computer files of recordings will be deleted (in consultation with ITSS) after transcripts are reviewed and approved by myself or within two months of the interview.	Forms will be destroyed (shredded) five years after research results have been reported.
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Non-Identifying Information:

	Transcripts		
<b>Research Phase</b>			
Recruitment	n/a		
Data Collection	n/a		
Data transcription	n/a		
Data analysis	Dr. Crocker and I will have electronic or paper copies of transcripts		
Reporting	n/a		
Storage	When not in use, paper transcripts will be stored in locked cabinets. Electronic copies will be stored on encrypted memory sticks and backed up on my SMU computer.		
Destruction	Transcripts will be destroyed five years after research results have been reported. Paper copies will be shredded. Memory sticks will be deleted, and computer files deleted in consultation with ITSS.		