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“Just Give Us a Chance”: Supports and Challenges to Maintaining Employment as Experienced  
by People Who Have Been in Prison

by

Amy Moore

Honours Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, University of Waterloo, 2018

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Social Work

Wilfrid Laurier University

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### Abstract

People who have been in prison tend to struggle to find meaningful employment (Opsal, 2012). While research delves into the topic of how criminalized people *attain* employment (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017; Anazodo et al., 2017), there is little known about their experiences *maintaining* employment. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after release from a Canadian women's federal prison.

Following Research Ethics Board (REB) approval, semi-structured interviews lasting up to 90 minutes were completed with each of six participants. Participants included two Indigenous women, three White women, and one White transgender man who all had experience in the Canadian women's criminal justice system. Interviews explored participants' employment history including necessary supports for seeking and maintaining employment. Interviews were analysed following the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which entailed generating codes and meaningful themes.

This research found the ability to attain and maintain employment are negatively impacted following imprisonment. For participants, a criminal record led to a lack of employment opportunities after prison (unless the work was low or minimum wage) and the feeling of being continually punished or constantly "paying back" for their decisions after release from prison. Feelings of continued punishment and defeat often led people to contemplate returning to crime, feeling it may have been easier than facing daily challenges in the community. Additionally, the two Indigenous women participants experienced frequent racism that negatively impacted their employment opportunities. Participants stated they were best able to maintain a job when connected with compassionate and comprehensive support services and workplaces that fostered flexible, compassionate, and supportive environments.

To increase employment opportunities and ability to maintain employment after prison, participant recommendations included addressing the stigma attached to criminalized people in the workplace and in broader society through education and storytelling. Educational work and communications strategies may support criminalized people in maintaining their jobs through increasing the number of employers who do not ask for record checks or who will hire people with criminal records. Policies that allow employers to ask about criminal background should be re-evaluated, and employers should consider excluding criminal record checks from hiring processes. Additionally, anti-Indigenous racism should continue to be addressed in Canadian society to increase employment opportunities and healing for Indigenous people. Culturally appropriate services should be implemented into a wraparound care model. A variety of healing methods in addition to culture, such as fitness or fine arts, should be explored in post-release support services. Finally, improved employment programming in prison and after prison is evident for rehabilitation and post-release success.

**Keywords;** Criminalization, women, federal prison, incarceration, employment, criminal record checks, Critical Disability Studies, Foucault Power Theory, punishment

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## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

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### **Introduction**

People who have experienced imprisonment tend to struggle to find meaningful employment after their release (Opsal, 2012). While research delves into the topic of how criminalized people *attain* employment (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017; Anazodo et al., 2017), there is little known about their experiences *maintaining* employment after prison. Since keeping a job is important to remaining out of prison (Farrall & Maruna, 2002), it is crucial to identify how services can continuously support people in the workplace for extended periods of time after release from prison. To begin advocating for services that are supportive to maintaining employment, my thesis aimed to identify the supports and challenges to maintaining employment following release from a Canadian women's federal prison.

### **Authors Academic Background**

To discuss how this project started I will outline my academic background and reflect on the experiences that led to my interest in the topic of maintaining employment after prison. Before starting my Master of Social Work (MSW) education I had a job as a child and youth counselor in Southern Ontario, Canada. In this role I supported youth facing mental health struggles and youth serving court-directed residential treatment in a Youth Justice Services open-custody program. My passion for supporting people who had been through the justice system grew because I saw how hard many of the youth worked to make positive life changes. I also saw how many roadblocks these youth faced, despite working toward change, such as: difficult family relationships, mental health challenges, or challenges to attaining credits for high school to access further education. My desire to join the MSW counselors in this Youth Justice Services



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program to support the youth on their journeys during and after custody catalyzed my interest in pursuing an MSW degree and I began applying to MSW programs.

While looking into MSW programs, I learned about Wilfrid Laurier University's (Laurier) Walls to Bridges (W2B) program. W2B is an "educational program that brings together incarcerated ('Inside') and non-incarcerated ('Outside') students to study post-secondary courses in jails and prisons across Canada" ('What we do', 2016). I applied to Laurier's MSW program for the opportunity to apply to the W2B program. I thought learning with people 'Inside' and from instructors who have experience supporting people who have been incarcerated would enrich my ability to support people in and out of prison.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020, I became skeptical that I would have the opportunity to apply to W2B in September 2020. This was when I started to think about completing a research study centering people who have been incarcerated. Being unable to participate in W2B, completing a thesis would allow me an alternative means to engage with and learn from the criminalized community. I saw research as an avenue to help identify and advocate for services that would support people experiencing challenges in the Canadian women's criminal justice system. Hearing from people about what support they need, through research, could be my way of contributing to improving services. With the combination of an eagerness to engage with criminalized communities outside of W2B and an interest in improving services, I decided to write a thesis.

To find a starting point for my thesis research I investigated literature on programs and services for people leaving prison and learned about barriers to employment for criminalized people. Some barriers included few community connections for support after prison or minimal assistance with job skill training after prison (Pollack, 2009). While looking into more recent

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literature, I read the dissertation by Grace (2020) who outlined a gap in literature around experiences of maintaining employment after prison. I decided to build my thesis topic around this unexplored area of research. This leads to my research question, *what are the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after release from a Canadian women's federal prison?*

To explore the research question, I chose three theoretical frameworks further discussed in the first chapter of my thesis: systems theory and two critical theories, Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Foucault's power theory. Systems theory was chosen to question employment and social service institutions as they may influence relapse into crime. Critical Disability Studies can be used to better understand the experiences of criminalized populations as it allows focus on individual daily struggles faced by people who deviate from social norms (Goodley, 2013). Foucault's work involves extensive theory around crime, power, punishment, and discipline and was chosen as a theoretical underpinning to explore power and punishment in the context of maintaining employment after prison (Foucault, 1995).

In the second chapter of my thesis, the importance of employment to remaining out of prison for people who have been incarcerated is reviewed, and the gap in literature around maintaining employment after prison is explored. In the third chapter, the Research Ethics Board (REB) approved methods are discussed. Research methods included six semi-structured interviews lasting up to 90 minutes. Participants included two Indigenous women, three White women, and one White transgender man who all had experience in the Canadian women's criminal justice system. The fourth chapter covers major themes of my research. Themes include lack of employment opportunities as continued punishment for criminalized people after prison, supports and challenges to maintaining employment after prison, individual experiences of criminalized people in the workplace, and the necessity of comprehensive wraparound care.

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Finally, recommendations from the research, limitations of the research, and future research directions are discussed.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Theoretical approaches**

Three theoretical approaches guide the analysis and recommendations in this thesis, including systems theory and two critical theories: Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Foucault power theory. These three theories and their applications to this thesis will be discussed in turn below.

#### **Systems Lens**

Systems theories and approaches began to develop in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as integrated models to understand human behaviour in relation to emerging technology and systems (Baylor University et al., 2020). Systems theory is an integrated model that explains how smaller systems relate to one another within larger, more complex systems (Baylor University et al., 2020). This interdisciplinary systems approach continues to be used in physical and social sciences today. A system can be described as “an organized entity made up of interrelated and interdependent parts” (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Examples of systems are organizations, prisons, individuals, families, or employment institutions. Applying systems theory enables recognition of the individual’s complex function within a system and individuals’ interrelatedness with their environment, individuals both affect and are affected by a system (Baylor University et al., 2020). Systems theory recognizes environmental forces and social contexts that impact an individual’s wellbeing (Langer & Lietz, 2014). It also considers the impacts of organized systems and how people navigate through them. For example, if an individual does not have a job, they may not be able to afford housing. If a person is vulnerably housed, their mental health

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may be impacted. Employment, mental health, and housing are three interrelated systems that influence each other.

In applying systems theory to criminality, Integrated Systems Theory (IST) set out to answer why people commit crimes (Pycroft & Bartollas, 2014). IST recognizes that human behaviour and criminality are complex; therefore, the consequent explanations of criminality are complex as well, with multiple influences that can increase or decrease the likelihood of criminalized behaviour rather than one single factor that explains crime (Pycroft & Bartollas). This theory is built on a summary of risk factors or “things in the real world” (Pycroft & Bartollas) that increase a person’s risk to criminalized behaviour. Risk factors to criminality have been identified in academic disciplines such as sociology, neurology, anthropology, and psychology (Pycroft & Bartollas). IST considers relationships between risk factors and systems, which are both important in understanding social behaviour over time (Pycroft & Bartollas).

IST has multiple assertions starting with the ideas that people can choose whether or not they commit a crime, and this choice is influenced by risk and protective factors beyond their control (Pycroft & Bartollas, 2014). Risk and protective factors towards criminality can exist at any of the six levels of system recognized by IST: cells, organs, organisms, groups, communities or organizations, and society (Pycroft & Bartollas). While these factors influence rather than cause criminality, exposure to risk factors generally increases the likelihood of criminal behaviour, and exposure to protective factors decreases the likelihood of criminal behaviour (Pycroft & Bartollas). Exploring relationships between risk and protective factors at different levels of systems are important to understand why people engage in criminalized behaviour. How to positively influence systems to decrease risk factors and likelihood of criminal behaviour

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and increase protective factors should be at the forefront of research and practice with people who are criminalized.

I prioritized a systems lens in my research's theoretical framework and analysis. The primary goals were to question two specific organizational level institutions in social work that may influence relapsing into crime after having been incarcerated at least once. My research considers how Canadian employment institutions and Canadian service institutions support and challenge individuals in abstaining from returning to crime. The focus on employment institutions was chosen based on research in criminology that emphasizes the influence of employment in the complex system of crime and return to crime. The influence of employment on return to crime is discussed in detail in the *Literature Review* in Chapter 2.

The focus on service institutions, such as parole, was chosen because of their undoubtedly large role in people's lives after prison, whether it is wanted or not. Parole is meant to be a bridge between incarceration and the community and allows some people to serve part of their sentence in the community under the supervision of a Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) parole officer (Parole Board of Canada, 2018). Considering the large role of service systems in people's lives, understanding their influence on crime and return to crime is imperative. A focus of my thesis is to explore positive influences on services that support people leaving prison.

### **Critical Disability Studies (CDS) Lens**

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of critical disability studies (CDS) and how this model provides a lens through which to understand employment experiences of people who have been criminalized. One of the main reasons I chose a critical disability theoretical underpinning for this work is because it addresses a weakness of systems theory. Systems theory, a social or materialist model, has a lack of focus on a person's individual circumstances (Baylor University et al., 2020), instead drawing attention to how institutions create barriers for people and, alternatively, meet the needs of people (Williams & Mavin, 2012). To address this gap systems theory may be coupled with individual or psychological approaches to consider a person's individual experiences (Baylor University et al., 2020). However, an added limitation with individual or psychological approaches is these models tend to see conditions as functional, biological, or psychological limitations. This approach risks encroaching on an individual deficit model or blaming an individual for their circumstances. As such, there was a need to balance social models that *look past* individual experiences and psychological models that *blame* individuals for their experiences, this balance can be provided by CDS.

Normative concepts and social interpretations of CDS resonated as a way to express individual experiences of marginalization in employment after prison while acknowledging influences of systems. While I am not proposing that criminalization should be considered a new category of disability on par with physical or mental impairments, CDS addresses a gap in systems theory and allows room to discuss the daily struggles people with a criminal record face due to being 'othered' or seen as deviating from socially constructed norms. Therefore, I have

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chosen to couple CDS with systems theory for this thesis to apply a new lens through which to understand the experiences of individuals after prison, complementing the use of systems theory to understand service systems' influence on crime and return to crime after prison.

Goodley (2013) provides a review on critical disability studies and discusses the development of its theoretical ideas. This review explains CDS had its beginnings as a response to materialism, or a social model view of disability. Materialism revolved around addressing the socio-economic exclusion of people with disabilities from work, education, or participation in community living (Goodley, 2013). In other words, materialism or social models worked to address systemic marginalization and material needs of people with disabilities through policy (Goodley, 2013).

Over time, as social models expanded into multiple disciplines like social work, it seemed as though they could only explain a part of a person's story or circumstances. Marginalization is based on relationships between people who have disabilities and people who do not have disabilities, and these relationships impact people daily in multiple ways (Goodley, 2013). Focusing on disability as materialistic or systemically imposed struggles, and how policy can influence those struggles, omits daily impacts on people with a disability (Shakespeare, 2006). Focusing on systems and politics instead of marginalization experienced through social relationships can silence a person's individual experiences. If systemic oppression is the only focus, individual experiences and intersections of disability and marginalization based on relationships between those who have a disability and those who do not can be lost.

Shakespeare (2006) summarised that while systems are integral to people's experiences with disability, there are individual features of disability that should be acknowledged such as culture, gender, and personal identity. To ignore individual features of a person would deny



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physical, mental, and relational experiences of disability. Materialist approaches did not look past political and economic barriers to disability or address individual experiences of people living within social systems (Goodley, 2013). There is also the problem that social models can be dogmatic (Shakespeare, 2006), defining what a disability is on behalf of individuals rather than letting them define what it means to them. For example, one may not identify as having a disability but are told they have one by political and social conditions.

An opposing definition to a social or materialist view to disability is a physical definition (Goodley, 2013). However, a physically based definition of disability, such as a person who uses a wheelchair or has vision loss, does not accurately represent the community either. One reason for this is not everyone with a physical condition impacting mobility would consider themselves as having a disability because the term disability connotes impairment. If someone was born with vision loss, they may not see themselves as having a disability or being impaired because they are used to it, that is their ‘normal’. Additionally, a physical definition of disability could miss invisible disabilities like traumatic brain injury, chronic pain, or mental health. Because these characteristics cannot be identified visually, they may not be considered when disability is defined physically.

To address issues present in materialist and physical views of disability, CDS considers disability a dichotomous social relationship between people who are ‘normal’ and those who are physically and mentally ‘deviant’ from that norm (Vehmas, 2004). The definition of disability for this paper is directly influenced from and best explained by Vehmas’ (2004) Ethical Analysis of the Concept of Disability:

“Disability is essentially a social phenomenon and concept. It is constructed in particular social contexts, and they determine the meaning it carries. Disability is also a normative

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concept that reflects the ideas concerning what kind of beings humans ought to be, both mentally and physically, and how society ought to be constructed in order to treat its members equally. The term *disability* implies that individuals considered as disabled lack essential human abilities or possibilities to qualify as persons (in a morally significant sense) or to live a good life. Whether ‘disability’ can accurately be explained by social and environmental factors, or by biological factors, determines when ‘disability’ is actually a concept describing society or the characteristics of some of its individuals. In either case however, having a ‘disability’ implies an undesirable state of functioning or being of an individual- either to him or herself or to other people in society (p. 213-214)”.

Vehmas (2004) continues to explain that this dichotomy of people with disabilities as ‘abnormal’ or ‘other’, and people without disabilities as ‘normal’ is false as everyone faces different levels of impairment in their lives. Regardless, normative concepts of what people should be and how they should act influence who are seen as having disabilities.

I understand the previous quote as follows: norms, interactions, contexts, and ideals influence where and when someone is considered to have a disability. Disability cannot be solely explained physically, individually, or socially because of the vast characteristics of disability. Instead, CDS considers someone with a disability to be whoever has a ‘deficit’ compared to the norm in a given situation. In my view this is the key to the balance between social and psychological models. CDS allows an understanding of how disability can be fluid and show up in different ways in different contexts. We can account for the influence of social attitudes and constructs through considering who and what makes up the normative group. CDS also allows exploration of daily individual impacts to people with disabilities through the relational and contextual model of disability.

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It has been explained that after years of social models ignoring important individual contexts of disability and the inaccuracy of a physical definition, there was a need to re-engage with the fundamental questions of what disability is and how to improve the lives of people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2006). This has led to a current view of critical disability studies as a process of social organization into normative and non-normative groups: 'one' and the 'other' (Vehmas, 2004). To be considered part of the non-normative group is to be 'othered.'

Vehmas (2004) explains that social constructs influence how society is built and people's assumptions of what is 'normal.' Able bodies and stable minds are considered typical; therefore, states of being that deviate from this norm are considered a disability. Normative groups define what a disability is through their common values and practices. Non-normative groups of people experience 'othering' by being compared the normative group and seen as deviant or against the norm (Vehmas, 2004). This explains why someone may not identify as having a disability but are seen by normative society as having one (Vehmas, 2004). How a person thinks of their situation does not excuse them from being a part of the 'other' based on their non-normative characteristics (Vehmas, 2004). The 'other' group often experiences social and systemic disadvantages such as overcriminalization of people with mental disorders (Boyce, Rotenberg & Karam, 2015; Livingston, 2016). On top of the stigmatization, overcriminalization, and 'othering' people face for living with a mental illness, having a criminal record is one more way a person living with disability is deviating from the norm and serves as further stigmatization.

With this approach, CDS can be applied to criminality in that it can be extrapolated to explore why people with criminal histories experience stigmatization or 'othering'. CDS can also be used to explore social and individual experiences of criminalized people who deviate from socially constructed norms. Typically, daily social norms are to obey the law and people with

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criminal records have gone against this norm. As a result of socially constructed responses to criminality, many social factors are negatively impacted such as finding work or housing after prison (Martin et al., 2012). A person's undesirable criminal history shows them as deviant from other people in society, and they experience the consequences of acting in an abnormal way. Extrapolating from a CDS perspective, normative constructs and social attitudes influence how people who are criminalized are viewed in society. Some views include criminalized people being seen by normative society as deviant or the 'other' and deserving continued punishment after prison, as discussed in the *Findings* section (Chapter 4). These views influence how criminalized people are treated every day and the marginalization they experience after prison.

Unfortunately, people with a disability, specifically a mental health disability, experience overcriminalization (Boyce, Rotenberg & Karam, 2015). People with mental illness disproportionately experience 'othering' due to their disorder, and having a criminal record is one more way they deviate from the norm in addition to mental illness. Applying CDS to the overcriminalization of people with mental illness implies double stigmatization to an already 'othered' population (people with mental illness). Criminalization of people with mental illness serves to further stigmatize that population.

The double stigmatization of people with mental illness and criminalization is problematic because people are not always in contact with the police due to criminal behaviour (Boyce, Rotenberg & Karam, 2015; Coleman and Cotton, 2014). Compared to people without mental illness, an increased number of people with mental illness encounter the police for their emotions, mental health, or substance use (18.7%; Boyce, Rotenberg & Karam, 2015). Additionally, a systemic review by Livingston (2016) synthesized 85 reports on contact between people with mental illness and police. It was found that one in four Canadians with mental illness

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have a history of police encounters (Livingston, 2016). This is a disproportionate number of encounters compared to the number of police encounters in the general population of Canada (Livingston, 2016). Despite increased likelihood of people with a mental health disorder encountering the police, many do not engage in criminal activity.

On top of police encounters, CSC reported on the occurrence of mental illness in people who have been through the Canadian correctional system (Sapers & Zinger, 2012). In 2011/12, 45% of men and 69% of women in Canadian federal correction systems had mental health care needs (Sapers & Zinger, 2012). Additionally, 80% of people in Canadian federal custody had a reported substance use disorder (Sapers & Zinger, 2012). These statistics demonstrate the large portion of criminalized people who require mental health care and are an indication of criminalization of mental health. This means that people are criminalized simply for their mental illness. This is problematic as people may do better with mental health support compared to a federal sentence, as demonstrated by the Not Criminally Responsible on Account of Mental Disorder (NCR) population in Canada (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013).

Literature on the NCR population in Canada sheds light on the how treatment of mental illness impacts rates of people returning to crime or recidivism (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013). An NCR legal defense is used for people “suffering from a mental illness that made them incapable of understanding their actions at the time they committed a criminal offense” (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013). An individual determined to be NCR is treated through the Canadian forensic mental health system rather than punished through the Canadian criminal justice system (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013), and addressing mental health concerns reduces the rate of return to crime (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013).

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To review treatment and risk of reoffending, NCR individuals on detention orders or conditional discharge must meet with a review board at least once a year (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013). This system of support and treatment is only available for NCR individuals and not people in the general federal prison population. Regardless of the length of time NCR people continue to meet with the review board, NCR individuals had lower recidivism rates (7.5-10.4%; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013; Crocker et al., 2013) than the general federal prison recidivism rates (41-44%; Bonta, Ruge, & Dauvergne, 2003; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013). These results show that people are criminalized for their mental illness. If someone is treated for their mental illness, they are less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. In other words, not having mental illness or addressing one's mental illness decreases odds of coming in contact with the Canadian criminal justice system.

In conclusion, CDS considers disability to be a social division into normative and non-normative groups. CDS can be applied to criminality in that it can be extrapolated to explore the experiences of people with criminal histories with stigmatization or 'othering' due to deviating from social norms. Unfortunately, the Canadian population of people with mental illness experience over criminalization, which serves to doubly stigmatize this population under the lens of CDS.

### **Foucault Power and Punishment Lens**

Through CDS I came to an understanding that because criminalized people are 'othered' due to socially constructed responses to criminality, they experience relational and systemic barriers daily. However, I continued to question the systems and barriers to employment in place and asked myself: why does being considered the 'other' have such an impact on criminalized

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people's employment? If one of the purposes of prison is to rehabilitate and help people reintegrate back into society (Nicol, 2020), why are criminalized people 'othered' and marginalized instead of supported in healing after prison? Why is finding and maintaining employment so difficult if an income is critical to survival in Canadian society? 'Othering' increases difficulty for criminalized people to reintegrate back into society and secure jobs and increases return to crime. Both will be discussed in the *Literature Review* section (Chapter 2).

To answer these questions, I have used Foucault's primary writing as well as texts written about Foucault's theories. Foucault's critical theories on discipline, punishment, power, and control provided a lens that helped me understand why criminalized people experience marginalization and 'othering' in employment after prison. My understanding of the question of why employment is so negatively impacted after prison based on Foucault's writing is as follows: for capitalism to be profitable, labourers must be exploited (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011). Foucault identified a relationship between capitalism and discipline and explains that for capitalism to 'work' or be profitable for a bourgeois society, workers must be exploited to increase their profit-making productivity (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011). One way to increase profit is low or minimum wage work. People or systems in power have reason to exploit workers into low or minimum wage work for greater profit.

For workers to become 'okay with' doing low or minimum wage work and to increase the profit made off this exploitation, discipline and control is imperative (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011). According to Foucault (1995), a modern method of discipline is to produce docility. Rather than premodern public displays of punishment and torture like hanging, modern punishment and discipline are exercised through control, forcing docility by making people do what is wanted of them (Foucault, 1995), which, in a capitalist society, is low or minimum wage

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work. Criminalized people, those who have been sentenced to punishment, experience the disciplinary tactic of docility while incarcerated. Hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination are the tools with which criminalized people are made docile, a form of discipline and control that forced them to provide the low or minimum wage work after prison that is needed from them to increase profit and benefit capitalism.

Foucault explains that docility works in small scale groups and is trained into people through multiple methods (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011). People in prison are a small population that can be controlled and trained into the docility that is necessary for capitalism. This would appear to be the answer to my question of why criminalized people's employment is so impacted. Basically, for capitalism to 'work' labourer's must be exploited. Criminalized people are a small population of 'others' that are being controlled and disciplined in prison anyway, so they might as well be controlled into accepting low or minimum wage work after prison. As such, methods of docility in place in prison set people up for low or minimum wage work *after* prison.

Criminalized people can be considered a group of 'others' through experiencing marginalization and social consequences such as discrimination in the workplace due to their 'deviance'. As a result of being considered 'other', there is minimal resistance around them only being qualified for low or minimum wage work. There seems to be societal barriers and marginalization in place that encourage criminalized people to work in low or minimum wage positions so the normative group does not have to. This is an assumption to the theoretical framework of my study and my research will investigate the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after prison when employment is low or minimum wage. To summarize, 'othering' impacts employment because criminalized people are a group that can be



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disciplined through docility into low or minimum wage work. This type of work is necessary to increase profits in capitalism.

Now to discuss more about docility. People are trained into docility or docile bodies in prison through three methods: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination (Foucault, 1995). Hierarchical observation is based on the concept that ‘we can control what people do merely by observing them’ (Gutting, 2019). The reason observation matters in discipline is because of its link to normalizing judgement (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011). Once people are in an observed space, they can be seen and judged. When being observed, people are subject to following certain kind of behaviours because they do not want to be judged for breaking the rules or not meeting a certain standard (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011).

People typically do not want to be caught doing something wrong for fear of getting punished or being judged. While everyone makes mistakes, over-surveillance or constantly observing actions of criminalized people increases the chances a mistake will get caught (Gutting, 2019). As such, criminalized people are over-surveilled and are often over-punished for mistakes (Gutting, 2019). However, it is not always possible for all people in prison to be observed at the same time since there are far fewer guards and cameras than criminalized people. As a result, people in prison know they *will* be observed by a guard or a camera, but it is never possible for them to know *when* (Gutting, 2019). Thus, they must act how they are supposed to act most, if not all, of the time because there is a constant risk of observation (Gutting). My understanding of this concept is that people in prison end up ‘policing’ themselves and act ‘good’ most of the time because there is always a risk of getting caught. Observation, or the threat or implication of observation, is a control and discipline tactic as people must act a certain way due to a risk of being punished.

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In addition to prison and institutional hierarchical observation, this method of control can be present in managerial supervision (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011). Foucault explains that this type of observation does not have to be from the top down but can be relational as people are constantly observing other people. An example given is students monitoring other students (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011), this could look like people in prison monitoring other inmates or employees observing each other and giving feedback on one another for performance reviews. There are work practices where employees are asked for anonymous feedback on coworkers' performance since employees work more closely with each other than with the managers. Managers needed feedback from other employees to get an idea of performance, and this is an example of relational observation.

While being observed, it is then possible to be judged against the norm. This is the next step in control and discipline, the judgement of those who are observed or normalizing judgement. Normalizing judgement explains that individuals are not judged based on the morality of their actions or how good or bad their actions are but rather by how their actions rank them in comparison to the social norm (Gutting, 2019). Whether or not an action is moral, people fear others will judge their actions if they went against the norm. I found this concept explained clearly through Schwan and Shapiro (2011) who said:

Normalizing judgement does not look to make the individual confess to their crimes, nor does it even seek to stop, or repress, bad acts. Instead it wants to use the presence of our being judged as potentially bad in relation to others (the failure to meet the norm) as a device for making people subordinate and harder working, more docile and useful (p. 120-121).

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This is similar to how CDS sees groups as either the normative group or the ‘other.’ If one has gone against the norms, they are seen as ‘bad’ in relation to the normative group. As Gutting (2019) explains, it is the threat of being judged as abnormal that controls people at every turn. In prison, this occurs by reminding people of their mistakes and what they have done wrong and trying to get people to work on their problems to ‘do better’ in society. In prison, people work on the mental health, emotion management, substance use, education, pro-social behaviours, and communication (Government of Canada, Correctional Service Canada, 2019b) to be more ‘normal’ and be able to function as less deviant in relation to others in society. During and after release, people are required to suffer the consequences of this ‘abnormal’ status. Control and discipline through docility could prepare people for low or minimum wage work after prison because feeling like the ‘other’, or not in the normative group, may create apprehension around interviews and resumes and impact the type of job a person can get (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017). More information on how employment is impacted by having a criminal record and ‘othering’ is in the *Employment after prison* section of the *Literature review* (Chapter 2).

Finally, examination is a combination of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment (Gutting, 2019). Once people are observed, normalizing judgement provides a gaze or a lens through which to compare people to the social norm (Gutting, 2019). Then, examination is the process of providing a tangible and visible score or rank to compare people and their performance against the assumed norm (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011), like grades in school, work history and performance, or mental health assessments. As a result, people have tangible scores or assessments that can compare them against social norms and average scores. In turn, people are pressured to have good or better than average performance on examinations and meet norms

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to advance in activities like school or work (Foucault, 1995). Through observation and normalizing judgement people are observed and judged, then examination provides a tangible means to compare people against social norms and abilities.

Examination as a method of discipline sets people up for low or minimum wage work as resumes are often the first examination employers look at. A criminal record or a gap on a resume likely hinders people's chances of getting a job as it indicates they are deviant and have gone against the norm. This is interpreted as a person being untrustworthy in the workplace and they are less likely to get a position. In summary, Foucault's theories are applicable to my thesis in that, continuous observation, feelings of not being a part of the norm, and marks that make criminality visible are methods of control, discipline, and punishment that prepare criminalized people for low or minimum wage work after prison.

In conclusion, criminalized people are a population of 'others' that are controlled into accepting low or minimum wage work after prison through methods of docility. The tools with which criminalized people are made docile are hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Pathways to Crime**

This section will explain the connection of meaningful employment to people remaining out of women's prison. The review will also illustrate how a lack of employment support in or outside of prison set criminalized people up for low or minimum wage work. It is crucial to investigate why criminalized people are encouraged into low or minimum wage work despite the importance of meaningful employment. Understanding the employment experiences of criminalized people may help take action and make change where necessary to have a more supported and meaningful employment experience.

This section will use an intersectional approach to explore and illustrate pathways to crime experienced by different genders and races. In Canada, people are involved with Canadian federal corrections when they have been sentenced for two years or more, and provincial corrections when they have been sentenced for less than two years (Government of Canada, Correctional Service Canada, 2018). Despite reintegration back into the community being one of the principles of federal sentencing in Canada (Government of Canada, Legislative Services Branch, 2021), many people released from custody recidivate or return to prison (Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0022-01). Recidivism in the Canadian criminal justice system is returning to federal corrections after having served a sentence (Government of Canada, Department of Justice, 2020a). Unfortunately, statistics are not widely available on recidivism in the women's criminal justice system.

The most recent statistics from adult admissions to federal correctional services in 2018/19 show 30.55% of people released from Canadian federal custody recidivated after release

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(Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0022-01). Of a total of 7,558 adult custodial admissions, 2,309 were from recidivism (Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0022-01). Notably, this statistic does not show the intersections of gender or race, a concerning limitation that prevents insight into Canadian women and marginalized communities' experiences with recidivism. Marginalized communities include people with disabilities, Indigenous people, Black people, and People of Colour.

It is pertinent to consider intersections such as race and gender when discussing recidivism and crime because marginalized communities are impacted differently while entrenched in the criminal justice system. Additionally, part of the importance to considering intersections of race in crime is to identify overrepresentation. Once overrepresentation is known and understood, action can be taken to support overrepresented communities. Indigenous people in Canada are greatly overrepresented in prison. For example, within two years after release from CSC in 2011/12, 24.2% of non-Indigenous men reoffended whereas 37.7% of Indigenous men reoffended and 12% of non-Indigenous women reoffended whereas 19.7% of Indigenous women reoffended (Stewart & Wilton, 2019). The study exhibits intersectional experiences for women and Indigenous people as women recidivate less than men, while Indigenous individuals, both men and women, have a higher likelihood of returning to prison after federal release than non-Indigenous men and women respectively.

Additionally, the Government of Canada Department of Justice report on the Canadian Indigenous inmate population between March 2009 and March 2018 showed the number of Indigenous women who were incarcerated increased by 60% in that 10-year period. (Government of Canada, Department of Justice, 2020b). Despite making up only four percent of

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the population of Canadian women (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2016), 40% Canadian incarcerated women are Indigenous (Government of Canada, Department of Justice, 2020). This is a gross overrepresentation of Indigenous women in Canadian federal prisons. In the interest of working to address this overrepresentation of Indigenous women in prison, the current study will also focus on Indigenous women's experiences of employment and refraining from criminal activity after prison. More data on the experiences and disproportionate representation of racialized communities is not available.

Abundant advocacy is currently underway to ensure that major Canadian institutions like universities and social services collect data on racial identifiers so that we are able to disaggregate institutional practices and outcomes by racial categories. Until then, we can look to US data to illustrate the severity of disparities in criminal justice systems. Data from the US shows Black and Hispanic people make up 29% of the US population but 57% of the prison population (Report of The Sentencing Project to the United Nations, 2018) indicating a conviction rate that is 5.9 times higher for Black Americans and 3.1 times higher for Hispanic Americans than White Americans (Report of The Sentencing Project to the United Nations).

Next, I will discuss varying experiences of pathways to crime across men and women. Gendered pathways to crime have been made apparent in Canada with men and women typically getting involved in crime and going to prison for different reasons (Pollack, 2012). Generally, Canadian women are involved in crimes of victimization more often than men (Pollack, 2012). Feminist criminology explains that childhood abuse and violence against women or other victimization precipitate survival strategies among women that are often criminalized (Pollack, 2012).

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A history of childhood abuse before the age of 18 years is common in both men and women in Canadian prison (Bodkin et al., 2019). A systematic review explored how a history of childhood abuse affects people's health and criminal justice system involvement in Canada as reported in 34 studies published since 1987 (Bodkin et al., 2019). History of abuse included: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (Bodkin et al., 2019; Sapers & Zinger 2012). The review reported 65.7% of women and 35.5% of men had experienced some form of childhood abuse with 50.4% of women and 21.9% of men in prison experiencing childhood sexual abuse specifically (Bodkin et al. 2019). A study reporting on victimization histories based on interviews with a representative sample of 228 men and 38 women currently incarcerated in two prisons in Western Canada, finding women reported significantly higher occurrences of sexual victimization before their first federal charge than men (75% and 34%, respectively; Bucerius et al. 2019). Finally, CSC reported 85% of women in the Canadian correctional system in 2011/12 had experienced sexual assault (Sapers & Zinger, 2012)

Wesely and Dewey (2018) explain there are gendered effects to sexual victimization. Childhood sexual victimization increases the likelihood of girls of running away from home, in turn creating additional vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation, substance abuse, petty theft, and prostitution (Wesely & Dewey, 2018). In interviews with 30 women who had been federally incarcerated and were in a voluntary re-entry assistance program in a Southeastern metropolitan area, Wesely and Dewey (2018) found that in addition to childhood abuse, some women engaged in criminal behaviour under the influence of their romantic partner. Some participants reported fallouts from relationships and moving past abusive relationships or relationships involving criminalized behaviour were their biggest obstacle upon release from prison (Wesely & Dewey, 2018).



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Additionally, the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey—Mental Health collected data on mental health and substance-use disorders in people 15 years or older in all 10 Canadian provinces (Boyce, Rotenberg, & Karam, 2015). In general, Canadians with a mental health or substance-use disorder were found to have higher rates of childhood maltreatment (66.5%) than people without a disorder (44.9%; Boyce, Rotenberg, & Karam). The survey also demonstrated women (6.9%) were more likely than men (4.1%) to meet criteria for a mental health disorder, specifically generalized anxiety disorder and depression (Boyce, Rotenberg, & Karam). Contrarily, men (5.2%) were more likely than women (1.6%) to experience substance use disorders (Boyce, Rotenberg, & Karam).

Unfortunately, impacts of victimization and childhood abuse continue into the adult lives of many criminalized women. Nearly half the women interviewed by Wesely and Dewey (2018) self-reported as having substance use, addiction, and other mental health issues that inhibited their daily functioning as a result of their victimization and sexual abuse. These concerns intensified their need for funds, leading to an increased frequency of engaging in criminalized activities like stealing or trading sex for substances (Wesely & Dewey, 2018). In 2010/11, CSC reported 29% of people admitted to women's federal prison and 13% of people admitted to men's federal prison were identified as having a mental health disorder (Sapers & Zinger, 2012).

Finally, acknowledging gendered pathways to crime enables a more intersectional approach to pathways to desistance. Desistance from crime is refers to abstaining from crime or remaining out of prison. A landmark study on women's desistance by Gioradano et al. (2002) recommended that, along with pathways to crime, pathways of *desistance* be considered a gendered experience. The study acknowledged there are different challenges for women both within and external to the justice system that should be considered for desistance, similar to the

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gendered pathways to crime or recidivism. It is important to acknowledge the intersecting aspects of people's identity when considering pathways into criminalized behaviour as well as experiences after prison to provide relevant support to their needs. Different genders experience the world in different ways and will differ in the array of challenges they encounter and supports they require. In the interest of acknowledging and exploring gendered pathways of desistance, this study will focus on the experiences of people being released from the Canadian federal women's criminal justice system.

Support services designed for criminalized women to reduce reincarceration are effective when based on a gendered approach, namely supporting them through their victimization to prevent further harm or re-criminalization. In a study interviewing 57 CSC parole officers, six gendered supports for women with children were rated as very important or extremely important to reduce recidivism and support successful reintegration into the community (Thompson, Lutfy, Derkzen, & Bertrand, 2015). These supports included: shelter, a family physician, childcare services, transportation services, legal services, and culturally specific resources (Thompson, Lutfy, Derkzen, & Bertrand, 2015). A study by Wesely and Dewey (2018) evaluating a re-entry program for federally incarcerated women found that women spoke highly of the program and appreciated the gendered support to re-entry from prison back into the community. The re-entry program offered independence from past partners, counseling, clothing, childcare, and a sense of community (Wesely and Dewey). The program was described as a meaningful alternative to becoming entrenched back into the same types of circumstances, relationships, and patterns that contributed to people's pathways to incarceration in the first place (Wesely and Dewey).

To summarize, criminalized women have unique experiences, such as increased exposure to childhood sexual abuse that often lead to gendered pathways into criminalization. To address

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gendered pathways into crime, there are available social services that address the needs of criminalized women and people who have been victimized. Pathways to crime and pathways to desistance are influenced through intersectional experiences. Gender and race impact the likelihood of a person receiving a federal sentence, and the type of criminal behaviour a person engages or re-engages in. Services should work to reflect intersectional experiences of the criminalized people they are supporting before and after prison.

### **Employment and Desistance**

This section provides an overview on the importance of employment in women's desistance from crime. In a pivotal study in the desistance literature, Farrall (2002) explored what aspects of probation services are successful in supporting people desist from crime. It was found that being motivated to avoid further trouble, employment, positive family experiences, mending damaged relationships, and starting new relationships were closely related to desistance. Probation practices that foster these important aspects of reintegration may have more success supporting people with desistance than practices that do not (Farrall, 2002). The findings of this research imply that to have an impact on desistance, probation and other services should support people in gaining and maintaining employment and creating opportunities to build and strengthen relationships.

A study by Bunting, Staton, Winston, and Pangburn (2018) further supports the role for employment in desistance from crime. This study used secondary data from 1,000 Kentucky men and women involved in a Substance Abuse Program (SAP) after their release from prison. Bunting et al. divided the employment categories of the participants into people with disabilities (63% of whom reported receiving disability funds), full-time workers, part-time workers, and

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people who were unemployed. The hypothesis behind organizing workers into these categories was that each category of worker had different protective and risk factors to recidivism.

Participants with a disability had the highest rate of desistance after one year of all four groups with 87.5% remaining in the community one year after their release from prison. The main protective factor for this group was the regular outpatient visits, which allowed for a continuum of care and wraparound support while re-entering the community that participants in the other groups may not have experienced.

The next two categories of employment were not statistically different with 82.61% of people who were part-time employed and 81.17% of full-time employed individuals remaining in the community for one-year post release from the prison system without recidivating.

Protective factors were higher education level, more connections with employers, having a sponsor for support, and living in urban areas due to increased availability of supports.

Contrasting this, only half of people who were unemployed remained in the community for one-year post-incarceration. This demonstrates the positive influence employment has on remaining out of prison or desisting from crime (Bunting et al., 2018). This study emphasizes the importance of employment and continuous care or a wraparound care model for people who are reintegrating into the community following incarceration.

Research has identified stressors on desistance for criminalized women such as lack of suitable housing upon release (Martin et al., 2012), and lower rates of higher education (Brown & Bloom, 2018). Interestingly, housing and education are an influence on and can be influenced by employment. Without education, people may not be able to find jobs that are not low or minimum wage, and without a job, it is hard to get housing. This is rooted in the interconnected concepts of systems theory and amplifies the importance of employment after prison. Education

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and skills lead to employment, and employment fosters wellbeing and shelter (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Not only is employment important on its own for desistance, but employment is central in multiple systems of a person's desistance from crime like wellbeing and shelter.

The benefits of employment after prison often go beyond statistics and numerically measurable variables like rates of recidivism. Research by Opsal (2012) takes a symbolic interactionist perspective to learning about the lives of women post-incarceration, who explain that employment is important to reconstruct their pro-social identity and to meet their financial needs. Conversely, women who experienced unstable employment did not sustain a pro-social identity shift and generally returned to criminalized behaviour (Opsal, 2012). Employment is important to live an independent life; but, after prison, a job is not just monetary benefits. Employment takes part in reshaping women's self-perception and in rebuilding their confidence after prison.

To learn why women do not return to prison, Gålnander (2019) asked women their reasons for desisting from crime. A common theme among the women was their future aspirations - some had dreams of normality, becoming part of a conventional society, belonging, and becoming a parent (Gålnander, 2019). To achieve these future aspirations, many of the younger women with lived experience in prison had short term goals of education and employment to contribute to stable living and "reclaiming" the title of good mother (Gålnander, 2019). Women felt that having been in prison eroded the perception of them being a good mother, so they had to work to reclaim that title. This study further supports the impact employment has on a person's life, identity, and desistance after prison.

To continue the discussion on motherhood, raising children can be a large part of a person's life. A parent has added responsibilities of protecting, providing for, supporting, and

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educating their children. People leaving prison demonstrably struggle with areas of life that influence desistance from crime like finding employment, adequate housing, and furthering their education (Bunting, Staton, Winston, and Pangburn, 2018; Martin et al., 2012; Brown & Bloom, 2018). As such, it is important to understand how parenting may also impact desistance. To increase quality of services for reintegrating people, the needs of parents in employment, housing, and education should be understood so services can support these needs. A gendered lens to explore the needs of parents across the gender spectrum should be taken to adequately understand experiences and needs of parents after prison.

A gendered study by Bachman et al. (2015) explored the complex relationship between motherhood and desistance from crime. Between 2010 and 2011 the researchers interviewed 118 drug involved women who had originally been released from a Delaware prison between 1990 and 1996 to understand events that increase the likelihood of mothers returning to crime (Bachman et al., 2015). Despite every mother in the study loving their children and wanting to be a good mother, motherhood did not decrease the likelihood of women returning to crime or substance use (Bachman et al., 2015). These findings were consistent with identity theory of desistance, which says that desistance is a cognitive process and pro-social roles like motherhood can only be maintained after a person leaving prison works towards a pro-social identity (Paternoster et al., 2015). Only after a pro-social identity and desistance were obtained did some women get a second chance at parenting through having more children or grandparenting; however, many women in the study were preoccupied with the insurmountable barriers to finding a job and securing housing after prison. As such, stepping into the role of a mother was not attainable (Bachman et al., 2015). While motherhood has implications for both desistance and employment, the relationships between these three are complex and, as such, are beyond the

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scope of this thesis and will not be specifically discussed. A future study based on the theoretical approaches and methods used by Bachman et al. (2015) should take place to understand the potentially complex relationship between motherhood and maintaining employment after prison. My thesis research is aimed to be an initial study to fill a gap in literature on maintaining employment after Canadian women's prison. This research can be expanded on in the future with studies that discuss and measure pro-social identities and impacts of parenting or grandparenting in relation to maintaining employment after prison.

The next important relationship to discuss is the influence of Indigenous identity on employment. I was not able to find literature on the impact of employment for Indigenous women after prison. Similar to non-Indigenous people, employment is important for Indigenous people after prison as people need a basic income to survive. People need to work to afford housing and necessities, but I speculate Indigenous people must deal with impacts of racism in employment. Future directions for research could investigate what is needed to support Indigenous women in employment after prison. Important pieces to look into are major challenges to gaining and maintaining employment after prison, and what supports are needed to address challenges and increase supports.

It is evident from the reviewed literature that employment plays a paramount role in women remaining out of prison and rebuilding their identities in the community. However, living with a criminal record is a major barrier to entering the workforce (Morris et al., 2008). Now that the benefits to being in the workforce for people with a criminal record have been identified, it is time to take the next step in supporting people coming out of federal prison and learn what can be done to address employment issues.

### **Employment and Prison**

Just as recidivism and pathways to crime are gendered, employment experiences in prison are different for women compared to men. Despite the importance of employment on desistance from crime for women, employment opportunities and opportunities for skill training are limited inside and outside of prison for women. The 2019/20 annual report from the Office of the Correctional Investigator listed programming as one of the top ten categories needing change or improved services based on complaints filed by women in prison about their experiences (Zinger, 2020). Employment is part of the programming in women's federal prisons, and despite its importance, there is an alarming lack of employment support for women that is effective long-term either while on the inside or back in the community. Women with firsthand experience in prison have identified barriers to employment upon release that include minimal support with fostering community connections or strengthening job skills (Pollack, 2009).

Many women explained that the jobs available to them in prison were cooking, cleaning, and maintenance, jobs that do not prepare them for the current labour market. Women emphasized the need for job training in trades, electronics, or mechanics (Pollack, 2009). Women described completing the same corrections-based program multiple times merely to ease their boredom and described some of the jobs in prison as “watching men pour cement”, merely a distraction, and a “line on a resume” (Grace, 2020). Additionally, a study on employment after prison found that women who were interviewed wished to secure employment but had received little training or education during their incarceration relevant to the current job market (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020). The findings of the aforementioned studies show that services involved in



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corrections are not designed for rehabilitation and post-release success. The need for adequate and improved employment programming in prison is evident.

Women struggle with employment support in prison, and this persists once they are released. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, employers may ask an applicant about and consider their unpardoned criminal code convictions (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008). However, unless an exemption applies, it is discriminatory to consider any information about pardoned criminal code convictions and provincial offences (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008). Despite the clear need for employment and for protection against discrimination in hiring processes, people continue to struggle with finding work once in the community after prison.

A longitudinal study that interviewed 22 men and two women on parole in Ontario, Canada identified that once back in the community, people's lack of employment experience was a major barrier to finding work (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017). Confidence was also severely impacted after prison. People who had recently left prison experienced decreased confidence and apprehension around interviews and resume writing (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017). There was also apprehension around what people should disclose about themselves in the workplace (Ricciardelli & Mooney). Disclosing criminal history may limit job opportunities and subject a person to discrimination, while not disclosing may influence people to feel like they are living a lie or going to be "found out" by someone at work (Ricciardelli & Mooney). This apprehension could impact interview performance, resulting in not getting a job or deter people applying for jobs in the first place. This list of barriers like a lack of opportunity for skill development, apprehension around interviews, and disclosure could be addressed in a continuum of care and relevant employment programming or training in prison and after prison. However, women continue to face these struggles on their own every day after leaving prison.

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On top of a lack of employment supports, a major barrier that makes finding jobs difficult after prison is a social one - the stigma from the 'mark' of incarceration. Similar to the 'othering' attached to disability as discussed in critical disability studies, it is not a lack of skills, but the stigma attached to having a criminal record (Anazodo et al., 2017) and being viewed as the 'other' that impedes employment. Anazodo et al. (2017) explain that structural discrimination can be intentional or unintentional within governing laws and organizational policies and can ultimately restrict individuals from participating in an organization in some way. As such, stigma and reluctance to hire people who may be untrustworthy exclude people who have been incarcerated from jobs (Anazodo et al., 2017).

Additionally, Ontario Human Rights at Work provides corporate exceptions that may exclude people with records from particular occupations (Anazodo et al., 2017). For example, someone who has a conviction of fraud may not be able to get a job in finances (Anazodo et al.), and most work involving children or youth, including teaching, requires a Vulnerable Sector Check that shows a record of criminal convictions. This is all to say that finding meaningful and mainstream employment can be incredibly difficult for people after prison regardless of protections in place (Anazodo et al.). There is not a lot of support in or out of prison regarding employment, and criminalized people do not qualify or have the experience for many jobs.

Considering the lessons from Foucault (1995), it may not be surprising that criminalized people do not qualify for many jobs unless they are low or minimum wage. In Canada, if people who have been formerly sentenced find a job, they often experience low wages, high amounts of manual labour, and non-gratifying and informal work (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020). A sample of 24 Canadian criminalized individuals were deemed 'qualified' for work that was part time, had little to no benefits, and was minimum wage (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020). The struggle

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to survive after prison goes further by often requiring people leaving prison to spend their time volunteering rather than earning money (Sheppard & Ricciardelli). People are often made to complete free labour under the guise of training for a future paid job position.

Exploitative and low wage work has been shown to have a negative impact on overall wellbeing such as people having low living standards and precarious housing and environments (Hilbrecht et al., 2017). People who are underemployed also had lower self-assessed mental health than people with other types of employment (Hilbrecht et al., 2017). If the low wage and exploitative work available to recently incarcerated women is not addressed, desistance from crime will remain difficult.

Considering the many challenges and apprehensions around employment after prison, there seems to be a lack of support for people leaving prison in navigating social and structural barriers. Since we know employment can be important in desisting from crime, social services should go beyond supports to obtaining meaningful employment and should adopt a long-term lens on how to support criminalized people in maintaining their jobs. This in turn, would support people in desisting from crime long-term.

### **Maintaining Employment**

In her dissertation, Grace (2020) identifies that in addition to the documented challenges and supports to gaining employment after prison, long-term employment supports for people out of prison should be explored in research. This was after she completed research on what helped reintegrating Canadian women increase their employability through interviews with 21 women with lived experience and 13 employment service providers who had worked with reintegrating women in Canada. Grace's research provided a snapshot view of reintegration and employment,

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identifying the lack of support and training for people inside Canadian women's federal prisons as well as the challenges to transitioning back into the community after prison. After interviews, it was not known if the participants with experience remained in the community or returned to prison. Grace proposed a long-term lens in future research on women's sustained employability after prison, and a comparison between obtaining employment and maintaining employment (Grace, 2020). Understanding the supports and challenges to maintaining employment will assist in advocating for services with people's long-term interests and desistance in mind.

There is limited research available on maintaining employment or long-term influences on desistance from crime; however, the available literature explains dynamic risk factors (DRFs), or changeable features of a person that predict a higher rate of individual return to crime (Heffernan, Ward, Vandeveld, & Damme, 2019). Examples of DRFs can be lack of employment or conflicted interpersonal social relationships. Having employment decreases someone's chances of returning to crime but this life feature, a job, is changeable. DRFs contrast static risk factors which are features of a person that cannot be changed with intervention, such as criminal history or age (Heffernan et al., 2019). For example, an extensive criminal history increases the chances of a person returning to crime, and their past criminal history cannot be changed. Knowing these DRFs are important as these are things that are known to have an impact on desistance. Understanding a person's DRFs will allow services to be strategic in their support. Coid et al. (2016) investigated 754 UK men and women who had been released from prison for 12 months following their release. Associations between DRF following release from prison and engagement in offending behaviour including violence, robbery, drugs, and acquisitive crime were explored. A total of 16 DRFs were found to be significantly associated with at least one of the aforementioned criminalized behaviours. A comprehensive list of DRFs

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and the domains involved in each risk factor developed from this research can be seen in Table 1,

*List of Dynamic Risk Factors from Coid et al. (2016).*

Table 1	
<i>List of Dynamic Risk Factors from Coid et al. (2016)</i>	
<b>Dynamic Risk Factors</b>	<b>Domains</b>
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• No address</li> <li>• Frequent address change</li> <li>• Dissatisfied with accommodation</li> <li>• Local problems</li> <li>• Eviction</li> </ul>
Social Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living with a partner</li> <li>• Criminal network</li> <li>• Unsupportive family/friends</li> </ul>
Coping/ Daily Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties with daily living</li> <li>• Services cut off</li> <li>• Borrowing money</li> <li>• Threats to person/family because of debt</li> <li>• Money from friends</li> <li>• Low income</li> <li>• Illegal earnings</li> <li>• Financial difficulties with managing the household</li> <li>• General coping difficulties</li> <li>• High stress score</li> </ul>
Leisure Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hanging around</li> <li>• Frequent visits to bars/pubs</li> <li>• Frequently betting</li> </ul>
Employment/ Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting fired</li> <li>• Disagreements at work</li> </ul>
Depression/Self Harm/Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased anxiety</li> <li>• Considering suicide</li> <li>• Non-compliance to therapeutic interventions</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Experiencing tedium vitae (weariness of life)</li> </ul>
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not attending treatment for mental disorder</li> <li>• Not attending treatment for substance misuse</li> </ul>
Compliance with Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missing appointments with probation officer</li> <li>• Receiving warning letter from a probation officer</li> </ul>

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Victimization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being the victim of theft/burglary</li> <li>• Being a victim of violence/threats</li> </ul>
Thoughts of Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking of violence</li> <li>• Having violent thoughts at least twice per month</li> <li>• Having thoughts of harming others more than once per week</li> <li>• Thinking of different ways of hurting others</li> <li>• Having violent thoughts about different victims</li> <li>• Being likely to meet a previous victim</li> </ul>
Psychosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having at least two symptoms on Psychosis Screening Questionnaire (PSQ)</li> <li>• Paranoid delusions</li> <li>• Having strange experiences</li> <li>• Combination of at least one PSQ symptom and a score of at least 5 on the State-trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI )</li> <li>• Combination of at least one PSQ symptom and non-compliance with therapeutic interventions</li> </ul>
Alcohol Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous drinking or alcohol dependence</li> </ul>
Drug Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any drug use</li> <li>• Any drug dependence</li> </ul>
Life Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being assaulted</li> <li>• Being made redundant or fired</li> <li>• Financial crises</li> </ul>
Thoughts of Previous Offending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughts of offences similar to the index offence</li> <li>• Thoughts of contacting a previous victim</li> </ul>
Attitudes to Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting that it is OK to steal if very poor</li> <li>• Pro-criminal attitudes or a high score on the criminal attitudes scale</li> </ul>

Heffernan et al. (2019) cautioned against using DRFs as determinative factors to returning to crime. Researchers should be wary of labels and the accompanying assumptions, such as deciding that since someone is unemployed and has a criminal history, they will certainly reoffend. The authors encourage the reader to consider addressing these struggles at a systemic and population level. Researchers should consider DRFs as a way to bridge theory and practice by learning general problem areas to be addressed in people's lives that may help desist from crime.

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Specifically related to maintaining employment, Greiner, Law, and Brown (2014) investigated the DRFs of 497 Canadian women released from federal prison into the community and found the two DRFs that significantly predicted recidivism over a two year period post-release were employment needs and criminal associates (Greiner et al., 2014). Women were more likely to return to prison if they had problems with employment over time and remained in contact with criminalized associates. While identifying the importance of maintaining employment, this study does not inform on what systemic challenges to maintaining employment should be addressed, and what supports to keeping a job should be duplicated within our community services.

### **Pre-Data Collection Theorized Supports and Challenges to Maintaining Employment**

Due to the gap in literature around maintaining employment after prison, exploring the supports and challenges to maintaining employment for people striving to remain out of women's federal prison is an important area in need of research. To improve policies and treatment, the particular needs of people to maintain employment after women's federal prison must be highlighted and supported. It is especially important to know the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after prison since it is clear people are often qualified for challenging and low or minimum wage work. Despite limited studies specifically examining criminalized women and their experiences maintaining employment, supports and challenges to maintaining employment can be derived from the broader literature focused on criminalized women. In this section I will discuss a priori hypothesized supports and challenges to maintaining employment for people coming out of women's prison.

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Some challenges to maintaining employment after prison could include lack of specialized mental health supports, being rushed into the workforce, and attaining low or minimum wage work. The first impact in maintaining employment to consider is possible lack of mental health supports. Bakken and Visser (2018) examined gender differences in the influence of mental health on reintegration one-year post release in the United States and found that 36% of women and 15% of men have mental health concerns after prison (Bakken & Visser, 2018). Mental health affected three re-entry outcomes for women: employment, housing, and criminal behaviour, while affecting only employment outcomes for men (Bakken & Visser, 2018). Not only are women who leave prison more than twice as likely as men to have mental health concerns, these concerns put them at risk in a range of life domains.

The high number of women who need support with mental health could indicate a variety of struggles that need to be addressed. It is possible that there are not enough specialized services and resources to address specific concerns for formerly incarcerated women which could lead to inadequate or inappropriate support. A lack of adequate mental health support may impact the ability to *maintain* employment, as a woman may be able to obtain a job, but unable to keep it over time due to the impact of unaddressed mental health concerns.

Another strain on mental health and maintaining employment could be the feeling of being rushed into the workforce after prison. Ricciardelli and Mooney (2017) conducted a study on the barriers to post-release employment in Canada and followed six cohorts of men and women parolees over three years. A main theme identified in this research was that the parolees felt forced into social and community living reintegration before they were ready due to release conditions requiring individuals to quickly get a job or prove they were looking for one (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017). Pressure to attain a job is likely rooted in the importance of



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employment in peoples' journey to desist from crime; however, being forced to obtain employment before they were ready resulted in feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

Unfortunately, beginning a job under overwhelming conditions may not be conducive to managing mental health over time and pressure to obtain employment quickly may not be conducive to finding a good job that fits the persons skills and needs. It is possible that a large barrier to maintaining employment is that parolees tend to be set up for failure. Many struggle with mental health to begin with, then they are rushed into employment which may further impact their mental health and, consequently, their ability to maintain employment. Future research should explore if better education and supports before release or more time after release from prison before being required to have a job would be beneficial. Perhaps having time to settle into their living space, work on familial and supportive relationships, and adjust to being 'on the outside' would help women maintain employment.

Rushing women from prison into the work force can also bring into question the quality of employment they must settle for. Women are, on average, over-represented in precarious workforces in Canada such as temporary employment or involuntary part-time employment (Raphael, et al., 2020). Considering this fact coupled with the employment struggles imposed by a criminal record, it is not surprising that previously incarcerated women must resort to low or minimum wage work. Research by Pollack (2009) with women in Canadian prisons revealed that the only job training women received in prison pertained to cooking, cleaning, maintaining the prison, and hairdressing. Pollack (2009) explained that: "When placed on a résumé, these types of job experiences at best relegate women to feminized and racialized low-wage employment or, at worst, are skills that are not marketable in the community" (p. 125). In other words, women are rushed into employment and forced to accept low-wage positions.

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Considering the social determinants of health can explain how health consequences from low and minimum wage employment impact the maintenance of work overtime. Insecure employment in Canada is defined as intense work with non-standard working hours (Raphael et al., 2020). Low and minimum-wage work in Canada is often associated with these characteristics. These types of working conditions are associated with higher rates of stress, bodily pains, and a high risk of injury (Raphael et al., 2020). Working excessive hours increases chances of physiological and psychological problems such as sleep deprivation, high blood pressure, and heart disease (Raphael et al., 2020). In turn, these negative side effects of exploitative work impact personal relationships, parenting effectiveness, and children's behaviour (Raphael et al., 2020). With all this in mind, it is understandable how simply maintaining an insecure job may be grueling and unmanageable for many women over time. Exploitative or low or minimum wage work appears to not necessarily be a barrier to attaining employment. Many women must work these jobs for a plethora of reasons like fulfilling parole requirements or financial stability. However, being over worked and under-paid with negative physical and psychological side effects may prove maintaining employment to be difficult over time.

Discovering supports available to women after prison that effectively help them maintain employment is even less explored in the literature. As discussed above, people out of prison are often rushed into work and settle for low or minimum wage jobs. Having established connections with previous employers or other accepting employers may positively transform the employment experience. It is likely that the employee would be happier in their role if they had more control on deciding where to work rather than settling for the first available job. If they know or have connections with the other employees, they may feel more accepted and like they belong. A

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concern of many people out of prison is what to disclose about their criminalized histories in the workplace (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017). The apprehension around disclosure to the employer may be diminished if the employer has agreed to hire the person despite their record due to a past trusting relationship. Additionally, in a familiar or accepting environment, disclosure to coworkers may not lead to discrimination. Coworkers may already know or be accepting of the situation and the person's criminalized past. Even if rushed into a job for parole conditions, perhaps a familiar or accepting and less overwhelming environment can support the maintenance of employment and health.

Based on systems theory, another support to maintaining employment may be stable housing. Assistance with housing may help women avoid precarious situations they might otherwise encounter to obtain money and shelter. Stable housing may allow for more time to adjust to the community compared to someone struggling and living precariously. Women will have more time for training or searching for a job that suits their physical and mental needs if they are safely housed and not struggling for survival and security. The study by Bunting, Staton, Winston, & Pangburn, (2018) described earlier found that 87.5% of people in the sample who identified as having a disability remained in the community one year after their release from prison, with the main protective factor being their regular outpatient visits and the provision of a continuum of care. Different types of care provision and a strong support system after prison may be protective, in part, because of the stability offered, which would also support women in maintaining employment. Perhaps a broader range of services to provide comprehensive supports, and a continuum of care would be helpful to criminalized women, specifically in maintaining employment.

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The literature illustrates that maintaining employment is difficult for women out of prison since they are faced with many challenges such as lack of specialized mental health supports, feeling rushed into the workforce and attaining low or minimum wage work. Despite the challenges, many women are successful in maintaining their employment. Some possible supports are connections to employers, stable housing after prison, and a continuum of care. My study aimed to speak with service providers or women with lived experience in prison to have a better understanding of supports and barriers to maintaining employment post incarceration.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Method**

I conducted a qualitative study and conducted a thematic analysis of interviews with people who had been formerly incarcerated. The aim of the study was to explore supports and challenges to maintaining employment after release from a Canadian women's federal prison. I contacted three halfway houses that support women with experience in prison and invited peer support workers to participate in the research. Following Research Ethics Board (REB) approval, I completed six 90-minute semi-structured interviews. Participants included two Indigenous women, three White women, and one White transgender man who all had experience in the Canadian women's criminal justice system. Interviews explored participants' employment history including necessary supports for seeking employment and maintaining employment. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews were analysed following the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which entailed generating codes and major themes. Findings and recommendations were based on major themes rooted in systems theory, Foucault power theory, and CDS.

#### **Influences on Method**

To answer the research question of, what are the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after release from a Canadian women's federal prison, the methods used in my study deviate and align with previous research. My methods and analysis deviate from the studies discussed in the *Literature Review* that involve secondary data and DRFs (Bunting, Staton, Winston, and Pangburn, 2018; Greiner, Law, and Brown, 2014). As discussed earlier,

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Heffernan et al. (2019) states DRFs should be considered systemic and population level trends. It is important to understand these quantitative, population-level trends in criminality for policy and services. Population trends provide a basis for planning support services, prevention services, and policies to support criminalized people. Quantitative data can show areas of high risk and need, like employment or housing, and may provide urgency to addressing needs impacting large portions of a population. However, there is room to enrich research and literature with qualitative studies. The researchers Greiner, Law, and Brown (2014) demonstrated maintaining a job for less than two years after leaving prison increases risk of reconviction; but, there remains a gap in literature amplifying experiences of the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after Canadian women's federal prison using a qualitative approach. Therefore, I chose to fill this gap in literature through qualitative investigation of interviews with people who have been incarcerated in a Canadian women's federal prison.

The procedure was heavily influenced by my reflections on the importance of qualitative research to fill the gap in literature around the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after Canadian women's prison. To add to quantitative trends in data, my research aligns with studies aiming to center the experiences of criminalized people as the dominant discourse in literature. Cnaan & Dichter (2007) explore the history of social work in the United States over the last 100 years and discuss the heavy emphasis on its professionalization. In order to be considered a professional body, the field moved toward scientification through evidence-based practice in education, research, and practice (Cnaan & Dichter, 2007). Through this perspective, there is often allowance of only one dominant narrative of who criminalized women are and what they need to remain out of prison (Pollack, 2013). Considering this piece of history, social workers must be aware of the silencing nature of evidence-based perspectives. The

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investigators who construct research also construct narratives and dominant discourses around the topic.

The concept of silencing people with lived experience and allowing different evidence-based approaches to direct portrayals of criminalized people, eradicating their perspectives and subjectivities, is known as epistemic violence (Pollack, 2013). To address this type of silencing, it is important to include women who have been in prison as main stakeholders in qualitative research. This provides a way for an accurate narrative to be painted by those with experience. It is necessary to value the firsthand experience of women who have been federally sentenced, to understand what they think is needed to support their community, and appreciate their knowledge as the dominant discourse. The methods of data collection and analysis of my research are aligned with studies from my *Literature Review* that use qualitative procedures to amplify the voices of people with experiences of prison (Anazodo et al., 2017; Brown & Bloom, 2018; Farrall, 2002; Gålnander, 2019; Opsal, 2012; Pollack, 2009; Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017; Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020).

To complement firsthand experience in prison, speaking with service providers allows for research to focus on how service systems influence complex systems of crime and prison. Researchers Johnson, Schonbrun, Peabody, et al. (2015) interviewed service providers about their perspectives on service delivery challenges and treatment needs of women who are re-entering the community and who experience co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Service providers shared unique perspectives on larger service systems, societal issues, and how a lack of aftercare resources for women in mental health and substance use increases the likelihood of reincarceration (Johnson et al., 2015). Service providers' perspectives are unique as they work within the system daily, learning how to best use the system to support people re-

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entering the community from prison. Bergseth, Jens, Bergeron-Vigesaa, and McDonald (2017) asked community service providers to identify the needs of women in prison and rate the urgency of those needs. The authors explained that service providers validly identified areas of need previously identified in literature such as employment, housing, and mental health. Interestingly, service providers were able to rank the urgency of each need based on their experience with how many women they worked with who struggled in each area (Bergseth et al., 2017). This perspective would not be possible without the input of service providers who have experience with many women who have been through the criminal justice system.

Interviewing both social service providers and people with lived experience in prison in one research study allows for the combining of multiple perspectives and a more nuanced understanding of the question at hand, for example, what helps reintegrating Canadian women increase their employability (Grace 2020). The benefits of connecting with women who have been through the criminal justice system as well as service providers significantly influenced the decision to invite peer support workers to participate in the current study. Due to the limited time and scope of a Master's research study, it was not possible to speak with people with lived experience in prison *and* service providers. To remedy this issue, peer supporter workers with experience in prison and experience supporting others inside or leaving prison were interviewed. Peer support workers have a connection to both worlds: they have experience in the prison system and supporting other who have been in the prison system, by including them in this research, we can examine dual perspectives on the research question. Each participant would have lived experience expertise as well as knowledge of systems and care models through their peer support role. Including their insight will allow for a depth of knowledge in the interviews and data.



### **Sampling Strategy & Recruitment**

This study was approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) Research Ethics Board (REB), REB number 6676. Aligned with a social work perspective, people with experience are considered experts of their own lives and experts on what they need in order to maintain employment after prison. For this reason, the intended sample for this research was four to eight people who had previously been incarcerated in a Canadian women's federal prison and had experience as peer support workers. This population size was chosen based on the scope and timeline of the research study, and influenced by previous Master's qualitative research which typically include similar sample sizes. Due to Indigenous women's overrepresentation in Canadian prison, I specifically sought Indigenous women for interviews to ensure their voices were amplified in this work. It is important to explore Indigenous experiences maintaining employment after prison to understand action necessary to support the overrepresented community.

I initially considered a peer support worker to be someone who had been in prison at some point in their life and who completed peer support training or worked or volunteered as a peer support worker. However, I began expanding the definition of a peer support worker when I came across people interested in participating in the study who supported peers who had left prison through their roles and had valuable systemic information on employment services, housing services, or entrepreneurship after prison, but did not have the label or training of peer support workers. This prompted me to broaden the definition of a peer support worker to someone with experience in prison and supporting other criminalized people in any capacity

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outside of prison. Three of the people interviewed were ‘traditional’ peer support workers, one was an entrepreneur who hired other people from prison, one was a peer housing support worker, and the last was a peer employment support worker. All six participants supported other people coming out of women’s prison in some way and offered their personal knowledge as someone with experience in a women’s prison. In their position as support people, participants gave their perspectives on general experiences of people in their community and barriers that are built into the system.

People who have been through the women’s criminal justice system are a hard-to-reach population. To recruit potential participants, I used a variety of methods. One participant’s full name and place of employment was featured in an interview they had done with an Ontario newspaper. I reached out to this individual via their public Facebook page by introducing myself and my position as a student researcher and asked if I could speak with them about the research I was doing. They agreed and were interested in participating in an interview once more information was given. Aligned with a chain-referral or snowball sampling approach, the next three interviewees were invited to participate through personal connections. I was introduced to one participant through someone I worked with who used to support women leaving prison, and the next was introduced to the project through a research colleague of mine. The fourth participant was referred to the study through another participant. Finally, I contacted three halfway houses in Southwestern Ontario to invite people who participated in the program to be interviewed for the study. Managers from the three halfway houses were contacted by phone and provided with the study’s information letter (Appendix A, p. 106) and a permission to contact letter (Appendix B, p. 109) to give to potential participants to provide more information about the project and that asked them to grant me permission to contact them after providing their

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email or phone number. The final two participants reached out to me via my student email after hearing about the research through the contacts at the halfway houses. In the end, I completed a total of six compensated interviews. Each participant was compensated with a \$20 Shoppers Drug Mart gift card. Due to interviews being virtual, I asked the participants for their address and sent the gift cards via letter mail. I asked for email confirmation once participants had received their gift cards.

## **Participants**

Six people were virtually interviewed via video call for this project. Five participants identified as women, and one identified as a transgender man. To respect the LGBTQ+ community in Canadian women's prisons, this project uses the terminology "people who have been through the women's criminal justice system" rather than terms such as "criminalized women." The participants were an average age of 38 years old. Two participants identified as Indigenous and four identified as White. Five interviewees were from Southwestern Ontario, and one was from Nova Scotia. To avoid focusing on someone's past and their criminalized behaviour, this study will not report the type or length of federal sentence for each participant. The hope is that the focus will remain on the expertise provided by the participants in their interviews.

## Procedure

Once a potential participant agreed to be interviewed, I emailed them the information letter, informed consent letter (Appendix C, p. 110), verbal consent form (Appendix D, p. 114), interview questions (Appendix E, p. 115), a resource list for accessible mental health supports specific to the participant's location (Appendix F, p. 116; Appendix G, p. 119), and a virtual meeting link. My Laurier student email account was used for all communications.

The 2020/21 Covid-19 Global Pandemic required social distancing and limited contact with others. As a result, the one-hour compensated interviews took place via confidential video chat using the Zoom platform. An audio recording device was used to record the audio of these videos with the permission of the research participant. While conducting virtual interviews, I was in a private space to ensure confidentiality of the participant. At the beginning of the virtual interview, I explained to each participant the purpose of the study and what I was hoping to learn during the interview. I asked if they had time to go over the information letter and consent form, and if they had any questions about the project or any of the forms. We then went over the verbal consent form and, once verbal consent was obtained, proceeded with the interview questions. The participants were presented with a reminder that this study is voluntary, and the interview could be ended at any time without repercussion or loss of compensation. After the interview, I sent participants a \$20 Shoppers Drug Mart gift card in the mail to thank them for their time.

I then transcribed the interview recordings by hand using Microsoft Word. Interview recordings were permanently deleted from the recording device immediately after transcription. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing the interviews and altering or deleting identifying information, and assigning participants interview numbers instead of pseudonyms. Interview

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numbers allowed for the genders of the participants to remain anonymous. In an additional effort to protect the anonymity of participants' gender, gender neutral pronouns (they/them) are used to refer to participants throughout the results section rather than gendered pronouns (she/her, him/his). Participants were told their own interview numbers so they could identify their comments and data in the research. I am the only other person who is able to link comments or data to the participants' real names. Any references to specific locations, places of work, services, or other people were removed and replaced with [CITY]/[AGENCY]/[WORK]. Written consent forms have been stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office and electronic data has been stored on a password protected computer. I have been the only researcher with passwords and keys to access these devices and cabinet. The data will be retained for one year after the study is completed. At this time, any paper copies of data will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive.

## **Data Analysis**

The interviews were analysed following the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes and features of the data, then identifying and exploring meaningful themes amongst the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I familiarized myself with the data through conducting each interview and transcribing each interview recording myself. In doing this, I was able to get a sense of themes, supports, and challenges that were consistent across participants. Becoming so involved with the data also helped with the writing process. I had many weeks to digest the interviews and what the implications could be for theory, practice, and my thesis.

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Once transcription was completed, I uploaded anonymized transcripts to Dedoose analysis software. I read through the first two transcripts and generated a long list of initial codes pertaining to features like stigma, intersectionality, employment, care models, and healing. By the third transcript, the data appeared to reach saturation and I had generated a representative list of codes. Once coding was complete, I exported the code list to an Excel file and printed off the list of 45 codes. I cut the list into strips and began organizing the codes into manageable categories and initial themes based on similarities. This helped me familiarize myself with the data and codes. I considered how each code related to each other in the context of supports and challenges to maintaining employment and living with a criminal record. I came up with a group of meaningful ‘parent’ categories with ‘child’ and ‘grandchild’ sub-categories. The complete list of parent, child, and grandchild categories can be seen in Table 2, *First Round of Categories*:

<b>Parent Category</b>	<b>Child Category</b>	<b>Grandchild Category</b>
Supports in place for people released from women's prison	1. Support in care  2. Support in Employment	1.1 Random Angel 1.2 Meet where the person is at 1.3 Working on self 1.4 Giving compassion 1.5 Compassionate care 1.6 Hope 1.7 Wraparound care 1.8 Using a variety of healing methods  2.1 Flexible workplace 2.2 Supportive work environment 2.3 Compassion in the workplace 2.4 Expanding skills 2.5 Receiving connections through employment supports

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		2.6 "Healing" work
Gaps in the system for people released from women's prison	3. Barriers in the system  4. Barriers in society/attitudes  5. Barriers to employment	3.1 Systems theory- interrelated problems 3.2 living within the system 3.3 experiences of reintegration 3.5 living experiences 3.5 prevention techniques 3.6 pathway to crime 3.7 exercising power 3.8 staying in a halfway house after prison 3.9 self advocacy/ doing things on own 3.91 silos  4.1 Advancing in the workplace 4.2 Stigma/stereotypes 4.3 Better behind bars/ doing crime 4.4 racism/intersectionality/social context 4.5 Paying back for crimes constantly  5.1 shift work/overqualified 5.2 debating disclosure/impacts of disclosure 5.3 ability to work 5.4 impacts on confidence 5.5 record check/resume
Working as a peer support worker		
Mental health		
Additional concepts I kept track of	6. Message to other women 7. Gaining employment quotes 8. Maintaining employment quotes 9. Practical Suggestions	9.1 Culture education 9.2 Employment suggestions 9.3 Healing 9.4 Service suggestions

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I then considered and applied the theoretical approaches taken in this thesis to the supports and gaps that I identified. Once I made sense of how the codes related to the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis, I organized codes and categories into major themes. These major themes are the basis for the findings and recommendations of the study and can be seen in Table 3, *Major Themes and Subthemes from Research*:



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<b>Major Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Theoretical Underpinning</b>
Continued Punishment and Control After Prison	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of employment as continued punishment</li> <li>2. Criminal record check and racism as examination</li> </ol>	Foucault (docile bodies, hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examination)
Maintaining Employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Compassionate care</li> <li>2. Compassion in the workplace, flexible workplace, supportive work environment</li> <li>3. Education on criminalized and Indigenous populations for employers and general population</li> </ol>	
Experiences of Women After Prison	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coming to terms with criminal record and situation after prison</li> <li>2. Need for trades and other job market relevant training in and/or out of prison.</li> </ol>	
Experiences Through a CDS Lens	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Socially Accepted Punishment</li> <li>2. Individual Impacts of ‘Othering’</li> </ol>	CDS
Wraparound Care		Systems

The initial categories from Table 2, major themes from Table 3, and completed thesis report have been shared with all participants for review of the major findings from the research, and how their interviews have been interpreted. Participants were welcomed to give feedback about the major findings and their quotes used in the report.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### Environment of Interviews

Multiple interviewees stated they were eager to tell their stories in the hopes that sharing their employment experiences would help other people leaving prison maintain their jobs. This was also evident when participants thanked me for taking the time to listen to their stories. This was striking to me because I felt as if I was the one who should be thanking them for being major contributors to my research as participants. The participants were engaged in interviews as they each offered a depth of information about their experiences and well thought out recommendations for other criminalized people, service providers, and employers. There seemed to be two main emotional responses from participants when discussing systems and societies that have failed them. There was notable frustration and outrage as demonstrated by strong language and passion, and there was some sadness expressed through tearing up while discussing challenges during interviews.

Through interviews, I experienced similar emotions to the participants; I also felt the frustration and sadness being expressed. I empathized with hearing firsthand accounts of the hard work people put into improving their lives after prison only for them to be met with more challenges. This reminded me of the youth I used to support in the open-custody program. I felt upset and frustrated that people often do the best they can to improve their lives after prison, but they face systemic barriers daily. I also felt hopeful that in collaboration with the participants, my research could make a difference on support and employment after prison. In sum, interviews were upsetting and frustrating at times but had an air of hope that the research would lead to improvements in employment for other people after prison in the future.

## **Continued Punishment and Control After Prison**

### ***Lack of Employment as Continued Punishment***

Docility is a method of punishment in prison that prepares criminalized people to do what is wanted of them (Foucault, 1995). I theorized that training docile bodies in prisons prepares people for exploitative low or minimum wage work after prison to increase profits made in a capitalist society. The findings of this study suggest docility is not only enforced in prison but is reinforced after prison as a form of continued punishment. This occurs, in part, to increase the amount of people who must turn to low or minimum wage work to increase profit-making in capitalism. Employment, or lack thereof, plays a key role in the continued discipline of criminalized people after prison. There are characteristics of docility discipline inside prison as well as throughout employment navigation after prison, like stigma, that make people feel like they are constantly paying back for their crimes.

Participants said they felt like they were experiencing “constant pay back”, or continued punishment for their mistakes. This punishment was felt after prison and being back in the community trying to lead meaningful lives. One participant, Participant Four, explained they were getting “the continual message that I’m not worth supporting, I’m not good enough...” Participant Four put it succinctly when they stated the barriers after prison are, “like a constant pay back” that make life very challenging. Participant Three explained that people experience so many struggles and barriers after incarceration that the real prison and punishment is returning to the community.

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“The real prison for a lot of people is not being in prison. The real prison for a lot of people is not knowing where to go and you freeze. Because you don’t know how to get a, a job you don’t know how to repair your credit, you don’t know how to save, you don’t know how to open a bank account, you don’t know where to live. Like, it’s, it’s insane. So that’s the bigger prison for a lot of people which is why they resort to crime to go back in. To come back to freedom.”

Employability, or the lack of employability, plays a major role in the constant pay back and continued discipline of people after prison. The major question of this research was what are the supports and challenges to *maintaining* employment? During interviews, I asked participants their experiences around maintaining employment, and all of them said that was hard to talk about maintaining employment without talking about gaining employment. There was a consensus that there could not be one (maintaining) without the other (gaining). Participant Three explained that it is hard to stay in a box, such as maintaining employment, and putting people into boxes like whether they need support with maintaining or gaining employment may limit them in the end. Focusing only on gaining or maintaining employment may limit someone’s potential. According to Participant Three, what is most helpful is allowing people to “learn and grow opposed to just putting them from one box to another box.”

The coupling of maintaining and gaining employment is related to systems theory as maintaining and gaining are part of one employment system that should be considered together. Systems theory talks about boundaries of a system, and it seems that maintaining and gaining employment are within the same system boundaries. The indication of this is employment requires an extensive support network that needs to consider multiple aspects to be effective, such as best practices for supporting people obtain and keep their jobs long-term. The present

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findings will continue to discuss the supports and challenges to both maintaining and gaining employment after prison.

Continued punishment after prison can also be seen in the increased likelihood of criminalized people landing in low or minimum wage work. Criminalized people face many barriers to finding meaningful work, so their only resort is the low or minimum wage work that the rest of normative society would not like to do. To protect workers from discrimination based on their criminal record being a barrier to employment, Ontario Human Rights at Work does not allow pardoned offences to be considered upon hiring (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008).

Despite this, multiple participants explained how persisting discrimination and criminal record checks continue to be a barrier to employment. Participant Two described how pardons do not provide the protection from discrimination one may infer from the Ontario Human Rights at

Work code:

“This year [DATE], I was eligible to apply for my pardon. My record suspension. And my mom’s always like you should get it. And I was like I’m not getting it, I decided against it. Because I’m tired of giving the government my money. 900 dollars to apply for a record suspension [or] pardon. And the thing is that because of the sector that I’m in [social services], every job I apply for I’m gonna need a vulnerable sector check. So, when you get a pardon or record suspension and you have to get a vulnerable sector check, [your record] comes up! [A pardon] only protects me from a basic clearance, and what it will say is ‘pardon been granted.’ So, you’ve outed me that I do have a record by saying my pardon’s been granted. Even on the application forms: ‘have you ever committed an offence that you have not been pardoned from?’ Yes we know legally you can’t ask me if I have a criminal record but that’s exactly what you’re doing right now.

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So, to me, what's the point? Seriously. To protect my employment? But volunteering and doing this work in this field I'm always gonna need a record check that is gonna out me. Travelling. If I wanted to get a record suspension because I wanted to travel to the United States. You have to get your record suspension and then you have to apply for a US waiver. Which is \$1000 and you have to renew it every year. And it is not guaranteed that if I brought my pardon papers and my US waiver paper to the US border security, they [won't] look up my shit and... deny me entrance to their country. So truly, tell me what's the point of getting a pardon?"

In addition to the points presented by Participant Two, Participant Six explained that a gap in a resume can be an indicator of a criminal record for employers even without conducting a criminal record check. Participant Six explains they either had to be honest about their criminal record and risk not getting the job or lie about the gap in their resume. Lying felt contradictory to them and their treatment because they were supposed to be living an honest lifestyle after prison. Since it is possible for employers to identify and discriminate against people with pardoned offences, people leaving prison have trouble finding work unless it is low or minimum wage or laborious.

Considering the barriers to meaningful employment, an anecdote from Participant Four explains very clearly the type of low-wage work people were shepherded into after prison: 'The work I can get right away is ... temp agencies, factory work. ...then ... if I wanna get a decent factory job..., it's [a] criminal check.' They continued to describe the less decent factory jobs as follows:

"You can have a job if you're willing to do anything. But I'm gonna tell you one of the first factories I went to work in... it's hard. It's hard on the body, it's hard physically

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when you're not used to it. It's hard mentally...would go and I remember every break crying outside not wanting to walk back in. But then it's like, well I got a job. Be thankful you got a job."

This quote demonstrated how roadblocks to employment, such as record checks, are set against criminalized people and lead them to not only accepting low or minimum wage work, but also being grateful they have that position. Being grateful for this type of position could perpetuate punishment further as criminalized people may not want to give up a low wage position they are 'lucky' to have to pursue potentially unattainable higher wage work. Throughout interviews, participants expressed the continued punishment through systemic challenges and social judgement they felt after coming out of prison.

### *Hierarchical Observation and Normalizing Judgement in Employment*

The findings suggest criminalized people struggle with employment because of the mechanisms of docile bodies that are in place in employment to continually punish criminalized people into low or minimum wage work after prison. The first method of discipline that is evident in employment after prison is hierarchical observation. According to Foucault (1995), hierarchical observation can be experienced through a managerial or relational perspective and is control or discipline through threatened or actual observation. The control that is exhibited is due to hierarchical observations' link to normalizing judgement, and people's fear of being judged for breaking the rules and being seen as a criminal or untrustworthy (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011).

Criminalized people are observed in the workplace after prison. There is management in the workplace, relational observation, parole, and other system observation. This all leads to

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ample opportunity for normalizing judgement, or opportunity for people's actions to be compared to normative standards. Participant Two provides a clear example of observation in the workforce after prison that directly impacted their ability to maintain employment. Participant Two explained that when they applied for a social service job, the hiring manager did not ask them if they had a criminal record, and they chose not to disclose this information. Participant Two continued to say:

“But what I didn't know is that the [social service agency] was going through a lot of internal payoffs, and so they had brought in an outside investigator from the city. But I bonded with this girl, I didn't know that that's what her role was. I thought she was just a manager... And so, three weeks into the job...we were leaving for the day and... it's nice when you have a connection with somebody that you work with. And I just really bonded with her, I just really appreciated her, her candidness, and I appreciated...what she was doing there, even though I didn't really know what she was doing \*laughs\*...so we were leaving, and she asked me...Participant Two can I ask you something and I was like yeah yeah. And she was just like 'so, how did we get you through welfare?' ... she goes well your resume's so good Participant Two, you have so much experience, we want you ... I'm just confused as to why you came through welfare. So, then here's the big question. Do I disclose, do I not disclose [criminal record]? And I chose to disclose... not even 24 hours later, for my next shift, the ED called me before my shift, said “can you please just come and see me before you start your shift?” And I knew it. I knew right then and there they were gonna fire me.”

This example from Participant Two shows that observation can happen in a multitude of ways after prison. There are managers, coworkers, and systems who are always looking out for people



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going against the norm. Even if someone has the work ethic and is qualified to obtain a job there are hierarchical observation systems in place to discover who has deviated from the norm in the past to discipline them in the present. Being judged as deviant in the workplace impacts criminalized people's ability to maintain employment.

According to Foucault's (1995) theory, Participant Two's story alludes to hierarchical observation which is imperative as it allows visible space for people to be judged against the norm. Normalizing judgement involves the fear of being different or being judged as worse than other people. Participant Five expressed to me during our interview that one of the largest barriers to finding employment for them was that fear of being judged as someone who has been to prison. Participant Five said: "Well there it's that fear, right? ...Speaking for myself, I used to sit there and think that I had this number written across my head, right? ... is there a [criminal] look about you...?" This is a method of continued punishment as people constantly live in fear after prison that they will be judged as bad and criminals simply because of the way they look. People felt so judged and observed that they felt someone could tell they had been to prison just by looking at them. This fear would not only have an impact on someone's mental health, but as Participant Five explained it would have a very real impact on the types of jobs people apply for and obtain. The fear of being judged in the workplace is a method of continued punishment after prison.

Another aspect of normalizing judgement is the intersectionality of crime and race. Participant One discussed that going to prison was not a major barrier for them to find work once back in the community. Instead, a major barrier was anti-Indigenous racism in Canadian societies. This finding goes beyond continued punishment in employment after prison and moves towards how people can be punished in the workforce for being Indigenous. Canadian

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workplaces have Western norms and common behaviours. Westernized norms in the workplace include: a ‘clean’ Western hairdo, dressed in Western ‘business casual’ attire, good posture, eye contact when talking, and confidence. These are precisely the norms that reinforce views that Indigenous people who wear medicine bags or Indigenous men with long hair are ‘abnormal’ or against the norm and are consequently judged as ‘other’ or inadequate. Participant One explained how Indigenous people can be seen in the workplace:

“You have a lot of views on Natives as a negative thing, obviously. That they won’t hire certain Native people because in our culture, a lot of people don’t realize this, but we don’t look people in the eyes because it’s a respect thing. So, when someone’s talking to us, we look down. But people don’t understand that so if an Aboriginal person is going into an interview, and they’re not making eye contact with the person that they’re being interviewed by, that’s going to be taken as disrespect. I just feel like there needs to be a lot more education around that... because in our culture it really is a respect thing...it’s to show that we’re listening right? ...and it also goes back to the residential schools where we weren’t allowed to look the nuns and the priests in the eyes...”

What Participant One is describing is a type of punishment and Anti-Indigenous racism that came up in this research as a present-day barrier to accessing and maintaining employment for Indigenous people in Canada.

To conclude, the findings of this research support there are characteristics of docility discipline, like stigma, throughout employment navigation after prison that make people feel like they are constantly paying back for their crimes. This research shows criminalized people are observed in the workplace and being judged against the norm, that they can be punished by being

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excluded from the workforce when their criminal record is discovered, and that Indigenous people who have been criminalized face additional barriers to facing employment.

### *Examination in Employment*

According to hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement, people are continuously being observed and judged against societal norms (Foucault, 1995). Examination provides a tangible object, score, rating, or mark... any measure that makes it easier for people to be compared against the norm. In the case of employment after prison, this research found the examination is a criminal record check. This document allows people to be compared to normative employee standards, which is typically to have no criminal record, and negatively impacts obtaining employment.

Multiple participants explained that they often do not waste their time applying for jobs that ask for a criminal record check such as social service agencies, and three participants described sifting through lists of online jobs ads that require record checks. This is because places that ask usually do not want to hire people who do have a record. The interviewee Participant Six stated:

“A lot of times you’ll know the job ad, like it’ll say: can’t have a criminal record, can’t have a criminal record. If I knew a job was asking if I had a record..., am I gonna apply for that job? Maybe not. Depending on what it is, or how it is. And I think...something that becomes an issue is the gaps in the resume, right?”

This method of examination disciplines criminalized people in the workforce by limiting or barring their access to jobs. This controls people and encourages them into low or minimum

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wage work, which is what criminalized people are deemed ‘qualified for’ due to the difficulty of reintegrating into mainstream employment (Anazodo et al., 2017). Participants stated that they have a very strong work ethic and want to be good employees. Regardless, there are many jobs that people with records cannot or do not bother applying to due to this record check examination process, as Participant Six shared in the above quote. Participant Six continued to say that criminal record checks are unfortunate because: “I know I’m a hard worker. And I just find if someone’s not going to hire me because of that it’s their loss. Cause I just know I’ll be an asset no matter where I go.” This shows that Participant Six had good self-esteem at the time.

Participants felt that criminal record checks are often unnecessary or were unrelated to the job position. Participants said they were being excluded from well-paying jobs for little reason other than stigma. Participant Three explained:

“If you’re gonna be a social media coordinator for TD bank, do you really need a criminal record check? Or if you’re gonna do marketing events, or something like that. even if you wanna be ...an Uber driver... I couldn’t even [be] one [and] my record is so old. Like you know I think we all need to heal from our decisions. So, I don’t think it should be something that they’re gonna look [from] 10 years ago and be like oh you still can’t be a driver. Where if [someone was in prison] six months ago, okay maybe it’s a little recent, maybe they wanna see some work that you’ve done to address those things. But it doesn’t mean you should be banned from driving for all companies forever. No absolutely not. Or if you’re gonna be an Instacart shopper, if you’re gonna shop for someone’s groceries, do you need a criminal record check? No. \*laughs\* let them shop...what are they gonna do, steal your oranges? When the only thing they’re trying to

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do is put some kind of money in their bank account and then ... they're gonna lose their job?"

Participant Three touches on being excluded from jobs due to stigma as the assumption with many workplaces is that criminalized people will steal or be dishonest employees. Participant Three said that criminal record checks should not be allowed to be based off stigma that criminalized people will be dishonest. Employers should have to provide a "good reason why" they require a criminal record check. Participant Two said that good examples of jobs that could involve a vulnerable sector check are those that work with children. Participant Two expressed that, with a criminal record:

"You're the criminal, so nobody's gonna believe you cause you must be a liar if you're a criminal. You must be a liar, you won't tell the truth... You're not a credible person, you're not an honest person because you are somebody who broke the law. So, no matter what the situation, you can't be telling the truth."

People with criminal records experience stigma and exclusion from work; however, like Participant Three said, they are just trying to put food on their table and pay rent. It was suggested that employers take a step back and consider if they really need to ask for criminal record checks and why they are asking in the first place. Is knowing about a person's record essential to the job? It was pointed out by two participants that working with kids or certain jobs that involve money may warrant record checks. But it was felt many other job positions in Canadian communities exclude people with criminal records unnecessarily.

To continue with points of examination, for an Indigenous participant, the examination that negatively impacted obtaining employment did not have to do with their criminal record but

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rather their race. For many in Canadian society the examination of whether one is Indigenous or not allows a point to compare them against the norm. Participant One explains the impacts of being examined or identified as Indigenous in a colonial society. They elaborate on ‘White passing’ and that it is sometimes good for them that they can “pass” the examination as non-Indigenous.

“So thankfully for me, my father’s Irish, so...I can pass I think, I’m kind of, ‘the White One’ right? I feel like maybe because I can articulate my words, and I can advocate for myself, and sometimes I feel like that helps me, obviously in life. But you have people who are so traumatized. And have so much heavy trauma in their life that they can’t have conversations like that. And they’re too scared to speak up.”

This type of examination, or racism, is a mechanism of control and discipline for Indigenous people. As Participant One said above, Indigenous people are punished for being who they are through systemic barriers and often struggle to advocate for themselves due to trauma. This is a method of control as anti-Indigenous racism dictates where Indigenous people can work. If they are judged as against Canadian Western norms, they are controlled to conform to work standards or denied the job. Again, there is a history of anti-Indigenous racism, past and present, that I do not have space to include in this paper. The finding that anti-Indigenous racism impacts Indigenous people daily is a major one that could be dissected beyond the findings section in my thesis. It is also an important piece to include in this research as it explains the impact of anti-Indigenous racism in Canadian communities as it relates to employment. After prison, Indigenous people are not only being punished and judged for having a criminal record, but also punished by racism.

### **Supports and Challenges to Maintaining Employment**

Major supports in maintaining employment noted by participants were education about Indigenous and criminalized communities and a compassionate work environment. Education was listed as important due to its ability to increase people's compassion. Participant Three shared that "I take every little stigma and every little myth, and I prove it wrong through story telling." Participant Three said the more stories can be shared, the better "to showcase truth rather than myth." They continued to say that people have certain perceptions due to being fed negative stories about people. For anti-Indigenous racism, employers could educate and learn about why people may need days off, act or dress a certain way. Participant One, said they had an amazing work experience because their employer supported them and their Indigenous culture:

"My employer now is amazing in the sense I have every day off, my treaty days, she gives thumbs up to be paid. There's only myself and another female that are both Indigenous that work there. We get paid to uh, you know go to sweat, we can take our clients. There's, you know, we have funds for medicine."

It is important to accept more than Western business norms. Addressing misunderstandings around traditions like lack of eye contact, and other Indigenous employee needs could encourage hiring of more Indigenous people. Through storytelling and education about Indigenous cultures, negative stereotypes may become less of a barrier to Indigenous employment.

A compassionate work environment was also suggested as key to help criminalized people stay employed. If there is honesty and open communication at work, a supportive

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environment, and no discrimination, people can maintain their jobs. Participant Two described an agency they volunteered with as their safe haven because of the compassionate work environment:

“I’m not judged for my anger, my tears, my frustrations. We keep things really open and when we go through hard times and if folks feel harmed, we work through it. You know we don’t punish people, we don’t suspend people, we don’t write people up, we don’t kick people out, fire people, we don’t do any of that. We bring this restorative piece, this transformative piece in.”

Participant Two said that it is important for work environments to be compassionate, committed, collaborative, transparent, and not authoritarian. People should be able to talk about what is going in their lives and how it may be impacting them at work without being punished or judged. On the contrary, Participant Three shared experience with a work culture that was not as compassionate, saying people feel like any talk of substance use at work could lead to stigma towards them. Stigmas like these have an impact on work as people may get disciplined, be fired, or quit, which is unfortunate as it is possible to work through certain situations involving substance use and employment. Participant Three gave the example: if someone does not show up to work because they have experienced relapse and there is an honest and compassionate work environment, they would be supported in healing and given another chance. If employers are not compassionate, someone may lose their job and have to start over.

To summarize, continued punishment after prison, or docility, is a method of control and discipline present in prisons. Docility occurs through mechanisms of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination. The findings of this study indicate that mechanisms of docility extend beyond prisons and also work to punish and control people in the community



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after prison. This continued punishment and control after prison often negatively impacts employability and leads people to low or minimum wage work. After prison, people are constantly being observed and judged for having records. The examination of criminal record checks excluded people coming out of prison from many well-paying jobs in the community. On top of these struggles, Indigenous people often deal with methods of punishment and control that stem from anti-Indigenous racism which impacts people's lives and work. Recommendations to address these barriers are to consider whether asking applicants if they have a criminal record is necessary and not automatically excluding people from a position if they do have one. Compassion in the workplace through education and storytelling was seen as key in combatting stigma and supporting Indigenous and criminalized people in maintaining their jobs after prison.

### **Experiences of Women After Prison**

Two main subthemes emerged from the data around the experiences of women after prison. The first was that some women think there are personal benefits to coming to terms with their criminal record and situation after prison. The second was the need for more trades or other skilled education inside of or following release from prison. To discuss the first subtheme, research has shown women often serve prison sentences for crimes of victimization, such as partaking in criminal behaviour under the influence of a romantic partner (Wesely and Dewey, 2018). While considering victimization as an influence on women turning to crime, two participants explained that it is important for women to leave "denial" of their crimes, and take responsibility, while also acknowledging victimizing situations. The participant Participant Three explained that it is important for criminalized people to "address [their] failures" through "ownership, honesty, and accountability." Participant Three explained that being honest about

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their “failures” and taking accountability was less restricting than trying to hide their criminal record.

“You have to leave the denial mode, you really do. As much as we know that crime is impacted by so many other factors and it’s never crime itself...sometimes people just need to know that you are aware...[of your actions]. Like I didn’t organize this [criminalized] operation but I still have to admit that I ignored a lot of red flags in my life. And that led to me making poor decisions or bad relationships.”

Coming to terms with one’s criminal record impacts employment because, as Participant Three continued to explain, if one can learn to talk about “their failures in an empowering way,” they may feel more confident in themselves for being true to who they are. Confidence and empowerment can allow one to talk about skills they learned during or after prison in job interviews, and criminalized people may feel more confident in presenting their skills as assets. Participant Three explained how they presented the skills they learned in prison in an empowering way on their resume:

“What I did, and this is kind of interesting this is what a lot of people loved, was I made a resume... of all the skills that I had in prison. And all of the courses that I took in prison, and all the I had in jobs prison. I put garbage lady, I put librarian... This not only was highlighting my failure, but it was also highlighting what I learned from it. And not hiding from my past. I took this [resume] to the gym ... and I was like this is where I just was, but this is what I learned, and this is why I think I could do really well working here. And I got the job.”

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Coming to terms with one's criminal record is the journey to taking accountability or ownership of criminalized behaviour despite the high occurrence of crimes of victimization in women and girls, highlighting the gendered piece of this subtheme (Bodkin et al., 2019; Bucerius et al., 2021; Sapers & Zinger, 2012). Being a victim then going to prison may be dual traumas that women identifying people or people in the women's criminal justice system may require support with. Services for people leaving women's prison should consider the multifaceted traumas women experience and how counseling and other supports may aid in taking accountability, gaining and maintaining employment, and changing life situations to support non-criminalized behaviour.

The second subtheme was the need for trades and other job market relevant training inside of or after prison. The CSC program, CORCAN (Correctional Canada), "provides employment experiences to offenders in areas that are in line with apprenticeship trades... on-the-job training... [and] helps offenders get the skills and certifications they need to secure a job upon their release" (Government of Canada, Correctional Service Canada, 2019a). The CORCAN program is available for federally sentenced people in men's prisons in Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan (Government of Canada, Correctional Service Canada, 2019a); however, CORCAN does not appear to be available for women (Government of Canada, Correctional Service Canada, 2019b). Participant Five recalled that much of the trades and skills programming had been cut from the women's prison they were in:

"I know that when it comes to inside they need to offer more programming. More skill work. Something that can relate to today. I know that when I first got there they had stuff

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like auto and all that type of stuff. Then with funding cuts and everything they took a lot of things away.”

Another participant, Participant Two, explained that as a peer support worker, they like to “push trades” with everyone they work with because there is a young population in prisons and trades typically offer pensions. Increasing the opportunity for people in women’s prison to take part in trades and other relevant job market skills training will increase employment opportunities. This, in turn, will decrease the number of women who experience continued punishment due to limited employment opportunities, must work low wage or labourious jobs, or are unable to acquire a job at all.

To conclude, two subthemes emerged from my research interviews that explore the experiences of women after prison. While acknowledging that many women turn to crime from criminalized survival behaviour or victimization, women may work to come to terms with their criminal records and speak about their criminal records in an empowering way. This can lead to talking about their criminal record and skills in a positive, empowering manner on resumes and in job interviews. The second gendered subtheme was the need for increased opportunities for women to enter trades after prison. Education and skills training in and after prison to increase trades education and employment opportunities for people who have left women’s federal prison is necessary.

## **Experiences Through a CDS Lens**

### ***Socially Accepted Punishment***

After discovering that methods of control and punishment exist in employment for people coming out of prison, the next key question for me was how this continued punishment is ‘allowed’ to occur. How has it become socially acceptable to turn countless criminalized people away from jobs by requiring the absence of a criminal record to be hired? It appears that employment, or lack thereof, has become a socially accepted method of continued exploitation and punishment for people with a criminal history. Extrapolating from a CDS lens, excluding criminalized people from employment opportunities is socially acceptable because they are seen by normative society as deviant, the ‘other’, and deserving of exploitation and continued punishment after prison.

Since criminalized people are seen as being in an “undesirable state of functioning” (Vehmas, 2004), it is more accepted by society for them to be exploited in the workforce. Extrapolating from a CDS framework allows us to consider criminalized people as having gone against the norm and being deviant, as defined by Vehmas (2004). As discussed by Vehmas (2004) in relation to ability, the disconnect between ‘us’ and ‘them’ allows the perpetuation of marginalization. This argument can be applied to those with a criminal record. During interviews, stories were shared with blatant examples of how a criminal record can define someone as being the ‘other.’ Participant Four shared that since they can speak and act well, people often assume they are part of the normative group. But when their criminal record is disclosed, everything changes, and job applications turn out differently.

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“I’ll get to an interview process and be doing well and at the end ‘oh just...’, and they assume you don’t [have a criminal record] \*laughs\*. The assumption a lot of times is like when I’m talking yeah but ‘oh just, do you have a criminal record’ \*sarcasm\*? Yes [I do] ...And then all of a sudden it changes.”

This quote supports the concept of the extension of CDS to the experiences of individuals with a criminal history as it explains how criminal records alone result in people being ‘othered.’

The idea that criminalized people have done something wrong or have offended against society allows space for deserved judgement. There is a history in Canada of categorizing people into deserving and undeserving of welfare and support of the government and services (Walker & Smythe, 2020). If people are seen as “victims of circumstances”, like being born with an impairment, they are seen as deserving of support (Walker & Smythe, 2020). If people are viewed as inflicting or causing their own misery, like causing a car accident that inflicted impairment to themselves, they are undeserving of support (Walker & Smythe, 2020). There is a social construct that criminalized people deserve to be punished or to struggle because they have chosen to break the law. Criminalized people are blameworthy and thought of as flawed, untrustworthy, or dangerous. This could be evidenced in the social acceptance of requiring criminal record checks when applying to a job. People without a criminal record, the normative group, may not think twice about it. In fact, some could see the benefit of record checks in keeping ‘untrustworthy’ people out of the workplace and feel they do not deserve well-paying jobs. Social acceptance of these types of employment barriers allows for the perpetuation of marginalization.

One of the participants, Participant Four, was able to get a job because the Indigenous community and programs they were a part of did not judge them for their decisions. Participant

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Four had 18 years of experience in a service area before their prison sentence. They stated that even with this experience, “nobody else would have taken my [service area] background and saw it as a good thing with my record \*laughs\*.” This alludes to stigmas against criminalized people in employment in mainstream job positions. Participant Six, another participant, explained that large gaps on resumes raise “red flags” for employers, which is telling of the stigma people hold against individuals with criminal records. Criminalized people are seen as deviant and having wronged society, and a person like this should not be in the work force. Is it possible that a criminal record could be something other than a red flag, perhaps a mark of courage or personal growth? Could it not be the case that someone overcoming prison, being free, and applying for a job is commendable and has demonstrated strong characteristics for an employee? Instead of this, criminal records are seen as red flags and warning signs of the people that should be kept out of workplaces.

Earlier in the Findings, the impacts of education on compassion and in turn employment were explored (see *Examination in Employment* pg 68). Findings of this study show education to address stigmas is wanted by Indigenous and criminalized communities to influence how they are viewed by the rest of society. Participants felt that instead of being viewed as untrustworthy in the workplace, employers may see that many criminalized people are dedicated and hard-working employees who have made mistakes or had a victimized pathway to crime.

### **Individual Impacts of ‘Othering’**

One of the reasons I chose to use a CDS lens for this research was because it allows room to explore the individual experiences of people considered ‘others.’ If disability is relational and

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contextual, the context and impacts can be explored. While CDS explores how the relational aspect of disability is experienced, it can also be extended to explore other groups considered ‘others’ in relation to the norm. For the purpose of this thesis, criminalized people are an ‘othered’ group to which CDS can be extended to explore relational impacts on the daily experiences of people with a criminal history. Specifically, I will discuss how relational and contextual responses to criminal history impact gaining and maintaining employment after prison.

The first impact of being the ‘other’, and one of the major barriers to gaining employment, is a decrease in confidence and hope. Participant Six pointed out that one of the first challenges to gaining employment is self-confidence: “I think gaining [employment], actually getting that self-confidence, putting yourself out there, selling yourself, you know. You may get rejected, [don’t] take that personally.” What I understood from a few of the participants was that they had been turned away, “beaten down,” and dealt with so much that it was hard to build themselves back up again and regain confidence. Without that confidence, it was hard for participants to believe in themselves enough to apply to a job, sell their skills, or explain a gap on their resume. Participants explained rejections may be internalized, making it that much harder to get the courage to apply to the next job.

The next piece of this process is a decrease in hope. With so many contexts where criminalized people are ‘othered’ and rejected, there becomes a lack of hope in life. At this point, there is the lack of hope in finding employment as well. Participant Four shared an emotional story about their lack of hope after prison:

“I went to a city where I don’t know anyone, I have no supports, no money, and a record.

And now I have to try and find a job to support myself. Well, I’m just gonna say right



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from the start, mentally I was in no position to be able to support myself or work full-time \*teary\*. So those expectations put on somebody when you leave that place [prison], that you are okay, you haven't gotten assistance and now be a contributing member of society. But you're going to be shamed for it, judged for it every step of the way. And you're gonna hit all these roadblocks. So, it's a really, frustrating thing."

Desistance from crime had become difficult at points in a person's journey when their confidence and hope was extremely low. Participants explained when there was no hope and nowhere to turn for work or support, people may feel they are better off behind bars or participating in criminalized activities. Participant Six said that "most people return to old lifestyles because they don't have a job, and they don't have money." Participant Two, who had been fired from their social service job and had been on financial assistance programs was doing their best and still barely getting by. They shared:

"...but I was like, I'm just gonna go back to what I was doing, you know? Like truly, cause I needed to pay my rent, I had bills, I wanted a little bit of freedom. I wanted to get a car, um, and realistically if I could just go back and even like a couple days out of the week like, or is there like a deal that I can do that I could just make a quick easy thousand, couple thousand dollars and then just like chill for a little bit right? Like that was a real contemplation for me because it was way easier that what the fuck I was going through."

It is worth noting that all the participants expressed that they were doing their best, going to all the programs and parole, trying their hardest to live within the system and rebuild their lives after prison. But confidence and hope were impacted after continued roadblocks to employment to the point that people felt it may be easier to go back to prison.

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One suggestion that was made to support people coming out of women's federal prison with increasing their confidence and hope was peer support programs. Equally important as addressing systemic barriers, it was incredibly helpful for some of the participants to talk with peers who had been through similar experiences. Peer support allows people to see through example that it is possible to make it through the struggles. There are people who have been through similar things and are still okay. Participant Six stated:

“I'm big...on peer support only because talking to somebody who's been through it, you know sometimes we talk to people and they're like well you can do it. And you just feel like yeah, but you wouldn't... you don't know, you haven't been there. Like it's easy to tell someone things... but I think hearing it from someone who's been there...”

To address this need of peer support for criminalized people, it is important to include this suggestion in the wraparound care model that will be discussed in the next section. Peer support and connecting with peers is helpful to work through internal roadblocks of lack of confidence and hope. In the interest of peer support, during interviews participants were asked what they would like to share with other criminalized people coming out of Canadian women's prison. The advice and messages to other criminalized women can be seen in Appendix L (p. 120).

The purpose of this section was to point out the impacts of being considered a relational 'other' on people with a criminal history. Being a part of non-normative groups can have a detrimental impact on a person's life as they are not welcome in contexts critical to survival, such as work contexts. When people are constantly being rejected in relationships there is a decrease in confidence and hope. As discussed by participants, this often leads to a struggle to desist from crime.

### **Systems Lens and Wraparound Care**

This study spoke with criminalized people who were peer support workers to get a dual perspective of lived experience and knowledge in services. When asked about the experiences of the peers they had supported, participants said many had similar employment struggle. There are a few services that help criminalized people with employment, but it seems without this support, criminalized people struggle with multiple areas of life after prison like employment and housing. Participant Four shared the following:

“Because I will look, I do, I go and I’ll, go work with the homeless, I’ll work in the shelters, I’ll go to those places because I know what it’s like. And they’ll look at me and like how did I get out of there? And I’ll go back to these places, and I’ll see the same people that I saw a year ago, two years ago. And, I just know, like they really don’t have a chance. Um, unless something crazy and drastic will change for them like it did for me. Or unless they have this wonderful organization or people that can help them like happened for me.”

For this study, the participants were required to be employed or to have been employed since their time in prison. Two participants, including Participant Four, explained that their situation as an employed person was not normal after prison, and they felt lucky to have a job and a place to live. While many of the participants of this study had positive job experiences and are gainfully employed, this was described as not typical for criminalized populations. In the previous quote, Participant Four described that for many people something ‘crazy and drastic’ needs to change or they do not stand a chance. For Participant Four, that change was getting involved in a wraparound care model, this is also one of the major supports to helping maintain

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employment. Participants indicated that trying to improve one area of a person's life after prison, like employment, may not be successful without addressing barriers in other parts of the person's life. Wraparound models provide support in a range of life domains. Participant Six explained:

“So, it's like at this point, I have to find a job. I need to find a place. Well how do I find a place if I don't have a job? How do I find a job if I don't have a place? Like, it's just... So, I was getting to a point where I was just ready to pack it in and go back to prison. Because I just felt like I couldn't...”

Multiple participants listed programs and a team of support people as helpful to them because of the comprehensive support that was provided. Some participants needed support with rebuilding relationships, substance use, housing, employment, and how to repair bad credit or open a bank account. A wraparound care model could offer a team of supports to address the multiple areas of need after prison. There was consensus among participants that more general support with life challenges and wraparound support was needed for people after prison.

Wraparound care is grounded in systems theory and acknowledges that people's lives are interrelated complex systems (Schirmer & Michailakis, 2019). Wraparound care is a common care practice for youth with emotional disorders and their families, and is defined being as intensive, structured, and involving a team: the supported individual, caregivers, family members, professionals, and individualized supports that may benefit each supported person (Olson et al., 2021). The team of wraparound support people develop, implement, and monitor an individualized plan of care based on the persons needs and goals, implementing an array of comprehensive supports for multiple aspects of a person's life including mental health, housing, or support with the justice system (Olson et al., 2021). Wraparound care models have a

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significant positive impact on a range of youth's behavioural outcomes and are a less expensive alternative to other care models (Olson et al., 2021).

Without a strong support system or wraparound team after prison, Participant Six explained that “most people getting out, like, they feel lost. Most people just go back to their same town cause it's familiar. Even though it's not healthy.” Participant Six explained the lack of support and returning to old places and behaviours contributed to the difficulty in desisting from crime. Participant Five also spoke about wraparound care when discussing more funding is needed to support people in all areas, or systems, in their lives, rather than criminalizing people:

“And government stopping so many of these cuts in certain areas. Like, if you don't wanna sit here and fill up the prisons... then have other options there for people, you know? Um, they have to look at things differently there's no need sending a drug addict or an alcoholic ...to a prison. They need to go someplace else. They need to go to rehab or something, and you're not gonna get rehab in prison. You know? Um, mental health issues, big thing. Oh, that's a whole other topic, you know?”

In addition to wraparound supports, the interviewed participants advocated for a variety of cultural and healing supports and services after prison that could help maintain employment. Participant Four, an Indigenous participant, said that a missing piece for them and their healing was reconnecting with their culture. Participant One explained why Indigenous people who are not connected with community and culture struggle with supports after prison:

“Speaking from an Indigenous perspective, it's really hard as Aboriginals when we get out of prison it's you, you've got the non-Native parole officer, you have all non-Native halfway house staff, they don't quite understand, you know what I mean? So, it's like, this is why a lot of the women want to stay in prison it's because they get to sweat three

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times a week, have access to an Elder, have their medicines on hand ... So, this is why we failed our women as soon as they get into the community.”

This supports the idea that more cultural supports are necessary to help people maintain employment and lead more fulfilling lives after prison. It was also suggested that there should be a larger array of healing services that are considered ‘acceptable.’ Participant Three was advocating for an array of healing services:

“Substance abuse goes hand in hand with maintaining jobs and in prison they teach you that the only thing that you can do to help rectify this is to go to AA and like, ok, AA is great but it’s not for everyone... And the fact that the prison only promotes this kind of recovery is very limited. And it often keeps people in more, now they’re in another prison. Now they’re like, they’re telling me basically how to heal, when really there’s way more options to do that.”

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) may also be limiting because it is religious based and not all criminalized women ascribe to a higher deity. Participant Three listed fitness, yoga, wellness groups that go for outdoor walks, volunteering with animals, crafts, and taking up professional organization as some people find this brings mental clarity. Participant Three said a lot of people relapse and are not able to maintain employment because the healing is so limited. People need to take time to heal in many areas before being able to maintain employment, and a variety of healing methods may support more people in their recovery.

To conclude this analysis, a wraparound care model is essential to the wellbeing and support of criminalized people after prison. Aligning with systems theory, support, and improvements in multiple areas of life will increase someone’s overall functioning and their

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ability to maintain employment. Help in multiple areas of life may make life easier. Participants suggested that an array of healing and cultural services be implemented into the wraparound support system to promote recovery, maintaining employment, and desistance from crime.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

Employment is crucial after prison as it provides financial security, enabling individuals to afford housing and living costs (Opsal, 2012), and it helps people desist from crime (Farrall & Maruna, 2002) and rebuild their lives after prison. Even though employment is important for people after prison it is not always easy to attain (Anazodo, Chan, & Ricciardelli, 2017).

Application processes that require criminal record checks and unnecessary disclosure often exclude people with criminal records from jobs. Due to these challenges, people are often left to pursue precarious and exploitative work with low wages and high amounts of manual labour after prison (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020). In criminal justice literature, there is research and information on attaining employment (Anazodo, Chan, & Ricciardelli, 2017; Grace, 2020), and one study demonstrating that problems with maintaining employment increase risks to returning to prison (Greiner et al., 2014). However, this study does not illuminate the supports or challenges to maintaining employment after prison or offer perspectives of what criminalized people must do to keep their jobs for long periods of time. To better understand maintaining employment after prison, my research asked the question *what are the supports and challenges to maintaining employment after prison?*

This research used a systems lens, critical disability study lens, and Foucault's power and control lens to interpret the data. Findings showed that it is difficult to discuss and isolate maintaining employment on its own as gaining employment is the first step. However, supports and challenges to maintaining employment were still discussed. Through the Foucault power lens, the interviews indicated that there are mechanisms of punishment and control that continue after prison to lead people into low or minimum wage work. After prison, criminalized workers



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experienced hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement. This means that criminalized people are constantly being judged for having been in prison. This judgement, or examination, often occurs when employers ask for criminal record checks. Criminalized people are judged and excluded from the workplace due to their criminal record. Struggles to find support and employment was described as a form of continued punishment after prison due to society's judgment and distrust of criminalized people.

The CDS lens provided insights on why society accepts the continued punishment of criminalized people after prison. Similar to people with disabilities experiencing stigma-based challenges in employment, society allows the continued punishment and exploitation of people with criminal records since they are considered as having gone against the norm or being deviant. Impacts of being considered the deviant 'other' in society include a decrease in confidence and hope due to the number of barriers that must be faced every day after prison. These feelings of defeat often lead people to return to crime since it may be easier than facing daily challenges in the community. Intersectionality was also a barrier as Indigenous people experienced daily racism that impacted their employment opportunities or success on the job. A disconnect to culture and culturally appropriate services is also a barrier to personal healing.

Multiple major recommendations have come out of this study to address the outlined barriers to employment after prison. Employers should address stigmas against criminalized people in the workplace through education and storytelling and re-evaluate the need to exclude people with criminal records from the workforce. Removing the criminal record requirement may address the marginalization of criminalized people and their exclusion from the workforce. Education and storytelling for employers and the general public is important in the future to increase compassion for criminalized and Indigenous people in the workplace. Employers should

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strive to create a compassionate workplace to support their employees. Anti-Indigenous racism should continue to be addressed in Canadian society to increase employment opportunities and healing for Indigenous people. Culturally appropriate services should be implemented into a wraparound care model that considers a variety of healing methods. Finally, based on systems theory, more funding should be made available for wraparound care to promote healing in all areas of life. If a person is employed, it is likely that their living situation and other situations will improve, and vice versa helping them stay out of prison. Wraparound care should include a variety of healing opportunities and cultural supports.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

As with any study, my thesis had both strengths and limitations. One strength of my research is the sample size, the number of participants I was able to interview was within the initially proposed range. I do believe despite the smaller sample size of six people that this study is representative of experiences for people coming out of Canadian women's federal prisons. This is because findings around maintaining employment are consistent with previous literature. There was also within-participant reliability, a lot of the participants had similar experiences with each other which leads me to believe others in the community would have had these experiences as well. Furthermore, I was able to conduct in-depth interviews due to the limited number of participants involved in this study, leading to rich data collection and analysis. Another strength of this study includes the dual perspectives of the participants. Including people who had experience in prison and with peer support work allowed a depth of insight into the processes, barriers, and supports to maintaining employment after prison.

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One of the limitations of the study was the limited racial and ethnic diversity of the participants. I was fortunate to speak with Indigenous and White people and think there would be a benefit to hearing from more and diverse voices. Black women and People of Colour coming out of federal prison live with distinct intersections and experience that should be heard in research like this. Including these communities in research will increase the generalizability of research and allow findings to be applied to Black communities and People of Colour. These communities should have a voice in research and direct the decisions made about care after prison that will impact their lives.

### **Recommendations**

Multiple recommendations to improve employment experiences after prison emerged from conversations with the participants. These recommendations included:

- More funding in the community for a greater range of healing supports available to people coming out of prison.
- Wraparound care and enhanced services supporting people coming out of prison.
- Re-evaluate if asking about criminal records is necessary in the hiring process or hire people with criminal records.
- Foster compassionate work environments and cultural education in the workplace.
- More employment programming in prison.

One major recommendation emerging from the research is more employment programming in prison and more funding in the community for enhanced services supporting people coming out of prison. Employment support in prison may support the avoidance of low or minimum wage work after prison. More funding in the community will allow for a wraparound

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care model which involves collaboration between programs to support in a multitude of life domains like housing, employment, and substance use, or other supports important to each individual being supported. Participants reinforced that working towards this systems theory-based wraparound care model is crucial for desistance from crime. To be specific, there should be funding for slow and supported transition from prison back into the community, so people are better prepared for leaving prison. The participants in this study needed time to adjust after prison, work on their mental health and confidence, and find a decent job and housing before taking on major life responsibilities. Additionally, a variety of healing and cultural supports should be available in service as a diversity services in may support more people in their recovery. More funding for housing and employment to support a slower transition back into the community should be available.

Increased funding for wraparound care and more strict policy on criminal record checks in employment applications would address the continued punishment criminalized people face after prison. The idea of employment as continued punishment after prison is rooted in Foucault's (1995) power and discipline lens and may be addressed by wraparound care. Lack of employment, housing, or other forms of punishment may be reduced when people are supported in multiple areas of their lives. Wraparound care may increase overall quality of life, reducing feelings of being punished after prison. Additionally, employment is key in care and desistance from crime, so increasing the amount of employment opportunities for criminalized people is crucial. This can be achieved with more strict policies around when criminal record checks can be requested. This will contribute to decreasing dependence on low or minimum wage employment.

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The next recommendation is for employment policy. Participants stated that criminal records were a major barrier to employment and, in many cases, participants felt record checks were unnecessary. It should not be the norm that employers can exclude criminalized people from the workplace. Employers should have the burden of proving why they need to exclude criminalized people from the workforce, rather than criminalized people needing to prove why they are worthy for the workforce. This recommendation is rooted in CDS. It encourages those who are part of the employed normative group to think about how and why they are excluding individuals from the ‘othered’ group, in this case criminalized people, from the workforce. Again, some employers may have good reason for exclusion. However, others may be rooted in stigma and could remove criminal record checks from application processes to give criminalized people a chance to succeed in the workforce. Ontario Human Rights at Work should take additional steps to ensure that criminalized people are not discriminated against in the workforce. One step could be eliminating the identification of pardoned offences from vulnerable or other criminal record checks. Educational work and communications strategies to help develop a larger slate of employers who do not ask for record checks or who hire people with criminal records are recommended.

There were also multiple recommendations for future research as follows:

- Increase the sample size to better understand a diversity of experiences in maintaining employment after prison.
- Include Black participants and participants of Colour in interviews on gaining and maintaining employment.

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- Include four separate groups of participants: people with lived experience in prison, peer support workers to people who have been in prison, service providers supporting criminalized people, and employers
- Research on collaboration between siloed services.
- Research on the influences of motherhood and parenting on maintaining employment after prison.

Future research should increase the number of participants interviewed to capture a broader range of experiences that are representative of the general population. For example, speaking with women who are above the average age range of the participants (38) is an important intersection to explore with respect to employment. Age groups experience the world differently just as genders and races do. It is important to hear from mature criminalized people so research can be generalized to their experiences in employment. It is also necessary to hear from Black people and People of Colour coming out of women's federal prison in the future. Unfortunately, I was not able to recruit Black people or People of Colour coming out of Canadian women's federal prison. It is important to consider racial intersectionalities to understand how people's employment experiences are impacted differently while being part of different marginalized communities. Additionally, research could explore the impact of employment and other services on desistance from crime for Indigenous women, Black Women, and Women of Colour, as this is a current gap in research.

To provide additional breadth and depth to the understanding of maintaining employment after prison, future research could include four separate groups of participants: people with lived experience in prison, peer support workers to people who have been in prison, service providers supporting criminalized people, and employers. Service providers have experience with systems

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and pathways to employment and wraparound care and could share their knowledge on how to improve that care. Community employers could be interviewed about what they need to either support hiring people with criminal records at their place of work or identify what needs to happen to remove the requirement for criminal record checks on applications all together. Removing the criminal record check would help alleviate judgement and exclusion of criminalized people.

Future research could also investigate collaboration between siloed services like housing and employment exploring such questions as whether or not resources are available for increased collaboration between silos to build a wraparound care model, or if it is possible to enrich services that already exist through collaboration. It would also be interesting to explore what education would be effective and digestible for employers and the general public to address stigma around criminalized and Indigenous people. One of the participant recommendations was to address myths and false perceptions of who these communities of people are. Research could develop education programs or modules and programs that people with lived experience in prison and employers think may be helpful to support people in the workplace.

**Chapter 6****Conclusion**

To conclude, exclusion from employment opportunities is a socially acceptable way to continually punish criminalized people after prison. This is because criminalized people are seen as the ‘other’ and deviant. This research found that the ability to maintain employment can be negatively impacted after prison. To increase employment opportunities and ability to maintain employment after prison, participant recommendations included addressing the stigma attached to criminalized people in the workplace and in broader society, as well as continuing to address anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada. Improved employment programming and funding should be available in prison and after prison and employers should consider excluding criminal record checks from hiring processes. Finally, a wraparound care model that includes a variety of healing and cultural methods should be implemented to support people leaving prison.



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## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

### Appendix A: Information Letter

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION REGARDING INTERVIEWS – ‘JUST GIVE US A CHANCE’: SUPPORTS AND CHALLENGES TO MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT AS EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN IN PRISON

Researchers: Amy Moore, MSW Candidate, Bree Akesson, PhD

#### INFORMATION

- Participants will be asked to take part in an individual virtual interview with the Primary Investigator via Microsoft Teams or over the telephone.
- The questions asked will center around participants’ employment history and the supports and challenges they experience in order to keep their job.
- The study will take about one hour and 30 minutes to complete.
- Data from approximately four to six research participants who have experience in the women’s criminal justice system will be collected for this study.
- With your permission, you will be audio-recorded for research purposes. The researcher will use themes from the interview in the final report. You have the right to refuse being audio recorded.
- Only Amy Moore and Bree Akesson will have access to these recordings and information will be kept confidential. You will be able to preview these tapes at request. The tapes will be transcribed by March, 31 2020. The tapes will be deleted following transcription.
- This study has been approved by the WLU Research Ethics Board (REB)

#### PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity you choose. You may participate in the study without being audio-recorder, in this case the researcher will write down your responses. You will be asked if your words can be quoted if they do not identify you, you may participate in the study without being quoted. If you withdraw from the study, you can request to have your data removed by contacting the primary researcher and asking for your data to be removed until March 31, 2020.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

The questions that will be asked in the interview are not addressing or specific to trauma. However, emotional or trauma response may arise while reflecting on or disclosing past experiences. Discussing your experiences may cause you to feel a sense of loss of privacy or regret of disclosure. Should you feel distressed during the interview, you can speak to the researcher about your feelings, and the interview can be stopped at any time without loss of compensation. You can choose not to answer a question. A list of publicly funded mental health resources for the area is attached to the consent form.

Participation in this study may also involve social risks such as a loss of privacy or social stigma associated with criminalization if there is a loss of confidentiality. Every possible measure will be taken to remove identifying information from the research material following the procedures outlined in the “Confidentiality” section of this consent form.

## BENEFITS

Participants may benefit from the participation in this research project by being able to express the challenges they face and supports they experience while maintaining a job for a long period of time. The participants insight will be used to enhance employment services for criminalized women. The research will contribute to the body of literature by filling a gap around how women are or are not able to maintain employment after leaving prison. Knowledge from this project will be used for projects to raise understanding of the challenges women face to employers and social service providers.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality/anonymity of your data will be ensured by assigning you a false name in the data and altering or deleting any identifying information from quotes used in the final report. The data will be stored in a locked office, on a password protected computer and on a password protected recording device, any paper data will be stored in a locked cabinet located at 115 Westwood Drive, Kitchener ON. You may participate in this study without being quoted in the final report.

## FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research might be published and presented in a thesis, course project report, book, journal article, conference presentation, class presentation. The results of this research may be made available through Open Access resources. An executive summary of the findings from this study will be available by September 1st, 2021. You can request the executive summary by e-mailing moor0430@mylaurier.ca. The researcher will reach out to you to check the accuracy of your quotes used in the final report by March 31, 2020.

## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

### WHO TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS

If you have any questions regarding the study or if you experience adverse side-effects due to the study, you may contact the principal investigator, Amy Moore at [moor0430@mylaurier.ca](mailto:moor0430@mylaurier.ca) or 519-716-3865

## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

**Appendix B: Permission to Contact Letter**

Hello! My name is Amy Moore. I am currently a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University working under the supervision of Bree Akesson, an Associate Professor of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am completing a research project titled: **‘just give us a chance’: supports and challenges to maintaining employment as experienced by people who have been in prison.** This project aims to increase social service providers and employers understanding of the barriers and supportive strategies women experience while maintaining employment after prison. The goal is to start an effort to change the barriers experienced and increase the useful supports identified by the research participants.

If you are interested in being involved in a virtual or telephone interview that will take up to one hour and 30 minutes, you can provide your information below and Amy Moore will contact you with further details.

Your information will be kept confidential and only used to contact you about this research project. This study has been approved by the WLU Research Ethics Board (REB)

If you grant permission for Amy Moore to contact you, please provide your preferred contact information below:

Name:

E-mail address:

Phone number:

**OR**

Contact Amy Moore at [moor0430@mylaurier.ca](mailto:moor0430@mylaurier.ca) or (519) 716-3865

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for considering working with me.

Sincerely,

Amy Moore  
MSW Candidate, Faculty of Social Work  
Wilfrid Laurier University

**Appendix C: Informed Consent****WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT  
STATEMENT**

‘Just give us a chance’: supports and challenges to maintaining employment as experienced by people who have been in prison

Principal Investigator: Amy Moore, MSW Candidate, Wilfrid Laurier University

Faculty supervisor: Bree Akesson, PhD, Associate Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to identify the supports and challenges to maintaining employment experienced by women, non-binary and transgender people who have been criminalized. This study will allow social service providers and employers to understand some of the needs of women, non-binary and transgender people coming out of prison in order to maintain their jobs. A goal of the study is to consult with the participants about actionable items to improve how long women, non-binary and transgender people can maintain their jobs after prison. The researcher is an MSW Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University working under the supervision of Bree Akesson, who is an Associate Professor of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University.

**Information**

Participants will be asked to take part in an individual virtual interview with the Primary Investigator via Microsoft Teams or over the telephone. The questions asked will center around participants’ employment history and the supports and challenges they experience in order to keep their job. The study will take up to one hour and 30 minutes to complete. Data from approximately two to eight research participants who have experience in the women’s criminal justice system will be collected for this study. As a part of this study, you will be audio-recorded for research purposes. The researcher will use themes from the interview in the final report. You have the right to refuse being audio recorded. Only Amy Moore and Bree Akesson will have access to these recordings and information will be kept confidential. You will be able to preview these tapes at request. The tapes/films will be transcribed by April 2021. The tapes will be deleted following transcription.

**Risks**

The questions that will be asked in the interview are not addressing or specific to trauma. However, emotional or trauma response may arise while reflecting on or disclosing past experiences. Discussing your experiences may cause you to feel a sense of loss of privacy or regret of disclosure. Should you feel distressed during the interview, you can speak to the researcher about your feelings, and the interview can be stopped at any time without loss of compensation. You can choose not to answer a question. A list of publicly funded mental health resources for the area is attached to the consent form.

Participation in this study may also involve social risks such as a loss of privacy or social stigma associated with criminalization if there is a loss of confidentiality. Every possible measure will be taken

## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

to remove identifying information from the research material following the procedures outlined in the “Confidentiality” section of this consent form.

You are free to discontinue the study at any time and/or choose not to respond to any question without loss of compensation.

### **Benefits**

Participants may benefit from the participation in this research project by being able to express the challenges they face and supports they experience while maintaining a job for a long period of time. The participants insight will be used to enhance employment services for criminalized women, non-binary and transgender people. The research will contribute to the body of literature by filling a gap around how women, non-binary and transgender people are or are not able to maintain employment after leaving prison. Knowledge from this project will be used for projects to raise understanding of the challenges women, non-binary and transgender people face to employers and social service providers.

### **Confidentiality**

In the transcription phase, you will be assigned a false name, all other directly identifying information such as address, telephone number or email will be removed from the data. Indirectly identifying information, such as workplace, date of birth, or unique personal characteristics, will be altered or deleted from the data. For example, locations will be replaced with [CITY], and workplaces will be replaced with [EMPLOYER].

The data and transcripts will be coded information. This means that the principal investigator will be able to re-identify participants, if necessary, from the transcribed interviews. A written list will be kept that links participants’ false names with their actual names. This is done so participant review of quotes can occur during writing of the final report. Participant review is done to ensure any of participants’ quotes used in the final report are accurate, used in the correct context, and reflect the ideas, opinions and feelings of the participant being quoted. You will be contacted by mail or email by the researcher to share the research by June 2021.

The electronic data will be stored in a locked office, on a password protected computer and on a password protected recording device. Any paper data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office located at 115 Westwood Drive, Kitchener ON. Only the Primary Investigator, Amy Moore, and her supervisor, Bree Akesson, will have access to the electronic data and paper data.

You may participate in this study without being quoted in the final report.

### **Compensation**

For participating in this study you will receive a \$20 gift card. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive this amount. Any compensation received related to the participation in this research study is taxable. It is the participant’s responsibility to report the amount received for income tax purposes and Wilfrid Laurier University will not issue a tax receipt for the amount received.

## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

### Contact

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you may contact the researcher, Amy Moore, at [moor0430@mylaurier.ca](mailto:moor0430@mylaurier.ca) or 519-716-3865

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board, which receives funding from the [Research Support Fund](#). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or [REBChair@wlu.ca](mailto:REBChair@wlu.ca).

### Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity you choose. You may participate in the study without being audio-recorded, in this case the researcher will write down your responses. You will be asked if your words can be quoted if they do not identify you, you may participate in the study without being quoted. If you withdraw from the study, you can request to have your data removed by contacting the primary researcher and asking for your data to be removed until April 30, 2021.

### Feedback and Publication

The results of this research might be published and presented in a thesis, course project report, book, journal article, conference presentation, class presentation. The results of this research may be made available through Open Access resources. An executive summary of the findings from this study will be available by September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. You can request the executive summary by e-mailing [moor0430@mylaurier.ca](mailto:moor0430@mylaurier.ca). The researcher will reach out to you to check the accuracy of your quotes used in the final report by March 31, 2020.

### Consent

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

It is advised that you print or save this consent form and/or record the researcher contact information in the case that you have any questions or concerns.

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I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in this study. (Selecting this option will open the questionnaire)

I have read and understand the above information. I do not want to participate in this study. (Selecting this option will return you to your browser)



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**Appendix D: Verbal Consent**

This interview will take place on Zoom with only the interviewer present.

- Yes  No Have you received and read the Informed Consent statement that was emailed/mailed to you?
- Yes  No Do you understand the potential risks involved in your participation?
- Yes  No Have you had your questions answered to your satisfaction?
- Yes  No Do you agree to participate in the study?
- Yes  No Do you agree to have this interview tape recorded?
- Yes  No Do you give permission for the researcher to use personal quotations from your interview, provided all identifying information is removed?
- Yes  No Do you give the researcher permission to contact you after the interview to check the context of the findings?
- Yes  No Do we have your permission to send you a \$20 gift card in the mail?

What is your preferred method of communication?

- Phone  email  regular mail  other

Name:

Email:

Mailing address:

Person obtaining consent:

Date:

## MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

**Appendix E: Interview Guide**

1. Demographic
  - a. Age range 18-15, 26-25, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 66-75
  - b. How do you identify? M,F,TM, TF, other, Prefer not to say
  - c. Race/ethnicity
  - d. Geography of past employment
  - e. Geography of incarceration
  - f. current geography
2. Can you give me a sense of your employment history?
3. What kind of employment supports did you receive after release?

PROBE: (health care, social services, employment, mental health)
4. Can you give me a sense of your background and incarceration?
5. What is or has been the biggest challenge to maintaining employment after prison?
6. Do you notice different supports/ challenges in gaining employment vs maintaining employment?
7. What can you tell me about the challenges/supports to maintaining employment experienced by the people you are currently working with?
8. What can we take from your experiences to share with other women with criminalized pasts, frontline workers, service providers, employers, policy makers etc.
9. What would you like to see come out of this project? (Action items)
10. Is there anything else you would like to add that I didn't ask, or that didn't come up in the interview?
11. Referral to other potential participants?

## Appendix F: Resource List Southwestern Ontario

### Here 24/7: 1-844-437-3247

Here 24/7 is your front door to the addictions, mental health, and crisis services provided by 11 agencies across Waterloo Wellington. All you need to do is reach out to us. We'll work together with you to understand what you need and work to get you connected. We do the intake, assessment, and referrals for most local government funded addictions and mental health services. If you need a service outside what Here 24/7 can offer, we'll do our best to link you directly. It's our job to be your guide, figure out your needs, and help you navigate the system. This leaves you free to focus on maintaining hope and pursuing recovery.

This information was received from: <https://here247.ca/>

### Carizon Family and Community Services

Carizon specializes in children's mental health, youth engagement and development, family violence services, individual and family counselling, parental support and education, credit counselling, workplace resilience, settlement support and community wellness. In partnership with Lutherwood, Carizon operates Front Door, your first stop when accessing child and youth mental health services.

400 Queen St. S.  
Kitchener, ON, N2G 1L2 Map  
519-743-6333

[www.carizon.ca](http://www.carizon.ca)  
[info@carizon.ca](mailto:info@carizon.ca)

Ages served: All ages  
Languages served: English  
Fees: Yes (A few of our programs have fees.  
Subsidies available.)  
Area Served: Waterloo Regional Municipality

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**KW Counselling Services (KWCS)**

A multi-service agency offering counselling supports to individuals, couples and families in Waterloo Region. In addition to our counselling work we offer a variety of parenting education workshops, leadership training for members of the multicultural community and outreach support for low-income families, newcomers to Canada, and the LGBTQ2+ community. We are proud to have been supporting children, youth and families in this community since 1950.

480 Charles Street, East  
Kitchener, ON, N2G 4K5  
519-884-0000 x222

www.kwcounselling.com  
info@kwcounselling.com

Ages served: All ages

Languages served: English, French, Spanish, German, Romanian, Portuguese

Fees: Yes (Fees are based on income level and will be determined at the time of the Intake interview. Those who live in the Waterloo Region may be eligible for subsidies.

KW Counselling Services is committed to ensuring that no one is turned away due to their inability to pay for service.)

To be seen: Clients/families may self refer

Area Served: Waterloo Regional Municipality

**Muslim Social Service Kitchener Waterloo (MSS)**

Cultural and faith-based counselling is offered to clients who want to find healing by returning to their faith and cultural roots. By talking to a qualified counsellor who understands both their religious values and cultural background.

480 Charles Street, East  
Kitchener, ON, N2G 4K5  
519-884-0000 x222

www.kwcounselling.com  
info@kwcounselling.com

Ages served: All ages

Languages served: English, Arabic, Gujrati, Kutchi, Urdu, Swahili

Fees: Yes (Sliding Scale Method Used)

To be seen: Clients/families may self refer

Area Served: Waterloo Regional Municipality

This information was received from:

<https://www.ementalhealth.ca/Waterloo-Regional-Municipality/Walk-In-Counselling/index.php?m=heading&ID=442>

**Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM)**

A list of publicly funded mental health resources for people who identify as Indigenous or Aboriginal, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis are available at this website:

<https://www.ementalhealth.ca/Ontario/Indigenous-First-Nations-Inuit-and-Metis-FNIM/index.php?m=heading&ID=124>

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**Appendix G: Resource list Halifax, Nova Scotia**

- If you are facing a mental health crisis, please call the Nova Scotia Mental Health Crisis Line - available any day, any time:

**(902) 429-8167**, or toll-free at: **1-888-429-8167**

- <https://www.ementalhealth.ca/Nova-Scotia/Indigenous-First-Nations-Inuit-and-Metis-FNIM/index.php?m=heading&ID=124>

Mental health resources for people who identify as Indigenous or Aboriginal, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

- <https://www.healthyminds.ca/>

“Healthy Minds Cooperative is a charitable organization offering province-wide, peer-based mental health support to the public. We offer this through navigation, wellness workshops, and peer-led mental health support groups (including one just for men)! All of our services come at no-cost to the public, and are referral and waitlist-free.”

- <https://www.mentalhealthns.ca/find-support>

Community Mental Health Clinics are staffed by a team of professionals who provide a range of services to help people manage their mental illness and improve their mental health. Services are available at no cost to adults:

Bayers Road Community Mental Health: 902.454.1400

Bedford/Sackville Community Mental Health: 902.865.3663

Cole Harbour/Eastern HRM Community Mental Health: 902.434.3263

Dartmouth Community Mental Health: 902.466.1830

West Hants Community Mental Health: 902.792.2042

Addiction Services : 1.866.340.6700

Mental Health Services: 1.888.429.8167

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**Appendix H: Messages to People Coming out of Women's Prison**

**Participant Five:** There's light at the end of the tunnel if you sit there, and you want it bad enough.

Anything is possible. You know? It's all what you desire. And you can make your destiny. And yes, you're gonna have those knock downs. But you're strong enough too that you can sit there and just wipe it off and keep pushing through. You know?

**Participant Five:** I think that's why a lot of times at the house they and they just sit there and they get me to

talk to a lot of the girls because it's like, I encourage them. Right? It's like, I'll sit there and say, don't take that crap. You know. It's put up your big girl panties and get back out there. You know? You've been beat down by the best of them when you're inside, so you know let's just push forward. You're woman, you're strong. Women are strong.

**Participant Five:** and when different things come at you I look at it as it's just, it's an experience you know.

Like I don't know, I mean you don't know what every day holds. You can sit here and you can figure you know, but you don't know. You know? So you just gotta with the flow.

**Participant Four:** in the work I do in going to these places I see people not getting out of the cycle. So

then I realize it is a rare thing I've done. It is rare that I've come out of incarceration, addiction, abuses and all of these things and I can be on a wellbeing path.

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Um... so, I just really wanna share, that there is hope. And I guess that um, you know I pray every day. I have uh, we'll say I put down my tobacco, right. So when I put down my tobacco. I ask every day for Creator to find, if anyone's looking, that my story will help someone. If it's something that you know can help them see some light, or you know. Whatever, because they have to find the power in themselves. This is the other thing I also know. Is that uh, you know someone has to find that light inside themselves, I cannot do it for them. I can guide, I can show but I cannot make someone take those steps.

Um, and so I just really wanna share to have courage, and to take a step. It's not all or nothing, big things that have helped me, it's not black and white, it's not all or nothing, be easy. If I'm, whatever I do today I'm starting from today, I'm not starting from yesterday I don't send myself back. I don't do all of those things.

Um, so really just, the talking to yourself. Um, and it is a cliché, but it's a cliché it's a real truth. But really there's so many I have met that never thought they could be more. That never thought they would do more, that didn't think there was people that would believe in them. There are those people out there and when you see them you work with them. You know, and do for yourself.

**Participant Four:** Don't complicate things, um it's so easy when you've lost everything to want everything right away, but that comes with responsibility. The more you wanna take, and the more you want back, um, more responsibility comes and that can be overwhelming. And I would find myself falling back into past ha, you know, past habits or patterns



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because, um, yeah I would get overwhelmed again. So uh, yeah, to be easy and to take everything as a process.

And my best thing, I love this one, you're allowed to change your mind. I change myself, based on new information I'm allowed to change my mind. So if I have a plan in place of what I'm gonna do, I'm allowed to change that plan. Any time I want, for any reason I want. It's up to me, it's my plan. And I've gotten stuck in those before and especially like those were my mainstream ideas you have to plan you have to work it.

I can adjust my plan, new information, right? So allow yourself new information and adjustments.

**Participant One:** I feel like with those that experienced incarceration is like, the number one thing is like,

keep trying. And always remember that you're equals with everybody you know what I mean and like. I feel like that, the biggest one of the struggles that I still deal with like, you know you do get severely institutionalized, even if you're in there... like, you can start to show signs of institutionalization within like a week of being in jail so. You have women who, I did two and a half straight my first round about so. I couldn't even sleep alone because when I first got out of prison like, no one was opening my door every hour to see if I was breathing so for me like, you know what I mean?

Even today like, I can't go to a, a food court and make a decision because there's so many there I'll get so overwhelmed I'll walk away. But people don't get that right? So I feel like, for me to say to women like be patient, but don't forget like you're still equals to everybody in the community. Noones above you, and I think that's one of the main

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things that we all struggle with when we first get out. Is like, 'oh my god they're looking at me like I'm a, like a convict' you know what I mean? Like that's how it feels. Even though they're not, I just feel like we've gotta keep pushing and like just keep pushing is the number one.

**Participant Three:** um, I would like to share that, the biggest strength for me was actually like addressing my

failure and talking about it. Rather than hiding it. Because the more that you hide things, the more you restrict yourself, and the more you're gonna tend to freak, you're gonna just lose it. Not lose it cuz I don't know what the politically correct term is, but... You restrict yourself from anything for too long, including being yourself, you will eventually lose yourself. And...but learning how to talk about your failures in an empowering way. And doing that through ownership and honesty and accountability is the number one thing.

And the number two thing is simply asking for help. Um, and then know what's required to get a job. And again, like you know, when it comes to like do they, do you have proper job attire. And you know, just even speaking properly, or like, answering tough questions. Right? You have to leave the denial mode, you really do. And as much as we know that crime is impacted by so many other factors and it's never crime itself, um, that's what sometimes people just need to know that you are aware. Like I didn't organize this drug smuggling operation, but I still have to admit that I ignored a lot of red flags in my life. And, that led to me making poor decisions, or like bad relationships.

Again, that's another thing bad relationships is what leaves women trapped, right? So, it's hard to know how to find someone, or who to find someone when, there's, that

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guidance isn't really there. And when you leave prison you're still very very vulnerable. And you've been alone. So it's, if anything it's even harder to decipher peoples real intentions. And it's easy to like latch on to the, the first thing but, for me leaving prison single was the most empowering thing. So try to build up your positive networks before like jumping into a relationship. I think was my thing. Um, and then also reaching out to different charity organizations for help. Because they're, the more and more these issues become more front line, um, there's a lot of work that's being done. Like I could name like you know 4 charities in Ontario and organizations that do really really fantastic work about helping people that have been in and out of the system. Elizabeth fry, you know you have um Rise Helps, you have Building Up Toronto which teaches women in the trades. You have Young Street Mission, you have STRIDE

**Liam:** I would just say that um... not to get discouraged, um it, it's tough getting out and adapting um, back into the community. I mean, that's what I'm grateful to have this role, because I know how important, to me it's really important because I know how much I struggle. And I just feel like if people had resources and supports most people getting out, they just say they feel alone like they just say they feel out of place. And so, I just know that if they had people like I've even gotten employment mentors for people, if they just had those resources and just had those options to call people that, you know they can manage to, and stay out. That's the main thing right it's even hard like let's, let alone finding a job it's just hard for people to stay out of prison. Like, that just becomes it's whole a lifestyle in it's own, right? So I would just want, you know, people to just not be discouraged. To just go and just be yourself and you know if you don't get one job like don't let that prevent you from, you know, applying to other jobs.

