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**Abstract**
As women's prison populations grow in Canada and around the world, more women are exposed to carceral practices which use disciplinary techniques to shape them into 'docile bodies.' Although intended to shape women's minds, these processes also have marked effects on female bodies. Using a Foucauldian perspective, we examine how women adapt to and resist the prison's disciplinary routines and its intrusions into their lives and bodies. Interviews with female ex-prisoners reveal how everyday degradations, health practices, self-injury and body modification shape their bodies and identities. These women's accounts are interpreted through the lens of the body to explore the long-term effects of the prison's rationalities and technologies on their bodies, minds and identities. We document how women negotiate these forces during their imprisonments, as well as after their releases when they are living in the community. Even though women are released from prison, they are not home free; the prison's technologies and rationalities permeate the prison walls and follow the women as they negotiate community life.

**Key Words** corporeality, identity, imprisonment, governmentality, women

# Home free? The (After)Effects of Imprisonment on Women's Bodies, Physical and Mental Health and Identity

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## Introduction

The number of women imprisoned in Canada and elsewhere in the world has grown significantly in recent years.[1,2,3] As such, increasing numbers of women are exposed to carceral practices which rely on disciplinary routines to regulate physical activities, while simultaneously affecting their thoughts and actions. These routines have real short- and long-term effects on women's bodies. Michel Foucault, and many governmentality theorists who have built on his work,[4-8] have examined in detail how the prison shapes the mind through the body. Whilst much existing research examining women's bodies in prison[1,6,7,9-15] as well as male identities in prison,[16-18] few researchers examine men's imprisoned bodies,[19] or the bodies of women who are returning to life in the community after prison. This article explores the effects of the prison on women's bodies as they negotiate life in prison and subsequently transition to living "on the outside." We examine female ex-prisoners' own accounts of imprisonment and (re)integration through the lens of the body to demonstrate that although women's bodies physically escape the prison, their released, (re)integrating bodies are not "free" of the institution and its effects.

## Canadian women's corrections

Researchers and activists have noted the dramatic increase in women's imprisonment in Canada.[1,3,20,21] In the past ten years, the number of Canadian women who are admitted to custody to serve sentences of two years or more has increased from 232, or 5.0% of all admissions, in 1997-1998 to 307 (6.1% of admissions) in 2007-2008. Women

now represent approximately 5% of the federal correctional population, including those serving time in prisons and under supervision in communities; whereas they represented approximately 3% of federal prison populations in the early and mid-1990s.[3,22-24] The growing institutional population is particularly troubling; in the past, women were more likely to be granted parole, and were usually granted parole earlier in their sentences than men because they are considered less likely to reoffend. Now, new "risk" and "need" assessment instruments classify "needy" women as more likely to re-offend, reducing their likelihood of being granted early release.[25] As parole grant rates decrease and incarceration rates increase, women serving time in prisons(495) now outnumber those serving sentences in communities(483), even though for many years, prisoners on conditional release outnumbered those in institutions.[3,26] These increases occurred despite the existence of *Creating Choices*, a federal correctional framework designed to respond to women's needs and accelerate community integration. When the research supporting *Creating Choices* was conducted in 1989, 203 women were doing time inside Canadian federal prisons.[22,23] Twenty years later, this number has increased by 144%.

*Creating Choices* provides a foundation for Correctional Service Canada's female prisoner strategy. The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW), the group that authored the report, included correctional authorities, researchers, and representatives of women's advocacy and aboriginal groups. Female prisoners also had significant input into the report. The Task Force aimed to transform in women's corrections: they wanted to re-form corrections; align correctional practices with feminist principles; acknowledge the challenges federally sentenced women face; and empower women to create lasting, positive change in their lives.[23] The report included five key principles for reform, including: empowerment; meaningful and responsible choices; respect and dignity; supportive environment[s]; and shared responsibility.[23] While its goals and principles are laudable, sadly, *Creating Choices* did not produce the radical changes it promised.[6,7,11,20,27] New regional prisons were built across the country, but many other challenges identified in the original document remain: women are still imprisoned far from their homes and support networks; risk assessment instruments remain flawed; and the services available to women are still paltry compared to those available for men.[1,7,28,29] Regardless of the ideologies underpinning correctional facilities and processes, they have marked effects on women's bodies.

## Imprisoned bodies: a theoretical lens

Michel Foucault describes punishments as manifestations of the state's power over individuals.[30] Until the eighteenth century, corporal punishment prevailed. Sentences were meted out publicly in the town square to remind the king's subjects of his power; these were essentially public spectacles of torture.[30] Eventually, public torture gave way to hidden punishments, carried out behind prison walls. As physical beatings disappeared, punishment instead involved depriving individuals of their freedom, and "the body as the major target of penal repression disappeared."[30 p8]

The prison emerged, in the place of whips and scaffolds, as a new tool of punishment. It sought to isolate individuals and observe their behaviour – ultimately making them "knowable" and transforming them into "docile bodies" that could be easily governed.[30] Instead of maiming or killing prisoners, their thoughts and actions were controlled, shaped and molded within the prison, creating compliant and capable workers for labour and military service. These institutions would then continue the processes begun in prisons, shaping docile bodies into whatever form was convenient and practical for their requirements (e.g., soldiers, labourers, servants, etc.). This process is replicated by social institutions, as well as by individuals who internalize these processes, using "technologies of the self"[31 p18] – through which they use internalized discipline to work upon and "improve" themselves – to engage in "body projects."[32] While the prison targets prisoners' *minds* to create docility, this requires the confinement and training of their *bodies*. Although no longer the ultimate target of punishment, the body is no less implicated in punishment in prisons than in the town square. The physical location of punishment has changed, as well as its ultimate goal, but punishments are still situated on the body, and continue to have real and lasting effects on prisoners' corporeality.

As forms of punishment changed, so too did individual responses to it. The condemned had no recourse in the face of early physical punishments; one could run away, only to face a harsher punishment when eventually caught. When the king imposed the death penalty, little could be done to challenge this power. The rise of the prison, however, resulted in prisoners being surrounded by disciplinary structures and technologies that act on the body to produce changes on the mind.[30] As the system relies on coercion and compliance, prisoners can challenge the power held over them. The prison is a total institution, regulating and controlling all aspects of prisoners' lives; relations of power are everywhere. As Foucault notes, these relationships open avenues for prisoners to

challenge their confinement:

> …at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight, every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle… [33 p794]

He notes that resistance works as a "…chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used."[33 p780] As such, prisoners' resistance highlights institutional power and unfair practices. Resistance challenges dominant structures, limiting prisoners' docility and allowing them to reverse power relations.[9,33] Foucault notes that a "plurality of resistances" exist within power relations, opening spaces for individual agency, even within structures like prisons.[34 p96]

Resistance can take many forms. Often, as we will see, imprisoned women transform their bodies from sites of punishment into sites of resistance.[9] Women may express resistance through their assumed gender roles, feminist identity, sexuality, religion or belief system, actions, thoughts and appearances.[1,6,13,35,36]

## A note on methodology

The women's voices presented here emerged from research conducted for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council -funded research project. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa. Women from the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec who had served prison sentences of seven years or more and who had been released for five or more years were interviewed about their experiences. Twenty women participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews between May and December, 2004. Each woman gave informed consent to participate in the project. The sample included three groups of participants: ten female ex-prisoners who had served sentences of between seven and fifteen years in Canadian federal prisons, five of whom also participated in follow-up interviews (n=10); nine professionals working with ex-prisoners (n=9); and one ex-prisoner's daughter (n=1).

This study builds on earlier research conducted by Sylvie Frigon on women's experiences of their bodies and identities in prison.[11] While the earlier study examined women's bodies in prison, this study asked ex-prisoners to reflect upon their experiences *before*, *during* and *after* prison, and how these shape their identities and bodies; their views of the criminal justice system; as well as their lives and relationships with others after prison. The participants who work with ex-prisoners reflected on their roles as advocates working with and for women in conflict with the law, as well as on how prison influences their "clients'" identities. The ex-prisoner's daughter discussed her relationship with her mother before, during, and after incarceration, as well as how her mother's imprisonment shaped, in turn, her own life and identity.

All of the interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and eventually coded using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Key patterns and themes in the women's narratives emerged through four independent rounds of coding. The resulting themes were temporally divided into women's experiences before, during and after imprisonment. This article explores various themes through the lens of the body, highlighting advocates' experiences with their clients and ex-prisoners' reflections on how prison has and continues to affect their bodies and identities.

## Women's bodies in prison

Michel Foucault traced the history of punishment, noting variations in its visibility, character and goals.[30] What began as a public spectacle of brutality, degradation and atrocity slowly transformed into a concealed, organized and calculated re-formation of subjects' actions and thoughts. In contemporary times, punishment must "…be essentially *corrective* … it is not so much the vengeance of an outraged law as its repetition, its reduplicated insistence."[30 p179] Thus, punishment now 'corrects' 'delinquents,' creating docile bodies. While the methods and goals have changed over time, punishment remains a manifestation of the state's power inflicted on the deviant's body. Prisons ultimately attempt to reform the *mind*, but to do so, routines are imposed on the *body*.

When a woman is imprisoned, she experiences many intrusions on her body. The court process, which can be disorienting and confusing in itself, especially for those relatively new to the criminal justice system, gives way to the prison.[37] Going to prison involves submitting to "degradation ceremonies," institutional routines including strip searches, body cavity searches and disinfecting showers, which degrade women and strip them of their identities.[1,14,15,38] After these degradations, women must adjust to having their bodies constantly scrutinized.

The body is the means through which the prison can act on the prisoner's mind. As such, bodies take on new significance as the site of correctional interventions.[39] The micro-

geography of the body is segmented, scrutinized and acted upon by the correctional system. It is observed, analyzed, compared against the ideal and "corrected."[6,30] Correctional interventions therefore must negotiate the terrain of the body, shaping and molding it into a more docile and compliant form. In response to these (re)formation attempts, the prisoner's resistance turns the body into a contested space, politicizing both the prisoner's body and actions. This microspace is contained within a larger space: the prison, which itself is also a space of correctional intervention.

Prisons are sites of constant surveillance. The environment is designed to make every space and place, and thereby all the objects in the space, knowable.[30] Prison surveillance is organized vertically – prison authorities monitor women's movements and actions via surveillance cameras and direct observation; and laterally, as prisoners monitor each other. Foucault describes this as panoptic surveillance: "It is a segmented, immobile, frozen space. Each individual is fixed in his place. … Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere."[30 p195] In addition to the vertical/lateral bifurcation of surveillance, surveillance and security are also divided into *static* and *dynamic* security categories.[40-42] Static security includes cameras, restraint equipment, building designs and other environmental aspects promoting security. In contrast, dynamic security involves interactions between guards and prisoners, as well as intelligence gathering activities, including searches.

Prisoners are not only constantly watched, but are also subjected to regular searches: non-intrusive, frisk, and strip searches are all routine. Strip searches pose significant problems for women. Besides the inherent humiliation and dehumanization, strip searches are particularly painful for women with histories of abuse.[14,28] These searches are conducted whenever women may have possibly had access to contraband (e.g., after visiting family, during transfers or temporary absences, after leaving a work area, etc.), are entering or leaving segregation, or whenever staff reasonably suspect they may be carrying contraband – in short, on a regular basis.[43,44] Cheryl, an ex-prisoner, described the regular degradations she experienced during strip searches: "It's always degrading because you gotta go through … these searches…. I mean, anyway you looked at it or anyway you cut it it was just degrading because of how they treated you. Like you weren't even a human being." Searches of prisoners' cells can similarly lead to degradation and affect a woman's sense of autonomy. Prisoners have few belongings, making violations of their personal space and effects more painful than it otherwise might be. Martha described room searches, noting the degradation of the process:

> They searched your belongings, but only once a month your laundry. Say you had 10 pants, 4 skirts, 5 blouses and 4 t-shirts, they make a list once a month. They enter your room, make you go out and they search while you are working, while you're not there. Two come in with their little gloves, check absolutely everything, under the mattress, once a month. In one way, you are supposed to be independent, to be this, to be that, I would really like to think that there is fraud, that there is contraband. (authors' translation)

The prisoner culture also enforces conformity. Prisoners engage in lateral surveillance, watching one another to determine who does not fit in, and subsequently subjecting them to ridicule and ostracism. Brit describes how her feminist identity, including symbolic yet mundane activities, such as shaving her legs, changed while she was in prison.

> Let's say you don't shave your legs … you're like a hard core feminist, you probably would if you're in prison after a while, because you would be sort of ridiculed a lot, for that sort of thing, because it would be considered bizarre, or weird, and they would think this woman is just a freak! … if you are different in a way that doesn't coincide with the prison subculture, because you can't … escape the social norms of prison life. So it's easier after several years of sort of being ridiculed or let's say shunned or ostracized, to go "Fuck it, I don't care about it, I'm going to shave my legs…" You may change your behaviour, in order to adapt and cope.

Prisonization and conformity are enforced on two levels: vertically, through surveillance, searches and routines; and laterally, through social pressure and ostracism. Constant surveillance, a technology of the prison, leads to a technology of the self. Individuals must regularly submit to degradation, seemingly useless searches and peer pressure to survive in the institution; these processes become internalized, resulting in self-monitoring and self-discipline. Under this constant surveillance, how a woman looks, moves her body and responds to her environment become key parts of her daily life in prison.

The harsh conditions of imprisonment, including poor nutrition, insufficient exercise, high rates of minor and major illnesses (e.g., colds and flu, skin infections, AIDS, hepatitis, etc.), and the stress associated with imprisonment accelerate the aging process. As a result, prisoners often appear to be ten or fifteen years older than their chronological age.[37,45,46] Prisoners not only look older, they also have high rates of chronic health problems that normally manifest in older age, including arthritis, asthma, diabetes, emphysema, high blood pressure and hypertension.[45-47] Prison health care is often considered to be substandard; significant delays in seeing

physicians, obtaining diagnostic tests and receiving treatment are frequently reported. The prison environment compounds the tensions many women feel in relation to medicine, a discipline that, like the prison, has disproportionate power and influence over individuals.[48,49] Indeed, medical services within correctional facilities blur the boundaries between health care and punishment.[48] Cheryl, aged 54, describes herself as prematurely aging, stating "I feel like I'm 60." She discussed some of her health problems:

> My health was turning bad inside. And I knew different things were happening to me. It's like I had my gallstones like for almost two years. And I'm talking about excruciating pain. And I'm telling these people and I'm telling these people. Well, it wasn't 'til I got out on day parole that I'm rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. And then when I was in jail they told me that I had cataracts on my eyes. But it was no big deal. I would be fine. You know… once I was out they could be taken care of pretty easy and that. Well I wasn't even out a year and I had two major surgeries on my eyes. I was going blind in one eye. So… there's a lot of things lacking, eh?

Prisoners, especially older female prisoners, also have significantly higher rates of mental illness than the general population.[3,45,47,50] Kelly notes how her mental health deteriorated in prison, manifesting itself through an eating disorder that took a drastic toll on her body, "… I was very sick through that…I mean, when I went into the system, I weighed 190, and I had an eating disorder before, and I went back to that eating disorder, I went down from 190 in six months, not even six months, to 91 pounds." Healthcare treatment and access are the most common subjects of grievances filed by prisoners in Canada's federal prison system, accounting for 13.3% of all official complaints.[3,51]

While the prison environment is often considered to be detrimental to an individual's physical and mental health, it can provide a refuge for women who have been homeless, addicted to drugs or victimized. Prison provides a warm place to sleep and access to regular meals, medical services and dental care, all of which women might not have otherwise. The prison also protects women from the physical violence of families, partners, pimps and other abusers who may harm them on the outside.[15,52] Suzie recounts the pain of her life before prison:

> My mom left when I was 6, then my step-mother arrived when I was 9. Between 9 and 14 there was a lot of physical abuse, between 14 and 16 I defended myself, I was rebelling, I started to smoke pot, I was exposed to all kinds of drugs, foster families. (authors' translation)

For Suzie, prison represented stability after years of physical and mental anguish. Although prison is often seen as a monotonous, infantilizing environment for punishing and reshaping prisoners, given some women's difficult lives before imprisonment, this may still be an improvement.

The prison, nonetheless, manifests the state's power to punish; it is a total institution that controls all aspects of everyday life. Foucault indicates that "…the prison must be an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus: it must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual…."[30 p235] Further, the prison "…gives almost total power over the prisoners; it has its internal mechanisms of repression and punishment: a despotic discipline."[30 p236] As such, it removes individuals' autonomy, substituting instead institutional routines, protocols and decision-making. Daily minutiae, including bodily functions and attending to the necessities of life, are removed from individual control and become part of the power structure, resulting in conditions such as chronic constipation and improperly managed diabetes.[11] This opens more avenues for the state to control women's bodies. April recounts how the prison rules and routines led to everyday degradations throughout her sentence. Recalling one incident, she stated:

> I happened to be on my period at the time. You have to knock on the thing and say 'Could I have a tampon please?' And these men give it to you and it was just like so degrading." April also explained that the food served highlighted her lack of autonomy, "And not having choices! Not being able to think for yourself … even down to the littlest thing. You know, some nights you feel like a hamburger and you go down and it's fish. It's like… pfft. It bothers ya.

Food is particularly significant for women; they traditionally have responsibility for planning and cooking meals, making the lack of choice particularly painful.[36] While Canada's regional federal women's facilities include kitchens in the living units which allow the women to plan and cook their meals, women in segregation, as well as women imprisoned in provincial prisons and in other countries do not have this opportunity.[40] By disrupting individual agency, the prison can assert control and absorb women into institutional routines. While prisons wield power over the prisoner, this power is not absolute. As with any set of power relations, power is accompanied by freedom, and therefore resistance.[53] Prisoners may resist or subvert the prison's institutionalizing forces, often using their bodies as sites of resistance. Foucault states,

> Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can truly be claimed that one side has 'total power' over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing [her]self, of leaping out of the window, or of killing the other person. This means

> that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance … there would be no power relations at all.[53 p.292]

Women may act out and resist the institution when its procedures and routines degrade them. Resistance can take many forms, including refusals to eat or bathe. Famous examples of resistance include Irish Republican Army prisoners' 1981 "dirty protest" where prisoners smeared their cell walls with their feces and, in the case of female prisoners, with menstrual blood. Canadian prisoners started, and continue to participate in, Prison Justice Day (August 10th), on which hunger strikes and work refusals are common.[35,54-56] Study participants recounted their own resistance strategies. Suzie describes how she resisted having to give her sanitary napkins to the guards:

> There was no compassion with what I was going through emotionally. They wanted to have the sanitary napkins that I had on, because they knew, they knew from the doctor's papers that I had points, that I could not bring in drugs, but they wanted to know, wanted to see my sanitary napkins…. To take the time to come attack me with it, I flipped. I got up, I started to toss all that was in there, enraged, turned all the chairs over. I demanded to go to the hole, I said "Take me to the hole." They took me, but not by force, It was me who walked straight there, the worst was that I was dripping all over my thighs, because they took the sanitary napkin. (authors' translation)

Although Suzie was punished, she was able to express her rage and the degradation of having to prove she was actually menstruating. The arbitrary, degrading and punitive aspects of imprisonment lead women to question the state's power to punish them. These challenges may manifest in women's actions, thoughts or appearances.

Marking one's body represents another conduit for women to resist the prison. Women use their appearances to reassert their identities; by engaging in "body projects" or transformations, women can change themselves and express their identities.[32,57] Tattooing and piercing, clothing, makeup, and self-harm can all provide women with a method for maintaining an identity behind bars. These behaviours can have costs, however; they can affect prisoners' health or lead to institutional charges or punishments. Tattoos are often used to document one's emotions and resist institutionally-imposed feminine stereotypes. Suzie recalls how tattooing helped her to manage her anger:

> I started doing tattoos; I have tattoos all over my body. I was doing tattoos; I would get paid with cigarettes. … my aggressiveness dropped a lot. (authors' translation)

While this behaviour can provide a space for resistance and an outlet for women's anger and emotions, it is potentially dangerous and harmful: tattooing in prison exposes women to infectious diseases (e.g., HIV, Hepatitis C) through unsanitary tattoo equipment.[58,59] Other manifestations of resistance pose different dangers, including the risk of accidental suicide. Self-injury, especially cutting and slashing, is very common among female prisoners. For prisoners, it represents a way to express pain, release frustration, and assert control.[10,11,60] The prisoner can decide when to cut, where to cut and how far to go. Sonya, who works with female prisoners, discussed her feelings about self-injury and why women cut themselves:

> I think that there are more healthy ways of releasing that resistance or expressing it and that's the part we work on, right? And I think too if you are confined like animals there are just certain ways that you adapt as a means of survival and a means of interacting. And I think too it's self-preservation.

Cheryl remembers relying on cutting and slashing after having extreme difficulty coping at the beginning of her sentence. Once she adjusted to the prison, she attempted to help other prisoners who were self-harming and committing suicide. While providing help, she had to bear witness to others' self-injury and pain.

> I was slashing a lot. Yeah. And then the last… time that I was peer support there was like seven att… two deaths and five attempted hangings… or was it three? And [the warden] … would always call on me to do this, that, this, that. I mean, I was sleeping on the floor outside of people's cells just talking to them all night trying to keep them alive, eh?

While cutting and slashing are common forms of self-injury, women can mark their bodies and show resistance in other ways. Bodily changes can also result from other health conditions. Anorexia and bulimia are more common in female prisoners than in the general population. Controlling one's intake (or lack thereof) of food represents a way to gain control.[36] Kelly describes how she used her eating disorder to cope and resist within prison, and how she was punished for this behaviour:

> I would eat 3 spoonfuls of peanut butter a day, and black coffee and water, that was it. And it was like, it's not hard because you do it for a while and then that's the control, and you're full and everything. And so then they put me in seg, and so I said okay I'd eat. So then my other way that I originally did it was throwing up, I didn't have to stick my finger down my throat, it just…So I'd eat and then come back to the wing … and so I wasn't gaining weight.

Kelly's resistance provides some relief from the institution, but has negative consequences for her health. This resis-

tance does not balance the extreme inequality between the all-powerful, total institution and the relatively powerless prisoner; it does, however, create a space for prisoners to challenge or subvert the power confronting them. It may also make imprisonment more bearable for the prisoners, increasing their chances of surviving the ordeal.

Prisons use technologies of routinized discipline to shape prisoners' actions. Although prisoners may resist these forces, their long-term exposure to the prison leaves many visible and invisible scars. As prisoners complete their sentences and return to their communities, the markers of the prison's disciplinary rationalities and technologies of control, as well as the prisoners' own resistance, remain etched on their bodies and minds, shaping their relations with society, and posing challenges to their lives on the outside.

## The ex-prisoner's body

> Where do you start? It's like…we've done a job on ya! And you know, good luck, here's some bus tickets and a little booklet on community resources, and go make yourself a cute little life. (Cindy)

Cindy, who works with ex-prisoners, recounts the dislocation women feel after leaving prison. After prison, ex-prisoners face many immediate challenges: they must find somewhere to live, medical care, a source of income, obtain identification, and develop a support network, among other things.[29,61,62] Although women are no longer surrounded by bars and walls, their minds are not so easily freed from captivity. Foucault[30] notes how the prison aims to produce docile bodies: bodies with internalized discipline, that comply with directions and orders, and that will be suitable for integration into the broader society. These behaviours are encouraged through institutional programming and routines aimed at re-shaping women's actions and thoughts; compliance is enforced through punishment.[6] While these forces are less prevalent in the community, they imprint themselves on women's bodies, adding additional hardships to the (re)integration process. The bars may be gone, but women's bodies still bear markers of imprisonment.

Foucault discusses how the prison can "normalize" individuals and enforce conformity.[30] Social forces in the outside world also serve a similar function. Gender roles and behavioural norms create expectations about how women will act and look. Erving Goffman notes that nonconforming individuals – those whose presence breaks or offends social rules – are considered to have a "stigma."[63] Ex-prisoners may have stigmas that are easily visible, or their stigmas may be latent, but still present in their thoughts and actions. Martha notes that the tattoos she got in prison permanently mark her body as "dangerous" to others.

> When I got out for the first time, I was wearing a tank top, I have some tattoos. I saw that certain women who saw me on the subway were clutching their handbags. That screwed me up emotionally; today, I can say that I no longer wear tank tops on the subway. …I had to change because I didn't want to be seen like that. (authors' translation)

Suzie recounted similar problems with her tattoos:

> Because of my tattoos, mothers were holding onto their children on the subway or things like that. I had thought it was all in my head, because anyone who saw me, I had a smile on my face and gentle eyes, everyone smiled at me. (authors' translation)

Being perceived as a dangerous person deeply affected Suzie. In contrast, Cheryl recognized that she is seen differently because of her tattoos but resists strangers' intruding stares. Instead of changing her behaviour or attempting to hide her tattoos, she claims her space in the community, asserting that she belongs.[39] She challenges others' negative interpretations of her body project and the people who look at her differently:

> They're looking at you and you think "Oh god. They can… they're saying inmate." Right? And then you get confused in the middle of that thought, "No. They're looking at you 'cause of your tattoos." And then you combine the two and it's like "Holy shit." Yeah. Now, I'll tell you the truth though. Now I just get pissed off at people, eh? I do. I ask them "What the fuck are you lookin' at?" I do. I don't walk around staring at people…

Body alterations such as tattoos and scars are common in prison, and may garner a woman respect or recognition. On the outside, tattoos are becoming much more popular among women, but they are often highly feminized, conforming to female body and gender ideals.[57,64] Prison tattoos, however, take on a different significance outside of prison, permanently branding women as masculine, primitive and "damned."[65 p4] Cheryl asserts her presence in public space, refusing to show shame or embarrassment and making others question their assumptions of her. Her bravado and continued resistance to social norms reaffirms her body as a contested, politicized space and her image of herself as a "fighter" in prison. Her reactions in private life on the outside, however, show that her identity is positional and shaped by her surroundings.[32]

In contrast to Cheryl's strongly asserted presence in public space, in private settings she and other ex-prisoners attempt to avoid public scrutiny and "pass" as normal. Goffman[63] notes that when a stigma is not easily visible, the bearer can pass herself off as normal, but may still be found out.

> When I go to [a friend's] house, out of respect for her, I try to always remember to have a long-sleeved shirt on. Because her landlord's straight, her neighbours are straight, they don't know about people with tattoos. What are they going to think? "Oh my god, look at that *** all those tattoos" and the ring in her nose. I mean, I know how people think, eh?

Here, Cheryl wishes to "pass" for someone who has lived a different life so as not to embarrass her friend. She fears judgment and negative treatment because of her marked body. Similarly, to avoid the stigmatization of being an ex-prisoner, Kelly changed her appearance after leaving prison. Her reflections, however, still show how the institution and cultural norms have shaped her way of thinking:

> When I first got out, there was things that I changed about myself, like my appearance, like different coloured hair, and I still was worried about my weight, but I still worked on being who I wanted to be, I've still almost reached that goal, but just being who I always wanted to be. Because as a kid, I always had this thing as to be, you know, be the good little girl, and do what I'm told, and meet someone, and have this nice place and have a family and do things together as a family, and I never had that.

Kelly's narrative shows how she is mindful of the stigma of prison, but also how she remains influenced by the notions of femininity imposed by the prison and society as a whole.[9] Her transformation represents a technology of the self, used to present her body as "normal" and acceptable. Both Cheryl and Kelly show how women's identities are positional, shifting depending on the social setting and others' reactions.

After prison, many ex-prisoners seek to re-develop relationships with family and friends, looking to create or re-build lives that have been interrupted by their imprisonment.[29,52,61] While most of the women noted having a few close friendships or relationships with family members, few indicated that romantic relationships were important to them. This may be related to the women's past histories of abusive or troubled relationships, or to an unwillingness to share their bodies with others. Kelly indicated that prison changed how she opens herself to others. She now limits others' contacts with her body, both by avoiding romantic relationships and by restricting everyday physical contact. She notes, "… it took a long, long time to shake someone's hand." Kelly's discusses her decision to avoid intimacy and personal relationships. While indicating that she would still consider an intimate relationship, her allusions to past hurts show that she no longer trusts human companions with her body:

> …I don't want…I'm sixty years old and I'm not saying there isn't somebody out there, but I enjoy doing things sometimes by myself, or with other people. Like I'm an animal person, I'm a nature person, and outside…and so far no one's ever liked the things that I like. And when I was a child and even growing up through both relationships, I had cats and they were my friends, they never hurt me, I cared for them, and I'm still that way.

April has also avoided dating after breaking off a series of relationships that included two marriages. April initially sought out relationships because she was afraid of being alone when she first left prison. Retrospectively, she describes her feelings:

> I felt like at first if I didn't have someone in my life I'm not going to make it. I'm not going to be able to do it. I'm not going to be able to, you know, live on my own, pay all my bills. I need someone. I don't feel like that anymore. But you do at first. You think you're not going to be able to do this.

In contrast, April now describes being single as a way of asserting her independence and autonomy:

> Well, I feel like I can make it on my own. I don't feel like I have to depend on anyone, which is a good thing for me. I really feel like I can make it on my own. I don't need anyone. You know? Not to see that I'm going to have plans on being alone the rest of my life. I don't. You know. But I'll make sure it's a good relationship too before I get into anything.

These ex-prisoners' lack of romantic relationships may reflect a desire to avoid intimacy and protect their bodies and selves from possible abuse or pain, in contrast with men, who often maintain relationships during imprisonment or create new relationships shortly after release.[66] Living without romantic relationships, however, is also a place for resistance: women find that they are capable of living autonomously and do not require a partner despite social scripts to the contrary.

While most of the women were not making time for romance after prison, they were attending to their bodies. As noted, prisoners' health is often poorer than that of the general public.[15] After release, many ex-prisoners look to repair some of the neglect that their bodies have experienced in prison.[67] Cheryl indicated that she has endured multiple surgeries to correct many years' worth of medical problems:

> I had medical concerns inside but they want to give you an anti-depressant for everything, eh? They don't want to look at the real issues. Since I've been out, I've had like 13 surgeries.

Fortunately for Cheryl, she was able to access medical care quickly on the outside. Not all women are so fortunate; many endure withdrawal from medications and continue to suffer because they lack access to proper medical care. Mary, a worker, describes the difficult situation women are placed in

when their health needs are not properly attended to in their release plans:

> Let's say they have umpteen dozen different medications while they're in custody. They're now being released. They might give them a day or two of medication. Depending on which city you're going to, huge waiting list to get a family doctor. …let's face it, if you're taking somebody's benzodiazepines or any of those kind of medications that are mood-altering and all of a sudden you're detoxing 'em 'cause you don't have a doctor. I mean, what are you going to go to? You're gonna go to something to try and make you feel better.

When women lack the health services they need, their releases are further complicated, and may be doomed to failure.[29,61,62]

Being isolated inside the prison changes how women adapt and react in the outside world. The stress of attempting to integrate into the community, coupled with the urgent needs one must meet after release may lead to illnesses. Kelly experienced physical pains during reintegration, stemming from a severe case of pneumonia:

> I ended up getting pneumonia I think the first year I was out because of all the running around you do do that you're not used to doing I think. … So I had that experience… yeah, pneumonia. Coughed and I had every muscle in my back. I couldn't move for weeks. I had to go to the chiropractor every day and it was all I could do to sit in the car and go to the chiropractor. It was killing me. I just think that… I lost a lot of weight. A lot of weight. I went way down. I looked like a toothpick and I couldn't put it back on for quite a while. I just started to this year.

For Kelly, getting out brought a new set of health challenges which compounded her existing medical conditions. The stress of integration combined with a severe illness made the reintegration process both *physically* and *emotionally* painful, echoing the pain of her time in prison.

After prison, women must renegotiate places in the community with the stigmas of imprisonment imprinted on their bodies. These stigmas – be they tattoos, scars, illnesses, or behaviours – mark women as different and challenge their abilities to integrate. Whether they choose to hide their bodies or display them to others; seek out partners or seclude themselves; or engage in self-discipline or self-care, women must insert themselves into the social world and find a way to survive. While these women have all succeeded at staying "out", their bodies and minds still bear the markers of being "in."

## Conclusion

Although the women interviewed may have "escaped" the prison, it has indelibly etched itself on both their bodies and minds. Female ex-prisoners' bodies have been visibly and invisibly marked: they look and feel many years older; their physical and mental health may have deteriorated; their skin bears tattoos and scars from their body projects and resistance; they engage in self-monitoring and self-censoring; they are no longer accustomed to or integrated with life on the outside; and they lack friends and companions. These ex-prisoners' accounts of their experiences show that the prison and its rationalities and technologies continue to affect their everyday lives. In prison, the women developed resistance strategies to counteract the homogenizing and infantilizing forces that surrounded them. These strategies change how women relate to their bodies, turning them into politicized sites of struggle and resistance as well as canvases on which to display their pain and anger. While these resistance strategies helped the women cope within the prison, they are not well suited to negotiating life on the outside. As women leave prison, the markers of their survival isolate them as different, dangerous and damaged.

All of the women interviewed have left the prison, but they are far from "home free." Everyday reminders of the prison remain chained to their bodies, which they are unable to fully reclaim as their own. Their prisoner identities have transformed and shifted as the women have become ex-prisoners; remnants of these identities are now permanent parts of their lives, just as the prison rationalities have embedded themselves in the women's thoughts. As Kelly summarizes:

> "It never leaves your mind either. I'm noticing that… never leaves your mind. It just goes on and on and on and on and on."

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