

“DOIN’ WHATEVER I HAD TO DO TO SURVIVE”:
A STUDY OF RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND TRANSFORMATION
IN THE LIVES OF INCARCERATED WOMEN

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The number of women who are incarcerated has increased significantly in the past few decades. Originally designed to manage male offenders, jails and prisons are ill-equipped to address the unique needs of women inmates whose paths to incarceration often include histories of trauma, abuse, and addiction. This qualitative study investigated the lives of 13 women who while incarcerated at Dallas County Jail, participated in an educational program, Resolana. The purpose of this study was to understand the women's lives prior to incarceration, as well as the impact of the program and changes they experienced, if any, as a result of what they were learning. Data were collected using semi-structured, life history interviews, and by engaging in field observations as a volunteer for each class for a period of one week.

An in-depth analysis through a critical lens, using a holistic-content narrative analysis method, was done with one participant's life history. The findings are presented as an ethnodrama illuminating the cultural, social, personal, and legal systems of oppression that she survived and that contributed to her path to incarceration.

Analyzed through a lens of agency and resistance, the findings that emerged from an analysis of all the participant's life histories reveal that the women's criminalized actions were often survival responses. The women employed various strategies, both legal and illegal, in response to people or situations involving control, power or domination over their lives.

An analysis of the women's experiences with Resolana through a transformative learning theoretical framework indicates that the women experience transformation in various ways and to varying degrees. The learning environment served as a container in which transformative learning could be cultivated through opportunities for interpersonal and intrapersonal engagement.

The results of this study reveal the need for more and targeted advocacy and education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women. The results also indicate that the process and content of Resolana's programming had a transformative impact on participants, and for some, the transformation was enduring. Finally, the results challenge definitions of criminal behavior in the context interlocking systems of oppression, and encourage thinking about alternatives to incarceration.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the women participants of Resolana who courageously shared their lives with me. Their stories have much to teach us about survival and healing in an unjust world. May they continue to resist the deeply rooted, violent systems of oppression that are so ingrained in our everyday lives, that we too often either fail to see them, or fail to oppose them. May they also continue to find love, hope, and support.

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I am indebted to Bette Buschow, founder and former executive director of Resolana, who made this research possible. I remain inspired by her vision, compassion, and tenacity in creating and developing Resolana. While she would likely first give credit to those who contributed to her vision, her work is testament to the difference that one person can make when fueled with conviction, empathy, and a willingness to see what is often invisible to others.

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family, service, gratitude, and faith. Their loving presence always surrounds and sustains me. My brothers, Chris and Frank Sandoval, and my sister, Cynthia Fellner, have always been there for me. I have never taken for granted the safety net they likely unknowingly provided me as I pursued my professional and educational goals. They and their beautiful families mean the world to me. My prima, Dr. Anna Sandoval, is an inspiration to me, and no matter the distance between us, I always felt her presence and support.

I realized early on that being in college was a luxury, and I am grateful to my parents, Cathy and Claude Sandoval, for their sacrifices and support. I am especially thankful to my mom who has always understood how much my education meant to me. During my undergraduate years she would leave a plate of dinner for me in the refrigerator when I stayed late in the computer lab at school, and I would often come home to clean and folded laundry on my bed. As hard as she worked, she would leave me kind notes of encouragement telling me how proud she was of how hard I was working and how much she admired me. As a graduate student, she always asked about my research and listened with sincere interest as I read parts of my dissertation to her. She is my heart and my champion, and I am grateful to her for her unconditional love, faith in me, and for being a constant source of strength, courage, and humor.

I have the most amazing son, Julián Tárula, who has been on my educational journey with me his whole life. Having a full-time working mom, who was also a student meant many nights of take-out dinners for him, learning how to do laundry at an early age, and often being the last kid to be picked up from his after-school program. His happy spirit, loud singing throughout the house, and quick wit continue to bring me joy,

and are a constant reminder of the most important things in life—well-being, and staying close to the people we cherish. He has always been wise beyond his years and has taught me through his actions, how to be patient, the ability to quickly forgive, and the importance of doing absolutely nothing once in a while. His love of learning, desire to make a difference in this world, and appreciation for family make me so very proud. I love him beyond measure and am so grateful for his support.

Finally, I wish to thank Becky Petitt, my partner who has walked bravely through the world with me for 14 years. While I truly appreciate her assuming full responsibility for the last few years for all matters related to daily living—grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, organizing home maintenance, keeping plants alive, etc.—it is her unfaltering patience and belief in me that I value most. I could always count on her to provide honest, supportive feedback, and to help me work through my ideas. She is an extraordinary person who has survived and accomplished much, and I am the fortunate recipient of her respect, love, trust, admiration, and commitment. I am also the fortunate recipient of her silly dances and witty sarcasm that keep me laughing. Throughout both our professional and educational paths, we have experienced both the joy and pain of life and have loved each other through heartbreak and sorrow—and still we make up silly rhymes and dance silly dances. How can anyone look at us and the life we have built together, with Julián, and not recognize that love makes a family? I look forward to our future with a shared passion for social justice and the continuous search for peaceful, mindful, compassionate living.

NOMENCLATURE

CPS	Child Protective Services
Date, John, or Trick	Term used to refer to a prostitute's customer
DCJ	Dallas County Jail
Hope House	Pseudonym for a drug rehabilitation program where some of the interviews for this study took place
Resolana	Educational program for incarcerated women at Dallas County Jail
Tar	A form of heroin
UA	Urine Analysis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I was invited to work on a research project led by my faculty advisor, Dr. Carolyn Clark, related to understanding the lives of incarcerated women. During one of the life history interviews I conducted with a colleague as part of this project, I was moved by Lisa's¹ story. She was a 52-year-old White woman who was sentenced to life in a Texas prison for murder. I knew from the background information I had on her that I would be interviewing a "murderer," and honestly, I was somewhat nervous. I am embarrassed to admit that I wondered if I would be interviewing someone who was more like Andrea Yates², who in news stories appears depressed, emotionally vacant, or sometimes remorseful; or, would she be more like the serial killer, Aileen Wuomos, who was depicted as a cold, heartless killer in the movie *Monster*? At the time, these were the images I had in my head of women who had committed murder. The woman I met was nothing like the images in my head. Lisa was just a few inches taller than I, was soft-spoken, and had sincere, kind eyes. She was a bit shy at first and was surprised that we were interested in hearing her life story. As she chronicled the details of her life leading up to the crime she admittedly committed, I felt a strong connection to her. Her stories reminded me of the many mistakes I made as a teenager that could have easily thrust me into the criminal justice system, and I felt grateful for the love and support of my family, and other resources that kept me from straying too far down

¹ Pseudonym.

² In 2002, Andrea Yates was convicted of capital murder for drowning her five children.

destructive paths. As I learned about Lisa’s life, I didn’t see a murderer in front of me—I saw a mother, a daughter, and a friend. I saw a woman who had a really difficult childhood; a woman who made some bad choices and who had no one to support her in recovering from those choices; and I saw a woman who while suffering from the crimes of her past, looked forward to any opportunity she had to keep her body and mind active, knowing she would likely never be released from prison. Lisa participated in every class she was allowed to that was offered at the prison. Having something to look forward to and something new she could learn kept her from despair.

I left that interview deeply affected by Lisa’s story and when it came time to decide on a dissertation topic, I was drawn to learning more about the lives of incarcerated women and specifically, what learning opportunities were available to them in prison. My search for programs in Texas led me to Resolana,³ a program for incarcerated women at Dallas County Jail that offered women “holistic and woman-centered programming.” I was intrigued by the images on their website of women in jail uniforms creating works of art, dancing, laughing, and engaging in discussions. I immediately filled out a volunteer application and contacted the then Executive Director and founder of the program, Bette Buschow, to set up a meeting to explore the possibility of conducting my study on Resolana. After my meeting with Bette, I attended a Resolana class as a volunteer and I was hooked. Resolana’s holistic educational

³ The Spanish term *la Resolana* refers to the sunny side of a building or plaza, a protected place where the warmth absorbed by the adobe walls draws people to gather together and talk. Traditionally, the village elders (called '*los resolaneros*' or *sun seekers*) spent their afternoons seated against these "warming walls," exchanging news with passersby, swapping stories, and passing on their cultural wisdom to the community.

approach seemed to align well with transformative learning, an area of adult education in which I have a strong interest. The curriculum integrates cognitive, creative, therapeutic, somatic, and pragmatic learning opportunities that are informed by the literature on gender-responsive programming for incarcerated women. One example of a class I attended as a volunteer used an expressive form of learning called Playback Drama⁴, which uses performance to help participants share their stories. The lead instructor for Playback Drama said that when the women tell their stories and then re-enact them or see them performed by others, they oftentimes see the situation in new ways. Dance provides another medium for self-discovery and expression that can lead to change. Mati Vargas-Gibson, an instructor for Resolana who teaches 5Rhythms®⁵ writes, “Our body is the primary vehicle for expressing all the possible states we can find ourselves in, giving them a voice and a chance for transformation” (2010b, p. 2). The 5Rhythms class is described as a “non-choreographed dance journey. It’s an exploration of the self of how we move or cease to move” (p. 2).

We all have tight spaces where we feel imprisoned: thoughts, feelings, rigid attitudes, in this we are no different from the women inmates. When we put ourselves in motion and start to seek space within our bodies, we can relax, find new and original energy available to us, and connect with our deep, instinctual truth. We can listen to ourselves and know what we really need, what we need to

⁴ Playback Drama is no longer part of the Resolana curriculum.

⁵ A non-choreographed dance experience. According to the program’s website, “The 5Rhythms are a practice, both poetic and practical, fluid and focused, a marriage of art and healing that directly addresses the divorce of body from heart, heart from mind that has so plagued our cultures.”
<http://www.gabrielleroth.com/>

do, what we have to let go, what we can look forward to, and how to just be alive in the moment. (Vargas-Gibson, 2010a)

Resolana's creativity workshops, which also include music, art, and writing, provide ways for women to access and express emotionally charged issues, and actively engage in the "5 Cs: community, cooperation, contribution, concentration and completion" (B. Buschow, personal communication, April 5, 2010). The art classes have included projects such as creating a group quilt, creating a group mandala for participation in the Global Art Project⁶, and making "good girl, bad girl" dolls to examine messages received about what it means to be a woman. Finally, the curriculum includes behavioral and cognitive-based classes that seek to help the women promote wellness, understand and overcome addictions, work toward healing from trauma, and develop life skills such as job readiness, anger management, parenting, and building healthy relationships.

While I am sure a lot of planning went into each class, the instructors seemed to effortlessly create a learning environment that was challenging, supportive, and oftentimes fun (depending on the class). I continued to volunteer whenever I could, and the time lapses between my visits to classes allowed me to recognize changes in the women, as well as changes in me. With each class I learned something new about myself, whether it was a new skill, or something negative I didn't realize I was holding on to, and I could see that same learning in the women participants as well. The program seemed to embody the philosophy and practice of adult education that drew me to the

⁶ "The Global Art Project matches participants across the United States and seventy other nations and each pair (group or individual) exchanges a piece of art expressing their vision of global unity."
<http://resolana.info/art-inmates.htm>

field: It served a group that had limited access to learning opportunities; it seemed to be grounded in a practice that promoted individual growth and change, as well as a commitment to social change, on both small and large scales (e.g. working to change the way society views incarcerated women, and advocating for educational resources and programming aimed at the unique needs of incarcerated women); and as much as possible in a jail context, the classes were facilitated in a way that equalized the power dynamics by reinforcing the idea that we were all equal partners in the teaching and learning process. With the support and encouragement of Bette and other Resolana staff members, thus began my journey of learning more than I ever bargained for, not only about the impact Resolana has had on the participants of the program, but also about the failure of our “justice” system and the convenient truths we as a society tell ourselves about women (and men) who are incarcerated in order to justify our abdication of compassionate social responsibility for them.

The Present Study

The purpose of my study was to gain an understanding of how the women participants experience Resolana and the impact it has had on their thinking, feeling, and behavior. Using a transformative learning theoretical framework, I was interested in exploring the learning process of current and past participants in the Resolana program, addressing questions such as: What changes did the women perceive going on inside themselves as a result of their participation in the program? Did they experience empowerment, and if so, how was it achieved and how was it manifested? I was also interested in how the women’s experiences were mediated by race, class, and gender.

For the participants who were no longer incarcerated, I wanted to investigate what impact the program had on their experiences of reentry into the community. Finally, I was also interested in learning about the women's lives prior to incarceration and their experiences with family, school, and work, as well as important relationships and events that shaped their lives. Through semi-structured life history interviews, the participants gave rich accounts of their experiences with the program, as well as detailed accounts of their lives, which for many, were filled with stories of repeated trauma and abuse, addiction, and courage. My intent in using semi-structured life history interviews was to employ a critical feminist methodology in my data collection and analysis. "The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71, emphasis in original). At the heart of this is the validation and valuing of women's experiences, listening to and understanding women's social realities, and creating the space where emotions and stories can be shared in manners the women choose. Life history research has the potential to shed light on both human experience and the social context of individual and collective experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2001), create space for untold stories (Romero & Stewart, 1999), and provide opportunities to recognize and honor learners' lived experiences (Rossiter & Clark, 2010). Legal scholar Richard Delgado (1989) also writes about the importance of storytelling for marginalized groups:

Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation. Members of outgroups can use stories in two

basic ways: first, as a means of psychic self-preservation; and, second, as a means of lessening their own subordination. These two means correspond to the two perspectives from which a story can be viewed—that of the teller, and that of the listener. The storyteller gains psychically, the listener morally and epistemologically. (p. 2436-2437)

An important feature of Resolana's curriculum is the sharing of personal stories, whether intentionally through structured activities, or organically through the process of working on a project together. Thus, a life history approach aligned well with Resolana's learning process and environment, and commitment to "use our imaginative resources to co-create meaning and hope, growth and change" (Buschow & McNabb, 2010).

This document includes five chapters. This introductory chapter outlines the background information related to my study, the purpose of the research, a description of the present study, and the structure of the document. Chapters II through IV were written as individual manuscripts for future publication. Although they are intended to be stand-alone manuscripts, Chapters II and III provide detailed information about the Resolana participants' life histories. I first introduce one of my participants, Jasmine, in Chapter II. While stories are told in courts of law, there are specific ways in which a story can be told, and the tellers, whether as defendants or victims of crimes, have little control over if and how their stories get told. There are rules everyone must follow in the courtroom and the narratives are often rehearsed and incomplete. In this case, I wanted Jasmine to be able to tell her own story in her own words; thus, my findings are represented in an ethnodrama, a script of significant events in her life developed from her interview

transcript. Chapter III introduces the reader to the other women in my study and is an analysis of their paths to incarceration through a lens of agency and resistance. Using a transformative learning theoretical framework, Chapter IV is an analysis of the women's experiences as learners in the Resolana program. I conclude with Chapter V, in which I summarize my findings, discuss the implications of the study, and discuss actions that can be taken to work toward change.

CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF A “STAR”: JASMINE’S STORY

The following ethnodrama, a script that consists of “analyzed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artifacts” (Saldaña, 2003, p. 218), is a portrayal of major life events of a woman named Jasmine⁷. As part of a larger study examining transformative learning in an educational program⁸ for incarcerated women, I conducted semi-structured life history interviews with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women who participated in the program. One of the goals of this research project was to understand the women’s lives and contributors to their paths to incarceration. Jasmine’s story is one of thirty interviews. Her story, while unique in some ways, is representative of the life histories and pathways to incarceration many of the women shared.

Why Ethnodrama?

Ethnodrama is often used to shed light on injustice and oppression and to elicit compassion and emotion to move people to work toward change (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Cannon, 2012; Mienczakowski, 1995, 1997; Sangha, Slade, Mirchandani, Maitra, & Shan, 2012; Ward Randolph & Weems, 2010). Ethnodrama also allows for greater use of research participants’ actual words in the representation of research findings, which can take the reader from the abstract theories and statistics that permeate research on

⁷ Pseudonym. All names of people, places, and programs, with the exception of Resolana, have been changed to protect the anonymity of the research participant. “Star,” in the title, is Jasmine’s professional name on the streets—her hooker name—also a pseudonym.

⁸ The educational program, Resolana, is a program provided at Dallas County Jail. The interviews took place from May through September 2011.

incarcerated women, to the realities of the lived experience of a woman whose life circumstances led her to a likely path of crime and incarceration. According to Goldstein (2008):

The richness of performed ethnography comes from three sources: the ethnographic research from which a play script is created; the reading or performance of the play; and the conversations that take place after the reading or performance. In these follow-up conversations, research participants and other readers or audience members have input about the conclusions of the research. This allows for ongoing analysis of the research findings. The incorporation of audience input into on-going revisions of the play provides an opportunity for mutual analysis, and in doing so, can help create more ethical relationships between researchers, their research participants, and the communities to which the research participants belong. (Goldstein, 2008)

As a feminist researcher, after completing my data collection and analysis, a major concern I had was how I could accurately represent the women's experiences. Imposing my own interpretive lens on their stories, I worried, might further contribute to their marginalization, or unintentionally minimize the significance of their lives and what they have to teach us about the treatment of women who have come into conflict with the law. Jasmine has a story to tell—a story that needs to be told. With very little prompting during our over three-hour interview, she gave detailed accounts of her lived experiences that led to a recurring cycle of incarceration—mostly for prostitution charges. During our interview, she displayed a range of emotions, from laughter to tears,

as her life story unfolded. As she spoke, her voice rose and fell, sped up and slowed down, and choked up and paused, bringing life to and drawing me into the people, places, and events that contributed to shaping who she is. Re-presenting her story in her words through performative text allows Jasmine to invite the audience into her world—forcing us to critically examine our definitions of criminal behavior, our perceptions of culpability, and our use of a penal system to “rehabilitate” women whose life experiences and struggles mirror hers.

Analysis and Findings

To analyze Jasmine’s life history, I used a holistic-content method of narrative analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) to generate initial impressions, and identify themes and patterns, as well as omissions and important moments in the story. Critical theorists advocate the use of storytelling and narrative analysis to help give voice to the experiences of marginalized groups (Anzaldúa, 1999; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus, I also applied a critical lens to analyze the influences of systemic oppression on her life. Jasmine’s life story consisted of multiple stories, and a constant theme that emerged in each one was survival: she survives her abusive childhood; she survives multiple violent relationships; and she survives painful decisions she has made that have caused harm to her children and herself. With the goal of projecting Jasmine’s voice, the following ethnodrama is a way of communicating part of my research findings in script form using “everyday words of informants and not in the codes of academic discourses which bind most research reports” (Mienczakowski, 1997, p. 159). Thus, the script, including the dialogue, was developed directly from her words.

Scene I—Opening Monologue: Growing Up

Jasmine is sitting on a chair in a room at Hope House, an addiction rehabilitation facility, where she is serving the remainder of her most recent prostitution charge. She is a 28 year-old Black and Native American woman. She's about 5'8", smiles easily and has almond shaped eyes, long, straight, brown hair and fair skin. She is wearing jeans and t-shirt.

I remember we were staying in the trailer parks, and my dad who was my mom's pimp, would beat her. We...you know, we could hear her screaming from outside. My mom had started using heroin and crack or whatever. And he left her because he didn't want his bottom ho⁹ to be on drugs, and he had tried to get my mom to be clean, you know. I guess whenever she had me I was hooked on to drugs or whatever. Well, one day I remember we all got beat. Me and my older sister and younger brother snuck outside to go skip rocks at the train tracks because we knew Tommy, my mom's boyfriend at the time, was fixin' to beat our mom and we didn't want my little brother to see that. Well, Tommy met us at the trail with a belt and boy we got whooped all the way back to the house. I mean we had welts on our legs. And I remember my mom came in there and she brought us bologna sandwiches, and she had this big ole black eye. Everybody got whooped that day.

I have some good memories growing up. I remember playing cheerleaders with my brother and sister and playing in the basement, rolling down the stairs and sliding down the stair rail. I remember, too, at my kindergarten graduation, my mom, she had

⁹According the Urban Dictionary, "bottom ho" is "pimp language to describe the pimp's main best-selling ho." <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bottom%20ho>

gotten me this new dress, y'know, and I just thought I was just so pretty. It was one of them neon colored dresses and stuff. So I remember being in the graduation, and I had to hold up a letter. But I can't remember what the letter was for. I had to hold up this letter and say something. And I was so happy that day.

But things got really bad when my mom got together with this man, Jake. This is when she got strung out on heroin and crack real bad. I was 12 about this time. And uh, I mean she was strung out bad and we would have to come home from school and take care of her. My sister was living with our grandma so it was just me and my little brother. But anyway, my mom was so strung out she was turning tricks inside and outside the house. Well, there was this old White man, Larry, and everybody knew if Larry's at your house, your mom's turning tricks. It's just everybody knew that, you know. And we lived in the bad part of town called The Bottoms and there was also White Town, but we lived in The Bottoms. Well anyways, Larry would always come, you know, over to our house, and one day my mom told us to come home early, or whatever, because Larry was coming over. Well, when we got home my mom was like "come on, I'm going to give y'all a bath." And me and my little brother are looking at each other kind of freaking out because she's never done this to us before. You know, I mean, she's never given us a bath. We've always bathed ourselves. And she's really giving us a bath and stuff. Then my mom tells me to get my little brother dressed and to put some cologne on him because Larry wants to talk to him for a little bit. Well, I knew then what Larry was going to do to my little brother so I asked my mom, "Well, how come I can't just go in there and talk to Larry?" So she lets out a big sigh and says,

“Well, I mean, you can if you want to, do you want to?” And I was like, “Yeah, I want to go in there and talk to him.” I mean he was a kid, you know, only nine years old, and I mean in my eyes I was, you know, I was grown. So my mom put some make-up on me, fixed my hair in this poofy hairstyle and I went in the room with Larry. And y’know, we did what we did, or whatever, and he gave me two one hundred dollar bills. And so, I gave it to my mom and she was like “Good, good, you did good,” and stuff like that. But I mean, I was hurting, y’know what I mean? Like my body was hurting. I lost my virginity to him. That was the first time I had sex. And that was the first time I ever turned a date. I was twelve years old. [Begins to cry] I remember I just wanted to take a bath but I was afraid because my privates was hurting and I was bleeding a little bit, so I just kind of laid there thinking about it for a minute. After that he would come over from time to time when my mom would get real sick and need a fix, but he gave the money to my mom instead of me.

So she kept smoking crack and shooting heroin and one day she tried to sell me to her dope dealer, Rock. Well I know Rock’s not really a good guy for selling dope and stuff, but when my mom tried to sell me to him he was like, you know, “No!” You know, and he slapped my mom. He slapped her and then he was like “How are you going to sell your kids?” I remember because I was mad at him, I was like “Don’t be hitting on my mom!” And he was like, “Your mom is trying to sell you to me, do you understand what that means, do you know what that is?” So he gave my mom a half ounce of dope or whatever, and some tar...some heroin, and I went to go live with him. He bought me clothes and everything and he didn’t try no sex stuff or anything like that.

He showed me how to cut and sell dope so that I wouldn't sell my body.

Someone asked me once how I felt about my mom back then and honestly, I just felt sorry for her. I was wanting to take care of her. I was wanting to really take care of her. I did. And I wanted to take care of my brother, too, and then my sister, she needed stuff up there in the country, or whatever. So I figured if I was making some money, you know, it would be easier like this. So I started making money selling dope.

Scene II: Gettin' Hooked up with the Pimps and Stuff

Jasmine is now 14 years old. After being severely beaten by her mother and her mother's boyfriend, she was placed in a children's shelter, which she ran away from. She hitched a ride to Texas and is walking around in the stifling heat with twenty dollars in her pocket and a duffel bag of clothes trying to figure out her next move. A man in a Lexus drives up next to her and rolls down the car window. She feels the cool air coming from inside the car and breathes in the smell of marijuana and feels a sense of relief.

Albert: Hey little mama, where are you going? Do you need a ride to where you're going?

Jasmine: I'm really just walking. I don't know where I'm going right now. But I know it's really hot out here.

Albert: Well that's OK, just get in. [Jasmine gets in the car.] Well, where you coming from?

Jasmine: I'm from two states away. I ran away from home.

Albert: Well, you got any kind of way to make money?"

Jasmine: No, I don't really know how to make any money.

Albert: Well first off, don't be telling everybody how old you are.

Jasmine: Okay.

Albert: My dad owns a lingerie modeling studio. Have you ever modeled? I think I can get you on.

Jasmine: Really? Okay, get me on!

The scene changes to Jasmine wearing heavy make up and lingerie and standing on a raised platform in the middle of a room. (In her interview she said, "They make you wear lingerie and like kind of look at you like you're a, like for auction or something. He's turning me around inspecting me making sure I was, I guess, appropriate to be sold or something. I don't know. And I mean, it just really made me feel like, I guess like a slave would feel when they were being sold"). A man walks up to Jasmine and inspects her. As he starts to walk away, he summons her with his index finger, instructing her to follow him. He walks toward a door and opens it and Jasmine follows him through the door. Before the man shuts the door, he hangs a sign on the knob that reads, "Taken."

Scene III—Monologue: Losing Self-Respect

We return to the opening scene at Hope House with Jasmine sitting in the chair.

I stayed at that place a few months and I remember all these guys coming in to pay me and stuff but I never seen any money, you know, so I don't really know how much I was making. Albert would just tell me "this guy is worth 600, this guy is worth 500." You know, and stuff like that. But he would give me weed, and stuff like that, and give me a beer when I wanted a beer. You know, he took me to Disney World and bought me clothes. Then Tami and Jordyn, they were prostitutes, they asked me when

Albert was going to give me my money. I told them he was taking care of me and I didn't need no money. And Tami was like, "Star, you're not getting taken care of, you're getting pimped." And I said "I ain't getting pimped!" Because my daddy is a pimp and I'd know if I was getting pimped, you know? But apparently I was making a lot of money because when I asked Albert about it, he just got real mad and said Tami and Jordyn were puttin' crazy things in my head. Then I started to feel like I really don't want to be here no more. I started to feel like I was being kidnapped and held hostage, you know. So Tami and Jordyn helped me escape.

Then I ended up working for this other pimp named Deuce for a little bit, and then I met this lady named Rosy who hooked me up with this pimp named Hollywood. I didn't know it then, but Rosy sold me. She got a thousand dollar finder's fee for me from Hollywood. I saw him give her the money but it wasn't until years later that I understood how all that went down. I got tired of working with Hollywood, too, and so the time came when I was riding around with one of his hos and we went to make some money. We went to this hotel and she left the money in the car and asked me to hold her money so I said OK. She had like 600 bucks, and I had like 600 bucks. And she went upstairs to go do a date, and when she went upstairs to go do the date, I just got the money, and I put it in my purse. I also got some condoms and I put those in my purse, just in case, you know. And I put the keys to the car in the sun visor, because I didn't want to take her car, you know, she was a nice girl. And um, I took off walking because I was tired of Hollywood.

When I left Hollywood, I really had nowhere to go. I remember I was near a park drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette trying to figure out what I'm going to do next. Then I see this guy, Rat, and he tells me I can come stay with him for a few days. I told him I didn't have any money but he said we could work something out. Well, when I get there all these guys are over there and stuff. And I didn't know "work something out" meant me sleeping with everybody in the house. And whenever I was trying to get up and go, he wouldn't let me go. He's like, "No! You ain't goin' nowhere!" you know, making me think he was going to beat me up if I tried to leave, basically. So I ended up having sex with all the guys in the house. Then this guy James comes in, and they were like, "James, you want a turn?" And I was trying to act like it didn't bother me because I didn't want to get beat up. And I guess I was tired, you know, and just like "fuck it, I've already been turning dates," you know, what does it mean if somebody is running a train on me? I had lost all self-respect at that point, you know what I mean? Well, James had kind of gave me a little help because he was like, "You know what? Y'all are wrong for doing her like that." You know, he's like, "We're supposed to be building our women up, not tearing them down."

Well James and I ended up getting together and I was with him from the time I was about 16 until I was 20 something. He's my first baby's daddy. He's Darius' daddy. James took care of me, but he was always sleeping around with other women and started getting to where he was tricking with the dope fiend girls. And so I figured if he's going to be out there tricking—tricking means paying money for sex—if he's going to be paying these dope fiend girls dope for sex, that must be the kind of girl that he wants. So

I figured I might as well try me some dope too, you know. So I asked Sheri, a girl that he was paying for sex, and I asked her you know. And she was like “Yeah, he gives me dope.” I was like OK, well maybe this is what he wants me to do. And so I tried it.

Scene IV: Depression, Addiction, and Motherhood

Jasmine is 20 years old and she is with her four-month-old baby, Darius. She is living at a motel and starts hanging out with people who take Ecstasy. With her “baby body,” getting dates is more difficult and she is depressed. Jasmine is in her motel room and she picks up her phone and dials a number.

Jasmine: Miss McGregor? It’s Jasmine. Can you watch Darius for me? It’s not safe out here what I’m doing and I don’t want Darius out here.

Miss McGregor: Well, how long do you want me to watch him for?

Jasmine: Just until I get enough money to be on my feet and get an apartment. I’ll pay you by the week.

Miss McGregor: Yeah, I’ll keep him for you. Just make sure you pay me once a week, every week.

Jasmine packs a bag for Darius, wraps him in a blanket and leaves to take him to Miss McGregor. The stage lights go off for a few seconds and when they come back on Jasmine is back in the motel room laying on her bed strung out on Ecstasy. Her phone rings continuously but Jasmine does not pick up. The stage lights go off again and when they come back on Jasmine is panicked and talking on the phone to her grandmother.

Jasmine: Grandma, I need your help! CPS took Darius. They said I abandoned him. They said I wasn’t taking care of him.

Jasmine's Grandma: What happened? Why are they saying that?

Jasmine: Grandma, I feel like I just want to die! I got caught up in drugs and I left him with a sitter. I got so bad I just forgot—I forgot to make money, I forgot to pay the sitter. I didn't go back to get him. Miss McGregor called CPS and they have him. Can you come get him?

Jasmine's Grandma: I'll come and get him. He's an enrolled tribal member and they have no authority over him. I'll be there.

Jasmine hangs up the phone, puts her head in her hands and cries.

Scene V: The Witch Pimp

Jasmine is sitting in a motel room with an older White man, a trick she just picked up, and they are smoking dope. There is a loud banging on the door. It's her pimp¹⁰ and boyfriend, Antoine.

Antoine: Open the door, bitch! I told you not to leave! You're gonna get it now, bitch. Open the door!

Jasmine: [Quickly takes another hit of the dope] I'm not opening the door! You're acting crazy!

The Trick: Who's that? Why are they doing that? Why are they coming to the door?

Jasmine: Man, that's my boyfriend. He wants to beat me up. Give me a hit! Give me a hit! I need to smoke! He's going to beat me! [Jasmine sucks in a deep hit of the dope.] Man, he's out there tricking with his dope fiend girls, trading coochie for dope, and I'm here trying to make us some money and *he's* mad?

¹⁰ In our interview, Jasmine refers to Antoine as the "witch pimp."

Jasmine sees Antoine pick up a trash can and bang it against the window. He is screaming at her to open the door and eventually he breaks down the door and, enraged, brutally attacks and beats her. After he beats her, he throws her in the shower and runs scorching hot water over her while scrubbing her with a steel wool pad and telling her she needed to get clean and get the devil off of her. The stage lights turn off for a few seconds and when they come back on Jasmine is lying on the floor bruised and barely able to move. Antoine is sitting on the floor rolling a joint.

Jasmine: [Struggling to speak] Antoine, I'm in so much pain. I can't breathe. I think my rib is broken. Can you please go buy me some Tylenol? I need something for this pain.

Antoine: I'm not leaving here. Why? Just so you can leave? Here. Take a hit of this. It will make you feel better. [Antoine holds a pipe up to her mouth so she can take a hit of dope from the pipe. He then starts to rock back and forth].

Antoine: This is why guys go to jail for killing their baby mamas...for putting bags over their heads.

The stage lights turn off and when they come back on Jasmine has bandages on her body and a duffel bag over her shoulder. She looks around the motel room, walks out the door, and slams it behind her.

Scene VI—Monologue: Rape, Motherhood, and Loss

We return to the opening scene at Hope House with Jasmine sitting in the chair.

Well after that happened with Antoine, I left him and a few months later I caught a prostitution case and went to state jail for six months. When I got out, one night I was out late trying to make some money and I got picked up by the wrong guy and he raped

me with a knife. I got pregnant and I wasn't sure if the baby was Allan's, this man I was seeing, or the rapist's. When I told Allan I was pregnant and didn't know if he was the father or if the rapist was the father, Allan told me, "I love you for who you are. And I know that you do stuff that may not get the best results, but regardless, you're pregnant and it will be my baby." I felt happy for that and everything, but you know, it just...I couldn't...I couldn't bring myself to let somebody love me or to let somebody care that much about me. So when he started saying stuff like that, it would scare me so I would leave. Then I didn't feel good about myself so I smoked crack all through that pregnancy, you know, I just, I couldn't bring myself to love the baby. I couldn't bring myself to love me, you know. I know now that I love my son. I named him Allan. But he's been adopted. They took him from me in the hospital. Since then, I only saw him once at the welfare office. I heard that he got adopted by a nurse. He'd be like four today and sometimes I'll look at commercials and stuff and I'll think, "Oh, I wonder if he looks like that?" Hopefully, one day after I get my life together, you know, I'll be able to... if not try to get him back because I know he is probably happy where he is at, but at least just be able to know... know that he is happy and to know that he's safe, you know, to see a picture of him or something.

Scene IV: Seeking Help

Jasmine is standing outside of a house carrying a baby and knocking on a door. It's cold outside and she is wearing shorts, no shoes, and she is visibly bruised. A man, Earl, with whom she had a brief relationship, answers the door and he can tell Jasmine is distraught. He invites her in the house.

Jasmine: Earl, can you help me? I need some help

Earl: What the...come on in. What's going on?

Jasmine: I also need a drink. Can you get me some wine or something?

Earl: No. What you need is a cigarette, a meeting, and to talk about it.

Jasmine: Shut up, Earl. I don't need that right now!

Earl: Well, tell me what happened then.

Jasmine: Well, first I should tell you that this is Riley. She's your daughter. *Jasmine hands the baby to Earl and he hugs and kisses the baby who looks just like him.* I know it was wrong, but I got back together with Antoine and I let him believe Riley was his.

Earl: Forget about that. What did he do to you?

Jasmine: I thought it would be different this time, but as usual, he brutalized me. He was so excited about the baby and he even brought me balloons, took pictures, and held my hand. It was the first time anyone had been there for me when I had a baby. I thought he had changed.

Earl: How did you end up here?

Jasmine: I really thought he was gonna kill me this time, so when he said he was leaving to make a run, I asked if I could go with him. I thought the drive might calm him down. When he started talkin' crazy about why guys kill their baby mamas, something in my head said, "Run, run, run!" So when we got to a stop light, I grabbed Riley and jumped out the car. This is the only place I could think of to go. He beat me bad, Earl, and I was holding Riley trying to protect her. I had to ask him to please let me put her down while he beat me so she wouldn't get hurt.

Earl: I know my sister can help. I'll call her.

Earl's sister invites Jasmine and Riley to stay with her until Jasmine gets on her feet.

Closing Monologue: Loving Jasmine

We return to the opening scene at Hope House with Jasmine sitting in the chair.

So, I was staying with Earl's sister and they were really really helping me. But it was hard for me to humble myself to accept their help like this because I'm so used to doing it on my own. So, whenever Earl's sister would say her daughter would watch Riley for me, I just had it in my mind that, you know, I'm going to go out and make something happen so I can get this done by myself. I don't want to have to keep asking them. And you know, I was on my way to turn a date and my home girl [a good friend] asked me to drive her to go turn a date, and I told her I would. And she said that he might want a two-girl show. So I told her to call up there and see, and she called, because I was nervous—I hadn't dated in a while, you know, and I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it. So, we go to the parking lot, she went up to the room and I was putting on my make-up and stuff and she called and she said "He wants somebody to come here. Come on up." And so, I mean, I was really making the choice. I was going to go up there and go make that money. But when I opened the car door and was getting ready to step out, the police pulled up right behind me and flashed the light on me and was like you know, "Ma'am, do you have a driver's license?" You can't just park in the parking lot of the Hilton and be waiting on somebody, which is why they questioned me. And so y'know, all of them other times whenever I got stopped and gave my ID, the probation violation didn't show up. But this time, the probation violation showed up and that was

just intervention, divine intervention, you know, from somewhere. Because I was ready to make that decision. I *had* made that decision. I was just getting ready to act on it.

So, I ended up back at Dallas County Jail and I was in an educational program called Resolana part of the time, which really helped me. They really helped me get a sense of calmness and routine and to manage my anger better. You know, if you made me upset I can tell you “Look, I’m upset with you because....” And not, bam, boom, pow, which is how I learned to react. When I left the jail I had to come here to Hope House so I could continue to work on my recovery. And now I am at a point where I believe I deserve better. I believe I deserve more than what I have allowed myself to have, you know, just because I feel more love for myself than I have ever felt before, you know?

Jasmine stands up.

I have a couple of months to go here at Hope House. Darius still lives with my grandma and I see him as often as I can. And my daughter, she’s ten months old now and she’s staying with Earl’s sister. She really is a nice Christian lady who really wants to help me. She’s bringing my daughter to visit this Saturday. So they’re helping me out and that feels good. I still need to work on humbling myself to accept help from others, but it feels good. Things are going great. And even whenever they don’t go as great as I would like for them to go, I know that if I just hold on, that it will always get better. You know, it can’t get any worse than it’s already been. And if it does, that’s OK because I can still make it through that, too.

Things are different this time and well now, I think that instead of turning to drugs, I can turn to something different. I have different resources that I can turn to. I have a support system. I know where I can go to AA meetings and when I get out of here, I know that I'll have a sponsor. I also know that I have sisters that are in recovery with me that may be going through something too. I know how to get out of myself, and go help somebody else when I start feeling, you know, like "woe is me." There are other things that I can do instead of just going to drugs. And also, I have a lot more to lose, you know. Whereas before, I had nothing to lose, you know. Well, I felt like I had nothing to lose, but now I know that I can love me. I have me to lose. That feels better.

Jasmine exits the stage.

Discussion

An "Avalanche of Cumulative Vulnerabilities"

We do not know how Jasmine's story continues. What we do know is that for a majority of women like her who have little or no support, resources, nor options for living-wage employment opportunities, returning to jail or prison is normal. According to Watterson (1996), "What is abnormal is finding a supportive and forgiving community, staying out, and making decisions based on a sense of self-worth, optimism, and the possibility of new opportunities" (p. 313). Research shows that women of color, women who live in poverty, women who lack formal education, and women who are mothers of minor children face greater risk of incarceration due to the interlocking oppressive forces of racism, classism, and sexism that function in the legal system in particular, as well as in society as a whole (Belknap, 2007; Bush-Baskette, 1998;

Chancer, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 2002a; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Christian & Thomas, 2009; Crenshaw, 2012; Danner, 1996; Logan, 2004; Nanda, 2012; Pimlott & Sarri, 2002; Richie, 2002; Sherman, 2012). The risk begins early on when girls, particularly girls of color, come into conflict with the law where they are more likely than boys to be charged with status crimes such as violating curfew laws, ungovernable or incorrigible behavior, or running away. This early introduction into the justice system places them at greater risk for future incarceration (Belknap, 2007; Chesney-Lind, 2002a; Sherman, 2012). According to Sherman (2012), “Social expectations that girls behave obediently, modestly, and cautiously have been remarkably durable over more than one hundred years of juvenile justice in the United States, and throughout that time these expectations have masked structural gender discrimination” (p. 1586). Sherman argues that this structural gender bias that seeps into the discretionary decision-making by law enforcers, including police, probation officers, prosecutors, and judges, has negatively impacted girls caught up in the legal system, from arrest to disposition, and is difficult to challenge. She writes:

The structural discrimination that supports detaining and incarcerating girls for violating these norms is both hard to see and hard to challenge. It is often hidden behind outward goodwill toward girls and legitimate expressions of concern for their vulnerability and possible victimization. (2000, p. 1586)

A study by the American Bar Association and the National Bar Association (2001) also reported race and ethnic bias in the processing of girls’ cases. The study reported that while White girls made up 65% of the population of at-risk girls, 34% of

them were in secure detention compared to nearly 50% of African-American girls. The study also reported that 70% of cases involving White girls were dismissed compared to 30% for African-American girls. For adult women, race and gender bias, as well as class status, renders poor women of color particularly vulnerable to legal surveillance and punishment (Crenshaw, 2012). This is evident in the intersecting prison and foster care systems that are “marked by glaring race, gender, and class disparities” (Roberts, 2012, p. 1476); in the “overpolicing” of communities of color, particularly in welfare housing communities (Lipsitz, 2012; Ocen, 2012); and in the increasing assault arrests of girls and women of color, an unintended consequence of mandatory arrest policies that emerged in the 1990s as a result of the Violence Against Women Act (Crenshaw, 2012). Lipsitz (2012) argues that poor women of color face an “avalanche of cumulative vulnerabilities” that place them at great risk of incarceration. These vulnerabilities include a lack of economic opportunities, employment and housing discrimination, race and gender bias in the legal system, and the criminalization of poverty. According to Lipsitz:

At the intersections of race, gender, and class, the rights, welfare, and dignity of all women of color—but especially of black women and Latinas—are violated egregiously by the national failure to enforce fair housing and fair employment laws. Housing insecurity pushes women of color disproportionately into neighborhoods characterized by criminogenic conditions—conditions that increase their likelihood of becoming ensnared in the criminal justice system. After arrest, conviction, incarceration, and release this vicious cycle continues as

women of color then confront additional impediments to securing housing during their reentry into society because of their criminal records. (2012, p. 1749)

Jasmine's life history exemplifies the consequences of this "avalanche of cumulative vulnerabilities."

Abuse

In the telling of her life history, Jasmine begins with an early childhood memory of seeing her mother being abused by her boyfriend who was also her pimp. The abuse stories continue through to the end of the interview, and her history of trauma and abuse is not uncommon. Estimates of incarcerated women who experienced physical and sexual violence as children and adults range from 40 to 80% (Maeve, 2000). In their study of 391 incarcerated women, McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap (2008) found that 70% of the women experienced what would be classified as rape, half the women experienced sexual abuse as children, and 26.9% reported sexual abuse by three or more abusers. Although some of the women experienced sexual abuse by other women, the majority of perpetrators were males. According to Maeve (2000), incarceration often exacerbates the effects of sexual abuse and violence that many incarcerated women have experienced. She writes:

Though our knowledge base commonly acknowledges abuse histories of inmates, current penal philosophy does not endorse or accommodate treatment modalities that could mitigate the effects of such abuse. Compounding the problem for women is the notion that prisons may actually recreate conditions of trauma and thus retraumatize women over and over again (p. 479).

These conditions include women prisoners being subjected to routine strip searches or pat-downs, being placed in solitary confinement, and being vulnerable to continued sexual abuse and exploitation by male corrections officers. During one of my interviews at the jail, a woman who was sent to the solitary confinement room (referred to as the “time-out” room in jail) that was adjacent to the classroom where I conducted the interview, began loudly kicking and banging her fists on the room’s steel doors. The banging went on for at least 30 minutes and based on the volume of the sound the banging made, it was certain that the woman would leave the room bruised and in physical pain. The woman I was interviewing said that the room is made of concrete walls, has a concrete slab to lie on, a toilet, and table for food. She said the room is kept at a temperature that is unbearably cold and the jail officers are allowed to confine a woman in there for up to 23 hours without giving her a blanket. According to Maeve (2000), women are placed in solitary confinement at three times the rate of men and for less serious offences. She likens this practice to being sent to one’s room as a child, possibly by well-intentioned parents attempting to discipline their children, but likely with abused children, by perpetrators with “sinister” intentions. She suggests that this practice, along with the others mentioned above, may trigger memories of childhood abuse and trauma. She explains, “All of these scenarios result in a lack of control over who touches one’s body and under what circumstances” (p. 480). Maeve, as well as others who have written about the extensive abuse experienced by incarcerated women (Belknap, 2007; Bloom, 2003; M. Brown, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly, 1994; DeHart, 2008; Gilfus, 1992; McDaniels-Wilson & Belknap, 2008; Raj et al., 2008;

Richie, 1996; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009; Simpson, Yahner, & Dugan, 2008), emphasize the need to provide support and opportunities for rehabilitation that address their victimization. Maeve writes:

...I am suggesting that an awareness of the long-term consequences for women who were abused as children includes an acknowledgement of the larger society's failure to protect children, and for women (and men) has substantially contributed to the human tragedy of crime and incarceration (2000, p. 474).

Addiction and Prostitution

Research also shows that Jasmine's history of drug addiction is a common experience among women who are incarcerated (Belknap, 2007; Bloom, 2003; M. Brown, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly, 1994; DeHart, 2008; Gilfus, 1992; McDaniels-Wilson & Belknap, 2008; Richie, 1996; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009; Simpson et al., 2008; Urbina, 2008). Unlike men who are more likely to begin using drugs as a result of peer pressure or personal pleasure, women are more likely to begin using drugs in an attempt to self-medicate or to escape from the pain of trauma, or physical or sexual abuse (Inciardi, Lockwood, & Pottiger, 1993). Chesney-Lind, Pasko and Laidler (2004) note that there is also a strong link between women's drug use and prostitution, "long a mainstay of women's survival tactics in marginalized communities" (p. 132). In her 1992 qualitative study of the lives of 20 incarcerated women, Gilfus found that childhood sexual abuse was a major contributing factor to drug use at an early age, and for those who were involved in prostitution as a means of survival on the streets, drugs were a way of coping or escaping from what they found to be "disgusting"

work. Like Jasmine, rather than being protected by the legal system, the women in her study were cast into a recurring cycle of incarceration.

Conclusion

It is my hope that Jasmine's story makes the reader uneasy. What I really want to say (but is perhaps too messy for a dissertation), because uneasy is too mild, is: I hope Jasmine's story makes the reader sick, as in turns-your-stomach-makes-you-wanna-puke sick. That is how I felt for months reading and re-reading the life histories of the women in my study. The sick feeling comes from knowing that we, as a society, failed these women—we failed Jasmine. Not only did we fail them, but our collusion with the system by failing to learn, and for those who know, failing to do something about it, allowed and continues to allow women like Jasmine to suffer the enduring consequences of childhood exploitation and abuse. Our collusion allows that suffering to continue into adulthood by refusing to see the people warehouses tucked away and hidden from view—warehouses that impose additional barriers on already confined lives. When telling people who asked what I was studying, most reacted by asking questions that I found disturbing:

“Were you scared going into the jail?”

“What do *they* look like?”

“Did you wear plastic gloves?”

“So that's where my tax dollars go—paying for programs for criminals? I wish someone would house, feed, and educate me for free.”

“You are *actually* in the same room as *them* and they aren't handcuffed?”

Their reactions indicate that they have bought into the convenient belief that incarcerated women are different from you and me. If considered people at all, they are to be feared. I have asked myself over and over what I would have done in circumstances similar to those faced by the women whose lives I studied. The truth is that my response is always from a privileged perspective, and *really* being in those circumstances is unimaginable. Likely, the biggest difference between many of *us* (those who have not come into conflict with the law) and *them* is our life circumstances and access to support and resources. While not the focus of this paper, it is important to note that the two women in my study who would be considered “success stories,” in that they had overcome their addictions and turned their lives around, had resources. They had family members who believed in them. They had homes to go to when they got out of jail. They had formal education and marketable job training, experience, and skills. Admittedly, there are women who commit violent crimes, and in fact some of the women in my study had done that. However, understanding the context in which these crimes were committed, while not excusing or minimizing them, should cause us to question our mostly failed attempts to “rehabilitate” women like Jasmine. Watterson (1996), who conducted an extensive study on women in prison, calls prisons a “wasteland” (p. 336). She writes:

We all have the potential to grow and change and contribute to life—even convicted murderers and armed robbers. But prison is a concrete womb for everyone. It is a place we send people for punishment, and while they’re there,

we surround them with concrete, force-feed regression, and then hurl them back into society expecting them to be self-sufficient. It doesn't make sense. (p. 336)

Jasmine is able to work on her addiction recovery at Hope House and she feels encouraged and hopeful. She has survived much in her life and my hope is that the reader or audience sees that—sees her will, determination and strength. Knowing that her life history represents similar circumstances of many women who are incarcerated, how can we not be troubled by our deeply flawed legal system? How can we not be moved to do *something* to work toward change? And so I leave you, the audience of Jasmine's ethnodrama, with these questions: What can we do? What will we do?

CHAPTER III
COMPLICATING NOTIONS OF GUILT AND INNOCENCE: INCARCERATED
AND FORMERLY INCARCERATED WOMEN'S STORIES OF
AGENCY AND RESISTANCE

I couldn't get the feelin' of shame offa' me. And it wasn't until somebody gave me my first shot of dope is when I finally realized, oh god, here's relief. I don't feel nothin', how 'bout that? I don't feel nothin'. And to this very day—I'm in jail now for prostitution—my very first John that I get after I've been asleep for days or after I've been locked up for a while, makes me feel like the nastiest person in the world. Until after I hit that first high, then the rest of it is like, it's simple, simple. But the first John—like say, I've been on dope for like a week or somethin' and I decide to go home and get some sleep and I sleep for three or four days, the first trick I turn is always my worst nightmare. It's always my worst nightmare because it's the one that tells me that I'm doin' somethin' bad, I'm doin' somethin' wrong, and I'm abusin' my body. It's the one that comes up and says, "Sarah, you're nasty! What are you doin'?" Just, it shames me all over again. And then that's why I go out and get high. And then I get high, and all the rest of it doesn't matter now, I'm high! It doesn't matter then. (*Sarah*¹¹, 43 years old)

¹¹ Pseudonym. All names of people, places, and programs, with the exception of Resolana, have been changed to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

I could like remember being happy at certain times, but I could have like blackouts because, for a LONG time I was being sexually abused by my cousin. Since the age of 4. And I would run away a lot. And my mom like, never understood why. I guess because she was so busy drug dealing and stuff cause, that's where I learned how to drug deal was my mom and my brother. So, that's kind of like who I was. That's where I learned most of everything I know is with my mom and my brother. Cause where we were living, it's really a messed up place. (*Alma, 19 years old*)

Sarah and Alma, who were participants in my study, share common life histories that included violence, abuse, addiction, and recurring forced institutionalization and incarceration. Despite these experiences, as well as their struggles to survive the imposed constraints of poverty, racism, and sexism, their stories defy representations of being powerless victims. Rather, what is revealed are stories of women who challenge and resist the social and legal structures that seek to confine them, using the means they have available.

This paper presents an analysis of the stories of women's "deviant" or "criminal" actions and pathways to incarceration through a lens of everyday resistance (Wade, 1997) that challenges us to broaden our understanding of agency and resistance and to think more deeply about societal notions of guilt and innocence in a violent and unjust world.

Review of the Literature

There is an increasing body of research that sheds light on women's pathways to prison which often includes histories of victimization including incest, date rape, stranger rape, intimate partner abuse, and drug abuse and/or addiction (Belknap, 2007; Bloom, 2003; M. Brown, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly, 1994; DeHart, 2008; Gilfus, 1992; McDaniels-Wilson & Belknap, 2008; Richie, 1996; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009; Simpson et al., 2008; Urbina, 2008). Women of color, women who live in poverty, and women who are mothers of minor children face greater risk of incarceration due to the interlocking oppressive forces of racism, classism, and sexism that function in the legal system in particular, as well as in society as a whole (Belknap, 2007; Bush-Baskette, 1998; Chancer, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Christian & Thomas, 2009; Danner, 1996; Logan, 2004; Pimlott & Sarri, 2002; Richie, 2002). In the past three decades the number of women in prison in the U.S. has increased dramatically. The most striking increase occurred from 1980 when approximately 12,000 women were imprisoned, to 1999 when this number reached more than 90,000 (Chesney-Lind, 2002b). According to Chesney-Lind, "this startling increase was simply an unintended consequence of the nation's move to mass incarceration as a result of a 'war on drugs' and a host of other 'get tough' sentencing policies" (p. 79). She cites the "war on drugs" as being a "largely unannounced war on women" (p. 88). Tougher policies that have impacted the increase in women's incarceration include stricter mandatory sentencing laws for certain crimes including drug offenses, lengthier prison sentences as a result of "three strikes" policies and other sentence enhancement laws,

stricter parole policies, and others aimed at closing the revolving door in and out of correctional facilities (Urbina, 2008). The rates of women who are incarcerated continue to climb at a steady pace. In 2008, women made up 7.1% of the population under state or federal prison jurisdiction compared to 6.7% in 2000, and show an average of a 3% increase from 2000 to 2008 with a majority of prison admissions being for nonviolent offenses (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009). Women of color fare even worse in the U.S. judicial system: In 2008, Black women were incarcerated at a rate 3 times higher than White women, and Hispanic women were incarcerated at a rate 1.5 times higher than White women (Sabol, et al., 2009).¹² While billions of dollars have been allocated to prisons and jails over the past two decades, access to income support through public assistance, health care (including drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and mental health care programs), and vocational training, has diminished (Burke, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 1996; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Danner, 2007; Hirsch, 2004; Pimlott & Sarri, 2002; Rubinstein & Mukamal, 2002), placing women “in double and even triple jeopardy by substance abuse, poverty, and incarceration for drug-related offences” (Burke, 2002, p. 175). According to Belknap (2007), there is “a significant blurring between the victim and offender categories in women’s and girls’ lives” (p. 2). In her qualitative study of 60 women in a maximum-security U. S. prison, DeHart (2008) found

¹² Belknap (2007) notes that “a major threat to the validity of using official statistics of crime rates is that discrimination may distort the statistics. For example, if Latinas are more likely than White women to be arrested for the same offense, the official statistics would exaggerate the Latinas’ offending relative to White women. If African American women are more likely than Latinas to be arrested for the same offense, then official statistics will inflate African American women’s crime rates. Thus, when differences are found based individually on gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, and so on, it is not clear whether there are distinct actual differences in the categories of these variables concerning crime rates or whether the differences among the categories represent differential (discriminatory) processing of offenders (e.g. sexist, racist, classist practices)” (pp. 106-107).

that the incarcerated women's histories of victimization and experiences of multiple traumas from childhood through adulthood relate directly to the women's crimes. For example, early experiences of sexual abuse in the home often led to illegal escape routes such as running away from home and drug use to numb the pain of abuse, as well as prostitution, drug dealing, theft, and other crimes as a means of survival on the streets.

Given the restricted options and negative influences illustrated in these women's stories, failure to choose a pathway involving crime seems more remarkable than having chosen such a pathway. This is not to excuse or justify criminal behavior, for most women in our sample possessed a component of choice in committing their crimes. However, these findings place a frame of life circumstances around such choices helping to understand the crossroads at which choices were made and the types of things that may have helped women make different choices.

(DeHart, 2008, p. 1378)

The life stories of the women who participated in my study align with these previous studies on pathways to incarceration. The majority share a history of victimization related to intersecting oppressive forces including physical and sexual abuse, poverty, inadequate health care, and discrimination in an unjust legal system. In their realities there is a place where choice and constraint intersect, obscuring the lines between "criminal" behavior and survival strategies. Hearing these women's stories, particularly those that involved enduring years of physical and sexual abuse, I initially found a natural tendency to focus my reading and analysis of their stories on their victimization. However, a deeper reading of their stories reveals similar patterns of

agency and resistance. As the women hold positions of both victim and perpetrator, these actions fall into the realm of both legal and illegal activity in the context of their life circumstances which are enmeshed in social injustice and complex and shifting power relations.

Method

Participants

The participants in my study included 13 women. At the time of data collection, eight of the women were incarcerated at Dallas County Jail (DCJ), three had served time at DCJ and were finishing out their sentences at a court-ordered residential drug rehabilitation program, and two had been released from DCJ and were completing the terms of their probation. They range in age from 19 to 46, and self-identified¹³ as: African-American (1), Black (1), Black and Cherokee Indian (1), Caucasian (2), half Native American and half Black (1), Hispanic (2), Mexican (2), White (2), White and Black (1). Nine of thirteen have children that range in age from 10 months old to 27 years old. Only one of the women still has full custody of her children. Their reported criminal charges include: check, credit card, and identification fraud; forgery; felony theft; felony escape; prostitution; and various drug related offenses. One woman served time for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon (she ran over her boyfriend with her car).

¹³ The question asked was, "How do you identify in terms of your race or ethnicity?" In an attempt to maintain the women's right to claim their own identity, rather than selecting a category to place them in based on their answers (e.g. labeling the women who identified as White or Caucasian as White), I chose to keep intact the terms they used to identify themselves.

Three of the women dropped out of high school and reported no additional formal education, seven dropped out of high school and later earned a Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED), one completed high school, one graduated high school and attended college for four years, and one completed high school and earned a bachelor's degree in business management and marketing. Three of the women who earned GEDs also have some college and/or trade school credits and one is currently working toward a bachelor's degree in criminology.

Prior to incarceration, three of the women were unemployed, one worked as a customer service cashier, one worked as a topless dancer, one worked as a home health care provider, one was an assistant manager at two different establishments, one worked in sales, four earned their income through prostitution, and one explicitly through drug dealing, though five worked intermittently in the drug trade. All the women were involved or had been involved with Resolana, an educational program for incarcerated women at DCJ.

The women who were incarcerated at the time of data collection were contacted through Resolana classes and those who wanted to participate in the study completed an interest form. The two formerly incarcerated women expressed interest in participating in the study to Resolana staff members and shared their contact information so an interview could be arranged. The women living at the residential drug rehabilitation facility were identified by Resolana and the facility's staff members as women who were interested in participating in the study. Participation was completely voluntary and participants were informed that their involvement would remain confidential.

Data Gathering and Analysis

I, along with my co-investigator, Dr. Suzanne Enck¹⁴, conducted semi-structured life history interviews with each participant. The interviews with the women who were incarcerated took place in the education classroom at Dallas County Jail. The interviews with the women who were in rehab took place in a private room at the rehabilitation facility, Hope House¹⁵. The formerly incarcerated women chose the location of their interviews: one was at a coffee shop near her home and the other was at a park area surrounding an outdoor concert venue in downtown Dallas. Suzanne secured a grant for her study which allowed her to provide the latter two women \$25 compensation for their time. Depending on how much the women were willing to share, the interviews lasted between 35 minutes and over three hours.

After editing the first drafts of the transcribed interviews¹⁶ and reading through them multiple times, I used Atlas.ti to create and apply codes to my data using grounded theory guidelines (Charmaz, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Charmaz (2011), “In order to construct a fresh theory from the data, using grounded theory necessitates being as open as possible to what is happening in the data and beginning inductive inquiry from that point. Hence, grounded theory leads the researcher to ask: What is most significant in these data?” (p. 170). What struck me as most significant as I coded each transcript were the limited options the women had as a

¹⁴ Suzanne Enck is an assistant professor at the University of North Texas who was conducting a separate study on the topic of abuse and incarcerated women. We are co-principal investigators on each others' studies and conducted the majority of the interviews together.

¹⁵ Pseudonym.

¹⁶ The initial transcriptions were done by Suzanne Enck's graduate students who were included in her IRB protocol and were paid through her grant.

result of their life circumstances and their ability to survive those circumstances no matter how dehumanizing or dangerous. Thus, after the initial coding, I focused my analysis around the themes of agency and resistance and created categories from the codes in which the women responded to people or situations involving control, power or domination over their lives.

Key Terms

In his work as a therapist treating victims of abuse, assault, and who have suffered various forms of domination and oppression, (Wade, 1997) found that “alongside each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative and determined resistance” (p. 23). To analyze the women’s stories in my study, I use Wade’s definition of resistance:

...any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect) or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance. Further, any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, on behalf of one’s self or others, including any effort to redress the harm caused by violence or other forms of oppression, represents a de facto form of resistance. (p. 25)

I also draw on Faulker & McDonald’s (2009), Showden’s (2011) work on women’s agency and how it emerges in women’s personal lives amidst the social and

political, and cultural realities in which women make choices about their lives.¹⁷

Women's agency, according to Showden, must be understood within the context of women's lives. Faulkner and McDonald argue that true resistance

...can be found through examining the *specificity* of women's conditions, the legal, social and cultural structures that disempower women, and the transformative power of negating the label of victim. Resistance then becomes a way of life, a survivor response or a political action. (p. 11)

Findings

Resourcefulness

Despite their limited options, the women exhibit agency and resistance in how they find ways to support themselves and their family, navigate the legal system, and protect themselves in dangerous situations.

Finding support and making a living. Several of the women ran away from home at an early age in an attempt to escape poverty, sexual, physical, and/or emotional abuse. With a lack of job skills and limited education, they relied on what they had learned at home and on the streets, and on the resources and job opportunities they had available to support themselves. Alma began running away at the age of eight to escape the sexual abuse of her cousin. Mari began running away from home at the age of eleven. She was sexually abused by her stepfather until she was nine years old, and by her mother's boyfriend when she was older. Both grew up in impoverished

¹⁷ See also Toner's (2009) work, which examined agency and resistance in the lives of Native American women who were recovering from substance abuse.

neighborhoods and found refuge and support when they joined gangs. Alma recognized that while turning to a gang would likely lead to getting into some kind of trouble, they provided her with an emotional outlet (talking about her problems) and also a means to make money (dealing drugs). Mari considers herself a survivor. “I’ve survived on the streets since very young,” she said. She recalled being in dangerous situations and around dangerous people—dangerous people who showed her love and support:

Whether it came to Kiki, to Pepe, to Ruben, they were the worst of the worst.

Ruben’s still doing 99 years on attempted murder and aggravated kidnapping.

These other people I was around, these are the people that showed me more love than I think anybody I’ve ever seen—in their own way.

She said they had compassion for her and what she had been through, and they tried to take care of her, unlike her family of origin.

Miller’s (2001) findings from her study on girls’ involvement with gangs showed that family problems were a common reason girls joined gangs. She found that experiences with abuse, drug addiction, neglect, and danger in the home were the most common reasons girls sought social, emotional and sometimes economic support from gangs. This was the case, too, for Alma and Mari. Miller argues that to understand the complexity of and accurately document young women’s lives, we need to recognize that often their trajectories into gangs are acts of resistance to oppression and victimization. She argues: “Our reluctance to view women’s crime in terms other than as resistance to gendered victimization constrains our abilities to fully document women’s lives (p. 15)” She also argues that we need to include in our meanings of resistance “those gender

strategies adopted by girls and women that ultimately and even purposively uphold women's oppression. Only in doing both can we adequately address those aspects of young women's lives that involve harmful actions—against themselves and others” (p. 15).

Throughout her childhood and adolescent years, Megan moved between homes. She sometimes lived with her mother who was physically and verbally abusive, and other times with her grandparents whom she described as loving. Rather than being angry with her grandmother for not protecting her from her mother, she admires her grandmother for not keeping her mother from her despite the fact that she was aware of the abuse. Megan dropped out of school in the sixth grade and throughout her story she talked about her high level of intelligence and how she was never able to fully develop through formal education because the opportunities were taken from her. She also mentioned being bi-polar, but reported never having been formally diagnosed. Based on her early memories and the way she told her story (at times it was disjointed), it is highly possible she struggled with an undiagnosed mental illness, which may have contributed to her circumstances. She has served time for theft and various drug related offenses, including manufacturing and delivering. She described herself as a kind-hearted and loving person who was taken advantage of by most of the people in her life and has suffered from addiction for most of her adult life. Strip dancing, for Megan, became a lucrative profession and was her “saving grace.” “Because it saved my integrity as a woman, you know. I could still make money without selling myself,” she said. Prior to becoming a professional dancer, she had been living with a woman who was helping her

take care of her daughter and she felt trapped. She was convinced the woman wanted to take her daughter away from her and that the woman undermined her relationship with her daughter. Eventually, the situation became so miserable that she knew something had to change:

So at that point, I was like, I have got to figure a way out of this life and start a new life. I had no education. Nothing to do. My best friend...I call my best friend. She is in Georgia and she's a dancer. She makes boo coo [beaucoup] bucks. So I call her and I'm like, "Look, I have got to...how much money do you make?" and she said, "I make this much." And I said, "I'll be right there." So um...I, I, I go down there. I get a job. I start dancing. I come back. I get my daughter. I don't remember how I did it, but it somehow that empowered me. Just that venture off on my own empowered me. Yeah, I made good money dancing.

As a dancer, she decided the kinds of transactions she would engage in with her clients, and set boundaries based on her comfort level.

Every dancer can pick the way she did it, you know what I'm saying? You could...I never did private dances that much. I just generally do stage because I didn't want to get that close to anybody. ...I can't be touched. I can't be violated, you know. It's an art form. It's a way of expressing art to me. ...You know I'm expressing myself as a woman and I'm able to have that, have that shield around and that wall. So through that, I was able to find a whole other person.

Dancing gave Megan a sense of control over her life. It is one of the few occasions in her story where she does not identify herself as a victim. Consistent with Megan's dealings with her clients, in her in-depth study of women in the strip trade, Bruckert (2002) found similar strategies being used. She identifies the stage as a labor site "where resistance against client control is made real through praxis" (p. 117). While public images of women strippers typically render them as deviant, powerless, sexual objects, to the strippers in her study, it is the male clients who are deviant, gullible, pathetic, and infantile.

The hidden transcript's depersonalized conception of the audience as deviant or infantile helps the dancer maintain a positive self-image in the face of catcalls or judgements. She can always remind herself that their opinions are relevant only to the extent that they can be manipulated for her income. Far from being agents of her oppression, the men are transformed into mere consuming objects. (p. 117)

Like Megan, the women in her study also disassociated themselves from their clients, particularly the regulars who were deemed needy, to protect themselves from the emotional demands of their work. According to Bruckert, "Ironically, stripping, which appears to epitomize oppressive gender roles and women's subservient position, can also be a site of resistance to those very linguistic and cultural constructs" (p. 120). Earlier research on strip dancers conducted by Ronai and Ellis (1989) and Ronai (1992) supports Bruckert's claims.

Sarah was 43 years old at the time of our interview and she has been in and out of prison for prostitution and drug related offenses since she was 17. She lived in a stable

home with her grandparents until she was four years old and then lived with an alcoholic mother who brought home and slept with different men after her stepfather was incarcerated. She frequently witnessed her mother having sex with these men. Sarah's mother was physically and verbally abusive to her; however, the verbal abuse is what stays with her. She explained:

So anyway, she'd come home from work and she would, like she had a bad day at work, she would tell me that she wished I was never born, that I was nothin' but a mistake, that I was gonna end up being a little slut when I grew up. And just that she didn't really want me, and my sister was the only baby she really wanted, all this stuff here. And I was like, y'know, and then she would beat me on top of that. But the beatings weren't really what I remember. It was the words that today—those words still affect me.

Sarah's mother sent her to a psychiatric center at the age of nine because she was misbehaving. After that, she was in and out of juvenile homes and foster care and dropped out of school in the tenth grade. On occasion, her mother would take her back and Sarah believes her mom did this to collect welfare checks and when she would get tired of her, would kick her out again. Sarah ran away for good at the age of 15 and since then, her major source of income has been through prostitution. From a young age, Sarah found ways to survive. She sought help by finding ways to contact family members and people she met in various circumstances. She realized that although the support she found (if any at all) was temporary, it helped her immediate circumstances. Sarah is smart and found ways to get out of dangerous situations (discussed more later). In the

world she lives in, she exercises the power she has to advocate for and protect herself. When she had a baby in jail, Sarah was determined to keep her newborn son away from Child Protective Services (CPS) and find a loving home for him. Her hope was that she would be able to reunite with her son after serving her sentence, and finding a home for him provided her with the best chance for that. While in jail, she managed to contact an agency and begged them to take her son and find a home for him. When they told her they had no openings, she wouldn't take no for an answer and the agency found a home for him. "And so this woman has had my child since the day he was born. And I chose to leave him there because I haven't done the right things since then," she said. Sarah imagines a future where she no longer lives on the streets and can turn her artistic talent into a business. While in jail, she earned commissary money by cutting hair and selling her art:

Yeah, I cut hair in here. And I know how to paint, draw, that's how I make my money here because nobody comes up here to support me, you know what I'm sayin'? So I draw cards and stuff for the women here.

All of these women managed to identify and surround themselves with the support they needed to survive.

Finding resources. Once convicted, securing employment is extremely difficult and can severely restrict women's options for legal work (Maidment, 2006). Along with challenges securing employment, the formerly incarcerated women in Maidment's study also shared feelings of "intimidation, disorientation, and trepidation" (p. 102), which added a psychological dimension to the pressures the women faced as they tried to

resume their lives outside of prison. The two formerly incarcerated participants, Carla and Taylor, faced similar pressures upon release from jail; however, they actively sought information and resources that could assist them in a variety of ways. Carla found assistance through the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) Project Rio whose mission is to provide economically disadvantaged ex-offenders assistance with securing employment. She also enrolled in college to pursue a degree in criminology. She applied for another program through TWC that would assist her in obtaining a paid internship; however, she was denied acceptance because she had not been out of jail long enough. Nevertheless, she continues to search for opportunities and resources that will help her achieve her goals. Having dealt with the struggles of being an ex-felon in the "free world," Carla wants to earn a degree that will help her support other women who have been incarcerated. She was incarcerated for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon for running over her boyfriend with her car when she found out he was cheating on her. At the time, she was intoxicated and deeply depressed, although she does not excuse her actions.

Prior to her most recent incarceration for fraud, Taylor was a successful salesperson and had worked both with a company and independently. Growing up, Taylor's life was shrouded in fear and secrecy because both her parents were HIV positive due to a blood transfusion her mother had after giving birth to Taylor. This was in the 1980s when AIDS was less understood, and out of fear of losing their jobs as educators, her parents admonished their children not to tell anyone. Her mother died when she was 11 and her father when she was 13. After their deaths, she lived with her

older sister, then an aunt, and then she was adopted by a pastor and his wife. The pastor started sexually abusing her a year after she moved in with them. To cope, she began shopping and her addiction to money and shopping began after she finished college. She was raped by a stranger who entered her home and this experience sent her addiction into “manic mode.” To support her addiction, she engaged in various kinds of financial fraudulent activities. With a degree in Business Management and Marketing, Taylor is a smart and savvy business woman. When she was released from jail, she found a resource that connects investors with ex-offenders who are interested in starting their own business. While the program historically only served men, she managed to get in the program and at the time of the interview had three investors interested in her business proposal. To control her addiction, Taylor remains active in Debtors Anonymous. Whenever Carla and Taylor find resources that could help formerly incarcerated women, they share that information with Resolana staff to help them update their list of resources for the women they serve. Existing in a world where they contend with many challenges, these women developed resourcefulness as a life skill.

Navigating and subverting the “justice” system. All the women in my study had prior arrests and all but one served time in jail and/or prison on multiple occasions. Thus, it is not surprising that they understand the legal system and learned to navigate through the complicated and oftentimes seemingly arbitrary judicial processes. The women do not passively accept sentences or other legal mandates, but rather conduct their own research on the law, advocate for themselves, and in some cases use their knowledge of the judicial system to get assistance or to subvert authority, particularly

when they feel threatened or if they have been treated unfairly. Examples of this include admitting guilt in order to get treatment for drug addiction, refusing to heed the ill advice of their court-appointed attorneys, negotiating for lesser charges that would allow for probation in order to avoid incarceration, knowing how to pass drug tests, and purposely violating probation when their probation officers treat them unfairly or when the expectations of probation are unrealistic. Carla's example of getting burned out by and resisting the unrealistic expectations of probation exemplifies this latter experience:

And so basically from 2003 to 2008 is just like a blur because all I was doing was working, working, working. You know, I was just basically working all the time because probation, they make it sound so easy. Probation, probation is like literally a second full-time job because I would...not only do you have to pay for your probation meeting like your probation officer¹⁸, I had to pay for every single class I did. Then you have to pay for UAs¹⁹. I was paying for restitution and paying court fees, so literally one of my jobs was just literally for me paying my bills and the other job was basically just for probation.

Eventually, she chose to violate her probation because she felt the demands were unfair and unrealistic. It was also negatively impacting her physical and mental health.

Responding to what they felt was unfair and/or potentially harmful post-incarceration release requirements, both Carla and Sarah violated their probation by leaving the halfway houses in which they were required to serve part of their sentences. Carla became frustrated because she was initially told she would only have to live there

¹⁸ Required monthly supervision fees.

¹⁹ Urine analysis tests.

for six months but was kept there for almost a year. Along with this frustration, coordinating visits with her young daughter was challenging because children are not allowed to visit halfway houses where sex offenders reside. Even if her daughter had been allowed to visit her there, Carla would not have wanted to expose her to her living circumstances. Sarah felt personally threatened living in a halfway house and preferred to take her chances on the streets, knowing she would have to do whatever she could to survive. She explained:

So when I come here, I was in the Bridge House. Well, the Bridge House has like 200 men to like 8 women. And then, the majority of the men that are there are either there for raping a female or have some sort of child offense or some sort of sexual offense. Because that is a state-owned halfway house, they have to be able to accept these sex offenders in there. And so everybody had a certain kind of box on their leg, you could tell if they were there for sex offense, or there for murder—one of the two. So it's like I'm lookin' at all these guys lookin' at all these boxes on their legs, and they're all tryin' to talk to me, and I'm like, I'm tryin' to tell the counselor, "Look, I don't feel comfortable here. Do you not understand where I come from? I don't feel comfortable here. Number one, I'm a victim of sex offense. Number one, I have two kids, and I couldn't bear to think of someone doin' something to one of them, you know what I'm sayin'?" So this is a conflict of interest here, could you get me out of here? Could you send me to an all-female halfway house?" And she's like, "I'm tryin' to talk to your parole officer." Two weeks pass by and nobody said nothin' to me, so finally I took it

upon myself to leave. So I've been out there on the streets for the last 6 months, by myself, doin' whatever I did, had to do to survive.

According to Maidment (2006), requiring women parolees to live in halfway houses with male sex offenders is not uncommon. Given the abuse histories of many incarcerated women, this practice can lead to revictimization and hinder any possibility for recovery. Violating parole under these circumstances may very well be a rational, self-protective response rather than a criminal act. Forced to contend with a judicial system that is clearly not designed to serve their best interests, these women find ways to resist the imposed and unsafe and at times unrealistic living requirements.

Protecting Themselves

With the exception of Carla, all the women in my study were victims of physical and/or sexual abuse. They suffered abuse at the hands of boyfriends, husbands, relatives (fathers, mothers, uncles, male cousins), Johns, pimps, or madams. Along with running away from dangerous and abusive situations in the home as discussed earlier, the women used various strategies to protect themselves from violence and abuse: seeking legal assistance, using their instincts and knowledge to escape danger, fighting back, and acting fearless.

Seeking legal assistance. Identified as criminals in the system, for these women seeking legal assistance carried some risk; thus, only in rare cases did the women seek legal assistance. This is exemplified in Lynn's story. After getting out of prison on parole, Lynn had to live in a homeless shelter. During this time, she met, fell in love with, and moved in with a man who became verbally, emotionally, and physically

abusive. She said she stayed in the relationship because of her low self-esteem, but her AA sponsor helped her feel better about herself, which led her to question her choice to remain in the relationship. She thought about harming him in self-defense, but because of her criminal record, which included prostitution, drug related offenses and credit card fraud, she chose to seek legal assistance instead:

So knowing that I have, that I'm an ex-felon, I couldn't possibly take matters into my own hands because the odds would be against me. So I know either he was gonna' get hurt in our relationship or I was. I can honestly, y'know, it may sound scrupulous, but thank God it was me. I'm out of the relationship, it cost me... I had to carry around a letter, and I had to go through victim assistance to get relocated to Dallas. I was hospitalized. But they helped me relocate to Dallas. They helped me medically, with my medical, and y'know, victim assistance really helped me. And he received time. He received time because he left me for dead. But, I'm not a victim anymore. I'm a survivor of that.

Despite the costs, and the economic, sociological, and psychological constraints typically associated with leaving an abusive relationship with an intimate partner (Belknap, 2007; J. Brown, 1997; Coates & Ridley, 2009; DeHart, 2008; Showden, 2011; Wade, 1997; Warner, Baro, & Eigenberg, 2004), Lynn not only left the relationship, but pressed charges and had her abuser convicted. She leveraged the legal system to work on her behalf in this situation.

Using their instincts and knowledge to escape danger. Danger was the norm for the women who earned a living through sex work and, given that prostitution is

illegal, they felt no protection from the police no matter what kind of crimes were committed against them. Sarah tells of a time when she thought a John was going to kill her. She was 18 years old and about six months pregnant. She and the John were about to have sex in the alley when he insisted on sniffing “Rush.” He was having a difficult time having an orgasm and when Sarah told him he needed to hurry up because she had to buy diapers, milk, and medication for her baby who was at home, the man became irate. He held her at knifepoint, made her blindfold herself with her shirt, forced her into his car and drove her to his house. The moment he mentioned that he had a wife was the moment Sarah saw an opportunity to survive the situation.

And so I’m climbin’ up the steps and he tells me, “Crawl through this window.”

I’m like, “Crawl through the damn window? Do you not live here?” He’s like,

“Don’t worry about it. He said “I ain’t got a key. My wife’s got the keys.” I said,

“Your wife?” So that was my key, to keep him from really hurtin’ me.

She then tries to elicit sympathy from him and reminds him that she is pregnant:

So when I get inside, he’s wantin’ to tie my hands and my ankles down with these nylons, I’m like, “Dude, I’m pregnant and you’re cuttin’ off my circulation to my baby. Please, could you...I’m already here. I already...it’s not nothin’ I could do. Could you not tie up my hands and feet?”

She continues to try to get him to think about the potential consequences of his decisions by keeping his wife on his mind:

‘Cause the whole time he’s doin’ this I’m thinkin’, man, this man’s gonna’ kill

me, and I’m sayin’, “Well where’s your wife at? How come she’s not here?” And

I'm making...steadily keeping his wife on his mind, you know what I'm sayin'?

I'm like, "Does she know you've done things like this before?" He's like, "No! This is the first time I've ever done somethin' like this before." And he's really talkin' fast. And so by the time he gets me to where he's at [where he picked her up], he pulls out a hundred dollar bill and he hands it to me. I was like, what? He's like, "Yeah, here's for all the trouble you went through. I'm sorry I took you through all that. Just don't worry about it." So I got out of his car. And I went home with \$135, and I'm like, "Ugh, [if] this man stops again next week, no thank you. No."

Despite her youth, Sarah's experiences had taught her a great deal about human behavior. It is this knowledge that contributed to her ability to survive the streets and talk herself out of dangerous situations. The women who were involved in sex work in Maher's study (1997) on a Brooklyn drug market, and in Northon-Hawk's study (2001) on street prostitution, shared similar strategies to survive on the streets. They, too, faced increased danger and potential violence from Johns who used drugs and experienced difficulty ejaculating. In an attempt to avoid situations where they might become "victims of male sexual frustration" (Maher, 1997, p. 14), the women tried to stay away from mixing drugs and sex work because the use of drugs often interfered with the man's ability to ejaculate. Through past experiences and intuition, they also developed strategies to keep themselves alive knowing they had no protection from police.

Out of necessity, Jasmine learned how to protect herself at an early age and also used her instincts and knowledge of human behavior to survive on the streets. Jasmine's

mother sold herself for drugs. She was addicted to heroin and crack. To support her drug habit, she also sold Jasmine's body to one of her Johns. Jasmine was 12 years old at the time. When her mother tried to sell Jasmine's body to her pimp, he took Jasmine to live with him. Rather than forcing her into prostitution, he taught her the drug trade so she would not have to sell herself. Jasmine sees this man, "Rock", as a father figure who protected her and did the best he could to raise her. After being beaten and held at gunpoint for drugs and money by her mother and her mother's boyfriend, Jasmine was sent to a children's shelter, which she ran away from. At the age of 15, she hitched a ride to Texas, was picked up by a pimp, and turned to prostitution and occasional drug dealing to earn a living. When Jasmine senses she is in danger or will be expected to have sex with someone from whom she sought help or shelter, she attempts to maneuver her way out of the situation. She shared several stories similar to the one below:

So we get to Main and we ride up and down that street for a while and then we go to Central where there is a Red Roof Inn. And he's like, you know, we get to the room and I remember he was like "Well, what do we do? Should I get one room, or two?" Like that. Or no no, he was like "I'm going to get one room. Should I get one bed, or two?" Like that. And you know, I already knew what he was trying to say, so I just looked at him and I was like "just get one" because I know I'm going to get out of it, but right now I'm thinking, you know, how am I going to get out of it? So we get there, and he gets one bed and I'm all, you know, "Well, come take a bath" trying to tell him to get in the bathtub. So as soon as he gets in the shower—because we've been together all day so he trusts

me, you know, he's trusted me or whatever. So as soon as he gets in the shower I look in his wallet and get some money out and I left him 20 bucks, you know. But I get the money out and I go. Because I mean I didn't have no money, all I had was my duffel bag with me. So I ease out of the room, and I go and I run and I remember looking behind me thinking "any minute he's going to come up in this van and coming to get me." And I went and I walked up Central and I made it down to Main.

When they sensed danger, both Jasmine and Sarah used their "street sense" to escape danger.

Fighting back. Fighting back an abuser carries potentially deadly risks.

Nevertheless, beginning at an early age, with no one to protect her when being beaten, Jasmine fights back in self-protection. At 14 years old, Jasmine keeps a "beat up stick" in her room and uses it when her mother's boyfriend starts to beat her:

Well, then he takes off his belt and he just starts hitting me with it. And um, I remember I'm trying to grab the belt, I'm trying to grab the belt, and uh there's a stick in my room. And I used to call it the beat up stick, it's sittin' behind my door. In case somebody tries to come in at night, or something, I have my stick. And so, um, I grabbed that stick, and I'm fixing to try to hit him back with the stick.

On the streets, Jasmine has to continually be aware of her surroundings where almost anyone is a potential threat. Here, she fights back to protect herself and her unborn child from a woman who is involved with her boyfriend and three of her friends:

Well on my way back, I guess they had seen me or whatever so I seen this car go up, and I see it turn around. And I'm thinking, oh, you know, it's probably a trick or something like that trying to stop me, because they always try to stop me. And whatever, she gets out. When she got out, I look and I seen it was her. So I was like, "Oh man, she is ready to fight," and I know I'm four, five months pregnant, you know, so I'm like, "I know she wants to fight." So I seen her walking up to me, so my first instinct is just to hit, because I don't want to get hit, and I got a baby to protect. So I just start swinging. And so I'm whooping her and then three other girls get out. And so, when they get out I'm just like, dang, you know. So I just, I'm still swinging but then I'm trying to protect my baby at the same time. So I go down like that, and whenever I go down, I can feel them all hitting me on my back. They're hitting me on my back. And um, finally I got Veronica's hair but I don't want to let it go because I know if I let go, then I'm going to have to get up and somebody's going to hit me in the face, you know. So finally, I don't know what made them stop, but they stopped. Maybe somebody yelled police or something like that. And they got scared and they stopped and they pulled my shirt off and left me out there with no shirt on, but I had my bra on.

Despite the very real threat of being killed for fighting back, Jasmine tries to protect herself and her daughter from her boyfriend with whom they had been living.

And um, you know, it was just real, it was becoming too much for me, you know, and so we would get into arguments and stuff and of course the last time he beat me up I had Riley in my arms and you know, I was telling him, "Just let

me, please let me just put her down first,” you know, cause I could already tell in his face whenever it’s coming, you know, and he would, I felt him on my back. I had her, holding her to my chest, and I was just, you know, kicking him trying to hold still and kick him, you know, and I’m thinking in my brain, “Oh my God, my baby is going to have shaken baby syndrome,” and you know, I’m just going crazy in my mind.

While Jasmine has been taken advantage of and abused throughout her life, when she tells her story, she does not convey the sense that she feels like a victim. She fights back, escapes from, and sometimes gets even with (discussed below) her perpetrators. If she feels threatened or gets tired of being in a situation, she finds a way out, despite the potential consequences.

Acting fearless. For some of the women, when faced with danger, particularly during their involvement with drug dealing or prostitution, adopting a fearless attitude served two purposes: It earned them respect on the streets and it sometimes kept them from harm. Sarah explained:

Until one day, I’m there, I’m in the house, and he comes to the door and he has this pump-shotgun in his hand, and he reached up and he went “chk” [makes a click sound] like this and pointed it in my face. And I looked at him and I said, “Man, you better get that thing outa’ my face.” He said, “What are you gonna’ do if I don’t?” And I slapped the barrel of the gun out of my face out of fear. I did this just so he wouldn’t think I was scared. So I slapped the barrel of the gun, I said, “Man get that thing outa’ my face, I’m not playin’.” And he started

laughin', he said, "I like you. You're pretty cool." And I left it at that, I never went back because, he ended up gettin' arrested.

When talking about her life experiences, Mari frequently describes herself as competitive and fearless. While those characteristics may have always been present in her life, it was when she joined a gang that those characteristics earned her respect which had been missing from her home life.

So I really wanted a lot of respect, so I went all out. Like, I had no fear. I lived my life to like, I didn't care what happened. I didn't fear nothing, I wasn't scared a nothing. So that really moved me up quick in my gang. Because they saw, "She's down for her, she doesn't care, she..." I got respect and my stripes for doing everything like, they were gonna go do something, I was right there, front row, ready to do it.

Harassment and victimization are part of everyday life for women who are involved in the male-dominated drug trade, according to Maher (1997). To survive the terror they faced in the streets, the women in her study who were part of the drug trade often adopted an attitude of fearlessness and a "badass", "crazy," or "gangsta bitch" stance or attitude (citing Katz, 1988). Consistent with Sarah's and Mari's experiences, this persona was a necessary survival strategy for the women in her study.

Getting Even

Daily acts of resistance are also revealed through the women's intentional acts of getting even with their perpetrators or oppressors. These acts gave them a sense of satisfaction and control in various situations. In his research on how subordinate groups

resist domination, Scott (1990) identifies theft as a “low-profile strategem”. He writes, “Resistance, like domination, fights a war on two fronts. The hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile strategems designed to minimize appropriation” (p. 188). Karen, Jasmine, and Sarah shared stories of stealing from Johns or pimps. Sarah learned from another sex worker how to pickpocket and steal from the tricks, and “run game on dope dealers.” Jasmine shared a story of being brutally beaten by her boyfriend: He broke her ribs, repeatedly stomped on her head, and after beating her, put her under a scorching hot shower and scrubbed her body with a steel wool scouring pad telling her she needed to get clean and get the devil off of her. She left him after this brutal assault and shortly thereafter was incarcerated for prostitution. When she was released from jail, she resumed her relationship with him and stole her boyfriend’s car to get back at him for beating her:

Well um, when I got out, he came to pick me up when I got out and he had a blue Cadillac. Well, I stole his Cadillac, because you know, I never got to pay him back for beating me up, you know what I mean? So whenever I got out I had held that grudge with me that whole six months, you know. So when I got out he had this blue Cadillac, so I stole the Cadillac. You know, and he was at a football game checking on his, checking on somebody at a kid’s football game thing and left me in the car. And so I was like, you know, it was hot outside too. And so he left me in the car and the keys were in the car so when he went up there, as soon

as he went up there I left. And um, I told him, “I’m going to the store. I’ll be right back.” And never came back.

Karen recalled a time when she stole from a John who hurt her and degraded her. She had just arrived in California with a woman she was dating at the time and they had nowhere to live. She explained:

So we get there to Hollywood, California, and I get picked up by this, her and me get picked up by this guy, and I end up having to sleep with this guy. And y’know, I’m used to being abused, so...I end up sleeping with him for a place to live, and he ends up, and I ended up having to sleep with him for both of us, so. I’m used to that kind of stuff...so I do that. Um. And uh...He ends up doing things to me that didn’t feel right, I uh, he ended up starting to hurt me...and uh degrades me, so I end up, trying to rob him.

While the act of stealing is criminalized behavior, for these women, “stealing” is agency—a means of adjusting the balance of power and contesting the brutality and degradation they experience. Unfortunately, these acts of retaliation often reproduce the women as “criminals.”

Resisting Gender Expectations

The theme of motherhood surfaced in many of the women’s stories. These stories were often painful to tell and elicited feelings of grief, guilt, and shame. The complexity of these stories warrant a deeper analysis beyond the scope of this paper. However, Carla’s experience, although somewhat unique, is reflective of the struggle that many of the women faced with their role as a mother. After giving birth to her daughter, Carla

became deeply depressed. She started drinking heavily and using cocaine to help her stay awake at night with her baby. Disappointed in where she was in her life, she shamefully admitted that she felt hate and anger toward her daughter. She became so depressed that she attempted suicide. She said she was likely suffering from postpartum depression, but was never medically diagnosed or treated. Unlike some of the other women who attempted at all costs to maintain custody of their children (despite the sometimes unintentional negative consequences their children suffered), she was allowing herself time and space to work through the feelings she had about her daughter despite the expectations of being a “good mother.”

And part of me is so...I hate it because I'm like with my nieces and nephews, it's like I can just hug them and you know do all that, but like with her, it's like like there's part of myself that's shut off from her like I act a certain way when I'm around her, you know. I'm like not just comfortable with her. I'm not just comfortable hugging her or doing certain, you know being affectionate with her where I am with my nieces and nephews. So I don't know if that's going to take counseling or what, but that's like one of the main like things right now.

Dominant narratives of motherhood depict mothering as natural, instinctive, selfless, and nurturing. Furthermore, women are expected to bond with their children in utero and feel overflowing and unconditional love for their children at birth. Although Carla still carried feelings of shame and embarrassment for not feeling the way she “should” about her daughter, her choice to maintain distance from her as she tried to understand and work through her feelings is perhaps one of the more audacious acts of resistance to

gender expectations. According to Mollen (2009), “As ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ are still largely conceptualized synonymously, particularly in pronatalist countries, the act of resisting motherhood requires a kind of gender rebellion” (p. 138). Carla wants to have a healthy relationship with her daughter, but realizes she needs to understand her feelings toward her daughter in order to be a good mother.

Resisting Stigma and Valuing Self

Women need to know that they can reject the powerful’s definition of their reality—that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped in oppressive circumstances. They need to know that the exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength. (hooks, 1984, p. 90)

A final and important finding in the women’s stories is that despite their experiences of being abused, neglected, degraded, and sometimes discarded, and having their self-worth continually attacked, the women see themselves as valuable and worthy of love. Hope, rather than defeat, prevails. For Paula, the recovery work she has committed to doing while in the Resolana program in jail gives her hope:

And if I can have the drive in here, then I can have that drive out there.
And that gives me hope. That I’m not just a failure and I’m not just giving up. Y’know, ‘cause I could sleep all day if I wanted to, in another tank. Waste my life away, and do what? Instead I choose to get up and go to class. I choose to make something better of my life. I choose to educate myself and create an opportunity for me to want to leave these doors. I’ve

done that. So if I've done that I can do anything. That's the hope that I have.

Carla has learned to love and care for herself. She doesn't let the label of "convicted felon" define who she is:

I was just telling someone the other day I know it's weird, but it's like I love myself, you know, even though like I actually feel like I'm in a worse situation because I'm a convicted felon, but I actually love myself more. And that like, you know, you show that because it's like I want to do some more stuff for myself when before was just about other people like I found my worth in other people and stuff like that. Now it's just like I know it sounds selfish, but now it's like I have the attitude, well it's about me and what I need to do.

Alma, who started using heroin at the age of 11 and used to cut herself to cope with the pain of the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, has also learned to love herself. She said, "Because I know that whatever happened to me as a child is not my fault. And I didn't have to take it out on myself. And I always thought I was ugly, but I'm not." Prior to her recent incarceration, Alma was injecting up to three grams of heroin per day, but she is determined to turn her life around:

And I know if I go back to that, I will die. And I'm not ready to lose my life yet. I have already set a lot of high intentions for myself when I get out. Because my intentions might change, I might want to go and be a lawyer.

When she completes her court-ordered rehabilitation program, Alma's goal is to work with youth who are involved in drugs and gangs.

When asked what has changed for her that will help her cope with the challenging circumstances of her life, Jasmine said that she now has a support system that she's never had before and she, too, learned to love herself:

And also, I have a lot more to lose, you know. Whereas before, I had nothing to lose, you know. Well I felt like I had nothing to lose, but now I know that I can love me. I have me to lose. That feels better.

While many may see them as mere criminals, for these women rejecting this imposed identity and choosing self-love and self-care is a powerful act.

Concluding Discussion

The unruly woman of Western societies is a product of the bourgeois imagination and the politics of patriarchal relations. Her crimes are the impolite crimes of the woman who lacks the resources to wrap herself in the cloaks of middle-class femininity. The "bad girl" of cultural stereotyping is the product of class-biased, racist and heterosexist myths. Historically and to the present, her appearance, actions and attitudes have been offensive to the dominant discourses which define, classify, regulate and set penalties for deviance. She is socially constructed as undeserving of the "protections" of the woman who is confined within the patterns of gender conformity. (Faith, 1993, p. 1)

Labeled as criminal, deviant, addict, whore, thief, crack mother, and victim, the "choices" made by the women in my study have been judged without consideration for

the imposed oppressive circumstances that determined their options. They have been cast off into our current system of mass imprisonment, which has created additional post-incarceration barriers to securing legal employment, safe living conditions, adequate healthcare, educational opportunities, and in many cases the basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing, particularly for those with little or no support from friends or family. Many of them have been pathologized as suffering from manic depression, Borderline Personality Disorder, or low self-esteem, as a way of explaining their “criminal” behavior. In her discussion about the problems of identifying low self-esteem and other psychological disorders as a main contributor to women’s criminal behavior, Pollack (2000) argues, “This type of approach individualizes the experiences of women in conflict with the law by locating the cause of law breaking within women’s psychology. As such, forms of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism are ignored and escape being understood as contributing factors in the lives of women in conflict with the law” (p. 6). As I listened to the women tell their stories, I was aware of the visible and emotional scars of racism, classism, and sexism that marked their lives. As their stories unfolded, I was also aware of the courage, strength and resilience they revealed not only in the living of their lives but in the excavation and retelling of painful and often violent memories.

Categorizing and simplifying as “law breaking behaviors” their actions, such as running away as a minor, prostitution, using or selling drugs, stealing, or getting involved with criminal street gangs, not only disregards their historical and material conditions within which their choices are made, but also discounts the intentions of the

women as they sought to avoid and respond to the poverty, injustice, violence and victimization that were imposed on their lives. Examining the women's so-called choices and behaviors through a lens of resistance and agency assists in identifying the personal resources the women possess that might inform their future choices. I am not arguing that because stealing, for example, is an act of agency or resistance in many of these women's stories that their future behaviors should involve stealing, nor am I attempting to minimize the potential negative consequences for them or others of some of their actions. I am arguing that helping the women see that they do have agency and choice in how they collude with, challenge, reject, or actively work against oppressive forces, and that they are capable of moving beyond their present state of being, can be a powerful realization that positively impacts their future decision-making. As Collins writes, "As people push against, step away from, and shift the terms of their participation in power relations, the shape of power relations changes for everyone. Like individual subjectivity, resistance strategies and power are always multiple and in constant states of change" (Collins, 2000, p. 275). Reframing their actions through a lens of everyday resistance works to counter the negative and oftentimes debilitating assaults targeted at them by the people in their lives and by the legal system, and can help them continue to claim and use their personal power in life-supporting ways.

Hearing their life stories and examining their choices and behaviors through a lens of resistance and agency based on the options available to them also gives a more accurate and just account of their pathways to incarceration and forces us to reconsider criminal behavior and thus, our response as a society to women in similar circumstances.

According to Duley (2006), “Alternatively, by hiding the political conditions and socioeconomic processes under which marginalized people are accused of committing crimes, ‘offending’ behavior is portrayed as unconnected to these processes and caused merely by individual failure” (p.77). Thus, when these women’s actions are individualized and judged without considering institutionalized violence and oppression, incarcerating them for engaging in bold, self-protective behaviors that serve to defend their dignity and/or their existence and that place them in conflict with the law, becomes a convenient way to dispose of them. According to Davis (2003),

The prison therefore functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs—it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism. (p. 16)

Incarceration is not a solution for reform in these women’s lives. Jails and prisons are ill-equipped to help the women recover from drug or alcohol addiction and the trauma and/or violence they experienced throughout their lives. For women who suffer from addiction, repeated convictions are often linked to deeper addiction, and incarceration frequently exacerbates whatever challenges they faced prior to incarceration (Alleyne, 2006). In prison, survivors of sexual abuse and other forms of assault are often revictimized through standard practices such as strip searches or solitary confinement

(A. Y. Davis, 2003). Women who enter prostitution because of their limited employment options and are convicted for prostitution are almost automatically caught up in a system of recurring incarceration. When they get out of jail or prison, they face the same limited options they had prior to incarceration and often return to prostitution, knowing the consequences. Within feminist discourse, the idea of legalizing prostitution is strongly debated. Some feminists see legalizing prostitution as sanctioned violence against women and other feminists see it as a necessary measure to protect women who engage in sex work (McClintock, 1993; Showden, 2011). Research does show that criminalizing prostitution increases the dangerous circumstances under which the women work and does nothing to decrease or abolish prostitution (Bungay, Halpin, Atchison, & Johnston, 2011; Edwards, 1987; Faith, 1993; Hayes-Smith & Shekarkharb, 2010; Maher, 1997; Martin, Hearst, & Widome, 2010; McClintock, 1993; Norton-Hawk, 2001; Sanders, 2007; Shdaimah & Wiechelt, 2012; Showden, 2011). This is true for the women in my study who were involved in prostitution. Rather than punishment and confinement, what could help the women is compassionate support, safe transitional housing, employment training, and living-wage employment opportunities.

While we need to find informed, compassionate, and healing alternatives to incarceration for these women whose actions have been labeled “deviant” or “criminal,” we also need to critically analyze and change the systemic violence induced by institutionalized racism, classism and sexism. Without working on these issues simultaneously, we will continue to vilify the women survivors of this violence and ensure the recurring cycle of incarceration.

CHAPTER IV
RESOLANA: PAVING PATHS TOWARD TRANSFORMATION WITH
INCARCERATED WOMEN

I cannot imagine a place where one might stand and have a clearer view of concentrated disadvantage based on racial, class, and gender inequality in the country than from inside the walls of a women’s prison. There, behind the razor wire fences, concrete barricades, steel doors, metal bars, and thick plexiglass windows, nearly all of the manifestations of gender domination that feminist scholars and activists have traditionally concerned themselves with—exploited labor, inadequate healthcare, dangerous living conditions, physical violence, and sexual assault—are revealed at once. (Richie, 2004, p. 438)

According to Covington, “Some of the most neglected, misunderstood, and unseen women in our society are those in our jails, prisons and community correctional facilities” (2004, p. 341). Historically, the prison system was designed to manage male prisoners and the criminal justice system has failed to keep pace with the increasing numbers of women who are incarcerated, as well as to provide resources and programs that address the needs of women inmates. Urbina writes, “Therefore, given the increase of incarcerated women, female inmates confined to prisons are often enmeshed in a system that is ill-equipped to handle the specific needs of female offenders, the problems that brought them to prison, and the challenges that women confront during their imprisonment” (2008, p. 5).

Numerous studies support the need for a holistic approach to education that creates opportunities for incarcerated women to heal from their traumatic pasts, addictions, and personal losses, as well as to understand the oppressive forces that may have contributed to their paths to incarceration (Covington & Bloom, 2006; H. C. Davis, 2001; Ferszt, Salgado, DeFedele, & Leveillee, 2009; Gray, Mays, & Stohr, 1995; Pedlar, Yuen, & Fortune, 2008; Williams & Taylor, 2004). Given the historical focus on male offenders in criminology (Belknap, 2007; Chesney-Lind, 2002b; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Urbina, 2008), there are limited offerings of gender-responsive programming for women inmates and this lack of appropriate intervention may negatively impact women's recovery, which oftentimes leads to recidivism.

One example of such programming is Resolana²⁰, a non-profit community based organization. It provides incarcerated women at Dallas County Jail holistic, gender-sensitive programming that aims to educate and empower incarcerated women. Participants in the program typically range in age from 18 to 55, and they are racially and ethnically diverse²¹. Prior to incarceration, most women live below the poverty line, although some participants are middle-class. Many report lifelong traumatic and abusive events and self-medicating behaviors used as coping mechanisms. The majority of the women are single mothers who are the sole support and caretaker of their minor

²⁰ The Spanish term *la Resolana* refers to the sunny side of a building or plaza, a protected place where the warmth absorbed by the adobe walls draws people to gather together and talk. Traditionally, the village elders (called 'los resoladeros' or sun seekers) spent their afternoons seated against these "warming walls," exchanging news with passersby, swapping stories, and passing on their cultural wisdom to the community.

²¹ At the time of data collection, from May to September 2011, the percentages were approximately 40% White, 39% African American, 15% Hispanic, and 3% Native American.

children. With limited access to familial or social support, many had difficulty providing for their children. More than 30% of Resolana's clients report no permanent address, and a majority report being unemployed at the time of their arrest. Most participants are untreated or relapsed substance abusers and 54% have an existing drug felony on record. In Texas, this drug felony handicaps them with a lifelong ban from receiving food stamps, welfare benefits, federally assisted housing and most educational assistance. Without this assistance, successful reentry seems nearly impossible. (B. Buschow, personal communication, April 5, 2010). With five part-time staff²² and approximately 120 volunteers (30 who contribute on a regular basis), the program offers women inmates classes in art, dance, yoga, and other expressive forms of learning, as well as anger management, parenting skills, and psychoeducational classes related to substance abuse and trauma (see Appendix A for a description of Resolana's core areas).

While Resolana offers a variety of classes designed to meet the unique needs of incarcerated women, and there is rich, anecdotal evidence from the inmates of how the classes have fostered transformation in their lives, evaluation of the program's impact on the participants is fraught with challenges, thus, there is a lack of research-based evidence of the program's effectiveness. One challenge is that the population of approximately 900 women incarcerated at DCJ is rather transient. Many women are awaiting trial, serving short sentences, or waiting to be transferred to a longer-term facility. Because of this, women inmates who participate in Resolana classes attend for an average of four weeks, and in some cases, for several months. Additionally, the

²² For the majority of time during data collection, from May to September 2011, the five paid staff members were part-time. In July 2011, one staff member was employed full-time.

program has grown significantly since it began in 2006, and since it is largely supported through volunteer efforts of women in the community, the program staff has been unable to focus on an in-depth study of the program's impact on participants.

This study examines the experiences of 13 women who participated in Resolana while incarcerated at DCJ. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of how the women participants experience the program and what impact it has had on their thinking, feeling and behavior. Using a transformative learning theoretical framework, I explored the learning process of current and past participants in the Resolana program, addressing questions such as: What changes do the women perceive going on inside themselves as a result of their participation in the program? How is transformative learning fostered in jail, and finally, for the participants who were no longer incarcerated, what impact did the program have on their experiences of reentry into the community?

Review of the Literature

Transformative learning may be understood as the epistemology of how adults learn to reason for themselves—advance and assess reasons for making a judgment—rather than act on the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings, and judgments of others. Influences may include power and influence, ideology, race, class and gender differences, cosmology, and other interests. (Mezirow, Taylor, & Associates, 2009, p. 23)

Transformative learning theory was first introduced to adult education by Mezirow in 1978 (Mezirow, 1978). While Mezirow has written extensively on

transformative learning, I will give a brief introduction to his theory, then review the expanding literature as it relates to this study. Mezirow's 1975 study of women returning to college found that women tended to follow a pattern of transformative learning:

- 1) A disorienting dilemma; 2) Self-examination; 3) Critical assessment of assumptions; 4) Recognition of one's discontent and the process of transformation; 5) Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action; 6) Planning a course of action; 7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan; 8) Provisional trying of new roles 9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; 10) A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow et al., 2009, p. 19)

In Mezirow's view, new experiences provide the opportunity for new interpretations, giving new meaning to prior experiences or "perspective transformation." According to Cranton & Roy,

At its core, the idea is elegant in its simplicity. We make meaning out of the world through our experiences. What happens once, we expect to happen again. Through this process, we develop habits of mind or a frame of reference for understanding the world, much of which is uncritically assimilated. We absorb, in the process of daily living, values, assumptions, and beliefs about how things are without much thought. (2003, p. 88)

At the heart of Mezirow's theory is a focus on rational thought and reflection to identify problematic beliefs. Drawing from Habermas's theory of communicative action, it is

through rational discourse with others that we validate or justify contested beliefs and make “an informed and reflective decision to act or not” (Mezirow et al., 2009, p. 22). Action may be immediate or delayed depending on circumstances that may limit action, a need for additional information on appropriate actions, or a rational and validated decision to maintain an existing pattern of action. Additionally, “Transformations may be epochal (involving dramatic or major changes) or incremental and may involve objective (task oriented) or subjective (self-reflective reframing) change” (p. 23). Finally, transformational learning has the capacity to be emancipatory in that through the process, individuals become aware of and question oppressive social norms and work to change them (Mezirow, 1991). Here, Mezirow was influenced by Freire (1970) whose work with teaching literacy to the economically impoverished in Brazil focused on “conscientização,” or consciousness-raising. Freire believed that once people became aware of the realities of oppression, they could take action to transform the world.

The initial core elements of transformative learning that Mezirow identified, individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue, have been expanded through empirical research to include: “a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and an authentic practice” (Taylor, 2001, p. 4). While individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue are incorporated into Resolana’s classes, particularly in the psycho-education classes that help to address addiction and trauma, it is the holistic orientation that is the heart of Resolana’s programming. Thus, it is this core element that I will now turn to in reviewing the literature on transformative learning.

Holistic Orientation

Taylor describes a holistic orientation as one that “encourages engagement with other ways of knowing—the affective and relational” (2009, p. 10). A common theme found in the literature on holistic approaches to transformative learning is the necessity of engaging emotions in the process. Dirkx has written extensively on the importance of feelings in the adult education classroom and claims that emotions and imagination are essential to the transformative learning process (Clark & Dirkx, 2008; Dirkx, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2008; Dirkx & Smith, 2009). He posits that “significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult’s emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world” (Dirkx, 2001, p. 64).

Davis-Manigaulte, Yorks, and Kasl (2006) discuss the role of expressive ways of knowing in fostering holistic learning that connects affect and rationality so that transformative learning can take place. “By ‘expressive ways of knowing’ we mean those forms of expression that engage the learner’s imagination and intuition” (p. 27). They write that while some educators use expressive activities in their practice, they are often limited to icebreakers and are viewed as non-analytical. According to the authors, incorporating forms of expression such as music, visual arts, dance, movement, story, and drama help bring unconscious thoughts to the surface. “Imaginal and intuitive knowing manifested in expressive forms is an important bridge between precognitive, prelinguistic experiential knowing and conceptual knowing, which is often referred to as rational or analytical knowing” (p. 30). Lawrence (2005) argues that while cognitive

knowing, which has been the main focus in the adult education classroom, is important, it is also limiting.

When we open up intellectual space to incorporate other ways of knowing into our teaching practice, as expressed through metaphor, dance, poetry, visual art, or dramatic expression, we draw on the affective, somatic, and spiritual domains.

Participants can more fully express what they know. (p. 4)

O'Sullivan, Morrell, and O'Connor (2002) also embrace the affective, somatic and spiritual domains of learning. They write:

We even would claim that essential transformative learning takes place unconsciously and that there is no need to attempt to bring everything into our consciousness, no need to try to pin a name on every experience. When we dance, for example, or spend the night outside under a star-filled sky, or examine a photograph, we learn. We learn in ways that change us and give us the vision and compassion and strength to work for both personal and social change. (p. xviii)

Engaging spirituality in adult education settings is beginning to receive more attention (Compton, 2002; Dei, 2002; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2002; J. P. Miller, 2002; Palmer, 1993; Tisdell, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) view spirituality as a component of the self and transformative learning as more likely to occur when spirituality is included in the learning process. They see spirituality as being about “meaning making and a sense of wholeness, healing, and the interconnectedness of all things” (p. 38). They argue that while engaging

spirituality in the classroom might be challenging and uncomfortable, it can “help fuel the transformation process” (p. 46). They write, “Engaging learning in multiple dimensions, including the rational, affective, somatic, spiritual, and sociocultural, will increase the chances that new knowledge is actually constructed and embodied, thus having the potential to be transformative” (p. 39).

Engaging the Arts to Foster Transformative Learning

Current research shows that using arts-based teaching methods to foster transformative learning is not uncommon and can be effective in a variety of contexts (Archer-Cunningham, 2007; Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Donoho, 2005; Lawrence, 2005, 2008; Lipsett, 2002; Olson, 2005; Patteson, 2002; Picher, 2007; Scher, 2007; Wesley, 2007). Most of this research, however, has been conducted in higher education or community settings. Research on fostering transformative learning with the arts in a prison context is limited and not grounded in the transformative learning literature even though arts-based education programs have existed for quite some time. Research I was able to locate shows positive benefits to learners who are incarcerated, despite the challenging circumstances. In her work with incarcerated women, Baird (1999) implemented what she called a “humanities-oriented model,” in which the participants were introduced to women’s literature that included themes relevant to their lives. She found that through writing poetry and dialogue, the program participants gained a better understanding of themselves, behaved with less hostility in their cell blocks, and gained a sense of confidence and hope for change in their lives. Finio (1986) found that expressive activities such as painting, drawing, writing poetry, and performing offered

inmates who participated in a prison arts program in Philadelphia an opportunity to learn new skills, learn about themselves, discuss their experiences, and express their emotions.

She writes:

Within the artistic milieu, the prisoners learned to accept the inevitable risks of experimentation. They were not afraid of failure here, because there was no such thing—only, perhaps, unexpected or controversial results. Critique of the students' work led to discussions of the thoughts and feelings from which it had come; some quite lofty and related to cultural themes, others more empirical or personality inspired. These discussions provoked a wide range of emotional responses, including sadness, fantasy, and often anger. . . . The creative process showed how things could change. A slip of the paintbrush only altered the picture and called for revision of the original idea. (pp. 67-68)

Using art therapy with incarcerated women, many who were victims of abuse, Beth Merriam (1998) found that because art making is a highly personal and self-directed activity, it offered the possibility of self-empowerment. In such a restricted and highly regulated environment, control and autonomy are stripped from inmates, yet reclaiming power and control is key to recovery from abuse and trauma. Art therapy also provided the women an opportunity for self-discovery and an alternative voice to express and release feelings such as anger and aggression. "Their artwork became a container for powerful, potentially destructive emotions and began to clarify for these women who they are and why" (p. 169).

Restoring power and control, as well as dignity, to incarcerated women who had been abused was also a goal of an arts-based program piloted at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (Williams & Taylor, 2004). The curriculum included visual art, music, storytelling, and journaling. Qualitative data were collected after the eight-week program ended and findings were similar to the previous studies discussed: engagement with artistic forms of expression led to self-discovery, release of emotions, healing, and change. “Emotional and artistic expression helps survivors of domestic violence to formulate accounts/stories to cope with the psychological effects of severe stress” (p. 51).

Mullen (1999) co-developed an arts-based program for women inmates using creative writing, movement, and the visual arts. Her research discusses how prison art education can be used to promote change, reflection, and activism. Interviews with participants showed benefits related to personal growth—overcoming fears, improved self-esteem, healthy expression of anger, improved communication skills; interpersonal growth—ability to make connections with other women in the program, desire to teach others upon reentry; and safety—ability to release and express emotions through language and visuals.

Related specifically to performance arts in prisons, Hart (1986) sees performance as an opportunity for inmates to revision their lives. Through re-enactment, inmates can examine their circumstances and the choices they have made. They can use imagination to re-create and consider alternative ways of managing life after incarceration and expand their options.

They can shape that re-creation through any number of visual, auditory, and kinetic modes that do not impose the linguistic and technical demands of more conventional media of communication such as writing and rhetorical argument. That freedom is important for people who, in the case of American inmates, have often not had much success with traditional education. (pp. 19-20)

Many scholars have challenged Western knowledge practices that separate the mind from the body leading to a lack of awareness and inattention to what we can learn from and know in our bodies (Beaudoin, 1999; Brockman, 2001; Clark, 2001, 2012; Crowdes, 2000; Freiler, 2008; Michelson, 1998; Nagata, 2009; Ross, 2000). According to Mills and Daniluk (2002), therapeutic work with women survivors of child sexual abuse rarely include opportunities for somatic learning, “yet each individual’s history is etched in their body and is reflected in their breathing, in the lines on their faces, in their eyes, and in the way they walk in the world” (p. 77). Several common themes were identified in their research with women survivors of child sexual abuse who had participated in dance therapy. First, the women were able to “reconnect with their bodies” which some had rejected consciously or unconsciously, and others felt their bodies had left them. Dance therapy provided them with a sense of safety and control and made the memories stored in their bodies more accessible and less frightening. Second, the playful nature of dance therapy provided relief and joy. They found that healing and growth did not have to occur only through serious and emotionally heavy work. Spontaneity, struggle (related particularly to the unfamiliarity of this type of therapy), and a sense of intimacy and connection to others were also common themes. Finally, the women experienced a sense

of freedom that resulted from their choice and control over the therapeutic process. They were free to choose whether or not to participate in an activity, whether or not to verbally process their experience, and when and how to move. “This woman described the sense of personal freedom as *entitlement—reclaiming her right to be in charge of her body and her experience*” (p. 80, emphasis in original).

Although this research is not anchored in the transformative learning literature, the findings show that incorporating art in various forms into prison education programs can have transformative effects on learners. It also offers important insights into the teaching and learning process in a prison context.

In summary, the literature reveals that there are multiple ways to foster transformative learning. Research shows that a holistic approach to transformative learning that includes opportunities to engage the mind, body, and spirit can open up more possibilities for learning than education that focuses solely on engaging cognitive, rational learning processes.

Method

Participants

The participants in my study included 13 women (see Appendix B). At the time of data collection, eight of the women were incarcerated at Dallas County Jail (DCJ), three had served time at DCJ and were finishing out their sentences at a court-ordered residential drug rehabilitation program, and two had been released from DCJ and were completing the terms of their probation. They range in age from 19 to 46, and self-

identified²³ as: African-American (1), Black (1), Black and Cherokee Indian (1), Caucasian (2), half Native American and half Black (1), Hispanic (2), Mexican (2), White (2), White and Black (1). Nine of the thirteen have children that range in age from 10 months old to 27 years old. Only one of the women still has full custody of her children. All the women had prior arrests and their criminal charges include: check, credit card, and identification fraud, forgery, felony theft, felony escape, prostitution, and various drug related offenses. One woman served time for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon (she ran over her boyfriend with her car).

Three of the women dropped out of high school and reported no additional formal education, seven dropped out of high school and later earned a Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED), one completed high school, one graduated high school and attended college for four years, and one completed high school and earned a bachelor's degree in business management and marketing. Three of the women who earned GEDs also have some college and/or trade school credits and one is currently working toward a bachelor's degree in criminology.

Prior to incarceration, three of the women were unemployed, one worked as a customer service cashier, one worked as a topless dancer, one worked as a home health care provider, one was an assistant manager at two different establishments, one worked in sales, four earned their income through prostitution, and one explicitly through drug dealing, though five worked intermittently in the drug trade. All the women were

²³ The question asked was, "How do you identify in terms of your race or ethnicity?" In an attempt to maintain the women's right to claim their own identity, rather than selecting a category to place them in based on their answers (e.g. labeling the women who identified as White or Caucasian as White), I chose to keep intact the terms they used to identify themselves.

involved or had been involved with Resolana, an educational program for incarcerated women at DCJ.

Seven of the women ran away from home or foster care at an early age in an attempt to escape poverty and sexual, physical, and/or emotional abuse. In Texas, if a minor runs away at 16 years old or younger and is reported, the police have a right to find and return the child to the parents or guardian, thus, these women either found themselves back in their abusive homes, in the foster care system, or in a juvenile detention center. Alma,²⁴ who was raped by her cousin when she was four years old until she was eleven, used to purposely get in trouble so she would get sent to “juvie,” the only place she could escape her cousin’s assaults. Lynn, who was sexually abused by her grandfather from the age of 7 – 15, stopped talking for over a year immediately following his death. As a result, she too, was institutionalized until she started talking again. With the exception of Carla, all the women in my study were victims of repeated physical and/or sexual abuse. They suffered abuse at the hands of boyfriends, husbands, relatives (fathers, mothers, uncles, male cousins), Johns, pimps, or madams. All but one of the women suffered from addiction to drugs and/or alcohol and all but Christy reported having participated in drug rehab programs prior to incarceration.

The women who were incarcerated at the time of data collection were contacted through the Resolana classes and those who wanted to participate in the study completed an interest form. The two formerly incarcerated women expressed an interest in participating in the study to Resolana staff members and shared their contact information

²⁴ Pseudonym. With the exception of the program, and program founder’s name, all names of people and specific places have been changed to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

so an interview could be arranged. The women living at the residential drug rehabilitation facility were identified by Resolana and the facility's staff members as women who were interested in participating in the study. Participation was completely voluntary and participants were informed that their involvement would remain confidential.

Data Gathering and Analysis

I, along with my co-investigator, Dr. Suzanne Enck²⁵, conducted semi-structured life history interviews with each participant. The interviews with the women who were incarcerated took place in the education classroom at Dallas County Jail. The interviews with the women who were in the rehabilitation program took place in a private room at the rehabilitation facility. The formerly incarcerated women chose the location of their interviews: one was at a coffee shop near her home and the other was at a park area surrounding an outdoor concert venue in downtown Dallas, Texas. Suzanne secured a grant for her study which allowed her to provide these latter two women \$25 compensation for their time. Depending on how much the women were willing to share, the interviews lasted between 35 minutes and a little over three hours.

After editing the first drafts of the transcribed interviews²⁶ and reading through them multiple times, I used Atlas.ti to create and apply codes to my data using grounded theory guidelines (Charmaz, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I then categorized the data according themes and focused my analysis on experiences of

²⁵ Suzanne Enck is an assistant professor at the University of North Texas who was conducting a separate study on the topic of abuse and incarcerated women. We are co-principal investigators on each other's studies and conducted the majority of the interviews together.

²⁶ The initial transcriptions were done by Suzanne Enck's graduate students who were included in her IRB protocol and were paid through her grant.

transformation. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). To understand the “natural” setting of the program and the learning context, I also conducted field observations as a volunteer for each class for one week in July of 2011. As a volunteer, my goal was not to situate myself as an objective outsider, but as an involved volunteer member engaged in the learning process (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003).

Findings

To give the reader a sense of the learning context and nature and structure of the classes I attended during my field observations, I include my post-observation reflections in italics. Most of the women included in these reflections did not participate in the interview portion of my study, but gave formal consent to be included in my observations.

The Learning Environment

It's Monday morning and I walk into the Resolana classroom with Nancy and Diane, two Resolana staff members. As usual, the brick walls are covered with the women's art work. The bright, art-filled classroom is a stark contrast to the rest of the jail with mostly mauve colored walls, white doors and trim, and concrete floors. Two quotes on signs in the classroom catch my eye. One reads: “You are here because of your past. We are here because of your future.” The other reads: “You don't have to believe everything you think.” I also notice a list of resources available to the women once they are released from jail. From the classroom, we walk into the adjoining pod

“I” which has recently been reserved for the women serving time at DCJ who are enrolled in Resolana. The dedicated pod and the fact that we are allowed into the pod are two recent changes to the program and, from what I understand, unprecedented for programs at DCJ.

We walk up the concrete stairs to what looks like a stage where the jail officer’s desk sits. The stage faces the arched walls that are lined with beds on two floors. From the stage, the officer has a clear view of everything that transpires inside the pod. As we walk up the stairs I notice that some women are sitting at round tables talking, some are still sleeping in their bunks and some are aware that we’ve come in and are walking toward the tables. As the women begin to move toward the tables, the talking increases, which bothers the officer. She turns to us and says, “I don’t know who is normally on duty in here at this time, but I am new to this pod and if this were my usual pod, I would not have all this noise. The women would be quiet.” She shouts at the women telling them to quiet down and take a seat at a table. Two of the women react to her shouting by rolling their eyes and they seem to purposely walk a little slower to their seats, which makes me smile. It’s really cold in the pod and some of the women are sitting at the tables with a blanket wrapped around their shoulders. The officer tells these women that they have to take the blankets back to their bunks and if they’re too cold, then they should get back in bed. She also reminds them that they are not allowed to tuck their arms under their shirts. I asked one of the women why they were not allowed to sit with their blankets wrapped around themselves and she responded, “Because this is jail.”

Once the women are seated Diane gets everyone's attention by raising her hand. That's the customary signal in Resolana classes that it's time to focus. Most of the women also raise their hands until everyone quiets down and focuses on Diane and Nancy who cheerfully wish everyone a good morning. Diane reviews some of the program requirements for the new participants and makes a few adjustments to the class rosters based on information from the women. Diane then asks for a few volunteers to help lead the morning stretches to help "wake up bodies and minds." Three volunteers come up to the bottom of the stage and lead the women in a series of deep breaths and mild body stretches. I look around and notice that everyone is participating. After the stretches, the next part of the weekly Monday morning in-pod program is led by Nancy who asks the women to reflect on the intentions they set last week and asks for volunteers to share their intentions. For the women who are new to the pod, Nancy explains that the word "intentions" is used rather than "goals" because unmet goals can sometimes stir up negative feelings toward ourselves. Intentions, on the other hand, speak to the things we would like to work on or plan to do, and also acknowledge the unpredictable and oftentimes uncontrollable circumstances that might impact our ability to carry out our intentions. One woman shared that her intention was to be more patient. She shared that at one point during the week she was feeling hostile. She said, "I'm not gonna lie, I felt like hurting someone who got in my face." She shared that rather than acting on these feelings, she talked through them with her "bunkie" until she got into a better emotional space. Another woman who was recovering from alcohol and drug addiction and was working on the twelve steps shared that her intention was to make

amends and she wrote and sent letters to her kids and mom. Another shared that her intention was to pray more and another said she wanted to “be a better model for Christ.” During this process, there seemed to be a strong sense of community and support. Nancy validated each woman’s intentions and the women gave each other their full attention. I saw nods of encouragement or understanding, air high fives, and verbal expressions of encouragement. Nancy then asked everyone to write down their intentions for the week and three steps they could take to put their intentions into practice. To model sharing and affirming for the women Diane shared hers, which was humility. After she shared the steps she would take to put her intention into practice, Nancy responded with, “I see you. I hear you. And I affirm your intentions with love.” Nancy asked the women to share their intentions with a partner and affirm each other’s intentions as she did with Diane. For the next several minutes I could see and hear the women sharing their intentions and affirming each other. While this was going on, the officer searched through the women’s bunks. No one else seemed to be paying attention to the officer.

To close the morning, the women read a passage about new beginnings from a book called, “A Woman’s Spirit” followed by deep breathing. In that moment, it was easy to forget we were in a jail. Before we left the pod many of the women expressed their thanks and gratitude. One woman told me, “These community meetings are my favorite part of the week. I look forward to them all weekend.” There are no Resolana classes on the weekend.

Initiated by Resolana staff and volunteers and maintained by mostly everyone involved, a safe, nurturing, nonjudgmental, and fun environment served as a container in which transformative learning could be cultivated. All but two women had prior experiences with educational programs in a jail or prison and all but one reported that they had participated in addiction recovery programs in the past. Thus, when talking about their experiences with Resolana the women often compared the learning environment in Resolana with other programs in which they had been involved. Christy, a former participant who was interviewed at Hope House, an addiction recovery program, shared how much she missed the Resolana staff and volunteers. She said that while some of the recovery curriculum was the same or similar in terms of content, Resolana had a more positive impact on her because of the support, encouragement and care she felt from the staff and volunteers. She said, “Like you know how y’all guys are really encouraging and greet us with smiles and open arms? They are not like that [at Hope House]. And I even told Nancy and Angela and asked them, ‘Please write me a letter of encouragement because y’all [Resolana staff and volunteers] have impacted my life.’” Christy said that rather than encouraging, the structure of Hope House was demoralizing. She said, “I wish Resolana was here. I really wish they were. Because everybody would feel a lot more secure, because that’s what y’all do, y’all [Resolana staff and volunteers] make us feel secure about ourselves. And let us know there was hope.”

For the women, care is evidenced by the volunteers simply showing up when they don’t have to. Megan commented:

Y'all replaced all the people that didn't give me the chance and I love y'all for that [crying]. I love you for that. Every day that you come in here, the difference you make in my life replaces the difference that my mother didn't make. You care. You come here.

The women also feel valued and cared for by the program staff and volunteers because they show up without judgment. Carla shared:

What I really like was the volunteers, because you know, they didn't judge. Like in some cases, like I guess when, well, I've seen like where you know you have like in some programs, whether they're out here in the free world, you have volunteers that come in, but some of them have, like you can almost sense like an attitude. Not an attitude, like almost a superior attitude about them. And I didn't sense that at all from the volunteers. You know, they didn't have no judgment. I didn't feel they had. I felt like they welcomed everyone, you know. And you could sense they were glad to be there, you know. They always expressed how happy they were to be there.

Alma said that the volunteers "really take their time out to be here for you, to listen to you, and to give you support to really get the help you need." Taylor's comment reflects what many of the women shared—that Resolana staff and volunteers treat them like human beings. She said:

And in Resolana I would go to these meetings, and every time we had a Resolana meeting, all these women, complete strangers, "We love you. We're here because we love you. We're here because we want to support you." And they

would just treat us like humans. They were the only people in the jail that treat us like humans. They never, you know, they had opportunities to look us up. They probably knew what we were in there for, but nobody ever judged us.

The support that is created in the classes extends into the pod. In the pod, the women encourage each other emotionally, hold each other accountable, and validate each other's progress. Alma explained:

Like every time one of us is down, if it's not me, it's her, or Olivia or Sierra. One of us is there to support the other. We've... Resolana is women helping women, so we've learned how to help support each other. And if one of us don't want to go to class it's like "no, you're going to class, so get up." And they pull the blanket up, and they're like "OK, I'm going."

Sarah shared that when she first moved into the pod, she felt a sense of serenity and that there was a "group thing going on and everything was kosher." Lynn refers to the women in her group²⁷ as her "sisters in Resolana" and feels supported by them. "You know, when I'm going through something, they can pinpoint, 'Hey Lynn, what's going on?' You know, without even me talkin' about it."

The women also describe the learning environment as a safe place to reflect, open up, and try out new behaviors. Megan describes other pods as being volatile and the women in them as "predators" and "vultures." She said that Resolana provides her with a safe and quiet place to work on her recovery. "The point is, is that I have the

²⁷ Because there are 64 women in the pod and jail policy allows a maximum of 20 inmates in the classroom, the women are separated into groups. The classes are repeated so each group can attend all the classes.

environment to do that. Without that environment, you can't work the program with a bunch of people that are running around jail fighting each other." Mari feels safe opening up in classes facilitated by one of Resolana's staff members, Angela. Referring to Angela, she said:

She is very insightful and she has a lot of feedback. And she doesn't leave you feeling like...bare. She doesn't make you just talk and bring it all out and leave you like [gasps], there, cut you off. She kind of gives you good feedback and insight and stuff like that.

Finally, the women describe the learning environment as fun. Talking about one of the staff members, Christy said she loved Nancy because of her sense of humor. "She just brings you out of that little state of mind you're in and makes you feel a little bit more alive, you know." Comparing her experiences in Resolana to her experiences at Hope House, Christy said:

The whole time you're in jail you're so excited to get here because you're like, "wow." But I laughed more in jail than I have here. We don't ever laugh. We don't ever just get to sit around and like, shoot the shit. We're just like always at each other's throat 24/7.

Alma said, "We have so much fun in here!" and talked about the importance of the friendships she has developed with a few of the women. During one of the classes I attended, several of the women shared that this was the first time in a long time that they had fun without the influence of drugs or alcohol. Taylor shared that Resolana taught her

how to play and that she carries that with her as a parent. Talking about her husband who enjoyed taking their kids to play at the park, Taylor said:

And it used to irritate me because I need to be serious all the time. I mean we could have a conversation and joke, laugh, that's great. But we need to be serious. It's all about business. Yes. We're adults. And I think that for me I realized, I learned that whenever my parents passed away, I feel like I had to grow up real quick. I had to hurry up and... so I never really had an opportunity to chill and be a child. And so you know whenever me and my husband go into that mode of 'let's go play,' you know, it's cool. And it helps our relationship, as well as it helps us to be able to cater to our kids and our kids are *down* for it.

The women also reported that the environment was uplifting citing specifically the daily affirmations, in the classes or in the pod.

The women really enjoy the creativity classes and I can see why. This evening's project was to create a collage that represented our intentions for the week. We had magazines, pens, and colored pencils to work with. One of women I sat with told me that she loves the art classes because they helped her discover that she is creative. She showed me some of her art work that was hanging on the wall. One of them was a mosaic self-portrait that she made with small pieces of torn up paper. I was impressed.

As we worked on our projects the conversation flowed easily and was unstructured unlike some of the other classes. A couple of the women shared stories of being in abusive relationships. One of the women raised her shirt sleeve and showed those of us who were sitting at her table a three inch scar from a stab wound—"A

permanent memory of my ex-husband,” she said. She shared the story in the same way someone might share a story of getting a scar from falling off a bike as a kid. Some of the women complained about the jail officers and they all agreed that the one on duty that night was the meanest one. “You can’t even talk in the pod when she’s on duty,” one woman said. Another woman said she stays in her bunk all day when that officer is on duty. “I’d rather sleep than deal with her negative energy. She bums me out,” she said. We also talked about our kids, music, and places we would like to visit. One woman held up her collage and she had written on it, “You are beautiful.” It was clear that the message was meant for the woman sitting across from her. Another woman said, “Girl, you know we aren’t supposed to pass notes to each other. You’re gonna get in trouble.” She responded, “I’m not passing notes. And besides, I wrote it to myself. I am reminding myself that I am beautiful.” Some of the women quietly worked on their projects and seemed content not talking to anyone.

At the end of class most of the women shared their intentions and collages with everyone. The class concluded with a brief “check out” on how everyone was feeling. Relaxed, hopeful, sad, proud, tired, chill, happy, worried, were some of the words the women used to describe how they were feeling. After check out, the women helped us gather and count the supplies and stack the plastic chairs back up in the corner of the room. As the women exit the classroom, some of them give me an air hug and say thank you. Hugging is not allowed in the jail so I have to suppress my natural inclination to respond with a real hug. A hug—I can’t imagine being deprived for months of such a

small act of human connection. Based on my interactions and conversations with the women, they find ways around this and other jail prohibitions.

Intrapersonal Engagement

While the environment that is created and maintained is conducive to transformative learning, in Resolana the difficult work of transformation seems to begin with reflection on and engagement with the self. Each Resolana class offers the women an opportunity to learn about and express themselves in different ways. While yoga, dance, and art involve less (or no) structured dialogue than the psycho-educational (e.g. Seeking Safety) or life skills classes (e.g. anger management), each woman is encouraged to participate at her comfort level. Thus, even in the discussion-rich classes, just being present is an acceptable level of participation. Every participant shared examples of how engaging with the self has led to a deeper understanding and valuing of the self which contributed to their ability to change their thinking and/or behavior. Their examples fit within three broad themes: self-awareness, self-expression, and self-care.

Self-awareness. The most prevalent experience the women shared related to self-awareness was developing an understanding of how their past traumas have impacted their lives. For five of the women, learning specifically about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was an important step toward understanding their feelings and behaviors. Alma identified two major events in her life, being sexually abused and her brother's death due to an overdose, that contribute to her PTSD symptoms. This has led her to a greater understanding of her drug addiction and reasons for self-mutilation. She said she used to ask God what she did to deserve what was happening to her. She now

sees herself differently. She explained, “Because I know that whatever happened to me as a child is not my fault. And I didn’t have to take it out on myself. And I always thought I was ugly, but I’m not.” Taylor shared a breakthrough moment she experienced in a Seeking Safety class:

And while sitting in Seeking Safety, she was talking about PTSD and addictions. It’s this one chapter on... Miss Helen. It was her and Cathy. It was this one chapter on PTSD and addiction. And I sat there and I cried the whole class because everything they were saying was me. Not realizing that you could actually have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and not, you know, not be aware of it.

This awareness led to Taylor’s desire to seek answers to her problem. She asked the jail counselor and a Resolana staff member to help her “figure out what was wrong with me,” which led her to Debtor’s Anonymous (DA). While in jail she sent a letter to a local DA group and developed a connection to a sponsor with whom she still works outside of jail. Lynn said that learning about PTSD has helped her better understand “my repeated cycle of what I’m going through.” She said,

Oh my God, Resolana has helped me... they have. Resolana have really stepped on my toes. They have really opened the doors for my understanding *me*, y'know. And it just... they have given me tools to work with. They have made me identify what Lynn is going through, my feelings, emotionally.

Recognizing and admitting their addiction was another common experience the women shared. Although Alexis has been involved in other addiction recovery programs, this is

the first time she has admitted to herself that she is an addict and cannot drink or use drugs in moderation. She said that through Resolana she has learned, “For real that I’m a real addict, without a shadow of a doubt. No, I can’t experiment. No, I cannot do that, and I can’t...[Interviewer: Light drinker.] Yeah, I can’t do that. I know what and who I am.” Lynn shared that she has not only identified that she has a drug and alcohol problem, but she has also learned how to recognize her triggers that contribute to her desire to use, and to plan for how to better respond when she experiences those triggers. Sarah who is awaiting her transfer to Hope House realized the extent of her addiction. She said, “But this program I’m in now, Resolana, has taught me a little something about myself. And I don’t feel like 90 days is long enough to get rid of the drug addiction I’ve had all my life.” She has also come to a better understanding of the roots of her addiction and takes responsibility for her choices:

But, I mean being in this program, and just takin’ a hard look at myself and realizing that the next time I go out there I might not make it back to jail—because I honestly believe death is my next step if I don’t straighten out. And it all stemmed from being in an abusive home, you know what I’m sayin’? But today, I can’t blame my mother for nothin’, because once I was at the age that I knew right and wrong, it was no longer her. It was my decision, you know what I’m sayin’?

Other examples the women shared about developing a greater self-awareness include Alma recognizing that she has a problem with anger; Carla realizing that she is a “control freak” and her wanting to control everyone and everything contributed to the

bad decisions she made; and Karen recognizing in the incest recovery class she has “worn that jacket of incest for a long, long time...and it’s just, it’s really done a number on me, ya know, and um...it’s just really broken me down.” While all the women shared painful memories of past trauma during the life history portion of the interview, the opportunity to better understand and make meaning of their circumstances and choices seemed to contribute to a sense of relief, the ability to imagine new possibilities for their lives and in many cases their will and ability to make positive changes.

I attended a 5 Rhythms²⁸ class today for the first time. It was a bit awkward for some initially (me included), but the women stuck with it and most appeared to enjoy it. The experience of this class is not an easy one to put into words because of the nature of it. Even though there is a dance leader, the dance moves are spontaneous and unique to each person. This has been a really emotionally heavy two days for the women and that seemed to be expressed by some during the dancing. There was one woman who was having a particularly difficult time and at one point sat down against the wall and cried. Another woman sat with her and talked with her for a bit and then got up and continued dancing. I didn't know if the instructor noticed her and when I passed by the other volunteer who is a student of the instructor, I asked her if one of us should check in with her (the woman who was crying). She said no, that it was the instructor's role. The instructor eventually went to her and encouraged her to get up and continue dancing, which she did. She continued to cry on and off throughout the class. Since there is very

²⁸ A non-choreographed dance experience. According to the program’s website, “The 5Rhythms are a practice, both poetic and practical, fluid and focused, a marriage of art and healing that directly addresses the divorce of body from heart, heart from mind that has so plagued our cultures.” <http://www.gabrielleroth.com/>

little talking in this class, perceptions of the mental space she was in were left mostly to interpretation. Another woman who was completely into the music and just “lettin’ loose” also cried at one point and danced through it. She later this evening said she loved the class and teased one of the volunteers about being a better dancer than her. Another woman at one point during the class let out a gut-busting laugh and said “I feel really stupid doing this.” I shared her sentiment and laughed with her. She stuck with it and also seemed to be really into the music at different points. There were only two women who sat on the sides for most of the class: one had arthritic knees and the other had a cast/boot on her leg. But even she participated as much as she could and said to me when she walked in the class, “you’re gonna love this...this is my favorite class.” There was another woman who as soon as she walked in asked me if she could sit out because she just took some medication and had a headache. The instructor encouraged her to try and told her that if she didn’t feel better, she didn’t have to stay. She also stuck with it and seemed to get really into it.

I knew going into the class that some of the women really like it and some don’t enjoy it. I can see why this activity might be difficult for some. The instructor explained a little about what we were doing, but the why wasn’t always apparent. Her class is about learning through the body and at different times throughout the dance we were asked to focus on movements and feelings on different parts of our bodies. My guess is that most have never experienced making meaning of that kind of learning. There is very little verbal processing of what’s going on, or of feelings that were evoked at various moments in the dance and perhaps that’s by design. For the women who were crying or

feeling “stupid” or “uncomfortable,” processing those feelings might have led to insight about where the feelings were coming from and a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the movements and how their bodies were responding to the different rhythms and movements. Then again, it’s possible they did gain insight without talking about the experience. My own movements made me aware of the discomfort and fear of the unfamiliar. The more I danced, however, the more natural the movement felt and I became more willing to allow my body to move freely. I was also aware that no matter how awkward and uncoordinated I felt, the other women’s nonverbal affirmations were encouraging and made me feel talented and creative.

The woman who was crying on the side of the room, and on and off throughout the dance, seemed to work through something and was clapping and smiling by the end of the class. In a class later that evening, she shared with the group that during the dance class she realized that it would likely be a long time before she would see her family again and that she needed to make peace with that. Even though there was some discomfort at times from various women, they seemed to really enjoy it. I left wanting to discuss what happened, but I didn’t get the sense that anyone else did.

Self-expression. A significant feature of transformation that the women shared was their new-found ability to express themselves, whether through the creativity classes or psycho-educational discussion-based classes. The creativity classes appear to be a powerful means of self-expression and a tool for enhancing a sense of self-efficacy in the women. Included in the cluster of creativity classes are music, dance, visual art, and creative writing. During our interview, Alexis shared a picture she had made that was

hanging on the wall in the classroom: “That’s the rose with my thorns, yep, and that rose is like white for peace and it’s going through my heart like tearing through my heart cuz I wanna have peace. I wanna have peace. I wanna have peace!” Mari shared one of her pictures that was titled “Beautiful Disaster.” She drew what looked like clouds at the bottom of the page and written under the words, “Rest in Peace,” were the names of her son and daughter, whom she had miscarried. She also had the names of her three daughters written on the picture. Two of her daughters were taken from her by Child Protective Services and were later adopted by their foster parents. She still has one daughter who lives with her father, Mari’s former boyfriend. When asked if “Beautiful Disaster” is how she would characterize her life, she said, “I guess that’s why I said beautiful disaster. ‘Cause it’s really... it’s beautiful but it’s just a disaster. I guess that’s how I really do see my life.” Lynn shared her picture titled “To know me is to love me.” To her, the picture and words meant: “If only you knew my life story it would motivate you. But always remember, things do not always look the way, the real way it is.” Paula, Ana and Taylor shared the benefits of engaging with the self through art and/or dance:

Look, more art classes, because seriously, we need more. The more ways to express, like, there’s so many extroverts in here, that are to themselves. They don’t know how to express themselves. And so when you can just like, throw a...like if you open this room and say, “Okay, get your pencils and erasers and q-tips,” and say, “Go.” ...To focus in on that one thing takes you away from here for that one minute, and you don’t have to think about that, and so like, the creativity classes, man that’s where I’m

at. You know what I mean? If it's about color and about creating I got you, you know? (Paula)

They showed me how art, when you get into art, how you feel. How you can change your mood afterwards. Sometimes you don't feel like doing it but once you do it, all of the sudden you're into it. And you've forgotten about that thought you had, that terrible thought, feeling is gone before you know it. You look at the picture and you're like "Oh my God. Look what I did." And so it gives you like "Hey, I'm pretty good." (Ana)

They would always tell you pay attention to your body. They call it body wisdom. Yeah, it sounded very goofy but it's funny how when you step out being around them how much they taught you. And I never realized how much I learned till I was able to put a lot of it to practice. 'Cause even though some of the art classes were like horrifying to me—I'm just not an artistic person. I'd be negative—I'm not an artistic person. ...And you would think with the hair I would be like an artist or something. But I'm not. I mean my stick figures are awesome though. I mean just seeing the collages of expressing yourself, the colors, you just never know how freeing that could be. And it helps you come to understanding with—and I hate to even admit this, Nancy [speaking into the recorder to Nancy, a Resolana staff member]...*the child within*. You know that kind of thing. "Catering to the child within," and how that actually helps you as an adult. And it helps me relate to my kids a lot better. (Taylor)

Taylor also shared that while she “hated” doing yoga in Resolana because the jail uniforms would “ride up,” since she has been out she has taken yoga at a local studio and also has yoga tapes at home.

I observed in the expressive arts classes that there is little verbal processing and meaning making of the women’s creations or experiences at a deep level. In an art class the women may choose to describe their art work to others at the end of class, but their sharing typically does not extend into the telling of personal stories as they did during our interviews. Nevertheless, it appears this is not necessary for transformation. Particularly as evidenced in the way the women shared and explained their art during our interview, they draw from and express their lived experiences, emotions, and desires through nonverbal processes.

For most of the women, the above, however, does not negate the importance of verbal self-expression. With the exception of Karen who said she does not trust many of the inmates in the pod, all the women shared examples of how Resolana encouraged or taught them how to open up and verbalize their feelings with others. As several participants explained:

And it helped me to open up, ‘bout me being molested, ‘bout me being raped, ‘bout me going through domestic violence, and helped me identify—I really truly feel the information I have now, that I won’t be repeating this vicious cycle of doin’ drugs, goin’ back to prison. (Lynn)

But now, if it’s on my mind and it’s not right, I’m gonna say, “Speak up.” I don’t want to hold it in. I’m gonna speak up. And let them know why, but I’m

not gonna blurt and cuss and yell and stomp away. I'm gonna sit down and say "Look, this is what's up. This is what's going on. You tell me and I'll tell you, and we'll work it out and if we can't, then things got to change." (Ana)

So, Resolana classes, for me, is allowing me to express myself and get some kind of stimulation, also some type of voice to my heart. When my mom died, I didn't know what to say or when to say, or I didn't get the opportunity to say all the things that I needed to say. So, it's kept me, I guess, bound in my lifestyle for a while. (Paula)

But, I really did get routine, mainly is what I got. And uh, learning how to verbalize on my feelings rather than act on my feelings. You know, if you made me upset I can tell you "Look, I'm upset with you because...." And not, bam, boom, pow. (Jasmine)

I also observed in the discussion-based classes that some of the women did not verbalize their thoughts; however, in several classes I attended the women sitting next to me would tap me on my shoulder or my leg and show me things they had written on their handouts such as: "My past is not who I am. When I see you grow, it helps me grow. I love Resolana. I love myself. I feel like crying. I am ready for change. I want to forgive myself and others. Nancy rocks! (referring to Resolana staff member). We are trying to better ourselves." Perhaps these women were not ready to share their thoughts with the entire group; however, the fact that they intentionally shared them with me indicates a desire for their voices to be heard and for someone to bear witness to their thoughts and feelings.

Self-care. Finally, through intrapersonal engagement, the women learned and practiced self-care. Carla, who used to find her worth in other people, said, “Now it’s just, like I know it sounds selfish, but now it’s like I have the attitude, well it’s about me and what I need to do.” Ana realized that part of her problem was wanting to help other people instead of herself. She said, “I never realized I had a problem, but I realize that now. But I’m fixing it. I’m fixing it.” For Taylor, taking care of herself meant learning how to set boundaries, “I mean setting boundaries is one of the coping skills that’s powerful for me, but hard, right, very hard. But just being able to say ‘I can’t do that’ or ‘I can’t go there’ ‘cause I know *me*.” Alma, who as mentioned earlier, always believed she was ugly, moved from accepting help from the other women to improve her self-esteem, to being able to encourage it herself. She explained:

And like, the girls in here, they are like “OK we need to get your self-esteem up. Come on, go to the mirror. Tell yourself ‘I am beautiful.’” I was like, “Do I really have to do this?” And they would make me say “I’m beautiful.” And I was like, “No, no.” And they were like “you’re going to do this every day until I see you do it by yourself” And they were like, “What are you doing? Did I just see you do that by yourself?” And I was like, “OK, you caught me.” They were like, “Oh my gosh, I’m so proud of you!” I was getting all red.

Alexis, Jasmine, and Carla, who all shared stories of struggle and guilt about their relationships with their children, realized that regardless of how much they wanted to repair and nurture those relationships, taking care of themselves had to be a priority. Alexis explained:

It's also, like when I get out, about not moving so fast as in to get my children back. Like letting them stay where they are at and work on me a little bit more, like don't move, don't be in such a hurry, you know, 'cause Rome wasn't built in a day and you didn't get here over night.

Jasmine continues to work on loving herself and sees this as an important step in being able to give to and accept love from others. She said:

I'm still working, but I figure once I, my love for me grows more, you know, then I can, you know, then I can love my children the way that I can. I can accept love from them. I'm not really concerned with love from a man right now, because I got to get me and mine under control first.

Lastly, Christy is better able to identify what is not working for her and her recovery and advocates for herself. When she experienced "an emotional breakdown" at Hope House after an upsetting conversation with her mother, a counselor wanted to put her on psychiatric medication. She told the woman she didn't want to take medication and that she wanted learn how to deal with the situation. She also shared:

It's part of my treatment plan to journal, but I don't really journal that much. I journal, and then I'm like, now what? They even made me a God Box because I'm like, so frustrated, and they told me to put my thoughts in there. But I'm like, I need something stronger. I need y'all to...I need actual help. Help me, you know? I don't need to just put my thought in a box and give it God, that's what they always say. And I know that sounds kind of rude, but that's how I feel. You know? If it was that easy, then I wouldn't feel this way and I wouldn't be in this

position that I'm in, and we wouldn't be having this conversation. It's not...I can't just give it to God and put it in there, I wish I could but, it's... I need something a lot more deeper than that.

In Resolana she felt cared for, encouraged, and learned new skills that were helping her understand herself better. At Hope House, she said she feels anxious and frustrated, but continues to search for healthy ways of coping that *she* believes will help her.

Interpersonal Engagement

In Seeking Safety this afternoon the topic of the day was Getting Others to Support Your Recovery. I attended the class with Resolana staff member, Helen, a volunteer, and 10 participants. Before class started, one of the participants asked if we could keep the lights off during the session. She said they never turn the lights off in the tank and she wanted a break from the bright fluorescent lighting. With the lights off, the classroom is still fairly lit since it sits between two jail pods and is surrounded by glass walls. We kept the lights off. Helen began the class by asking the women to remind the new participants of Resolana's commitments to each other such as confidentiality, no cross-talking, listening without judgment, and being supportive. After Helen introduced the topics, Tammy, a thin, White woman who appeared to be in her late 30s, raised her hand and said she had something to say to the group. She said she wanted to thank everyone for being in class and that the night before she was feeling "OK with being in jail." She said, "I have never been in a program where love was shown. It's been like being reborn. I can breathe and I have learned to be patient." Even though hugging and touching are not allowed in the jail, to demonstrate support another woman sitting next

to Tammy put her arm around her shoulder for a second. Helen and several other women thanked her for sharing. One of the women volunteered to begin the readings on people who could influence recovery. The readings discussed people who could be categorized as supportive, neutral, or destructive. Helen asked if anyone would be willing to talk about anyone in their lives who fit into any of the categories. Sherie, an African-American woman, shared that she came to the realization that her mother was destructive to her recovery and that she was tired of trying to get her approval. "All my life my mom told me, 'You ain't shit. You ain't gonna amount to shit. You're overweight. No one's gonna hire you.' What I know is that I'm good at prostituting, good at selling drugs, and good at doing drugs. I want to be good at something else and I don't want to believe my mom anymore." Judi, a White woman who appeared to be in her late 30s and had struggled with an addiction to meth, said, "I can finally say that I would be willing to give up Jason for my recovery. He is destructive and I know that and admit it." Elena, a forty-year-old Mexican woman who spoke limited English asked Janice who frequently translated for her to tell the group that she was destructive to her own recovery and wanted to move forward. Elena had already been at DCJ for a year and it had been over a month since she heard from her court-appointed attorney. She had not been sentenced and had no idea how much longer she would be at DCJ nor where she was going from there. She said she was beginning to feel hopeless and worried that she would never see her children again. "Even though I don't know what's going to happen, I know I need to change for me and for my children," she said. Helen validated their comments and asked them to briefly imagine a conversation they might have with people in any of the

categories and write down three to four things they would say to them or in Elena's case, to herself. Some of the women shared what they had written and we talked about how others might respond to them. The women took turns reading excerpts from the session and we ended with the customary "check out" with how everyone was feeling. Grateful, thoughtful, anxious, copacetic, rejuvenated, and sad were some of the descriptors the women used. Helen shared with me that this was the first time Sherie had spoken up in the group.

Embedded in Resolana's curriculum are activities meant to promote healthy, positive relationships. The life histories of the women in my study revealed very few examples of loving, supportive, trusting, and nonviolent relationships. In fact the people they were closest to were often emotionally, verbally, physically, and/or sexually abusive. Keeping themselves physically and emotionally guarded was a protective strategy they used both in and out of jail and thus, connecting with, trusting, and empathizing with other women in jail was a risk for them. Nevertheless, the women shared many examples of how the opportunities to engage with other women contributed to the changes they recognized in themselves and others. Specifically, these experiences encouraged them to open up and share their stories with each other, helped them develop empathy for the other women, and instilled in them a desire to help others.

Opening up. Before she was incarcerated, Alma, who is very petite, was using about three grams of heroin a day and said that she realized that if she goes back to that life, she will die. Through her participation in Resolana, she sees the importance of

asking for help and talking to others. Telling us about friends and family members who have died from drug overdoses, Alma said:

And they really don't want their mom to be crying because they made that bad choice and decided to use heroin instead of opening up and saying, "Hey look, this is what happened to me. I think I need to go to therapy, or I need to talk to you about something." Just open up. It's not hard. Even if you think it's weak, it's not weak. Because some of them are like, "No, I don't want to seem weak" or "I don't want to feel like a punk," but it's not. I'd rather get some help. I'd rather look like a punk than do drugs and be dead.

Ana said she appreciated connecting with other women, sitting in a circle talking, telling each other how they were feeling that day and giving each other feedback. "Like when we sat down and talked to each other and found out how many kids...asked each other so many questions. And find out we have something in common. That we're not all that different." Megan found a support group in Resolana and has identified a Narcotics Anonymous sponsor who will be there for her when she gets out of jail. She has learned that, "You gotta be ready for relapse, you know. There's gonna be relapse. You've gotta have a support group."

Not all the women are able to open up and let go of the strategies that have protected them, however. Like Karen, who as mentioned earlier, does not trust the inmates in Resolana (she said she trusts only the staff and volunteers), Alexis also does not trust the other women. She said:

I got in here and shut down because I don't want people to take my kindness for

a weakness and so either I'm an all or nothing person. Either I'm gonna be nice, but then people wanna... we're in jail, so, if I give you something that means you're just gonna take advantage and stab me in the back. So my point is to just sit there, be to myself. I could care less if you think I'm stuck up or whatever, and just don't talk to me. And that's how I've become because that's the way my life experience has taught me to become.

Nevertheless, Alexis made some positive connections with a few of the women, reported several benefits from participating in the program, and intends to stay sober and return as a volunteer.

Opening up also meant sometimes having difficult conversations with fellow Resolana participants, which provided the women an opportunity to put into practice the communication, anger management, and grounding²⁹ skills they learned. Alma shared the most detailed account of such an experience, in which she said that if the same situation had occurred two months earlier, she likely would have gotten into a physical fight and would have been kicked out of the program. After getting into an argument with another inmate, whom she felt had betrayed her, Alma first talked to her:

Before I even got as angry as I did, I just told her, "Look, I'm really upset that you lied to me and you used me like that, but I'm just not going to talk to you no more, so just don't get mad when you try to talk to me or come around me and I don't say nothing. I'm just cutting you off, so don't take it personally."

²⁹ Grounding skills as defined by Najavits (2002), are mental, physical, and soothing strategies that help people detach from emotional pain. According to Najavits, "Distraction works by focusing outward on the external world, rather than inward toward the self. You can also think of it as 'distraction,' 'centering,' 'a safe place,' 'looking outward,' or 'healthy detachment,'" (p. 133).

When her anger escalated, Alma said rather than fighting she walked away:

And I went and grabbed a towel and went and twisted it and I did beat on my mat. And everyone was like, “Are you OK?” And I was like, “I need to get out of here. I need to go get some air. I need to go get some air.” They were like, “I’m going to go talk to the guard.” And I was like, “Yeah go talk to her, because I’m shaking right now I’m so angry.” And they were like, “Try to calm her down, try to calm her down,” and I was like “I’m trying to be calm. I’m trying to be calm.” But you just can’t use people like that. It’s wrong. Especially if somebody is really caring about you and putting just a little bit of trust into you.

She went outside to get some air, broke down crying and then prayed. After that she felt much better and said she felt like she walked away from the situation a “bigger person.” Prior to this incident, Alma began to understand the extent of her anger after taking an inventory in the anger management class. She said her score on the inventory was significantly higher than everyone else’s and she committed to improving how she worked through her anger. She learned several healthy coping skills in the Resolana classes that enabled her to respond differently and the other women supported her through the ordeal.

Empathizing. Being able to empathize with and see themselves in the other women seemed to be both humbling and empowering. Carla said that hearing the other women’s life stories made her reflect on her own life and that an AA volunteer had a significant impact on her. She said:

There was like one volunteer for her AA you know, who did AA, and she’d been

you know, incarcerated, lost her... never seen or saw her child. It was just like really bad and I was just like you know what, if she can do that and still remain, have a positive attitude and have a good self-worth about herself, why can't I?

Having been out of jail for several months at the time of our interview, Carla had experienced the challenges of putting what she learned into practice. When she was released from jail, she went to live with her mother who was on a fixed income, she had no car, and struggled to find a job. A former inmate who also participated in Resolana helped her secure a job with the temporary agency she was working with and she said she was fortunate that she could live with her mother. Recognizing her own addiction to money and spending helped Taylor understand and connect with women who suffered from other addictions. She explained:

You know, you just like, that's one of the reasons I never judge the prostitute, the drug addict. You know, and it could be because also 'cause I had to deal with these women so many months, but at the same time I understand. And they "How could they smoke crack and be pregnant?" You know what I'm saying? You don't...with an addict, you don't think about *anybody* but yourself.

Giving back. Hearing other women's stories while in jail inspired Carla to go back to the jail as a Resolana volunteer and work toward a degree in criminology so she could help incarcerated women. She explained:

I still had stuff to go back to, but there's people when they get out they literally have nothing. They have just the clothes on their back. And I'm not trying to make excuses for people, but I think that a lot of people, the reason, like,

especially like they get back into like whether it's prostitution or this and that, it's so easy to make that you know, to make that money. They say like, "Hey, we can pull a couple tricks tonight and get some money to buy maybe an outfit or some food or you know, pay for a motel room." Because that's fast, easy money. Because if you try to get a regular job or something, you're going to wait like a couple weeks. You have to wait a couple weeks to get your first paycheck and in the mean time you still have to pay for transpor...find a way to get back and forth to work. You still have to...they're not going to um hire you if you don't have half-way decent hygiene. You need clothes so I think a lot of people fall back into that routine so fast.

Taylor who also had been out of of jail for several months at the time of our interview shares a commitment to giving back to Resolana and actively seeks information and resources to share that might be helpful to women when they are released.

I call every time I get a new resource. She [referring a Resolana staff member] talks to me probably like three times a week. Yeah, but I call her every time I get a new resource, it's because a lot of the resources that are given to us are not dated, I mean, they're dated, you know. And um, I think Angela is just doing so much. She has a full time job, and she's doing Resolana, and volunteering a couple of nights a week so...and that can be hectic in itself. So as I go through and find resources that are alive, I actually call her and tell her about them.

All but four of the women expressed a desire to give back in some way, either by returning to the jail as a Resolana volunteer or helping formerly incarcerated women

outside of jail. Giving back seems to serve as a redemption function that allows the women to see their incarceration as having a positive purpose.

Discussion

These findings suggest that the women experienced a process of transformative learning. At the foundation of these experiences was an environment conducive to transformation. The women describe the learning environment and how they are treated by the program's staff and volunteers in ways that are consistent with the humanist assumptions embedded in transformative learning theory (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Unconditional positive regard, a belief in the women's ability to grow and change, a sense of care and accountability for each other, and encouragement and active engagement in improving self-concept all worked to create a safe haven in the jail in which the women could examine their experiences and work toward change. Discussing transformative learning that is emancipatory, Cranton (2006) writes, "There is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, authenticity and a sense of enthusiasm and interest in others as well as challenges of others' points of view" (p. 107). In an environment where the women's bodies are literally imprisoned, the learning space created in Resolana is characteristic of an emancipatory atmosphere as described by Cranton. With the exception of what one chooses to think and how one chooses to behave, choice is virtually nonexistent in a jail. Integrating choice wherever possible is another emancipatory characteristic of the program that contributes to the transformative learning process. The women choose and apply to be in the program, indicating for some a readiness to learn. There is a set of classes that make up the core curriculum, and the

women can choose additional courses they find relevant to their lives, such as parenting skills, Al-anon, and incest recovery.³⁰ While in class, the women choose their level of participation. In the classes I attended, any pressure to share came from the participants and was quickly thwarted by other participants or the lead facilitator. In most adult learning settings, the integration of choice may seem unremarkable. In the context of learning in a jail, it gave the women a sense of purpose and control over their lives.

Paula's comment exemplifies this:

For me to get up and go to class is a plus. It means that I want something. And if I can have the drive in here, then I can have that drive out there. And that gives me hope...that I'm not just a failure and I'm not just giving up. You know, 'cause I could sleep all day if I wanted to, in another tank. Waste my life away, and do what? Instead I choose to get up and go to class. I choose to make something better of my life. I choose to educate myself and create an opportunity for me to want to leave these doors. I've done that, so if I've done that, I can do anything.

While this study does not focus on understanding how individual transformation can lead to social transformation, which is characteristic of emancipatory learning, I would argue that the women's desire (and actions in the case of Carla and Taylor, the only participants free to do so at the time) to give back in the way of volunteering and helping other incarcerated women is an indication of the possibility for social transformation.

³⁰ Because of the limited number of participants Resolana can serve, the women are allowed three unexcused absences. However, there is flexibility depending on the circumstances surrounding the absences.

Regarding social transformation, what needs to be interrogated also, however, is the responsibility of the educator or “learning companion” (Cranton & Wright, 2008) to reflect on and critically examine his or her assumptions about fairness, equality, and freedom.

Finally, consistent with findings on how expressive ways of knowing foster whole-person, transformative learning (Yorks & Kasl, 2006), Resolana’s holistic orientation and opportunities to engage both affective and cognitive domains of learning contributed to an environment conducive to transformation. According to Yorks and Kasl, expressive ways of knowing help to prepare learners to be open to learning by serving as a bridge from the outside world to an internal mental and emotional place. They write, “Often, this is accomplished through adopting rituals at the beginning of the learning encounter that resonate with the participants as whole-person learners” (p. 51). Nancy and Diane’s Monday morning community meeting is one example of such a ritual that helps the women prepare not only for the learning in that meeting, but also for the classes they will attend throughout the week. The combination of these features of Resolana’s learning environment is what the women said allowed them to be open to learning and change.

Through intrapersonal and interpersonal engagement opportunities, the women were able to examine their past experiences and how they shaped their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, as well as try out new behaviors and thought patterns. The women shared numerous examples of transformation. Most of the changes the women shared were incremental, rather than epochal (Mezirow et al., 2009); however, that does not negate

the importance of those changes. Being able to open up about past traumatic experiences; for the first time seeing oneself as valuable and beautiful; responding differently to feelings of anger; and being able to ask for and accept support from others can have a lasting impact on future decisions as they did for Taylor and Carla. Worthy of note, too, is Taylor's experience of not realizing "how much I learned till I was able to put a lot of it to practice." This is an indication of continued transformation outside of the learning environment.

In jail, every attempt is made to strip the inmates of their personal space, their individuality, and even their identity. To the jail officers, and oftentimes to each other, they are mere criminals—deviants who cannot be trusted and must be controlled. From the green and white horizontal striped uniforms they all must wear, to the highly regimented daily schedule, the women's lives are structured around jail policies and procedures. In the Resolana classes, the women are allowed to be who they are: individuality and identity, and the experiences, thoughts, and perspectives that shape their identities are shared verbally and nonverbally through discussion and artistic expression. This sharing is a catalyst for change, and both the rational, cognitive processes and extrarational processes engaged in the various classes seem equally important to fostering transformation. According to Lawrence, (2012) "Extrarational describes a process of meaning-making expressed through symbol, image, and emotional expression" (p. 472). For some of the women, Resolana's art, dance and yoga classes not only offer a means of self-expression and meaning-making, but also a respite from

negative thoughts and feelings—a positive, healthy escape. According to Merriam (1998), whose research focused on an art therapy program for incarcerated women,

It is the focus on the image that makes art therapy distinct from verbal therapy and perhaps safer in that it seems less intrusive for some women. The art image is a personal statement that provides a focus for discussion and exploration, yet it also provides distance from the strong feelings evoked. This has proven to be especially helpful with the women whose cases I present in this paper who dissociated feelings and were withdrawn and resistant to verbal therapy, Art therapy allowed them to process and integrate information, to contain it in the artwork, thus gaining distance, as well as to nurture and self-soothe. (p. 158)

While Resolana's art classes are not art therapy classes, the therapeutic benefits of learning through art described by Merriam seem to capture the experiences of the women in Resolana.

In the classes that focus on critical reflection, discussion, and skill building that can assist one in responding differently when faced with similar circumstances, the learning is no less emotional nor are the learning activities devoid of opportunities for the women to engage their imagination and intuition. For example, in an anger management class the women are asked to reflect on and analyze their past experiences and behaviors, including how they felt about the situation and themselves. They are then given anger management strategies to consider using in the future, and are asked to imagine themselves responding in new ways to similar situations. Some of the women may volunteer to role-play one of the strategies they just learned. This is typical of how

reflective and rational cognitive discourse is integrated with emotion and imagination to foster transformative learning in the program.

A critical element to any kind of transformation is a willingness or readiness to change. It is important to note that two of the women, Mari and Karen, shared little to indicate transformation. At the time of our interview, Mari, a 28-year-old Mexican woman, was awaiting transfer to a state prison where she was sentenced to serve two years. As a child, Mari was sexually abused by her step-father until she was nine years old. She ran away from home several times and by the age of 11 she was deeply involved with a gang, ditching school, and doing drugs. She has been through several drug rehabilitation programs and has sobered and relapsed several times. She identifies as a “career criminal” and while a part of her longs to be free from addiction, drugs numb the pain of her past. When asked about what kind of support she would need to change, Mari said there is nothing anyone can do and that it has to be when she is ready. She said:

‘Cause in the end, it’s all what’s in the inside. Every woman I think I’ve talked to growing up since we were little girls I talked to, they’re fucked up. They’re scarred, scarred beyond repair. We’re talking about brothers, fathers, molesting, just abuse. All kinds of ugly stuff. The closest thing that comes, that heals and brings comfort, like instantly, is a drug.

Nevertheless, Mari said she learns something new every time she goes to class and has come to recognize her triggers and her tendency to dissociate.

Karen is a 39-year-old White woman who looks like she could be in her 50s. She never developed trust with the other women in Resolana and while she consistently attended classes, she said she did not share much in the classes. Karen was sexually abused by her brother between the ages of 7 and 10 and by the age of 17, she was living on the streets. Drugs became a means of escape for her and prostitution a means of survival and a way to support her addiction and her children. The abuse she endured in her younger years has impacted her throughout her life and she never felt loved or lovable. She is very aware that in a structured environment like jail and rehab, she can stay clean, but on the outside, she has no support, nowhere to live, and with her criminal record, no immediate job opportunities. This lack of support and resources is a huge barrier to her continued recovery. She sobers up and goes back to the life she has known for so long. She recently found out she is HIV positive and is very depressed. Karen's circumstances exemplify a significant challenge regarding transformative learning. While Karen can and has critically examined her past and has learned new behaviors, the material conditions of her life remain the same and our response as a society to people like her ensures a continued cycle of incarceration and a lack of opportunity for lasting transformation. The need for continued support outside of jail is critical for all the women. Carla and Taylor who are considered "success stories" in that after their release they continued to put into practice what they learned in Resolana, both had supportive families, a safe place to live, and job experiences and skills that allowed them to find employment. Both recognize that as a major contributing factor to their continued transformation.

Conclusion

Research shows that because most women who are incarcerated commit nonviolent crimes, their crimes are often the result of traumatic pasts that include physical and/or sexual abuse and substance abuse, and their pathways to incarceration are strongly influenced by race, class, and gender inequality, most women offenders would be better served by community programs outside of prison walls (Belknap, 2007; Bloom, 2003; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). This is true for the women in my study. Nevertheless, as long as the upward trend of women's incarceration continues, so does the need for effective programming and appropriate treatment in women's jails and prisons. Resolana's holistic and gender-responsive curriculum is unique and characteristic of research-identified programming that can better respond to incarcerated women's realities. The results of this study reveal that participants experienced transformative learning and for the two women who were no longer incarcerated or serving time at a court-ordered rehabilitation program, the transformation was enduring. These results can inform both policy and educational programming aimed at addressing the diverse needs of incarcerated women. Recognizing the value of programming that offers incarcerated women multiple ways in which they can access and learn from their experiences can encourage policy makers to advocate for and fund like programs. While this study does not provide new information regarding women's common pathways to incarceration (although it does offer additional confirmation to the existing pathways literature), it is my hope that as these stories continue to be told, the more people will

become aware and compelled to take action toward change in how we respond to women who come into conflict with the law.

This study is also important to the adult education literature on transformative learning. To foster transformative learning in a prison context with incarcerated women requires an understanding of the ways in which women's paths to incarceration are unique. It is imperative that adult educators working in this context understand the common histories of trauma, abuse, and addiction among many women who are incarcerated, as well as how those histories can impact their transformation and learning in jail or prison. For example, for many of these women, incarceration is often a re-traumatizing event, which can impact their interest and/or ability to learn in this context. Without this knowledge, some of their behaviors that outside of jail served as means of self-protection and self-preservation might be misunderstood and used against them by disallowing their participation in educational programming. During my work with Resolana, I witnessed many women begin the program with what one might call an angry, hostile, or closed-off attitude. But the fact that these women chose to attend class was an indication to the Resolana staff and volunteers that they were interested in learning something. With, patience, care, and compassion, and an understanding acceptance by staff, volunteers, and other women in the program of those initial attitudes, many of the women changed. According to English and Irving (2012) there is little new research on transformative learning that makes gender a central category of study. They write:

We speculate that in the attempt to unite with other causes in the struggle for equality and to tone down feminist rhetoric, adult education scholars have forgone special attention to women; this depoliticization means that women's needs and causes are increasingly hidden. (p. 246)

This study brings to forefront women's experiences and offers insight into how transformation can be fostered in an unlikely place.

Fostering transformative learning that is emancipatory in a women's jail may appear oxymoronic. The trek to the classroom in which Resolana classes are held begins with a walk through a metal detector and a short walk to the desk where the jail officers exchange our ID's with a pink visitor badge. Other than our car keys, we are only allowed to take the pre-approved instructional materials with us to the classroom. We take the elevator to the fourth floor and press a button outside a heavy steel door. The door buzzes and we push it open and step into the sally port with another door that will not open until the first one closes behind us. We exit the small space and walk down a corridor and pass another guarded desk. When we get to the classroom, we encounter another set of heavy doors that we have to be "buzzed" into. The classroom, enclosed with glass and concrete walls (imagine being in a fishbowl), is in between two "pods" (large, open rooms) that confine 64 women, with bunk beds that line the walls, and open showers that are often occupied). The women start to trickle in wearing their green and white striped uniforms and plastic clogs. Something has drawn them to the class and for at least a couple of hours, they have an opportunity to escape from the jail's normal routine. While it is difficult to imagine creating an environment and engaging

pedagogical practices that foster emancipatory, transformative learning in a highly visible, highly regulated, and multiply guarded environment, that is exactly what the women in Resolana do.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Regarding the complete failure of the prison system, in 1996 Kathryn Watterson wrote in the final chapter of her book , *Women in Prison: Inside the Concrete Womb*:

As I write this last chapter, I feel real despair. I feel bitter that people live in such oblivion to one another that books like this one must be written. Why don't people already know? Why are we as a society unwilling to seek the truth of how we are hurting ourselves? (p. 337)

Seventeen years later as I write this concluding chapter, Watterson's sentiments are mine, although, a part of me also feels hopeful.

I began this study wanting to investigate the transformative learning process of incarcerated women engaged in an educational program, as well as gain an understanding of the participants' lives prior to incarceration. What I discovered related to fostering transformative learning in a jail context is that it is possible. It is that knowledge that gives me a sense of hope. In the case of Resolana, a safe, nurturing, non-judgmental, and fun environment was critical to the women's openness to learning. The holistic curriculum invited learning to happen in multiple ways, whether through dialogue, art, or activities that engaged the body. Through opportunities for intrapersonal engagement, the women gained greater self-awareness, an ability to express themselves, and a greater capacity for self-care. Prior to their participation in Resolana, many of the women had never reflected on their experiences and how those experiences shaped who

they are. All but one of the women suffered from drug and/or alcohol addiction and while many of them had participated in drug rehabilitation programs before, those programs did not help them get at the root causes of their addictions. For most of the women, their drug and alcohol abuse was directly related to the repeated trauma and abuse they suffered throughout their lives. Many of the women developed an awareness of the impact of the trauma and abuse they experienced when they learned about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Resolana. Understanding that many of their behaviors were symptomatic of PTSD gave them a sense of relief. The relief came from a deeper self-awareness and something concrete they could work on resolving, and it was never used as excuse for the crimes of which they were convicted.

Through interpersonal engagement opportunities, some of the women were able to recognize their destructive communication and behavior patterns (oftentimes learned and used as a survival strategy outside of jail) and learned new skills that helped them communicate more effectively. Learning from, connecting with, and learning to empathize with the other women in the program instilled in most of them a desire to give back to the program.

The life histories of the women and the circumstances that contributed to their paths to incarceration revealed that categorizing and simplifying as “law breaking behaviors” their actions, such as running away as a minor, prostitution, using or selling drugs, stealing, or getting involved with criminal street gangs, not only disregards their historical and material conditions within which their choices are made, but also discounts the intentions of the women as they sought to avoid and respond to the

poverty, injustice, violence and victimization that were imposed on their lives. For these women, framing such actions through a lens of agency and resistance gives a more accurate account of the “choices” they made that contributed to their paths to incarceration. The common patterns of agency and resistance they shared include resourcefulness in being able to find support, and finding ways to make a living, despite the multiple barriers they faced prior to and post incarceration. The women also found ways to navigate through the justice system, as well as subvert it when they felt threatened or as if they were being treated unfairly. They protected themselves in the streets and from their abusers at home by using strategies such as fighting back, acting fearless, seeking legal assistance, or using their instincts or knowledge of human behavior to get out of dangerous situations. Finally, they displayed acts of resistance and agency by getting even with their perpetrators, resisting gender expectations, and valuing themselves despite the imposed stigma attached to their actions. Hearing their life stories and examining their choices and behaviors through a lens of resistance and agency forces us to reconsider criminal behavior and thus, our response as a society to women in similar circumstances.

Implications

Other adult educators can learn from both the process and content of Resolana’s program. Without programs that provide a holistic approach to recovery and create opportunities for transformation, jails and prisons are ill-equipped to help the women recover from drug or alcohol addiction and the trauma and/or violence they experienced throughout their lives. There is strong evidence that the program fosters incremental, as

well as lasting transformative learning (reflected in the experience of Carla and Taylor, the two formerly incarcerated participants). A comment that many of the participants made, not just those I interviewed, but also women I interacted with during my field observations, is that they need a Resolana on the outside³¹. While this research shows that Resolana is effective in fostering transformative learning in jail, the reality of the conditions that many of the women return to after being released cannot be ignored. With prior arrests and convictions on their records, their ability to quickly find a job that pays a living wage can be a huge barrier to creating a new life for themselves outside of jail. For the women who lack financial resources and support from friends or family, securing safe housing away from the negative influences that could easily propel them right back into jail or prison, is nearly impossible. For the women who have limited or no social support, education and job skills, and whose only source of income has been through prostitution or drug dealing, what other options do they have? It should come as no surprise that these women end up back in jail or prison. While both Carla and Taylor continued to practice what they learned in Resolana once they were released from jail, it is important to note that both women had family support, job training and experience, and safe places to live, which they identified as critical to their ability to turn their lives around. Following up with other Resolana participants who are no longer incarcerated can provide additional information about the long-term impact of the program. In the past, one of the challenges of continued evaluation of the impact on participants once

³¹ In October 2012 Resolana held its first post release support group in the Dallas community.

released was an inability to find and contact them. With the new reentry support group offered to past participants in the community, continued evaluation is now possible.

While the original intent of my dissertation did not focus on researching the criminal justice system, it became a natural byproduct of my study. What I learned about the criminal justice system and its treatment of women is where the same feeling of despair that Watterson wrote about 17 years ago comes from, and for the same reasons. Watterson writes, “For two hundred years, knowledgeable people in America have been saying that prisons don’t work. They don’t stop crime. They don’t deter criminal behavior” (p. 337). According to Watterson, the high rate of new felonies committed by repeat offenders (80% at the time) who had previously served time in a correctional facility, was a clear indication of our failed prison system. She argues:

...In any other business, this rate of failure would not be tolerated. In any other business, investors would pull out if even half of the products failed and if no progress was made in achieving the company’s goals. In any other business, the public would go wild over spending billions and billions of dollars in public funds with nothing to show for it but failure. (p. 337)

Her words still ring true—our prison system is a complete failure and yet our incarceration rates continue to rise. According to a 2010 report (Schmitt, Warner, & Gupta, 2010):

- The United States currently incarcerates a higher share of its population than any other country in the world. The U.S. incarceration rate—753 per 100,000 people in 2008—is now about 240 percent higher than it was in 1980.

- In 2008, the U.S. correctional system held over 2.3 million inmates, about two-thirds in prison and about one-third in jail.
- Nonviolent offenders make up over 60 percent of the prison and jail population. Nonviolent drug offenders now account for about one-fourth of all offenders behind bars, up from less than 10 percent in 1980.
- The total number of violent crimes was only about three percent higher in 2008 than it was in 1980, while the total number of property crimes was about 20 percent lower. Over the same period, the U.S. population increased about 33 percent and the prison and jail population increased by more than 350 percent.
- Crime can explain only a small portion of the rise in incarceration between 1980 and the early 1990s, and none of the increase in incarceration since then. If incarceration rates had tracked violent crime rates, for example, the incarceration rate would have peaked at 317 per 100,000 in 1992, and fallen to 227 per 100,000 by 2008—less than one third of the actual 2008 level and about the same level as in 1980. (p. 1)

The women in my study are targets in this deeply flawed system. All but one of the women I interviewed were incarcerated for nonviolent crimes and the majority of their charges were drug related or for prostitution. Their entry into prostitution was a means of survival; however, regardless of the circumstances, they were criminalized. Programs like Resolana can have a positive impact; however, funding for such programs is scarce and sustainability a challenge.

Addressing the Problem

For large-scale change to occur, the systemic problems that contribute to women's pathways to incarceration need to be addressed. When thinking about these systemic problems—racism, sexism, classism—all a part of what has been called the prison industrial complex³², saying it can be overwhelming is an understatement. Where does one start? As I discuss in Chapter III, we first need to rethink what it means to be “guilty” or “innocent” in our criminal justice system. We need to continue to learn about and share the stories of women who suffer from structural race, class, and gender discrimination—discrimination that is supported and reinforced by the legal system. I imagine the lives of the women in my study would have been very different if they had received assistance in recovering from the trauma and abuse they endured, as well as assistance recovering from their addictions. Being discarded into our jails and prisons offered no opportunity for them to improve their lives.

Advocating for changes in how we treat nonviolent and drug-related crimes is another important action that can be taken. Prison divestment advocates argue that funding community programs that offer mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as prevention programs for youth, would cost less and have favorable, rather than the debilitating outcomes that incarceration produces (Petteruti & Walsh, 2008). Additionally, without post-release support in securing employment and safe housing, there is strong likelihood of recidivism. Finally, rather than continuing to put women in

³² “The prison industrial complex is a complicated system situated at the intersection of governmental and private interests that uses imprisonment, policing, and surveillance as a solution to social, political, and economic problems” (Petteruti & Walsh, 2008)

cages that confine with the false promise of rehabilitation, we need to advocate for programs like Resolana, both in and outside of jail or prison, that address the unique needs of women, who are incarcerated and provide compassionate support.

Epilogue

Today was a particularly difficult day at the jail. I just completed a week of field observations and am sad to be leaving the women I've gotten to know. I wonder what will happen to them. While it sounds like a cliché, I understand at a deep level why the Resolana staff and volunteers say, "I get more than I give." Hearing the women's stories and witnessing their courage as they struggle to find hope, meaning, serenity, forgiveness, and joy while doing time—things we women on the outside also search for—has both disturbed and inspired me. Walking into the building today to conduct life history interviews I was keenly aware of the 25 or more people standing in line outside in the wet heat waiting to get into the jail to visit someone—a mother, father, sister, loved one? Some of the people in line appeared to be families with parents, grandparents and children. The children were playing in line and looked happy. The majority of people appeared to be Black and Latino and most of the adults were women. I felt guilty as I jumped to the front of the line into the air-conditioned building and told the jail officer that I was with Resolana. I gave the officer my car keys, audio recorder, and folder of papers I needed to conduct my interviews and walked through the metal detector. I picked up my things and headed toward the check-in desk. The lobby area is large, but there are only a few metal benches in there. I wondered why the people outside are not allowed to come inside and wait. The jail officers on duty were nice

today and I easily exchanged my driver's license for a badge that allowed me access to the fourth floor where the interviews were held.

As my co-investigator and I walked past the jail officer's desk on the fourth floor to the Resolana classroom, an officer calls out to us, "You should know that it's feeding time." Feeding time? As if the women are animals in a zoo. Her words of warning make me think that this is how we justify the warehousing of women who need help, not incarceration. We don't see them as people. Most of us don't see them at all. They are conveniently confined beyond our view, allowing us the freedom to remain ignorant to their lives and the injustice of "justice" system. I have become accustomed to the smell of "feeding time" at the jail. It's a strange smell that reminds me of a town with a food factory that I drive through to get to Dallas. We walked past carts that were filled with trays of food that looked as unappetizing as they smelled. Of course, the women who are incarcerated are the ones serving the food and stacking empty trays. As we entered the Resolana classroom where the interviews are conducted, I felt a sense of relief looking at the colorful walls filled with the women's artwork. The classroom is a safe zone—a pocket of hope inside the "concrete womb" (Watterson, 1996)

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APPENDIX A

RESOLANA CORE AREAS

(1) **Mental health** – Central to our program is *Seeking Safety*, the same evidence based curriculum used by the county treatment center to help the women confront their addictions and learn healthy coping skills. Optional classes for victims of sexual abuse or domestic violence are taught by therapists from our long time community partner, the Family Place.

(2) **Life skills** – Required classes like *Healthy Communications*, *SelfWork*, *Anger Management*, *Planning for Change* and *Job Readiness* are offered on a rotating basis.

(3) **Parenting** – A six week series taught by the Child Abuse Prevention Center alternates with an eight week series taught by Resolana staff and based on the evidence based *Nurturing Families* curriculum for families with substance abuse, supplemented with materials from the 2003 Canadian study *Waiting for Mommy*.

(4) **Wellness** – Yoga classes provide exercise and teach stress management, while other classes focus on health issues.

(5) **Creativity** – Our integration of the arts (e.g., visual art, dance, music, drama, creative writing) is innovative and effective in building the sense of trust and community that underpins our deeper work.

(6) **12 Step** – A variety of 12 step meetings are offered (AA, NA and Alanon). We're proud that a former participant leads the AA volunteer team and another, who is not yet eligible to visit the jail, has helped recruit the NA team.

(7) **Resources** – Resolana provides case management services to participants both during their time in jail and at release.

**Contributed by Resolana founder, Bette Buschow.*

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANTS

Incarcerated Women

Name	Age	*Race/Ethnicity	Education
Alexis	40	Black and Cherokee	4 years of college (no degree)
Alma	19	Hispanic	9 th grade
Megan	40	Caucasian	GED
Karen	39	White	9 th grade and GED
Lynn	46	Black	11 th grade and GED
Mari	28	Mexican	GED, trade school (legal information specialist), and some college credits
Paula	30	Mexican	High school degree
Sarah	43	White	10 th grade, GED, and 27 college credits

Formerly Incarcerated Women

Name	Age	*Race/Ethnicity	Education
Christy	26	Caucasian	9 th grade
Taylor	29	Black	Bachelor's degree
Ana	43	Hispanic	10 th grade
Jasmine	28	½ Native American and ½ Black	GED, cosmetology credits
Carla	32	White and Black	GED and currently working on associates degree

* To respect the women's right to claim their own identity, rather than selecting a category to place them in based on their answers (e.g. labeling the women who identified as White or Caucasian as White), I chose to keep intact the terms they used to identify themselves.