

REINTEGRATION OF FEMALE OFFENDERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Female offenders are a minority in the criminal justice system. In corrections, operational approaches, protocol and policy are developed and implemented based on the findings from the majority, that is, men. A number of authors have acknowledged that existing reintegration paradigms for offenders hinge on male models of change and fail to respect arguments that women and men transform differently (e.g., Blanchette & Brown, 2006; Herrschaft, Veysey, Tubman-Carbone, & Christian, 2009). Accordingly, they maintain that there is a need for gender-specific reintegration efforts to facilitate women's reentry into their home communities.

Today's conceptualization of 'effective rehabilitation' is based primarily on the principles of classification first articulated over twenty years ago by Canadian researchers Andrews, Bonta and Hoge (1990). Although there are several principles posited in the model by Andrews and colleagues, those most fundamental (and most commonly cited) include 'Risk', 'Need', and 'Responsivity'. As such, the paradigm is often referred to as the RNR model.

In brief, the risk principle suggests that: 1) with appropriate assessment, risk of recidivism can be predicted, and 2) level of risk should be matched with the level of service provided. Specifically, Andrews and colleagues posit that higher levels of service should be provided to higher risk offenders, while those assessed as lower risk derive better outcomes from less intensive intervention.

The need principle contends that, to reduce criminal recidivism, intervention must focus on the 'criminogenic needs' of the offenders. Criminogenic needs are characteristics of the offender (or his or her social situation) that relate directly to his or her risk of reoffending. Accordingly, changes in levels of criminogenic needs are associated with changes in risk to reoffend. Importantly, the need principle distinguishes 'criminogenic' from 'non-criminogenic' needs; while offenders might have multiple needs, only some will be criminogenic in nature. For instance, Andrews and colleagues suggest that attributes of the offender such as psychological distress, low self-esteem, or poor physical health are 'non-criminogenic' in nature. While the need principle does not necessarily denounce the provision of services for non-criminogenic needs, it clearly states that the focus and priority for intervention should be those areas that are criminogenic (e.g., substance abuse, pro-criminal attitudes, anger/hostility).

The responsivity principle posits that treatment services should be delivered in a style and mode that match the learning style and ability of the offender. The responsivity principle subsumes two general types of considerations. The first, commonly called 'broad' or 'general' responsivity states that for most offenders, optimal treatment response will be achieved when treatment providers deliver structured interventions (e.g., cognitive behavioural strategies) in a warm and empathic manner, and using a firm but fair approach. Thus, the general responsivity principle describes attributes of the intervention that are external to the offender. The second type of responsivity pertains to internal characteristics of the individual being assessed. These are referred to as 'specific' responsivity considerations, and examples include: gender, ethnicity, motivation to change, literacy level, and intelligence. The specific responsivity principle also recognizes the need to match individual therapist characteristics with those of the client in order to maximize treatment gain.

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In the years that followed, a very large body of correctional research mounted to support the principles articulated by Andrews and colleagues. Although these principles have been framed as 'gender neutral,' the majority of the supporting research was either focused exclusively on male offenders or failed to disaggregate the results by gender.

Research on reintegration suggests that family separation and community isolation (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001), poor quality of life conditions (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009), mental illness (Hartwell, 2001), and lack of secure, stable, legal employment (Blitz, 2006) are all significant factors in addressing the reintegration needs of women. Superficially, these constructs appear similar to those identified as relevant for men, thereby strengthening arguments for gender-neutral approaches. While some authors question the need for gender-based distinctions in reintegration efforts, I suggest that the evidence supports a gendered approach to correctional services.

II. INTEGRATION OF "WHAT WORKS" WITH GENDER

The state of research and program development for women lags far behind that for men. Specific challenges include, though are not limited to: low base rates of crime and re-offending, little gender-specific program theory, and a lack of research pertaining to female offenders overall. However, based on the available evidence, it is argued here that integrating the (gender-neutral) principles of effective correctional intervention with gender-informed approaches will yield optimal results in reintegration efforts.

This article advocates for the integration of a number of gender-informed theories and methodologies in contemporary correctional services. Specifically, it is suggested that gendered pathway (e.g., Belknap, 2007), relational theory (Miller, 1986), strengths-based perspectives (e.g., Van Wormer, 2001), positive psychology (Gillham & Seligman, 1999), and good lives models (Ward & Brown, 2004) are all relevant frameworks for intervention with female offenders. Additionally, it is essential that correctional programs and services for women are trauma-informed (Messina & Grella, 2007) and incorporate multiple needs into a comprehensive and holistic treatment approach.

Gendered pathways research, first introduced about 30 years ago, provided a novel feminist approach in its attempt to explain female criminality. Using primarily qualitative interview techniques, researchers have identified pathways into crime that are 'gendered.' The 'typical' female trajectory into the criminal justice system begins with an abusive (or otherwise aversive) home environment. For self-preservation, the young female then quits school and leaves home to live on the streets. This, in turn, may lead to further victimization, and to cope, the individual may begin to abuse substances. The woman is likely to resort to behaviours such as prostitution, fraud or robbery to survive. These survival strategies are 'criminalized' and the individual ends up caught in the criminal justice system.

In a unique and empirically strong 2009 study examining gendered pathways, Salisbury and Van Voorhis used interview and survey data to assess various gender-responsive needs with an intake cohort of more than 300 female probationers. Results of their study, which used a path analytic approach, supported three gendered pathways to women's incarceration: 1) a pathway beginning with childhood victimization as a precursor to mental illness and substance abuse; 2) a relational pathway in which women's dysfunctional intimate relationships enabled adult victimization, reduced self-efficacy, and mental illness and substance abuse; and 3) a social and human capital pathway in which women's needs in the areas of education, family support and self-efficacy, as well as relationship dysfunction, contributed to employment/financial difficulties and, ultimately, imprisonment. The authors concluded that their findings supporting gendered pathways have implications for correctional interventions for women.

Relational theory (Miller, 1986) is a highly salient perspective for incorporation into correctional services for women. Briefly, relational theory suggests that connection to other human beings is necessary for healthy human development in both genders but is particularly important for women. Further, relational theorists note that healthy relationships are characterized by empathy, empowerment and mutuality. It is argued that these criteria promote zest and vitality, empowerment to act,

knowledge of self and others, self-worth, and a desire for increased connection (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). The emphasis on healthy relationships, connectedness, empowerment and self-worth makes relational theory very compatible with the pathways perspective described earlier.

Research provides support for the relevance and influence of a variety of relationships in women's offending behaviour, or their decision to desist from crime. A critical component of women's relationships is that related to their children and parenting responsibilities and research continues to suggest that childcare services, confidence and capacity in parenting skills, and support in parenting, is important to the successful reintegration of women (e.g., Brown, 2010; Cobbina, 2010; Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009; Stalans, 2009; Thompson, 2008; Van Voorhis, Wright, Salisbury, & Bauman, 2010).

Strengths-based approaches, such as those proposed by Van Wormer (2001), indicate that the offender's strengths need to be recognized and integrated into her service provision. More specifically, service providers should capitalize on the offender's strengths in order to help the client heal and re-integrate into the community. Van Wormer emphasizes the goals of restorative justice as 'geared towards the needs of the victim, the offender, and the community.' Proponents of strengths-based approaches argue that intervention with incarcerated females is complicated by the oppressive patriarchal structure of the jail/prison system, clients' victimization histories and the various psychosocial problems frequently presented by female clients (Mahoney & Daniel, 2006). Consequently, it is suggested that traditional (gender-neutral) ways of working with female inmates 'often fail to challenge the profound effects of self-destructive behaviours, the internalized pathologizing self-discourse, and the oppressive societal ideologies that frequently characterize the lives of incarcerated women.' Thus, the strengths-based intervention paradigm is viewed by some (current author included) as particularly important for female offenders.

It is noted that psychological frameworks have not always effectively highlighted the relevance of strengths-based perspectives. Gillham and Seligman (1999) discuss the origins, benefits and costs of 'negative psychology' and highlight that prominent psychological theories have often failed to focus on people's capacity to demonstrate resilience and underestimated the relevance and power of general well-being. Gillham and Seligman argued for the development of a science of 'positive psychology,' a psychology capable of providing individuals with knowledge on 'how to build virtues like creativity, hope, future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, moral judgment, forgiveness, humor, and courage, and how to enhance happiness and life satisfaction.' Positive psychology has been defined as the study of positive emotions, positive character traits and enabling institutions (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005) and has flourished during the past decade. There have been increasing levels of progress in this area in both therapeutic and research undertakings; nevertheless, the present author maintains that reintegration efforts for women have been slow to incorporate aspects of positive psychology within existing models of intervention.

The capacity for offender change and the personal decision to desist from crime speak, at least in part, to the strength of an offender. Simpson, Yahner, and Dugan (2008) highlight the importance of offender change as they suggest that just as criminal behaviour emerges at different times, changes in criminal behaviour are anticipated as bonds to social institutions develop and persist. However, these bonds represent only one component of a complex process. Roberts (2010) defines a model of change specific to women that considers the complexity of change for women by incorporating 'person/functioning' factors, 'situation/demand' constraints, and 'resources/environment' considerations. Taken together, this model demonstrates the change process for women as a product of their capacity to 'hold in balance' 1) the demands upon them, 2) the external resources and legitimate opportunities available to them; and 3) their overall capacity/functioning. The fact that so many women are successful upon release provides support for the strength these women hold in maintaining the required 'balance' in this complex change process.

The research of Bui and Morash (2010) acknowledged 'self-determination' as a factor in the change process. Specifically, several of the women who took part in this research indicated that self-determination made it possible for them to stop drug-use without any treatment. Furthermore, Gobeil's research (2008) found that one of the largest protective factors was the woman's personal decision to be 'crime-free' (ranked first) or a personal commitment to remain 'crime-free' (ranked third, after

employment). All in all, research on the change process and self-determination highlights the strength of individual women and their capacity to change as a result of their individual decision-making process.

An effective method of conceptualizing components of positive psychology is the good lives model for offender rehabilitation. Ward (2002) suggests that typical rehabilitation efforts presuppose the conception of possible 'good lives' for offenders; in turn, the understanding of the necessary internal and external conditions for living such lives are not always implicit. Ward (2002) refers to 'good lives' as methods of living that are beneficial and fulfilling for individuals, arguing that any conception of a possible 'good life' requires an understanding of an offender's capabilities, temperament, interests, skills, values and support networks. Ward argues that 'a necessary condition for the reduction of offending is the instillation of ways of living that are more fulfilling and coherent.' Accordingly, effective reintegration efforts should integrate perspectives that will contribute to the good lives of female offenders.

Ward and Stewart (2003) maintain that traditional correctional intervention efforts are concerned with risk reduction (i.e., reducing crime and poor/disruptive behaviour) and propose that correctional intervention efforts need to consider the enhancement of an offender's well-being and capabilities. Stated simply, the authors suggest an enhancement model of rehabilitation rather than a strictly harm-avoidance model of rehabilitation. They adeptly suggest that a strictly criminogenic need perspective fails to offer a theoretically integrated view of the rehabilitation process. Accordingly, they argue that there is a requirement for 'additional substantive theories about the need in question.' Andrews and Bonta (2003) contend that arguments supporting the 'Good Lives Model' (GLM) are based largely on theory, with little empirical evidence to support the value of the model.

In an effort to contribute to the substantive knowledge of the employment needs of offenders, while at the same time providing empirical evidence to support the GLM, Taylor (2008) conducted research which operationalized the model by considering the vocational interests of male and female offenders. More specifically, she examined rates of concordance between vocational interests and institutional and community employment and the respective impact of vocational interest concordance on correctional outcomes such as institutional adjustment and recidivism. Although quite exploratory and preliminary, results revealed minimal support for the statistical significance of vocational congruence as a whole. Nevertheless, post-hoc analyses revealed interesting differences for Aboriginal and women offenders, as well as offenders over 30 years of age. Additionally, vocational congruence emerged as a significant factor in predicting time to recidivism. When considering the results for women, they provide preliminary evidence to suggest that women who were engaged in employment that was congruent with their vocational interests had more positive outcomes (e.g., decreases in security level) than those women who were engaged in employment that was incongruent with their vocational interest. As increasing research is conducted to operationalize the Good Lives Model, we will have a more concrete demonstration and understanding of what is important to the 'good life' of an offender.

In one's efforts to understand the contribution of gender-specific variables, gendered pathways, relational theory, positive psychology, and other constructs and theories outlined thus far, it will be critical to recognize that measuring change and outcomes related to these areas is prudent. For some this may require a systematic paradigm shift with acknowledgement that understanding women's crime requires awareness of much more than an understanding of outcomes related to institutional adjustment and recidivism. Often, and for obvious and respected reasons, these long term and ultimate outcomes are treated as the 'gold standard' in outcome research with limited recognition of the impact of interim outcomes. Hedderman, Palmer, and Hollin (2008) provide one framework/model for measuring change/outcomes related to gendered pathways. Ultimately this provides recognition of the contribution of these gender sensitive variables to the crime process. Such a framework may contribute to consistency in measurement; thereby strengthening related research outcomes both nationally and internationally.

Importantly, as this knowledge base grows, researchers and administrators alike will continue to struggle with carefully distinguishing between 1) gender-specific needs that directly predict criminal behaviour, 2) those that are in essence precursors to established criminogenic needs but are not

criminogenic in and of themselves, and 3) those that should be treated as responsivity factors. As highlighted by Hollin and Palmer (2006), in dealing with women, we are dealing with 'interacting adverse life events' and need to ensure that assessments do not artificially, or inadvertently, reduce or elevate risk while at the same time avoiding a mistranslation of women-specific needs into criminogenic needs.

Our capacity to move beyond an unrelenting, yet pioneering, focus on criminogenic needs and a pure risk reduction framework toward the enhancement of female offenders' well-being will inevitably be facilitated by: 1) the consideration of gendered pathways; 2) the recognition of the critical nature of healthy relationships for women; and 3) the incorporation of strengths-based perspectives and positive psychology. Accounting for all of these components in an integrated model of intervention for female offenders will pave the road toward 'good lives' to optimize successful reintegration into the community.

To be clear, the current article is not suggesting dismissal of traditional gender neutral principles of effective rehabilitation. On the contrary, there is tremendous and well-substantiated value in the risk/needs/responsivity paradigm. Nonetheless, it is argued that a gender-informed perspective that incorporates elements from both gender-neutral and female-centered approaches provides the opportunity to capitalize on what we know works in offender rehabilitation, *and* what we can learn by placing gender at the forefront.

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