

**Formerly Incarcerated Women's Online Accounts of Pathways to Criminality and
Incarceration: A Contribution to Feminist Pathways Theory**

by

Sabrina Arabzadah

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An oral defense of this thesis took place on October 30, 2023 in front of the following examining committee:

Examining Committee:

Chair of Examining Committee

Dr. James Walsh

Research Supervisor

Dr. Shahid Alvi

Examining Committee Member

Dr. Carla Cesaroni

Thesis Examiner

Dr. Karla Dhungana-Sainju

The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

ABSTRACT

Some feminist scholars argue that pathways research is not truly representative of girls' and women's pathways to crime. This paper uses the gendered pathways theory that recognizes and highlights some of the unique factors that can influence women's pathways into crime. Pathways theory has been criticized because it does not recognize the interconnectedness of risk factors (e.g., substance abuse, familial relationships, and mental health struggles), and two being that the research focuses on only a select few risk factors. This study uses narrative criminology to present women's stories to understand their pathways to criminality in their own voices. Using first-person accounts from the blog, *My Story in a Women's Prison*, female offenders' own perspectives and perceptions of their pathway to criminality and incarceration were analyzed. This paper concludes that women's own voices online can highlight how they perceive their risk factors, providing legitimacy to the gendered pathways theory.

Keywords: pathways; abuse; female criminality; incarceration; risk factors

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Some feminist criminologists have argued that mainstream theories of crime only incorporated gender as an afterthought (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). Yet, a great deal of criminological research suggests that individuals follow distinct and gendered pathways to crime (Boppre et al., 2018; Chesney-Lind, 2010; Cobbina et al., 2010; Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008). Moreover, the vast majority of general pathways research literature has been developed using samples of boys and men (Boppre et al., 2018; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). By extension, often (and historically), there has been an assumption by the criminal justice system that what works for incarcerated men will also work for incarcerated women (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Gehring, 2016; Kruttschnitt, 2016). Thus, feminist criminologists have argued that research has not been representative of girls' and women's pathways to crime (Boppre et al., 2018; Chesney-Lind, 2010; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Daly, 1992; Gehring, 2016; Kruttschnitt, 2016).

The assumption by the criminal justice system that what works for incarcerated men will work for incarcerated women has raised several concerns from feminist criminologists. As a result, to address this concern, these feminist criminologists suggest that the gendered pathways theory can provide insight into women's pathways to crime. The gendered pathways theory suggests that risk factors (some of which are specific to women), such as abuse or trauma, often beginning during childhood, can lead to criminality in adolescence or adulthood (Boppre et al., 2018; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016). Research on gendered pathways to crime has provided some insight into victimization and abuse as a complex and layered aspect of criminal offending (Brennen et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2018). However, stories in women's own voices found online are largely absent from the current literature. Examining the perceptions of formerly and currently incarcerated women would be valuable in understanding how they

themselves might characterize their pathways to crime and prison. This gap in the gendered pathways theory leads to this study's research question: *What risk factors do women in the blog identify that can illuminate and advance the gendered pathways theory?*

This study, using a narrative criminological approach, will try to shed some light on women's perceptions of their journeys to incarceration using their stories found on an online blog. The participants in this paper consist of women in the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* who are currently or were formerly incarcerated at the Lowell Correctional Institution in the United States in Ocala, Florida. By making use of the available data provided through the online blog, this study attempts to capture how women themselves perceive their pathways to crime and incarceration in an informal setting.

Statement of Paper Purpose and Research Objectives

In this paper, Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) research on pathways theory will be utilized to demonstrate that women's childhood experiences may lead to criminal behaviour and, in some cases, incarceration. Daly's (1992, 1994) framework of gendered pathways groups women into four pathways (i.e., street women, drug-connected women, battered women, harmed and harming women) (Gehring, 2016, p. 118). Chesney-Lind (1989) discusses abuse, mental illness, and substance abuse as interrelated issues contributing to women's offending behaviour (Gehring, 2016). After three decades, Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) gendered pathways perspective remains relevant as it continues to be used in gender-responsive policy and practices in treating women in correctional settings (Boppre et al., 2018; Brennan et al., 2012; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Valdovinos Olson & Amendola, 2021). However, feminist pathways scholars argue that there is an ongoing need for further examination of Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) original pathways theory model (Belknap,

2010; Broidy et al., 2018; Carr & Hanks, 2013; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Gehring, 2016; Kruttschnitt, 2016).

Today, components of the gendered pathways theory continue to be unexplored as critiques of feminist pathways theory have emphasized the narrow focus on only a select few risk factors (some of which are specific to women) (Broidy et al., 2018; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). Along with the critique of the gendered pathways theory not necessarily recognizing the interconnectedness of risk factors, suggesting that childhood victimization, addiction, and mental health should not be categorized as separate entities (Broidy et al., 2018; Carr & Hanks, 2013; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Gehring, 2016). To explore these critiques, this paper studies women's pathways to crime using a blog called *My Story in a Women's Prison*, comprised of stories from women who have been or are currently incarcerated. It is hoped that examining women's experiences in their own voices will shed some light on what women say (if anything) about the impact their risk factors may have on their likelihood of criminal behaviour, incarceration, and re-offending. This paper attempts to provide a more organic and holistic examination of pathways theory which is currently absent from most pathways research (Belknap, 2010; Broidy et al., 2018; Carr & Hanks, 2013; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Gehring, 2016).

Equally important, scholars have identified that feminist pathways research has yet to explore women's stories on social media (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Gehring, 2016). Women's stories told online through forums and blogs are important as they provide a new perspective on their life experiences. A significant reason for studying women's voices on the internet is that the internet has become an important source of data as it is how we communicate. Further, these digital technologies and platforms are a new access point for marginalized women

to tell their stories. Through content analysis¹ women's discourse on social media will be examined, specifically by using a blog, I aim to show how conducting content analysis online allows an opportunity to understand online communities (Neuendorf, 2017; Krippendorff, 2019). Narrative criminology demonstrates that women's stories told online can promote empowerment and agency while allowing marginalized communities to express their own voices (Bove & Tryon, 2018; Costello et al., 2017; Chen, 2016; Presser, 2009; Stavrositu, & Sundar, 2008). Therefore, for women, blogging is used as a mechanism for them to share their stories and can allow unsolicited narratives to be heard (Orr et al., 2017).

Paper Overview

The introduction presents discussions of feminist pathways theory, suggesting that the research on pathways could benefit from including the voices of women themselves and examining how women see their own pathways to crime and incarceration. It notes that women might be able to describe how they thought childhood trauma and other risk factors are interconnected and predictive of their criminality and incarceration. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature on female offenders and the various risk factors prevalent in many of their lives. Chapter two will also discuss Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) contributions to feminist pathways and its critiques, along with discussions from more recent pathways scholars. Chapter three will describe the qualitative methodology used in this paper. Chapter four presents the results of my investigation of the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison*. Finally, chapter five will begin by highlighting key findings from the paper. It will describe the study's limitations, policy implications and the possible direction of future research.

¹ Content analysis is defined as a form of research by analyzing a body of communicated material through evaluation of its key themes in order to establish its meaning. Content analysis is relevant here as it is the qualitative method used in this paper to understand women's stories told in the blog.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gendered pathways theory claims to explain women's complex pathways to criminality and incarceration. This literature review will discuss critiques of the gendered pathways theory focusing on components of gendered life that are missing from extant explanatory frameworks. The relevant literature will also show how women's first-person accounts would be useful in providing an opportunity for women to share their experiences online.

Understanding and Differentiating Female Criminality

An integral part of the feminist pathways framework is understanding how social circumstances can shape female criminality. The societal experiences of women are significantly different compared with men. The following literature outlines how the gendered pathways framework can be used to explain and understand female criminal behaviour. Irwin and Chesney- Lind (2008) explains how girls' violence is shaped by male-centred and masculinized explanations and moving beyond this idea can be challenging. The masculine theoretical assumptions used to explain female criminality can result from the lack of understanding of female criminality, resulting in "up-criming" (Irwin & Chesney- Lind, 2008). Up-criming means viewing girls within the same scope as boys can create a narrative that places girls in a punishment-oriented system that relies on lengthy incarceration (Irwin & Chesney- Lind, 2008). Belknap (2015) summarizes this phenomenon as "female lawbreakers historically (and to some degree today) have been viewed as 'abnormal' and as 'worse' than male lawbreakers—not only for breaking the law but also for stepping outside of prescribed gender roles of femininity" (p. 34).

In her book *Fighting for Girls*, Chesney-Lind (2010) establishes how girls' violent and criminal behaviour can be understood through variables like individual factors (e.g., early

delinquency, early running away from home, and early puberty) and family characteristics (e.g., parental support or monitoring, parental incarceration, and involvement with gangs). However, there is a discrepancy when understanding the nature of women's violence and aggression, which can cause a "war on girls" (Chesney- Lind, 2010, p. 242; Chesney- Lind & Merlo, 2015). This "war on girls" criminalizes girls' escape from abuse, trauma, maltreatment, and other conditions of victimization (Chesney- Lind & Merlo, 2015).

Chesney-Lind 's (2015) research later demonstrated that gender norms play a role in the status of offences (e.g., defying parental authority by running away from home). Non-Criminal offences may be a form of survival behaviour – an opportunity for girls to avoid abusive situations that may lead to later criminality and incarceration (Chesney-Lind, 2015; Lilly et al., 2016). A study by Gueta and Chen (2016), who interviewed twenty inmates, nine men and eleven women, found how both genders negotiate notions of femininity and masculinity. When constructing their pathways to crime, men and women presented different pathways (Gueta & Chen, 2016). For example, women whose crimes are associated with masculinity (e.g., violent offences) resulted in longer sentences compared to women whose crimes are seen to conform to their gender roles (Gueta & Chen, 2016). Previous research shows how the gendered pathways framework has provided some understanding of female criminal behaviour. However, research on how female criminality is shaped excludes women's voices on the internet.

Studies have shown how male offenders are embraced as offenders only and female offenders as victims only (Palmer et al., 2010; van der Knaap et al., 2012). However, some evidence suggests that men's pathways to crime show that men experience victimization and suffer from trauma leading to violent crime and survival crimes (e.g., gang membership) (Brown et al., 2020; Helfgott et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2010; van der Knaap et al., 2012). Considering

that the world is more complex when looking at both genders is important. Women's pathways to criminal behaviour can be shaped by their need to conform to their gender roles and complex societal constructions associated with women. Nonetheless, women's pathways to criminality and incarceration must be understood in all their complexity and in terms of their different world experiences as women. Therefore, gaining a fuller understanding of women's stories told online can provide insight into women's criminality while taking into account that both male and female offenders have multiple layers to what leads them to crime and incarceration. In the next section, discussions will be made on the development of the gendered pathways theory.

The Gendered Pathways to Crime

“Traditional criminological theories” are often criticized by feminist scholars as being male-centred, as male samples were used predominantly in these theories, and only later aspects important to female offending were considered (Belknap, 2015; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Gehring 2016). Authors like Kruttschnitt (2016) are critical of mainstream criminological theories that categorize women as an afterthought, raising concerns regarding whether the same theoretical constructs applied to men can adequately explain the phenomenon of female offending. The consensus from this scholarship is that the research developed using samples of boys and men is not truly representative of girls' and women's pathways to crime (Boppre et al., 2018). Historically females that committed crimes were viewed as more “male-like” therefore, criminologists regarded female offenders through a male-centric lens (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). For example, women who committed violent offences (e.g., robbery or aggravated assault) were assumed to fall under male-oriented theories (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019).

Before the mid-seventies, theorizing about criminal behaviour was almost entirely about men (Chesney-Lind, 2010; Lilly et al., 2015). The emergence of pathways theory through

scholars Chesney-Lind (1989) and Daly (1992, 1994) has provided a better understanding of the pathway for some women from childhood trauma to criminality and incarceration (Brennen et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2018). The feminist pathways scholarship emphasizes that men and women enter the criminal justice system through different pathways, meaning examining women's lives before their criminal involvement is imperative (Gehring, 2016). Pathways theory suggests that childhood (and sometimes adulthood) trauma can serve as trajectories to offending behaviour (Belknap, 2015; Gehring, 2016).

Gendered pathways theory emerged during the early 1990s. Daly (1992, 1994) identified five paths women took that led to possible criminal behaviour (Lilly et al., 2015). The five categories include street women (e.g., women who fled abusive households and survived on the street by engaging in drugs, prostitution, or theft to survive), harmed and harming women (e.g., women who experienced sexual and physical child trauma and abuse, which led to chronic adult offending), battered women, drug-connected women, and economically motivated women (Boppre et al., 2018). Daly found that women's most common pathway to female crime was the harmed and harming pathway (Boppre et al., 2018). Since Daly's (1992, 1994) research on gendered pathways, scholars like Chesney-Lind (1989) have replicated her typologies (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Lilly et al., 2015). Chesney-Lind (1989), in her take on gendered pathways theory, describes that a pathway begins with early abuse and trauma, which pushes girls out of the home and onto the streets where they cope with their mental health, consequently causing alcohol use, drug use, and prostitution (Broidy et al., 2018).

Later pathways research continuously demonstrated how female criminality and incarceration could be caused by women's victimization, drug use, abuse, and trauma (Brennan et al., 2012; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Voorhis, 2012). Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney

Lind's (1989) gendered pathways theory remains relevant today as scholars continue to use their theoretical impetus as a building block for their own research (Alarid & Wright, 2015; Brennan et al. 2012). In addition, the gendered pathways perspective continues to be used for developing gender-responsive treatments for women (Brennan et al. 2012).

The social response to female crime has tended to mirror what is known about male crime, but this "add women and stir" approach makes no sense (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). Research indicates that women engage in criminal behaviour for different reasons than their male counterparts (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Lilly et al., 2015). Simply adding women into traditional criminological theories can be problematic as female criminality can be shaped by the consequences of their gender. Moving forward, looking at recent studies of the gendered pathways theory is vital.

Understanding The Gendered Pathways to Crime

The following studies demonstrate research into what we know about the gendered pathways to crime. Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2012), in their book, *The Female Offender*, dive deeper into women's pathways to offending and prison. Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2012) used qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the childhoods of adult female offenders. Findings showed that unemployment, homelessness, drug use, and prostitution shaped girls' future criminal behaviour during their adult lives (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2012). Other research from Chesney-Lind & Merlo (2015) examines the arrests of girls in the United States. By assessing victimization trends, the authors find that young girls' victimization becomes criminalized (Chesney-Lind & Merlo, 2015). One example of the pattern of victimization to criminalization is girls being arrested for assault because of having arguments with their parents (Chesney-Lind & Merlo, 2015).

Recent research by Flores et al. (2019), who conducted qualitative research by interviewing 33 justice-involved girls, provided further insight into the gendered pathways theory. In their study, Flores et al. (2019) found that girls reported experiences of verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse. An important concept discussed by Flores et al. (2019) is polyvictimization which refers to the multiple experiences of victimization that occur simultaneously or sequentially. Flores et al. (2019) coined the term polyvictimization to reflect how forms of abuse, trauma, and victimization should not be categorized as separate entities. It would be beneficial to apply Flores et al. 's (2019) perspective of understanding pathways in the context of female adult offenders.

A literature review from Brown et al. (2020) explores the nature of female-perpetrated crime through thematic content analysis by examining articles/studies (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles and books). Brown et al. (2020) explain risk predictors of future criminal behaviour in girls and women in their findings. Brown et al. (2020) found that the gendered pathways theory has concluded that the most common pathways to the justice system for girls and women include:

aversive family environments (e.g., abuse, neglect, trauma during childhood) which result in inadequate coping strategies (substance abuse) or propel girls into the streets where requisite forced survival strategies (e.g., sex trade, robbery, drug use/selling) are in turn criminalized, unhealthy relationships with intimate partners (e.g., intimate partner violence, explicit or implicit coerced involvement in the drug trade) and economic marginalization/poverty (p. 117).

Research from Widom and Osborn (2021) draws on findings from a prospective cohort study that connects female offenders' behaviour to the history of violence they experienced in

their childhood. Widom and Osborn (2021) found that it is more likely for women who were maltreated during their childhood to be arrested for a criminal offence, especially if the offence is more violent (Widom & Osborn, 2021). Another study by Barlow and Weare (2019) explores women as co-offenders by conducting semi-structured interviews with eight women. Barlow and Weare (2019) found that overlapping factors such as co-offending relationships, substance abuse, and financial issues motivated women to commit crimes. It is important to consider how risk factors may overlap as this can provide insight into female adult offenders' pathways to criminality (Barlow & Weare, 2019; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016).

There is some literature on women's experiences in prison using their own voices. In their book, Wally Lamb (2003) presents women's voices through a collection of autobiographies by inmates from the York Correctional Institution, Connecticut's maximum-security prison for women. Lamb's (2007) book *I'll Fly Away* presents women's voices through a writing workshop at the same correctional institution. Lamb (2007) in his book presented a collection of essays where women provided their own perceptions of their pathways to criminality and incarceration through their personal written stories. The women in their stories describe being sexually, physically or mentally abused, as well as their struggles with their mental health (e.g., depression and bipolar disorder) (Lamb 2003, 2007). In addition, women's own voices are also seen in the book *Inside this Place, Not of It* by Levi and Waldman (2011). The authors present the stories of thirteen female inmates from Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla, California (Levi & Waldman, 2011). Women provided their own testimonies on accounts leading up to their incarceration and experiences while incarcerated (Levi & Waldman, 2011). As can be seen, several studies have used women's voices to understand how they characterize their life experiences and choices.

Although there has been a great deal of research on women's pathways to criminality and later incarceration, research using women's own voices found on the internet remains absent. The next section will provide insight into critiques from authors who use the gendered pathways theory in their research.

Critiques of The Gendered Pathways to Crime

The narrow focus on only a select few risk factors can create a disregard for other factors that may impact women's criminality. Research from feminist pathways scholars tends to focus on victimization, abuse, and trauma. However, recent research demonstrates how other factors can contribute to women's criminal behaviour. For example, most women convicted of crime are mothers, yet little is known about the impact of mothering on criminal behaviour (Yule et al., 2015). Using data from interviews with 259 incarcerated women in Ontario, Canada, Yule et al. (2015) found that women temporarily refrain from drug use and illegal earnings when they live with their children. Yule et al. (2015) use life-course theory to analyze the impact motherhood can have on women's criminality. Thus, it remains crucial to use a feminist pathways perspective to explore the impact mothering can have on women's criminal behaviour (Yule et al., 2015). Other factors that are raised in the literature but need further exploration are familial relationships (e.g., parental supervision, parent-child relationship, family criminality, family support), mental well-being (e.g., internal mental health struggles), and living situation (e.g., runaway, out of home placement) (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019).

Nuytiens and Christiaens (2016) interviewed 41 female prisoners from four prisons in Belgium, they found that there is not much research on why it is the case that women's onset offending occurs during their adulthood. The findings from Nuytiens and Christiaens (2016)

show that women offend due to financial needs, addictions, and abusive intimate relationships. Like Daly's (1992) findings on 'street-women' or 'battered women' Nuytiens and Christiaens (2016) findings demonstrate that women's adult offending is often directly linked to their victimization while in abusive intimate relationships. In research by Simpson et al. (2008), they describe significant findings on women's pathways to incarceration, they found that the women in their sample were adult-onset offenders. Simpson et al. (2008) found that the most significant risk factor associated with women who begin offending as an adult was victimization (e.g., sexual or physical assault). Applying the feminist pathways theory to female adult offenders online is needed to explore how childhood factors can contribute to women's adult offending (Nuytiens and Christiaens, 2016; Simpson et al., 2008).

Other research from Broidy et al. (2018) examines how exposure to abuse during one's childhood shapes female offending trajectories. Using data from 470 female offenders in Australia, the authors assessed a self-report drug use and criminal offending survey (Broidy et al., 2018). The findings from their study showed that early abuse (e.g., sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse) caused internal symptoms (e.g., anxious, bad thoughts, apathetic, distrustful), which in turn caused drug use and later offending (Broidy et al., 2018). These findings suggest that women who experience childhood abuse find ways to cope during childhood and adolescence, as they do not begin offending until adulthood (Broidy et al., 2018). Broidy et al. (2018) argue that "it may be that the drug use, like the offending, started later when these women moved into adulthood and found themselves ill-equipped to navigate the expectations of adulthood" (p.1581). The authors express the lack of measures and research on adult abuse and trauma (Broidy et al., 2018).

Evidence from Freiburger and Marcum (2019) in their book *Women in the Criminal Justice System* explain how pathways theory has become more complex. In their book, the authors draw on research contributed by experts in criminology and argue the importance of focusing on females in the system (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). Freiburger and Marcum (2019) explain that the gendered pathways theory has contributed to a better understanding of women's trajectory into prison. However, Freiburger and Marcum (2019) note evidence from Leigey and Hodge (2012), who found that adult female inmates have not been adequately addressed in pathways research. Drawing on the study from Carr and Hanks (2013), the authors further suggest the significance of looking at the stories from the perspective of women and what they themselves have to say regarding their pathways (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019).

Carr & Hanks (2013) utilize the pathways model in their qualitative analysis of the case of Amber. Amber (a pseudonym) tells her story of what led to her offending and incarceration (Carr & Hanks, 2013). She describes her childhood, recalling being sexually abused by her brother and other male relatives (Carr & Hanks, 2013). When Amber told her mother, she accused her of lying (Carr & Hanks, 2013). At the age of 13, Amber started stealing, which in turn resulted in her incarceration (Carr & Hanks, 2013). Later in her life, Amber started doing sex work and using drugs (Carr & Hanks, 2013). Amber's reconstruction of her gendered pathway to offending and incarceration emphasized victimization, a difficult relationship with her family, and drug use. In their research, Carr & Hanks (2013) connect aspects of drugs, sexual violence, and crime typically being viewed as violations of gender norms, thus demonstrating how not understanding female criminality can create a narrative of gender "maintenance" that is expected of these women. Amber's story, told through Carr and Hanks' (2013) research demonstrates how female offenders' own perspectives can provide significant insight into their

pathway to criminality. However, women's narratives and voices remain largely absent from the literature, especially women's narratives told online.

Gaps in the Literature

Women's first-person accounts would be useful in gaining a better understanding of their experiences on how women themselves characterize their pathways to crime and prison.

Women's own voices online are absent from the current literature, especially for female adult offenders. This paper will build on Broidy et al.'s (2018) research on the role of the interconnectedness of multiple risk factors and Flores et al.'s (2019) similar concept termed polyvictimization. In addition, researchers like Belknap (2010) and Kruttschnitt (2016) describe how stepping outside the role of prescribed "femininity" results in criminal sanctions. However, there is predominantly a lack of research into how feminine roles can apply to female adult offenders (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016; Simpson et al., 2008).

The scholars Broidy et al. (2018) and Freiburger and Marcum (2019) discuss internalizing mental health symptoms as contributing to women's offending. However, Freiburger and Marcum (2019) raise concerns about there not being consistent evidence that internalizing mental health problems predict reoffending, primarily when assessed with other risk factors. Assessment at the individual level is needed to understand the relationship between mental health problems and offending (Broidy et al., 2018; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). For women, studies have found that familial support systems can reduce offending (Barrick et al., 2014; VanVoohris et al., 2010, as cited in Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Brown et al., 2020). Yet, these results suggest that further consideration is needed to grasp a better understanding of the role familial relationships play in women's lives (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). Finally, the literature is missing discussions on motherhood and its role in the lives of previously and

currently incarcerated women online. Research on the risk factor of motherhood suggests that it contributes to whether women engage in criminality and, therefore, needs further examination (Yule et al., 2015).

Like Carr and Hanks' (2013) research, which provides the story of Amber's path to her offending and incarceration, this paper will use a blog to present women's stories. Content analysis using the blog can add context, enhance information, and allow insight into components of women's offending that would otherwise remain invisible (Costello et al., 2017). Women's narratives told online through blogs are useful as feminist criminologists urge researchers to view offenders as "people with life histories" (Presser, 2009, p. 191). For example, women's trajectories from victimization to offending can be understood better through understanding how they themselves might characterize their pathways to crime and prison. By analyzing women's stories in a blog, this paper could contribute to the gendered pathways theory by supporting Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) gendered pathways framework. The next section defines and explores the risk factors used in this paper.

Risk Factors

Risk factors measure the outcome of interest and the probability of future criminal conduct (Brown et al., 2020). In addition, risk factors can also be fixed, meaning they cannot change (e.g., race, gender, and age) (Brown et al., 2020). The literature shows that risk factors for offending are overwhelmingly binary with respect to gender, as both men and women can experience forms of childhood and adulthood adversity, substance abuse, and mental health problems (Brown et al., 2020). Although risk factors pertain to both men and women, this paper will focus on risk factors identified in studies that include women, along with risk factors described as being gendered (Brown et al., 2020). Risk factors that are gendered in nature refer

to risk factors found in previous research to be strongly related to offending in females (Brown et al., 2020). This paper uses the following categories for the risk factors: demographics, childhood adversity, substance abuse, mental health, familial relationships, living circumstances, and adult-family related. Each category consists of specific risk factors that will be summarized below.

Demographics. Some studies with female-only samples find risk decreases with age, while others have found this is untrue (Brown et al., 2020). With these mixed findings on the *age* risk factor, a conclusion cannot be made on the impact age has on female offenders (Brown et al., 2020). *Marital status (single)* is often associated with the likelihood of women's criminal behaviour, as studies have shown that women often engage in criminal behaviour by being co-offenders (Barlow & Weare, 2019). Therefore, the status of women's relationships and their age should be explored further concerning their criminal offending.

Motherhood status is an important factor as well. Whether a woman has children or not can be a significant factor. A study by Yule et al. (2015) has shown that motherhood and having children help direct women away from criminal lifestyles. However, there is not much research on this finding. In addition, findings are mixed when analyzing the relationship between having children and offending. Some studies have found that having children decreases reoffending in previously incarcerated women, while others have found no significant relationship (Brown et al., 2020; Dehart, 2008; Yule et al., 2015). Thus, more research is needed on whether having children can predict women's offending behaviour. Women's own voices through their stories can provide insight into what we do not know about the impact motherhood status has on women. These voices can highlight whether having children can decrease the likelihood of women reoffending.

The next risk factor examined under demographics is *employment*. In studies, employment instability, employment problems, and unemployment have generally been associated with an increased risk of offending (Brown et al., 2020). Employment status is more consistently associated with offending, particularly in findings using female-only samples (Brown et al., 2020).

Like employment, *education* problems such as weak ties to a school, poor academic performance, special education, and dropping out of school are risk factors for criminal offending. School suspension and expulsion play a critical role in later offending (Dehart, 2008; Owens, 2017). School instability and related factors (e.g., dropping out of school) are risk factors for the outcome we observe as the school-to-prison pipeline. The “school-to-prison pipeline” is a social phenomenon where students become criminally involved with the criminal justice system due to school policies that use law enforcement rather than discipline to address behavioural problems (Dehart, 2008; Owens, 2017). Studies with samples that include males and females have found that educational problems or attainment can account for offending or reoffending (Brown et al., 2020). Overall, studies that included education (e.g., school dropout, suspension, and expulsion) as a risk factor found that youth will engage in criminal behaviour due to negative school policies.

Finally, housing instability is a marker in many women’s lives. Fowler et al. (2015) explain how housing instability during adolescence can impact functioning during adulthood. Housing instability in Fowler et al.’s (2015) study was measured by the number of residential address changes reported by the youth. Findings from Fowler et al. (2015) outline how increased housing instability in adolescents predicted significant elevations in rates of “depression, arrest, and smoking regularly.” (p. 10). In addition, Fowler et al. (2015) describe how family instability

(i.e., relationship quality with family members) can be interconnected with housing instability. Given that, further investigation is needed on the impact of housing instability on female adult offenders, specifically, how housing instability (e.g., homelessness) can intertwine with other risk factors, such as familial relationships.

The data collected in this study will attempt to provide insight into the role demographics play in predicting women's offending. Age, motherhood status, marital status, employment, education, and housing instability will all be examined to determine whether these risk factors contribute to the likelihood of offending in females.

Childhood Adversity. Childhood adversity consists of emotional, sexual, and physical abuse that can be perpetrated by an adult (e.g., parent, sibling, family friend, stranger, or some other person). For the purposes of this study, physical or emotional abuse by a sibling or friend is excluded to avoid the confounding effect of less serious conflict that normally occurs within the home and at school (Broidy et al., 2018). In other studies, childhood abuse is also referred to as polyvictimization – as emotional, sexual, and physical abuse can be intertwined with one another (Brown et al., 2020; Flores et al., 2019). Previous literature has also demonstrated that once you are a victim, the likelihood of being a victim again increases (Boppre et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Javdani et al., 2011; Kruttschnitt, 2016). For instance, studies have shown that female adult offenders who experienced abuse during their childhood often experienced intimate partner violence as an adult (Boppre et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019).

Emotional abuse is verbal and/or mental abuse, sometimes called psychological abuse. The definition of verbal abuse is as follows “a repeated pattern of caregiver behaviour or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted,

endangered, or only of value in meeting another's needs" (APSAC, 1995, p. 2; Myers, 2010, p. 126, as cited in Coates et al., 2013). Many components play into verbal abuse, such as belittling, degrading, humiliating, or shaming the child, which often results in being isolated and experiencing emotional neglect (Coates et al., 2013). Emotional abuse is conceptualized as any form of being made to feel sad, bad, or frightened (Broidy et al., 2018).

Physical abuse is any form of violent victimization that occurs inside and outside the home (Flores et al., 2019). This categorization of physical abuse does not include abuse that occurs through an intimate partner. Physical abuse can be so severe that it can cause one's life to be in danger (e.g., hitting) (Flores et al., 2019). The abuse can be from parents, where there is a general sense of fear and intimidation being used (Flores et al., 2019). Research shows that physical abuse, especially when combined with emotional abuse, can negatively impact women's future criminal behaviour (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Flores et al., 2019).

Sexual abuse is any form of forced sex and unwanted sexual activity (Basile et al., 2007). In other words, those who report while growing up if they had ever been touched in a way that made them feel uncomfortable or made to do something sexual that they did not want to do is sexual abuse (Brown et al., 2020). Several studies have indicated that a history of sexual abuse can cause women to re-offend (Brown et al., 2020).

This study aims to explore childhood adversity, specifically examining the data on physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. There are limited studies on how childhood adversity can interconnect with other risk factors (e.g., substance abuse and familial relationships). Therefore, this paper can provide evidence of childhood adversity's significance as a predictor of offending in females.

Substance Abuse. This study will measure substance abuse as a risk factor by examining participants' discussions of *alcohol and/or drug use* and *history of illicit drug use*. Substance abuse can be an addiction to alcohol and prescription medicines (e.g., pain pills, stimulants, anxiety pills) (John Hopkins Medicine, 2019). Having a substance dependency means several things, including "Tolerance to or need for increased amounts of the drug to get an effect" (John Hopkins Medicine, 2019). This measurement has many components (e.g., drug problems, early onset of drug use, types of drugs used, and combining alcohol and drug use into a single category). In various studies, substance use has been linked to female offending, like addiction leading women to criminal behaviour for financial gain (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019).

Experiencing physical and sexual abuse during women's childhood has been linked to causing substance abuse later in life as a coping mechanism (Anumba et al., 2012; Boopre et al., 2018; Lansford et al., 2009; Smith & Saldana, 2013). Smith and Saldana (2013), in their research, find that adolescent girls have "distinct relationships between childhood sexual abuse and the use of alcohol, marijuana, and hard drugs." (p. 461). Women's own voices can provide insight into how substance abuse can have an exponentiating impact when interconnected with other risk factors.

Mental health (Internalizing). Mental health problems can arise internally for girls and women and can be a risk factor for offending. Internalization is measured through participants noting specific instances in their life where they had *stress, depression, mood/anxiety, bad thoughts, trauma, apathetic, distrustful, nightmares, arguments, personal/emotional distress, trauma, and suicide attempts*. Evidence suggests that for females internalizing mental health struggles is a common coping response for women who have experienced minor and severe

stress and can cause both drug use and offending behaviour (Broidy et al., 2018). Furthermore, no consistent evidence exists that internalizing mental health problems can predict female reoffending (Broidy et al., 2018). Further assessment is needed on the role mental health problems (and particular aspects of those problems) play in an individual's offending (Brown et al., 2020).

Women who have experienced trauma suffer from depression and are more prone to experiencing internalizing mental health struggles than men (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Dehart, 2008). Women suffer from internalizing factors more as they tend to turn their anger, grief, and trauma inward on themselves (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Dehart, 2008). Women and internalizing issues are significant, specifically for women in prison, given that internalizing is harder to detect by the untrained eye (i.e., by staff in prison) (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Dehart, 2008). Therefore, this paper focuses on women's pathway from childhood abuse to mental health symptoms and subsequent criminal behaviour, concentrating on early symptoms of internalization that coincide with early abuse exposure.

Mental Health (Externalizing). In this study, *conduct disorder*, *anger regulation*, *oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)*, and *aggression* are measures of the risk factor for external mental health problems. In four studies using female-only samples, externalizing mental health problems were a significant risk factor for women's criminal behaviour Brown et al. (2020). These externalizing factors are considered personality/behaviour problems that can lead to women's offending (Brown et al., 2020). This paper will explore women's external mental health problems within the context of how they can overlap with other risk factors.

Familial Relationships. Studies with incarcerated women often explore the correlation between familial relationships and offending. The following measures are used in this study to

examine the risk factor of familial relationships: *parent-child relationship, parental supervision, family criminality, family support, family substance use, living with family, having children and relationship quality.*

A negative relationship with family or lack of support has been associated with a higher likelihood of reoffending in women (Brown et al., 2020). In addition, research has also shown that a positive relationship with family members has been associated with a decrease in recidivism risk in women (Brown et al., 2020). Research also suggests that an increased risk of offending occurs when women have a negative relationship with family members (Brown et al., 2020). Previous pathways literature has outlined how women and men living with their families had a lower recidivism rate (Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). This paper builds on existing studies exploring the relationship between familial relationships and offending by using women's own voices. Women's stories can demonstrate the nature of family relationships and the stories behind both the negative and positive impact familial relationships can have on women.

Living Circumstances. Studies have shown that women who run away from home during childhood are more likely to be criminalized or turn to offending behaviour (Brown et al., 2020; Flores et al., 2019; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). Scholars for the past 30 years have found consistent findings that running away from home contributes to women or girls' offending. Other research describes how women are more likely to engage in prostitution due to running away from home to escape the abuse at home and gain financial means (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). This study will address the risk factor of running away from home through its interconnectedness with other risk factors (Flores et al., 2019). Further research that moves beyond statistical analysis focusing on basic characteristics and numbers of known runaways is needed as statistics

are limited representations of reality. Using women's own voices is essential in presenting women's perceptions of the contributing factor running away from home plays in their lives.

Like the risk factor of runaway, out-of-home placement in foster care or group homes is a risk factor for offending in women. Some studies have shown the significant effect out-of-home placements can have on women, while others have stated that it does not affect reoffending (Brown et al., 2020). An important part of out-of-home placement is cross-over youth Bala et al. (2013) define this as "Youth living in the care or under the supervision of the child welfare system and also involved in the youth justice system due to criminal behaviour" (p. 2). In their report, Bala et al. (2013) explain how children in care are more likely to become involved in the youth criminal justice system than children with no history of involvement with the child welfare system. The literature identifies multiple risk factors that arise for youth that are in care, including substance abuse and mental health issues, history of abuse and neglect, and less opportunity to form a supportive and loving relationship with a parental figure (Bala et al., 2013; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000). Women's own voices presented in this study can provide the stories behind how living circumstances, when interconnected with other risk factors (e.g., childhood adversity and familial relationships), can increase women's chances of offending.

Adult Family-Related. In this paper, women's adulthood risk factors include multiple constructs: *partner recent abuse, living with a partner, having a partner, having a criminal partner, victim of adult abuse, and family/intimate partner relationship*. According to Brown et al. (2020), most studies found that having a criminal partner was a strong risk factor for women. Studies with women samples that explored intimate partner abuse as an adult found that reoffending is more common for women if they experienced recent physical and/or sexual abuse (Brown et al., 2020).

Previous studies indicate that having and/or living with a partner, family support, and having children may correlate with a decreased likelihood of offending (Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Yule et al., 2015). Other studies have shown that these factors are likely interconnected with other factors, such as substance abuse, mental health, and economic factors (Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Yule et al., 2015). Gaining a fuller understanding of adult family risk factors can provide a better understanding of women's perceptions of their adult circumstances and how it can lead to further criminality.

This literature review outlines what we know from pathways theory and identifies gaps. This paper examines women's stories online with sensitivity to the elements of what we know and what we do not know, about the gendered pathways theory. The blog used in this study provided a data source to explore women's perceptions of their life experiences and how they may fit our understanding of the gendered pathways theory. The next chapter outlines the methodological steps taken to accomplish this study.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodological framework used in this study. Qualitative analysis will be used to understand how women become engaged in criminal behaviour or, in some cases, become incarcerated. This chapter consists of three main sections. The first section will discuss how women's narratives told online are significant in providing insight into components of the gendered pathways theory that would otherwise remain overlooked. The second section discusses how this study took important steps in accomplishing content analysis research online. Finally, discussions will be made on the data collection process, focusing on how the data was gathered and processed using content analysis to analyze the contents of a blog.

Using Narrative Criminology

Few researchers have discussed the importance of narratives, precisely the significance of storytelling. Stories play an important role in research as they help shed light on women's life experiences that may be difficult to hear and thus can influence action (Presser, 2009, 2010, 2016). In addition, stories allow women to strategize and characterize the world and its agents (e.g., family, education, and governments) through their own points of view (Presser, 2009, 2010, 2016). Narratives are not just anything people say, it is a particular type of online discourse (Presser, 2016). Presser (2009, 2016) frames narrative criminology as a methodology that aims to understand and confront rather than predict and control. Presser (2009, 2016) explains how understanding women's narratives is valuable, as these narratives told through women's own perspectives can provide context into the gendered pathways literature. In addition, Presser (2009, 2016) acknowledges that these stories are not literal or complete truths, but women's stories are an unmistakable source of evidence. It is important to note that

narratives are complicated, nonlinear, and unique – often, they expose useful patterns of thought (Presser, 2009, 2016).

In this case, women’s discourse is told through their stories posted on a blog, which can influence or motivate others to tell their stories (Miller & Palacios, 2015). The authors explain how stories have the power to change the identities and futures of those telling them (Bove & Tryon, 2018). For example, stories promote a destigmatization process that allows the listener and teller to eliminate any labels associated with female offenders (Bove & Tryon, 2018). Stories showcase the oppression against women and bring to light problematic social constructs (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). Consequently, narrative criminology raises the importance of how it is essential for criminology to take stories seriously when studying human lives (Maruna & Liem, 2021). The internet has provided a useful way to study the narratives of women who have been incarcerated. These stories can assist in social change through women telling ‘their own’ stories (Maruna & Liem, 2021; Presser, 2009, 2016). The blog provides a storytelling platform where women’s narratives can assist in analyzing women’s voices to understand how women construct their lived experiences of gendered pathways (Maruna & Liem, 2021; Presser, 2009, 2016).

Presser’s (2009, 2016) approach to narrative criminology emphasizes how we do not care if the stories are true or not what matters is women’s construction and perceptions of their lives. Presser and Sandberg (2019) explain how narrative criminology is concerned with showcasing patterns of harm and possibilities of resistance in stories. Narrative criminology has critical potential as women’s stories, especially when shared with others, can help women escape oppression and hardship (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). Narrative criminologists believe that stories can reveal ways for social change as the world is socially constructed through stories (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the kinds of stories we

participate in as these stories drive the phenomena we study (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). The women's narratives in their own voices can confirm their pathways to criminal behaviour and incarceration – in this study, we now hear this in women's own voices. This new, innovative, emerging methodology provides a platform where women may provide a new perspective of currently and formerly incarcerated women's perceptions on how they might characterize their pathways to crime and prison.

Content Analysis

The arguments presented in this paper are based on research conducted through qualitative analysis using content analysis. Content analysis is defined as “analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes to ascertain its meaning and probable effect” (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 1). In other words, it is a process where qualitative data is described to represent clusters of responses (Crowe et al., 2015; Neuendorf, 2017). In this case, the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* is analyzed, which consists of women in an online community.

Some advantages of content analysis include analysis of the data without direct involvement with the participants, this ensures the researcher does not influence the results (Crowe et al., 2015; Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022; Neuendorf, 2017). In addition, conducting content analysis is highly flexible as it can be done anytime and at any location (Crowe et al., 2015; Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022; Neuendorf, 2017). Content analysis also has some disadvantages. For instance, it may be difficult to interpret the data, which can impact the reliability and validity of the results (Crowe et al., 2015; Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022; Neuendorf, 2017). Regardless, for the purposes of this study, using content analysis makes the

most sense as it allows a methodological process where women's pathways to criminality and incarceration can be clearly illustrated (Krippendorff, 2019). The blog posts are a form of women's discourse online that can provide insight into women's narratives without the added pressure of the women knowing that they are being studied (Krippendorff, 2019). Online content analysis provides another dimension to what we know about women's stories while providing details of their unique life experiences (Krippendorff, 2019; Maruna & Liem, 2021). In the next section, the several steps taken in the process of conducting content analysis are outlined.

Data Collection Procedure

The search terms I used to look for potential blogs and forums included "women", "incarceration", "blog", "forum", "girls", "prison life", and "story". Starting my search, it was challenging to find online communities of adult female offenders who described their experiences with criminality and/or incarceration (Urbanik & Roks, 2020). During my search, I noticed the blog "My Story in a Women's Prison". The blog consisted of female adult offenders providing detailed accounts of their life trajectories that led them to their criminal behaviour and incarceration, specifically women noting their experiences during their childhood. Due to the nature of the data, I decided it was best only to use the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* in my research, as women's full narratives were easily accessible in this blog.

The blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* was created through the website blogger.com, where users can make an account and create blogs for free. The blog took place from November 2016 to December 2019 and is open to the public and does not require permission to enter and view the blog posts. Most of the blog consists of Sadie's story. However, the blog also includes stories from other women. The participants are women who were or are currently incarcerated at Lowell Correctional Institution in Ocala, Florida, in the United States. This study uses a blog

with women from the United States as there were more examples of American women online, likely due to more women being incarcerated in America. Due to Sadie being incarcerated at the time of the blog, Kathleen (Kathy), Sadie's mother, helped her daughter run the blog. Kathleen took on the role of the blog facilitator. While incarcerated, Sadie and the other women's lack of computer access meant she and others would send Kathleen written weekly blogs for her to post. In addition, YouTube became a source as the blog included embedded videos posted on Kathleen's YouTube channel. The blog includes videos in three different settings: Kathleen's interviews with other incarcerated women, videos of the previously incarcerated women describing their experiences, and some videos from the family members of incarcerated women. The mother and daughter's blog became the data used in this study as it contained a virtual community where these women were free to share their stories.

In this study, a deductive approach was used to analyze the data using the gendered pathways theory to explore whether critiques raised by researchers are relevant and meaningful (Streefkerk, 2022; Crowe et al., 2015; Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). A latent approach was used to analyze the data by exploring women's perceptions of their life experiences and how it may fit our understanding of the gendered pathways theory (Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022). Using content analysis, categories related to the gendered pathways theory were analyzed, particularly components of the theory that demonstrated risk factors associated with women's criminality (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

The blog consisted of 113 posts. Each post was recorded and saved in a document, along with transcriptions of the videos. Intensive notes were made on the data by noting women's discussions of their life experiences that could fit our understanding of risk factors and the gendered pathways theory. After intensive notes were made to become familiar with the data, the

coding process was developed (Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022). The codes to analyze the blog’s contents consisted of risk factors identified as related to female offenders in the previous literature to answer the research question: *what risk factors do women in the blog identify that can illuminate and advance the gendered pathways theory?* (Broidy et al., 2018; Chesney-Lind 1989; Daly, 1992; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016). The coding process involved coding risk factors identified in the gendered pathways literature (Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022). The data was coded by recording the characteristics, words, and phrases associated with each code (Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022). Table 1 summarizes the details regarding the risk factors concerning the categories in the blog, along with the specific codes associated with each category.

Table 1

Details of the Categories and Codes

Demographics:
<i>Age</i> <i>Motherhood Status (has children)</i> <i>Marital Status (single)</i> <i>Employment</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Housing Instability</i>
Childhood Adversity:
<i>Emotional Abuse</i> <i>Sexual Abuse</i> <i>Physical Abuse</i>
Familial Relationships:
<i>Parent-child Relationship</i> <i>Parental Supervision</i> <i>Family Criminality</i> <i>Family Support</i> <i>Family Substance Use</i>

Relationship Quality
Living with Family
Having Children

Mental Health (Internalizing):

Stress
Mood/Anxiety
Bad Thoughts
Apathetic
Distrustful
Nightmares
Arguments
Depression
Trauma
Personal/Emotional Distress
Suicide attempts

Mental Health (Externalizing):

Conduct Disorder
Anger Regulation
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)
Aggression

Living Circumstances:

Runaway
Out of Home Placement

Adult Family-Related:

Partner Recent Abuse
Living with Partner
Having a Partner
Having a Criminal Partner
Victim of Adult Abuse
Family/Intimate partner relationship

Substance Abuse:

Alcohol and/or Drug Use
History of Illicit Drug Use

Table 1 outlines the codes used in this paper to analyze the blog. The codes identified pertain to gendered risk factors. The literature review described these risk factors in detail, which outlined risk factors specific to women that may lead them to criminal behaviour and later incarceration. The literature on the gendered pathways theory demonstrates that the gendered nature of these risk factors is not discussed enough in research. The vast data available through the blog will be used to explore the critiques identified in the gendered pathways literature. The next chapter outlines women's narratives told through the blog.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, the findings will provide anecdotes from the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* to present data relevant to the gendered pathways theory. Women's narratives will provide anecdotes on how women's criminality goes beyond a select few risk factors. In addition, the findings presented in this section will provide evidence of how the gendered pathways theory does not recognize how these risk factors can intersect. The findings will show how other factors outside victimization and substance abuse must be explored to understand female criminality better. Although the women do not talk about the gendered pathways theory directly – their perceptions and beliefs about what led them to criminality and incarceration could easily fit into what we know as pathways theory.

Demographics of Participants

The participants include women who engaged with the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* through written posts or videos embedded into the blog from Kathleen's YouTube channel. The blog consists of women who were or are currently incarcerated at Lowell Correctional Institution in Ocala, Florida, in the United States. After carefully analyzing the blog posts and transcripts from the YouTube videos, I determined that out of the 23 women who participated in the blog, 13 were relevant to this study. 10 women were excluded from the study as they did not provide data relevant to the risk factors explored in this study. In addition, Kathleen, Sadie's mother, is categorized as a participant in the blog. Kathleen is the facilitator of the blog, and her posts play a contributing factor in understanding the facilitation of the blog. Table 2 shows the details of the participants in this study.

Table 2*Details of the Participants*

Name	Age	Method of Storytelling	Status of Incarceration
<i>Kathleen (Kathy)</i>	<i>70s</i>	<i>Facilitator of Blog</i>	<i>Not Incarcerated</i>
Sadie	Mid 50s	Written Blog Posts	Incarcerated at the Time of Blog
U'Dreka	28	Written Blog Posts	Incarcerated at the Time of Blog
Evie	26	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated (Youth Offender)
Jennifer	44	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated
Morgan	24	Written Blog Posts	Incarcerated at the Time of Blog
Marshanna	Early 30s	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated
Amanda	Mid 30s	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated
Yazmin	23	Written Blog Posts	Incarcerated at the Time of Blog
Taylor (Mother Kim)	18	Taylor's Mother (Kim) Posted Video	Incarcerated at the Time of Blog
Michelle	28	Written Blog Posts	Incarcerated at the Time of Blog
Jessica	Early 30s	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated
Denise	Early 30s	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated
Allie	Early 30s	Video Interview with Blog Facilitator	Formerly Incarcerated

Note. Some of the ages of the participants are estimations made based on the data.

Women's Stories on their Trajectories to Offending

Throughout the blog, participants tell their stories about their experiences that make up their trajectories toward offending. Concerning women's stories, discussions will focus on childhood adversity, substance abuse, the interconnectedness of risk factors, risk factors and incarceration, and family dynamics and motherhood. Previous literature on women's offending

behaviour suggests that the prominent predictors of female criminality that need further exploration are motherhood, familial relationships and the interconnectedness of risk factors (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Yule et al., 2015).

Childhood Adversity

Emotional, physical, and sexual abuse (forms of victimization) that female offenders experience during their childhoods can impact their offending trajectories (Brown et al., 2020; Chesney-Lind & Merlo, 2015; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2012; Flores et al., 2019; Widom & Osborn, 2021). The following is a post from Sadie where she describes being sexually abused. Sadie writes, “During a severe mental breakdown when I was 5, my mother sent her children to their fathers. Before that, unbeknownst to my mom, I had been sexually abused by a family member.”. From Sadie’s perspective, the sexual abuse she endured as a child impacted her mental well-being. Later posts in the blog demonstrate Sadie’s understanding of how she turned to alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism.

In the blog, Kathleen made a post asking other women to share their stories, this is when women like Jennifer then shared her childhood experience stating, “I grew up with a lot of physical and sexual mental abuse in my family and outside of my family.”. Describing the women, she has met in prison, Jennifer notes how “most of them had been sexually abused or abused growing up in some way shape or form”. Furthermore, Jennifer’s perception of her drug addiction is that it led her to endure a life on the streets, she states “abuse out there on the streets you know sexually verbal physical yes all of that you know that's it's a very tough life out there.”. In an interview with Kathleen, Amanda described having a tough childhood stating that she was in foster care and was adopted when she was five. However, her adoptive father was

abusive. Amanda says her family looked great financially and from the outside, but that was not the case. Amanda describes the abuse to Kathleen:

My dad used to beat me you know threw me through a sliding glass door used to choke me with belts or try to smother me with pillows tried to drown me in a bathtub oh yeah so it was hard but I mean a lot of people didn't see that they saw you know my perfect parents and they saw what my parents wanted them to so I had a hard childhood.

Amanda's understanding of her childhood abuse is that the abuse ultimately led her to run away from home, which resulted in "gang banging". Amanda's home situation was troubling. She mentions her physical abuse and neglect, noting specifically how she was forced to stay in the attic describing how she had "to eat and sleep and go to the bathroom up there". In addition, Allie, another woman interviewed by Kathleen, describes how her childhood was "functional". Allie states, "I grew up I would call it functional because I was unaware of my dad being an alcoholic nobody was ever abusive so pretty much grew up with as a normal childhood and you know no problems until my teenage years". Allie's perception of her childhood illustrates someone whose childhood did not impact her future criminality, but later intimate partner abuse increased her risk of incarceration.

Sadie, Jennifer, and Amanda's stories provide insight into their perceptions of their physical and sexual abuse. Looking at the stories of these young women establishes their perceptions of how their victimization impacted their lives. For two of the participants, this abuse continued into adulthood. Sentiments later from these women will highlight the impact sexual, physical, and emotional abuse had later in their lives.

Substance Abuse

Participants described struggling with substance abuse Sadie writes, "Alcoholism runs in our family and alcohol was my drug of choice. People have said I was the worst alcoholic they have ever seen. I was not a daily drinker but a binge drinker. I could go for a time without

drinking but that demon always caught up with me.”. Sadie describes her perception of how her substance issues with alcohol led her to further struggles with her mental health. She writes:

You cannot reason with an addict. You cannot shame them into quitting, you cannot guilt them into quitting. During the years, I made several suicide attempts. I have been to psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and put on every anti-depressant, mood stabilizer, upper-downer and so forth-none of it helped me at all and sometimes made me feel worse.

Sadie’s life continued to move forward, she described building a life for herself by becoming a vet tech and moving to Florida. She was still an alcoholic and worked two jobs as a manager of 2 animal hospitals. She got pregnant at 28, decided to quit drinking while pregnant, and did not drink for two years. Sadie wrote in the blog “I could always live but I could never heal my insides. I always wanted to leave earth. I just could not get comfortable in my own skin.”.

Sadie’s perception of her substance abuse is that it may have resulted from her mental health struggles. Sadie believed at the time that she could handle one drink but then described herself as becoming a “full-blown” alcoholic after having one drink. This was when the first offence for Sadie occurred when she got a Felony DUI with her child in the car. Sadie describes the experience in her blog: “What I did that day, I feel so ashamed of. How could I do that? I never thought I would become a mother like that-ever! Drove drunk with my child.”. This is when the courts decided that she must attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Her boyfriend began to resent her for attending AA, leaving Sadie for another woman. Sadie describes her life after this in the following statement:

When I found out I drank Nyquil that night and drank liquor the next day. I drank and OD'd on 200 Tylenol PM. My sister found me almost 2 days later half hanging off of my bed-naked, vomit everywhere. I had drank a gallon of liquor. She thought I was dead. I was rushed to the hospital-too late to pump my stomach. My liver was protruding from my body and I began to swell. My mom flew in from California as she was told I was on my deathbed. ICU watched me as 200 Tylenol PM processed through my liver. I had also aspirated my vomit resulting in pneumonia...I went to California to live with my mom and her husband to try and get help. When I relapsed, I felt like my world was over. I had

failed worse than anyone could ever fail... I lost everything, my life, my child, my job, my child's father-everything. So much shame. I hated what I did and became what I hated. I had nothing left to live for. My time in California is a blur-an alcohol blur... I was missing for a few days and my mom went looking for me and found me unresponsive and again I was rushed to the hospital and was on my deathbed from alcohol poisoning. Poor me, poor me, pour me a drink. I am a disgusting alcoholic. I drink until death. I sit in my own vomit and feces for days. Why I did not die over and over again is beyond me.

Sadie's addiction and substance abuse continued in Washington state when she discovered she had a warrant for her Felony DUI that she was unaware of. Sadie turned herself in and was given six months at a Goodwill treatment center; her experience with this center was good and helped her change significantly. This was when she started to forgive herself for losing her child over alcohol. For Sadie, things began to get better. She mended her relationship with her daughter's father and had partial custody of their daughter. But things changed again after her boyfriend, whom she met during treatment, became addicted to pills and died from an overdose while on drugs. This was when Sadie started taking Oxytocin. She explains this in the following statement:

My world shattered. I didn't drink over it though. During this time, I had a back injury and was prescribed oxycotins. This was during the time the drug companies were telling doctors that they were not addicting. What they did do, for some reason, is even out my emotional state and took away my craving for alcohol, so I kept taking them.

Sadie goes on to describe her addiction, stating, "As time went by, my addiction to oxy's became more and more and I needed more and more. I found a 'pill doctor' and he supplied me with a monthly prescription. I became more and more addicted and more dependent.". Sadie's oxy addiction continued as she writes, "After a few years of being sober, I started relapsing on and off and the cycle of paramedics and emergency rooms began again. I was so ashamed of myself because I really thought I had beat it. Now I was not only an alcoholic, but also a pill addict". Sadie describes her addiction as a horrible time in her life as she writes:

As an addict, I was in denial about how bad it really was. After all I was working and going to school. I felt like the pills kept the alcoholism at bay, even though they were not doing that anymore...I look back at that time and I was so out of touch with reality, so in denial about my alcoholism and pill addiction. I did not want those labels. I did not want to be an alcoholic. I did not want to be an addict. I wanted a normal life and even with my addictions, I tried so hard to maintain the look of normalcy.

Sadie's struggles with addiction continued even when Kathleen, her mom, threatened to tell everyone about her addiction. This was when Sadie decided to turn to alcohol again and promised to go to treatment. However, after turning to alcohol, her mom had to call the paramedics when she found Sadie unresponsive. Sadie was in a psychiatric facility for a couple of weeks. However, crack became her new addiction after associating with dealers. Sadie describes how she began to spiral again, stopped getting to work on time and stopped studying. Sadie explains the situation in her blog as follows:

To make a long story short, she [Kathleen] took one of my crack pipes and called the police and I got arrested for drug paraphernalia but that was enough to lose my job and all hope of ever becoming a nurse. I lost my daughter again. My whole life fell apart-again. I take full responsibility for that. No one's fault but my own. At the time, though, I blamed my mom for everything. It was all her fault. If she hadn't called the police, if she had gotten me into treatment-if, if, if.

Sadie's understanding of her addiction struggles is that it resulted in her criminal behaviour and subsequent incarceration. In later discussions, Sadie's story will continue as we learn her perception of what led her to her current term of incarceration.

Other stories from the blog show women's struggles with substance abuse. Michelle explains her experience by explaining her perception of her addiction and how it started as a young adult, stating:

As a young adult I struggled with self-esteem issues, stubbornness, two extremely co-dependent relationships and being the product of divorced parents I thought I was in control. Little did I know that the dysfunctional elements of my life would inevitably fuel me to become a statistic in the ever growing epidemic of prescription pills, which were never prescribed.

Michelle believes her mental health struggles stem from her internalizing factors of having bad thoughts about herself. Michelle describes how she was young and naïve when she started using painkillers. Michelle recalls getting introduced to painkillers stating, “Addiction is a vicious cycle; one that creates constant battles between my conscience and my desire to ignore and forget. I ran from my problems, but even miles away in Florida, I was stuck within myself. The rollercoaster life of addiction had me at many highs and lows.”

Another woman, Yazmin, describes her childhood experience and how she began doing drugs by saying that although she grew up in a good home and had a loving family, she chose the street lifestyle when she was 12. Yazmin recalls, “At the time I was growing up in the ghetto of Polk County, Haines City, Florida. Later my family “up-graded” and moved to Auburndale, Florida, but I still continued to hang out with “Bad People”. I began partying, fighting and doing stuff I had no business doing. I was always into some kind of mess.”. Yazmin describes entering the system as a juvenile and getting into trouble when she was 17. Yazmin writes, “Now I sit here and wish that I could take everything back, to start over. I used to think that drugs were cool and fun to do. I knew it was an easy way to escape my pain and struggle I hid inside.”. Yazmin’s perception of her childhood and subsequent drug use fits with the gendered pathways theory’s understanding of how internal mental health struggles can cause later drug use as a coping mechanism.

In a video interview with Kathleen, Jessica describes her struggles with substance abuse, stating, “I grew up pretty okay but I made a lot of bad choices and those choices put me in jail and struggled with addiction for many many years now”. Marshanna also describes how being kicked out of her home at 15 ultimately led her to a life of addiction she tells Kathleen:

I was dating this guy and I was working for a bail bonding company and I had to go to work the next day and I was having a really bad night and the guy that I was dating said

here I want you to try this well I didn't know what it was I just went on had to hit it come to find out it was crack cocaine I smoked it and before I knew it I liked it.

Taylor tells her story of being incarcerated in the youth program at Lowell through her mother. In a video, Kim Taylor's mother reads a letter from Taylor that she told her mother to read. In the letter, we learn that Taylor struggles with drugs as well. Taylor writes, "everybody thinks that my mind is right when really it runs deeper than that I feel like I'm going to give up I want a better life but I have no options I want an education but I don't feel smart enough I want to stop doing drugs but that's all I think about I want more and more". Denise, another woman interviewed by Kathleen in a video, describes how she was charged for possessing pills without a prescription and has had multiple drug charges since 2008. However, when asked about her childhood, Denise states, "I had a fantastic childhood I wish the world was still like that to be honest I mean a single mom my mom brought us up my dad died when I was four but um a great childhood". Denise describes having a good childhood but how she started to spiral in her 30s due to her "addictive personality". Denise's perception of what led her to drug use is her mental health struggles.

Another participant, Dia, was incarcerated in 1997 for 25 years for 127 counts of organized fraud. Dia's perception of her childhood is that she was supported, stating, "I had a lot of family support I never lacked for anything in my life okay I you know every family has their dysfunction, so my family isn't perfect you know I had a lot of good examples in my life and I had a lot of bad examples in my life". Dia's perception of her substance abuse is that her drinking led her to make bad decisions, but she does not blame the alcohol for her ultimate incarceration but blames her bad choices. Dia states, "I drank I made bad choices you know...a lot of my family members have been in prison my sister is currently incarcerated she just got she's about five years into her an 18-year sentence". Dia's story illustrates her perception

of her childhood circumstances and how she does not blame her family for her incarceration but believes her drinking and bad influences around her led her to imprisonment.

The women's discussions of their victimization and addiction illustrate how they understand the life choices they may not have wanted to make necessarily. The women's perceptions of their own victimization fit the gendered pathways theory's notion that childhood victimization can lead to future criminality and incarceration. These women's stories illustrate their understanding of how crime was not part of their lives until addiction or victimization entered their lives. A major pattern illustrated through the narratives of these women is how victimization can cause struggles with mental health (internalizing and externalizing) and thus causes these women to abuse substances. These factors contribute to the later criminality in these women's lives.

Abuse as an Adult

For three of the participants, their abuse occurred through their partners. U'Dreka states how her involvement in the system was due to her being at a crime scene. She writes,

I was there at the crime scene but too scared to call for help and get the police on the gunman whom at the time was my abusive 21 year old boyfriend and best friend...He also got 3 life sentences. But at the time I did not know what to do so now I am sitting in prison for the rest of my life because I didn't call the police

From U'Dreka's perspective, the abuse she endured from her boyfriend resulted in her making bad decisions. In addition, U'Dreka's perception of her relationship is that it was abusive, and her sentiment of being too scared to call for help suggests that she was abused.

Morgan's story also illustrates an instance of an older boyfriend whom she ran away with, whom she later learned was abusive. Although the specific form of abuse is not identified, Morgan describing her boyfriend as a "monster" illustrates that some form of abuse occurred. Morgan writes, "At 14 I fell in love with a man who was 7 years older than me. I thought he was

the only thing that mattered in my world. I thought it was love and he turned out to be a monster. I put him before my own family.”. Marshanna also describes her perception of her relationship with a man stating:

so when I got with him I was very dependent on him all and he controlled everything so once I started getting a job and building myself up where I could be a provider myself things got very bad in our relationship you know fairly physically emotionally...I ended up running away from him.

Marshanna’s described the relationship as “very abusive”. Her discussions show that Marshanna perceived her relationship as controlling and abusive. Three women briefly describe how their abuse continued into adulthood, which suggests that women’s abuse as an adult may impact women’s offending and incarceration.

The Interconnectedness of Risk Factors

The women’s stories illustrate how adverse family circumstances, strenuous living circumstances, mental health struggles, and risk factors in women’s adult lives, such as toxic partner relationships, can interconnect. Women’s perceptions of these factors and how they may coincide can demonstrate how they may fit aspects of the gendered pathways theory.

Sadie’s story describes her understanding of how her childhood abuse impacted her mental health (internalizing and externalizing). The effect of the abuse is illustrated through Sadie’s later sentiment after being victimized:

The main theme of my childhood was that I was unwanted and no one could deal with me. I ran away from home for the first time when I was 11. I was mentally and emotionally abused on every level-as was my sister. I was very sad my entire childhood and attempted suicide for the first time in 5th grade-one of many, many to come.

Sadie then describes how her home life impacted her health, further writing:

I went to live with my Dad-who always seemed angry and with my step-mother who resented raising me and my sister as she was not able to have children of her own at that point. It is a long convoluted story about my upbringing with them-not a happy place.

Mom basically lost custody of my sister and I and we were not encouraged to see her or to think positively of her.

Sadie's story highlights that a hostile home environment can impact a young girl's life. Sadie continues by explaining her story of how when she was 12, she was in a group home. Sadie describes her victimization in the following statement:

I admitted myself to a psychiatric ward when I was 18 because I wanted to commit suicide. It wasn't that I wanted to die so much, it was that I just wanted the pain to end. I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder but never really got any help. Emotional pain that never ends is probably why most people commit suicide.

Sadie's story illustrates her perception of how the sexual abuse she endured as a child impacted her mental health and created a strained relationship with her family as a child and later teenager. Sadie's perception of her experiences with mental health struggles, out-of-home placement, and running away from home illustrates how they interconnect. Sadie's understanding of her life frames her own understanding of her mental and emotional well-being, increasing her risk of abusing alcohol and drugs.

In addition, Yazmin describes her perception of her home life and how her family's neglect led to her a life of drugs and addiction later. Yazmin writes:

With everything going on in my home. I had family problems and I never had communication with my family. My parents never took the time to ask me, "how's school" or "how are you?". They never said "I love you" or "I'm proud of you". It was like living with robots; mechanically going through day to day. We never sat down to have conversations as a family and I use to yearn for that connection with them that I found easily in the "gang family". At home I felt unimportant and pressured to do good and to do what I was told. It caused me to rebel and I decided to take on a "whatever" attitude and just do my own thing. "Whatever Yasmin Wanted". I thought that would make up for the pain and loneliness that caused my emptiness inside-but I was wrong.

Yazmin's discussions of her strained relationship with her parents illustrate her perception of how it caused her to engage in deviant behaviour as a youth. In Yazmin's post, we learn that her strained relationship with her parents led her to run away from home and try to find the love and

affection she lacked with a “gang family”. Yazmin’s perception of the lack of love and affection from her parents fits the gendered pathways theory’s understanding of how constraints within the family can lead women to run away from home and feel isolated (i.e., internalized mental health struggles).

Another woman, Marshanna, describes her life after she was kicked out of her home at 15, Kathleen asks her where she went after she was kicked out, and she recalls, “I knew some friends because of course I had run away off and on before I was originally kicked out then I had met some older gentleman and they told me in order to stay with them I had to have sex with him in exchange I remember calling my mother and begging and pleading to come back but she told me I could not.”. Marshanna further describes the situation by stating “I ended up doing what I needed to do to survive at such a young age”. Marshanna’s later discussions fit the gendered pathways theory’s understanding of physical abuse. Marshanna explains how she was physically abused by her children’s father, whom she met when she was kicked out of her home. Marshanna describes her situation further in her interview with Kathleen stating:

things got very bad in our relationship you know fairly physically emotionally...I ended up running away from him because you know everywhere I went like if I went and stayed with a friend in Jacksonville or wherever he would find me I have no clue how he did it but he found me and I would go back and it would be the same thing for seven years I tolerated that abuse.

Marshanna further describes her story, telling Kathleen, “I would say that my family was not as close-knit um my mother did the best that she could raising me...I ended up being adopted so I never got to know my father...my dad that adopted to me wasn't the greatest parent.”. Kathleen then asks her about being kicked out of her home at 15. Marshanna explains, “my mom I guess because I was giving her so much trouble at that age and early on that she just couldn't handle it no more so she said it was tough love. She that I had to move out that I need to find somewhere

to go”. Marshanna describes her family dynamics by describing the role of drugs in her family, telling Kathleen, “there is drinking I believe they smoke marijuana...drinking marijuana, cocaine, crack. Even my aunt I remember my aunt telling me that she had smoked crack for a long time.”. Marshanna explains her relationship with a man ten years older than her when she was 17. Marshanna explains to Kathleen her situation by stating, “I ended up having two children two boys 15 and 16 the kid's father was very abusive I had realized that early on I realized that was not the lifestyle I wanted for me and my children...when I got with him I was very dependent on him all and he controlled everything”. Marshanna’s perception of her relationship with the older man fits in the gendered pathways theory’s understanding of emotional abuse. Marshanna raises multiple risk factors in her story. Her perceptions of her living circumstances and abuse from her partner frame them as interconnected risk factors contributing to her offending. Marshanna also describes experiencing various forms of abuse during her childhood, Marshanna’s perceptions of her childhood fit the definitions of victimization, particularly emotional and physical abuse during her childhood.

Risk Factors and Incarceration

Discussions here will describe stories from the women where discussions indicate a direct link between the risk factors identified in this paper and their incarceration. Sadie’s perception of her substance abuse issues fits the gendered pathways theory’s understanding of how addiction can lead to incarceration. After stealing her car back and selling it to a dealer to support her addictions, Sadie went to prison twice, the first time for five years. The second time is what led her to be incarcerated for 20 years. Sadie writes in the blog:

I owed this drug dealer a lot of money and he came knocking at my door and when he left I ran to a near-by gas station and went inside the convenience store...Then I saw him and I ended up jumping in the back seat of this black lady's car and yelled at her to drive and drop me off a couple of blocks down because my "boyfriend" was after me. I was always

in the back seat on the passenger side of her car which she attested to. I told her I was not going to hurt her as she attested to at trial. I never asked for her keys or money. I was very agitated and I wanted her to drive...I had my crack pipe pusher in my back pocket which was hard to sit on so I took it out and hid it in my hand. The lady asked what I had in my hand and I was embarrassed and said nothing then showed her my crack pipe pusher. When she realized I had no weapon, she grabbed me by my hair and started hitting me and I finally got away and out the door and she ran after me. I am sure that jumping in her car scared the hell out of her and I feel very bad about that.

Sadie continues her story in the blog by further explaining that the woman in the car was yelling for the police. Sadie explains that she went to her motel room, got her box cutters which she used for drugs and went into the bathroom, where she cut both her arms from wrist to elbow. Sadie describes the situation further by writing, "When the police came, they tried to open the bathroom door, but I was on the floor keeping it pushed shut with my feet. They finally got in and called an ambulance. They asked me if I had been in her car and I said yes. From, the hospital I went to jail.". However, the story continues as Sadie explains that the victim's story differed. Sadie states:

Her story was the same as mine except that she said that I cut her-she had a "cut" on her face and that I said, "drive or I will cut your fucking throat". I am telling you I never cut her as I had no weapon and I would never say that. The "cut" was actually a scratch that never bled, never had to see a doctor.

Sadie's perception of her addiction frames her substance abuse as leading to her incarceration. Sadie perceives her addiction as stemming from her need to cope with the sexual abuse she endured during her childhood. From Sadie's perspective, the sexual abuse she experienced as a child increased her risk of suffering mentally, which increased her risk of turning to alcohol and, later, drugs to cope with the bad thoughts (i.e., internalizing mental health struggles) related to her abuse. Sadie's perception of her substance abuse and mental health fits under the gendered pathways theory's understanding of how women's incarceration can be a direct result of

struggling with addiction. In her story, Sadie recognizes how multiple risk factors can intersect and result in criminal behaviour.

Marshanna in her story, describes her perception of her addiction leading to her incarceration. Marshanna in her interview with Kathleen, states:

They [her drug dealer] had me do horrible things done the unthinkable that I never have done in order to get that drug to stay high and what led me to prison was while I was on these drugs I wanted to get back at people hurt me so I would say it was an anger problem and when I would smoke that drug and it would warp my brain kind a per se and it would say let's go rob your kids father's home.

Marshanna goes on to explain how due to her addiction to drugs she would do anything to stay high. She explains to Kathleen further stating:

so the drug dealer that was riding me around and pimping me out and doing all this and that he I ended up just robbing his [her ex-husband] home and he and ended pressing charges on me and there were a couple of other homes that I had broken into with my co-defendant the boyfriend that also got me in trouble

Recall that Marshanna, was thrown out of her home at 15 years of age by her mother, which led her to survive and live on the streets. Due to the need to survive on the streets, she would trade sex for shelter and married an older man who was later abusive towards her. From Marshanna's perspective, her addiction led her to be incarcerated. Like some other participants, Marshanna's perception of her addiction illustrates the gendered pathways theory's understanding of how addiction can be supported through a partner like a boyfriend or a husband. Being a co-offender with her intimate partner is a common occurrence for some of the participants.

Furthermore, U'Dreka and Morgan were incarcerated as youth offenders, not adults.

U'Dreka describes her perception of what led her to be incarcerated: by writing:

I am a 28 year old young woman who has been incarcerated since I was 17. I was sentenced to life plus 40 years without the possibility of parole or a chance. The sad thing about it is I did not kill anyone and did not have the intent to hurt or kill anyone. The state sentenced me on the Principle Theory because I was there at the crime scene but too scared to call for help and get the police.

In U'Dreka's case, the gunman at the crime scene was her boyfriend, who was abusing her. U'Dreka's abusive relationship with her boyfriend led her to her incarceration. For Morgan, she was incarcerated after running away with her boyfriend. Morgan writes, "Well, I ended up running away with him and while on the run he robbed and killed someone.". Morgan then describes what happened after the robbery and murder, writing, "We were found a week and a half later in El Paso, TX. We were charged with 1st-degree murder, armed robbery and burglary with assault. We were sent to prison with 3 life sentences.". At 15, Morgan's life completely changed; she recalls, "My life was gone, my dreams were shattered. I came to prison when I was 15. It was the hardest thing for me and my family.". In these two stories, U'Dreka and Morgan's perceptions of what led them to be incarcerated fit the gendered pathways theory's understanding of how an older male partner involved in criminal behaviour can influence young women to engage in criminal behaviour.

Yazmin frames her incarceration as being due to her living on the streets after running away from home and later needing to support her drug addiction. Yazmin's perception of what led her to be incarcerated fits the gendered pathways theory of how living circumstances and substance abuse can lead women to criminal behaviour and prison. Yazmin describes her perception and understanding of why she was incarcerated by writing, "I got caught up in a home invasion, and armed robbery gone wrong. It was my first, and of course, my last time. I thought I was that "gangster", "badass", "unstoppable Yazmin". I thought I knew it all.". Another woman, Jessica, describes her perception of what led her to be incarcerated. Jessica, in her interview with Kathleen, describes how supporting her drug habit led her to be incarcerated:

I've done things to support my habit rather than I guess harming somebody directly I've kind of sold drugs to support my habit and that's what continuing me back in and out of

jail as far as that goes and you know abuse out there on the streets you know sexually verbal physical yes all of that you know that's it's a very tough life out there.

For Jessica when asked by Kathleen what her crime was, Jessica said, “it was sales of opiates” which was for her most recent charge. Jessica goes on to describe the circumstances that led to her incarceration. Jessica says she entered the system multiple times, stating that after she was released in 2016 by the Florida Department of Correction, she returned to her old lifestyle. Jessica explains, “I was re-arrested on multiple drug charges, two counts of sale of Dilaudid let me see a possession of the MDMA possession of Tylenol three with codeine possession of oxymorphone tampering with evidence possession of paraphernalia”. For Jessica, she was first arrested when she was 13 as a youth offender. Jessica explains her story further by stating “I was 24 the first time I was sentenced to any amount of time just since then it doesn't go very long and then you know it just happens again it's just you know a real bad cycle”. Jessica and Yazmin’s perception of their substance abuse issues presents how the need to support their drug addiction increased their risk of criminal behaviour and incarceration.

Familial Relationships and Motherhood

It is evident through the blog that the mother and daughter relationship plays an essential role in how we understand Sadie’s story. Kathleen’s point of view and her role in the life of her daughter Sadie provides a different perspective not often explored. Kathleen explains that she felt as though she had failed her daughter. Kathleen explains her perception of her daughter’s addiction as hard to watch, and she felt helpless even. We also learn how there was generational trauma. Kathleen explains how her perception of her childhood victimization through discussions of how her father sexually abused her and physically abused her mother. Kathleen writes:

So, I became a very problem child. First attempted suicide at 12. I would run away. I was sexually promiscuous at a young age... My young adult life was one of depression, drinking, promiscuity, suicidal ideation and the forever feeling of worthlessness and that I

was too damaged to deserve anything good in my life. I never had anyone to help me through any of it. I was the black sheep of the family-the problem child. I got married at 16, had a baby at 17 and moved to Washington with my husband-one of 5 husbands to come.

Although Kathleen was not incarcerated, Sadie and Kathleen's perception of their parent-child relationship illustrates how it plays a critical role in the futures of many women like Sadie. The criminal justice system's impact on families is evident through Kathleen's posts, where she explains how thinking about her daughter being incarcerated is hard. Kathleen writes the following in the blog:

As a mom with a daughter in prison, it is a daily challenge to not let it get the best of me and to live my life, but I cannot help but worry every day-not because of Sadie, but because of the lack of kindness and compassion of the prison system...I think that is the worst part-the helplessness that you cannot protect her... I cannot imagine Sadie doing it. My heart goes out to all the families who are dealing with this.

Some incarcerated women do not have a good relationship with their families. Through anecdotes from Sadie, we learn that those with good relationships with their families consider their prison experiences better. As Sadie even states, "There are many women who have family that is poor or no family so they never get money put on their commissary so they have to figure out a hustle. For them, it is the only way to survive.". Sadie writes:

You should hear the girls begging their families for money just to get basic necessities-prison forces you to do it. Many families are poor or don't understand the real needs of a prisoner. It is heartbreaking to hear them on the phone. All we have is our family and a lot of women here don't have anyone. Lost and forgotten.

Sadie's perception of family frames familial relationships as having a significant role in women's lives, as many women in their stories explain how they do not have support from their families. Sadie states in another post, "If you have a family who can put money on your account for hygiene and canteen your prison life is way less stressful.". Sadie received support and help from her mother and sister throughout her incarceration. For instance, Kathleen constantly

pushed to get Sadie a doctor in prison when Sadie was having health issues. Kathleen writes, “I have been advocating for Sadie's medical to go see a cardiologist. The warden has been helpful but medical has not. I have emailed the Director several times and finally they did a sonogram of her heart and she has a heart valve problem.”. Many other incarcerated women do not have the same support outside of prison as Sadie.

In an interview with Kathleen, Jessica was asked if she had any support from incarcerated family members. Jessica recalls getting help from her family only from her recent incarceration. Jessica states, “well the last time yes but some of the times before they were not able at that time so it's really hard if there's you know you have loved ones and they're in there without any money or anything like that you know they just don't provide enough you know”. When Marshanna was asked if she got any support from her family, she told Kathleen:

not so much one of the guys that I had got involved with I guess you would call him a John when I was on drugs when things would go wrong I would call him...when I went to prison I memorized his address so I started writing him letters I said please you know can you put something on my book...he finally wrote me back...he made sure that I had a full canteen

Marshanna recalls not being able to talk to her son, which made her prison experience more difficult she states, “it's very easy to slip back in that and I just kept thinking of my son to hold on I said I don't care whatever else happens I've got to make through this for my son”. In the women’s stories describing having a supportive family, a child, or someone to support them, they perceive that a stable lifestyle is attainable when they have that support as it ensures they do not fall back into their old lifestyles. When talking to Kathleen, Dia described the importance of having a family support system. Dia states:

there's a lot of cases of women that are incarcerated that those sentences are incredibly harsh and it almost makes you lose hope you know I had some moments in mine and my time of incarceration where if it wasn't for the fact that I have the family that I have and and the support that they gave me I probably would have gotten swallowed up by the

prison system and I wouldn't be who I am today right you know because it's easy for that to happen you know

For Allie, she recalls getting support from her mother and son. In her interview with Kathleen, she states:

she did she sent me money and she came to visit once a month with my son which was tough for me because my son...he kind of blamed himself for me being there one day he was like I should have told the cops the truth that you didn't hit daddy with a hammer he still blames himself so what that was tough for me honestly those visits were tough.

Dia's story presents how a good relationship with her son helped her while incarcerated. Dia describes how most women "don't have anybody that that is gonna lift them up instead of constantly being beaten down because that's what happens to you". Dia later adds, "so I have to give a lot of credit to my mom there again my family you know but there's so many women in there that don't have that". Amanda describes the lack of support she received, stating, "my family wasn't there for me you know I barely talked to my son you know I would write, and I had I had some people that wrote me while I was there many people drifted away my family probably wrote me five letters the whole time I was there barely answer the phone". Marshanna, Dia, and Allie's voices on their relationships with their family and children fit the gendered pathways theory's understanding of how it may deter women from criminality or drive them towards criminal behaviour.

As the blog progresses, Kathleen mentions advocating for changes in women's incarceration and the prison system. It is particularly interesting to see how family members advocate for creating changes in the system when a family member is incarcerated. For example, in the blog, Kathleen constantly reaches out to policymakers and asks them for help. In one post in the blog titled "My Experience As A Mom with an Incarcerated Daughter" from October of 2017, Kathleen elaborates on her perspective of things. Kathleen states, "I thought that as time

went on things would get easier but it never does. To know that your daughter is in an environment where she is just "inmate" and there is such disregard for her as a human being wears on you even when you think it's not, or try to be positive.” Kathleen expresses her frustrations further by explaining that there is a stigma against incarcerated women. Kathleen writes:

I know many women, esp young women, in my daughter's prison who are "guilty by association". They either did not know a crime was being committed or they knew and were afraid to tell but did not participate in the crime. They are serving life sentences... There are many many people who are incarcerated who are innocent because of prosecutorial misconduct, an uninformed jury and basically a broken criminal justice system.

Kathleen's concerns illustrate how incarceration may influence not just the women incarcerated but also those around them, like their families.

In this chapter, discussions consisted of outlining women's trajectories toward offending. Specifically, discussions were aimed toward providing specific anecdotes of the women in the blog describing their experiences and perceptions of their risk factors and how they may fit our understanding of the gendered pathways theory. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings in light of the theoretical framework of the gendered pathways theory.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Throughout the blog, women made sense of their lives and their history of criminality and incarceration by discussing their lives in ways that resembled what researchers would consider the gendered pathways theory. The women's online narratives fit the gendered pathways theory's understanding of risk factors and illustrate the complexity of their pathways. In this section, I examine the results of this study to discuss how women's voices online lend support to what Chesney-Lind (1989) and Daly (1992, 1994) have been saying since the 80s, specifically, the narrow understanding of the gendered nature of risk factors and a lack of acknowledgement that these risk factors are often interconnected. The findings in this study suggest that women's offending and later incarceration occur due to factors that include but are not limited to, childhood experiences, substance abuse, mental health, and familial relationships.

Discussion of Key Findings

Women's discourse using narrative criminology is presented through the women's posts in the blog illustrating what gendered pathways scholars conceive as risk factors, and the ways the women perceive their risk factors are what we frame as pathways. The findings lend further support to gendered pathways theory while utilizing a relatively new source of data that, that to my understanding, has not been utilized before.

Some of the findings in this paper suggest that women's criminality is linked to multiple risk factors that work interconnectedly. Some of these factors include but are not limited to childhood abuse, substance abuse, living circumstances, mental health, familial relationships, and adult-family relations. The findings suggest that women's criminality and subsequent incarceration can be influenced by their childhood trauma (e.g., physical, emotional, and sexual) and, in some cases, increases the chances of difficult life circumstances (e.g., mental health

struggles, substance abuse, difficult living conditions) during adulthood. The findings suggest that other factors, such as the dynamics of women's familial relationships and motherhood status, can deter women from criminal behaviour or take them on a different pathway. Additionally, it appears that women who step outside their prescribed gender roles are perceived as criminals resulting in misinterpretations of females in the criminal justice system.

Therefore, this paper lends support to Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) pathways theory by offering a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of risk factors, the importance of the motherhood role and the critical role played by families. The women in their posts online talk about their perception of their risk factors in a manner that provides a reality to our understanding of the gendered pathways theory. The findings suggest that women's pathways are complex, and this is illustrated through their reflections on understanding female criminality through women's adverse childhood and adult experiences, the interconnectedness of risk factors, and the importance of motherhood and familial relationships.

Understanding and Reflecting on Female Criminality

The findings in this paper suggest that the participant's female criminality can fit under the lens of feminist scholars' understanding of prescribed femininity (Belknap, 2015; Chesney-Lind, 2008; Chesney-Lind, 2010; Chesney-Lind & Merlo, 2015). The women's narratives highlighted the consequences of behaving outside prescribed "feminine" gender roles (Belknap, 2015; Chesney-Lind, 2015; Lilly et al., 2016). Participants described how their violent behaviour may have led them to their incarceration. Reflections from participants on their own understanding of their criminality and how they were perceived insinuated that abusing drugs or alcohol, running away from home, or being kicked out of the home, being sexually promiscuous, and committing violent offences (e.g., armed robbery) are not abiding of the rules of femininity

(Belknap, 2010; Kruttschnitt, 2016). These findings in women's own voices online support Chesney-Lind's (2010, 2015) research on how non-criminal offences, such as girls' escape from abuse, trauma, maltreatment, and other conditions of victimization, are criminalized.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that women's strained relationships with their family members occur due to women falling outside of their prescribed gender roles (Belknap, 2010; Kruttschnitt, 2016). Participants reflect on how they are perceived by family members, specifically explaining how their addiction and mental health struggles resulted in them being perceived as deviant. Doing drugs or consuming alcohol at a young age for some of the participants resulted in the assumption that their behaviour should be penalized (Chesney-Lind, 2015). In addition, some participants recall engaging in unhealthy toxic relationships early in life, creating the perception that they are hypersexual. The participants suggested that their family members implied that substance abuse and engaging in early relationships are two factors seen as prescribing against the assumed feminine roles (Chesney-Lind, 2010; Chesney-Lind & Merlo, 2015). Anecdotes from the blog show that women's childhood victimization can result in changes in their behaviour. Women's experiences with childhood victimization are considered a major factor in contributing to women's later risk factors such as substance abuse and mental health struggles. The findings in this study are similar to those of (Flores et al. 2019; Chesney-Lind & Merlo, 2015; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2012; Widom & Osborn, 2021).

The conceptualization of female criminality based on the participants indicates that falling outside of the societal expectation of femininity results in a higher likelihood of being criminalized by those around them, specifically by family members. These findings are similar to Belknap's (2010) and Kruttschnitt's (2016) discussions of how stepping outside the role of prescribed "femininity" results in criminal sanctions. These findings on female criminality

illustrate how the blog presents women's own voices on how feminine roles can apply to female adult offenders. This is a component where researchers have identified there being a lack of research in (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016; Simpson et al., 2008).

Reflecting on The Interconnectedness of Risk Factors

The findings of this study suggest that the gendered risk factors identified in this paper are interconnected. For many women, childhood abuse functioned as the onset form of abuse, trauma, or victimization they endured (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Flores et al., 2019). Participants describe experiencing different forms of victimization simultaneously, this aligns with Flores et al.'s (2019) concept of polyvictimization². Participants recall that sexual, physical, and emotional abuse as a child led to struggles with their mental health (internalizing and externalizing) (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Flores et al., 2019). This finding supports research from Broidy et al., (2018) who described how women's experiences with childhood adversity would lead to their internal mental health struggles. For example, in this study, some participants described how coping with their childhood abuse became so difficult that it impacted their mental health (Broidy et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020). Some participants recall having suicidal tendencies, stress, nightmares, and depression.

With respect to how gendered risk factors interconnect, the findings suggest that early-onset childhood trauma can lead women to use substances to cope with their mental health (Broidy et al., 2018; Freiburger and Marcum, 2019). Participants described how turning to drugs or alcohol resulted in a difficult relationship with their parents. For other participants, the history of substance abuse in the family led to their drug and alcohol use. Due to the contributing risk factors mentioned above, participants recall being kicked out of the home or running away from

² Polyvictimization refers to the multiple experiences of victimization that occur simultaneously or sequentially.

home to escape the abuse, scrutiny, or trauma at home. Other participants explained how they were placed in foster care or group homes, often resulting in further abuse or neglect by their caregivers. The participants also describe that they would re-offend due to struggles with coping with their mental health struggles, substance abuse, and subsequent housing instability. The findings illustrated that participants were arrested for criminal activities, including but not limited to robbery, burglary with assault, accessory to murder, and possession and/or selling of drugs. These findings align with Freiburger and Marcum's (2019) findings of how risk factors that work interconnectedly can lead women to offend and reoffend.

For many women, adulthood occurred quickly, as not having a stable family environment or home meant they had to survive on the streets. Participants described how the need to survive on the streets was the main contributor to their offending during their adulthood. The consequences of using and abusing substances to cope with their internal mental health struggles (e.g., bad thoughts, stress, sadness, distrustfulness) for the women meant having to survive on the streets. Based on the stories in the blog, surviving for some women meant having an unhealthy toxic relationship with an older male. In the blog, participants disclosed that they would seek love and affection from an older boyfriend or by joining a gang due to their abusive home environment. Some participants described choosing gang life as a replacement for a family. Other participants recalled engaging in a relationship with a man to maintain financial stability or gain access to drugs. For instance, the women described making sexual promises to men to get financial means to supply their addiction. However, adult abuse (e.g., intimate partner violence) only occurred for three participants. Thus, a conclusion cannot be made on childhood victimization's impact on later abuse during adulthood.

Based on the research findings from the blog, participants, in some cases, acknowledged that their engagement with criminal behaviour occurred when they were on the streets. These findings are similar to Daly's (1992) conceptualization of women's paths to criminal behaviour 'street-women'³ and 'harmed and harming women'⁴ and scholars like Chesney-Lind (1989) along with others who have attempted to replicate her typologies (Alarid & Wright, 2015; Boppre et al., 2018; Brennan et al., 2012; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Lilly et al., 2015; Voorhis, 2012). In the findings of this study the women describe their paths to criminality and incarcerated because of a combination of the need to survive on the streets and experiencing forms of childhood victimization. The women in the blog specifically note the impact their mental health both internalizing and externalizing had in their lives.

The findings support Broidy et al.'s (2018) discussions that substance abuse occurs during women's adulthood when they find it difficult to navigate the expectations of adulthood. In the blog, childhood-onset abuse appeared to be interconnected with other gendered risk factors that ultimately led to women's criminal behaviour and subsequent incarceration. This finding of this study also supports Broidy et al.'s (2018) discussions of how women's criminality occurs due to the risk factors of early abuse and trauma, which pushes girls of the home and onto the streets where they are left to cope with their mental health, resulting in alcohol, drug use, and prostitution. These findings also resonate with Nuytiens and Christiaens (2016) research that women offend due to financial needs and their addictions. Each women's perception of their own incarceration presents how different risk factors can overlap. Based on the women's stories, an inference can be made that there is a clear link between multiple risk factors contributing to

³ Street women refers to women who fled abusive households and survived on the street by engaging in drugs, prostitution, or theft to survive.

⁴ Harmed and harming women refers to women who experienced sexual and physical child trauma and abuse, which led to chronic adult offending.

women's offending and subsequent incarceration. Overall, the findings suggest that risk factors should not be examined as separate entities as women's pathways are heavily influenced by multiple risk factors working interconnectedly.

Reflecting on The Significance of Motherhood and Familial Relationships

One of the main findings of this paper is that motherhood and familial relationships played a major factor in women's criminal behaviour. Previous pathways literature discussed how these factors could deter women from further criminal behaviour (Yule et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2020; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). In doing my research on the factors of motherhood and familial relationships, for some women, it served as a risk factor and for others as protective factors. Protective factors work as a measure that decreases the likelihood of individuals engaging in criminal behaviour (Brown et al., 2020). Although this paper did not set out to examine protective factors, findings suggest that participants are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour if they have a stable parent-child relationship, support from family members, and overall good relationship quality with family members. Regarding motherhood, women in the blog describe how having stable relationships with their children prevented them from engaging in criminal behaviour. For example, Allie and Dia described how while being incarcerated, having a stable relationship with their children helped them get through their difficult prison experience. Other participants described how their lack of a relationship with their family and children resulted in a difficult time while incarcerated.

Discussions in the blog on motherhood demonstrated that for many women, a good relationship with their children meant not falling back into a life of criminality but instead trying to stay away from a criminal lifestyle for the sake of their children. This finding is similar to previous research on motherhood that uses life course theory which finds that having children

decreases women's reoffending (Brown et al., 2020; Dehart, 2008; Yule et al., 2015). The women's stories fit the gendered pathways theory's discussions on motherhood, providing insight into an area of women's risk factors that is limited in research (Yule et al., 2015).

Family history of substance use and generational abuse played a significant factor in the lives of the mother and daughter in the blog. Having a good relationship and support on the outside from family members while incarcerated played a significant role in the lives of women. For example, it appears that some participants who did not have a supportive family were more likely to find coping with life more difficult and thus would turn to drugs or alcohol and increases the risk of re-offending. In contrast, women who had regular communication with their children and family members would have a better outlook on their futures, resulting in them moving away from their "old lifestyles". These findings support previous research on familial relationships where the findings suggested that a positive relationship with family members has been associated with a decrease in recidivism risk in women (Barrick et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2020; VanVoohris et al., 2010, as cited in Freiburger & Marcum, 2019). On the other hand, research has also shown that an increased risk of offending occurs when women have a negative relationship with family members (Brown et al., 2020)

The discussions above demonstrated reflections on female criminality, the harms of incarceration on female offenders, the interconnectedness of gendered risk factors, and the factors of motherhood and familial relationships. What takes place next is a discussion on how the findings of this paper contribute to the existing literature on the gendered pathways theory.

Contributions to Existing Research

What risk factors do women in the blog identify that can illuminate and advance the gendered pathways theory? From the findings in this paper, it can be concluded that although the

women do not directly speak about pathways theory, they made sense of their lives and their history of criminality and incarceration by talking about their lives in ways that resembled what researchers would consider “pathways”. By examining risk factors identified in feminist criminological research, this paper lends support to Daly’s (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind’s (1989) gendered pathways theory. Extending on the qualitative approach of narrative criminology (Presser, 2016) and content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019; Luo, 2022), this paper uses the blog to understand women’s stories told online. Finally, this paper contributes to the field of feminist criminology research by providing a much-needed perspective on how women themselves characterize their pathways to crime and prison.

In their research, Daly (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind (1989) discussed the gendered pathways theory, which suggested that women engage in criminal behaviour for different reasons compared to men. The gendered pathways scholarship generally discusses that women’s and men’s lives vary before criminal involvement (Daly, 1992, 1994; Chesney-Lind, 1989). Early pathways research suggests that childhood trauma and adulthood trauma can serve as trajectories toward offending behaviour (Belknap, 2015; Daly, 1992, 1994; Chesney-Lind, 1989; Gehring, 2016). Daly (1992, 1994) describes five categories of pathways to women’s offending street women, battered women, harmed and harming women, drug-connected women, and economically motivated women (Boppre et al., 2018). This study found some evidence of Daly’s (1992, 1994) categories of street women and harmed and harming women. Some participants recalled being victimized during childhood, while others explained the need to offend to survive on the street (Boppre et al., 2018). Chesney-Lind (1989), in her research, develops Daly’s (1992, 1994) research on pathways theory by indicating that women who must survive on the streets often will result in their later substance abuse and mental health problems. This study’s findings

using women's voices in the blog show how women who lived on the street would engage in substance abuse to cope with the mental health problems developed through childhood victimization. Women's first-person accounts in this study provided a deeper understanding of the complexity of the gendered pathways theory.

Since the development of Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) pathways framework, scholars have attempted to replicate their typologies. As a result, critiques have been raised on the pathways theory by feminist pathways scholars. These critiques of the gendered pathways framework suggest that pathways theory has become more complex and therefore women's own voices were used in this study to present evidence of the complexity of pathways theory.

Women's Own Voices Online

The main contribution of this study is the use of the blog and videos used to centre women's voices which allowed currently and previously incarcerated women to frame themselves and their lived experiences of their gendered pathways. The use of narrative criminology in this study presents how it is important to take stories seriously when studying the lives of women, as women's narratives are valuable (Maruna & Liem, 2021; Presser, 2009, 2016). The narrative criminological approach allowed a reflection on women's stories in the blog to understand in their own voices how they characterized their pathways to crime and prison (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). This approach further presented women's stories in a manner that highlighted risk factors related to their gendered pathways to criminality and incarceration. Critiques of pathways theory have raised the issue that women's voices through narrative and storytelling are vital in illustrating the complexities of women's pathways to criminality and

incarceration (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016; Simpson et al., 2008). To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study using voices online in a specialized blog.

Complex notions of pathways theory raised the issue of the need for more insight into adult female offending to explore offenders who start offending in adulthood (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016; Simpson et al., 2008). Researchers have raised concerns about the lack of insight into factors that can be specific to women, such as motherhood and familial relationships (Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Yule et al., 2015). Another critique raised by scholars is the complexity of risk factors in terms of how they can interconnect (Broidy et al., 2018; Carr & Hanks, 2013; Freiburger & Marcum, 2019; Gehring, 2016). The complexity of male and female offenders appears to be evident through their social circumstances, which are heavily shaped by social constructions of femininity and masculinity (e.g., running away from home may be a form of survival behaviour – girls wanting to avoid the abusive situations may lead to later criminality and incarceration) (Belknap, 2010; Chesney-Lind, 2015; Kruttschnitt, 2016; Lilly et al., 2015). Given the few studies that focus on using women’s own voices online, this study offers women’s first-person accounts in a blog.

Although there have been studies using women’s own voices to present their narratives (Carr & Hanks, 2013; Lamb 2003, 2007; Levi & Waldman, 2017), studies using women’s own voices online remain unexplored. The blog *My Story in a Women’s Prison* presented evidence of the gendered pathways theory that would have otherwise gone unexplored. The blog provides unprompted stories from women, this provides no positionality or bias from the researcher and thus can increase the reliability and validity of the data. In the blog, a mother and daughter provided data and built a community where female adult offenders and ex-offenders could discuss their pathways to criminal behaviour and incarceration. The findings lend support to

Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) pathways framework by providing stories directly from women. Discussions consisted of a variety of risk factors that the women identified as contributing to their offending behaviour.

In this section, the contributions to existing literature were presented. This study aligned with Daly's (1992, 1994) and Chesney-Lind's (1989) findings that women's criminality is contingent on their differential pathways. However, critiques raised by feminist pathways scholars demonstrated the need for the use of women's own voices to understand the complexity associated with the gendered pathways theory. Therefore, using an online storytelling platform allowed additional insight into women's pathways. Now, discussions will shift toward the limitations of this research.

Limitations

This study's findings cannot be generalized to all formerly incarcerated women because the data set is from one blog. The data shows that participants were incarcerated in the Lowell Correctional Institution in Florida, United States. The findings consist of US data, and unlike Canadian prisons and jails, US detention centres vary from state to state. In addition, this study is limited to the experience of 13 women from the blog. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized due to the small sample group and the limitation of women's voices from Florida.

In addition, due to participants' online presence only, it was difficult to identify some of their characteristics, such as racial backgrounds. Therefore, it could not be determined if race played a factor in any of the findings. Other components not examined in this study but can play a crucial role in shaping women's experiences include peer support (e.g., supportive friendships) and community-related factors (e.g., community social disadvantages such as poverty and

racism). Furthermore, using content analysis meant gathering clarification on the data was not possible.

Women's narratives can demonstrate something that often is underscored, their resilience. This paper didn't set out to talk about resilience, but women can be resilient. Understanding how women in an online blog can be resilient could illuminate how women cope with the risk factors they experience. Although this study did not explore women's resilience, Presser (2019) acknowledges that stories can showcase an individual's resistance to harm and stigma. Therefore, discussions would be speculative on how women's narratives online can present their agency and self-awareness. Despite these limitations, the data and findings provided interesting information on gendered risk factors and allowed insightful data on women's pathways to criminality and incarceration.

Future Research

Key findings from the blog raised several components that would benefit from additional research in the future. Further research that examines the risk factors of motherhood and familial relationships would be beneficial, especially using a mixed methods approach. A mixed methods approach could provide a more rich and nuanced way to study both incarcerated men and women. This mixed methods approach could more clearly reveal the impact of gender – especially the similarities and differences.

Although this paper did not set out to examine women's resilience, this was an interesting finding. Given that, future research would benefit from studying both men's and women's resilience. Using narrative criminology in future research could illuminate how sharing stories online can act as a form of resilience (Presser, 2009, 2016, 2019). Finally, this paper highlighted how the internet has become an important source of data, especially in understanding what

women have to say about their criminality and incarceration. Given that, future research would benefit from examining multiple forums or blogs online that consist of a larger sample of women.

Conclusion

This research discussed how the women in the blog *My Story in a Women's Prison* identified risk factors that may illuminate the gendered pathways theory. Qualitative analysis was achieved using a narrative approach to understand how 13 women's first-person accounts of their experiences can fit the gendered pathways framework. Women's stories in the blog illustrated how the women made sense of their lives and their history of criminality and incarceration

Using the blog provided the opportunity for women's own voices online to present how the women themselves perceived their life experiences that increased their risk of criminality and incarceration. The women suggest that having children and their relationship with their family members greatly contributed to whether they would engage in criminality or re-offend. This research raises the question of what other risk factors can push women away from criminality. It is hoped that this research will work as a starting point for further discussion of currently and formerly incarcerated women's own stories. Based on these conclusions, researchers should consider the significance of using data on the internet that incorporates women's narratives told using their own voices.

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