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"Tread Carefully": A Qualitative Study of Activists' Perceptions of the Prison System and Strategies for Promoting Change

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"TREAD CAREFULLY": A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ACTIVISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRISON SYSTEM AND STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CHANGE

by

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Abstract

This study used in-depth qualitative interviews from six participants to understand prison activists' perceptions of the prison system and their strategies for enacting change. A constructionist lens was used to analyze the data with Joel Best's (2017) social problems theory. Prisons were framed and problematized by the activists based on systemic issues of colonization, mental health and substance use, CSC misconduct, and cultural attitudes towards punishment. Lack of public awareness, and in educational environments, towards these issues led to strategies of education in order to build communities that are more inclusive, caring, and connected. Strategies like advocating for trauma informed care and connecting non-incarcerated with incarcerated were examples of community building. The activists also experienced challenges in their work with negotiating relationships - in particular, the fear of helping, frustration in managing the complexities of activism, and moving forward despite challenges in their work. Therefore, Goffman's (1959) theory of presentations of self was another useful theoretical lens. The findings suggest that prison activists use different framing strategies depending on the context of the situation and how they want to present themselves. Furthermore, the strategic and covert methods for enacting change diverge from traditional activist methods and aim to create change at an individual level.

Key Words: Prison activists, activism, systemic prison issues, social problems, presentation of self, social movements

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social change is a complicated process. It requires several elements to line up at the same time for progress to happen. A problem needs to be recognized, there needs to be support and agreement concerning the problem, and society needs to be willing and prepared to enact changes (Best, 2017). There is a fair amount of research concerning the shortcomings and failures of the prison system; public distrust in the criminal justice system (Winter, 1983), inequities of transgender populations in prisons (Johnson et al., 2020), the inhumane treatment of the incarcerated (Haskin, 2017), the criminalization of substance use and racialized social control (Letman, 2013), increased suicide rates in prison (Hayes, 1997), issues with aging prison populations and community reintegration of older people incarcerated (Hagos et al., 2022), systemic trauma in prison settings and other institutions (Goldsmith et al., 2014), poverty and racism that creates direct paths from school to prison (Darling, 2019), and other structural problems. There are several issues regarding prison structure, but if they are not acknowledged and changed the problems will persist. This is why activism is important.

Activism itself is a component of the criminal justice system that is less talked about. There are non-profit organizations that attempt to help with reintegration of criminally sentenced individuals, work with youth that are grappling with mental health struggles, work with family members of the incarcerated, or bring educational programs into prisons. These organizations certainly fit into the purview of what activism means for this study. They create change by adding elements of humanity to issues that concern how the criminal justice system functions. It is important to further understand this group of individuals and how they go about creating

change. My research question is how do prison activists problematize prisons and promote social

change?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL

FRAMEWORK

Origins and Conceptions of Prison Abolition

Initially, prisons were designed as a temporary holding place for those who commit crime to wait before punishment was assigned or a trial commenced (Foucault 1979, as cited in Gibson, 2011). Foucault (1979, as cited in Gibson, 2011) then describes a shift in European society between 1760 and 1840 concerning punishment and a changing societal view that things like the death penalty were cruel. Society was also ready to move away from the all-controlling monarchical system and in doing so distributed power into various institutions like prisons that subjected working class people to increased monitoring and control (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Gibson, 2011). The violent punishments that were previously used were replaced with the mental punishment of incarceration (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Gibson, 2011). The idea was that prisoners would ruminate on their wrong doings under a highly controlled and surveilled setting (Gibson, 2011). Fear of incarceration was meant to act as a deterrent to crime (Crime Museum, 2021) and eventually "rehabilitation" efforts were introduced to prisons (Gibson, 2011). The concepts of deterrence and rehabilitation contradict one another as deterrence relies on the pains of imprisonment to prevent people from wanting to return and rehabilitation requires treatment and support to change people's lives (Sung, 2003).

The emergence of modern prisons has been a cause of controversy where individuals and activists have disapproved and worked towards their removal from the start (Piché & Larsen, 2010). Early critiques of the modern prison system at its inception in the eighteenth century may have been influenced by Thomas Bruxton (an MP in Britain) and Victor Hugo (writer of *Les Miserables)* who outlined the cruelty of imprisonment (Piché & Larsen, 2010). Further down the

road it became clear that prisons do not "deter" crime nor does it "rehabilitate" individuals (Mathiesen, 1990, as cited in Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 393). In the 1960's and 70's, ideas of prison "abolition" seemed like a reasonable response given the problems of prisons and a movement of prison activism gained traction (Piché & Larsen, 2010). In 1968 *KROM* was established in Norway as a group of "prisoners, ex-prisoners, academics, lawyers, and practitioners" involved with the legal system working to reform issues of youth justice (Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 393). Similarly in 1971, a French activist group called *Groupe d'information sur les Prisons* worked to elevate the voices of people on the inside of prisons (Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 393). In the United States Angela Davis and George Jackson gained support for prison abolition as political movements towards equality because people of colour were being (and continue to be) criminalized (Piché & Larsen, 2010). Quakers are another group of individuals who were against prisons. Quakers in the United States influenced Quaker movements in Canada (Piché & Larsen, 2010). *The Quaker Committee on Jails and Justice in Canada* attempted to educate the public on the importance of prison abolition (Piché & Larsen, 2010). They also recognized a need to combine global perspectives on this issue, which led to the inception of *ICOPA* (Piché & Larsen, 2010).

The International Conference on Prison Abolition (ICOPA) was first held in 1983 in Toronto, Canada (Piché & Larsen, 2010). This conference gathered activists and intellectuals to discuss concepts and present ideas of prison abolition to society (Piché & Larsen, 2010). The goals of the conference included establishing "solidarity" to encourage camaraderie within the abolitionist community, creating a space for the sharing of information, making the public aware and educated on the subject, and explaining feasible substitutes for incarceration (Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 394). The discussions at these conferences formulated ideas of "community

corrections" that were not based on "punishment" or "rehabilitation," but to help those who

diverged from societal "norms" return to the community (Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 394).

However, government funding for welfare programs, support systems, and community

alternatives was cut, making these efforts futile and actually leading more "mentally ill and

poor" people to prison (Collins, 2008, as cited in Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 395). Political rhetoric

surrounding the concept of "decarceration" did not limit ideas of punishment, but rather was

used to expand carceral punishment further into communities (Cohen, 1985, as cited in Piché &

Larsen, 2010, p. 396). This created the need for prison activists to frame the issue less as

alternatives to incarceration, but to think less "retributive" as a prison model (Bianchi & van

Swaaningen, 1986, as cited in Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 396).

A political push for more social control, created fertile grounds for a more liberal

economic system and a more "authoritarian" criminal justice system ("neoliberalism") to emerge

(Peck, 2003; Davis, 2003; Giroux, 2004, 2009, as cited in Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 397). This

exacerbated issues of non-gender role conforming women, poor individuals, People of Colour,

and young people being targeted and put through the system (Piché & Larsen, 2010). This issue

of "neoliberalism" was also brought up by Sudbury (2004). Sudbury (2004) connected this to

issues of "globalization," "militarism" (with the military often being utilized to suppress social

movements), and the "prison industrial complex" (p. 9). The term "Prison industrial complex"

has become a slogan for the prison abolition movement and came from the "prison boom" in

California (Sudbury, 2004, p. 12). Sudbury defines the prison industrial complex as: "a

symbiotic and profitable relationship between politicians, corporations, the media, and state

correctional institutions that generates the racialized use of incarceration as a response to social

problems rooted in the globalization of capital" (p. 12). The concept of the prison industrial complex challenges the power structures upon which elite personnel in the prison system profit.

Loved ones, dependents, family, and other members of the community are also impacted by prison issues (Piché & Larsen, 2010). Furthermore, funding for important community programs gets cut in order to fund prisons (Piché & Larsen, 2010). This means that everyone is impacted by prisons as they expand and "intertwine" with the community (Nagelsen & Huckleberry, 2008, as cited in Piché & Larsen, 2010, p. 397). All of this showcases that prison activists and abolitionists work within the framework of the political context of the time period. As political atmospheres change, so must the approaches of prison activists.

Abolitionism involves not only the concepts of prison removal or revision, but also making that "vision" a reality (Burns et al., 2020, p. 98). Abolitionist activists have depended on "direct action, mass protests, and lawsuits" in an attempt to halt the expansion of prisons (Sudbury, 2009, p. 26). However, there are some instances of progress of activism involving activist groups working collaboratively with correctional institutions, albeit temporarily, suggesting opportunities for change (Sudbury, 2009). The abolitionist movement is made up of "grassroot organizations" that can work with correctional facilities in certain circumstances (Sudbury, 2009, p. 26). These groups could be anti-prison activists, lobbyists, prisoner collectives, and student associations (Sudbury, 2009).

Race, Colonialism, and Intersectionality

Ideas of prison abolition have a strong overlap and connection with concepts of decolonization. Since prisons align with colonial ideas of punishment, it makes sense that a decolonizing lens would support prison abolition. Dobchuk-Land (2017) is critical of community policing strategies that specifically target Indigenous communities. Dobchuk-Land (2017) noted

that the "criminalizing" nature of the police and prison system are indicative of "settler colonialism" (P. 416). The concept of "depoliticizing" social issues that are seen in feminist perspectives of the prison systems (Terwiel, 2020; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Boodman, 2018; Whalley & Hackett, 2017; Pollack, 2019) can be seen in concepts of race and colonialism as prisons are seen as "depoliticizing the material violence of settler colonialism" (Nichols, 2014, as cited in Dobchuk-Land, 2017, p. 416). This is achieved by creating ideas that Indigenous communities are too damaged to deal with their own problems, breaking relationships and ties to society (Dobchuk-Land, 2017). "Tough on crime" approaches are promoted in this way of thinking and targeted community policing and a prison system based on punishment ensure that Indigenous and marginalized groups have increased contacts with the criminal justice system, creating barriers in establishing Indigenous sovereignty (Dobchuk-Land, 2017, p. 416). These "liberal" (or neo-liberal) practices towards community policing (and overemphasis on harsher punishment for criminality) need to be resisted by prison activists or "abolitionist organizers" because they help to rationalize the expansion of prisons that are harmful for Indigenous populations (Dobchuk-Land, 2017, p. 416).

Sudbury (2008) outlines the effects of "economic restructuring" and how movements towards "small government" created economic structures that criminalize the poor (p. 346). Issues of racial capitalism showcase how economic structures are failing people in poverty and racialized groups as well as creating a system that is "anti-life" (Estes et al., 2021, p. 256). Furthermore, the "war on drugs" campaigns criminalize drug addiction and target people of colour (Sudbury, 2008, p. 346). There are also additional issues of profiting off prisons and notions of "the prison industrial complex" where prisons are not only institutions of isolation by "state power," but a "transaction" to be exploited (Sudbury, 2008, p. 347). Canadian prisons are

often funded by large United States corporations for profit (surveillance industries, security companies, construction companies, etc.) and low income and racialized groups are being "integrated into the global economy" (Sudbury, 2008, p. 347). These are all things that activists fight against and work to change (Sudbury, 2008, p. 348). Sudbury (2008) identifies six types of activism which include: advocating for human rights, scrutinizing sentences given after already having spent time in prison, legal action towards "decarceration," "moratorium activism" (against building new prisons), abolition in favour of alternatives to incarceration (the current system cannot be fixed or reformed), and calls to release "political prisoners" (p. 348). Abolitionists see the "prison industrial complex" as a form of "racialized state violence" (Sudbury, 2008, p. 354). Angela Y. Davis and Assata Shakur, who were political prisoners, are frequently mentioned in abolitionist literature. In the 1970's they, along with groups of activists, marked "contemporary" anti-prison movements (Sudbury, 2008, p. 354). Black liberation groups and Indigenous rights groups were targeted by government agencies and labeled as national threats, which demonstrates prisons as a tool for oppression (Sudbury, 2008). The intention of prisons then shifts from public safety to suppression of people with political and economic disadvantage to protect the government and business elite (Sudbury, 2008).

All of these forms of activism lead to the necessity of "rethinking global justice" (Sudbury, 2008, p. 357). It is by creating connections with those in prison, upholding the rights of prisoners, minimizing and disassembling prisons, and calling out "state violence and political censorship" that activists can disrupt displacement in the economy and the marginalization of groups (Sudbury, 2008, p. 358). The concept of solidarity is also important in building "sanctuary cities" according to Jeffries and Ridgley (2020) as well as important for mutual aid

and "solidarity as resistance" to form a world without prisons (Aiken & Silverman 2019; Spade 2020; Kaba & Spade 2020, as cited in Davis & Fayter, 2021, p. 162).

A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient to deal with the complexities of crime and the varied needs of those involved in crime. Ideas of a "spectrum of decarceration" see the need for "gender-specific" ways of dealing with crime and approaches to prison abolition (O'Brian & Ortega, 2015, p. 142). Integrating these ideas and understanding their intersectionality is important. This also aligns with concepts of solidarity that are present in the literature. Furthermore, it is also clear in the literature that "women of color, immigrant, queer, transgender, poor, and other marginalized women" experience an intersectionality of problems in the criminal justice system and have organized programs for alternatives to criminal justice involvement (Law, 2011, p. 85). Queer theory is something that is not widely spread in the literature of prison activism and abolition, but it is important for intersectionality and solidarity for the multitude of disenfranchised groups that are negatively impacted by the prison system. Rosenberg and Oswin (2015) note the overrepresentation of the trans community in prisons. Similarly, to social movements for racial equality, queer activism from the 1970's saw an increased amount of queer and trans people being incarcerated (Rosenberg & Oswin, 2015). The literature is clear that issues of "neoliberalism, heteropatriarchy, [and] white supremacy" are integral to the societal structures that perpetuate prisons and punishment and suppresses certain groups of people (working-class, people of colour, women, the queer community, etc.) (Dillon, 2011, as cited in Rosenberg & Oswin, 2015).

Calls For Change From the Inside

People on the inside of prisons are working "participants" for prison change and not simply "subjects" of that change (Scott, 2009, p. 20). They use different strategies to showcase

the need for institutional change through "resistance" (Scott, 2009, p. 20). The concept of resistance is often reduced to "childish" behaviour, however, it can actually be a necessary "survival" technique (Scott, 2009, p. 20). Prisoner activism is also often conflated with "radicalism" which is problematic and inaccurate (Decker & Pyrooz, 2019, p. 811). This labeling of prisoner activism as "radical" or even "extremism" problematizes activists' work and creates further obstacles for change.

Much of the "early activism around women in prison" was focused on incarcerated mothers and the effects on their kids (Barry, 2000, p. 170). Maintaining connections with their children and communities has always been a priority of incarcerated women (Barry, 2000). Furthermore, it is rare for men to take on the role of primary caregiver when a mother goes to prison, creating situations of displacement of children (Barry, 2000). Dealing with these issues remains priority to incarcerated mothers all while dealing with additional institutional issues of guard abuse, sexual assault, late-stage miscarriages due to prison conditions, and poor medical care conditions (Barry, 2000). These are all examples of issues that prisoner activists fight to change from the inside.

Activism can also start or continue once an individual leaves prison. There are an increased number of ex-prisoners getting involved in prison activism (López-Garza, 2016). Ex-prisons face barriers of reconnecting with their kids, getting jobs, and accessing housing and work to remedy "regressive policies and government and employment regulations" (López-Garza, 2016, p. 84). They work towards this through:

> petitioning, lobbying, marching, demonstrating... speaking out against the injustices and inhumane treatment to which they have been subjected...create leadership workshops and trainings...congregate at conferences and summits...meet with policy makers, the media, social service providers, and criminal justice personnel in their attempts to remove the barriers they face as they rebuild their lives (López-Garza, 2016, p. 84).

This demonstrates the different methods and efforts that prison activists make to create changes to the prison, criminal justice, and social welfare systems as well as the obstacles to recovery after prison (López-Garza, 2016). López-Garza (2016) also outlines how activism is a method of rebuilding and finding purpose in one's life after prison. However, it does not detail the lived experiences in carrying out these tasks of implementing change. This also does not include the motivations of prison activists that have not experienced prisons.

Prison Reform and Abolition Through Education

Education is a common form of activism and may be a way of rebuilding one's life. The literature covers three methods of activist teaching which include educating people about abolition, bringing educational programs into prisons, and activism through scholarship. Chartrand and Piché (2019) found in their study of undergraduate students taking a course on abolitionist ideology that students initially had difficulty grasping concepts of abolition as they contradicted previously established assumptions about the criminal justice system and "state repression" (p. 39). As the course progressed students were forced to develop alternative perceptions and gained new "ontological" ways of looking at the world (Chartrand & Piché, 2019, p.39). Some students were unable to grasp the concepts of abolitionism, but the vast majority were able to understand its concepts, yet saw it as an unrealistic goal (Chartrand & Piché, 2019). This aligns with concepts that require abolitionists to be able to solve every problem through a viable alternative (Knopp, 1991, as cited in Chartrand & Piché, 2019). This puts impossibly high standards on the work of activists trying to change the penal system. Furthermore, Jackson and Meiners (2010) pointed out that students were able to recognize that prisons were problematic, but thought abolition was too extreme as they were caught up in

societal ideas of good and bad (and what to do with the people who "deserve" to be locked up).

This certainly showcases the difficulty activists can face when trying to enact abolitionist ideas.

Some activists and educators bring educational programs inside prisons. Larson (2011)

offered a creative writing workshop to prisoners. Larson had nine people in his class and pointed

out that many others, if given the opportunity, would join the class. Workshops like these are

lead ups to abolition as they are not interested in "reform[ing]" prisoners, but "transform[ing]"

lives (Larson, 2011, p. 10). Castillo (2015) observed that Indigenous female prisoners, given the

opportunity to reflect on their histories were able to connect with each other, connect with

themselves, and understand the political circumstances of prison life. Furthermore, educational

programs can foster helping relationships that build "civic community" and dismantle the

distinction between "public and carceral citizenship" (Larson, 2011, p. 10). Another example of

a prison education program is the Walls to Bridges (W2B) program in Canada which is a course

that has students on the inside of prison and on the outside work together and was inspired by

Indigenous elders (Pollack, 2020). The program is not lecture based, but instead creates an

environment for students to engage in complex ideas. This program has shown to be successful

in providing leadership opportunities to incarcerated women, inspiring participants to document

and publish their experiences, and empowering the voices of participants (Pollack, 2020). The

program is even supported by Canada's Correctional Investigator and The Standing Senate

Committee on human rights (Pollack, 2020). However, these programs are not universal and

available at all prisons.

Ramasubramanian and Sousa (2021) document the experiences of scholar-activists. They

mention that scholar-activism critiques power structures that negatively impact marginalized

groups and attempts to create change through meaningful scholarship (Ramasubramanian &

Sousa, 2021). However, it can be difficult navigating these spaces as there are many stakeholders, such as community members, non-profit organizations, and the academy (Ramasubramanian & Sousa, 2021). The scholar-activists in this study also saw their work as part of a continuum with their activities not fitting more traditional presentations of activism, but still in the lane of advocating for change (Ramasubramanian & Sousa, 2021). Given some of the educational strategies to prison activism, it is important to understand how the public reacts to this work. However, there is limited research on how the public reacts to ideas such as prison abolition.

Public Reactions to Activist Work and Prisons

Diekman and Goodfriend (2007) outline how social change, divergence from the status quo, and activism are often met with "ambivalence." Established activist groups that appear to be "losing power" receive less ambivalence than activist groups that are new and appear to be "gaining power" despite comparable goals in each group (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2007, p. 415). Seemingly, any new ideas that have some sort of traction for creating societal change are met with resistance and uncertainty. There also appears to be increased ambivalence for activism that is seeking favoured and "positive goals" (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2007, p. 415).

Andrews et al. (2016) discuss how "proximity" to activism, the "social and political context" of the time, and "individual attributes" may influence people's attitudes towards activism (p. 1026). People's closeness to protests can either help to garner sympathy for the movement or create increased fear and feelings of risk to personal safety (Andrews et al., 2016). It is possible that white southerners that were closer to the civil rights protests had more sympathy for the cause (Andrews et al., 2016). This creates challenges for prison activism, because getting close to issues in prisons is difficult due to their isolation. It can be difficult to

sympathize with things that go unseen. Social context informs people's attitudes towards social issues (Andrews et al., 2016). With social movements like Black Lives Matter and Me Too gaining support, there seems to be more willingness for inclusion and the prevention of harm to people, which could bode well for prison activist movements. Individual factors like education and religion can be strong predictors as to whether someone will support a cause (Andrews et al., 2016). Education has shown to increase tolerance of activism because it widens cultural perspectives, can create open mindedness, and develops critical thinking skills (Bobo & Licari, 1989, as cited in Andrews et al., 2016). Religion is often attributed to resistance to change and lack of tolerance towards different groups (Sullivan et al., 1981; Gibson, 1982; McCright & Dunlap, 2008, as cited in Andrews et al., 2016).

Roberts and Hough (2005) found that most people in their study were very unaware of the prison system and basically no one had any direct connections to prisons or prison populations. It was also found that many members of the public had a perception that life in prison is very simple (Roberts & Hough, 2005). Members of the public are less likely to understand or think about the effects of prison on the financial and emotional well-being of family members; the systemic inequalities faced by minorities; the increased risk of suicide, assault, and death; increased health problems and poor health care; and the troubles of reintegrating back into the community (Roberts & Hough, 2005). These issues are not often covered by the media, which usually focuses on prison riots, violence, and prisons being a free-ride (Roberts & Hough, 2005). Furthermore, it was found that public values concerning the role of prisons more heavily emphasized punishment, over rehabilitation (Roberts & Hough, 2005). These are challenges and perceptions that prison activists need to work to change, however, little is known about the specifics of these strategies when it comes to prison activism.

The literature does a good job of addressing the goals and ideologies of prison activists and abolitionists as well as the critiques and the racial, gendered, and societal issues that are entrenched in the functionality of prisons. However, there is minimal information on the lived experience of prison activists and different types of activism, particularly more covert strategies. This is a gap that limits understanding of social movements, their innerworkings, and the role of activist work in creating social change. This project intends to fill part of this gap by investigating the lived experiences of prison activists and their perceptions of the prison system.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses a social constructionism stance to investigate how prisons are problematized by activists. Berger and Luckman (1967, 1991) are often credited as the originators of social constructionist theories (Andrews, 2012; Cunliffe, 2008; Dreher, J. 2016). Berger and Luckman (1967, 1991) look at how knowledge is constructed and what makes it important for society. They see knowledge as something that is "created" rather than "discovered" (Scwandt, 2003, as cited in Andrews, 2012). Social constructionist theory has been used to study and understand social problems and social movements (Schneider, 1985).

Social movement theory is relevant for this study as activists and activism are the focus. Social movement theory looks at the mobilization of resources, political opportunities, framing, and group identities (Engels & Müller, 2019). Mobilizing resources refers to acquiring tools that can be used for starting social movements (Engels & Müller, 2019). Funds, support, personnel and other resources are necessary for social movements (Engels & Müller, 2019). Resources are also not necessarily physical and can be "moral, cultural, socio-organisational" (Engels & Müller, 2019, p. 76). In addition to the available resources, political opportunity structures also play a role in the success of social movements (Engels & Müller, 2019). Basically, people

engage in social movements when the political context is favourable (Engels & Müller, 2019). Naming the problem and framing the issues are another aspect of social movement theory (Engels & Müller, 2019). Frames are actively produced by members of the social movement (Engels & Müller, 2019). Frames will be discussed in more detail below using Best's (2017) conception of social problems. Lastly, social movements need a collective identity and agreement on issues and process (Engels & Müller, 2019).

Best's (2017) social problems theory is helpful as a theoretical framework for this paper as it takes a constructionist stance and investigates how prisons are problematized by activists. Best describes the process in which situations become problematized. It is a process that starts from a claim being made, to the media covering the claim, to people reacting to the media coverage, and then policy is developed (Best, 2017). Taking this process into account, it is important for context to understand how social problems come about and are framed. It also emphasizes the importance of studying activist's reactions and how they frame issues, because it can inform policy. Additionally, it is important to understand who has the power to make claims.

The creation of claims requires grounds, warrants, and conclusions which make up the persuasiveness or rhetoric, which can be presented in many ways (Best, 2017). Grounds make up the details and proof of the claim through means of typifying cases or statistics, for example (Best, 2017). Warrants are how claims about distressing circumstances are validated and are used to convince people that something needs to be done about the situation (Best, 2017). Conclusions are the directions and suggestions as to how the problem should be handled (Best, 2017). For claims to be convincing they need to appeal to people's feelings and rationality (Best, 2017). This "frames" how the claimsmakers want the issue to be understood (Best, 2017, p. 70).

There are four main ways that frames are constructed in social movements: Bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation (Best, 2017). In bridge framing, claimsmakers often seek out like minded individuals to support their cause (Best, 2017). It is easier to make connections with people who have supported similar movements in the past (Best, 2017). Amplification framing requires the promotion of presumed universal moral values (Best, 2017). If the person cares about a specific moral issue, then they should care about the specific claim (Best, 2017). Extension framing requires claimsmakers to widen their frame to create more interest in their cause (Best, 2017). Basically, if the core reason for the claimsmaker's interest in the movement is not enough to convince a group of people, then expanding the claims to fit that interest may be necessary (Best, 2017). Lastly, transformation framing requires adopting a new way of looking at the world or issue at hand (Best, 2017).

Best identifies activists as potential claimsmakers. They try to create change often through protests, sit-ins, or other strategies to spread awareness on social issues (Best, 2017). This garners media attention for their cause as part of the process of claimsmaking (Best, 2017). However, Best points out a less public form of claimsmaking called "insider claimsmaking" (Best, 2017, p. 67). This refers to a form of claimsmaking where the claimsmaker is directly connected to policy makers and able to suggest changes from within and away from public media coverage (Best, 2017).

Additionally, Goffman's (1959) theory on presentation of self is a useful theoretical lens as this study looks at the strategies and interactions activists have when promoting change. Goffman (1959; 1990) describes human interaction through stage imagery. People are actors

who behave in different ways depending on whether they are performing in the front stage or

back stage (Goffman, 1959; 1990). There is a negotiation of relationships with the performers,

the audience, and outsiders in order to put on the best show possible (Goffman, 1959; 1990). It

sets out the dramaturgical rules of interaction and points out the risk of embarrassment that is

inevitable when humans communicate (Goffman, 1959; 1990). Social groups risk how they are

perceived every time they "perform" or interact with others (Goffman, 1959; 1990). When

entering environments, people extract as much information as they can from the other person

(Goffman, 1959; 1990). Gathering this insight allows people to control social interactions and

predict the behaviour of others to achieve desirable outcomes and minimize disruption

(Goffman, 1959; 1990).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Evolution of the Research Question

In the initial stages of this project, the research question involved wanting to better understand the lived experiences of prison activists and their perceptions of the criminal justice system. While these elements still remain an important part of the research question, it became clear as the research progressed that more focus needed to be made on the nature of the activist work itself, rather than on how the activist work informed perceptions of the criminal justice system. The struggles and limitations of activism, particularly for creating change in the prison system, are integral to understanding this group of people. The research question, having started as *what are the lived experiences of activists and their perceptions of the prison system,* evolved to *How do prison activists promote social change and problematize prisons?* Qualitative research questions need to be "refined" throughout the research process of reviewing literatures, connecting theory, and during the data collection process (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 31). Qualitative research is cyclical in nature and requires that all elements, including the research design, data collection, and analysis, be reassessed and refined as research progresses (Hennink et al., 2020).

Sampling

The sample population included people who were over the age of 19 and either self-identified as an activist or described their work as activism or advocacy. Their work was also directly related to prison issues. The six participants included in the study were composed of five women and one man. Out of these individuals only one person stated "I don't consider myself an activist," but later described their work as "activism" and "advocacy". For one

participant it was unclear how they personally identified, but identified those they worked with as activists. The other four all self-identified as activists. This group was made up of people bringing instructional programs to prisons, an academic conducting research and working with decision makers, and people who know those who are incarcerated and advocate for change and create outlets and communities for families of the incarcerated.

The original research plan included a potential 8-10 interviews which seemed possible within the timeframe of the study. However, with some delays from the ethics review process and issues with snowball sampling new research participants, doing more than six became impractical to complete the project within its parameters. The number of interviews conducted was based on practicality rather than theoretical saturation. Saturation is the point in data collection where no new information is being garnered by continuing to collect data (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink, 2020). Saturation is the goal when analyzing qualitative data, however, given how understudied prison activism is, previously established contacts were useful for defining the sample population and developing strong themes in the data.

Five of the interview participants were sampled through previously established contacts and one was sampled through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves a process of asking research participants to recommend someone who might be eligible to participate in the project. Snowball sampling with more sensitive topics is often the most ethical and effective way to sample (Hennink et al., 2020; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Prison research has a tendency to be more sensitive in nature (Stiles et al., 2012); therefore, snowball sampling was the most appropriate method. Furthermore, snowball sampling is useful when recruiting participants from informal networks (Hennink et al., 2020), which is a description that fits prison activists. This is also a relatively small population. However, snowball sampling usually works better when there

are several streams coming from different participants to engage with the complexities of the population (Hennink et al., 2020). Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) point out the main issues with snowball sampling are finding participants to create chains, verifying their eligibility, and monitoring and controlling the chains. This study was mostly unable to overcome the first hurdle. Only one person was able to be recruited through snowballing which is a limitation of the study. The purposive nature of snowball sampling requires that a population be defined and refined as research progresses (Hennink et al., 2020). This was difficult to achieve since the convenience of previously established contacts was mainly utilized. Previously established contacts were purposively sampled based on their involvement with prison activism. Having these connections created a unique opportunity and position to study this topic cue to the small nature of the sample population.

      After the completion of an interview participants were asked if they knew anyone that may be interested in participating in the project or anyone that they can connect me with. Participants reached out to their networks with little to no response. I followed up usually twice to a maximum of three times if appropriate as to not burden the research participants. One recommendation from a participant initiated contact with a potential recruit. This individual stated that they may be interested in participating but needed to ensure that the study would be anonymous. After explaining the procedures put in place to protect confidentiality and sending the consent form, the potential recruit politely declined to participate. This was accepted without question so it is unclear as to why the individual declined to participate. It is interesting that it happened after the consent form was sent. It is possible that this created a barrier and fear of participating knowing that their name had to be signed to a document that associated them with the project. Consent forms are not required by the Tri Council Policy Statement – 2, but are

normalized by research ethics boards. Collecting consent needs to be culturally appropriate and in a manner that is comfortable to the participant. More research is needed to understand why people decline to participate in qualitative studies.

Another participant was also able to connect me with a potential recruit. In this case the individual agreed to participate, however, they also had concerns with anonymity and wanted to make sure their name would not be attached to the project in any way. This is a key methodological challenge with snowball sampling. Even though they have been referred by someone you have met, snowball sampling still requires that participants trust a stranger with sensitive and private information. Building rapport and trust is important for qualitative research (Hennink et al., 2020), but this is challenging to build mainly over email communications. The participant that was successfully recruited through snowball sampling was communicated with through a phone call prior to agreeing to participate in the project, which seemed to ease any stress about participating in the project. Communication by phone with potential participants may be a better methodological process than email.

Interviews

Qualitative research is exploratory and takes a participatory, methodological stance where conclusions are drawn from what the data presents, rather than the data being used to support a hypothesis, to understand phenomenon (Hathaway, 1995). This study utilizes an interpretive paradigm approach to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of prison activists. Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) conception of the active interview informed the interview style and ontological approach to this study. Interviews are a co-created space and the active interview involves creating meaning through dynamic conversations (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This means that as the active interviewer, I need to go beyond listing off

predetermined questions to expand on relevant topics, unique perspectives, thought connections, and I need to be open to diverse possibilities (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Interpreting meaning is the most important part of active interviewing and is what should guide the practices of the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Epistemologically, since this takes a stance that reality is constructed through human interaction, it makes sense that knowledge is derived from that same human experience (Hennink et al., 2020). Knowledge is created through "interpretation and observation" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, as cited in Hennink et al., 2020). This makes interviews an appropriate method of developing understanding of phenomena and in this study which involves understanding perceptions and strategies of prison activists.

In-depth interviews are a way of creating meaning between the interviewer and interviewee through semi-structured conversations (Hennink et al., 2020). This involves developing an interaction with the purpose of understanding the research question, building "rapport" and "trust" with the interviewee, conducting questions empathetically, and "probing" to get a deep understanding of the story (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 116). In-depth interviews are typically used to elicit people's stories and experiences surrounding a specific topic of interest and involve creating understanding of people's perceptions, lived experiences, and how these things influence behaviour (Hennink et al., 2020). This made in-depth interviews an appropriate data collection method. Prison activists' perceptions of the justice system, lived experiences, and how they interact and deal with problems in their work, are all components that were discerned during the interviews. These components also help to answer the research question that involves how activists problematize prisons and their strategies for enacting change.

The interview structure followed Hennink et al. (2020) guidelines for in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to an hour and thirty

minutes with an Introduction (to outline the purpose of the study and confirm voluntariness and consent), opening questions (that are topic related to help build rapport), key questions (that get to the root of the research question), and closing questions (to fade out of the interview and avoid leaving the interviewee in an emotional state). Ending interviews on a positive note became particularly important as individuals would often talk about the frustrations and emotional labour of their work. I always tried to ensure that a positive question like 'what is the most rewarding part of your work' was left for near the end of the interview to ensure that participants left on an uplifting note.

The interviews in this study, particularly the initial few, were perhaps more structured and list-like than Holstein and Gubrium would suggest. However, as interviews progressed more opportunities for reflection and interpretation emerged to create deeper descriptions. This skill was built upon and developed as the study progressed. This also means that asking probing questions, an important part of the in-depth interview process, was lacking at certain stages of the project. This creates limitations in the knowledge acquired.

Scheduling interviews also had its challenges. It was sometimes difficult to fit interviews into participants' busy schedules and life circumstances. Occasionally, it would be weeks before hearing from individuals, people missed the meeting time or were late, the interview would need to be rescheduled, or the personal health of the participant delayed their ability to participate. These are of course all reasonable circumstances that are to be expected when conducting a research project. However, they also can create issues for organizing and timing research projects. I tried to mitigate some of these issues by being as available as possible to meet the needs and schedules of the participants.

The interviews were then transcribed without the use of transcribing tools or software. This was done to ensure accuracy, note important vocal inflections, document any behavioral observations, and to get immersed in the data. This also helps for reflecting on the data and determining my reactions and emotions surrounding the data. This helps with not only reflexivity and to avoid cherry picking the concepts that stand out at first glance, but to understand the totality of what the interviewees are saying. Schegloff (1997, as cited in Oliver 2005) believed that the participants' words are honoured when written in exact detail as it helps to avoid clinging to previously made assumptions.

Coding and Data Analysis

A combination of deductive and inductive codes were used. The deductive codes were not identified in the literature and searched for in the data, which would be methodologically problematic and improper (Hennink et al., 2020). Instead, they were discovered in the data and supported by the literature, which is how deductive codes should be presented according to Hennink et al. (2020). Inductive codes were identified using active reading (critically thinking and reflecting on data) and discerning connections, repetitions, and common phrases (Hennink et al., 2020). These codes became the basis in my analysis process. Codes were validated by making sure they were relevant, repetitious, and grounded in the data (Hennink et al., 2020). The analysis process used the framework set out by Hennink et al. (2020). Hennink et al. (2020) sets out five steps to analysis that need to be grounded in the data that were used to organize the methodology of this paper. These steps are description, comparison, categorization, conceptualization, and explanation (Hennink et al., 2020).

First, main messages and points that were being made by the interviewee were highlighted and assigned a notation that was left in the margin to describe what was stated. These

statements helped to develop codes or sometimes even themes that needed to be further broken down to understand the nuances of the concept. For example, the term "fear of helping" started as a description of what a participant stated and this description was repeated throughout the coding process of the transcripts. However, this description did not fully encapsulate the nuances of the fear and emotions that the activists experience in their work. Fear of helping was broken down further to include consequences to one's self and others, the criminalization of helping, and suppressed helping. Then the broader analysis of these themes were investigated. The theme of 'fear of helping' was conceptualized and explained through the ways that people present themselves and negotiate relationships given the challenges of activist work. It also created important ethical considerations.

Ethics

The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) for research involving human participants sets out guidelines for ethical practices in research. The core principles outlined by the TCPS2 involve informed consent, voluntariness, confidentiality, and protecting research participants from harm. Research participants need to be made aware of how the study is being conducted so they are able to make informed decisions on whether or not participating in the project is appropriate for them. It is also important that a participant's voluntariness can be withdrawn even after an interview and throughout the research process so that they have control over the data they generate. That data then needs to be made confidential, meaning that it is stripped of identifiable information and stored safely. These steps are taken to prioritize participant safety and mitigate harm. Qualitative research is also an ongoing process and "requires sustained reflection and review" even after ethics approval (Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Dempsy et al., 2016, p. 487).

There were some important ethical considerations while conducting this research. Most notably was the concern from several of the participants about "anonymity." Individuals, including those who declined to participate, made it very clear that it could become very problematic for them if they were to be identified in this research. Concerns about not being allowed access to institutions they need to work in, causing harm to those within prisons, and even concerns of personal incarceration made maintaining confidentiality the utmost importance for this study. Participants are also critical of the prison system while also relying on prison to allow them to continue their work, which makes them more vulnerable and maintaining confidentiality even more of a priority (Surmiak, 2018).

Transcripts were only observed by the researcher and supervisor and quotes were meticulously edited to protect confidentiality (Dempsy, 2016). This meant that any information given that was specific to a person's identity was not included. This went beyond simply removing identifying information such as names, places, and organizations, to exclude elements that were integral to a person's identity or stories that were so specific and unique to the individual that they could be identified. Surmiak (2018) outlines a similar process for making data confidential for vulnerable groups. Saunders et al. (2015) recommends removing names, places, ethnic background, jobs, family relationships, and any other information deemed identifiable (as cited in Surmiak, 2018). These guidelines were followed. Locations were generalized along with other identifiable descriptions that participants mentioned in accordance with Surmiak (2018). This of course created both ethical and methodological challenges. It is important as a researcher to present data as it is told by the research participant and encapsulate their lived experiences as they have presented it. Certainly, elements that are core to a person's identity should not be altered, redacted, or censored. This is ethically important because it would

be harmful to participants to present misleading interpretations of their perceptions and experiences. It is also methodologically important because researchers should not cherry pick or leave out important information about participants. It is important to conceptualize the totality of people's lived experiences. However, elements of this had to be compromised for additional ethical considerations of participant safety (Surmiak, 2018).

Ethical research conduct requires that the well-being and safety of research participants remains a top priority at all stages of the research process (TCPS2). It is also important to protect those who decline to participate in research. Even Though people who decline research are not exposed to the risks of the study being conducted, they may still be exposed to some risks (Stiles et al., 2012). Research in prison environments has been noted as a type of research where research decliners could be at risk (Stiles et al., 2012). In the context of this study, the activists are trying to work within prisons to form change. This may not be the same type of risk as prisoners may face, but association with a project that is critical of the prisons system definitely adds a layer of ethical consideration and due diligence to make sure that the same level of confidentiality that is given to research participants, is also awarded to research decliners. Concerns about being barred from prisons or negative effects for those on the inside may still apply even if the individual declined to participate. There was only one individual who declined to participate and care was taken to protect this person's confidentiality. The other element was making it abundantly clear at all stages of the research that they could decline or withdraw without any consequence. Voluntariness is critical with this type of research (Stiles et al., 2012; TCPS2). Information about the research project and the steps taken to protect confidentiality were sent to participants prior to interviews in order for participants to give informed consent

(Surmiak, 2018). Participants were also verbally asked about any concerns they may have before the interviews started (Surmiak, 2018).

The gender of participants also created ethical considerations. The sample population consisted mostly of women with only one man participating. Prison activists in general seem to be mostly women. This created concerns that simply knowing the gender of the participant could be identifiable considering the small population of prison activists. Gender neutral pseudonyms were used to help conceal the gender and identity of individuals. These names were selected from websites listing gender neutral names.

Health of participants also became a relevant issue while in the middle of a global pandemic. At the beginning of the research process, the Covid-19 pandemic appeared to be improving with parts of the community opening back up. However, the Omicron variant emerged and created additional health threats and closures that made participants feel unsafe doing an in-person interview. The goal of generating qualitative interview data is to get thick descriptions of lived experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The location of interviews is part of the context in which these thick descriptions are generated (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This means the location is important for data analysis and that the interview location needs to be a place where people will feel comfortable to share their experiences. Interviews need to take place where the researchers and participants felt most comfortable.

Before Omicron was becoming a variant of concern, one interview did take place in person. This interview took place in a small coffee shop. After that, due to the Omicron COVID-19 variant, participants felt uncomfortable doing in-person interviews. Since my methodology and ethical procedures were proposed on the basis of creating environments where participants felt comfortable and safe, it was only logical to move interviews for those participants online.

Zoom was utilized for the sole purpose of being able to see and communicate with participants as it has been utilized in several other research studies (Lobe et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). Passwords and waiting rooms were utilized to prevent zoom bombing, as recommended by Lobe et al. (2020). No other Zoom features like recording or transcribing were used due to issues of ownership and how information is stored. The interviews were recorded on a separate password protected device, just like in person. Email correspondence was deleted as soon as possible after being received or sent (Lobe et al., 2020) from both the inbox and deleted folders.

There were definite benefits to moving the interviews online, other than participants feeling more at ease. Doing interviews in public spaces is challenging. You have to find a place that is small, quiet, in a location convenient to the participant, and a place that the participant feels comfortable. Even in these ideal situations there are still the distractions of the atmosphere: other people, other conversations, people walking by, and the shock of being in a new location. There were also rigorous safety protocols put in place including mask wearing, social distancing, sanitizing surfaces, and providing masks and hand sanitizer which can create barriers to building rapport. These distractions are minimized in online interviews as both participant and researcher are in their own homes or a quiet location of their choosing. It also means that everyone is likely in an environment where they feel comfortable and safe. Furthermore, people were also very familiar and comfortable using Zoom because they had been using it over the course of the pandemic. Only one participant used Zoom for the first time in their interview. Lastly, Zoom allowed me to check-in with my facial expressions and better understand what the participant was seeing in my behaviour. This allowed me to adjust accordingly and present myself in a way

that encouraged further discussion of the topics as well as eliminate facial expressions that may

be negatively interpreted by participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Problematizing the Prison System

The participants' motivations to change the prison system were rooted in wanting to

address the systemic issues in prisons. The participants identified issues of colonization, poverty,

mental health struggles, substance abuse issues, aging prison populations, misconduct from the

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), and problems associated with a focus on punishment.

The demographic issues that can be seen when looking at prison populations were a concern to

the participants and important for how they framed prison issues. One participant, Alex, stated:

> I try to show people that crime is divorced from punishment. Like I think that until
> we recognize that the system is broken in the way that privilege and marginality
> determine whether someone goes to prison much more than like the commission of
> deviant acts. So, I don't know, you need people to care about their communities. It's
> so hard, like in the social problems sphere … people are overwhelmed with what
> to care about and what they know about. I find that most people are genuinely good
> and when they learn about the issues in the prison system like especially like racial
> overrepresentation, and issues of poverty and addiction, and increasingly people
> are being concerned by the different ways that gender is impacting incarceration …
> so people are often like shocked like 'no it's a fair system you wouldn't have
> different conditions based on gender or race or class' and so yeah that's the only
> way I know how, is trying to reframe the way people think about prison. [pause]
> away from that neoliberal idea that you are an individual who is bad. (Alex)

This quote is a good summary of many of the structural issues that motivate the participants to

enact change and the transformative framing used to change world views (Best, 2017). It also

sets the stage as to how prison issues are framed by activists. Issues of inequality that stem from

systemic issues and cultural norms are what make prisons problematic. The notion of

neoliberalism that is in the patriarchy and white supremacy that enable prisons and punishment

and suppress those in poverty, people of colour, women, and the queer community (Peck, 2003;

Davis, 2003; Giroux, 2004, 2009, as cited in Piché & Larsen, 2010; Sudbury, 2004). This also

connects to the need for gender specific processes in the criminal justice system (O'Brian & Ortega, 2015). Participants noted that a general lack of awareness of these issues by members of the public perpetuates systemic problems.

The data suggests that framing the issues in prisons is reliant on pointing out and making people aware of the systemic inequalities that are present in prisons. Another participant, Blake, when asked how these issues can be explained to people who are unaware, pointed out:

> You start by maybe looking at who is incarcerated and stepping back and kinda taking a critical look at colonization, at capitalism, racial capitalism, like I think that's a great place to start, so that you put the human aspect, but you put it in a context. Because otherwise it's hard to make sense of abolition. People just kinda freak out, but if you put it in the context of the broader structural inequities that's a very powerful, I think, conversation. And that's a helpful conversation. (Blake)

Making connections to how larger systemic inequities translate to the demographics of prison is key to how prison issues are framed by participants. This quotation also resonates with Estes et al. (2021) who talk about how economic structures and racial capitalism are failing people of colour and those in poverty. Furthermore, Blake's conception of appealing to the "human aspect" of incarceration is important as capitalist structures have been critiqued by Estes et al (2021, p. 256) for being "anti-life" or anti-humanity. From the perspective of participants, the problem is the lack of humanity associated with larger systemic issues.

Colonization as the Problem

Participants linked the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in prison to colonization several times. The problem with this issue is often framed as the lack of awareness that people have surrounding it. Framing strategies used by the activists often try to emphasize this. Alex stated:

> I meet a lot of dominant reactions like people go to prison because they are bad. Then I say "do you think that Indigenous people are more bad than white people?" to which they say 'no.' And then I say "are you aware that over half of women

serving life sentences are Indigenous" and they say 'no.' I try to use evidence to change people's minds and then, yeah, what I find is that most people don't have...don't come in with strong senses of the system. Then I try to help them, but I think also people who take the time to interact with me must be in an open minded enough space that I'm certainly not interacting with all people in this country about it. (Alex)

People's understanding of crime and criminality is limited, which leads to misunderstandings about who makes up prison populations and how the criminal justice system functions, according to participants. This is also an example of bridge framing, where often activists are engaging with people who are open to their ideas (Best, 2017). Furthermore, ensuring people understand the process of crime and incarceration and how historical events create pathways to criminality was also talked about. Regarding this issue Blake stated:

you make links with residential schools and the 60's scoop and the child welfare system, like when you start to make links and that the prison is sort of the natural outcome, not the end point but certainly a part of that sort of, what has happened to Indigenous populations, that can be very powerful. (Blake)

The data suggests that disadvantages and historical inequalities become the necessary focus for understanding criminality and who ends up in prisons. Crime and substance addictions are seen as natural responses to systemic oppression for participants.

Another participant, Frankie, recognized these pathways of equality starting from childhood. The trauma of communities dealing with systemic inequalities is prevalent with issues of intergenerational trauma and explained in this quote:

I don't wanna see kids that have already been damaged and already gone through, you know, this sort of horrible pipeline that has all these root causes that I don't need to explain, and you know again foster system, corrections system, all Indigenous, you know [here] of course it's not 100% but it's certainly 70-80% it's ridiculously high numbers and so that, that sort of fundamental racism of that system along with the sort of bureaucratic sort of good intentioned nightmare … Like I can't fix it, I cannot fix the system, I would love to, I can't. Like I can push and I do but I can't reconstitute that entire pipeline, that entire system and all of those colonial kind of assumptions that we make. I can't fix all that, I can't fix the history, I can't fix the present day. But I know it and that helps, right. (Frankie)

This quote not only outlines the racial and systemic inequalities that lead vulnerable groups into

the criminal justice system pointed out by participants, but the frustrations and inadequacies that

participants feel when working in the prison system and trying to change it.

Criminalization of Mental Health and Substance Abuse as the Problem

Another issue that was raised frequently by the participants was the overrepresentation of

people with mental health and substance abuse issues in prison. This is often related to trauma as

well as systemic issues of colonialism. Frankie framed the issue of substance use as follows:

> There's this good person, you know there's a good person. They don't tend to do
> anything wrong and yet they've been involved with the justice system their whole
> life. And essentially that's because they have substance addictions and that's the
> reason ... Accept for the reasoning goes back further than that because why do they
> have addiction? Well they have addiction because, essentially ... the racist kind of
> system under which we operate … has set up lives for people, or driven people
> into situations where they inevitably have dysfunction and often times alcoholism
> or other substance problems and Certainly mental health problems and like all of
> these things that then become the sort of immediate cause of them being
> incarcerated. And ... a system that is essentially corrupt, it's essentially wrong.
> (Frankie)

This continues to frame the process of criminality and prison demographics. It is a combination

of the challenges of dealing with the traumas that stem from systemic inequities and dealing with

a criminal justice system that is discriminatory in its very design. This connects with Dobchuk-

Land's (2017) conceptions of tough on crime strategies that specifically target Indigenous

populations leading to increased contacts and overrepresentation.

The issue of substance abuse and mental health is also framed as an issue of care. People

who struggle with these issues do not receive appropriate care while they are in prison and their

health can actually get worse. Charlie stated:

> A lot of the ones I see now are just purely mental health struggles. We've seen it
> just go to crazy, you know, 15 years ago oh a lot of them are mental health struggles.
> They walk around talking to themselves, the walls, but it is now to just an extreme

point that these people need care. You know, they don't need to be locked up with a whole bunch of violence, you know that's exactly not what they need, they need care. And you know a junkie who's going out robbing things to support some crap habit. You know, they need rehabilitation, appropriate rehabilitation. There's no trauma care in prisons. One of the things that really, I must have spent 6 weeks working on that one, there's no trauma therapy. So if you come in with serious trauma and the vast majority of them have, there is no trauma counseling. You know how can that be? (Charlie)

Therefore, not only are people's trauma, substance abuse, and mental health struggles rooted in systemic problems, but they are also not receiving care to deal with those very issues. Additionally, another participant observed that mental health struggles are becoming increasingly prevalent in prison populations with Blake stating "what I've seen more and more is prisoners with mental health issues and like severe mental health issues." Prison issues related to mental health are framed as getting worse, creating a need for change to address these issues.

However, sometimes the scope of claimsmaking needs to widen to peak people's interest. Best (2017) describes this as extension framing. Charlie provides an example of this process below:

I honestly believe that if human beings knew these realities they'd be screaming. Because again if you don't personally care about this con, the son of a bitch was a bad guy screw ya, he is gonna be out there in this state of desperation and run into your mother, your girlfriend, your grandma. So if you don't care about the junkie cause they're just a junkie, for your own self-interest you should be going wait a minute, where is all that billions of dollars going ... almost every day I just feel like I am in Twilight Zone. How can we be, from any objective measure, be doing the exact wrong thing over and over and over again and just be okay about it. I mean it's just crazy. (Charlie)

If the systemic overrepresentation of people with substance abuse and mental health struggles is not enough to make people care about prison issues, this narrative is expanded to include issues of personal and public safety, and the frustrations of not dealing with that reality.

Misconduct by the CSC as the Problem

This leads into issues of criminal justice processes that are linked with these systemic

issues. Accounts of misconduct and issues of functioning with the Correctional Service of

Canada (CSC) were numerous in the interviews. Issues with poor medical standards, abuse from

guards, and inconsistencies from wardens were mentioned. Evan Stated:

> Are you going to punish him every freakin' day of his life while he's in there. You know with the lack of food or medical care or even a counselor to talk to him. Never, he hasn't had a counselor to talk to in 17 years. When his mental is...who he uses is me. you know he calls me up right away and we talk it through. (Evan)

This statement also includes the issue of punishment. All of the participants problematized how

the criminal justice system focuses on punishment rather than community building. Furthermore,

these issues of lack of care and misconduct are the result of illogical and flawed thinking of those

in power that refuse to listen to results of academic studies and investigations into prisons.

Charlie Stated:

> We are throwing billions and billions and billions of dollars [throwing arms in the air like they are throwing money] to this massive, one of the strongest unions in the country that get every benefit you've ever heard of. You have to have grade 12 education, a guard, grade 12 education. How is that possible that we just keep doing this shit and doing [continuing to gesture with arms].. as I say to everybody, don't listen to me, read one of the office of the correction investigator reports, OCI … And they tell you that guards are like their own gang. That they will beat you, rape you, steal from you blah blah blah blah like he tells you this. He tells you that some idiot in the federal government comes up with some new idiotic idea and regardless of the fact that it is worse for the inmates and costs the tax payers more money, I could go on and on and they just do it anyhow … How they have videos of guards beating the shit out of some inmate on video and nothing happens. How we have the racism, the sexism … if you are a tranny oh my god your life every single day. If you're a druggie, if you're a certain religious background, if you're small, if you're fat, if you're...your life will be a living hell every single day. And then you get out. (Charlie)

This quote frames issues in prisons as a result of powerful structures refusing to change and the

treatment of people who are looked down upon in society. It also connects with Law (2011) who

stated that people who are transgender or part of other marginalized groups suffer more in prisons due to intersectionality.

Further issues of power imbalances were also present in the discourse. Maintaining power was more important to prison wardens than people's humanity. This meant preventing programs or creating barriers to positive changes for the incarcerated. Evan stated:

> I realize now the system is like the old boys club, they don't fire anybody. The warden will get a tap on the wrist and, you know, he's got a brand new car and brand new house and he'll just move to some other place that he'll destroy, you know, and treat the people there and control the staff and demoralize everybody … And they just take … what the governments written and they interpret it to their own... he's got a lot of power, a lot of power, and people don't know that. And power makes men, most of the time men, do terrible things [we laugh]. You know he's taken so much away from them that would give them some ability to even be proud of themselves and want to live, most of them don't wanna live anymore. they're starting to slit their wrists or overdose on drugs and, you know, they don't care anymore. (Evan)

This quote illustrates how systemic issues of colonization, wealth inequality, mental health struggles, and substance use issues are ignored to gain and maintain power and control. These struggles with power systems relate to the concept of the prison industrial complex where system leaders, such as wardens, are profiting off prisons (Sudbury, 2004). This need for wardens to maintain power and control can also create barriers for bringing meaningful programs inside prisons. When asked about the challenges of getting a program approved by a warden, Alex stated:

> With [this warden], it was the worst I have ever experienced and it was just power. It was "I'm the decision maker here and I'm not gonna deal with your program" was how [the warden] phrased it. [Another activist] was able to branch off and do really great stuff and so have the others, but essentially curtailed [the program] and that was so crappy. But in most cases you have really good individuals working in prisons who are also often unhappy with the structure and so you find those allies and you work with them and that's how really good, like where the program's been strongest in [Canadian province] the CSC employees champion the program. So it just depends, every conversations different. But I couldn't beat [this warden] ... I

white flagged and I'm like "I hope [this other activist] can do better" [laughs]. (Alex)

Participants felt that progress in improving prisons or taking steps toward an alternative approach to prisons is impeded by decision makers that refuse to change. Attempts to offer services like educational programs or workshops are made futile if they are not approved by decision makers in the prison system.

It was also mentioned by participants that certain rules create barriers for people's recovery. There is a lack of counseling services and drug programs in prison according to the interviewees. However, these issues even expand into community corrections. Charlie stated:

> … in the real bigger picture … we don't understand that when you go to prison if you're not already a druggie you probably will become one … we don't understand how drugs are just everywhere. With really good reason, but we don't understand that and we don't understand that when you get out of prison, now as a junkie you can't go into a rehab facility. It's set up that you have to be out on the street for 30 days before they will take you … You know you'll hear some asshole say [deepens voice for imitation] 'well if you're a druggie you got yourself into it' or 'okay if you're a druggie, if you want to get clean go to rehab' but we don't have a place for you to go. (Charlie)

The functionality of programs is seen as problematic and is attributed to the mismanagement of resources by the CSC.

Cultural Attitudes Towards Punishment as the problem

However, these issues exceed problems in the criminal justice system of misconduct, colonization, and other systemic issues. There are also cultural issues and problems with how the public perceive crime and those who commit crime. Drew Stated this when talking about running their program inside prisons:

> Obviously prison comes up but it's not about prison they're already living that. You know, it turns out that there's more to them than that and so we mostly just talk about other things. But, you know, I think it helps the [people on the outside] understand what prison is about. Why, you know, they meet these people and they're like 'these are pretty normal, smart people they don't seem like horrible

monsters they're just like normal guys.' And so then, so my, my hope anyway, and I think they do this, is that they then go out and are like wait hold it, we kind of get told that prison is where all the bad people go, but actually some people in there seem to be pretty decent people who have like done some bad things. So I see that as kind of an activist move. And even just I don't know I mean even just the idea that so few people when you're incarcerated, so few people just talk to you like you're a smart human with thoughts. Like it's sad that I get to consider that a little bit of activism. (Drew)

This quote encapsulates how societal perceptions of people who commit crime can create atmospheres where they are not even treated as human beings. Therefore, understanding these systemic issues and cultural understanding of prison populations humanizes people and sets a standard for how all people should be treated. The problem is framed as an ethical and moral issue of the treatment of human beings in the prison system and in communities. This issue is supported by Roberts and Hough (2005) who found that public values of punishment for those who commit crime were held in higher regard than any form of rehabilitation. Additionally, Jackson and Meiners (2010) observed that university students were mostly receptive to prisons being problematic, but resisted notions of abolition as they were caught up in what punishment is deserved by those who commit crime. Change is difficult when society does not recognize their perceptions and ideas are problematic and uninformed.

These cultural issues are further perpetuated by a perception that Canada's justice system is "fair." If people do not understand that there are entrenched issues with Canadian prisons and believe that prisons are serving an appropriate response to crime, then that poses challenges for enacting change. A few participants brought up this issue:

Canada has the reputation for being, you know, more benign … I think that has been … A little bit of a red herring … because we don't have capital punishment for example, but we have really long sentences, we have consecutive sentences, you know, we have smaller populations, the prisoners are smaller, but proportionally to our general population like we incarcerate a lot of people … Canada maybe rides on this reputation of being more liberal, kinder, gentler prison

than in the States, but to me I feel like it's just more insipid, it's more hidden. (Blake)

I had no idea about the prison system or its problems. I just kinda assumed Canada was like a fair country and the system was relatively straight forward and within the parameters of law and then I experienced a system completely divorced from law and from public perception about it where really marginalized people were punished and community members didn't understand that … At the height of the Steven Harper … policy overhaul there were really terrible, terrible attitudes about incarceration dominating Canadian culture and of course at a policy and systems level, the system was being restructured in super punitive ways. (Alex)

This means that prison issues are largely hidden which connects to the concept of people being

unaware of the systemic issues in prisons. This connects with the concept of the depoliticized

nature of prison issues where prisons are removed from political conversations (Nichols, 2014,

as cited in Dobchuk-Land, 2017). Furthermore, participants also mentioned that due to the

isolated nature of prisons, it is hard for people to care or be aware of prison issues:

I think that because so many people are so far removed from prison that prison abolition seems terrifying and meaningless to them. Right they think that it's just let the, like let the doors open and all of the murders can just like go and run around and murder people. Cause I think that's just what they hear when you're just like 'abolish prisons.' And you're like 'no, no, no it's actually just about changing how we deal with things that we don't want people to do. (Drew)

The issue of prisons happening in isolation and away from public knowledge, means that educating

people on prison issues is a particular challenge. Especially considering the challenges of creating

change regarding visible issues like homelessness, as Charlie points out:

My whole job is to make you think so...we pass homeless people on the street, we pass you know the junkies and whatever at least it's there. Now it might not make you change your particular moral view of anything depending on how far up your butt your head is, but prisoners and the justice system is absolutely invisible...It's mind boggling to me how entirely ignorant people are ... There'll be a story about, you know, guards beating to death some dude, usually back east, and the response will be 'you do the crime, do the time' or 'yeah well you probably deserved it'. It's really mind boggling to me how any human could have that as their default but I tell everybody if you see, you know, a junkie on the street you go '[makes raspberry noise]' I have to understand what that's about. So if you see it and you still have that attitude I entirely understand that the mountain that I have to climb to educate

> you about the so called justice system is gonna be really hard. It's gonna be a steep climb. (Charlie)

Since what happens in prisons takes place away from the view of the public, it is not necessarily being detected or thought about by those who are not involved directly. Andrews et al. (2016) points out that people's propinquity to social movements can increase or decrease their support in the cause. This issue, combined with the entrenched cultural stigma of those who commit crime makes it extremely challenging to make people care about prison issues and any solutions there may be to fixing those issues. However, research has shown that education tends to make people more receptive to activist ideologies (Bobo & Licari, 1989, as cited in Andrews et al., 2016). Additionally, this quote talks about issues of guard abuse, which is present in the literature (Barry, 2000). This showcases how cultural ideas and systemic problems lead to poor treatment of those who are incarcerated.

Prison Activist Strategies

Given that prison problems are framed by lack of awareness of systemic issues, entrenched, problematic cultural ideas that stigmatize people who commit crime, and the lack of support for those who commit crime in dealing with those systemic and cultural issues, strategies for enacting change are centered around education. The participants emphasized the importance of education through media articles, teaching students, teaching courses on the inside of prisons, and talking to the community.

Educating Communities

Academic research is used by the activists to educate people and inform policy. When asked to describe her work, Alex stated:

> I describe my activism as at the intersection of action and the academy. So I do.. oh I have a really integrated approach, I do several different research informed projects, mixed methods qualitative and quantitative, and also try to become

employed by social purpose organizations who work to create immediate change in prison. And then I am building up my academic career with hopes of becoming a public scholar to raise awareness as to what I call the crises of the Canadian prison system. (Alex)

In this quote, educating people about systemic issues in prison through conducting research and using that evidence to influence decision makers is what makes up the core of activism. This relates to Sudbury's (2009) description of how activist groups can, at times, work collaboratively with correctional systems. This is also a form of insider claimsmaking, where Alex is trying to create direct connections with decision makers to enact change (Best, 2017). Blake describes this technique as 'taking up public space':

I love writing papers with people, you know, who have first-hand experience and knowledge. And like so it's a way of, sort of what I'm focusing on these days, so it's a way of taking up public space with a knowledge that needs to be shared. That knowledge that doesn't normally get shared, so that's it's just very rewarding to do that. And you get to hang out with your friends and do this kind of work. (Blake)

Furthermore, the power of education and educational structures to not only mold perspectives but to gain access to hard to reach populations, like those in prisons:

well I think, you know, Universities are really supporting these EDI goals … equity, diversity, and inclusivity and I think one has to look at the prison population. Universities are wanting to decolonize to Indigenize the academy and, you now, just like the truth and reconciliation calls for we have to create opportunities and remove barriers and to shift what's taught, how it's taught and so I think there is a natural responsibility for Universities to take up prison populations … I think the University can learn a lot [emphasized] from educating prisons, especially in terms of decolonizing. So I think criminology programs really need to shift, you know …Yeah I think the academy going in and supporting prisons and it is the one institution that seems to be able to challenge the prison. (Blake)

There was a sense from participants that educational systems have a responsibility not only to educate people on the systemic issues of prisons, but to use their power to change the way criminology students are being taught and help to improve the education and wellbeing of those who are incarcerated.

Some of the activists conducted talks to various groups, like university students, church goers, and advocacy groups to spread the word and enact prison change. The importance of making people think about these issues and reevaluate opinions and understanding of how prisons function was a priority. Charlie stated:

> I will lecture anytime anywhere, whether there is two people or 200 or 2000 and predominately most of lectures ... really right now are mostly for universities and colleges, some churches, occasionally an advocacy group. Then one of the people who had heard me lecture got radicalized and started a group at [their] university and then they started on the internet, [network], so you can find it at [website]. And so there has certainly been some forward movement. I'm not just doing this every day for nothing, there has been some forward movement. (Charlie)

Furthermore, media articles are another way that prison issues are made known to the public. However, Charlie pointed out that simply reading a media article is not necessarily enough to get people to care about their communities:

> People will all the time say to me 'well why do you do all these lectures, you know, it's so time consuming and what do you get out of it?' Well I've come to the conclusion that pieces in the paper and stuff are great, it might make you think but because the prison system is so invisible, just reading something in the paper isn't likely gonna sway you. I've really come to decide that it's important that you get to know some of us and hear our real truths of what we deal with every day and then throw, hopefully a little bit of facts and stats and reality in there so that we can try to touch people on a more individual basis … if you can get a couple of those people to think, you know they might blab to their friends or their family and I really think it has to go, to a great extent much more to an individual basis. (Charlie)

The process of educating and changing cultural ideas to fix systemic issues is slow and gradual. The support of individuals needs to be gained before groups and society can change. Therefore, establishing awareness and educating people at every opportunity possible is hugely important for social change.

The participants enacted different strategies for educating people and getting people to think and care about prison issues. Some of these strategies included appeals to logic (as seen above), appeals to emotion, appeals to humanity, and appeals to relatable circumstances. It can

be difficult for people to make sense of the concept of prison abolition or the need to care for

those on the inside. Simply appealing to logic is not always successful as Charlie points out:

> So trying to talk to somebody just using reason and logic is gonna get you nowhere,
> if you follow what I'm saying…You know, I could be telling you all about, you
> know, that most inmates have been sexually and physically abused, most of them,
> we closed all the nut houses and the mental health people, the homeless people all
> end up in jail. As a culture, I mean, I could go on and on and on. But again if you're
> the type of person who doesn't have that basic maybe compassion, maybe empathy,
> you're not gonna hear these words and have it mean much. So that's really stuck in
> my mind. I've even put that in my lectures and in my writing. And just coming to
> you with facts and details and whatever, if you've already gone to what we call the
> dark side, and you have this strong opinion, you know, bring back capital
> punishment, me telling you the facts of why it doesn't work isn't gonna sway you.
> Unfortunately, you need to see me telling my horrible scary stories and seeing me
> break down and that's really what is needed. (Charlie)

Gaining emotional responses is a way of getting people to engage, think about, and remember

prison issues. Best (2017) suggests that emotional rhetoric that can warrant powerful responses

of anger or shock is usually the most useful to change people's minds. However, it is often more

useful for populations seen as vulnerable like stigmatized prison populations. This is a type of

frame amplification where emotion is aroused by stories that the activist believes people ought to

care about (Best, 2017). It is also a way of connecting with people's humanity, which is another

strategy that was utilized. Alex Stated:

> when you have people who hate you without knowing you speaking public about
> how you don't deserve human rights or to be a participant in the community and
> then when you look at the composition of who's incarcerated and why they are
> incarcerated, I think that people are speaking largely out of informed perspectives,
> but in ways that create a lot of harm. A lot of people in prison have very low self-
> esteem and self-confidence and those messages that there is no place for them in
> the world has, often, irreversible impact. A lot of people die in prison. (Alex)

This quote showcases a call for people to care about the incarcerated as human beings as they are

treated in less than humane ways. It also connects to the findings of Roberts and Hough (2005)

who point out that members of the public are often unaware or less likely to consider issues of

increased suicides and deaths in prison due to lack of media coverage on the matter. People also have a skewed idea as to who people who commit crime are and appealing to the humanity of these individuals was very important. Drew stated:

> A lot of people say 'I hope that person rots in jail' about a lot of people who are actually like full and interesting human beings. This is just not a helpful way for us to be thinking about people. Like I really hope they don't do it again … that we can like do some things so that people don't like harm each other, I think that's worthwhile. … Okay so like the convoy organizers have been like denied bail and I'm like I'm glad they're not getting whatever their truck money anymore, like that's good. I'm glad they have been, you know, removed from yelling outside people's houses. That's also good. But like am I really gonna celebrate them being held in jail, like not real. Like I don't know what a good solution is but that is just not … celebration worthy. So I think that's where I find myself kinda at odds with … some popular opinion where I'm like I'm not excusing anything that they did but if … you just start following the threads it just gets really hard to celebrate anybody getting sent to jail. (Drew)

It can be difficult for people to disconnect crime and punishment. The retributive model that is used in Canadian society requires that people pay for the crimes they commit. The participants noted that Canadians are culturally hardwired to think about what people who commit crime deserve rather than what they need. Jackson and Meiners (2010) determined that when teaching students about prison abolition, they were able to recognize the problems in prisons, but did not support the idea of abolishing them because they were caught up with ideas of punishment. The activists emphasized the idea that people who commit crime are human beings that are "full and interesting" so it is important to find alternative ways of dealing with behaviours that everyone agrees they do not want to happen.

Additionally, there is the issue that people are often far removed from prisons. Drew described a technique for describe the concept of prison abolition to undergraduate students:

> So my favourite way of turning undergrads into abolitionists is to have this conversation [said excitedly] ... I'll say 'okay so what's your university plagiarism policy?' and they'll be like 'oh well if you copy something you get, like you fail the class, whatever'... and then I say 'like kay, so … who here has ever been

tempted to plagiarize something like ever? like to copy somebody's answers on a test, you know like calc one really stressful big exam were you tempted to look over? Like oh you had no time to, you know, to do that essay were you like super tempted to like see if you could copy something, like right? ... and almost all of them are like yeah I've been tempted … And then I say 'you know well why were you tempted? Were you tempted 'cause you were just like 'oh screw the system, the system sucks, I don't believe in morality, I'm just gonna cheat?' and then they're like 'no, I just didn't have time, or I was stressed, or I wasn't feeling prepared.' And I was like 'right. so … what about the punishment for plagiarism addresses any of the reasons why you might have wanted to cheat in the first place?' and they're like 'I guess it's kind of a deterrent.' And I was like 'yeah, but it's not gonna stop you from having those reasons.' And then I'll say 'okay then how much would you have to change to come up with a different system that actually addressed, like we agree that we don't want people to cheat, but now you have to think about what a different system would look like that addressed why people cheat in the first place. And they're like 'that would look pretty different' and I was like 'yeah [we laugh] that's the entire point. That's...' and I was like 'that's what abolition's about.' (Drew)

This helps to put prison issues into a context that is relatable to the group whose values and ideas are trying to be changed. This is more of a transformational framing approach where people are asked to completely change and rethink their world view (Best, 2017). Given the issues of many people being far removed from prisons, techniques are used to bridge this gap and create understanding of prison issues and prison abolition.

Education also becomes a way of helping prison populations get some of the support they are missing. If part of the issue is that prisons take vulnerable people and isolate them, education is a way of bringing people together and helping them develop skills. Charlie stated:

[someone I know on the inside], you know, is just taking part in a [program] to get university education. And [they're] just finishing up the first part and well I believe it's certainly gonna change [their] life. The success of [they have] and the project means that other inmates will potentially have the same opportunity, which I could talk about that all day. How can we not want to educate people who are mostly illiterate? (Charlie)

Education becomes a necessary way of empowering people to change their lives. Prison populations lack care and skills and education helps to fill these gaps. However, gaining access

to further education is no easy task in Canadian prisons. Many of the prison activists in this study

had to deal with the frustrations of trying to establish educational programs in prisons. Evan

stated:

> I've put a lot of money and effort into getting [their] education outside what they offer ... and these are things that they wouldn't do, I had to fight. I had to fight the system and you know, to me, an organization that is supposed to be preparing our inmates to come back out into the world and be productive citizens again and, you know, pay your taxes and, you know, the rehabilitation is zero. Like I think they offer anger management and that would make me angry [we laugh]. And he had already graduated from high school so everything they have … No positive movement to move these [people] on to the next stage. (Evan)

The promotion of the need for further education in prisons is based on the fact that prisons have

been unsuccessful in completing the rehabilitation component of their "purpose." It is also made

evident in the quote that the idea of rehabilitation emphasized by prisons is false and not present

in the way prisons function. This connects to the literature which is clear that rehabilitation and

deterrence are not realities of the current justice system (Mathiesen, 1990, as cited in Piché &

Larsen, 2010, p. 393).

Building Communities

The concept of building community was also very important to the participants.

Education was one of the ways utilized to build community with prison populations. Frankie

stated:

> introducing that idea of meeting people where they are and helping them get access to education that they need, that's really very important to me and that was a really powerful experience. So when I came [to this location] and I started working for [this organization] I worked in a community called [this] doing kind of similar work. You know, very community, grass roots kind of like what do people need. First-aid, let's offer a first-aid course, or you need math upgrading, let's do math upgrading, or we need a university level course, let's do that. (Frankie)

This quote connects the concepts of education and community, which is so important to the

activists. It also points out that the strategies of education and building community are not

mutually exclusive. Education is a way of building community and building community can help

educate individuals and bring new perspectives. Larson (2011) points out that educational

programs can create community by deconstructing cultural distinctions between the incarcerated

and non-incarcerated communities. If building community is the goal, then education is a bridge

or building block to achieving that goal.

However, the conversations about community building did not stop there and were very

prevalent in the interviews. The systemic issues of prisons are seen as tearing communities apart,

so rebuilding these injustices was very important to the activists. Alex stated:

> Help works when there's social safety nets. So the underlying conditions of
> incarceration are social. They're related to wealth and addiction. So if you stop
> putting people in cages and put them in treatment centers, then they tend to do well.
> And if you provide people in communities where they feel place in community,
> then they tend to do well. (Alex)

When asked what steps need to be taken establishing these goals of community building, Alex

continued:

> I think we need to put people with lived experience in the decision making spaces.
> So that the people that are making the policies and the laws can understand the
> impacts of them. And then like systematically I think that everything that Stephen
> Harper did needs to be undone, which the liberals are doing a good job of, albeit
> quietly. I think that if you do all this work outside of the public sphere and you
> don't include communities then the stigma is gonna remain. (Alex)

Communities are also, seemingly, left out of the decision-making processes and consequently do

not develop an appreciation for prison issues. The participants noted a need for inclusivity in the

importance of building community.

Family members and those who know people on the inside of prisons are often lacking

community and solidarity. For Charlie, building these relationships and removing barriers for

families to connect is of the utmost importance:

> So, when I first started going for visits to see [them in prison] … I couldn't eat for
> days before going, you'd be ready to puke the whole time you were going there,

you were so terrified … Everybody doesn't make eye contact, they sit with their shoulders kinda slump, like they look like they're gonna cry any minute … their all intimidated, you know they're living in the fucking twilight zone and they have so much paranoia and all that shame and embarrassment and of course CSC really discourages any kind of communication between visitors … you're not supposed to say anything or have any kind of communication with anybody else … So, they go out of their way … to discourage any kind of most basic kindness or communication. So … I would spot a newbie, you know, I try to smile you know 'hi how are you?' 'you'll make it through today' or you know this kind of thing. (Charlie)

Building community was also presented in simply showing kindness and making real connections with people. The concept of treating people as human beings was very prevalent in the interviews. Sudbury (2008) talked about the significance of connecting with incarcerated populations and standing up against state violence and censorship in order to minimize the marginalization of people. Frankie stated:

If I am able to make a connection with somebody where they can trust me, that's amazing because I'm working with people with very, very good reason not to trust anyone, right? … That helps me to understand that I have made a connection with someone and like a few years ago we sort of changed the way that, well I changed it, I really sort of made a decision to [sighs] focus less on the academic aspects of this and more on the well-being aspect ... So it was something that kind of came to me and then it took me a little a while and I realized how key that was. That allowing people to just feel like human beings, just that alone was huge … Sometimes just little, little things like someone will come into the [session] and I'll work with them a bit and they'll come and they'll be 'you know you have the best coffee. The coffee in here is better than anything else in the building and I really appreciate that'. (Frankie)

All of these issues are interconnected and contribute to how prisons are problematized by prison activists. Furthermore, people's lack of awareness and investment in issues of colonization, poverty, and mental health also becomes part of the problem. Participants pointed out the significance of educating the public on prison matters is a key part in enacting change as well as educating those on the inside to give them some of the care they are lacking. The systemic issues also indicate the major issues of inequality, observed by the activists, within

communities. Community building is a major component of the participants' values and "treating people as human beings" helps to solve part of the cultural issues surrounding attitudes towards prisoners. Strategies of appealing to logic, emotion, humanity, and relatable circumstances create the warrants and grounds to the claims being made about prisons in the most persuasive rhetoric possible. However, the concept of exposure is rooted in all of these approaches. The idea that if people knew the issues or had contact with those incarcerated that meaningful change could be created. Blake sums up this idea of community building by exposure quite nicely:

> Part of the work I do is connecting the non-incarcerated with the formerly incarcerated. And when they meet they're always surprised by how interesting the other person is, by what they have in common … like even when you get out of prison you're really isolated, you're in halfway houses, the stigma follows you, you tend to not connect with non-incarcerated. So, you know, we have a group … and … we got some funding, and we meet for meals and we bring non-incarcerated and formerly incarcerated members together. And it's just about building community … So, when people are actually exposed to these ideas, what I find is they're really open to them. … it's a really radical way to create connections and friendships as an activist, you know, this creating communities and friendships is an activism that is really rewarding and it just sort of takes care of itself when people start meeting people normally they would not have anything to do with. (Blake)

The concept of building community also forms the roots of how some of the activists got involved in their work. Frankie, for example, Frankie believes in the concept of "meeting people where they're at." Blake also views their activism as being rooted in exposure to prison populations and the desire to build these communities:

> My activism has been really formed by going inside prisons. … it really was going into prisons that I learned about feminism. That's, you know, and about community and the importance of building community and how that was important to people on the inside, so like the prisoners, and people on the outside like myself and a sense of being taken care of and caring for, a sense of solidarity.. (Blake)

Themes of solidarity were fairly prevalent in the literature and connect well to Blake and the activists' conceptions of community. Jeffries and Ridgley (2020) discuss the topic of sanctuary cities where inclusivity is of the utmost importance and governments and powerful institutions are

limited in their ability to punish and exclude populations through transformative and grassroots policies. This to help foster solidarity in communities. The participants are critical of political structures that seek to exclude certain groups of people and believe that exposure to new ideas and different people can help build a stronger sense of community and belonging.

Challenges of Prison Activism

The activists in this study had to deal with a multitude of different relationships in their work. Managing the different aspects of working with public reactions, negotiating relationships with prison and other administrations, making connections with incarcerated individuals, and developing ideas with fellow activists comes with wany challenges. There is fear that influences strategies for enacting change, limitations to what can be achieved, and the emotional challenges and burnout that can happen when balancing so many relationships and frustrations with one's work.

In some cases, how the participants approached situations was altered according to the audience they were working with. Charlie stated:

> So if I'm talking to a group of university students I may talk about, you know, the tax issues and the law issues and the whatever. If I'm talking to a church group I may tell them about when [the person I know on the inside] was arrested and the media surrounded my house for days and nights, I couldn't get out of my own house. And then I started getting death threats and I was afraid to go out to my garage, you know. Or people who couldn't wait to tell me you know in great detail how they were gonna all gang rape me and blah blah and send my tit to [the person I know on the inside], you know, stuff like this. So, you know, so I try to consider my listener. (Charlie)

Different members of the public react differently to information and require different approaches to make them think about prison issues. It is important to strategically alter how one presents themself in different situations in order to create meaningful change. This quote also showcases

the fear and vulnerability associated with prison activism and the lived experiences of prison

activists.

Many of the participants spoke about the different ways of approaching different types of

students and how to build and manage relationships with those on the inside of prisons. Drew

stated:

> I have very mixed feelings about going into a prison as somebody that believes that, you know, in an ideal world prisons just wouldn't exist and just like talking about that. Because I'm like I don't wanna get into some weird position. I honestly don't know what somebody has to believe about the necessity of prisons to get through a prison sentence. Which is part of why I actually avoid talking about prison directly with them. I talk more about kinda shared, I focus more on shared humanity. Like obviously prison comes up but it's not about prison they're already living that…I was like okay let's focus on the positive, so like most of the stuff we're reading, and it's not like all necessarily uplifting, but it's all about something that is moving towards, moving towards better. (Drew)

Many of the participants desire prisons to be replaced with entirely different systems. However,

Drew has reservations about who they communicate this information to. Speaking to

incarcerated individuals about abolition could be potentially problematic for people's ability to

make it through a prison sentence. The activists have to carefully present their views and be

mindful of who they are working with and which parts of themselves are safe to present.

Additionally, gearing conversations and lessons in their course or workshop towards positivity

was key to building relationships with students. It also takes a less formal style where students

are engaging in critical discussions. This aligns with Pollack (2020) who talked about the success

of W2B programs that connect the non-incarcerated with the incarcerated as they promote

leadership and empower people.

Furthermore, working with incarcerated people means balancing vulnerable and delicate

relationships. Frankie stated this about managing relationships with university students and those

who are incarcerated:

> I think what is most difficult about being [in the prison] is that I don't have any reservations if I'm [speaking with university students]. I don't have any reservations about those relationships … right I can just really you know kinda build that relationship the same way I would you know a friend that I see on the street or with a, a clerk at a grocery store, whatever. I don't have to be wary, I don't have to be guarded, I don't have to fear anything. Whereas [in the prison] it is not as easy. I have to be a little bit guarded. I have to have some boundaries, and of course you have to have boundaries everywhere, but like it's just a bit more broad and it requires a bit more energy to maintain your openness while still just being careful about those boundaries … I have [people] who really get to trust me and they'll tell me things that are criminal … things that are very vulnerable themselves of their own personal histories and things that have happened to them and like that doesn't happen [when interacting with the non-incarcerated]. (Frankie)

This quote also encompasses themes of "emotional labour" and the fears that can be associated with prison activism. It also showcases the careful navigation of interacting with different groups of people that was described by participants as well as the rule bending that has been documented in more covert activist stiles (Greenslade et al., 2015).

Establishing programs in prisons also requires fostering connections between different institutions that hold different places in society. Prison activists have to manage the different goals and priorities of multiple institutions all while fighting social stigma associated with prison populations. This is consistent with Ramasubramanian and Sousa's (2021) understanding of scholar-activism where a constant negotiation of relationships with various stakeholders is necessary for their work.

Fear of Helping

It was clear from the first few interviews that there is a fair amount of fear associated with prison activism. These fears range from not wanting to mess up by doing right for those incarcerated to not wanting to be barred from accessing prisons or criminalized for their activism. This concept of fear of helping can be broken up into four main sections, including: the

criminalization of helping, fear of consequences to self, fear of consequences to others, and suppressed helping.

The criminalization of helping was made up of situations where punishment was involved with people advocating for change. Alex noted:

> It's completely criminalized to stand up for people's rights from within prison … [I've] spent the next few years teaching people in prison how to like utilize the policy frameworks to hold the prison accountable for the laws they are supposed to follow in what ways they could and my work really shifted to support the queer community incarcerated because there was a lot of criminalization there. (Alex)

This quote alludes to the struggles and punishments that can be faced by those advocating for change from the inside of prisons. It is also consistent with Decker and Pyrooz (2019) who point out that activism from within prisons is often labeled as radical, creating barriers for enacting change. However, later on, Alex pointed out some more direct ways that advocates for change on the inside and upon release are criminalized:

> They [the CSC] were very concerned about my politics … And I was like "that is kinda who I am. I don't think I can change that, however, I work with your bosses and the experts in your system and I am trying to contribute to a fairer justice system which is the purpose of the system, therefore, it should not be criminalized." But I am always dancing this dance ... even though there is like a long rich history of rights based advocacy and that, you know, the evidence shows that it's good for the system when, when people discuss problems and then things advance in ways that represent the people that are there. (Alex)

This showcases the fear associated with a system that appears to punish those who speak about the harms it causes, have discussions about its flaws, and offer ideas on how it can change in productive ways. This relates to how activists in social movements are punished and imprisoned for their activism, like in queer movements (Rosenberg & Oswin, 2015) or racial movements (Piche & Larson, 2010).

Worries about harm or undesirable outcomes coming to one's self or others involved was another way that fear appeared amongst participants. Drew stated:

I'm mostly just scared that I'm, that I'm gonna mess up and do something wrong and just break trust. Because it takes so much trust. I mean on the part of [those incarcerated]. Like I'm mostly worried about doing, like doing the wrong thing by them. Because it takes so much trust to like let us in, and, you know, to read stuff together, to participate in something intellectual that's just like not what they're used to. Like they're seriously stepping out of their comfort zone. (Drew)

The activists are entering vulnerable situations where they have to build relationships with vulnerable people. Building rapport and creating spaces that people feel comfortable learning and being in can be a difficult path when managing and negotiating relationships with incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, there are additional challenges when managing relationships with prison administrations:

Blake: … it's like walking that line where, you know, you are concerned about being barred, about your access, not being allowed back into the prison, you know, like part of what I have done over the years is create good relations with the warden, with PO's, with you know … because that's ultimately I would like to keep going in, I'd like to keep offering [my programing]. So, one has to always tread carefully with you know being kinda outspoken about wanting to abolish the very system, but also needing to be very careful about relationships, about what is said publicly, you know, so even this interview at first [voice goes up] I was like no I am not gonna do it because it puts me at risk. So I think that would be the hardest part of this work.

Bradley: That is so interesting. So, you are wanting so badly to get involved with this group, but while also being critical and that creates this sort of, another barrier for you.

Blake: … it really requires a careful dance and you know just being really, really careful about you know when you bring outsiders into the prison you have to really be careful, you know, just about what's said off the cuff, about how we speak, about our actions. Because everything that we do ultimately has repercussions on prisoners like we just walk away or we're not allowed in but there's real repercussions, people can get denied parole, they can lose their children, like there's serious repercussions for the folks inside with everything we do. So, one has to really be careful and think about that a lot.

Phrases like "tread carefully," "walking that line," and "requires a careful dance," were repetitive and fairly common in the discourse. The significance of phrases such as these is that they suggest a negotiation between the parties and how they are interacting. There is a delicate balance that is

necessary in order to maintain, seemingly, very fragile relationships between parties, such as

between the activist and prison administrative staff. Fear of negative consequences are related to

the breakdown of important relationships that can lead to the discontinuation of programs or

retaliation towards someone on the inside. The participants signify a huge importance in

navigating these relationships with care and limiting how much criticism is directed towards the

system and those who control it.

Furthermore, this fear that is created in developing these relationships appears to be

intentional. Charlie in particular expressed the intent of the CSC to make visitors and those

coming into the prison feel uncomfortable:

> When you start getting known, your loved one, your inmate is gonna get known
> and while some of the guards and people will tell you I'm their absolute favourite
> visitor and they love and in another world we'd be good buddies, you also make a
> lot of really serious enemies … And if you're making enemies, that will
> dramatically affect the release, the parole, and so forth of that prisoner. So, they
> will plant things on you, they will plant things in your inmates cell, there is no
> recourse to anything ever, so they can do some really serious scary things. There is
> something known about when you go to visit um CSC will tell you that you very
> likely can and will become a target to the bad guys. So that, meaning that when
> you're leaving the institution one night heading home … the bad guys will follow
> you home … Like CSC gives you this all in writing … So there is that, but I've
> never in all these years had that experience, but I have absolutely had the experience
> that I have left the institution or left a rally or protest and been followed by CSC
> staff, no doubt … So they want you to know. You know their security, their job
> security and otherwise is more secure when you're afraid. And so they go out of
> their way. (Charlie)

This issue, along with the shame and stigma associated with knowing people on the inside,

makes it difficult for families to get involved in activist work and speak out on issues. This aligns

with Scott (2009) who pointed out that resistance is often met with retaliation and rule tightening

enacted by correctional officers. Charlie stated:

> We all know how corrupted it is and how brutal it is and inhumane and whatever.
> So, it was really hard for me originally to wrap my mind around how everyone
> wanted to stay, I call it closeted. It's like in the old days when you were gay or

> something you know. Everyone wants to be closeted … people don't want to be identified in their attachment to someone who is incarcerated, many people are fearful of what their neighbours would think if their neighbours knew, people that they work with. So, many of us are closeted. You know, many people use a different last name to avoid identification. A lot of it is legitimate, because you certainly can have the wackos coming after you, oh there's no doubt about that. But even years and years later there this massive fear that is almost indescribable and it has so many octopus legs to it because it keeps you isolated it helps encourage your shame and your guilt and all these things that you will have had, particularly if it was your kid or you know a husband, a brother. (Charlie)

The systemic issues in prison are broader than simply affecting those on the inside and includes activists and family members advocating for change. This affects the participants in fearful ways that make managing relationships difficult.

However, the way that activists conduct themselves in these situations is deeper than simply because they are afraid of negative consequences. It is a strategic method to allow them to continue to do their work and push back wherever possible from the inside. Frankie stated:

> There's quite a bit of advocacy that comes with it. That advocacy has to be kind of gentle because when I push against the constrictions of the situation here in the correctional center, I have a whole bunch of people who have a very different view of this than I do and I'm very careful because I've seen that already happen. Like I, we had a few years ago, I won't say, but there was a volunteer organization that had an executive director who was coming in and working with inmates and ended up being banned from the institution, they wouldn't let her come in anymore … there's just this risk that if you don't kinda try to work with the rules and then push, right like we have this very privileged situation of being inside this building and so being on the outside trying to get in …that's really complicated because there are all kinds of arbitrary rules. They pull the plug on you with no notice at all, they say 'yeah let's do it' and then they never call you, because these are all people that don't have the same goals that we do. And so for us to achieve our goals we have to go within. I think there's great value with people from without pushing as well, but this situation isn't that. (Frankie)

Managing and negotiating relationships means that the activists are able to continue their work and advocate for change in small ways, rather than having no access or ability to help people.

Greenslade et al. (2015) discussed the role of social workers and how they bend rules in order to

help clients, which connects to the boundary pushing that participants engage with in their activism.

Nonetheless, the risk of creating harm can be too risky at times for activists and their desire to help is suppressed. They are forced to stay publicly quiet about issues they are passionate about. Evan stated:

> I wasn't allowed to say anything, [the person I know on the inside] told me I wasn't allowed to say anything public, you know, I couldn't. I couldn't talk to a journalist and I knew things that were going on in there that were just breaking my heart and I thought people need to know that this is happening. [They] said the minute you put your name to it, or my name to it, then it gets here and the administration just comes down on them like crazy. And I mean seriously. And he said I don't need any more punishment than I already have and the minute that happens. And for years I said nothing. I got about a book [of notes], I think I might publish it someday. (Evan)

Many of the ideas and stories the activists have can only be shared in specific circumstances and cannot be shared publicly. This concept of suppressed helping due consequences from government agencies aligns with Sudbury (2008) who documented how black liberation groups were oppressed and their activism targeted by government bodies. This showcases how activism itself is criminalized and change is discouraged by society and institutions.

Dealing with Emotions

Managing all of these relationships and frustrations with the prison system is extremely cumbersome and stressful for prison activists. When asked about the most challenging parts of their work, Charlie stated:

> Not getting eaten alive with the rage, the frustration, the depression. [pause] not just tell yourself, believe that you are making a difference, absolutely is the worst part. When I first started [activist group], you know, when I'd be taking all those phone calls I mentioned to you, you know, when you're talking to a wife with three kids and the husband and the sole support is gone and the family won't help her and the, you know, it's been in the news and the neighbours are all suddenly not inviting you to the Barbecue and, you know, they're all talking about you and she's crying, crying, crying and then you hang up and half an hour later you start all over

with another terrible story, absolutely there was lots of times there where I got really, really depressed, I now take antidepressants and medication. It's overwhelming activism is like that anyhow, but it's overwhelming when you see an issue so clearly and you've learned so much and it's so obvious and everybody needs to know these and many people just don't give a damn and aren't interested, it's rough. (Charlie)

Dealing with these stressful circumstances means that activists need to find ways of coping with the frustrations of their work, the vulnerability of their relationships, and the slow moving nature of social change. Medication as well as counseling and finding outlets to communicate these frustrations were utilized by activists to cope with stress. Evan stated:

When I was out in-front of the building waving my flags and my posters it was like getting out in the parking lot and screaming [laughs]. You know, relieving all the stress. And I often do go out to some place where there's nobody and I just scream my lungs out and when, when we did it I front of the building both ends of the building and when we got all the newspapers and everything were there and every time I attended any event it was great to just yell you know get it off your chest. And that I guess was part of the point of not being able to say anything to anybody easily, this kind of gave me the outlet of demonstrating. (Evan)

I've cried a lot and I've screamed a lot and I've talked to people, like [this person] who have people in the system where you have to be able to network or talk to someone or you'll go right out of your crazy head and I've also got a councilor of my own for massive depressions that I go through where I can't do anything you know, I'm helpless, you know, totally helpless when it comes to it. And I'm not used to it as a grown up, you know, being like that … no one really knows what's going on and I am constantly appalled by most of the stuff that goes on. (Evan)

Additionally, these quotes show how activists deal with their frustrations in solitude and can feel lonely and overwhelmed in their work. A combination of stress relievers such as screaming in isolation and confiding in likeminded individuals were used by the activists.

Another coping mechanism mentioned was to focus on the purpose of the work. This is what allows people to continue in stressful situations. Alex Stated:

I remember all the people who died in prison and are still in prison. Yeah that's what drives me. I also have no life. I lost my marriage because I was working like three jobs and going to school full-time [laughs] and my ex-partner couldn't handle it. So I am dating somebody new now and there is definitely a lot of like teaching

them about the prison system and a lot of like we can have a relationship in the small amount of time I have to have a relationship. (Alex)

Activism in many cases becomes the individual's life's work and they devote much of their time and energy into it. This can be exhausting and lead to burnout. However, one participant had a positive view of the emotions that come with prison activism. Drew mentioned this after being asked about managing the frustrations, difficulties, and positive emotions of her activism:

> I don't know how I handle it. So I have this border collie and she's really rude and she like freaks out a lot and I just like to introduce her to people and I'm like she's okay she just has a lot of feelings [I laugh]. And I'm like, and every time I like introduce her, I'm like 'also I'm introducing myself'... I love that shit … Like I have a lot of feelings about ... stuff ... I do that all the time, I get really excited about it. Like it is, it's heavy, but it actually feels like it matters. So yeah sometimes it takes like a little bit of time to process, but that's, but it's also kind of my favourite. So the fact that people are having emotional reactions is great. (Drew)

Managing emotions is in many ways very similar to managing relationships for participants. In this case creating space for vulnerability and emotions for programs in prisons. Being vulnerable and emotional helps to develop relationships and connections with people for learning and self-discovery – but also contributes to the emotional labour of the work.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to further understand how prisons are problematized and the strategies

prison activists use to enact change to better understand social issues and social movements. The

results from the interviews showcased not only the ways that prison activists framed prison

issues, but how they present themselves in different ways depending on the context of the

relationship they are interacting with. The activists generate claims about the systemic issues of

prisons. The cultural ideas of punishment, powerful and controlling institutions, and the

stigmatization of incarcerated people perpetuate the systemic issues of colonization, poverty,

mental health and substance use, and CSC misconduct. These are all social issues that are

constructed, making Best's (2017) constructionist theory on social problems a useful application.

Best (2017) showcases the process and means of how social issues start and change. This leaves

a gap in understanding how people act and behave in the social problems sphere. Goffman's

(1959) theory of presentation of self addresses this gap by detailing the different facets of how

people present themselves and interact with others. However, little is known about how people

interact with social problems. This study attempts to fill this gap in knowledge by understanding

how prison activists interact and present themselves in a social problems context.

An Integrated Theoretical Model

The activists constructed their claims about the prison system using all of the framing

strategies set out in Best's (2017) theory. They connected with like-minded individuals through

bridging, appealed to the morals of humanity through amplification, broadened their claims to

include harms to the community through extension, and tried to make people reevaluate and

rethink their current world view through transformation. They educate people on the issues of

prison using emotional rhetoric, appeals to logic, appeals to humanity, and appeals to relatable

circumstances. This demonstrates the complexities of the criminal justice system and criminal justice reform. It takes a multitude of efforts and strategies, yet change happens very slowly. The activists described their frustrations of seeing little change in the system despite their attempts to improve it and point out its problems. The goal of prison abolition for many of the activists, seems very far away from being possible, despite prisons being protested since their inception (Piché & Larsen, 2010). Claims and social problems can change, but it takes time (Best, 2017).

For the most part, the activists were trying to create change by working from the inside of prisons. They brought educational programs or workshops inside prisons and attempted to work with policy makers who directly influence how prisons function. Best (2017) describes this as insider claims making, where the activists have direct connections with those with the power to create change. However, working to create change from the inside doesn't always mean that there is a direct relationship to someone in power. In fact, for the activists in this study, working in prison means constantly feeling like their place in the prison is unwelcome or their access can be taken away at any moment. This makes creating change and making claims very difficult from the inside because it is necessary to have positive relationships with prison institutions, but at the same wanting to dismantle those very institutions. This creates a situation that is more of an inside-out claimsmaking where the activists are inside the prison, but outside and unable to challenge the power structures. This means that they have to be careful about how they interact and manage relationships. Two of the activists used methods like protests, emailing politicians and wardens, and engaging in talks to various groups of people. These approaches are more direct with their attempts to change the system. However, speaking out against the criminal justice system can have negative consequences to people that are inside prisons that are

associated with the activist. The participant's activism itself is criminalized and stigmatized creating barriers to enact change and difficulty managing relationships.

Goffman's (1959) conception of presentation of self suggests that people perform in ways that limit disruption in interactions. They discern information from others and act accordingly based on the situation to put on the best performance (Goffman, 1959). However, activism often requires creating disruption. It requires challenging systems that people are used to and making people reevaluate how the world functions. The prison activists in the study did this mostly in covert ways. It involved "gentle pushes" from the inside or relatable circumstances when trying to convince the public. Furthermore, speaking publicly can create potentially negative circumstances for those involved. Methods such as relating prison abolition to plagiarism policies for undergraduate students is a gentler way of speaking about the problems in prisons (Like Drew demonstrated). However, more assertive claims, such as the one's used by Charlie, like abuse from correctional officers or media attacks on their family that are used to create disruption and get people thinking about the harmful ways prisons function and cultural ideas of crime that perpetuate stigma. It is this intentional placing of one's self in disruptive settings that is an integral part of activist work. Being open and vulnerable to relationships and connections with the public or those incarcerated involves pulling back the curtain of Goffman's theory in order to successfully participate in their work. Nonetheless, this is a balancing act of creating disruption without causing so much that people's safety is at risk.

People can also have a predetermined, misguided view of the nature of working with people in prisons. There is a need to not only get people to rethink the problems of prison, but also rethink working and caring about prison populations. The activists were met with reactions to their work that involved dominant personalities, people already involved in similar work, and

people that did not understand why the activist would put themselves in those environments. There are perceived dangers of working with those incarcerated and cultural views on the dynamics of these interactions that can give unsettling feelings to members of the public. Treating the incarcerated as human beings is a huge part of the activists' work and convincing people that those who are incarcerated can be good and interesting humans is part of the challenge of being an activist. Activists do not only have to present themselves in diverse ways depending on the situation, but they have to try and present vulnerable populations in positive ways or at least ways that make people care about those who are incarcerated. Since activism involves advocating for other people, how one presents one's self is important as it can shape how others are presented and treated.

The way one frames prison issues can depend on who they are interacting with. Who one interacts with changes the way they need to present themselves. For example, when interacting with undergraduate students, activists may take an approach that appeals to logic or relatable circumstances. It appears to involve more bridging and transformation when dealing with students. However, when interacting with church groups, like Charlie did, emotional stories about their experiences were used to frame prison issues. This is more in line with extension framing and amplification. Since people who are educated tend to be more receptive to social change and activism (Andrews et al., 2016), it makes sense that bridging and transformation would be techniques utilized on students. Churches and religions have a tendency to be resistant to change (Sullivan et al., 1981; Gibson, 1982; McCright & Dunlap, 2008, as cited in Andrews et al., 2016), considering women's rights to bodily autonomy and queer rights, for example. Using emotional rhetoric and extending moral views makes more sense than trying to build off of a moral consensus that does not exist, or rebuild a worldview that is set in stone, so to speak.

Furthermore, for these interactions to be successful (or create an ideal performance according to Goffman), activists have to be careful how they interact and frame social problems. Otherwise more barriers to change can form.

Constructing Identity

The challenges, vulnerabilities, and contentious situations that prison activists have to navigate while building relationships can create hesitancy in identifying as an activist. Although five out of six interviewees identified as activists, one did not. When asked if they identified as an activist, they stated:

> I don't [Emphasized, then slight pause] consider myself an activist. I just consider myself ethically bound to solve a problem that I have the skills to solve and the knowledge of the problem. like I am aware of the problem and I have the skills to solve it. So, but I have always had like a strong sense of civic responsibility.

Despite this answer, they also stated that they consider themself a "strong activist" and described their work as "advocacy." This demonstrates a disconnect between how the work is being described and how personal identity is being described. Even those who did identify as activists showed hesitancy or played it down as not "traditional activism":

> I happily consider myself an activist. I don't know maybe it's an ambivalent relationship to it cause sometimes it's like I'd like to think this is activist work. I like to think this is impactful work. I like to think, you know, it's advocating for change. But … I'm not necessarily like marching in protests for it. But I definitely see this as like just part of...anti-carceral work in general. (Drew)

This quote showcases the hesitancy or talking down to their work that many of the activists presented. Frankie even stated that there might be disappointment with their response as to what their activism entails:

> It's kind of sticky. It's got things that come with it that are a bit scary or unnerving and if I actually have a genuine relationship with somebody and let's say they're having a bad day and they decide to do something, you know, violent or aggressive then I'm more vulnerable to that because I have that relationship to the person. I don't just pull an alarm like pick up a phone or say 'oh you need to be locked up'

because I don't want to do that to somebody … and I have to like navigate this stuff. And that's not probably the answer you want about being an activist. If being an activist, I've been an activist ... in other aspects of my life … I was on a board of something and I was in press conferences and I was writing letters to the editor and I was doing. That's not really what this is about. This is, there's quite a bit of advocacy that comes with it. That advocacy has to be kind of gentle because when I push against the constrictions of the situation here … I have a whole bunch of people who have a very different view of this than I do.

There seems to be a negative connotation with the work being done by the prison activists. It is somehow less impressive than "marching in the street" or "being on the board of something." Ramasubramanian and Sousa (2021) found that scholar-activists did not consider themselves "traditional activists" either, but saw activism as a spectrum where their activities fit somewhere on a continuum of advocating for change. Additionally, the fear associated with working within the criminal justice system affects the way that activists see their work and construct their identity.

(Re)Defining Activism

Activism, as presented in current media, presents outspoken protests and campaigns advocating for change with the social issue in question. News articles on these issues often depict images of protesters with signs, street blockades, or yelling passionately into megaphones, among other public displays. These images shape how activism is defined culturally and can relate to how prison activists construct their identities. It is seen as public outcry for injustices that are being faced and a call for change to the systemic barriers that enable those injustices. Certainly, public displays of activism are important for social movements and awareness. However, these forms of activism are not the only strategies used to create change and dismantle social justice issues.

Greenslade et al. (2015) identify the covert ways social workers in Australia perform activism. They noted that "neoliberal ideology" creates barriers for the work of social workers (Greenslade et al., 2015, p. 427). Elements of risk management, more monitoring, and more emphasis on punitive measures actually got in the way of successfully being able to do their work (Greenslade et al., 2015). Dealing with this imbalance of procedure as well as increased client lists, lack of resources, and more paperwork requirements creates significant challenges in doing social work (Greenslade et al., 2015). The values of social work in helping people are devalued by policies that create conflict with supervisors and discrepancies in what the goals of the work truly are (Greenslade et al., 2015). This dynamic creates a need to change the system, while working within it. Similar to that of the prison activists in this study.

The social workers resisted the policies that were harmful to their work in covert ways (Greenslade et al., 2015). This may come in the form of "rule bending" or "turning a blind eye" to help build rapport with a client for example (Greenslade et al., 2015, p. 428). These are small, yet challenging, efforts to try and achieve one's goals within the confines of the institution. Greenslade et al. (2015) also created different typologies for both the type of activist and the type of activism used. The activist typologies included: "critical reflective practitioner, ethical practitioner, client-centered practitioner, structural social worker, human rights social worker, and radical social worker" (Greenslade et al., 2015, p. 432). The typologies based on activist techniques include the strategist, the change agent, the quiet activist, and the lawful activist (Greenslade et al., 2015). The strategist uses procedures of the organization in overt or covert ways to implement change that will go unnoticed by both the employer and clients (Greenslade et al., 2015). The change agent wants to stay in the job position that allows them to overtly or covertly seek opportunities for social justice (Greenslade et al., 2015). The quiet activist looks to

make small adjustments while going undetected and avoids directly challenging the system

(Greenslade et al., 2015). The lawful activist exclusively does activities that do not break the

rules, but may look for "loopholes" in policies that can be taken advantage of (Greenslade et al.,

2015, p. 433).

Clearly, certain working conditions and creating change through one's employment

requires additional forms of activism that expand beyond how activism is portrayed in the media

and societies perceptions of what activism entails. Where there is a clear power imbalance or risk

to one's self or others, covert forms of activism may emerge to create change that is less

detectable or overt. This study is interested in uncovering more about the strategies used by

prison activists who deal with power structures in the criminal justice system in order to address

systemic issues.

The prison activists in this study were hesitant to describe themselves as activists,

described their work as "marginal," and downplayed their role as an activist. These

contradictions and hesitations may be related to the fear activists have when managing

relationships and how they construct identity. It has been showcased that activism can be

criminalized and have personal consequences as well as consequences to those on the inside of

prisons. This may suggest that avoiding this title or limiting the scope of the activist identity is a

way of protecting one's self and others.

It also may relate to public views and perceptions of what activism looks like. If public

perceptions of activism are limited to protests and email campaigns, for example, then strategies

of education and community building for solidarity and creating meaningful relationships may

not be publicly understood or accepted as activism. López-Garza (2016) identified methods of

protesting, lobbying, creating workshops and courses, engaging with politicians and those in

charge of decisions, and contacting the media. Although some of the activists in this study engage with the media and protest injustices in prisons, this list of traditional activist strategies does not encompass the covert nature in which most prison activists in the study operate. This creates a need to rethink the concept of activism and what it entails.

The way activism is understood needs to be reevaluated. If people's perception of activism only involves a process of speaking out and advocating for change through protests and other means, then a huge part of what activism aims to do is left out. Of course, they all would jump on any opportunity to remove oppression and rectify systemic criminal justice issues; however, much of the work they are doing is simply trying to make people's lives better. Whether they are connecting and supporting family members of those on the inside, establishing educational programs and workshops in prisons, or trying to connect with policy makers, the underlying goal is to make people's lives better within problematic systems. This can also create challenges because one cannot do both things at the same time. The activists cannot protest change and still make people's lives better while they are living their lives within the system. Speaking against the prison system can have a negative impact on gaining access to prison and to prisoners themselves. Activism requires constant change and restructuring in order to achieve goals. Piché and Larsen (2010) document how the prison abolition movement has changed and evolved strategically to align with the political climate. Therefore, activists in certain situations have to do their work more covertly in order to help people and improve their lives, which is what activism is all about.

Sudbury (2008) identifies six types of activism which include: advocating for human rights, scrutinizing sentences given after already having spent time in prison, legal action towards "decarceration," "moratorium activism" (against building new prisons), abolition in

favour of alternatives to incarceration, and calls to release "political prisoners" (p. 348). Apart from seeking legal action, many of the strategies that are recognized as "activism" are mainly demonstrating and speaking out about a particular issue. However, in the case of the activists in this study, they are choosing to act on the issues they see rather than speak out about them in public ways. The inhumane treatment of incarcerated people and the improper care they receive is seen as the issue, so the activists put into action ways of treating incarcerated people or families of the incarcerated as human beings and give them education and resources to better their lives. The activism is in doing the vulnerable work, rather than spreading awareness on an issue for widespread social change. Social change is happening at a more individual level.

Furthermore, activism is not simply on a spectrum based on the type of strategies used, as outlined by Ramasubramanian and Sousa (2021) in their research on scholar-activists. The context of the situation can influence the types of strategies that are used. If the context for activism means that there are negative consequences to speaking publicly about social change, Then a more individual process of enacting change is utilized. Instead of calling for change in order to garner media attention, like in Best's (2017) conception of activism, change is performed in the interactions of the activist. They create the change by going against the status quo of prison punishment. They treat individuals in prisons as humans who deserve education, treatment, proper health care, and respect. This is extremely important as people often do not feel like "human beings" in prison. This means that activism is more than simply speaking out against injustice. It is about how you interact in daily life and the effort you make to improve other people's lives.

This form of activism also aligns with Larson (2011) who recognized bringing care into prisons as focusing on changing lives rather than fixing people. This in itself is a form of abolition according to Larson (2011). Offering educational programs in prison and treating people as human beings is not just a form of activism, but is also engaging in prison abolition. Additionally, Burns et al. (2020) point out that abolition is also about making that vision a reality. Since the activism stems from the action that prison activists put into their lives, they are engaging in creating new realities and, therefore, engaging in abolition. If the issues in prisons are systemic, conceptual, and constructed, then acting differently to these systems is a form of abolition. It is dismantling the structures that cause harm by creating positive interactions.

Continuing the "Steep Climb"

Despite the challenges prison activists face, they still find a way to keep going. Whether it is the "friendships" (Blake) that are formed, when people succeed instead of "die in prison" (Alex), opening up for genuine "connections" (Frankie), or the opportunity to "scream" (Evan) instead hold back emotions, these activists are motivated to do their work. The main thing that links the activists' motivations together is their shared interest in being there for others in need. Charlie and Drew Stated:

> Well sometimes I'm actually able to make a difference. If not structurally, certainly there's lots of times where someone feels, like I have felt too, like we're out on a blow up life raft in the middle of the pacific ocean and there just isn't anywhere to go, sometimes they got me. And sometimes I've been able to help a specific person. (Charlie)

> for their final projects … people had just like put so much of their hearts into it. And like just the feeling of like this mattered a lot to people. And to like, you know [people] ... from like the different kinds of groups. And so that, and like ... I mean [they] were crying because it was like beautiful and wonderful and you know, but I'm a cheap weep anyway so, but like just realizing that it really meant something. The like 'good after all these emails, after all this pain in the butt, I managed to do this thing and it meant something to people, like it mattered.' (Drew)

At the individual level, the activists were able to see the importance of their work. They were able to see how they have been able to help people and improve the lives of those they interact with. This is what allows the activists to continue with their work and surmount emotional frustrations and systemic obstacles that prevent change in the prison system.

Conclusion

This study has outlined the perspectives of prison activists and how they frame prison issues. The current political climate concerning mental health and how to better respect it, and create spaces to address it, creates an atmosphere that may be receptive to prison reform and abolition. Furthermore, recent media coverage of mass graves from residential schools has opened up conversations about racism and colonization in Canadian society that could expand to include conversations about systemic prison issues. However, there is usually resistance to social movements as they gain more traction (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2007), meaning, additional power struggles are to be expected as prison movements progress. Furthermore, given this possible shift in political ideologies, more research is needed to understand how members of the public frame prisons and their reception of abolitionist concepts.

Another aspect of the issue is that institutions seem unwilling to change. Some prisons are receptive to different programs, however, this is not widespread. It does not matter if members of the public are receptive to changing the prison system if decision makers in that system are resistant to that change. It is well documented that prisons do little to ease victim distress or rehabilitate those who commit crime. On top of that prisons suffer from systemic issues that disadvantage marginalized and racial groups. Given that the prison system is failing in its methods of dealing with crime and criminality, it is clear that different approaches or major improvements are necessary. It is challenging to conceive of different ways of doing things, but

it is better to try and fail than it is to continually fail doing the same thing that is known to be unsuccessful in dealing with crime. More focus on shared humanity, building communities, creating support systems for those in need, and educating people are necessary for reimagining prisons.

Prison activism seems to be in the beginning stages of a social movement. Concerning the concepts of mobilization, political context, framing, and collective identity described by Engels and Müller (2019), there is an abundance of moral and cultural resources among the prison activists. However, other aspects of resource mobilization appear to be lacking, such as an abundance of personnel and support. As mentioned above, the political structure may be in a place that is receptive to ideas of prison reform and the activists have clear framing strategies on mutually agreed upon prison issues. However, some work is still necessary in developing a collective identity as many of the activists are fractured from others in the field and are working independently.

The systemic issues concerning the prison structure that were outlined by the activists and in the literature, directly relates to how prison activists construct their identity. Issues of CSC misconduct like the misuse of power, discrimination, unwillingness to change, and retaliation create a toxic space for activism and change. It creates a paradoxical relationship of conflicting goals for activists to navigate. They have to grapple with wanting to speak out against the harmful nature of prisons while also wanting to directly help those in prison. Both of these desires cannot exist at the same time due to the systemic issues outlined. One cannot build positive relationships with wardens and other CSC staff while also directly criticizing their work. This can cause retaliation and power struggles from the CSC that the activists do not have

resources to compete with. This causes frustration and fear for the activists. It also creates ethical and methodological implications.

As detailed earlier, extra care was taken with making the data confidential, sometimes even omitting important and integral details about participants for their safety. This was methodologically and ethically conflicting as it means that data was altered in ways that were not always in the context of how the participants presented it. However, the discovery of the fear of helping that participants experienced was also important in forming the results, analysis, and conclusion of this paper. Hennink et al. (2020) describe the cyclical nature of qualitative research and how the research design, data collection, and analysis are all linked together in this non-linear, back-and-forth, and ever-changing structure. For this study these components linked cyclically, but also largely interconnected. The methodological structure, ethical findings, result discoveries, and analytical process all merged given the need to protect confidentiality - the fear of helping, the types of strategies activists used, and the need to redefine activism. All of these issues are centralized and rooted in the relationship between the activists and the CSC. The power imbalances and systemic issues in the CSC create a hostile relationship to change and create obstacles tricky for activists to navigate. These concepts anchor the methodology, ethical considerations, results, and analysis. They create a pin in the middle of the cyclical research cycle.

Additionally, given the overrepresentation of women in this study, future research may want to investigate the role of feminism in prison movements. A few of the participants' pathways into prison activism were informed by feminism. The literature also suggests that abolition is a form of feminist ideology (Terwiel, 2020; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Boodman, 2018;

Whalley & Hackett, 2017; Pollack, 2019). This creates interesting implications for future

discovery.

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Appendix A: My Research Inspiration

As a person with many interests and a passion for social justice, coming up with a topic to study was difficult for me. I knew that I wanted to complete a qualitative project and further the skills that I developed in my qualitative methods class. My project in this class was a content analysis on how YouTube commenters framed the issue of homeless criminalization. My first idea was to continue in this area. It then became a question of who or what resources I could utilize to complete my project. Interviewing skills were something I thought was missing from experience in my qualitative methods class, having taken it over a global pandemic. The next question was who could be the subject of my research project? Activists seemed like an interesting group of people who would be knowledgeable about their passions and have informed and unique opinions about social issues (they also seem to be left out of many scholarly studies). The idea of activism led me to the idea that activism itself is often criminalized. Whether it be police presence at a protest or societal stigma and resistance to fights for equality, activists struggle to be heard in political climates. This concept sparked a whole new chain of ideas. Could I investigate anti-poverty activists' perception of homelessness criminalization? Should I look at how activists perceive police? This meant that I had to decide what type of activist I was interested in studying.

I spent countless hours researching different activist groups and events in attempts to find something that not only fit my many interests, but could also be achievable for the time frame of the project. I came across an event involving prison activism. This topic was completely new to me. The concept of prison abolition was not something that was ever discussed in any of my course work as a criminology student. Therefore, being the curious intellectual, with an interest

in social justice, that I am, I knew that I wanted to know more about this idea and this type of activism. That meant that attending the event was a necessity.

With absolutely no idea what to expect, I made my way to the event to discover a small gathering of individuals setting up for the event. There were two tents and banners set up to set the stage for the speakers at the event. Each banner listed hundreds of names of those who have died unnaturally in prison. One banner even had a disclaimer that this was only some of the individuals who have died in prison institutions. There was a merchandise stand where things like t-shirts and posters were sold to raise money for the cause. The person running the stand stated that a lot of the merchandise is stuff that has accumulated over the years and repurposed. There were several prison activist groups there that passed out flyers and sold merch at the event, but I will leave them unnamed for anonymity. There were a couple dozen chairs set up for people to sit and watch the event. In total there were maybe sixty people there, some of which were holding signs exclaiming their objections to the prison system. However, this tapered off as the event went on and there were maybe thirty people left at the end.

When it came time for the speakers to start, all the seats were taken so I found a patch of grass in the shade at the back to listen. The event was introduced and the first speaker told their story and experiences with the prison system. During this speech I found myself getting emotional. At first I was very sad hearing stories of trauma as a result of the criminal justice process. However, this sadness then turned to anger. I became angry, not just at the stories of misguided criminal justice personnel, but at how these topics are not part of many conversations. Media criticisms of the criminal justice system seem to focus on police and social movements that are critical of police, course work has little focus on pointing out harmful behaviours of the criminal justice system, and (upon further investigation) academic literature has very little

information on how activists frame these issues. This all told me that this topic is very important to study and there was a need to understand it in more detail. Therefore, I decided to do my project on prison activists' lived experiences and how they frame the prison system.

Reflections From an Activist Event

This event was another opportunity to learn more about the type of work activists are doing in the prison system. There was an overwhelming sense that getting educational programs into prisons was laborious and, in the rare case that a program is approved, unsupported. Program runners in some cases were extending the scope of their expertise to help with services that people on the inside of prisons do not have access to (like helping with taxes). This is on top of trying to run a program that is already underfunded and understaffed. There is also an inflexible schedule in what was described as a "chaotic" atmosphere with lock downs and issues with staffing with correctional personnel. If lockdowns occur or a correctional officer calls in sick the program does not run and is not rescheduled. This creates inconsistent working conditions and stress for people running programs in prisons. In addition to these barriers, simply getting a prisoner a student ID card is arduous with repetition asking that is never taken seriously and stories of prisoners requiring armed guards, shackles, and strip searches in order to get access to this educational necessity. Internet access also poses an issue at several institutions.

On top of all of these barriers and obstacles that program runners are faced with, they also have to deal with the stress of working inside prisons and with some of the most vulnerable populations. Staff can become depressed, fearful, and paralyzed by ideas of prisoners knowing where they live (particularly in small communities where so many people have had contact with the justice system). It can be difficult to maintain mental health seeing prisoners that are in states of constant crises.

There was also a consistent theme of "us versus them" or a "world of the kept and the keepers" where prison workers are pitted against prisoners (and in extension prison activists). Furthermore, programs can be shut down by Correction Service Canada despite evidence of program success. Funding is also often not the issue with programs coming fully funded, but are rejected by the CSC (educational programs are usually funded by the universities, not the prison/taxpayers). Prison wardens can also be unsupportive of changes or additional programs and, if they are supportive, there is no guarantee that the next warden will be. This culture of "us versus them" creates conflict and barriers that lead to poor management of prisons, activist burn out, and a lack of programs that make a difference in supporting, healing, and helping vulnerable populations. It can also be difficult for activists working in prisons to not succumb to the ideas of the prison facility and work towards the goal of their programs. Activists also find that their perspectives of prisoners change as they spend more time with them and are able to dismantle any stereotypes and preconceived notions they may have about this group of people.

Activism was also presented in different forms. It came in the form of educational programs, from the inside of prisons, from researchers and students, as well as art forms (like plays). Storytelling and truth telling became forms of activism as they can help humanity. I asked a question to the Indigenous Elders at the conference about their responses to individuals who feel that some prisoners are 'too far gone' or 'beyond help.' The responses I received were grounded in the concept that if you remove trauma and stigma, allow people to speak, and listen to their needs, that no one is beyond help. There was this interesting story and image of a red handprint on a drum. The handprint represented this need to stop silencing peoples stories and lived experiences and stop forcing ideas on what you think their needs are. People are on a

healing journey and it is never useful to project your opinions on what that should look like. It just adds an additional silencing mechanism to vulnerable groups.

Activists can also have different ideas about what prison abolition entails and looks like. Some may want a complete dismantling of the institution, however, for others it is about redefining the intentions of the prison system. This conference and the literature in this area helped me to rethink concepts of the prison system. Before, I understood the prison system as 'not working the way it was intended.' However, maybe it is working to maintain colonial ideas, suppress those in poverty, and punish those who do not conform to societal norms. Abolition can mean getting rid of these ideas that are entrenched in culture. This also means that things like creating connections with prisoners, providing educational programs, dismantling colonial ideas of punishment, and reframing goals of prison institutions are all forms of abolition.

These concepts helped to reshape the questions in my interview guide because it was clear that I needed more focus on the lived experiences of activists, where my questions were mainly focused on their perception of the justice system. Activists play an incredibly important role in social change and, therefore, understanding their work and experiences gives insight into social movements that can often be overlooked. It is also important for reflexivity to show how my ideas of the criminal justice system have shifted from wanting to create ways of enabling the justice system to work as it is 'intended' to understanding that there are deeper systemic issues that inform the goals of the justice system and need to be redefined. When this project was first developed, I was skeptical of the idea of 'prison abolition.' I am now much more supportive and in line with this way of thinking.

Reflections from a Prison Activist's Presentation

I attended a presentation of a prison activist. They are someone who has done activist work since they were a teenager, but started her work in prison activism when her son received a prison sentence. They are interested in challenging prison bureaucracy, changing the way people think about prisoners and their families, exposing the idea that prisoners are treated as commodities, and reforming the broken prison system. They founded an organization for the family members of prisoners and works with lawyers to implement change in the prison system. They told the story of Their son and how sexual abuse is the most important predictor of criminal behaviour. They also reiterated the issues with the "us versus them dichotomy" and the dysfunction with the power system it creates. Furthermore, they pointed out that less than 10% of inmates have people that visit them and the system actually discourages them to do so. This connects with the from the PEN conference where fostering connections is actually a form of abolition. Breaking down these barriers that discourage connecting with people on the inside of prisons is part of changing perceptions of prisons and punishment.

They also pointed out that the system is not designed for rehabilitation (as many people become drug addicted in prison even if they did not use beforehand or were not addicted), but rather to isolate so that people do not commit crime (despite prisons being full of drugs, violence, and abuse. This creates a situation where prisoners are not getting better because of prisons, but have to turn things around despite the prison system. They not only have to overcome their trauma from previous lived experiences, but the additional trauma of the prison system. Cruelty and a "tough guy mentality" are encouraged daily in prison, where any positive stimuli is discouraged. This kind of masculine energy is also shared by the guards who label other guards who show affection or any sort of caring towards prisoners as "con lovers." This is a negative

word used to shame guards. They also mentioned the "lucifer effect" and how when you can do something, you do it. This was used to describe how prison guards take advantage of opportunities to overpower prisoners. However, they also know when they are doing something wrong. They told a story of how They witnessed a guard abusing a prisoner and how he justified it by saying that he had to because his boss is watching and it is expected. This shows not only how he knew that his action would be perceived as wrong, but how there is a culture and expectation of guards asserting power over prisoners. They also said that "culture eats policy every time. " There have been countless reports of issues and investigations by both Howard Sapers and Ivan Zinger on the issues of corrections, yet the issues remain because they are so culturally ingrained. The CSC is constantly fighting for control and maintenance of power. For example, there are circumstances of lengthy court proceedings just so individuals in prison can get access to things like thesauruses. When these things get to court they usually win, but the CSC always fights until the end. Another example of ingrained culture and a need to maintain power.

They pointed out how Canada is behind in prison reform, despite promises from Justin Trudeau to fix several issues. Situations have actually gotten worse in some respects with the "centralization" of food and catalogue goods. When food is centralized, it is made by one facility and then distributed to the others drastically lowering food quality and removing important jobs (that are essential to their prison plan and parole eligibility). This has created issues of prisoner health, the food cannot be reused, and it is not as cost effective as it is presented. This also means that food has become a commodity (like drugs) in prison.

They also outlined why people should care about the issues of the prison system. They pointed out that prisoners are people that are likely to return to the community at some point and

it is in everybody's best interest that the prison system helps them rather than exacerbate their problems. For example, when people are released back into the community they can be put back into environments that are harmful to them, despite requests not to be released in those areas (like someone who is addicted to drugs being released to a halfway house in the DTES). Furthermore, some programs do not offer addiction help until thirty days after being released from prison. The criminal Justice System has a $5 billion budget, and 75% 0f that goes to staff (who mainly only have high school education and minimal training) and not to fixing the integral issues of the criminal justice system. There is a $5 a day per inmate for food (hence the poor food quality). Prisoners are encouraged to buy food from the Cantine. This is in line with concepts of both food and prisoners being commodities. Prisons are profiting off the poor food conditions by exploiting their need for edible food. Furthermore, people are always hungry in prison. Nutritious food becomes something that prisoners are unworthy of. They mentioned that this is fairly common with several things that are fairly insignificant, like having a pizza party, and saying that prisoners do not deserve it.

This presentation was extremely heavy, especially for a criminology student like myself who started his degree program interested in being part of the criminal justice system. It is extremely discouraging and disheartening to see how the prison system is not only failing to rehabilitate individuals, but can actually traumatizes individuals. This presentation made me realize that the issues in the criminal justice system run much deeper than I realized. It really helped my understanding of critical criminology and systemic issues in the system. Ideas of culture were very important in the presentation and perhaps something that could be added to the interview guide (how do you deal with conflicting cultural ideas in your work?).

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Opening questions

1. How long have you been involved in activist work? How did you get involved in activism? Do you have friends that are involved?
2. Do you consider yourself an activist? What makes an activist in your opinion? What does activism mean to you?
3. What type of activism are you involved in? Why is this area important to you?
4. What events have you been a part of?

Media Opinions:

1. How do you feel about news coverage of the prison system? Do you think it gets an appropriate amount of attention compared to other movements/aspects of the criminal justice system?

Perceptions of the prison system:

1. How do you feel about the prison system in Canada?
2. What changes need to be made to the prison system in Canada? How can they be implemented?
3. Is there anything that the prison system does well? Why are these strategies successful?
4. What barriers do you see to achieving these goals? Are these barriers surmountable?

Dealing with critics of activist work/ideology:

1. What criticisms do you receive most often for your point of view? What do you think of these criticisms?
2. How does your family and people close to you feel about your work? Is it difficult maintaining relationships with those of different mindsets?
3. How do you explain prison activism to someone who is unaware? How do you feel about the responses you receive?
4. What is the most challenging part of prison activism? What is the most rewarding?
5. Can you think of a time someone acted negatively to your work? Positively? How do you deal with cultural barriers?

Closing Questions:

1. What are your future plans?

2. Is there anything further that you would like to discuss that we haven't been able to cover today?