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From Solitary to Solidarity: Belonging, Social Support, and the Problem of Women's Recidivism

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Abstract

This paper addresses the relation between belonging and social support and recidivism of formerly-incarcerated women by reviewing existing literature on their experience re-entering into society. Drawing on recent evidence, this paper considers that belonging and social support, in the form of frequent, positive interactions, may help formerly-incarcerated women overcome obstacles of successful reintegration. Specifically, the review paper supports a hypothesis that if formerly-incarcerated women have more social support as they re-enter into society, the recidivism rate for this population could decrease. The review also examines how different demographics intersect with the experience of reintegration. The review paper attempts to lead to a greater awareness of this issue and to encourage more research on the specific challenges faced by this population.

From Solitary to Solidarity: How Belonging and Social Support Relate to Women's Recidivism

Belonging is a fundamental part of well-being. An insufficient sense of belonging can cause pathological distress that can affect physical health, mental health, and behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A strong sense of belonging is associated with a variety of positive outcomes, including social support (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). This social support is often experienced through regular positive interactions with loved ones (Hagerty et al., 1996). It is one of most effective buffers against stress and may guide individuals towards a positive direction of physical and mental health (Cohen & McKay, 1984). Positive and supportive interactions are especially important for adult women to experience. If women do not perceive that they have enough social support, they become more vulnerable than men to psychological and social distress (Hagerty et al., 1996). Many women who have previously experienced incarceration, or imprisonment, are extremely vulnerable to distress tied to a lack of social support. In American society over the last ten years, the number of formerly-incarcerated women has increased twice as fast as the rate for formerly-incarcerated men (Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, & Richie, 2005). The number of incarcerated women has tripled to over 1,000,000 in the last decade (Covington, 2007). Many formerly-incarcerated women may experience reduced social support as a result of a stigmatizing and a perceived shameful label tied to their having been in jail, a stigma that their families, peers, and broader social network places on them as they attempt to re-enter their communities (Freudenberg et al., 2005). This is problematic because social support after incarceration may help individuals maintain their sense of the feeling of belonging regardless of what stressor they faced (Cohen & McKay, 1984).

Reduced social support from loved ones, or reduced feeling of belonging, can instigate destructive behaviors, such as violence towards self and other (Baumeister, & Leary, 1995). This

sequence may be uniquely problematic for formerly-incarcerated women. If formerly-incarcerated individuals find themselves with insufficient social support as they transition back into society, they may be vulnerable to committing offenses against themselves or others, which can result in recidivism. Recidivism is the tendency to return to a criminal lifestyle resulting in incarceration after re-entering into society (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001). Recidivism is prevalent: some evidence suggests 39% of adult women face recidivism within fifteen months of their release, which is high relative to their male counterparts (Freudenberg et al., 2005). In addition to gender, the high recidivism rate is compounded by certain demographics, such as race (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001). For example, in 2014, African American offenders were found to have the highest rate of recidivism, 81%, U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2014). Hispanic offenders were found to have a 75% recidivism rate while Caucasian offenders returned to prison at a rate of 73% (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). The current review paper attempts to clarify the relation between social support and recidivism for women post-incarceration by reviewing existing research on their experience re-integrating into society. Specifically, this review will consider belonging and social support and how specific support networks may help formerly-incarcerated women overcome the obstacles they face while attempting to achieve successful reintegration. The reviewed literature supports a hypothesis that the recidivism rate for formerly-incarcerated women could decrease if women were granted more social support as they attempt to re-integrate into life outside of prison.

Examining Women's Reintegration into Society

Over the last couple of years, the rate of incarcerated women in the United States has risen more than it ever has before, making the representation of women in prison inconsistent with the nation's overall population (U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2017). The majority of the

women incarcerated will be released, making the integration of formerly-incarcerated women an important area of study (Visher & Travis, 2003). However, there is no “one story” that effectively captures how all of these women re-integrate into society. They represent a diverse array of social demographics, and disproportionately identify with historically marginalized groups (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2010). Indeed, sixty percent of formerly-incarcerated individuals are minorities and are middle aged (Guerino et al., 2012). In addition, most of these individuals classify themselves as lower on a social and socioeconomic scale as compared to individuals who have not experienced incarceration (Schnittker, 2014). Therefore, an analysis of factors affecting women's post-incarceration re-integration into society must not only identify barriers inhibiting successful reintegration, but do so in consideration of the role of minority and lower social economic status.

Women facing reintegration into today's society after a period of imprisonment usually encounter numerous barriers to their re-entry, such as social isolation from those in the community around them. While little research focuses on support provided during the re-entry process for women in particular, and instead tends to discuss men's process, the existing literature suggests that a lack of acceptance from the community can often impede on women's ability to reacquaint themselves with the necessary parts of a successful life outside of prison (Richie, 2001). This has been shown through qualitative research that interviewed women who have formerly experienced incarceration (Richie, 2001). Women reported that their needs are often ignored or neglected, a demoralizing experience that can make it seem like a successful reintegration is not a possible achievement (Bloom & Brown, 2009). However, those formerly-incarcerated women who are provided with significant support are often able to work towards a successful integration and eventually live a life that meet their personal desires and society's

expectations of a “good” life (Lambert et al., 2010). Formerly-incarcerated individuals often use social support to help them cope with a diminished self-identity brought about through imprisonment (Lambert et al., 2010). Supportive others can help these women realize their worth and what they can do with their newfound opportunity of freedom that comes with their release from prison (Schnittker, 2014). The barriers of social isolation, therefore, can be confronted through social support: along with belonging, it may be central to the success of the reintegration process.

Belonging and Social Support

The feeling of belonging drives individuals to form and maintain relationships that fulfill an innate human need for social connection (Lambert et al., 2013). This innate need is met when social connections allow individuals to feel valued by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Once individuals feel valued, they feel a sense of belonging. Belonging is experienced when interpersonal connections allow individuals to comfortably share attitudes, opinions, and characteristics (Hagerty et al., 1996). The more comfort and acceptance felt in the relationships, the stronger the feeling of belonging. Belonging also acts as a coping mechanism for the intense distress individuals experience in that it facilitates proper social support (Cohen & McKay, 1984). When individuals feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to turn to the source of that comfort and support when dealing with difficult situations rather than commit destructive acts. In addition, this perceived sense of belonging can have a substantial positive impact on individuals' mental health during a stressful period (Thoits, 1995). Positive mental health supports active engagement with society and promotes a positive perception of the concept of community (Lambert et al., 2013). In a series of longitudinal and experimental studies, researchers found that the feeling of belonging grants individuals the mindset that they deserve a

meaningful life (Lambert et al., 2013). A combination of a stable sense of belonging and a strong mindset of deserving a meaningful life has been found to potentially enable individuals to gain a confidence in their social identities and pursue goals that benefit themselves and their communities (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009).

A strong sense of belonging is associated with a greater perception of social support (Hagerty et al., 1996). It can be achieved through stable, positive interactions within meaningful relationships. These relationships grant individuals the opportunity to trust in others (Cavallo, Zee, & Higgins, 2016). The literature has shown that, for women, these interactions of trust need to occur to maintain good psychological and social well-being (Hagerty et al., 1996). Social support and trusting relationships are most effective when they exist among loved ones (Freudenberg et al., 2005). Social support from loved ones is recognized as a factor that helps many individuals overcome stressful situations (Thoits, 1995). However, the experience of being in jail can change relationships with loved ones: many formerly-incarcerated women have fewer, lower quality interactions with loved ones than before their imprisonment, potentially reducing their feelings of belonging which may negatively affect the process of reintegration (Freudenberg et al., 2005).

Identity as an Obstacle to Belonging

Formerly-incarcerated women benefit from supportive social relationships that promote feelings of belonging, yet they also must navigate challenges related to self-perception. A sense of belonging can provide stability in individuals' perceptions of their self-identity, however, incarceration can negatively alter perceptions of overall worth (Schnittker, 2014). Such negative self-perceptions may hinder any positive thoughts and actions and create self-doubt. In turn, self-doubt contributes to psychological distress, such as lack of motivation, depression, and suicidal

thoughts (Hagerty et al., 1996). Additionally, if these women experience reduced feelings of belonging upon release from prison this may exaggerate a negative state of self-perception, which can further promote psychological distress and lack of motivation to live a meaningful life (Stillman et al., 2009; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003). Any type of social alienation and isolation—for example, stigmatization—can discourage a sense of belonging and thwart progress to larger life achievements (Porter, 2014). A stigma acts as a barrier that disrupts potential connections that can be made between people. This disruption of social connections can be detrimental to important aspects of everyday life, such as employment, potentially leading to homelessness or recidivism (Hagerty et al., 1996; Freudenberg et al., 2005). Mental and physical distress experienced by formerly-incarcerated women must be viewed in light of the potential detrimental effects of stigma tied to imprisonment.

Stigma. Connecting with other people in order to feel belonging and support can be challenging for formerly-incarcerated women because of certain stigmas tied to incarceration. A stigma is an undesirable label directed towards people perceived to be a part of a particular group, possibly resulting in prejudice or discrimination (van Olphen et al., 2009). Incarceration often leads many individuals to experience stigma after their release. This stigma usually labels previously incarcerated individuals as psychologically and socially inept to re-enter their communities or be active members of society (van Olphen et al., 2009). This stigma may be experienced by incarcerated individuals as expectations or pressures, such that they feel as if they cannot make any mistakes (Lebel, 2012), which is an unrealistic depiction of reintegration. Stigmas can stain formerly-incarcerated individuals' identities such that they perceive themselves as less and less deserving of the kind of "good" life lived by individuals who have not faced incarceration (Porter, 2014). Consistent with the way stigma typically works, most

individuals who have been incarcerated face social isolation from their family and community connections (van Olphen et al., 2009).

Stigma and race. Formerly-incarcerated individuals may experience stigma and discrimination differently as a function of their racial identity (LeBel, 2012). For example, formerly-incarcerated women of color have been found to be discriminated against more than their Caucasian counterparts (Riche, 2001). This is important to acknowledge as two thirds of those who are facing or have faced incarceration are women of color (Richie, 2001). These women are more commonly discriminated against on the account of their racial identity, which may have adverse effects on their attempt to reintegrate into society (LeBel, 2012).

Stigmatization can ostracize minority women from the social support they need in order to have a successful re-entry (Porter, 2007).

Focusing on the reintegration of Hispanic or Latino individuals is important as they make up thirty percent of the currently incarcerated population which is soon to be released (Freudenberg et al., 2005). The racial disparities faced by Hispanic and Latino individuals, in such arenas as socioeconomic status and health care, are particularly challenging for those who have experienced incarceration (Freudenberg et al., 2005). The lack of support and opportunity for help in the process of reintegration puts this population at a disadvantage. There is existing literature that demonstrates a concerning detriment in the lack of resources available to formerly-incarcerated Hispanic and Latina women, resources that would address important health issues such as pregnancy and HIV testing (Freudenberg et al., 2005). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific social disadvantages that are faced by formerly-incarcerated women who are Hispanic or Latina. This gap in the literature is problematic because 33.6% of current incarcerated people identify as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons,

2017).

Stigma and gender. Being a woman can compound the potential damaging effects of an incarceration stigma. Formerly-incarcerated women have been found to have more minimal social support relative to their male counterparts (Covington, 2007). This social isolation can contribute to recidivism rates in that many of these women are unprepared to meet the challenges and barriers of readjustment if they must face them alone. These women report feeling more marginalized than many formerly-incarcerated men, potentially because certain gender-based stereotypes require women, but not men, to refrain from being disruptive and be an active member of society (Richie, 2001; van Olphen et al., 2009). Unrealistic expectations along with a lack of support can set women up for failure at a successful reintegration.

Women are likely to be affected by negative mental health and thus lose potential opportunities to achieve a “good” life (Richie, 2001). Mental illness such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, can make it difficult for formerly-incarcerated women to successfully re-integrate into society by disrupting their everyday attempts of achieving it (Riche, 2001). With a higher chance of experiencing mental illness comes more societal issues, such as isolation or alienation, that can further challenge women’s ability to re-establish their perceived good life. Exacerbating mental health challenges, women receive less support from governmental and communal settings relative to men, such as fewer transitional workplace programs and fewer available therapies, which collectively can interfere with successful re-entry from a post-incarceration setting (Bloom & Covington, 2004). Beyond social services, a lack of social support from families and friends can limit many formerly-incarcerated women’s intentions to seek help for mental health issues, such as therapy, that would drive a successful re-entry into communities (van Olphen et al., 2009). The lack of acceptance from formerly-incarcerated

women's social networks and communities has a negative effect on many women's ability to re-integrate into their communities (Riche, 2001). In addition, these women are marginalized economically relative to men, such that they have less access to public assistance that they might need in order to to maintain a job and earn a steady income (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). This means they have fewer potential economic opportunities relative to men. Their economic disadvantage, coupled with the array of consequences associated with stigma can hinder women who have experienced incarceration from easily achieving successful reintegration.

Sources of Social Support

Interactions that occur frequently with individuals that promote "good" choices are essential to the reintegration success of formerly-incarcerated women (Cavallo et al., 2016). These interactions are found particularly effective when they occur with loved ones, i.e., within stable, pre-existing relationships (Freudenberg et al., 2005). Along with the stability of the interactions, the promotion of what a good life consists of is important. Research has found that those individuals who guide others towards "the right way" can have an effective impact on who they are helping (Cavallo et al., 2016). Formerly-incarcerated women who are guided by individuals who promote their well-being, for example their success at reintegration into society and their communities, have more opportunity to reach their re-entry goals and what they perceive as a "good" life.

Foundational social support. While little literature exists that addresses how the overall environment of a living space can contribute to the attitudes of the individuals who reside there, it is important to study when examining the reintegration process of formerly-incarcerated individuals. Many return to the same neighborhood they lived in previous to their imprisonment (Richie, 2001). This suggests that these women are returning to the same relationships,

dynamics, and pressures that were present when they engaged in behaviors that led to incarceration. A return to the same situation could potentially lead to further destructive behaviors, such as violent crimes, and ultimately to recidivism (Leverentz, 2011). The literature shows that community members often judge formerly-incarcerated women's worth during their re-entry based on unrealistic standards. Family and community members can judge off of harsh moral standards and are often reluctant to treat formerly-incarcerated women as an equal (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). These standards normally are not uniform and are ultimately used by community members to judge if individuals are redeemable or not (Leverentz, 2011).

Family. The families of women who have experienced incarceration undergo many sacrifices, such as financial instability and a change to the family dynamic (Guerino et al., 2012). The normal family dynamic becomes unbalanced when one member is incarcerated, even if temporarily. Also as most incarcerated individuals come from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds any additional expenses that may come with incarceration can make finances even more difficult (Guerino et al., 2012). The added financial and emotion stress of a family member's incarceration can cause the other family members to experience a multitude of negative emotions. Results of this could be negative mental and physical health, especially for children (Heidemann, Cederbaum, & Martinez, 2016a). Having a family member incarcerated also can impact the behaviors of family members, again with the emphasis on children (Heidemann et al., 2016a). For example, children who grow up in an environment with incarceration present within their family dynamic are more likely to engage in criminal activity that could potentially result in their own incarceration (Heidemann et al., 2016a). This endless cycle continuously alters the strength of familial relationships.

Each of these challenges can impede family members' willingness and/or ability to maintain relations with the member who has experienced incarceration. For example, these negative emotions and behavioral problems occurring in response to the incarceration can impact the family's decisions to continue to contact and support the member who has faced incarceration (Christian, Martinez, & Martinez, 2016). Regarding all of these adversities, being in the position of deciding whether to maintain relations and support a family member who has experienced incarceration is a challenge. This decision to support, unfortunately, is often made when the family members themselves are not receiving enough support from others (Christian et al., 2016). This can result in a choice *not* support the family member experiencing incarceration, putting that individual at a disadvantage during and after his or her incarceration. However, when family members do choose to help their loved ones who have experienced incarceration, they make a positive impact on the reintegration process (Christian et al., 2016; Guerino et al., 2012).

Mother-child relationships. When positive, familial relations can be a strong form of social support that can grant individuals the motivation to live a meaningful life (Lambert et al., 2010). One of the most powerful relationship that actively affects formerly-incarcerated women's life choices is the mother-child relationship (Brown & Bloom, 2009). However, there are many difficulties that exist within these women's roles as mothers that can lead to poor relations, and thus poor life choices. For example, a large obstacle is facing the stigma of being a "bad mother" (Brown & Bloom, 2009). More than half of formerly-incarcerated women did not finish high school, decreasing the chance of receiving employment that can stably support a family (Brown & Bloom, 2009). These unstable conditions can create challenging environments for their children who may be exposed to delinquent activities, possibly placing them at risk to face incarceration themselves (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999). Such a turn

of events may feed a perception that formerly-incarcerated women are not “good mothers.” Along with the challenges that an incarceration stigma presents, they also often feel guilty for abandoning their children (Heidemann et al., 2016a). These mothers often feel guilty that their presence in prison required that they place their children in a situation in which they had to “fend for themselves” without their mother present.

Being a strong role model for children motivates many previously-incarcerated women to try to achieve their perceived good lives (Heidemann et al., 2016a). The second chance to be with and raise their children is a powerful motivation that many formerly-incarcerated women use to work hard towards their re-entry goals and avoid recidivism. Acceptance and support from their own children is a main goal for many of these mothers, a goal that they perceive will be indicative of whether they have achieved re-integration success (Heidemann et al., 2016a). Although how mothers benefit from their children in terms of direct social support is not specifically identified, the combination of the love and true connection is enough to empower many formerly-incarcerated women (Tasca, Mulvey, & Rodriguez, 2016).

Surrounding community. When families cannot fully support members who have experienced incarceration, communities often can assist with the reintegration process. For example, among the many challenges intertwined with the reintegration process are finances and unemployment (Visher, 2013). Community support can come through small business owners providing employment for formerly-incarcerated individuals (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001). Formerly-incarcerated women can then become more stable with their finances, reducing their economic stressor. Along with improved finances, hiring individuals who have experienced incarceration grants them the opportunity to learn social skills and practice a solid work ethic that can benefit them in many areas of their lives (Clear et al., 2001).

The opportunity for formerly-incarcerated women to have employment is derived from the trust of the members of the community. Having the second chance to be an active member in society demonstrates a positive community response and source of support for them (Leverentz, 2011). This trust can trump other inhibitors, such as stigma, that these women face and give them the proper encouragement to work towards their re-entry goals. This positivity and motivation promotes positive mental health and self-worth (Leverentz, 2011). If these individuals have positive mental health and self-worth they will be more likely to take the chance to form relationships with other community members. This can ultimately strengthen their social identity in the community and continue the needed development of their neighborhood (Clear et al., 2001). This progress allows formerly-incarcerated women to continue to strive towards achieving their reintegration goals and their perception of their good life.

A positive neighborhood environment, whether it is the same one as before incarceration or not, can play a helpful role in the success reintegration of formerly-incarcerated women. If communities promote the successful reintegration of these women, the individuals and their families would live “good” lives (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). The development and support of the members, anyone who contributes to the community such as neighbors and business owners, can impact the reintegrating individuals economically, psychologically, and socially (Clear et al., 2001).

New Sources of Social Support

Much evidence suggests that social support from pre-existing networks (e.g., friends, family) can fall short for women after they are released from prison (Freudenberg et al., 2005; Lebel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015). This may explain why many women seek social support in new relationships with other formerly-incarcerated people (Schnittker, 2014). It can act as a buffer

from stress and promote feeling of belonging with those who have shared similar experiences (Lebel et al., 2015). It is difficult for those who have not experienced incarceration to understand the difficulties that women endure previous to, during, and especially after their incarceration (Schnittker, 2014). Thus the mentor-mentee relationship that often emerges between two previously incarcerated women often helps both parties. The individuals who act as mentee in the relationships learn methods to potentially increase their success at reintegration in society (Gartner & Riessman, 1965). The individuals who act as mentors have been found to deem themselves more worthy of the advice they share with their mentees and continue to work towards their own success at reintegration (Gartner & Riessman, 1965).

Mentorship. The literature suggests that people who help others, for example motivating them, also benefit, such as becoming more motivated (Gartner & Riessman, 1965). The recent literature highlights the value of mentorship to those undergoing tough circumstances by individuals who have previously experience the same circumstances, such as homelessness and incarceration (Lebel et al., 2015). Formerly-incarcerated women can act as mentors and facilitate the process of reintegrating into society for women who are beginning their journey (Lebel et al., 2015). These women often feel the most comfortable addressing the real issues preventing them from a successful re-entry into society when they do not feel the negative presence of stigma and discrimination (Schnittker, 2014). They often find this space among other formerly-incarcerated women. They can learn from other formerly-incarcerated women who have already experienced reintegration, receiving potentially useful information to help some expected obstacles. This form of social support empowers many of these women to continue to strive to live a meaningful life (Lebel et al., 2015). This guidance can be received in many settings, such as one-on-one

guidance, however self-help groups have been found also to be an effective method (Gartner & Riessman, 1982).

Benefits of self-help. Self-help groups are defined as small structured groups that offer mutual guidance for all members (Gartner & Riessman, 1982). Mentorship is a form of self-help groups that allows the mentor and mentee to experience the benefits of social support while learning from each other's experiences. This pairing allows a strong connection to form between individuals who have experienced similar situations, increasing productivity and accomplishment (Gartner & Riessman, 1982). Research shows formerly-incarcerated women utilize their drive for successful reintegration better when those who share their experience support them through deep connections (Heidemann, Cederbaum, Martinez, & Lebel, 2016b). They can act as mentors to those who are just beginning their reintegration process. This allows the individuals to feel comfortable to share their real feelings and issues without the judgment of those who do not understand their specific experiences (Tasca et al., 2016). The fear of discrimination and exclusion decreases when individuals who share experiences work together rather than with a professional staff member (Heidemann et al., 2016b). The specific interdependency former within the group can help formerly-incarcerated women overcome any negative influences that exclusion might have on their physical or mental health (Lebel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015).

Empowerment of others. Formerly-incarcerated women often volunteer and work to form open communities in which other individuals similar to them can remain oriented towards successful reintegration. A majority of these women who empower others to work hard towards successful integration and living also empower themselves to maintain the life that they have worked so hard to achieve (Heidemann et al., 2016b). This self-taught empowerment acts as a constant reminder of positive sense of self and worth (Lebel et al., 2015). This opportunity

keeps formerly-incarcerated women connected and focused on something positive, which may help them abstain from negative temptations that could result in recidivism (Tasca et al., 2016). The literature shows that use of formerly-incarcerated women as staff of reintegration programs is very successful (Lebel et al., 2015). Such evidence suggests that more employment opportunities under this category should be available to these women to promote better financial security and more social support (Lebel et al., 2015).

When formerly-incarcerated women achieve their re-entry goals, they create their own positive perception of their families and communities (Heidemann et al., 2016b). This is important in the sense of motivating their children and other formerly-incarcerated women to achieve “good” lives. It has been found that having a mother presently or formerly experience incarceration increases the likelihood of children developing mental health problems (Tasca et al., 2016). In turn, disruptive mental health can lead to destructive behaviors, potentially putting children at risk of their own incarceration (Heidemann et al., 2016b; Lambert et al., 2013; Tasca et al., 2016). This detrimental chain needs to be addressed more in the literature as parent incarceration is a main cause of younger adolescent incarceration (Cottle et al., 2001). Further research should look into what factors can help formerly-incarcerated mothers maintain positive relations with their children in order to reduce the rate of recidivism.

Conclusion

With rates of women's incarceration still on the rise in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2017) and the recidivism risk heightened without sufficient support post-incarceration, studying this vulnerable population is critical. With more research addressing this specific population, not only might new interventions be developed to support successful re-entry into society, but existing transitional programs and

therapies that have already demonstrated success can be modified and expanded on in order to help more of these women (Bloom & Covington, 2004; Lebel et al., 2015). A successful re-entry is important in order to promote better psychological and social well-being of not only formerly incarcerated women but also members of their respective communities, including their own children who are more at risk for incarceration by having parent who has experienced punishment for criminal activity (Hagerty et al., 1996; Riche, 2001; Heidemann et al., 2016a). In order to strengthen these transitional programs and fully support this population, additional research on the experiences of formerly-incarcerated women should also be conducted. Such research could illuminate the intersection of demographics and different forms of social support. Of particular interest is the intersection of minority demographics (e.g., minority race or sexual orientation), which can compound discrimination and vulnerability, with the negative stigma of incarceration. Research might particularly attend to the concerns, risks, and needs of post-incarcerated women who have minority ethnic identities, specifically Hispanic and Latina women, minority sexual orientations, and lower socio-economic status. These demographics represent many women who are currently or formerly incarcerated and more information on how these demographics predict their experiences could benefit many women (U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2017). Research that leads to clear recommendations could assist formerly-incarcerated women navigate the challenge of re-entry into society, and encourage their ability to create and sustain relationships that provide social support and a sense of belonging.

Research has supported that an accepting community can encourage formerly-incarcerated women to participate in behaviors that are less likely to result in recidivism (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Tasca et al., 2016). In order to promote healthy and productive lifestyle choices, social programs might prioritize educating community members about the needs of this

population. This might help reduce stigma and increase the practical and logistical support that helps sustain life outside of prison. By understanding the obstacles these women face and recognizing that most of these women are highly motivated to reform their behaviors, communities may be more prepared to create opportunities, which could have positive effects on formerly-incarcerated women's attempt to re-enter into society. With an overall change of communities' attitudes, we could see more drive for reform on a global level, which could support the overall population of women who have experienced incarceration. More research is necessary to identify systematic changes that might help women during their transition back into society, laying the groundwork for them to have more societal support, for example, less stigmatization and more resources, in order to help formerly-incarcerated women achieve a successful reintegration and live a positive life.

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