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Strength-based Approaches to the Treatment of Incarcerated Women and Girls

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Introduction

As the number and rate of women and girls involved in the criminal justice system have increased in the past decades, research on best practices for working with women and girls has also grown in order to prevent recidivism and to promote a variety of positive outcomes for these populations. From 1977 to 2004, the number of women in prison in the United States expanded by 757% (Frost et al., 2006). The imprisonment rate for women in 2000 was 65 per 100,000 residents, compared only 10 per 100,000 residents in 1979 (Carson & Sabol, 2012; Frost et al., 2006). The rapid increase in the number of women involved in the criminal justice system in the United States has been attributed primarily to macro-level changes in arrest and sentencing policies and practices and the expansion of prisons, especially for-profit prisons (Bloom et al., 2004; Richie, 2012).

As a result, more than a million women are under correctional supervision, and represent 18.5% of all adults involved in the United States' criminal justice system (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). Women account for 23% of adults on probation and parole, and 9% of adults in jails and prisons; overall, 69% of women involved in the criminal justice system are under community supervision and 31% are incarcerated (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). Incarcerated women's offenses range in type, but are mainly non-violent offenses, with 37% of women serving time for violent offenses, and 63% for non-violent offenses, such as 29% for property crimes and 25% for drug-related crimes (Carson, 2015).

Similarly, from 1992 to 2013 in the United States, the proportion of youth arrested who were girls increased from 20 to 29%, and the proportion of youth on probation who were girls rose from 16 to 23% (Sherman & Black, 2015). Girls involved in the juvenile justice system are commonly arrested for minor offenses or status offenses (i.e. those related to their age) (Belknap et al., 2011). For example, in 2012, they comprised 76% of juvenile arrests for prostitution, 40% for liquor law violations, and 29% for curfew

violations (Sherman & Black, 2015). The increase in the number and rate of girls in the juvenile justice system in the United States has been attributed to the multiple ways in which girls, especially girls of color, are "overpoliced and underprotected," such as through excessively punitive school-based practices and policies (Crenshaw et al., 2015). They are more likely to receive punitive responses instead of needed social services and formal supports, especially when they have experienced trauma, extreme poverty, and other forms of marginalization. This increase is also due to changes in arrest policies and practices in the United States that redefine girls' behaviors into criminalized behavior; for example, the change in policy to defining girls' involvement in family arguments as assault has led to higher rates of arrest and detention for girls (Chesney-Lind, 2010).

Girls and women comprise a small but significant proportion of those involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems in the United States. In the past two decades, a growing body of research has focused on gender differences in factors such as pathways to criminal justice involvement and the specific social, physical, and psychological needs of girls and women, resulting in an identified need for gender-responsive practices (Belknap, 2015; Covington & Bloom, 2007). A consistent feature of suggested best practices for correctional-based programming and practices is a strength-based approach to working with girls and women involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Hubbard & Matthews, 2008; Van Wormer, 1999; Wright et al., 2012). This type of programming has displayed efficacy in addressing some of the needs of girls and women, and is an area that may benefit from additional research.

Gendered Pathways to Criminal Behaviors

One frequently used theory to explain gender differences and trajectories into crime is feminist pathways theory. This theory encompasses a life-course perspective of the gender differences in types and dynamics of life experiences (Belknap, 2015). Daly's (1994) foundational work showed gender differences in common pathways to criminalized behaviors. The pathway category with the highest proportion of men included the use of violence for control and masculinity as motivating criminalized behaviors. In contrast, the pathway with the largest proportion of women included histories of childhood and adulthood victimization, substance abuse, mental health distress, and criminalized behaviors often connected to relationships and survival tactics. Numerous studies have tested and elaborated upon this work with similar resulting pathways for women that center on these factors (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014).

Similarly, a "school-to-prison pipeline" is a framework for understanding boys' and young men's trajectories into the criminal justice system in the United States, whereas a "sexual abuse-to-prison pipeline" is a framework commonly applicable to girls' and young women's trajectories (Saada et al., 2015). One review of over 1,600 articles and book chapters focusing on juvenile justice involvement and gender found that the combinations and influences of risk factors are distinct for girls and boys; for example, child abuse is prevalent for both, but girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse with subsequent mental health concerns (Zahn et al., 2010). While life experiences may be similar for populations of youth, the distinctive patterns and associated events differ across gender.

Most of the research about women's pathways into the criminal justice system focuses on the pivotal and central role of adversity and trauma, especially in regards to the cumulative nature of these experiences. These experiences occur within a gendered

context; for example, girls and women often experience punitive responses to their coping and survival strategies (e.g., running away from sexual abuse at home, which results in arrests as teenagers). In addition, race, class, and gender are a "triple jeopardy" for women, incorporating multiple forms of marginalization and disadvantage (Bloom, 1996). African-American girls are more likely to be harshly disciplined within schools for the same behavior as White girl classmates (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Despite high rates of sexual abuse, girls (especially girls of color) are often responded to with juvenile justice involvement, versus protective and trauma-specific services. Likewise, girls of color have been processed more harshly through the juvenile justice system (Bloom & Covington, 2001). Adversity continues into adulthood with various forms of violence, social marginalization, pervasive poverty, and addiction creating a system of "gendered entrapment," specifically for African-American women (Richie, 1996). The cumulative effects of trauma pervade multiple aspects of women's lives, including physical and mental health, home and property status, and school and work performance (DeHart, 2008). These effects shape the context in which women seek to navigate their lives and the limited choices available to them. Women involved in the criminal justice system are also denied forms of capital throughout their lives, which contributes to their involvement in the United States' criminal justice system (Owen et al., 2017).

Women enter the criminal justice system with significantly higher rates of specific concerns than men (Fedock et al., 2013; Messina et al., 2003, 2007). Some of these concerns include that women are more likely to report being the primary caregivers of minor-age children and have histories of at least one incarcerated parent, low educational attainment, being impoverished, and multiple health concerns. As an example, approximately 75% of incarcerated women in the United States have mental health problems, and 55% of men in state prisons have mental health concerns (James & Glaze, 2006). Similarly, over 80% of women meet criteria for a substance use concern, and both alcohol and drug misuse rates are higher for women in prison than for men in prison (Fazel et al., 2006).

Overall, the main aspects of feminist pathways theory are the interconnections and ramifications of trauma during childhood and adulthood, substance use, poverty, social status and marginalization, and system-level responses to girls and women (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). These aspects have explained women's trajectories into the criminal justice system, as well as, at least partially, predicted women's recidivism (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). Given the expansion of research about gendered pathways to criminal justice system involvement, efforts have also been made to design, implement, and test correctional programming for girls and women that corresponds to this theoretical foundation (Covington, 2008).

Gender and Correctional Programming

Gender differences exist in the type of programming available to men and women involved in the United States' criminal justice system. Up until the early 2000s, the majority of correctional programming in the United States was intended for and tested with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system (Belknap, 2015; Dowden & Andrews, 1999). For example, a review of juvenile justice programs in the early 1990s showed that 2% of the programs served only girls and 6% served primarily girls (Lipsey, 1992). Similarly, a meta-analysis of cognitive behavioral interventions for adults involved in the criminal justice system found that 62% of studies had samples of all men, and only 5% included all

women (Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005). Studies have also displayed gender differences in key treatment components needed for successful outcomes (Messina et al., 2006; Pelissier et al., 2003; Staton-Tindall et al., 2007).

A pivotal turn in correctional programming was the United States' National Institute of Corrections' report, *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders* (Bloom et al., 2005), which documented the need for a criminal justice system that recognizes the behavioral and social differences between the women and men involved in it. The following guiding principles were and continue to be the core components of gender-responsive programming:

1. Acknowledge that gender makes a difference.
2. Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.
3. Develop policies, practices, and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections to children, family members, significant others, and the community.
4. Address substance abuse, trauma, and mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated, and culturally relevant services and supervision.
5. Provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status.
6. Create a system of comprehensive and collaborative community services.

In addition, a strength-based approach is a key element for gender-responsive treatment and services, especially clinical approaches with girls and women (Covington & Bloom, 2007). This strength-based approach requires seeing women and girls as possessing the strengths and skills necessary for their healing and transformation processes. This approach is both quintessential to gender-responsive programming and a distinct approach to correctional programming. The following sections provide an overview of the initial impetus for a strength-based approach, the core concepts specifically for correctional programming, and a review of studies of clinical interventions using this approach for girls and women.

Strength-based Approach: Theoretical Overview

The main aspect of the strengths perspective is a belief in human potential and the capacity for people to grow and change through tapping into their own strengths (Saleeby, 1992; Weick et al., 1989). A strength-based approach requires a foundational and central perspective of seeing people as having both discovered and yet-to-be discovered strengths and assets (Van Wormer, 2001). Although this approach incorporates recognition that adverse events, oppression, and trauma occur in individuals' lives which *may* have detrimental effects, the emphasis is on building upon strengths instead of focusing on fixing, correcting, or eliminating deficits, problems, and abnormalities. Specifically, a strength-based approach incorporates identifying, gathering, and advancing progress through individuals' resources, strengths, and assets, including those from family and community sources (Saleeby, 1992). As a theory, this approach posits that these tasks will promote treatment progress, health, self-growth, self-actualization, and empowerment for girls and women and guides the method, style, model, and purpose of interactions with them (Van Wormer, 2001). Thus, a strength-based approach requires instilling hope, active listening skills, shared discovery, and an intentional identification and drawing upon assets and strengths – both within the individual and the environment (e.g., family, neighborhood).

Strength-based Approach and Corrections

This approach gained particular popularity and traction within the fields of social work and psychology in the 1990s (Saleeby, 1997). The overlap of corrections with clinical and social services led to a movement of incorporating the strength-based perspective within corrections (Van Wormer, 2001). Advocates of this approach highlighted how correctional programming and policies portrayed women as rife with personality disorders, disordered thinking patterns, irrational behaviors, and a myriad of risk factors and needs (Pollack, 2004). A strength-based approach focused instead on women as having multiple, helpful coping skills and internal resources, despite experiencing oppressive conditions that limit their actions and choices (Pollack, 2004). Understanding the social context, and particularly how women face multiple forms of oppression related to race, class, and gender, allowed for understanding how women's decisions are "rational responses to unjust circumstances" (Kendall & Pollack, 2003, p. 75). This approach countered theories of crime that focused on individual deficits related to social learning, antisocial attitudes, irrational thinking, and poor peer networks (Andrews et al., 1990; Hubbard & Matthews, 2008).

Guidelines and frameworks for women involved in the criminal justice system in the United States, particularly those under community supervision, explicitly linked to the strength-based approach in the 1990s and incorporated practices of casework, group treatment, consciousness raising, and an understanding of the sociopolitical contexts of women's lives (e.g., Rogers, 1992; Wilson & Anderson, 1997). As noted earlier, the growth of programming for girls and women has primarily occurred in the last decades and, with this growth, correctional programming has incorporated a strength-based approach in various ways. There are notable differences in this research that are shaped by differences in the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems. Research related to correctional programming for girls has a focus on prevention and intervention efforts toward youth behaviors defined as delinquent. This research also incorporates a population focus beyond just girls, including family-centered efforts and organizational change. In contrast, research on correctional programming for women involved in the criminal justice system centered on stages of criminal justice involvement, such as initial assessment upon entry into jail or prison and reentry into the community post-incarceration, with a focus on security and risk management and reducing recidivism. Most programming is for individual women or small treatment groups for women. The following sections outline strength-based approaches to correctional programming for girls involved with the juvenile justice system and women involved in the criminal justice system. The defining characteristics of each body of research structure the sections.

A Strength-based Approach with Girls

A strength-based approach has been used across different levels of practice with girls (e.g., at systems, group, and individual levels) and at different time points of involvement with the juvenile justice system (e.g., at risk, in centers). Research studies vary in how they define, examine, and test a strength-based approach. On a system level, a study conducted in 2010 compared two models of residential supervision in five juvenile detention centers in Connecticut (Day et al., 2015). One model was a behavioral reinforcement model commonly used in state-run juvenile centers, the other model was gender-responsive supervision that was used with boys and girls in juvenile centers run through contracts with non-profit agencies. The gender-responsive model included a strength-based

approach in the assessment process and daily activities; in operational tasks, this approach meant encouraging, creating, and maintaining staff and adolescent interactions, actively incorporating community building, and shared decision-making between staff and the adolescents. Of the initial sample of almost 1,500 youth, 22% of the sample were girls. Overall, girls with higher rates of histories of trauma, substance use, mental health concerns, and anger benefited from the gender-responsive model of supervision that incorporated a strength-based approach; they had lower risks of recidivism, yet girls without these histories showed an increased risk of recidivism with this model. There were no differences in recidivism outcomes for boys based on the supervision model. The authors posited that the gender-responsive approach might have helped girls with such histories develop more trusting relationships with staff, facilitating better engagement in the treatment. Of note, this study did not include all youth involved in these centers and missing data issues limited generalization of this study (Day et al., 2015).

In general, organizational change models with a strength-based approach are in need of additional research. In a systematic review of juvenile justice intervention research, of 141 studies, 21 articles were found to be rigorous and of quality for review (Evans-Chase & Zhou, 2014). Of the 21 articles, two studies found evidence for the effectiveness of a strength-based approach. The first study compared two groups of youth involved in the juvenile justice system: 106 youth in a strength-based wraparound program, and 98 youth involved in traditional mental health services (Pullmann et al., 2006). Girls comprised a small percentage of the study sample. Youth in the wraparound program were significantly less likely to recidivate, less likely to recidivate with a felony offense, and served less detention time; however, gender was not predictive of these findings. The second study was a pilot study of Alternative for Youth Advocacy Program in Ohio with a sample of approximately 80 youth (Mallett & Julian, 2008). However, the study did not mention, report, or discuss gender, limiting the ability to know if girls were included and if they benefited from this program.

On a family level, treatment models using a strength-based approach have shown positive outcomes. Kerig and Schindler (2013) conducted a review of interventions with girls at risk of or who were currently interfacing with the juvenile justice system. They spotlighted three common efficacious models for treatment, only one of which was a strength-based approach: functional family therapy. Studies of functional family therapy have found positive results for boys and girls, particularly in the outcome domains of reducing negative family behaviors and youth substance use. Researchers have examined specific elements crucial for change within the functional family model, such as the reframing technique and therapeutic alliance across family members, which are linked to the strength-based approach (Kerig & Schindler, 2013).

A group-based approach for adolescent girls involved in the criminal justice system is entitled *VOICES: A Program of Self-discovery and Empowerment for Girls* and is a gender-responsive program that guides the group through an understanding of the developing self and the centrality of connection to the lives of girls and young women. This program embeds a strength-based approach with relational cultural theory, trauma theory, and other perspectives central for girls and young women. VOICES has been studied in a variety of ways (Covington et al., 2017). It was first piloted in three different juvenile justice community correctional sites, which was a demonstration of how it could be feasibly introduced and implemented in different settings, with a diverse (in terms of ethnicity, community, and cultural background) population of adolescent girls. Feedback from facilitators and participants about the VOICES program was uniformly positive. Then a

follow-up study compared VOICES to substance misuse treatment. Girls in VOICES showed decreases in depression, aggressiveness, problems with affect, and anxiety; fewer reductions were found with girls in the other group. These types of changes were shown at the end of treatment, 3 months post-treatment, and 6 months post-treatment. VOICES has also been studied with trauma-sensitive yoga, with significant results for improving girls' self-esteem. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, are currently working with Northern California juvenile court, probation, and diversion programs to understand whether and how VOICES improves substance use, mental health, sexual risk, and legal outcomes for 200 community-supervised, justice-involved girls and young women aged 12 to 24 (Covington et al., 2017). Similarly, additional research has found sustained positive outcomes for girls related to substance use, mental health, and juvenile justice involvement after completing VOICES (Tolou-Shams et al., 2021).

For an individual-level target of intervention, researchers have examined outcomes for girls at risk of juvenile justice involvement or those self-reporting delinquent behaviors. A randomized controlled trial of two forms of individual therapy for racially diverse teenage girls compared emotional regulation therapy and a relational supportive therapy (Ford et al., 2012). The study examined mental health outcomes (particularly post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]), hope, anger, and emotional regulation. The emotional regulation therapy focused on identifying and managing symptoms of PTSD, and showed some efficacy in reducing symptoms of PTSD. The relational supportive therapy was client-centered "while facilitating self-directed, strength-based, solution-focused reflections on how to adapt past successes to manage stressors" (Ford et al., 2012, p. 32) and building strengths to help girls respond to other life difficulties. This form of treatment was significantly associated with girls' improvements in optimism, hope, and self-efficacy, and lower levels of anger. Notably, this study engaged girls in the community who reported engagement in delinquent behaviors, eliminating the limited environment of incarceration or confinement. However, this study did not specifically test the strength-based approach as a component linked to the findings for the relational supportive therapy and presents a question of how a strength-based approach may particularly help prevention-focused interventions for girls.

Limitations and Future Directions for Programming for Girls

The literature on best practices for working with girls in the juvenile justice system shows great variations across studies, with a wide range of measures, methods, and ways of operationalizing theoretical frameworks and principles, and with few studies capturing short-term and long-term outcomes (Walker et al., 2015; Zahn et al., 2010). In addition, studies use different definitions of juvenile justice involved girls, including girls at risk for involvement and those who are in detention centers. Researchers have stressed the need for studies to determine specific elements of programming that contribute to change (Ford & Hawke, 2012). One major limitation of the existing research is that a strength-based approach may be incorporated in the model, but not necessarily examined as a crucial aspect of the intervention. For example, a systematic review of prevention programs for youth delinquency spotlighted the type of location (e.g., school-based, family intervention), length of involvement, and key findings. No clear pattern emerged based on successful outcomes by gender. Of note, the review did not spotlight if a strength-based approach was used (Fagan & Lindsey, 2014). Likewise, some studies suggested that a strength-based approach may have been a component, but did not explicitly state such

inclusion (e.g., Bright et al., 2014). In many ways, the range of understandings of a strength-based approach (e.g., as a style of approach, as a way of perceiving girls, as an essential component of gender-responsive services or another model of care, or as complementary to a treatment model) is reflected within this body of research about correctional programs for girls.

Another major limitation is that, although gender-responsive programming explicitly incorporates a strength-based approach, research does not consistently consider and/or examine gender as a key factor. If the gender of the participants is not included, it is difficult to know if the program or intervention is helpful for girls. This dynamic was present in a study of strength-based juvenile justice programs across the country that incorporated interviews with staff, observational site visits, and administrative document review (Barton & Butts, 2008). The settings for six programs were chosen as study sites across the United States; they included two residential sites, three detention/probation sites, and one community-based placement. These sites were private, state, and county sites. This study looked specifically at the facilitators and barriers to implementing strength-based approaches within juvenile justice systems: an examination of organizational change elements. However, this study did not explore the role of gender.

Epistemologically, a strength-based approach does not commonly prioritize the same goals as traditional criminal justice (such as lowering and preventing recidivism or measuring compliance-based behaviors). Instead, a strength-based approach considers building and strengthening existing and additional resources across levels of domains (Mayworm & Sharkey, 2013). This type of priority requires different measures than those commonly used (such as arrest or offense charge) and a different research perspective. For example, one study evaluated a counseling group embedded within a Teen Court (Choate & Manton, 2014). The group had a philosophy of a strength-based approach combined with an explicit focus on skill building. The evaluation included satisfaction surveys to youth and questions about the therapeutic group aspects as a way to capture the strength-based dynamics. However, this study cannot be compared to other criminal justice studies because of this different measurement.

For future directions, outcomes for girls need to be investigated with proposed models, particularly organizational models of strength-based approaches for girls. The following are a few examples of such models. The Trauma-Informed Effective Reinforcement System (TIER) is a gender-responsive, research-based model of an alternative to compliance-focused behavioral management systems (Selvaggi, 2013; Selvaggi & Rothschild, 2012). The organizing principle of TIER is trauma-informed practice, establishing and maintaining physical and emotional safety in a 24-hour care facility. TIER provides tools that help girls and women learn how to be safe and contribute toward a safe environment while living with others. This practice happens when staff members reinforce positive, safe behaviors and use innovative practices that are relational, trauma-sensitive, and strength-based. In addition, the Pace Center for Girls includes 14 non-residential programs in Florida for girls at risk for delinquency who may have behavioral and educational problems (Treskon & Bright, 2017). The program and organizational culture incorporate principles of gender-responsive, relational, and strength-based approaches. Similarly, the model entitled Holistic Enrichment for At-Risk Teens (HEART) incorporates a strength-based approach through principles of gender-responsive programming and structural elements (e.g., opportunities for girls to build leadership skills) (Welch et al., 2009). Despite a lack of research, these models present interventions that involve staff, girls, and the foundational components of programming.

A Strength-based Approach with Women

A strength-based approach has been used and tested with women involved in the criminal justice system at a range of a time points of criminal justice involvement, including assessment, during incarceration, and upon reentry. Feminist pathways theory and the foundation of the gender-responsive principles have guided this expansion of correctional programming (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014).

Assessment at Entry into the System

As a response to gender-responsive programming in correctional settings, researchers have created gender-responsive assessment tools that incorporate strength-based domains. These assessment tools have been conducted in a range of jurisdictions (jails, prisons, probation, and community-based programs). The following are gender-responsive assessment tools: (i) The University of Cincinnati's Women's Risk/Need Assessment, which combines both gender-neutral and gender-responsive factors; (ii) the Northpointe Women's Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS; Northpointe Institute for Public Management, n.d.); and (iii) the Women's Risk/Needs Assessment-Trailer, which supplements the COMPAS or the Level of Service Inventory, LSI-R (Van Voorhis et al., 2008). The other commonly used model of assessment (e.g., the LSI-R without the supplement) is based on the idea of risk-need-responsivity, which is a gender-neutral model of assessment of risk and is not explicit in a strength-based approach, rather prioritizing a lack of needs (Andrews et al., 2011; Hunter et al., 2016). Gender-responsive assessments are more predictive of women's reoffending than gender-neutral assessments (Salisbury et al., 2009).

The Women's Risk/Needs Assessment (as a singular assessment tool and as a supplement) has been extensively studied and is used within the USA and internationally (Boppre & Salisbury, 2016; Van Voorhis et al., 2010). This assessment considers the following factors: criminal justice history, housing and safety, mental health history, physical/sexual abuse history, substance abuse history, education/employment/financial history, and parenting and family history. In addition, it focuses on women's levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Studies of the Women's Risk/Needs Assessment and the follow-up "trailer" assessment (Van Voorhis et al., 2010) show the following promising results:

- Gender-responsive mental health factors, such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, and anger were predictive of institutional misconduct and/or recidivism.
- Certain factors emerged from the research as strengths for women, such as confidence, family support (which significantly reduced the risk of both misconduct and reoffending), and educational assets and self-efficacy (which reduced the likelihood of reoffending).

Of note, debates persist around the necessity and efficacy of gender-responsive assessment tools, despite rigorous research indicating accurate risk predictive capabilities and their connection to positive outcomes (e.g., Van Voorhis et al., 2008, 2010). These debates have included a larger question about *how* to work with women involved in the criminal justice system (e.g., Holtfreter & Cupp, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). For example, with the Women's Risk/Needs Assessment tools, a strength-based approach is embedded into the instrument as a crucial element for understanding women's pathways into crime as well as desistance strategies (Van Voorhis et al., 2010). The outcomes are not just recidivism and institutional misconducts, but also promoting well-being for women. Thus, a

larger goal exists regarding the purpose of a strength-based approach (present in gender-responsive tools) as this approach is seen as necessary in changing the perception of women involved in the criminal justice system and professionals' interactions with them.

Treatment While Under Correctional Supervision

The number of promising evidence-based and gender-responsive curricula and materials has grown with the increased understanding of women's unique pathways to crime and their treatment needs. They have been evaluated with women in a variety of criminal justice settings. The following are examples of these curricula and training programs. Of note, all of these models are group-based treatment models.

Helping Women Recover: A Program for Treating Addiction (Covington, 2019) addresses substance misuse by integrating theories of women's psychological development, trauma, and addiction. This group-based program was studied through a randomized experimental study with incarcerated women in either *Helping Women Recover* or a standard prison-based therapeutic community for substance abuse disorder treatment. Women who received *Helping Women Recover* had improved psychological well-being, greater reduction in drug use, greater likelihood of staying in aftercare after release from prison, and a lower risk of recidivism than those in standard, non-gender-responsive programming (Messina et al., 2010).

Beyond Trauma: A Healing Journey for Women (Covington, 2016) is a group-based program that uses psycho-educational, cognitive behavioral, and relational therapeutic approaches to help women develop coping skills and emotional wellness. A brief version of this program is called *Healing Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Women* (Covington & Russo, 2016). Studies evaluating the effectiveness of *Helping Women Recover* and *Beyond Trauma*, both gender-responsive and trauma-informed programs with explicit foci on and foundation in a strength-based approach, showed that participants had reductions in PTSD and depression symptoms (Covington et al., 2008; Messina et al., 2012). These studies had samples of women in residential substance abuse treatment units, of whom half were mandated to treatment (mainly through the criminal justice system), and a majority of women (99% at the end of treatment and 97% at the 6-month follow-up point) reported no involvement in criminal activities (Covington et al., 2008). A follow-up study of a randomized controlled trial of women involved in drug court showed that women's involvement in these programs was significantly associated with improved well-being, low rates of arrest, high levels of participation in treatment, and reductions in PTSD symptoms (Messina et al., 2012). Research focused specifically on *Beyond Trauma* and the briefer version, *Healing Trauma*, has shown positive outcomes as well. Qualitative feedback from over 1,000 group participants highlights that these curricula are beneficial in both structure and content, and assist with intrapersonal dynamics (e.g., gaining self-respect, addressing and controlling anger) and interpersonal dynamics (e.g., healing relationships, developing interactive empathy) (Gajewski-Nemes & Messina, 2021). Similarly, women who have gone through *Healing Trauma* have described feeling empowered, lessened shame due to trauma histories, and finding a "safe haven" within the group space (Petrillo, 2021). These types of positive qualitative findings have also been found in research with women in segregated housing units who have gone through the curriculum, and significant findings have been found in improvements in measures of mental health and social connectedness for this population of women, which suggests that this is a helpful and effective curriculum that impacts strength-based domains for women across a variety of settings (Messina et al., 2020; Sigler et al., 2020).

Beyond Violence: A Prevention Program for Criminal Justice-Involved Women (Covington, 2013) is an evidence-based curriculum for women in criminal justice settings who have histories of aggression and/or violence; it uses a group-based model. This model of violence prevention considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. Researchers have studied the program's feasibility and fidelity (Kubiak et al., 2014), short-term and long-term outcomes (Kubiak et al., 2012; Kubiak, Fedock et al., 2016), and outcomes with specific populations (Fedock et al., 2017; Kubiak et al., 2014). Consistently positive results of lowered mental health symptoms and low recidivism rates for women who completed the program have been found. In addition, the program has been tested in two California women's prisons, and similar positive results have been found, with especially medium-to-high effect sizes for women who are serving long or life sentences (Messina et al., 2016). Significant reductions were found in PTSD, anxiety, serious mental illness symptoms, and anger and aggression in women serving time for violent offenses. These groups were tested with peer educators (i.e., incarcerated women serving life sentences). Notably, this is the first violence prevention program for women involved in the criminal justice system. Although the studies related to this curriculum studied mental health and recidivism measures, a core premise of the program is developing, building upon, and sustaining women's strengths; women who have gone through the program have expressed gaining a deep sense of meaning, despite life in prison (Covington & Fedock, 2015). Some *Beyond Violence* groups are led by women serving long-term sentences, and research has shown that they benefit from this facilitation in a variety of domains and that women who participate in such groups display significant improvements in measures of mental health, anger, and other factors (Messina & Calhoun, 2021).

Moving On (Van Dieten, 2008) is a group-based program based on cognitive behavioral theory, relational theory, and motivational interviewing. It provides women with opportunities to expand their strengths and strategies, and mobilize and access resources within community and personal networks. It incorporates cognitive behavioral techniques with motivational interviewing and relational theory. Positive outcomes have been found for this program for women on probation in terms of lower re-arrests and conviction rates for women who completed this program than women who did not receive it during probation (Gehring et al., 2010).

Reentry and Community-based Services

Similar to the risk and needs assessment instruments for women, a prototype case management tool, called the Women Offender Case Management Model, evolved from gender-responsive, evidence-based practices, was designed to reduce recidivism, increase the availability of services, and enhance the lives of women involved in the criminal justice system (Orbis Partners, Inc, 2006). The model is for use with women sentenced to probation and with those going through the spectrum of reentry processes. Nine core practices guide the implementation of this model:

1. Provide a comprehensive case-management model that addresses the complex and multiple needs of women involved in the criminal justice system.
2. Recognize that all women have strengths that can be mobilized.
3. Ensure the collaborative involvement of women to establish desired outcomes.
4. Promote services that are ongoing.
5. Match services in accordance with risk level and need.

6. Build links with the community.
7. Establish a multidisciplinary case-management team.
8. Monitor progress and evaluate outcomes.
9. Implement procedures to ensure program integrity.

This tool was evaluated by comparing outcomes for a matched sample of over 400 women from 2007 to 2010 in three Connecticut probation officers; of the over 400 women, 174 women received this model of case management, and 174 women with matched characteristics were put in the control group, women with supervision as usual who were waitlisted for the model (Millson et al., 2010). Short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes were evaluated. Significant positive increases were found in the domain of women's strengths, which were referred to as protective factors and included measures of self-efficacy and strategies for success, and in alignment with the strength-based approach, women who received this case management also had significantly more contacts with formal and informal supports (such as professional providers and collateral contacts). One-year follow-up data revealed that participants also had a significantly lower rate of new arrests in comparison to members of the control group.

Another community-based, reentry model is Transitional Case Management, a strength-based case management for adults on parole with a foundation of the individual's goals, informal and formal supports, previous accomplishments, and skills and abilities (Fletcher & Wexler, 2005). It begins while an individual is incarcerated in prison as part of release planning and allows for a process of identifying reentry goals, strengths, and supports. Transitional Case Management continues for 24 weeks post-release in order to ensure connection with requested services. A multi-site, randomized controlled trial of this model in the USA included men and women and compared it to standard parole services; no significant differences in the primary outcomes were found (Prendergast et al., 2011). This study brings up a question of whether or not a strength-based approach should be part of standard parole care – even if it does not have significantly improved outcomes beyond standard care – as a philosophy and perspective for correctional programming. For example, in the UK, a desistance model has been presented as a different way of viewing corrections: shifting from considering programming to focusing on lives and, thus, centering correctional professionals as supports to those involved in the criminal justice system in terms of changing their lives, as opposed to corrective, punitive agents (Maruna & LeBel, 2010). This model directly transforms the rehabilitation model that is focused on pathology into a deeply strength-based approach, requiring changing correctional policies and practices (Maruna & LeBel, 2010).

Qualitatively, women who were formerly incarcerated have described five key themes of the necessary factors for navigating reentry into the community: (i) finding shelter; (ii) obtaining employment income; (iii) reconnecting with others; (iv) developing community membership; and (v) identifying consciousness and confidence in self (O'Brien, 2001). Thus, they may benefit from strength-based approaches. Morash (2010) has studied a gender-responsive supervision model for probation and parole in comparison with traditional supervision for women. She found that gender-responsive supervision had multiple positive results for women, arising from the *process and interactions* of this type of supervision, and contributed to women feeling empowered to change their lives in multiple ways, not just successfully navigating parole. These findings bring up a question of the purpose of correctional programming; is promoting low recidivism the core goal of corrections? How do and should correctional practices and the values embedded into

correctional policies incorporate a strength-based approach and how do they promote positive outcomes in process and goals beyond lower recidivism? Ultimately, a strength-based approach corresponds with women's perceptions of meaning, purpose, and well-being, and challenges several core practices and policies within the criminal justice system.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The larger body of research about correctional programming for women faces many concerns related to rigor and replication, making comparisons across studies somewhat difficult (Gobeil et al., 2016), and the body of research focused on strength-based approaches in particular is not immune to these concerns. Strength-based approaches also suggest the need for new measures, as traditional measures of recidivism may not comprehensively capture strengths-approaches' priorities. A glaring concern is the lack of research on jail-based strength-based correctional programming for women. Thus, future research may consider investigating strength-based approaches across multiple points of interaction with the criminal justice system, creating new measures of strengths, and continuing to challenge the purpose and components of correctional programming.

Across studies of girls and women, a missing element is an evaluation of the role of cultural competence within strength-based models. In particular, there are gaps regarding how women's overlapping identities, including gender, race, sexual orientation, age, and class, influence how correctional staff perceive women's strengths. Likewise, little attention is given to how a strength-based approach may interact with, exacerbate, or mitigate forms of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression with the criminal justice system. For example, a strength-based approach builds upon supports and capital. Scholars have found that inequality persists in women's pre-incarceration, incarceration, and post-incarceration experiences, often in manifestations of lack of capital, and as connected to their experiences of oppression (Owen et al., 2017). A strength-based approach may also need to consider forms of inequalities amongst women. One concern for incorporating a strength-based approach for girls and women is the replication of strengths based on gender stereotypes. In crafting correctional practices and policies, caution must be used not to expect a narrow or uniform set of strengths across girls and women. For example, in calls for strength-based approaches that recognize girls' expressions of empathy, a concern is that girls will be viewed as having a deficit if they lack a specific level of empathy (Hubbard & Matthews, 2008). Likewise, future research may examine how girls' and women's intersecting identities connect to the need for, use of, and outcomes from strength-based approaches.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice and Policy

The number of girls and women involved in the criminal justice system in the USA has grown exponentially over the past several decades. With this increase, attention has been given to understanding gender differences of those involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems and to developing effective correctional programming. A strength-based approach aligns with the ethics and values of many helping professions, such as social work. As such, it is an appropriate approach to use throughout clinical interactions with

girls involved with the juvenile justice system and women involved in the criminal justice system, as they have commonly been pathologized within these systems. This approach is foundational for gender-responsive programming principles and strategies that have strongly guided the continued development of correctional programming. Across each stage and aspect of practice, a strength-based approach shapes how practitioners view girls and women, define goals, structure organizations, and measure success. Although studies have examined this type of approach with girls and women, more research is needed, and larger questions persist about how a strength-based approach may require challenging the purpose and core practices embedded in correctional programming.

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