Developing A Program Evaluation for

Thinking for a Change:

Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Change Program

with Incarcerated Women in Saskatchewan:

A Research Practicum Report

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Abstract

A program evaluation was developed for use by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice with the cognitive behavioural program *Thinking for a Change*. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of *Thinking for a Change* as utilized with incarcerated women in Saskatchewan. Data requests were made for sample groups of incarcerated women who had completed the program and a matched comparison group. A scan for gender responsivity in the program delivery was also conducted. The data sets received were not matched on factors that impact recidivism. Therefore, recommendations to the Ministry of Justice include correcting this oversight. Additional recommendations are made for the completion of the quantitative program evaluation as well as improving gender responsiveness in program delivery.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The financial cost of the correctional system in Canada is substantial (Office of the Auditor General, 2017). Furthermore, crime is an issue of public safety. Rehabilitation of offenders is imperative. While there is a wealth of research in the field of rehabilitative interventions, women represent a small and distinct group of those incarcerated in Canada. Ongoing research, including evaluations of rehabilitative programs for women are essential in ensuring the correctional interventions for women are impactful.

The purpose of this study was initially to evaluate the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioural rehabilitative program called Thinking for a Change: Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Change Program in reducing recidivism for female offenders in Saskatchewan. Due to unforeseen circumstances and time limitations, the evaluation was not completed. However, a data set was created in order to complete a quantitative program evaluation by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice over the course of the next several years. The data set created for the evaluation will allow for comparison of recidivism rates between offenders who participated in the program and a matched comparison group that did not participate in the program. In addition, a review of gender responsiveness was completed. This review included a scan for women centered practices in setting, staffing and delivery of the program.

The overarching guiding research question of this study was: “Is the Thinking for a Change: Integrated Cognitive Behavior Change Program effective?” The quantitative evaluation will allow for the collection of accurate, specific data about the potential impact of the program. A review of program delivery with a scan for gender responsivity provides further information regarding effectiveness for the specific population of women. This evaluation may in turn, serve to inform programming decisions for women within the Saskatchewan Ministry of
Justice. Ultimately, ensuring effective programming that reduces recidivism is beneficial to the women who are directly impacted but also to the general public in terms of public safety and government cost savings.

1.1 Context

Women are a significant minority of those in conflict with the law. Women represent approximately 50% of the general Canadian population but make up less than 25% of the individuals accused of a criminal offence (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). Women comprise an even smaller portion of those sentenced to custody. Approximately 11% of those admitted to custody in provincial or territorial facilities are women and only 6% of federal facility admissions are women (Correctional Service Canada, 2017).

However, there does seem to be a trend towards increased numbers of incarcerated women. The number of women offenders serving federal sentences has increased by 38 percent over the last decade (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). In 2017, there were approximately 700 women offenders in federal custody (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). Notably, during the same period, the number of Indigenous women offenders in custody increased. Currently, 36 percent of women offenders in custody identify as Indigenous (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Office of the Auditor General, 2017).

As the number of female offenders increases, so does the cost for incarcerating and rehabilitating them. In 1999, Canada’s correctional services cost increased 8% from the previous year for a total of $2.26 billion (Monster & Micucci, 2005, p.169). During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, Canada spent $110 million on women offenders in custody (Office of the Auditor General, 2017). Approximately $5.2 million of that was for correctional programs and $4.4 million was for mental health (Office of the Auditor General, 2017).
Given the rising numbers and cost of incarcerating women, it is essential to consider what correctional interventions are effective. Correctional interventions for both genders have developed and changed over the years. For example, it is widely accepted that punishment is ineffective (Monster & Micucci, 2005). There is significant research to support rehabilitative programs as more effective (Monster & Micucci, 2005). Additionally, rehabilitation is supported in several segments of legislation (Government of Canada, 1985; Monster & Micucci, 2005).

In the field of rehabilitative research, some have argued that gender is not relevant to treatment in corrections (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). However, feminist scholars are critical of this approach as not responsive to the unique needs of women (Gobeil, Blanchette and Stewart, 2016). Literature largely supports that “women are incarcerated for reasons different to those of men and react differently to being incarcerated” (Montford, 2015, p.285). Furthermore, it is widely accepted that correctional interventions for women offenders require a different approach because women’s pathways to crime differ from those of men (Gobeil et al., 2016).

In Saskatchewan, a previous rehabilitation program for women was discontinued after being evaluated not only as ineffective but counterproductive as it increased recidivism for participants (Government of British Columbia, 2015). After the discontinuation of the previous program, a cognitive self-change program called Thinking for a Change: Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Change Program (hereinafter referred to as Thinking for a Change Program, or simply Thinking for a Change) became the primary program for women at the Pine Grove Correctional Center in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. There have been no evaluations of this program’s effectiveness with the Pine Grove Correctional Center participants to date.

This report includes a comprehensive literature review of theoretical perspectives relating to women in conflict with the law and gender responsivity in interventions and public policy.
Cognitive behavioural intervention in general and the *Thinking for a Change Program* specifically are discussed, followed by a review of previous evaluations of the program.

Following the literature review, the development of the evaluation and the challenges of completing the analysis are presented. This includes a review of the qualitative scan for gender responsiveness. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature and aims of the evaluation. Finally, recommendations are made for future directions.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Canadian Public Policy and Gender Responsivity

There are two important reports that have helped shape Canadian public policy regarding Corrections. The first: Creating Choices (Correctional Service Canada, 2015), was aimed at specifically addressing federally sentenced women. The second is A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety, which was aimed at the general offender population in Canada (Government of Canada, 2015).

Creating choices.

In 1990, the Canadian Government accepted the recommendations made by the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW) in the report - Creating Choices (Monster & Micucci, 2005). The report is fundamentally a feminist policy document (Monford, 2015; Monster & Micucci, 2005). Creating Choices promotes a gender responsiveness in considering the unique needs of female prisoners (Monster & Micucci, 2015). The five guiding principles of Creating Choices are in line with fundamental feminist theory. They are: empowerment, meaningful choices, respect and dignity, supportive environments, and shared responsibility for the well-being of women (Montford, 2015; Monster & Micucci, 2015). Notably, the TFFSW was the first correctional system panel where Aboriginal women had seats and were able to directly contribute their perspectives (Montford, 2015).

Corrections Services Canada responded to the report with action. Kingston Prison for Women was closed and replaced with five new institutions across Canada followed by two Healing Lodges for federally sentenced women (Office of the Auditor General, 2017). Corrections Service Canada also introduced a new correctional approach for women offenders, recognizing that women offenders have different paths to crime than men offenders (Office of...
the Auditor General, 2017). In consultation with corrections experts, Corrections Services
Canada developed programs to address the risk factors that are directly linked to women
offenders’ criminal behaviour (Office of the Auditor General, 2017).

A roadmap to strengthening public safety.

Almost twenty years later, in 2008, the federal government accepted the report A
Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety (Roadmap) written by the Correctional Service of
Canada Review Panel (CSCRP). The report advances a much different agenda than the Creating
Choices report. The Roadmap report focuses on offender accountability, strategies to eliminate
drugs in prison, and general improvements to both community and institutional corrections
(Montford, 2015). The Roadmap report contains minimal mention of women offenders.

Contrary to the feminist policy of Creating Choices, The Roadmap report uses gender-
neutral language and provides unilateral recommendations for both genders (Montford, 2015).
The general approach to corrections in the report is punitive in nature (Montford, 2015). As
discussed earlier, the punitive approach to offending is ineffectual (Monster & Micucci, 2005).
The primary focus of the report seems to be employability of offenders after release (Montford,
2015). This is of concern in that employment programs for women that fail to recognize the
many gendered and multifaceted issues are not successful (Richmond, 2014). The priorities of
The Roadmap report seem to be in conflict of the Creating Choices report. While Creating
Choices acknowledges inequality and marginalization, The Roadmap report has a much more
individualistic framework (Montford, 2015).

2.2 Characteristics of Women Offenders

Women offenders are unique and differ from their male counterparts. It is important to
note that most women in the criminal justice system are nonviolent and are not threats to the
community (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). They have often experienced trauma in the form of physical and/or sexual abuse (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Covington & Bloom, 2007; Office of the Auditor General, 2017). Histories of drug or alcohol abuse and mental health concerns including suicide attempts are also common (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Office of the Auditor General, 2017; Sacks et al., 2008). Women in the correctional system are mostly young, poor, undereducated, unskilled, and visible minorities (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Covington & Bloom, 2007). Many are young mothers, and experience dysfunction in interpersonal relationships (Office of the Auditor General, 2017).

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Four fundamental theories frame interventions for women in conflict with the law: pathways theory, relational theory, trauma theory, and addiction theory (Covington & Bloom, 2007). These are briefly reviewed below.

Pathways theory.

Research on women’s pathways into crime indicates that gender matters. Significant differences between the lives of women and men influence the nature of their criminal offending (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Covington and Bloom (2007) note that women offenders often have histories of sexual and/or physical abuse and that the survival of which is the most common pathway to crime. Women face unique challenges. Some of these challenges are intrinsically linked to the key issues that lead to female criminality. These include “histories of personal abuse, mental illness tied to early life experiences, substance abuse and addiction, economic and social marginality, homelessness, and relationships” (Covington & Bloom, 2007, p16).

An often cited work in pathway theory is Dayly’s (1992) description of five types of female offenders in relation to what pathway led them to criminal activity. The pathways
include histories of childhood abuse, drug use, relational violence and poverty (Dayly, 1992). Consistently it seems for women, the pathways to crime are often riddled with emotional trauma, addiction, interpersonal relationship issues, and poverty (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Holtfreter & Morash, 2003).

**Relational theory.**

Relational theory developed from an increased understanding of gender differences and the different ways in which women and men develop psychologically (Covington & Bloom, 2007). The theory suggests that women are motivated primarily by the need to establish strong connections to others (Covington & Bloom, 2007). According to relational theory, women’s self-worth and identity are intrinsically tied to connections to others (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

**Trauma and addiction theories.**

Trauma and addiction are intertwined in women’s lives and the theories provide a critical element in the foundation for gender-responsive services in the criminal justice system (Covington & Bloom, 2007). The understanding of traumatic experiences has increased in recent years. It is now considered necessary for all service providers to become trauma-informed if they want to be effective (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Trauma-informed services take trauma into account and avoid triggering trauma reactions or re-traumatizing the individual (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Further, trauma informed staff adjust behaviour to support the individual’s coping capacity and allow survivors to manage their trauma symptoms successfully so that they are able to benefit from supports (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Operating from a trauma-informed standpoint is particularly important for the criminal justice system as practices such as searches and restraints could re-traumatize women (Covington & Bloom, 2007).
Addictions are often intertwined with other issues, including trauma. A holistic gender informed model of addictions allows clinicians to “treat addiction as the primary problem while also addressing the complexity of issues that women bring to treatment: genetic predisposition, health consequences, shame, isolation, and a history of abuse, or a combination of these” (Covington & Bloom, 2007, p.19).

2.4 Gender Responsivity

Gender responsivity is rooted in feminist paradigms and theoretical models such as those discussed above (Gobeil et al., 2016). Gender responsive interventions and treatment acknowledge the gender specific needs and pathways of women to criminality. In the corrections field, this means considering the needs and unique challenges and strengths of women when considering physical space, staff, programming and material (Bloom, Covington, Messina, Selvaggi & Owen, 2014).

Gender responsive treatment uses evidence-based practices such as cognitive-behavioural therapy and skills-based learning (Gobeil et al., 2016). It is also trauma–informed and addresses the gendered pathways of female offending including physical and sexual abuse, mental health, dysfunction in families, parent-child relationships and the importance of education (Adams, 2016; Gobeil et al., 2016).

Gender specific needs.

Women offenders are a distinct population. As previously discussed, women enter into conflict with the law in different ways than male offenders (Covington & Bloom, 2007). There are several gender specific needs that result in criminality and barriers to reintegration to society for women (Carter, 2017). In order for programming to be effective for women, it is essential that it address women’s unique characteristics and circumstances (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003).
Seven core gender specific needs are: history of trauma, substance abuse, mental health, interpersonal relationships, motherhood, socio-economic status and Indigenous women’s needs. These are discussed below.

**History of trauma.**

Female offenders experience high rates of trauma including physical and/or sexual abuse including sexual assault and domestic violence (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Covington & Bloom, 2007; Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Mak & Chan, 2018). This suggests that trauma and victimization is a factor contributing to women’s criminality (Gobeil et al., 2016). Furthermore, history of trauma and abuse can affect response to treatment and correctional outcomes (Gobeil et al., 2016).

Female offenders who have experienced trauma have a need to feel safe. When women do not feel safe in their environment, they may respond in a self-protective manner and be closed to interventions (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). In addition, it has been suggested that for women who have been victims, it may be more essential to address associated low self-esteem than for men (McGlynn, Hahn & Hagan, 2012). Correctional Service Canada (2017) suggests that women offenders benefit from trauma informed practices and trust in relationships with those delivering services.

**Substance abuse.**

Women involved in crime often have substance abuse issues related to their criminality. In fact, research indicates “that women who use drugs are more likely to be involved in crime” (Covington & Bloom, 2007, p.19). The Federal report: ‘Gender Responsive Corrections for Women in Canada: The Road to Successful Reintegration’ indicated that 94% of women in provincial custody and 74% of women in federal custody present with needs related to substance
abuse (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). This data reflects that substance abuse is a common disorder for women offenders at all levels of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, substance use has also been found to be associated with higher risk for recidivism with women than men (Gobeil et al., 2016).

The need for intervention for women that includes substance abuse treatment is clear. Indeed, research supports targeting substance use with women in conflict with the law (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). Some studies have shown that interventions that target substance use have a greater impact on recidivism rates for women than men (Gobeil et al., 2016). For women particularly, addiction is a multi-dimensional issue involving many other factors and life challenges (Covington & Bloom, 2007). These gender differences need to be carefully considered when developing substance abuse programs for women. In fact, Covington and Bloom (2007) suggest that programs for addictions that focus on women specific needs are more effective than traditional, gender neutral programs used for men.

**Mental health.**

There is ample research indicating that women offenders are more likely to have significant mental health needs compared to their male counterparts (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Gobeil et al., 2016; Mak & Chan, 2018). There are higher rates of mental health needs within correctional institutions than in the general population, and “female offenders are more likely than male offenders to be diagnosed with a mental disorder” (Sacks et al., 2008, p.414). Common mental health issues among women offenders are depression and anxiety (Mak & Chan, 2018). In Canada, high rates of self-harm, suicide attempts and suicide are reported for women in both provincial and federal institutions (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). This data highlights the need for consistent and adequate
assessment, interventions, programs, and services in institutions and the community for female offenders (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Sacks et al., 2008).

**Socio-economic status.**

Female offenders often have education and employment needs. This is reflected in reports that women at all levels of custody in Canada are less educated and often lack employment (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). Some studies indicate that incarcerated women have an even more prevalent lack of education and need for training and job skills than their male counterparts (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Sacks et al., 2008). Moreover, women’s involvement in crime is often economically motivated, driven by poverty (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

Women’s socio-economic status is intertwined with many other gender specific circumstances. For instance, female offenders are often primary caregivers which increases the challenge of finding well-paid employment (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). This is especially true for those women who became mothers at a young age. As Holtfreter & Morash (2003) point out, early pregnancy often interrupts education and family relationships resulting in economic marginalization and at times, criminal acts motivated by poverty.

The need to address education and employment for women is clear. However, Richmond (2016) found that women involved in a correctional employment program did not experience any decrease in recidivism compared to those who did not participate. The study also noted that the factors related to women’s offending are unlikely to be one dimensional (Richmond, 2016). Richmond (2016) also recommended that the specific needs of women be carefully considered in the development of programming.
Interpersonal relationships.

A woman's involvement in crime is often closely tied to and impacted by relationships with partners and family members (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Sacks et al., 2008). Accordingly, programs for women should include skill development in building positive relationships and be delivered by staff who understand the relational needs of women (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). Approaching interventions for women mindful of the impact of interpersonal relationships improves effectiveness of programs (Correctional Service Canada, 2017).

Motherhood.

Many women involved in the criminal justice system not only have children, but are most often the primary caregivers (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). Women’s child rearing responsibilities and the challenges related to those duties add an additional factor of consideration for correctional programming (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Mak & Chan, 2018). For instance, it has been suggested that female offenders may have a need for parenting skills classes (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, being a primary caregiver of young children can be an obstacle to employment (Correctional Service Canada, 2017).

Indigenous women.

The over representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system has received considerable attention (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Indigenous women are overrepresented at provincial and federal levels of corrections (Office of the Auditor General, 2017). In fact, the proportion of Indigenous inmates in custody is higher for women than it is for Indigenous men, highlighting even greater
over-representation for Indigenous women (Office of the Auditor General, 2017).

For Indigenous women the intersecting oppressions of race and sex are intertwined and complex (Mullaly, 2010). For many Indigenous women, involvement in the criminal justice system is comprised of multifaceted circumstances including colonialism, trauma, substance abuse, violence, isolation, and poverty (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). It is essential that policies and programs recognize the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and are responsive to the complex issues faced by Indigenous women specifically.

**Co-occurring issues.**

Each of the needs of female offenders discussed above are interconnected. These needs highlight the intersectionality of oppression that occurs when factors such as gender, race and socio-economic status create a uniquely individual experience of oppression (Mullaly, 2010). The interplay of needs and issues can be seen when looking at trauma history, substance use and mental health (Gobeil et al., 2016; Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Sacks et al., 2008). In fact, it has been estimated that almost 60% of incarcerated women have both substance use issues and another mental health diagnosis (Sacks et al., 2008). The rate of comorbid diagnosis is also shown to be higher for female offenders than males. Incarcerated women have co-occurring diagnoses, such as depression and substance abuse, four times more often than male offenders (Mak & Chan, 2018).

The complexity and interwoven nature of issues facing women is acutely salient when looking at substance abuse. Many women offenders use drugs or alcohol in attempts to self-medicate for undiagnosed and untreated mental illness as well as prior or current abuse (Covington, 2001; Galbraith, 1998; Inciardi & Pottieger, 1994). Interpersonal relationships may also have an impact on women’s substance use, because women are often introduced to
substances by male partners (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). Women offenders in need of drug treatment often have co-existing needs, such as needs for pre-natal care or parenting skills, or help dealing with abusive relationships (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). Unfortunately, the outcomes of offenders with concurrent disorders are generally poor (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). This further underscores the significant need for the interconnected nature of needs facing women in the criminal justice system to be given consideration in program development and delivery.

2.5 Gender Responsive Interventions

It is clear in the literature discussed above that programming for female offenders should not be identical to that designed for men (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). Rather, women’s programming should be specific to the complex and unique needs of women. Comprehensive and integrated treatment to address the interrelated needs of women is essential for effective correctional programming (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Sacks et al., 2008).

To accomplish this, interventions, programs, and practices with women who are involved in the correctional system need to be gender responsive and holistic. This involves acknowledging the high rates of trauma, substance abuse, mental health issues, and dysfunctional relationships among female offenders (Correctional Service Canada, 2017; Gobeil, Blanchette & Stewart, 2016). At the same time, just as women are different from men, they are also different from each other (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). Holtfreter and Morash (2003) emphasize the importance of needs assessments, stressing that it is most effective and cost efficient to tailor programming to the needs of women rather than immersing them in programming that may not address their specific needs.
In Canada, federal, provincial, territorial correctional authorities and stakeholders have agreed to address women’s needs in corrections rather than maintaining a single approach and system designed for men (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). The Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice utilizes the *Gender Responsive Policy and Practice Assessment Manual* as a guide to their practice of gender responsive services. Two of the authors of the manual, Covington and Bloom (2007), also provide guiding principles for a gender responsive approach to criminal justice services. These include: acknowledge that gender makes a difference; create an environment based on safety, respect and dignity; develop policies, practices and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections; address substance abuse, trauma, and mental health issues through comprehensive, and culturally relevant services; and provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

Finally, it is noted that research in criminal justice rehabilitation is weighted with literature regarding what is referred to as “what works”. This generally applies to the mass of research in rehabilitating offenders. It seems, in terms of female offenders, the answer is: gender responsive interventions work. In a meta-analytic review of correctional interventions, Gobeil, Blanchette and Stewart (2016) found that those interventions that are gender responsive are more effective than those that are gender neutral. This may be particularly true for women who have followed gendered pathways to offending (Gobeil et al., 2016). One study indicates that women who have gender specific pathways into crime also have the largest reductions in risk after gender responsive treatment (Gobeil et al., 2016).

### 2.6 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy as a Correctional Intervention

The *Thinking for a Change Program* is a cognitive behavioural program (Bush, Glick & Taymans, 1997). The theory behind cognitive behavioural therapy is that behaviour is learned
and we can understand an individual’s behaviour by understanding their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs (Lowenkamp, Hubbard, Makarios & Latessa, 2009; Reeves, 2006). Further, this understanding aides in facilitating change (Reeves, 2006). Cognitive-behavioural therapy is problem-focused and helps people learn to change distorted thought patterns and negative behaviours (Covington & Bloom, 2007; Mak & Chan, 2018). The objective is to recognize negative, detrimental thoughts and replace them with more useful and positive thoughts, which will lead to improved behaviour (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Cognitive behavioural therapy in general has been found to be a beneficial treatment that enhances psychological well-being and builds upon strengths (Mak & Chan 2018).

Cognitive behavioural programs are promoted by many researchers as an effective rehabilitative strategy, including Donald Andrews, a leader in criminal justice intervention and assessment (Wormith, 2011). Programs rooted in cognitive skill building have been shown to be one of the most promising interventions for offenders (Mak & Chan, 2018; Reeves, 2006). The approach is rooted in the concept that dysfunctional behaviors – including those that are criminal, are a result of unhealthy thought patterns and thinking errors (McGlynn et al., 2012). The aim is to teach offenders to identify thinking errors or cognitive distortions that result in poor decisions and antisocial behaviours (McGlynn et al., 2012). In addition, cognitive behavioural programming teaches critical reasoning skills such as consequential thinking and concrete problem solving which are also beneficial in the rehabilitation of offenders (Golden, Gatchel & Cahill, 2006; Reeves, 2006).

Most notably perhaps, cognitive behavioural therapy has consistently appeared in research as an extremely effective method to reducing recidivism (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Lowenkamp et al., 2009; Sykes, 2006). One study found that cognitive behavioural therapy
programs can reduce recidivism by 25% (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). As a result of the significant amount of encouraging research, cognitive behavioural therapy is a common choice in correctional programming and many programs have been designed within this framework for criminal offenders (Lowenkamp et al., 2009; Reeves, 2006).

Some have been critical of this approach for female offenders arguing that it has not been fully evaluated for women, and may not be transferable across gender groups (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003). However, a 2018 study by Mak and Chan found that female offenders experienced significant reductions in psychological distress and enhanced psychological wellness after cognitive behavioural programming. Cognitive behavioural therapy has also been acclaimed by Covington and Bloom, lead researchers in gender responsiveness. They state that the coping skills learned through cognitive behavioural therapy increase women’s self-esteem and self-efficacy, and confidence (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

2.7 Thinking for a Change Program

As mentioned, the Thinking for a Change Program is a cognitive behavioural intervention. The program focuses on problem solving, cognitive restructuring and social skills interventions (Bush et al., 1997). The program operates under the assumption that social behaviour can be changed by shifting cognitive behaviour (Sykes, 2006). The program primarily focuses on developing prosocial skills and attitudes (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). The program consists of twenty-two lessons and includes basic skill development of things such as active listening and more complex work of identifying and challenging thought patterns that relate to criminal behavior (Golden et al., 2008; Lowenkamp et al., 2009). The creators of the program Bush, Glick and Taymans (1997), suggest that by the end of the program, the group could conduct a self-evaluation and determine the focus for another 10 sessions.
The *Thinking for a Change Program* in Saskatchewan.

Prior to *Thinking for a Change* being implemented with women offenders in Saskatchewan, programs called *Emotions Management* and *Relationship Skills for Women* were utilized. *Emotions Management for Women* focuses on building self-awareness and skills to manage anger and other difficult emotions (Government of British Columbia, 2015). *Relationship Skills for Women* focuses on education and skills to address issues in unhealthy relationships including family violence and abuse (Government of British Columbia, 2015).

The same programs were utilized in women’s correctional facilities in British Columbia. In 2015, the Government of British Columbia’s Ministry of Justice released an impact analysis report of the programs. Interestingly, the evaluation found that inmates who successfully completed the *Emotions Management for Women, Relationship Skills for Women*, or both programs showed higher rates of recidivism at both “twelve and twenty-four months after custody release, including and excluding breach offences” (Government of British Columbia, 2015, p.3). Recidivism of those who participated in the *Emotions Management* program was 17-34% higher than matched comparison groups and 39-50% higher for those who participated in the *Relationship Skills* program (Government of British Columbia, 2015). Neither program was found to do any better than the other and the order in which women took the programs also had no impact on results (Government of British Columbia, 2015).

As a result of the evaluation, the *Emotions Management* and *Relationship Skills for Women* programs were discontinued in British Columbia. In Saskatchewan, while it was planned to discontinue the program, at the time of this research it was discovered that the *Emotions Management* and *Relationship Skills* programs continued to run until the depletion of resources for the programs in February 2017. During that time, the *Thinking for a Change*
Program had been running at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre (for men) for many years and Ministry of Justice officials reported that an ongoing evaluation showed notable indicators of success. The Thinking for a Change Program had also been running at Pinegrove Correctional Center approximately once per year. However, after the discontinuation of Emotions Management and Relationship Skills for Women, Thinking for a Change became the primary program for women in the fall of 2017.

The Deputy Director of Programs and a Program facilitator at Pinegrove Correctional Center conveyed some of the programs operational components. Currently, the program runs in the morning five days a week, for six weeks. Female inmates referred to Thinking for a Change are required to be assessed as high risk and low security. Women discuss and decide with case managers which program in the facility is the best fit for them and if referred to the Thinking for a Change Program, are interviewed in order to assess their willingness to participate meaningfully in the program. Anecdotally, staff at Pinegrove Correctional Center feel the program is sound and beneficial to women. However, to date there has been no evaluations of this program for women.

2.8 Previous Evaluations

There are limited previous evaluations of Thinking for a Change and they have mixed results. Seven evaluations of the program are discussed below including the previously mentioned evaluation in Saskatchewan with incarcerated men. It is noted that four of the studies examine participants on probation in the community and the participants in all studies were either predominately or exclusively males. No studies were found evaluating the Thinking for a Change Program with female offenders in custody.
Evaluation one: Saskatoon Correctional Centre.

Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice officials advised that the Saskatoon Correctional Centre has been conducting an ongoing evaluation of rehabilitation programs for its male inmates within the Centre since 2001. Inmates who have taken rehabilitation programs have been compared to those who were not able to attend (due to waitlists) and they were tracked regularly to see if they returned to any provincial Correctional Centre in the province. Ministry of Justice officials report that the evaluation showed that 24% of those inmates who completed Thinking for a Change returned to custody as compared to the 47.5% return to custody rate of those inmates who were waitlisted and did not attend the program. Return to custody includes those re-convicted of a criminal offence and those admitted to custody serving remand, who have not yet been found guilty of an offence.

Evaluation two: incarcerated males.

Stem (2011) completed an evaluation of the Thinking for a Change Program for incarcerated males. Participants were selected by facility staff according to risk level. Those deemed high risk were placed on a waiting list to partake in the Thinking for a Change Program (Stem, 2011). This practice is well in-line with well-established correctional principles of risk, needs and responsivity (Andrews, Bonta & Goe, 1990).

Stem (2011) compared those who completed the program to those on the waitlist who did not complete the program. The first analysis compared measures of attitude, including criminal thinking, problem solving ability, social desirability, therapeutic alliance and readiness for change (Stem, 2011). The analysis found that there was no statistically significant difference in these factors between the groups (Stem, 2011). Therefore, the study suggests that those who completed Thinking for a Change do not show greater reductions in criminal thinking, exhibit
greater readiness for change or increase their problem solving abilities compared to those who did not participate in the program (Stem, 2011).

Secondly, Stem (2011) examined institutions’ misconducts and recidivism rates. The offenders who participated in the program were not found to have fewer institution misconducts or a lower rate of recidivism (Stem, 2011). All levels of misconducts (from minor to the most serious) were considered in the analysis and recidivism was defined as re-incarceration (Stem, 2011). Stem (2011) conducted several statistical analyses and found no difference in prison misconducts or recidivism between those who participated in the Thinking for a Change Program and those who did not.

**Evaluation three: incarcerated males.**

A study completed by Sykes (2006) found that the Thinking for a Change Program made no statistically significant difference in institutional disciplinary write ups. The study was conducted in the United States with incarcerated males (Sykes, 2006). The study compared three groups: those who completed the program and received a reduced sentence, those who completed the program but did not receive a reduction in sentence and those who did not complete the program at all (Sykes, 2006). The dependent variable examined was the two most serious (of four total) levels of write up in the institution.

The time period included six months in custody prior to the Thinking for a Change Program and six months after the program; therefore, this study did not examine recidivism (Sykes, 2006). Sykes (2006) makes reference to research regarding the link between misconducts in prison and recidivism. He notes that the research is inconsistent, with some studies showing frequency of misconducts to be a clear predictor of rates of recidivism and other studies showing no indication that misconducts predict recidivism (Sykes, 2006).
Ultimately, Sykes (2006) found no statistically significant difference in the number of disciplinary write ups between offenders who did not complete the *Thinking for a Change Program* and those who did, regardless of whether they received a reduced sentence or not. Therefore, the data in this study suggested that completion of the *Thinking for a Change Program* did not impact offender misconducts (Sykes, 2006).

**Evaluation four: Males (mostly) serving community sentences.**

A study by Lowenkamp, Hubbard, Makarios & Latessa (2009), found a statistically significant difference in recidivism rates between those who completed the *Thinking for a Change Program* and those who did not. The study was completed with offenders serving a community sentence in Tippecanoe County Indiana in the United States (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). The participants in the study were predominately white (84%) males (71%) (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). Recidivism was measured as a new arrest with variable timelines and the average being approximately two years (Lowenkamp et al., 2009).

The final results of the study showed that 23% of the program participants recidivated, compared to 36% of the comparison group (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). When other independent variables such as age, race and risk level were held constant, the adjusted rate of recidivism was 28% for participants compared to 43% for non-participants (Lowenkamp et al., 2009). This is a statistically significant difference.

It is noted that this study was completed on predominately white males who were under direction to participate. Furthermore, the dependent variable of recidivism was measured by new arrests but the data was limited to offences reported within the same county only. Tippecanoe County Indiana is 1303 km² with a total population of 172, 780 (Tippecanoe County, 2015).
This may significantly impact the results as any new arrests outside this relatively small region would not be accounted for.

**Evaluation five: Males (mostly) serving community sentence.**

Golden, Gatchel and Cahill (2008) completed an evaluation of *Thinking for a Change* with different results. The study included one hundred males and forty-two females on probation in the community. A three group analysis included those who completed the program, those that started and did not complete, referred to as the ‘drop out’ group, and a comparison group that did not participate. Recidivism was examined as both new offences and technical violations (Golden et al., 2008).

Despite no statistical difference being found between groups for recidivism with a new offence the authors argue that the trend is still notable. The recidivism rate for those who completed the group was 13.2% compared to 18.2% for group dropouts and 20% for the comparison group (Golden et al., 2008). This represents a 6.8% difference between those who completed the program and those who did not participate. In addition, when examining technical violations, the study found that those in the ‘drop out’ group received significantly more violations than either the completers or comparison groups.

Golden, Gatchel and Cahill (2008) found that those who completed *Thinking for a Change* showed significantly more adaptive social problem-solving skills. Those participants who started but did not complete the program were found to have an “over reliance on maladaptive, self-defeating problem solving styles” (Golden et al., 2008, p.69). The study also found that those who did recidivate had poorer problem solving skills than those who did not (Golden et al., 2008). This finding emphasizes the importance of problem solving skill building for offenders and suggests that *Thinking for a Change* is effective in teaching these skills.
Evaluation six: males and females serving community sentences.

A study by Reeves (2006) found the *Thinking for a Change Program* to be effective with male and female adult offenders serving probation. The study compared the rates of probation completion and the ability to stay crime free for six-months post-probation (Reeves, 2006). The measure of recidivism or ‘crime-free’ was measured by new arrests (Reeves, 2006).

Those participants who completed the *Thinking for a Change Program* were found to complete probation at a higher rate than those who did not participate in the program (Reeves, 2006). Participants in the program were also found to have a slightly lower rate of recidivism six months after probation than those who did not (Reeves, 2006). However, this difference was found to be only slightly or close to statistically significant (Reeves, 2006).

The participants who completed *Thinking for a Change*, completed probation at a rate of sixty-nine percent (69%) while those offenders who did not participate completed their probation at a rate of forty-nine percent (49%) (Reeves, 2006). The twenty percent (20%) difference is statistically significant (Reeves, 2006). Criminal record checks completed on both groups six months after the completion of probation show a slightly significant difference. More participants that completed the *Thinking for a Change Program* remained crime-free for six months after probation than those who did not complete the program (Reeves, 2006). However, despite the significant improvement in probation completion, the rate of remaining crime free was only slightly, or close to, statistically significant. Reeves (2006) suggests that *Thinking for a Change* “may not have as sustained an effect upon these same offenders in their ability to maintain a crime-free lifestyle after their successful release from supervised probation” (pp. 104-105).
Evaluation seven: adolescents.

An evaluation of *Thinking for a Change* with adolescents evaluated criminogenic thinking, anger and pride in delinquency for those who participated in the *Thinking for a Change Program* compared to those who did not (Gallo, 2014). This study was conducted in the United States with adolescents serving probation and included both males and females but approximately twice as many males in the small sample (twenty-nine total) (Gallo, 2014).

The evaluation of anger noted a decrease in anger over time for both groups regardless of participation (Gallo, 2014). However, further analysis revealed those adolescents that participated in the program had an increase in criminogenic thought and pride of delinquency after completion of the program (Gallo, 2014). Gallo (2014) suggests these results may support the iotragenic effect –the notion that group programs for high risk adolescents can have a counter-productive effect because of the impact of peers.

Summary of Evaluations

In summary, the evaluations had mixed results. Five of the studies looked at recidivism as a dependent variable (Golden et al., 2006 Lowenkamp et al., 2009; Reeves, 2006; Stem, 2011). It is notable however, that the studies defined recidivism differently including re-incarceration or re-arrest. Two studies did find a statistically significant decrease in recidivism, one study found only a close to statistically significant decrease and two studies found no difference in recidivism at all. The other two studies examined other factors. One of these looked at incarcerated males’ rate of misconducts and found no difference between those who participated and those who did not. The second study examined adolescents and found no improvement from program participation in criminogenic thinking, pride of delinquency or anger. It is also noted that four studies were conducted in the community with a predominantly
male sample. No evaluations were found that examined the effectiveness of the *Thinking for a Change Program* for incarcerated women.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This research project began with a meeting with the Director of Offender Programs for the Ministry of Justice. My own interests in women’s issues, feminism and a professional history in the field of Justice overlapped with an interest the Ministry had in conducting a program evaluation for the Thinking for Change Program for women. Originally, the primary research goal was a quantitative analysis of data to assess program effectiveness. However, at the end of the research project the evaluation was incomplete. A data set was created for statistical analysis but several factors including time frame and sample size rendered the evaluation impossible at this time. Recommendations were made for improvements in the data set and ongoing evaluation in the future. Furthermore, discussion regarding program delivery and women’s specific needs were ever-present. After the completion of a comprehensive literature review, the project morphed to include a qualitative exploration of program delivery as it relates to gender responsiveness.

3.1 Research Design

In order to evaluate the Thinking for a Change Program, a quantitative quasi experimental design was planned. The Director of Offender Programs for the Ministry of Justice gained internal ethics approval to obtain non identifying data to be reviewed and analysed. A data set was created in order to compare a sample of incarcerated women who had completed the program to a matched comparison group who had not. The samples were to be matched on age, and risk level. Additional data was collected on race and type of offence – being a property offence or crime against a person. This additional data may be used in future analyses. Lastly, information regarding whether or not there had been a reconviction was also requested for the data sets.
The rationale for choosing age and risk level as factors to match samples is that each of these variables is known to impact recidivism. Age has been found to be a predictor of recidivism with older men and women less likely to reoffend than their younger counterparts (Prendergast, Huang, Evans & Hser, 2010; Scott, Grella, Dennis & Funk, 2014). Not only are individuals of greater age less likely to reoffend, but those who do reoffend do so after a longer period of time crime free (Scott et al., 2014).

Risk level refers to the assessed level of risk of each inmate according to the Saskatchewan Primary Risk Assessment tool (SPRA) (2009). Incarcerated women are measured using this assessment tool that rates them simply as low, medium or high risk for reoffending (Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, 2009). The Ministry of Justice uses the SPRA as a tool to predict general criminal recidivism (Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, 2009). The SPRA notes recidivism rates over a three-year period in the community (Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, 2009). Those assessed as low risk have a 20% recidivism rate while those at a medium and high-risk level have 50% and 80% recidivism rates respectively (Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, 2009).

3.2 Population Sampled

Participants were chosen using purposive sampling from the Pinegrove Correctional Center in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan as it is the only provincial facility for women in the province. While large sample sizes have many benefits, a small sample of fifteen participants in each group was chosen in consultation with the Ministry of Justice. This decision was made in coordination with the Ministry of Justice officials rooted in a desire to relieve any potential compounding impact of participants who may have also taken the previous program.
Pinegrove Correctional Center reported that fifteen women had completed the *Thinking for a Change Program* since the completion of the previous program in February 2017 (*Emotions Management* and *Relationship Skills*). The *Thinking for a Change* group ran twice since that time – once in the fall of 2017 with seven participants and again in the spring of 2018 with eight participants. The request for data to the Ministry of Justice encompassed a request for an additional sample group of fifteen women in Pinegrove Correctional Center who had not participated in the program and were matched by age and risk level as discussed above. There was no direct contact with participants as all information was taken from an existing database.

The goal of the data set created for the quantitative evaluation was to be able to compare rates of recidivism between the groups. For the purpose of this research – recidivism was measured as reconviction. The literature notes a few previous evaluations that define recidivism as re-arrest (Lowenkamp et al., 2009; Reeves, 2006). However, reconviction was chosen as the dependent variable because it rules out any false, or mistaken arrests of non-offending individuals.

The research questions for the study were:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in reconviction rates between those participants who completed the *Thinking for a Change Program* and those who did not?

2. Of those who were reconvicted of a new offence, is there any statistically significant difference between the groups in the type of offence committed (property crime vs. personal offence)?

3. Of those who were reconvicted of a new offence, is there any statistically significant difference between the groups in the amount of time between discharge from the facility and reconviction?
The review of literature provided a foundation to ask a further secondary question: Is the program delivered with principles of gender responsivity?

In order to answer this question a preliminary exploratory scan for gender responsiveness was conducted by attending the Pinegrove Correctional center. Unfortunately, observation of program delivery was not possible as there was not a group running over the time period of this project. However, the physical spaces utilized for the program delivery were toured. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was used to direct conversations with the Deputy Director of Programs and a program facilitator (see Appendix A).

3.3 Data-Gathering and Analysis Methods

A request for data was made to the Ministry of Justice. Specifically, a request was made for the age and risk level of all participants of the Thinking for a Change Program since the time it became the primary program. It was further requested that a control group matched on those factors be collected. The Ministry of Justice officials had an interest in gathering further information on race and offence type for potential further analysis; therefore, that data was included in the data set.

The data was retrieved from the Ministry of Justice database: the criminal justice information management system (CJIMS). The database was accessed only by a Ministry of Justice official who is bound by confidentiality. The information gathered from the database was summarized in an excel spreadsheet, saved on a USB and provided to myself. The spreadsheet included the following factors: offender numbers, age, gender, ethnicity, offence type, and Thinking for a Change program involvement. Once a review and analysis of the spreadsheet was completed, the USB was returned to the Ministry of Justice to ensure absolute confidentiality of the participants. The offender number does not allow for identification of participants for
anyone without access to the CJIMS database. Therefore, the data set received had no identifiable information and was returned to Ministry officials.

The intention was to use the spreadsheet to analyse the data using the SPSS statistical software program and return the data set to the Ministry of Justice. The independent variable was participation in the Thinking for a Change Program as measured by comparing two groups. The dependent variable was recidivism as measured by reconviction. A Chi Square analysis would provide an answer to the first research question and further analysis of remaining data could be accomplished with the resulting data.

As mentioned above, a tour of Pinegrove Correctional center allowed for the physical spaces utilized for program delivery to be observed. Further, a semi-structured interview guide was used to interview the Deputy Director of Programs and a program facilitator (see Appendix A). Handwritten notes were taken during the tour and interviews and used to compare to established guidelines. Once the information was documented in report form, the original notes were shredded.

3.4 Challenges

There were several delays in receiving the data set requested. Once received, it was found that there had been no reconvictions in either group – making statistical analysis for differences impossible. One reason for this may be that the short timeframe from program completion – particularly with the second group who finished programming in May 2018. It is noted that four of the participants chosen were still incarcerated at the completion of the project.
Chapter Four: Findings and Outcomes

4.1 Quasi Experimental Evaluation

The thought and consideration put into the data request was purposeful and linked to the literature. In the end, it proved to be more challenging to obtain the data than originally planned. As an external person, retrieving the data meant I was not able have control over the process. The late arrival of the data also brought with it an incomplete picture as no women in either the participant or control group had re-offended. This may be in part due to the short timeframe since each subject’s release. Information gathered from Ministry of Justice officials regarding the release dates of program participants shows that the range of release for those fifteen subjects was December 2017 – December 2018. As noted, some subjects were still incarcerated at the end of the project. It is further noted that reconviction as the definition of recidivism also necessitates more time due to the court process required between arrest and conviction. A graph representation of the early release date months for program participants is below (figure 1). The same information was not readily available for the non-participant group.

Figure 1. Early Release Dates of Program Participants
As indicated by the above graph, ten of the fifteen participants were to be released between June and December 2018. The development of the evaluation framework was completed in September 2018.

Importantly, the creation of a complete data set permits the Ministry of Justice to continue to track the thirty subjects over time to compare recidivism rates. However, once the data set was complete and received, a cursory examination of the data raised questions. A closer examination of the factors of age and risk level was conducted.

As previously discussed, age has been found to be a predictor of recidivism (Prendergast et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2014). An initial review of the data seemed to indicate a difference in the ages in the participant group and control group. In order to evaluate this, a t-test was conducted using the SPSS statistical software program. The results of the t-test confirmed that notable differences exist in age between the two groups.

Table 1. Mean ages of sample by group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of participants by group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participants</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49.4667</td>
<td>8.05221</td>
<td>2.07907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Participants</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30.0667</td>
<td>7.58256</td>
<td>1.95781</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. T test for equality of means between the groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for equality of means</th>
<th>95% confidence interval of the difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>6.793</td>
<td>27.899</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On average, subjects identified for the sample who did not participate in the program were older (M=49.4667, SE=2.07907), than those identified who did complete the program (M=30.0667, SE=1.95781). This difference, 19.4, is statistically significant $t(28) = 6.793$, $p=.000$, with a small effect size, $d= 0.23268$.

When reviewing the risk level of participants in each group a further discrepancy was noted. As seen in Table 3 below, the risk level distribution of each group varies notably. Pinegrove Correctional Center staff advised that participants are chosen for the group who are assessed as high risk by the SPRA (Saskatchewan Primary Risk Assessment) with very few exceptions. This is reflected in the risk level of program participants with thirteen of the fifteen, or almost 87% of the sample being high risk and the remaining two (13%) medium risk. In contrast, the non-participant control group contains one low risk individual and a close spread of 6 (40%) and 8 (53%) between medium and high risk respectively.

Table 3. Frequency of Assessed Risk Level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While a statistical analysis was not conducted on this data, the visual representation as seen below in figure 2 and 3 suggests that the difference in risk levels between the two groups is noteworthy.

Figure 2. Risk Level Comparison Between Groups

Figure 3. Risk Level Distribution of Each Group.
4.2 Gender Responsiveness Review

Steps are being taken to be gender responsive in the treatment and services for women in the corrections system. In Canada, there is a committee called ‘The Heads of Corrections’ which includes representatives from provincial and federal correctional institutions for men and women. Under this umbrella, the ‘Females as Correctional Clients’ Sub-committee’ considers gender specific issues and provides recommendations to the head of the corrections committee.

The Pinegrove Correctional Center Deputy Director of Programs is a member of the sub-committee and advised that its current objectives include: launching the *Gender Responsive Corrections for Women in Canada Strategy*; ensuring there is gender informed programming including programs, interventions and services offered to First Nations, Metis and Inuit women; staff training development; and gender informed assessments.

In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Justice utilizes the *Gender Responsive Policy and Practice Assessment Manual* by Bloom, Covington, Messina, Selvaggi and Owen (2014). As leaders in gender responsive corrections work, Covington and Bloom have developed recommendations for providing gender responsive services to women in custody. They emphasize that creating effective gender-responsive treatment and services includes several domains such as: site selection, staff selection, program development, and material that reflect an understanding of the lives of women in the criminal justice system and addresses their specific challenges and strengths (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Some of the recommendations are reviewed below alongside a discussion of the *Thinking for a Change Program* as delivered at Pinegrove Correctional Center. A tour of Pinegrove Correctional Center and interviews with the Deputy Director of Programs and a program facilitator were conducted to gather specific information about the program delivery for a review of gender responsivity within the institution.
Covington and Bloom (2007) stress the importance of a therapeutic environment for effective gender responsive services. This requires an environment that is “inviting, non-institutional, homelike, and welcoming, with culturally appropriate decorations and pictures (Covington & Bloom, 2007, p.23). The programming spaces at Pinegrove Correctional Center are exactly that. During a tour of Pinegrove Correctional Centre, it was noted that there are several programs run out of several spaces and the Thinking for a Change Program has been in more than one location. All programs are housed in a separate wing of the institution. The wing consists of several classroom spaces and a family visiting unit that is occasionally used as a programming space. The common space houses a library with bookshelves lining the walls. Each classroom door and walls are lined with artwork, including many Indigenous symbols, decorations and pieces of art.

Covington and Bloom (2007) also make suggestions around staffing. They recommend that staff are female role models for the inmates that reflect the cultural backgrounds of the clients (Covington & Bloom, 2007). While there are many staff in Pinegrove Correctional Center, the Deputy Director of Programs reported that there are only five program facilitators and no consideration of ethnicity or cultural background is made in the hiring practices of those roles. Further, contrary to the recommendations, Pinegrove Correctional Center staff advised there is no specific gender responsiveness or trauma informed practices training for staff.

However, it is noted that other characteristics recommended for those providing services to women are met. Covington and Bloom (2007) suggest that staff be consistent, and caring role models for women. Further, it is noted that advocacy for the women as well as alliance building and confidentiality be qualities of those providing treatment or services (Covington & Bloom, 2007). All of these qualities appear fully present in the facilitators of the Thinking for a Change
Program. The program facilitator reported that confidentiality is assured for the women and trust relationships are formed with many participants due, in part, to the length of time spent together for the program.

Several of Covington and Blooms’ (2007) recommendations are in relation to program delivery. For instance, Covington and Bloom (2007) advise that women only groups are preferable for women to feel able to share their experiences and feelings. Pinegrove Correctional Center is a female correctional center that houses only women and all program facilitators are women.

Covington and Bloom (2007) promote an environment of cultural awareness. This recommendation appears to be met in the facility. Ministry of Justice officials advise that there is a high representation of Indigenous women at Pinegrove Correctional Center. Indigenous artwork, jewelry-making and access to elder support happens in close vicinity of the programming.

Further, Covington and Bloom (2007) promote individualized treatment. It is stressed that treatment options are matched to the specific individual needs of each woman (Covington & Bloom, 2007). The sub-committee for females as correctional clients has placed emphasis on gender informed assessments. It is noted that at Pinegrove Correctional Center there is currently no gender informed assessments or screening. However, Pinegrove Correctional staff indicated that treatment options are decided on an individual basis between the women and their case manager. If the program is chosen, inmates are referred and interviewed to assess their program readiness and ability to participate meaningfully.

It is also recommended that treatment and services be strength-based (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Covington and Bloom (2007) suggest that treatment and services be based on women’s competencies and strengths in order to promote self-reliance. The strength-based
approach shifts focus from problems to the strategies women use to cope with their struggles (Covington & Bloom, 2007). *Thinking for a Change* is not specifically a strength-based program. However, a program facilitator at Pinegrove Correctional Center advised that there are opportunities and several occurrences during program delivery in which facilitators are able to bring focus to the strengths that women have.

Lastly, Covington & Bloom (2007) suggest program evaluations in both program design and program outcomes. It is recommended that assessments answer whether program missions and objectives are being reached and whether or not services matched to women’s needs are resulting in better outcomes (Covington & Bloom, 2007). The creation and utilization of this ongoing evaluation will meet part of this goal.
Chapter Five: Discussion

This research practicum combined current literature with the creation of a quantitative quasi experimental evaluation and a qualitative review. The purpose was to evaluate the ‘success’ of the Thinking for Change Program for incarcerated women. There is a substantial body of research and literature on gender responsive programing and female criminal offenders. However, there is a sparse amount of evaluations of this program, and no located previous evaluations of the program with incarcerated women.

5.1 Quasi Experimental Evaluation

The evaluation design included significant consideration of previous evaluations. A quantitative quasi-experimental design was chosen to compare a sample of women who had competed the Thinking for Change Program to a matched comparison group of women who had been incarcerated but did not complete the program.

Previous evaluations defined recidivism as re-incarceration or new arrest while others examined violations of probation or institution misconducts. However, these definitions have limitations. Re-incarceration misses some individuals in that it does not account for those who commit new offences, are arrested, go through the court system, are found guilty and serve a community sentence. Examination of new arrests on the other hand, may include individuals who are not guilty. For the purposes of this study, recidivism was defined as re-conviction of an offence. This eliminates the issue of including those who may be not guilty of a new offence or excluding those who are guilty of re-offending but are not sentenced to a custody facility.

The data request to the Ministry of Justice included a request that the participation group and comparison group were matched on age and risk level. This was chosen due to control for the fact that age has been found to be a predictor of recidivism (Prendergast et al., 2010; Scott et
Furthermore, risk level – as determined by the Saskatchewan Primary Risk Assessment tool (SPRA), is also directly predictive of recidivism (Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, 2009).

**Challenges and limitations of developing the quasi experimental evaluation.**

The Ministry of Justice did not allow for direct retrieval of the data set. Rather, a request was made and the data set was retrieved by a third party. There were several unforeseen and lengthy delays in receiving the data set with no direct communication between the developer of this evaluation and the individual doing data retrieval. Furthermore, information regarding program history, such as how long and often the program had been running and with how many participants was not readily clear. This was in part due to the overlap of a previous program as discussed earlier. Lastly, once the data set was retrieved, it was found that there had been no reconvictions in either group. This made statistical analysis for differences impossible at this time. It did however, allow for the creation of a meaningful evaluation framework for the Ministry of Justice to utilize over the course of the next several years.

Several limitation of the quantitative evaluation data are noted. The sample size is small at fifteen in each group. A greater limitation however, is the lack of consistency with the match variables between the groups. Once the data set was obtained notable difference in age and risk level were noted. While no statistical analysis was conducted on risk levels between the groups, it is noted that almost half of the non-participants were rated as low or medium risk to re-offend while just over ten percent of participants were medium risk with all others being high. This difference in risk distribution between groups is noteworthy. The final limitation of the quantitative evaluation data is the presence of a statistically significant difference in the ages of
each group. A T-test analysis found that those who participated in the program were statistically younger on average than those who did not.

5.2 Gender Responsiveness Review

A secondary goal of the evaluation was a preliminary scan for gender responsiveness in the program. On a federal government level, Correctional Services Canada (2017) has recognized the need for programming for female offenders to be gender responsive. Nationally, each province has acknowledged the need for the correctional system to serve the unique needs of women rather than maintaining the status quo of program and services designed for men (Correctional Services Canada, 2017). To this end, the Deputy Director of Programs at Pinegrove Correctional Center advised there is a ‘Females as Correctional Clients’ Subcommittee that reports to the Nationally driven ‘Heads of Corrections Committee’ which is tasked with the goal of launching a gender responsive strategy including ensuring there is gender responsive programming. In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Justice reports using the Gender Responsive Policy and Practice Assessment Manual (Bloom et al., 2014) as a guiding document. The creation of directing strategies is an important element of ensuring gender responsive correctional programming and interventions. However, a glaring shortcoming is that the Ministry of Justice has not utilized the manual to assess their practices.

Further exploratory review was completed into the practice and delivery of the program Thinking for a Change at Pinegrove Correctional Center. The program itself was not created with gender responsiveness in mind. However, as previously noted, the program is rooted in cognitive behavioural therapy (Bush et al., 1997). This general approach has been endorsed by Covington & Bloom (2007) as gender responsive in building skills that meet some of the specific needs of women.
A review of the program delivery at Pinegrove Correctional Centre was conducted through semi-structured interviews with the program director and a program facilitator as well as a tour of the physical space in the institution. The guideline for the questions and review was a series of recommendations for gender responsive services created by Covington and Bloom (2007). The program met several recommendations. It is a women’s only group setting in a therapeutic environment. There is evidence of cultural awareness in the building and programming spaces. Further, the program facilitators attempt to utilize a strengths based focus as much as is possible.

Areas where recommendations are only partially met include staffing, individualized treatment and evaluations. The staff at Pinegrove Correctional Center are all female, as recommended. However, Ministry of Justice officials advised there is no consideration of cultural background in the hiring for program facilitators and the facilitators receive no training in gender responsibility or trauma informed practices. It is recommended that treatment be individualized through gender responsive screening or assessment (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

While gender responsive screening and assessment tools were not noted, program options are decided individually for each inmate with their case manager. Lastly, contrary to recommendations, no evaluations have taken place to date.

It was noted through discussion with Pinegrove Correctional Center staff that women are not able to take more than one program at a time. This limits the ability to address the multitude of issues facing many women. As was noted previously, gender specific needs of women are interconnected and women having multiple needs may require services for each to address the complex nature of common co-occurring needs (Holtfreter & Morash, 2003; Mak & Chan, 2018).
Challenges and limitations of review.

A significant challenge and limitation of the gender responsive review is that this was an exploratory goal and not a formal assessment process. Despite this, the information gathered remains useful in providing direction for future evaluations.

The gender responsive review raised the question of whether or not strategic direction and planning is filtering down to action in a meaningful manner. The planning seems to be clear and in motion. It is also recognized that the program delivery seems to be fairly successful in some domains of gender responsivity. However, there is a disconnect between the presence of these two facts. The lack of training, awareness or common language around gender responsiveness in the facility highlights this.
Chapter Six: Recommendations

Through the compilation of the previous chapters, recommendations for further development and use of the quasi experimental evaluation framework were created. Further recommendations for improved gender responsiveness in programming were also developed. These recommendations mark the completion of the research practicum but also suggest future continued direction for the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice. Four recommendations are made in relation to completing the program evaluation and three recommendations are made related to gender responsiveness. The seven recommendations in total are listed below.

Recommendations for the completion of the program evaluation:

1) Create a larger sample size
2) Match comparison group by age and risk level
3) Track time and release date variables
4) Complete evaluation for three years

Recommendations for gender responsiveness:

1) Gender responsiveness assessment be completed
2) Gender responsive and trauma informed practices training for staff
3) Consider alternate programming designed to integrate these factors such as those discussed here

These recommendations will be discussed in further detail below.

First, in statistical analysis, larger sample sizes are generally preferred (Field, 2013). As a delay in being able to evaluate the program is already present, it is suggested that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice create a larger sample size utilizing the current group of eight
women completing the *Thinking for a Change Program*. This would increase the total sample size from fifteen to twenty-three in each group.

Second, as discussed previously, the data set provided failed to match participants by age and risk level. This is a valuable and essential step to a meaningful evaluation. It is critical that this is rectified. It will be necessary to maintain the participant group as it is inflexible, but the comparison group will need to be adjusted to reduce the average age and eliminate the low-risk and significant number of medium-risk women.

It is further recommended that there is some tracking of release dates as a time variable. That is, it is crucial to understand how long subjects have been out of the facility when considering whether or not they have been reconvicted of an offence. In a related suggestion, it is proposed that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice complete the evaluation on subjects until three years post release for each subject. This aligns with the (SPRA) risk assessment rates of recidivism and creates a good base for comparison.

The first recommendation for improved gender responsiveness is that a formal assessment be completed. While the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice utilizes the ‘Gender-Responsive Policy and Practice Assessment Manual’ by Bloom, Covington, Messina, Selvaggi & Owen, (2014) as a guiding document, they have not undergone a formal gender responsive assessment. This includes a formal process of pre-assessment preparation, facilitation, activities and the creation of a work plan (Bloom et al., 2014).

One of the domains in a gender responsive assessment is staffing. As previously mentioned, the staff delivering programming have not received gender responsive or trauma informed practice training. This is the next recommendation in this area. It is not only
suggested for program facilitators but for all case managers in the facility as they are working closely with the women and participating in programming decision making.

Lastly, it is recommended that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice consider alternate programming. Considering the mixed nature of the previous evaluations, a review of alternative program options was provided to the Ministry of Justice. These include programs developed specifically to integrate the complex female needs such as those discussed here. As the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice prescribes to the Gender-Responsive Policy and Practice Assessment Manual created by Covington, Bloom and other researchers, several programs developed by these researchers were reviewed. Each of the alternative program options presented to the Ministry of Justice has had a previous positive program evaluation.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Women are a small proportion of the population of incarcerated individuals in Canada (Correctional Service Canada, 2017). However, their needs differ significantly from their male counterparts (Montford, 2015). Ensuring effective rehabilitation of women is valuable both in terms of the financial cost of correctional services and in terms of public safety.

This research practicum sought to evaluate the cognitive behavioural program Thinking for a Change as a rehabilitative program for incarcerated women in Saskatchewan. An evaluation framework and data set was created to be utilized by the Ministry of Justice over the next several years. In addition, a qualitative scan for gender responsiveness was completed.

After some challenges with data collection, the data set created by the Ministry of Justice was analysed and found to have significant concern. The factors that the samples were to be matched on – namely age and risk level, were significantly different in each group. Moving forward, recommendations are made to the Ministry of Justice to correct this error and include more participants as the passing of time has allowed for this.

Beyond the creation of an evaluation data set, an exploratory scan for gender responsiveness was completed. This was accomplished by attending Pinegrove Correctional Centre to observe the physical space utilized for program delivery and completing semi-structured interviews with the Director of Programs and Program Facilitator. Many positive attributes of gender responsiveness were observed during the exploratory visit including a therapeutic environment, with indicators of cultural awareness, and women only groups with staff that are caring role models. Recommendations are made to increase gender responsivity including providing gender responsive and trauma informed training for staff and completing a full formal gender responsive assessment.
The importance of meaningful interventions for incarcerated women is clear. This report outlines the unique needs of women and the considerations for programming. It also provides a catalyst and tool for further ongoing evaluation of programming for women in Saskatchewan. It is hoped that the Ministry of Justice will continue their endeavour to assess and evaluate women’s programming at Pinegrove Correctional Center and that this report may aide in doing so.
References


Roadmap to strengthening public safety. Retrieved from:


Appendix

Pinegrove Correctional Centre
Interview Guide

General facility questions:
1. How many women are held in the facility?
   a. are there number trends over the last three years? (rising, decreasing, steady?)
   b. Are there facilities other than Pinegrove?

2. Provincial cost of women in custody?

3. What other groups are offered at Pinegrove?
   a. Do women take groups/programs concurrently?
   b. MH/substance use groups?

General Program Questions:
4. When was the program introduced at Pinegrove?
   a. How often has the program been running since then? Dates?

5. How many women in a group at a time?

6. How are participants chosen?

General facilitator questions:
7. How are facilitators chosen/trained etc.?
   a. Is there gender responsive training for staff?
   b. Is there trauma informed practices training for staff?

8. Do facilitators represent the cultural backgrounds of the inmates?

9. Are there male Corrections Officers? (there was a trial of this at one point) a. If so, are there male facilitators?

Program delivery Questions
10. What physical space is used?

11. How is the delivered? Would you say there are any specific methods, styles, or adaptations to the program as it is delivered?
   a. Any personal observations? Describe the general approach?

12. Is confidentiality assured?

13. Do you think women feel safe in the program?
   a. What is the feeling/mood in the group?
14. Do you think the women respond to and/or like the program? Why or why not?

15. Do the women connect and develop relationships with each other and facilitators during the course of the group?

16. What have participants told you/ said/ expressed about participation in the program?

17. Is there some way, time, manner in which other/specific issues facing women are acknowledged?

18. Do common issues related to pathways to crime (such as: past victimization physical/sexual abuse, substance use, unhealthy/ dv relationships, motherhood, poverty etc.) arise during groups?

19. Are there opportunities during program delivery to find, focus or utilize the strengths of the participants?

20. Is there training in Trauma – informed practices?
   a. Are you familiar with the approach? (taking trauma into account, avoiding triggering trauma responses, supporting individual coping strategies and abilities)
   b. Is this something you see happening in the delivery of the program?

21. Are risk factors for women (substance use, family/relational violence, MH) prioritized in program delivery in any way?

22. Are gender responsive principles applied to program delivery?