

# Complicity and Redemption: Beyond the Insider/Outsider Research Dichotomy

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**S**INCE THE 1970s, FEMINIST RESEARCHERS IN CRIMINOLOGY AND OTHER DISCIPLINES have engaged with ideas about voice, representation, inclusion, and authorized knowers in order to challenge male-biased positivism in the social sciences and to develop alternative “ways of knowing” (Belenky et al. 1986; Harding 1990; Stanley and Wise 1983). Critiques from women of color, Aboriginal, and lesbian feminists challenged the white biases and colonial assumptions embedded in this early work and the false assumption that there is a universal woman’s experience, leading to further feminist work on positionality, power, and voice (Kilty 2014). Contemporary feminist and other critical scholarship examines the complexities of multiple axes of power embedded within a variety of research methods (Jackson and Mazzei 2009) and the articulation of participatory methodologies in which researcher reflexivity is central (Kilty, Felices-Luna, and Fabian 2014). Our work joins these conversations by exploring how to move beyond “giving voice” to marginalized populations—a qualitative convention that maintains the authority of the academic scholar as privileged—toward a collaborative approach to knowledge production. This article, a collaboration between an academic/practitioner (Shoshana) and a formerly incarcerated woman (Tiina), aims to disrupt conventional ways of conducting and writing about research. Our focus is on explicating the process we engaged in while researching student experiences of university classes taught in a prison setting comprised of both incarcerated and non-incarcerated students, and how our work together tries to unsettle the subjectivities of the “academic knower” and the “criminalized woman.” Results from the study have been reported elsewhere (Pollack 2014), but our focus in this paper is methodological: specifically, on the process of analyzing interview data and reflecting upon the meaning of our collaborative work.

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We do not approach this article from a standpoint epistemological perspective that claims that one of us has a more accurate, legitimate, or “objective” view; rather we put our perspectives in conversation with one another in order to think through the gendered discursive complexities of experiencing incarceration. Our article is multivocal as we put in conversation our own voices, academic scholarship, lived experience, and interview data. At times we write in first person, at other times in conventional academic discourse, engaged in a conversation between and within texts and voices. We are not seeking a “place of innocence” in research about prisons and prisoners, but rather we place our attention on our process of drawing upon our respective knowledge emerging from our lived experiences, academic training, and shared feminist antiracist politics. Similar to Piché et al.’s project “to push the boundaries of what it means to ‘give voice’ in academic work and in criminological literature specifically” (2014, 450), our work explores collaborative research and scholarship between an academic researcher/educator and a researcher/student/former prisoner.

### Penal Spectatorship and Hearing Voices

In *The Culture of Punishment*, Michelle Brown (2009, 21) uses the notion of “penal spectator” to refer to the individual and institutional means of looking at other people’s pain from a distance and perpetuating the ideologies and practices of punishment in the process. Penal spectatorship, according to Brown, takes many forms: theory, scientific investigation, prison tourism, media, and film, all of which have something to do with gazing at other people’s pain. She suggests that spectatorship is not only about “looking at,” but also involves authoring and authorizing penal practices. A defining feature of the spectator gaze is an experiential distance from the pain and suffering of imprisonment. Although not the focus of her book, we extend this concept to also explore the way that prison processes themselves foster (actually require) prisoners to become penal spectators of their own lives.

Walls to Bridges is the educational program that is the subject of our research. Shoshana is an instructor and Tiina was an incarcerated student; our experience of the program is that it is rich and rewarding *and* rife with penal spectatorship. Students from the university have myriad motivations for being drawn to this course, but it is not uncommon to hear that they want to learn from the stories of incarcerated people. They hope to learn from firsthand narratives how criminalized people navigate the criminal justice system and the factors that brought them into contact with it (that this does not in fact happen in the classes is beside the point; this is how many articulate their initial attraction to the course). Critical scholars of varying orientations — poststructural, anticolonial, feminist, queer — have illustrated the problematics inherent in the dominant group’s desire to “hear stories” or “give voice” to subjugated knowledges (Bruckert 2014; Jones 1999; Marker 2009). In a provocative piece about cross-cultural dialogue, Jones (1999) argues that marginalized people are often asked to tell their stories in ways that may be beneficial for

those who are socially privileged, but may in fact be epistemologically violent for the subaltern voices asked to share stories of oppression. Of particular relevance to our project is Jones's observation that the dominant group's wish for dialogue, or to hear the voices of the Other, reflects (perhaps unknowingly) the listener's desire for a redemptive experience: "We seek liberation, through hearing you, through 'your' dialogue with us ... and [are] therefore cleaned from the taint of colonization and the power that excludes" (1999, 314). Similar to the idea that penal spectatorship is not only about gazing upon the pain of punishment but also about authoring (from a distance) further accounts of punishment, Jones's work illustrates that listening is also about authoring; the listener recounts narratives about both him/herself (as someone not implicated in othering processes) and the other (as someone who has suffered injustices that the listener has not). Within this configuration, there is no way out of the quandary, no redemptive place in which "voice" is given or heard, where pain and punishment are revealed and critiqued.

We see ourselves as inextricably caught up in and complicit with a web of incarceration and penalty, whether as a former prisoner or an "outside" academic. There is for us *no place outside* of penal spectatorship, as the complex cultural, legal, symbolic, and material strength of the (North American) prison industrial complex reaches far and wide, crisscrossing across spaces and sectors. Yet the subject and the methodology of our research are attempts to reorient the spectator gaze and to destabilize the production of academic scholarship about prisons and prisoners.

### Stories about Women's Criminality

**Shoshana:** I have been working in the area of women and imprisonment for 25 years, during which an explosion of feminist criminological research has undergone several iterations—from a standpoint critique of the masculinist nature of criminology, to extensive literature on how women's pathways to crime are different from those of men, to intersectional analyses of women as both victims and offenders (Comack 2014). Despite a wealth of feminist research drawing upon the voices of criminalized and incarcerated women (and here I am including my own work in this critique), one thing remains fairly consistent: Criminalized or incarcerated women are always speaking through a researcher's voice and are rarely provided the platform to contribute in a meaningful way to research—theoretical or methodological—about themselves. I worked as a psychotherapist in a women's prison before I became an academic. I worked with a group of feminist psychologists and social workers to provide trauma counseling, group work, and advocacy for the women inside. These early experiences form the foundation of my commitment to shared work with criminalized women, challenging professional (correctional, psychiatric, psychological) discourses that decontextualize lived experience from social structures, and promoting continual reflexivity in practice and research.

Over the past 25 years, I have been to countless conferences, have read hundreds of articles on female offenders, and have seen endless and repetitive statistics on the

mental health, substance use, mothering, and behavioral problems of criminalized women. Yet only on the rare occasion are the subjects of all this analysis and intervention given an opportunity to represent themselves and their own perspectives on crime and punishment. Of course, there are occasional opportunities for incarcerated people to share their stories at some criminological and/or correctional conferences and workshops. Yet how these stories are shared and structured is typically shaped by the agenda of those who are putting on the event, and thus they often take the predictable shape of a reformation narrative, identifying low self-esteem, faulty thinking, and poor choices as criminogenic factors. The hegemony of this narrative frame means that alternative ways of constructing self and experience are rendered unthinkable and thus unspeakable. As a researcher and scholar, I have examined the ways in which criminological and correctional discourses obscure social context and encourage the subjectivity of women in prison as deficient and dependent (Pollack 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012). What drew me to the Walls to Bridges program was the opportunity to create spaces of critique, exploration, and relationships that allow us all—professors, prisoners, students—to move out of the boxes created for us, all this within a classroom bounded by locked doors and razor wire.

**Tiina:** After interacting with correctional staff in honest and authentic ways, it did not take me long to figure out the lens through which I was being (un)seen. In my early interactions with staff, I was aiming to be genuine because I knew that I could benefit from accessing real help and support. However, when written reports of these interactions were later shared with me, I saw that my honesty was used to construct me as a horrible person—a risk to society. So I quickly learned to craft my words and my interactions with staff in ways that I wanted them to be documented; I became the manipulative person they were accusing me of being. Brown (2009) writes that penal spectatorship is enacted through a variety of cultural, symbolic, and material processes that are distant from the realities of being imprisoned. However, as an incarcerated woman, I became a penal spectator of *my own life*. I regurgitated my story over and over and molded my life to fit the shape of the correctional discourse to explain how I was broken and a risk to society but how—by accessing prison programs and education—I was being “fixed” and it would soon be safe to return me to society. During that time, I cannot say I was really aware of how I was reproducing oppressive practices and discourses; for the most part, I actually believed that I had been broken and that prison had saved my life and given me the opportunity to change. I was sent out to do public speaking—which I believed was an amazing opportunity (I did gain skills that help in my activism today!)—and I said I was so glad I came to prison and that *prison had saved my life!* Now, having been free for almost two years and having had the opportunity to study and analyze the gendered scripts women prisoners are required to perform, I feel somewhat differently. I actually feel a lot of guilt and shame about being brainwashed into being a correctional puppet. I feel I contributed to the reproduction of oppression for others inside and helped to create

a need for them to have to enact the same “performances” that I did, in order to be seen as successful and low-risk inmates. I also see how my privileges gave me the advantage to adopt the correctional rhetoric that ultimately bought me my freedom, whereas others without these privileges cannot so easily do so. My white privilege and having English as my first language allowed me to easily and convincingly adopt the correctional rhetoric in narrating my story of brokenness. Additionally, the fact that I had some post-secondary education, acquired via correspondence courses and through the Wall to Bridges classes while incarcerated, proved to the correctional staff that I was a changed person. The Canadian women’s prison uses the word “empowerment” a lot (see for example Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000); however, I was never given the power to say I was not the problem and that I am proud that I survived violence, poverty, and addiction. My experience is one of extreme violence from a very young age continuing right up to my incarceration. This is responsible, in part, for how I was able to say that prison saved my life. Not only was I able to get clean by coming to prison, but being in prison was also the first place and time I did not fear violence on a daily basis. The reality of living with constant violence in my childhood home and on the street was the context that supported the narration of my story within the correctional framework. Now after two years of release, my personal lived experience, combined with my BA in Women’s Studies and my current college education, has enabled me to re-narrate my experiences and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the gendered discursive dynamics of incarceration.

**Shoshana:** When I was doing my doctoral research in the late 1990s about women’s pathways to law breaking, I contacted an advocacy group comprised of formerly incarcerated women to ask for their support in recruiting participants for my study. They responded by asking, “Why should we help you? Another white liberal feminist researcher using us to get her degree. How is your research of any benefit to us?” More recently, Australian researchers Carleton and Seagrave (2014) were posed a similar challenge. In the context of Victoria, Australia, where many women were dying post-release, Carlton and Seagrave conducted interviews with women in order to bear witness to stories of survival. After presenting their work at a conference, an audience member challenged the researchers’ outsider status by saying, “Women die on the outside every week, every day. There have been so many times when we’ve sat around in prison grieving for the latest passing ... but who are you to speak for us?” These examples speak to the power dynamics inherent in criminological research and the disjuncture between lived experience and the methodologies of academic researchers. Typically, but certainly not always, researchers with very little connection to the communities of women who have lived or worked on the streets, or been involved with substance use and criminalization, do research *on* them, not *with* them (Bruckert 2014). Although feminist researchers have attempted to mediate these problematics by conducting qualitative research that centers on the lived experiences of incarcerated or criminalized women (Balfour

and Comack 2014), there are clearly ethical and epistemological problems in regard to power, voice, and representation being raised by the communities upon which academics conduct research. Rarely do we create research studies and methodologies with criminalized women as colleagues—as creators of academic and practical knowledge about *them*.

**Tiina:** Although Correctional Service Canada claims to empower women in prison and treat them with dignity and respect (see <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/women/index-eng.shtml>), what has actually been empowering for me is to be treated as a research colleague as opposed to an object of analysis. I could not participate in this research or scholarship without the knowledge Shoshana brings to the project and her willingness to share it with me. At the same time, I possess knowledge of criminalization and incarceration that she could not possibly have. Sharing our respective skills and perspectives in a feminist non-hierarchical fashion and acknowledging that neither of us has better or more legitimate knowledge than the other has been empowering indeed.

Our collaborative research work reduces the us-versus-them dichotomy and I think has the potential to be a methodology for future research. Yet, I still feel that the power dynamics of research can be problematic in a lot of ways. For example, while I am someone with lived experience of the issues under investigation, I am also a researcher. How do I not exploit participants and their experiences? It is definitely a tricky area and I feel I also need to be wary of tokenism. For example, before I become involved in any project, I have to question the motivation for having me there. Am I invited because my input will be valued or am I there to lend credibility to work that will not reflect my experience? I feel I can make some very positive contributions, but there is also the danger that the reason I am being asked to be involved is to help gain access to people who have been incarcerated—to lend credibility to the project so that women feel less inclined to ask “Why should I help you?” At the same time, I am concerned that without the contributions of someone with lived experience, problematic power dynamics and spurious conclusions about criminalized women could be perpetuated.

### **Disrupting the Divide: Insider/Outsider Research on Prisons and Prisoners**

Feminist criminologists doing ethnographic research, as well as other types of qualitative research, have grappled with the problematics of the (white) academic voice as authorized knower. The past few decades have produced important and groundbreaking work on women’s lived experiences of incarceration (see Comack 2014 for an overview), some of which theorize the experiences of incarceration from the perspective of imprisoned women. However, as Pollack (2014) argues elsewhere, asking women to tell their stories and give voice to their experience is not without its problems, not least of which is that the analysis, production, and dissemination of research findings are usually done without the contributions of

criminalized or incarcerated women—the academic voice remains privileged. There are, however, some encouraging developments that suggest a surge of interest in innovative research designs from various critical scholars and community-based researchers.

Convict criminology in the United States and Britain, for example, aims to disrupt the insider/outsider research binary by centering the perspectives and analyses of university scholars around the lived experience of incarceration (Earle 2014; Newbold et al. 2014). This work critiques and attempts to mediate the limitations of research that “analyzes crime from the sterile viewpoint of the middle class academic” (Newbold et al. 2014, 440) by developing theory and research about crime and punishment from the perspective of lived experience and academic training. Although not a straightforward or uncontentious process—for example, can people with lived experiences of incarceration claim epistemic privilege over the topic of prisons and punishment?—this burgeoning scholarship acknowledges that academic researchers are typically those who are granted “expert” authority over prisons and punishment.

Convict criminology has thus far not significantly engaged with community-based methodologies, nor does it incorporate much of an analysis of the raced and gendered realities of punishment. Participatory action research and community-based research have become increasingly well established in a variety of academic disciplines, and there is some evidence of its use in criminology as well. Kilty et al. (2014) offer innovative and reflexive research methodologies that unsettle conventional academic knowledge production about crime and marginalization. Additionally, we are particularly inspired by the groundbreaking research conducted by The College in Prison Research Collective at a New York state maximum security prison for women (Fine et al. 2010). This participatory action research project was conducted over a four-year period by a group of women in a New York prison—half of whom were incarcerated and half of whom were not. One of the many features that distinguishes this research from other criminological discussions about the voice of incarcerated peoples in academic scholarship is that the project was based upon relationships and had a political commitment to developing a community of researchers that valued the diverse experiences and skills of all collective members—whether university based or incarcerated. Further, their research methodology was framed by dialogue and shared learning, enabling them to jointly explore the tricky terrain of racism, homophobia, sexism, and concepts such as choice, responsibility, and accountability. Such a research model moves beyond the inclusion of incarcerated people’s voices, or the sharing of their stories, by acknowledging the myriad skills and limitations embodied by us all, and it entails a commitment to the hard work of being together as thinkers, scholars, and researchers across a wide array of differences.

### **The Walls to Bridges Collective: Research as Collaborative Practice**

**Shoshana:** The Walls to Bridges Collective (W2BC) is a group of incarcerated and non-incarcerated people who meet biweekly at a federal prison for women in Canada. W2BC is an outgrowth of The Walls to Bridges program, inspired by the US-based Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. University and college instructors teach courses in correctional settings, bringing both incarcerated and non-incarcerated students together for semester-long classes. Students in the first Walls to Bridges class that I taught in 2011 decided to continue meeting after the class was completed to work together on issues related to social justice, education, and criminal justice. In 2012, they established the Walls to Bridges Collective. As the courses were gaining popularity both at the university and in the prison, we decided to conduct a research study on the student experience of taking Walls to Bridges courses. We focused on the experience of those who had taken courses through the Faculty of Social Work, where I am a professor.

The central purpose of the study was to explore how students experienced the pedagogy of the class and what they learned about diversity, privilege, community, and social justice (foci of the course material). We received approval from the university Research Ethics Board and the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada, and developed a set of questions to guide interviews with former Walls to Bridges students. Five collective members—two of whom had been previously incarcerated—conducted interviews with former students. Interviews were conducted at the prison, in the community, and on Skype. The collective members had also been students of Walls to Bridges courses, so they too were eligible to participate in the study. We developed an interview method that paired together incarcerated and non-incarcerated collective members to discuss their answers to the questions. We felt that having one person interview the other would feel formal and artificial within the collective, and we wanted to honor our own belief in the value of collaborative learning and sharing. We interviewed 16 incarcerated and 21 non-incarcerated students, for a total of 37 participants.

I brought excerpts from the transcripts to the prison for our collective to code. Consistent with qualitative coding techniques that look for similarities and dissimilarities, we coded the excerpts into themes and categories and then reflected together on their possible meanings. I also co-coded interviews with collective members who conducted the interviews who were living outside. After doing an initial coding of the transcripts, we commented on each other's codes, reflections, and observations by emailing Word documents.

This phase was followed by a more intense analysis. I coded the transcripts thematically using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. Tiina and I then began having conversations about the possible meanings and implications of the participants' comments. As we reflected upon the participants' words and upon our own perspectives, emotions, thoughts, and experiences, we were also building



theory—theory that is collaborative and not bound by one person’s lens, experience, or preferred analytical framework. The conversation was textual, integrating lived experience with academic theorizing; it was holistic, iterative, and evolving. Fillmore et al. (2014) describe a similar process of data analysis in their community-based research on Canadian Aboriginal women’s drug use and treatment, conducted by a team of organizations and individuals. They use the term “crystallization” to refer to their own process of analyzing interview transcripts, which they describe in the following way:

At the center of the crystal are our team member’s diverse lenses that filter the analysis of the women’s stories through their experiences and knowledge sets. In order to organize the women’s stories, team members participated in identifying discursive themes. In all, we drew from the knowledge sets of different groups and people, including academic researchers, community members, elders, treatment workers (social workers, counsellors), storytelling participants and transcribers. (Fillmore, Dell, and Kilty 2014, 51)

Although on a much smaller scale, our process resonates with the idea of crystallization, which considers each lens and refraction as a legitimate source of knowledge reflected in the final discourses and practices of this project. We believe our intertextual conversations not only are consistent with the principles of dialogue that we follow in our collective and in Walls to Bridges classes, but also they allowed us methodologically to draw upon the expertise and lived experiences of the interviewers and helped to destabilize my position as the primary “knower” of the data.

**Tiina:** What is unique to our research is that I have had the opportunity to be a valued collaborator since the very beginning. I had no previous research experience; this is where Shoshana shared with our collective her unique knowledge, which we used to collaboratively begin this research. We formulated the interview questions and learned interview skills together, and then several of us conducted the interviews ourselves—something that for me was very meaningful. The data collection process and putting our ideas down on paper felt conversational and shared. At one point, Shoshana referred to something we were analyzing as “generating theory.” That was a surprise to me. I have not been used to having my opinions and ideas validated—in fact I learned the opposite in prison; when I said my true thoughts and feelings I usually experienced backlash and was therefore trained to only say what I thought they wanted me to say. So it was quite an empowering feeling to realize that I did contribute to the creation of academic scholarship.

### **“What Do You Think This Means?”: Analyzing Transcripts**

The purpose of the study was to explore students’ experience of the W2B classes; specifically, we were interested in how students experienced the teaching method

(circle pedagogy) and what they learned about diversity, privilege, community, and social justice. We had 37 interviews, each about 1.5 hours long. Although many themes emerged from these transcripts, for the purpose of this article we focus on two examples related to spectator gaze and discourses of healing and trauma. Our first shared reading of the transcript excerpts fell broadly into the categories of “personal impact” and “ripple effect” (a category named and identified by the collective members at the prison). We found that participants frequently spoke about “voice,” “healing,” and “empowerment” when talking about how they experienced the group dynamic in the classroom. As we coded the transcripts, we shared our perspectives on these themes, with the awareness that we were not coming to the data as objective observers, but that our emotions, thoughts, and lived experiences contribute to how we hear the participants’ words.

In one interview, an incarcerated student stated:

Like even when we spoke about our lives or certain things that we went through or whatever we’re going through in here. And just to see some of them [students from outside] crying, like it touched us. And to see how connected they were to us and how they felt. It’s like they felt what we were going through. It was soothing. It was a nice feeling to be able to have that. Because in a sense, we not only connected as a university class, we also connected as women, empowering each other.

**Shoshana:** I wonder about this. What were the tears about? Although she says it felt connected and empowering, what is really going on here? My own experience of teaching these classes is that some students from inside share their struggles of incarceration and this is a new awareness for the outside students. I know that they are often very shocked. Does this have something to do with power?

**Tiina:** These classes are the first time many people inside get to experience someone on the outside caring about them, bringing them out of isolation. When I was inside, I always believed staff worked to divide and conquer women, so the actual experience of women empowering each other made me want to emulate that within the prison and show others who had not experienced the Walls to Bridges courses how that could work.

**Tiina:** (two months later) Uh-oh, I feel very different about this now! This feels like penal spectatorship to me—I feel the student has been taught by corrections that they have to share their story. It is no one’s fault but it reproduces oppressive dynamics. Yet the incarcerated person feels rewarded by others’ tears and those who shed tears were feeling sympathy/pity for the one sharing the story. This feels icky to me now.

**Shoshana:** Oh, the pity problem: Another participant in the study talks quite strongly about how uncomfortable she was when it was clear that some of the

outside students were pitying her and the other inside students. She found it quite *disempowering* actually.

**Tiina:** Sometimes I put my life or prison conditions on display, even to people I know are only listening out of curiosity or fascination, just so people who have never experienced can get a small glimpse of what a terrible system we have, in the hopes they can share what I show or tell them.

We use this example not as an illustration of the students' class experience, but to reveal how using lived experience and knowledge in conversation with one another helped us start to examine the power dynamics of "hearing voices" in the Walls to Bridges classroom, and to draw on theoretical perspectives such as penal spectatorship to deepen our understanding. We found it interesting (as has been the case with most of our analyses) that Shoshana reflected initially on the role of the outside student in this story, whereas Tiina's gaze was directed at the inside student. Where we place our analytic emphasis is reflective of each of our own subjectivities, identities, and primary foci—Shoshana questions dynamics of power between inside and outside students, whereas Tiina's priority is on how inside students experience prison and the role of Walls to Bridges classes within the carceral space. Our analysis of the students' comments helped us to both reflect upon the complexities of Walls to Bridges classes and to engage in a transparent reflexivity, as is evident in how Tiina's response to the quote shifted over time. Her initial reaction was one of identification with the inside student who experienced the tears of her outside peers as soothing. Her perspective shifted several months later after thinking about the narratives criminalized women are encouraged to produce and how others hear and respond to these narrations. We think this illustrates the common, but rarely transparent, process of doing research—the interplay between the researcher's lived experiences, emotions, commitments, and preferred analytic framing.

We also explored the language of healing, which a number of inside students used to explain how Walls to Bridges courses increased their sense of self-worth and confidence, eroded from living in a prison setting and other damaging experiences.

The healing process [in the W2B class], just helps you realize you're a worthy person still, that everyone makes choices in life and mistakes, but you're still worthy as a human being. You are able to change. You are able to grow. You are able to still learn. You don't need to give up. You're not this lost soul that they just put away and they forget about you. You can still put your foot forward every day. This is just a stepping stone in life. That's what I find—[the W2B class] transformed [me], it's made me stronger and more confident in myself.

**Tiina:** It sounds like this person has done too much programming and cannot differentiate between the university class and correctional programming. It was still beneficial to her but I do not think the purpose of W2B classes is to heal because that would have to mean we are broken.

**Shoshana:** I feel like a few participants have alluded to the idea of healing. I wonder if it could also mean healing the damage that prison does. I am thinking about her comment, “They just put you away and they forget about you.”

**Tiina:** I think there is *no* healing from prison. You can *deal* with it, not heal from it. Even people who come in, such as W2B students and facilitators, come out scarred in ways they cannot heal from either. How this has really affected me is that I cannot really say to someone that prison was traumatic because the reaction will always be, “It’s prison, it’s supposed to be bad!” So how am I supposed to deal with that trauma? Especially when society is telling me I deserved it for being a bad person!

Tiina’s insistence that healing cannot happen in prison challenged us to think further about what factors contribute to this participant’s (and several others’) framing of their experience in therapeutic terms. We note that Shoshana’s comment implies a connection to the notion of healing, prompting further reflexivity about how her lived experience as a therapist in a prison may predispose her toward uncritically accepting the therapeutic language in this quote. At the same time, it raises important questions about what language is available to incarcerated women to express a sense of self-confidence, agency, or voice in a context of being “put away and forgotten about.” Further, Tiina’s final comment shifts us toward a broader discussion of the trauma of prison and the lack of discursive space available to express its damaging effects. The spectator gaze prohibits a discourse of prison as traumatic because “prison is supposed to be bad,” and these narratives are not solicited (unlike the “prison saved my life” narratives) nor given much legitimacy in the public realm.

### Conclusion

We have known each other three years and our relationship as colleagues developed organically; our data analysis plan was not in the initial research design but emerged out of the collaborative work we do in our collective. Some of the design was intentional, as was the way we approached the writing and analysis in this article. This article was written through emails, comments within interview transcripts, shared writing, and coffee shop conversations about self-representation, panopticons, gaze, and collaboration. We talked through questions such as: Whose voice are we representing? What is the balance and connection between lived experience and academic theorizing? What do we do with our disagreements? How do we recognize and not deny the real material differences between us and how power is operationalized in our relationship? If penal spectatorship is at least partially defined by experiential distance from punishment regimes, then reflexivity might also involve “a framework from which to challenge our distanced selves in relation to our own place in punishment” (Brown 2009, 191). We talked a lot about complicity and redemption. Issues of lived experience and voice in research are complicated and fraught with ethical and institutional quagmires (Bruckert 2014). Even the writing

of this paper is imbued with contradictions and complicities. Participatory models of research require openness to reflexivity, a willingness to critically examine power within research and scholarship. For academics, this means cultivating humility and entertaining the idea that academic knowing is only *one* way of knowing, not *the* way of knowing.

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