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Anchoring Amongst the Waves: Discursive Constructions of Motherhood and Addiction

Abstract The authors problematize essentialized notions of motherhood both ideologically and through criminalized women's accounts of correctional programming discourses that engage these notions as a way to foster "motherhood as praxis." Using data from interviews conducted with former female prisoners, we analyze how substance using mothers invoke the concept of a "good" mother by negotiating its meaning through techniques of self-surveillance and the surveillance of other criminalized mothers. Women use this renegotiated identity as inspiration to move away from activities in conflict with motherhood, such as using drugs and/or alcohol. Correctional authorities in drug rehabilitation programs encourage women to use motherhood as an "anchor" upon which to stop using and the women appeal to this identity to responsabilize their actions. Dichotomizing conceptualizations of a selfless, nurturing, and chaste mother with an addict identity is in fact a precarious rehabilitation tactic. We hypothesize that women who feel they cannot live up to the idealized notion of motherhood might use drugs to cope with feelings of inadequacy, a point that requires further research. Using a framework where motherhood is the key to recovery not only reinforces the addict identity should a woman relapse, it necessarily indicates failure as a mother.

Keywords Motherhood; Addiction; Identity; Prison; Women

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Women who use illicit drugs are rarely considered to be "good mothers." Popular media, legal, and correctional discourses construct drug using women as transgressors of both the law and the normative standards of femininity, which includes essentialized notions of motherhood, because of their criminality and substance use (McCorkel 1998; 2003; Boyd 1999; 2001; 2004; 2008; Malloch 1999; Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2001; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Moore 2007). These discourses seemingly construct a binary of "good" and "bad" mothers, and fail to consider socio-economic, political, and structural disadvantages that can have harmful implications for women involved in the criminal justice system. Rather than understanding these constructs as diametrically opposed, we suggest that the ideal of the "perfect mother" and the demonization of the "bad mother" exist on opposite ends of a continuum. These are extreme characterizations but are used as iconic figures against which we judge women in their capacities as mothers. Thinking of motherhood as existing on a continuum highlights how women at different times demonstrate strengths and weaknesses in their parenting.

For a woman who is addicted to illicit drugs, her identity as a mother is a precarious one. On the one hand, motherhood can be used to "anchor" women in their rehabilitation efforts as they create redemption scripts (Maruna 2001) that situate their identity as mothers as irrefutably connected to their recovery. At the same time, should a woman relapse, not only is her identity as a recovering drug user threatened, so too is her identity as a "good" (read drug free) mother. Using data collected from life history interviews with criminalized women, we argue that there is a hierarchy of motherhood that fails to recognize the structural impediments to reaching the

ideal conceptualization of motherhood. This hierarchy is formulated and reinforced through various forms of surveillance (by both the self and others) and it impacts how women who are addicted to illicit drugs make sense of their identity and their attempts at recovery. To situate our research and the discourses used to engage in the larger motherhood surveillance project, we begin by presenting an overview of the new momism and intensive mothering literature.

Neoliberal Motherhood: New Momism and Intensive Mothering

Motherhood is often equated with being the essence of womanhood (McQuillan et al. 2008). For some women, motherhood acts as the primary, and often-times only, form of self-representation (Choi et al. 2005; Lax 2006) where the desire to become a mother is simultaneously described as a biological imperative and a choice (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Enos 2001). Motherhood binds together notions of femininity, purity, and selflessness; above all, mothering is constructed as natural for women. Women are supposed to bear instinctive qualities with respect to bonding and connectedness to their children in order to detect their needs and minimize their distress (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Hays 1996). Although research abounds that debunks the myth of a perfectly intuitive mother (Douglas and Michaels 2004; Choi et al. 2005; Henderson, Harmon and Houser 2010), these discourses on femininity and motherhood remain.¹ Women are meant to adopt, without conflict, the con-

¹ For example, the ideal mother is expected to sacrifice everything that may be a potential risk to the unborn fetus, regardless of the cost. Sacrifices include: abstinence from alcohol (Golden 2005); drugs (Campbell 1999); tobacco (Nichter et al. 2007); and a myriad of other "risky" activities, such as using a heating pad; eating certain meats, cheeses, and seafood; consuming cold/flu medicine; and caffeine, to name a few (Quénart 1992).

struction of motherhood as moral, virtuous, and ultimately as fulfilling the project of womanhood; in this context, resistance to ideal motherhood is regarded as unnatural (Lax 2006).

Historically, there has always been an ideal conceptualization of motherhood; however, the attributes that make up this exemplar and the way motherhood is performed shift over time. The idyllic construction of contemporary motherhood is framed within a neoliberal context² – that is, with a focus on the mother as expert who is subject to techniques of responsabilization (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Apple 2006; Taylor 2011). The term “new momism” illustrates what it means to be a mother in the neoliberal era. New momism borrows from the historical notions that womanhood is fulfilled by becoming a mother, and that women have an innate and thus superior ability to care for children. New momism calls women to be completely and constantly devoted to their children – physically, emotionally, and psychologically (Douglas and Michaels 2004). Women strategically practice the rhetoric of new momism by following the techniques of intensive mothering. Coined by Hays (1996), intensive mothering discourse contends that a family should be centered on the child, and a mother should naturally become engrossed in and by her child’s life. True to the neoliberal framework, mothers are meant to become experts on their children and how to effectively parent. Ideal motherhood requires a mother to be educated about everything related to her children and thus supports the growing professionalization of motherhood (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Apple 2006).

² The neoliberal era, roughly characterizing the 70’s through to present day, promotes technologies of the self as a method of governance. With regards to state institutions, such as prisons, techniques emphasizing personal responsibility and fiscal efficiency dominate the landscape (Miller and Rose 1994).

By professionalizing motherhood women are expected to become experts on their children’s lives. Developing this expertise entails becoming highly skilled at navigating her children’s physical, intellectual, emotional, and social needs and keeping up with developmental milestones (Phoenix and Woollett 1991). For example, Apple (2006) finds that doctors expect mothers to be prepared to ask appropriate questions at their child’s annual physical and that mothers be assertive in making decisions about their child’s health and development while demonstrating deference to the doctor’s unique expertise. The ideal mother participates in “scientific mothering,” which consists of reading countless self-help books on mothering and child development (among the most popular is the *What to Expect* series) and taking an educated and pragmatic approach to the different advice. The ideal mother must find the balance between “embracing her natural instincts” and following the advice of *other* experts in order to effectively practice new momism.

While embedded in neoliberal discourse, the tenets of new momism cannot be regarded as deterministic, even if they are described as natural. Just as with other forms of social control, women are governed through their autonomy (Rose 1999). Women choose how they raise their children, how much time they spend with them, and how much they emotionally and psychologically invest in them. Douglas and Michaels (2004) note the contradiction inherent in new momism (and likely other neoliberal techniques of governance); that the actions one chooses are completely her own, but to stray from the suggestions offered by new momism discourses would be wholly unnatural and would illustrate “bad” mothering.

Women who are constituted as “bad” mothers are deemed so on two fronts: unnaturalness and failing

to meet their responsibilities. Campbell (2000) finds that the notions of maternal responsibility and maternal instinct are used to govern women, especially those who use illicit drugs; this means that if a woman becomes pregnant while addicted to drugs, her maternal instincts are expected to help her to refrain from using. As we explore below, criminalization and the use of illicit drugs taints women’s identities as mothers (Enos 2001; Boyd 2004). Women who use illicit drugs are thought to focus on drugs rather than their children’s well-being and thus are invariably creating a home full of chaos, disorder and neglect. In fact, Boyd claims that illicit drug use by a mother is thought of as a “...direct form of child maltreatment” (2004:10). By universally defining drug use as the antithesis of “good” or intensive mothering, we generate a kind of hierarchy of motherhood that situates those women who exercise new momism as diametrically opposed to criminalized mothers – especially those who use drugs. To discuss this hierarchy, we must first examine how the Canadian penal system discursively constructs motherhood.

Neoliberal Motherhood in the Canadian Penal System

There is sparse research on the role of a motherhood identity amongst criminalized and addicted women prior to the neoliberal era. We speculate that this dearth of knowledge comes from the small numbers of women prisoners before the 90’s³

³ Women are the fastest growing prison population worldwide (Peugh and Belenko 1999; Alemagno 2001; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2001; Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004; Balfour and Comack 2006). Between 1997 and 2006, the number of federally sentenced women in Canada increased by 22 percent (Pollack 2010:114). Critical scholars suggest that the steep rise in the number of imprisoned women beginning in the 90’s comes from the symbiotic relationship between the “tough on crime” rhetoric and the “war on drugs.”

and the subsequent lack of gender-specific programming. This is not to say that there were no programs designed for women during the welfare era⁴. In her genealogy of women’s imprisonment, Hannah-Moffat (2001) describes how throughout the 50’s and 60’s the Kingston Prison for Women (P4W) offered lessons in domestic reform techniques (such as meal preparation, housekeeping, how to prepare for company, and personal grooming) as a mode of rehabilitation. These domestic programs differed from contemporary substance abuse programs because they were not based on expert discourses but rather were created and run by institutional staff and volunteers who focused on the value of gender specific skills, such as sewing and hairdressing: “the premise behind many of these strategies was that the women prisoners had not been trained by their biological mothers to govern themselves properly” (Hannah-Moffat 2001:102). This suggests that correctional programming efforts have a long history of trying to feminize criminalized women through the discursive production of ideal woman/mother.

The introduction of gender-responsive penalty in the 90’s acted as a gateway for women-centered interventions aimed at reproducing normative femininity through discourses about what it means to be a “good” mother. As Hannah-Moffat (2007) points out, correctional programs use white, middle-class standards upon which to evaluate a woman’s ability to nurture and raise her

⁴ The welfare state is a governing trend to redistribute wealth towards those who are socially disadvantaged and where the state acts as a “safety net” (Rice, Goodin and Parpo 2006). For most western nations, the post World War II era (50’s and 60’s) was a time allowed for an inclusive political rhetoric that facilitated increased public spending at various levels of state intervention, including prisons (Garland 2001).

children⁵. These normative standards do not always represent the material lives and mothering techniques of criminalized women but are nonetheless used to reinforce the feminine ideal and subsequently govern how criminalized women practice mothering. The gender-responsive approach to women's corrections that emerged after the closure of P4W in 2000 is largely built on relational theory, which posits that close relationships (often with intimate partners and children) are particularly important for women because it is through these connections that women (more so than men) develop a sense of self-worth (Covington and Bloom 2006). This characterization of women as primarily wives and mothers contributes to penal programming's focus on essentialized womanhood. Hannah-Moffat (2010) notes the potential for positive systematic change to penal policies using feminist-inspired theory but is wary of how woman/motherhood and femininity are operationalized on the front lines. For example, programming developed from a relational perspective takes for granted that women want to be the primary caregivers to their children and choose to make motherhood the center of their identity (Hannah-Moffat 2010). In fact, women who choose to dissolve their relationship with their children, even if done for the child's welfare, are often pathologized and considered to be especially risky (Hannah-Moffat 2007; Kilty 2011).

When developing a woman's correctional plan, assessments of her risks and needs include an evaluation of her parenting capacity. According to Hannah-Moffat (2007) motherhood is attributed not only as a "need" for women but also as a potential risk

⁵ Hannah-Moffat (2007), like others (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Douglas and Michaels 2004), is not specific about what constitutes white, middle-class mothering techniques.

to be managed if she does not conform to dominant understandings of mothering. In practice, this becomes a form of identity management. It is clear that negotiating incongruent identities, such as mother, addict, and prisoner, is difficult, and that addiction and incarceration stigmatize the individual and disrupt identity management (Jewkes 2005). As a result, ex-prisoners commonly reach back into their past to re-center older, more positive and often normative constructions of self (for example, as mothers) in order to discard their criminalized or drug using selves (Goffman 1961; 1963; Lofland 1969; Baker and Carson 1999; Baker 2000; Maruna 2001; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002; Kilty 2011). In fact, Baker writes that women must engage in stigma management techniques that "transform their identities to those of «ordinary» people. This can be done by reverting to a «true self,» extending an identity present during addiction, or creating a new, emergent identity" (2000:864).

Maruna contends that as part of the identity transformation process, ex-prisoners craft a "redemption script," beginning with "a believable story of why they are going straight" (2001:86). It is important for recovering drug users to acknowledge that they identify with normative understandings of motherhood in order to present themselves as a redemptive subject (Lofland 1969; Maruna 2001; Brown and Bloom 2009). Participants in this study adopted an essentialized construction of motherhood as the root of their redemption scripts. Most participants repeatedly reiterated the phrase, "I am a good mother" but also recognized that substance use was at odds with their conceptualization of motherhood (Baker and Carson 1999). Giordano and colleagues describe such elements (such as motherhood or marital relationships) in the person's environment as "hooks for

change," which act as "catalysts for lasting change when they energize rather fundamental shifts in identity and changes in the meaning and desirability of deviant/criminal behavior itself" (2002:992). Hannah-Moffat (2010) argues that penal interventions use motherhood as a tool to regulate women and reinforce normative femininity. In other words, by teaching mothers how to govern their children, the women themselves are also being governed.

This research shows that motherhood acts less as a "hook" that the individual catches themselves upon, and more as an "anchor" that the women bind themselves or feel bound to, and which they identify as "always already" present, and thus as a component of their true or core self. Moreover, this research problematizes using motherhood as an anchor (or hook) because it may not result in lasting change but rather a cycle of drug use and desistance. The danger in "anchoring" identity to an essentialized conceptualization of motherhood is that it may create a feedback loop of abstaining from drugs "to be a good mom," while at the same time using drugs to cope with feelings of inadequacy in that role, an argument that correctional authorities often suggest drug using women endorse to justify or deny responsibility for their continued drug use (Prochaska and DiClemente 1992; Boyd 1999; 2001; 2004; 2007; Malloch 1999; Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2001; Maruna 2001; Grant et al. 2008; Kilty 2011).

For example, every participant in this study described how prison program providers, authorities, and correctional workers emphasized, as a tactic to get them to stop using, that the mother component of their identity *should* be(come) their true or core self (Loftus and Namaste 2011). Similarly, McCorkel found that in correctional drug rehabilitation programs, staff members confront women about their

drug use and "the nature of their *real* selves" (1998; 2003:51) in an effort to correct what they see as a failure to take responsibility. Discursively invoking essentialized constructions of motherhood to empower women (Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2001) to abstain from substances (Moore 2007) not only reifies the dichotomy of "good" and "bad" motherhood but it sets up a fragile paradigm for success, where a relapse may reinforce the addict self as their master status. Correctional programs rely on normative understandings of motherhood and thus fail to account for the context within which these relationships exist (Hannah-Moffat 2010). Blamed for their poor decisions, many women are likely to feel solely responsible for any setbacks that may come from their inability to live up to the expectations of ideal motherhood. Noting that correctional discourses promote essentialized notions of motherhood is not new (Diduck 1998; McCorkel 1998; 2003; Boyd 1999; 2004; Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2001; Greaves et al. 2004; Moore 2007). However, this paper examines the role these discourses play in the construction and negotiation of identity.

Methodological Note

This study is based on life history interviews conducted with twenty-two former female prisoners. Participants were located through community-based agencies and halfway houses, which, in order to maintain anonymity, cannot be identified. Most participants experienced homelessness at some point by living on the street, in a shelter, or in a drug/crack house. Findings from this research should not be generalized to other groups of users. The interviews were conducted and audio-recorded in the halfway houses and were then transcribed verbatim. Each woman was paid \$20 for her participation and was offered transportation or provided

public transit vouchers to assist with travel costs. There were no exclusionary criteria and all the women who wished to participate were interviewed; all participants were eighteen years of age or older and signed an informed consent form approved by Simon Fraser University's Ethics Review Board.

In order to recruit participants, the first author spent between approximately 15-20 hours a week engaging in observational fieldwork in the halfway houses where the women resided. She first gained entrée by meeting with the Executive Directors and house managers, who were interested and welcomed the research, as they felt it would showcase the needs of the women they serve and thus the difficulty of their work. Five months of fieldwork allowed Kilty to blend in with the goings-on of the agencies and the halfway houses, generate rapport with staff members and the women, and have countless casual conversations and informal meetings with staff members and the women who lived in the house and/or used the agency's services. This interaction helped to foster a detailed knowledge of, and familiarity with agency and house policies, procedures, and mandates, as well as the agencies' organizational and fiscal structures and constraints. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted between two and four and a half hours, and covered a variety of topics, including: childhood life, familial and romantic relationship history, histories of abuse, substance use, and self-harming behaviors, as well as discussions of imprisonment, reintegration, health, power, identity and resistance.

The women ranged from 24 to 65 years of age. Consistent with the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in Canadian prisons, 9 participants self-identified as First Nations or Aboriginal, the remainder self-

identified as white.⁶ Of the twenty-two participants, 8 served both provincial and federal time in prison, while 14 served provincial time only. In all, 14 were mothers, 7 of whom had lost primary or total custody of one or more of their children to social services or a family member due to their drug use and criminalization. All twenty-two participants were self-identified as having problematically used drugs and/or alcohol, but only 17 identified their substance use as an ongoing struggle in their lives. Similar to the temporal length of the women's addictions, which ranged from 4 to 25 years, the women's drug of choice also varied – with some identifying it as: crack cocaine (4); powdered cocaine (4); crystal meth (2); heroin (4); and alcohol (2). While the women's index offences ranged from solicitation, to drug possession, drug trafficking, theft, fraud, assault, and murder, 20 participants claimed that substances were involved in their carrying out of those offences. The remaining sections of this article examine how criminalized women who have experienced problematic substance use (which they characterize as addiction) construct their identities as mothers in light of the difficulties they face as recovering substance users.

The Role of Surveillance in Creating a Hierarchy of Motherhood

There is a common (mis)perception that criminalized mothers willfully ignore the call of new momism, but it is unlikely that any mother could miss the messages and pressures imposed by the media, other moms, and the broader social world about what

⁶ Although race is an essential component to identity, our data does not reveal significant differences in the mothering narratives presented by the Aboriginal and white participants. We suggest that future research adopt a more fully developed intersectional approach to examine the effects of race and ethnicity on mothering discourses.

it means to be a selfless and virtuous mother (Boyd 2004). However, it is of note that the definition of new momism is drawn from a white, middle-class interpretation of motherhood (Boyd 2004; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Gillies and Edwards 2006; McQuillan et al. 2008; Brown and Bloom 2009). In the penal context, this fact has two important consequences. First, mothers who are not recognized as women practicing new momism are characterized as lazy and neglectful (Douglas and Michaels 2004) and mothers who use illicit drugs are constructed as immature, out of control, and deviant (Boyd 2004). Given the over-representation of First Nations and Aboriginal women in Canadian prisons (Hannah-Moffat 2001; Boyd 2004), new momism discourse in the carceral context contributes to the creation of a hierarchy of motherhood that is likely to flow along racial lines (Taylor 2011). For example, in a similarly racialized construction of the "welfare mother," Douglas and Michaels note that "...because however insecure we felt in our identities as «mothers,» we suddenly (if briefly) felt very confident and virtuous when juxtaposed to this other, bad mother" (2004:199). In turn, this hierarchy leaves criminalized women with little capital upon which to reclaim their identities as "good" mothers (Gillies and Edwards 2006).

The second consequence of building the new momist discourse from a place of privilege is that women who are categorized as "bad" mothers may come to recognize themselves as failures. Indeed, research shows that regardless of race or social standing, many women feel doubt and guilt in their capacity as mothers (Choi et al. 2005; Henderson et al. 2010). For women who use illicit drugs, their identification as "bad" mothers (either by themselves, by others, or both) leads to an overall sense of failure in that role. As Stacey explains:

I think about getting out on parole, fucking up, going back, and you know, and just not wanting it in my life anymore. You know, like I'm not like my mother, but I am. I chose drugs over my own daughter. And, I don't want her to grow up and, either I did it, a hit and I died or, you know, I'm on the streets, somebody killed me, and I already feel bad now because I chose drugs over her. So, I don't want her to grow up and I'm still a drug addict.

Stacey's discourse not only illustrates how she feels drug use makes her a "bad" mother, it also shows her realization of the potential harm of her actions and the responsibility and love she feels toward her daughter. This quote illustrates the co-existence of multiple identities – that despite her drug use and criminalized status she remains a caring mother. While the women's narratives clearly illustrate the creation of a hierarchy of motherhood, it is important to recognize that one component of a woman's identity (that is, drug user) does not represent the totality of her identity. Knowing this, the ideal construction of motherhood created by new momism discourses sets unrealistic expectations regarding women's desire and ability to devote their lives to their children while simultaneously excluding already marginalized women from positively identifying as "good" mothers. As aforementioned, criminalized women, like most (if not all) women, are aware of the hierarchy of motherhood and their place on that continuum in light of their drug use. Positioning themselves on this continuum requires women to engage in different forms of surveillance as a way to monitor the status and quality of their mothering.

As Foucault (1977) describes in his analysis of Bentham's panopticon, surveillance is permanent when one believes they are always visible; this state of consciousness is used to foster vigilant

self-surveillance. Surveillance is a key component in the development of a hierarchy of motherhood, and takes three broad forms: self-surveillance, surveillance by general others, and state surveillance. Phoenix and Woollett (1991) note that surveillance performed by state authorities, such as social workers or psychologists, often targets racially minoritized and/or impoverished mothers and their children with the goal of diverting these children from a life of crime that is otherwise constructed as predetermined because of their mothers' inadequacies. By stressing an incarcerated woman's need to properly govern her children, she is responsabilized for their future behavior (Hannah-Moffat 2007; 2010; Henderson et al. 2010:233). Within this framework, less-than-perfect parenting is considered a social problem requiring intervention (Phoenix and Woollett 1991).

Women engage in self-surveillance as part of their apprehension of failing as a mother and the stress and guilt that come from a sense that they do not meet the criteria for "good" motherhood (Henderson et al. 2010). For example, Joyce recounted how her self-assessment as a "bad" mother acts as a roadblock to taking the steps to regain custody of her children:

I'm working on it. I have a lawyer for my children and I've obtained a lawyer for myself, representing me for my, to see my children. So that ball's started rolling because I noticed I get to saying I'm going to call the lawyer and I never go through with it because of that inner voice saying, "Well, look what you've done anyway, you're not worth having them." And then I say, OK, maybe it's better if I wait for them to come to me.

Joyce, like so many women in her position, internalized the normative ideal of what it means to be a "good" mother (Henderson et al. 2010) and judges

herself unacceptable. While Joyce's narrative primarily exemplifies self-surveillance, her views are also situated in relation to how other women monitor and view her addiction, which together create an environment of perpetual surveillance, examination and judgement.

Surveillance of a woman's abilities as a mother is common both in and out of prison. Enos' (2001) research revealed that women in prison judge one another's claims about motherhood by discriminating between the types of crimes they committed, their drug use (especially that which takes place around their children), and the woman's enthusiasm to return to her children. Reflecting this finding, and her status as a white, middle class mother of two sentenced to time in prison for committing fraud for the first time in her mid-forties, Shelley, expresses her negative feelings about mothers using drugs:

What surprised me the most was the women that, OK, I appreciate that you use and it takes over you, but when you have a baby – and you hear the women, "Oh, my boyfriend is picking me up and he's gonna have a ball, whatever, crack, ready for me when I get in the car." I mean, it made me sick to my stomach. And they were all...they were all like that. Nobody said, "Oh, I'm clean now, I've been clean for X number of days and I'm gonna stay clean and I'm gonna have this baby and I'm gonna be healthy." You didn't hear that.

Likewise, Shelley describes women who appear to choose drugs over their children, as she felt her mother did, as failing to demonstrate the required level of selflessness to be considered a "good" mother. Shelley's discourse, which clearly demonstrates the creation of a hierarchy of motherhood, also illustrates how her moral judgement of other women is rooted in her own pain of having been a child whose life was affected by a mother who used drugs:

What you're doing is affecting your children. What you're doing is hurting those kids for the rest of their lives...Yeah, give them up. Give them to somebody who cares because obviously you don't. You cannot get out of your own self-world, long enough to take care of your kids; to go to that PTA meeting, to go to that baseball game, to be on time, to make supper.

Shelley is speaking as a fellow criminalized woman, but her narrative also demonstrates that of a hurt child who wished her own mother had stopped using. The result of women engaging in the surveillance of one another is that they are participating in the creation of a supposed dualism between "good" and "bad" mothers. In fact, Henderson and colleagues write: "there does not need to be a policing agent to regulate mothers because they are doing it themselves" (2010:241). Shelley's narrative also demonstrates how proponents of new momism discourse often fail to consider the structural consequences of creating a hierarchy of motherhood, such as the responsabilization of the individual (Moore 2007). In this light, surveillance is used as a tool to demonstrate how one's inability to reach the ideals of new momism, for example by becoming criminalized, is tolerable given other more egregious drug using mothers. Being a former prisoner does not negate a woman's interest in distinguishing what accounts for "bad" mothering. Regardless of their own incarceration, participants such as Lindsay attempted to distinguish their personal narratives of motherhood from those of other mothers in prison:

Yeah, and I find it just to be really selfish...to be very selfish. Pregnant women were in there, you know? And I'm not one to talk, I mean I went to jail with two children at home, you know? But, I found them just to be very selfish and I can't imagine being pregnant and having the baby and babies at home. This one girl, there were four, her mother was look-

ing after them and they were all like, under the age of five, you know... I don't know. I don't know if it's right; young and pregnant women just not caring, being selfish and not caring about their...their unborn children. And there was many pregnant women in jail. So many.

Although Lindsay also spent time in prison and was separated from her children, she understands her situation to be very different from imprisoned women she conceives of as selfish – a trait she does not attribute to herself. For example, Lindsay stated that she was not selfish because "I kept in touch with my kids all the time. I wrote them letters and talked to them on the phone, and as soon as I got out I saw them. I see them regularly and I got sober so I could be a good mother." Selfishness is a personal attribute or characteristic that stands in opposition to the values of new momism, and, as Lindsay's quote exemplifies, selfishness is inextricably linked to being a "bad" mother. Likewise, Eleanor compared her familial situation with her observations of other women in prison: "To see her come into jail six months pregnant, with a crack baby. Some people have it worse off. My kids are lucky that I didn't show them that world." Although she is trying to distance herself from the image of the "bad" mother, Eleanor's narrative further entrenches the continuum of motherhood through which she attempts to reconstruct herself as a "good" (or at least "better" than some) mother. By participating in ongoing self-surveillance, as well as the surveillance of others in similarly marginalized situations, criminalized women may redefine the values of "good" motherhood so that the ideals of new momism shift to a set of expectations that fit within a framework where the mother is addicted to illicit drugs. The notion of a division between "good" and "bad" mothers, however, remains. As

we explore below, given that criminalized women are problematically identified as inherently “bad” mothers, it is perplexing that motherhood is used as an anchor in addiction treatment.

Anchoring Motherhood: Re-defining the Good Mother

Not surprisingly, in an effort to manage the stigma of being a substance-using mother, criminalized women frequently reject deviant or stigmatized identity labels by singling out an essentialized notion of motherhood as the defining component of their “true self,” master status, or identity. For example, giving up custody of your child, let alone having them removed, is especially stigmatizing insofar as it is seen as a violation of idealized motherhood (Comack 1996; Diduck 1998; Malloch 1999; Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2001; Comack and Balfour 2004). Emma, who gave up custody of her young son and daughter, commented on the social construction of “good” motherhood, and the consequence of violating the axioms of this construction:

I had two kids at home, I was working two jobs – I was dancing and I was bartending and I was 17. I had the day off, my son had been colicky for a week and a half, I fell asleep on the couch and my daughter climbed up on the stove and got second and third degree burns while I was sleeping. When I woke up she was playing on the floor beside me saying, “Mommy we got boo-boos,” and I realized that I couldn’t do it. That was the hardest decision I ever had to make in my life – to give her up. I gave her and her brother up to my mom. So my son has just recently come back into my care, a month and a half ago, but I’ve had some access to them all their lives. It’s hard because when I was inside, I heard this one guard say “How could she give up her own kids, just to get high.” So it doesn’t matter if you put your kids first and give them up because you can’t be the mother you want to be, you’re still a bad mom.

If the childless mother is incomplete, removing a child from a woman may increase her feelings of inadequacy, self-loathing, guilt and shame. Mothers who have drug and/or alcohol addictions and who entrust their children to the care of others, seen by them as a selfless and thus motherly act, are not perceived as “good” mothers because their acts of self-sacrifice go unacknowledged as such (Comack 1996; Diduck 1998; Boyd 1999; 2001; 2004; Comack and Balfour 2004) and are instead characterized as indicative of the mother’s riskiness (Hannah-Moffat 2010).

Although many participants re-defined what it meant to be a “good” mother, others adopted the discourses of intensive mothering and saw addiction and involvement with the criminal justice system as diametrically opposed to the ideals of new momism (Hays 1996; Douglas and Michaels 2004). For example, Shelley’s script reflects the neoliberal rhetoric of individual choice that undermines the consideration of structural disadvantages or barriers:

You know, I find it, if you’re gonna have children, if you’re going to decide to sleep with that person and then you’re right there then, making that choice, I’ve now given up responsibility of putting myself first, there’s somebody else to put first. Period.

While the rhetoric of new momism is visible in Shelley’s comment, it is also clear that criminalized women (like Emma, above) negotiate the normative standards of motherhood in order to represent themselves as “good” mothers.

Many participants resisted the assumption that the multiple identities of addict, criminal, and mother could not co-exist (Baker and Carson 1999; Enos 2001) but noted that the challenge of re-imagining these identities is most apparent while incarcerated. Given the constant surveillance in prison, those

women who do not elicit an acceptable performance of motherhood are admonished as “bad” mothers and are identified as risky; however, some women attributed their lack of visible mothering as a testament to putting their children’s well-being before their own. For example, Catherine used the language of new momism – selflessness, compassion, and responsibility – to explain her decision *not* to see her child while in prison:

My daughter would have been old enough to come and see me, but I didn’t want to take the chance of having her start to cry when between glass, what can you do, nothing. So I’m not going to do that to her.

Here, Catherine maintains the division between “good” and “bad” motherhood but uses characteristics that typically describe “good” mothers (the desire to comfort and nurture an upset child) in order to retain her identity as a caring and thoughtful mother in spite of her criminalization and addiction to illicit drugs. When attempting to reconcile the co-existence of these oppositional identities, participants used their statuses as mothers as the anchor upon which to frame their attempt at desistance from drug use (Plumridge and Chetwynd 1999; McIntosh and McKeganey 2000; Maruna 2001).

The context in which women attempt to reconstruct their self-concept also impacts the ways they manage their identities. For example, the gender-responsive treatment programs touted by correctional authorities use motherhood as a tool through which criminalized women can manage their substance use, but they do so with value-laden identity caricatures as goalposts and by emphasizing the need to make “responsible choices” (Plumridge and Chetwynd 1999; Baker 2000; Hannah-Moffat 2007; 2010; Moore 2007; Grant et al. 2008; Kilty 2011). By suggesting that women can *choose* to stop using

drugs women are encouraged to discover that their children deserve a mother who will prioritize their needs over drug use (Boyd 1999; Baker 2000; McIntosh and McKeganey 2000; Maruna 2001; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Gubrium 2008).

Subsequently, many participants repeatedly stressed that “being a good mother” was what they *should* be doing; for example, Sophie, a drug treatment court participant, stated:

I don’t wanna end up going in. I’m fighting for my son right now, and a stupid little slip-up right now is going to screw everything and I’m so scared. I don’t want my son to end up being adopted or something. That’s my biggest fear because I love my boy. I would never hurt him in any way. Like I raised my girls and they’re perfect kids. And he doesn’t deserve what his mother’s doing to him right now. Like, I mean, he needs his mom and I’m screwing it up for him. He’s my motivation right now. Everything is for him. I don’t want to be in jail and my son coming to visit. I don’t want that, you know? I wanna be a normal mom. It’s not his fault that I’m being a screw-up. But, he’s paying the price. It’s hard. It’s hard to watch your child cry when they have to take him through the door, to go somewhere else. I don’t want somebody else raising my boy, that’s my baby! So I’m fighting really hard to get him and I’m fighting really hard to stay off the drugs. That’s all I have to do... That’s what the programmers keep telling me, it’s up to me and that when I use I am failing my kids and when I’m clean I can be a mother again, they talk about that a lot. And being a mother makes me feel like a woman. I feel whole, when I’m with my children. I don’t feel that way when I’m not with them, you know? It’s weird. I feel complete when I’m with my children. And when something like this is going on, I’m... I’m lost.

Sophie was preoccupied with the fear of losing custody of her son because of a drug relapse; by re-centering her successes as a mother to her first two children (she did not use crack until well after her

third child was born), Sophie is trying to re-establish herself as a “good” mother (Maruna 2001). This narrative reconstruction, or what Goffman (1963) refers to as “reverting to an unspoiled identity,” allows Sophie to criticize the Children’s Aid Society’s (CAS) decision to remove her son from her care because of her recent drug use, which she claims ignores the fact that she successfully raised her two older children. This tactic led to a cyclical experience of drug use to cope with these feelings, which then justified the court’s decision to remove her child. CAS’s decision to remove her son from her care reflects Diduck’s finding that when a woman comes before the law as a mother, her

subjectivity comes laden with requirements of motherhood: chastity, self-sacrifice, nurture and care and she also comes bearing a mystical maternal connection to her child. How well she is able to negotiate these factors in the circumstances of her life determines whether she is essentialized as a good or bad mother. (1998:210-211)

Sophie’s narrative demonstrates the tension between being a “good” mother (because of her past maternal experiences) and a “bad” mother (because of her current drug use) and the incoherence that comes with developing this hierarchy.

The sense of self that women derive from their identity as a mother (Loftus and Namaste 2011) acts as the anchor that can support their “addict in recovery,” “recovered addict,” or “drug free” identity. By anchoring their core identity in their roles as mothers, the participants also actively endorsed the language of new momism in an effort to construct their children as particularly strong emotionally:

[My children] are really proud of me for pulling through. It’s amazing that they’re being proud of me for pulling through, doing time for what I did. (Shirley-Anne)

My family is my big strength right now... My daughter, she’s what keeps me going. Trying to stay clean for her. (Stacey)

Conceptualizing motherhood as an identity anchor typifies the ideals of new momism, particularly when correctional authorities and other mothers tout motherhood as the embodiment of strength and selflessness (Brown and Bloom 2009; Robbins, Martin and Surratt 2009; Kreager, Matsueda and Erosheva 2010; Loftus and Namaste 2011).

Mirroring much of the existing literature (Diduck 1998; Boyd 1999; 2004; 2007; 2008; Baker 2000; Maruna 2001; Greaves et al. 2004; Geiger and Fischer 2005), several participants described how thinking about their children in an altruistic way, which they described as “putting them first,” was a strong motivator to become and remain “clean.” Relying on the concept of intensive mothering to encourage sobriety and responsible parenting simultaneously reifies drug use as failure, which caused several participants to, as Elaine stated, “want to use more to numb it out.” Geiger and Fischer (2005) claim that for criminalized women, separation from their children can cause a feeling of anomie – which again defines women by their biological role as mothers and criminalization as compromising that potential self. Sandra felt that her status as a mother was negatively impacted by her addiction to the point that until she was able to completely abstain from drug use she could not be a mother to her child:

Yeah, but I have a lot of things to change before I can get [my son] back. I’ve got to change my whole pattern and my whole lifestyle. It’s hard. Especially when you’ve been like that your whole life. Every time I use, I’m losing a bit of myself [identity] and my ability to be a good mother and a good role model. It makes me feel worse, like there is something wrong with me – that I can’t just stop using so I can

be a good mom. Every time I relapse I feel more and more like maybe I’m just not cut out to do it. Don’t get me wrong – I want to be with my son. But, like the programs teach you, you can’t be a good mother when you use drugs because you don’t think clearly – you think about drugs not your kids.

Enlisting an essentialized notion of motherhood to promote a clean and sober identity dangerously raises the stakes of failure, without a corresponding increase in the benefit to the criminalized mother’s identity. This is especially precarious when correctional understandings of motherhood ignore the emotional and practical challenges criminalized women encounter when attempting to perform normative mothering (Gillies and Edwards 2006). Eleanor describes the stress of relying on new momism discourses while trying to recover from addiction:

I’m petrified that I’m going to crack under pressure. I have two outlooks in my life, either when it’s going too good I usually crash and get high or it’s going too bad...yeah, so if I’m seeing something and it’s going like really good I am gonna sabotage it cause it’s too good to be true.

While a woman’s identity as a mother may help her overcome a negative self-concept, for example, the “addict” self, life events that demonstrate or confirm that negative self-concept may strengthen its essence, in her mind and for those around her. Ongoing surveillance by the self, others, and the state thus works to reinforce the stigma (prisoner, criminal, addict) the woman is trying to manage (Enos 2001; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Henderson et al. 2010).

Conclusion

In this paper we explore motherhood, incarceration, addiction, and identity. Given the rhetoric of new momism and intensive mothering (Hays 1996),

women are under immense pressure to perform the role of the ideal mother, characterized by absolute and unwavering commitment to their children, selflessness, compassion, and nurturing – all of which are suggested to be natural qualities in women. The neoliberal principles stemming from new momism are reproduced in the carceral context where normative definitions of motherhood are used to evaluate a woman’s needs/risks and where mothering is used as a tool through which to govern women and their children (Hannah-Moffat 2007; 2010). Using the ideals of new momism, a continuum of motherhood is developed to clearly differentiate between “good” and “bad” mothers; this hierarchy is used as a tool for self-surveillance and the surveillance of other women. By engaging in techniques of surveillance, women are able to rank themselves in relation to others, which then allows them to self-identify as a “good” or “better” mother despite failing to reach the perfection sought through new momism (Henderson et al. 2010).

The motherhood hierarchy is complicated when mothers are addicted to illicit drugs and encounter the criminal justice system. Women must re-define what it means to be a “good” mother in light of their drug use and imprisonment, demonstrating that while they speak in terms of a hierarchy their actions reflect how motherhood exists on a continuum. Women often create redemption scripts (Maruna 2001) by prioritizing their status and roles as mothers ahead of their desire to use drugs. Giordano and colleagues (2002) research describes this element as a “hook for change;” however, we suggest that motherhood is more accurately described as an “anchor” because motherhood acts as a constant and implicitly heavy role around which other components of a woman’s identity (that is,

recovering addict) take shape. Correctional authorities and drug treatment programming encourage using motherhood as an anchor for change as part of their gender responsiveness (Boyd 1999; 2001; 2004; 2007; Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2001; 2007; 2010). That these discourses impact women's substance use and/or potential recovery is acknowledged here but precisely how they operate remains an important avenue for future research. While many participants took up this discourse and used their motherhood identity to spearhead attempts at recovery, we argue that using motherhood as an anchor in these efforts may be counterproductive to some women, particularly should they relapse. When drug use is discursively constructed as an

indicator of "bad" motherhood, any relapse is not only constituted as an impediment to successful recovery but it also denotes failure as a mother. Being judged by others or self-identifying as a failed mother may have the unintended consequence of women using drugs to cope (Enos 2001; Robbins et al. 2009). As one participant stated, "every time I use again after getting my shit together, it just spirals. It just makes me feel like I am a terrible mother." Ultimately, we invite scholars, policy makers and front-line personnel to consider the unintended consequences of using motherhood as an anchor for change. To do so requires examining how women are regulated by formal structures beyond themselves and other women.

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