Mothering in the Context of Criminalized Women’s Lives: Implications for Offending

by

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While it is widely known that most women convicted of crime or serving time in prison are mothers, little research has focused specifically on whether and how the daily activity of mothering affects women’s criminal behaviour. On the one hand, criminalized women often report that parenting is important to them. If mothering reduces the opportunities to engage in crime, strengthens informal controls, and increases the costs of crime, it should discourage offending. On the other hand, the challenges of mothering are particularly onerous for women who are economically disadvantaged, marginalized, and socially isolated – that is, the types of women who are most likely to engage in crime. If children create an imperative for resources that women cannot accommodate legally while simultaneously exacerbating psychological and emotional strains, women may turn to criminal behaviour. Using a sample of 259 criminalized women, I explore the mothering-crime relationship by examining whether the daily responsibilities and demands of living with children affect month-to-month changes in women’s involvement in offending. Controlling for criminalized women’s relationships, socio-economic
contexts, living arrangements, and leisure pursuits, I provide quantitative evidence about 
the relationship between mothering and property crime, drug use, drug dealing, and 
women’s use of violence against their intimate partners. I supplement this analysis with 
qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews with these women. Results indicate a non-
uniform effect of mothering on criminalized women’s offending: living with children 
discourages women from engaging in property crime and using drugs, makes no 
difference to whether or not they deal drugs or engage in ‘mutual’ violence with intimate 
partners, and increases their use of ‘sole’ violence against intimate partners. I discuss 
why living with children is an important “local life circumstance” shaping variation in 
criminalized women’s commission of some, but not all, offences, and consider the policy 
implications of these findings.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Barb is a 20 year old white woman who lives with her infant son, Salem. Over the past three years, she has been involved in four common-law relationships and has been permanently unemployed. Barb reports that she committed her first criminal act when she was 14 years old. Prior to the birth of her son, she regularly used marijuana, cocaine and “E” (ecstasy). However, Barb explains that “when I got pregnant with Salem, everything stopped. I straightened up. I grew up. I want to be a good mom. I want to let my baby live a good life. I stopped [using drugs] once I knew I was pregnant” (ID 305).

In contrast, Tina is a 55 year old white woman who is a mother to three children. She has been involved in two intimate relationships over the past three years, and has not had a job. Tina, who started offending when she was 10 years old, has a serious drug addiction: she alternates between using crack, Tylenol 3, or Valium on a daily basis. She explains that she uses the profits from her regular involvement in property offending, fraudulent schemes, and drug dealing, to “…get drugs, but also to have money to support my [youngest] son” (ID 203).

Though their children feature prominently in the descriptions of their offending experiences, these two women tell very different stories. For the first women, Barb, the birth of her son resulted in a marked turning point in her criminal behaviour. She explains that a major source of stress in her life following her son’s birth was “knowing that the cops were going to get me” if she continued with illegal activities. The possibility of being apprehended by the police made crime too costly for her. As a result, she credits her son with prompting her to make a decisive move away from a criminal lifestyle. In contrast, the second woman, Tina, attributes her offending, at least in part, to her need to financially support her son. Rather than discouraging her from committing

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All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the individuals.
crime, Tina’s desire to provide material goods for her son actually contributes to her offending.

The above narratives highlight the dynamic character of women’s offending. Rather than being stable, women’s crime pathways are seemingly responsive to the roles and responsibilities they assume. However, our understanding of the relationship between maternal roles and offending will differ markedly depending upon whose story we read. Among criminalized women – that is, women who have at times chosen to engage in crime and have been apprehended for it – conflicting messages about the role of children in their participation in criminal activity are commonplace (Baker and Carson 1999; Erickson et al. 2000; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Girshick 1999; Greene, Haney, and Hurtado 2000; Rosenbaum 1979). Indeed, the responsibility of caring for children seems to push some women away from crime, but, at the same time, it pulls other women towards crime. This raises the question: which of these stories is more representative of the experiences of most criminalized women?

The answer to this question about how motherhood shapes women’s offending trajectories remains elusive. Inquiries into the lives of criminalized women indicate that they care about their children; discussions of children often feature prominently in interviews with incarcerated women (Enos 2001; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Forsyth 2003; Girshick 1999; Richie 2003). However, these discussions do not clarify whether and how the obligations and responsibilities of the maternal role translate into behavioural changes, captured in their offending patterns. In fact, both quantitative and qualitative studies document every possible outcome with respect to the relationship between mothering and offending (Giordano et al. 2002; Griffin and Armstrong 2003; Hope et al. 2003; Kreager et al. 2010; Wakefield and Uggen 2004). It thus remains unclear whether, on the whole, children increase, decrease, or exert no effect on their mothers’ participation in different types of criminal activity.

In light of the ambiguity about the influence that children exert on their mother’s involvement in offending, the central objective of this study is to better understand whether and how the maternal role shapes women’s participation in a variety of criminal
offences. I am guided by sociological and criminological frameworks that suggest that major life events and role transitions, like motherhood, are influential in shaping individuals’ offending pathways (Sampson and Laub 2003). This study adds to scholarship that refines our understanding of the ways in which major life stages direct crime trajectories by investigating a feature of women’s lives that they themselves identify as a source of strength (Ferraro and Moe 2003). Better understanding of the nature of the motherhood-offending relationship is worthwhile to the extent that it may be useful for helping criminalized women, who represent a growing population in some countries, to re-orient themselves toward law-abiding ways. In this chapter, I briefly discuss stereotypes of criminalized women as mothers and describe how the assumptions behind these stereotypes shape social and correctional policy. I follow this with a discussion of the broad theoretical approach within which I examine the relationship between mothering and offending and then with a short description of the present study. Finally, I identify the potential contributions of this research to the existing literature on mothering and offending and end with a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

1.2 The Role of Criminal Mothers in the Public Imagination and Policy

Interest in the relationship between mothering and crime reflects a tension surrounding the perceived incompatibility of these roles. For example, Lombroso and Ferrero (2004: 186) claimed that “Maternity never inspires crime, even among female born criminals. The sentiment is too noble to coexist with degeneration.” Although Lombroso and Ferrero articulated this idea over a century ago, their view continues to be pervasive today in both the public imagination and public policy. Indeed, despite the work of feminist scholars to deconstruct the myth of the “good” mother (Arendell 2000; Fineman 1995; Hays 1996; Oakley 1981; Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Reiger 1995; Smart 1992; Turnbull 2001), normative assumptions about motherhood abound. The prevailing conception of “good” mothers as selfless, compassionate, and nurturing is perceived to represent the antithesis of criminal offenders (Boris 1994; Farrell 1998). As such, women who offend in spite of their maternal role are frequently vilified; they are seen as
“bad” mothers who fail to properly enact their normative (and gendered) social roles. This perception is especially true of mothers who use drugs. Such women are assumed to be self-centered and wholly unsuitable guardians for young children (Boyd 1999; Campbell 2000).

The stereotypical accounts of motherhood found in research and public opinion have also influenced policies directed at mothers who commit crime. Indeed, the predominant assumption that guides most social and correctional interventions into the lives of criminalized women is that maintaining relationships with their children will encourage other conventional behaviours (Bloom, Owen and Covington 2004; Farrell 1998; Hannah-Moffat 2007). Yet it is unclear whether this assumption is valid. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the influence of children on offending is not as unequivocal as is commonly assumed. More specifically, an apparent paradox exists between the maternal role and offending: while motherhood may be widely considered to be antithetical to criminal activity, most women convicted of crime or serving time in prison are mothers (Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004). Nevertheless, criminalized women often report that issues related to custody of children, repairing relationships, and parenting are important to them. But the challenges of mothering for these women are particularly onerous, given the numerous social deficits they experience. Clearly, motherhood and crime can and do co-exist – but in a seemingly complex way.

1.3 Approaches to Studying the Relationship between Mothering and Offending

Understanding how individuals develop as their lives unfold is a major focus in sociological and criminological research on offending (Cullen and Agnew 2006). Empirical findings suggest that, against the backdrop of continuity, large within-individual changes in offending exist over the life course (Caspi 1987; Cline 1980; Loeber and LeBlanc 1990; Sampson and Laub 1992), although much of this research has focused on male samples. Participation in some conventional roles and activities, such as marriage and employment, have been shown to provide the impetus for men to desist from crime by increasing controls, increasing costs of crime, and reducing opportunity
for crime, among other things (Giordano et al. 2002; Sampson and Laub 1990; Uggen 2000).

Motherhood – which represents a quintessential conventional female social role – is a distinctive stage in the life course to the extent that it is accompanied by roles and responsibilities associated with child care that heavily circumscribe the lives of most mothers (Hays 1996). Whether these responsibilities act as a protective factor against offending or, conversely, exacerbate the pressures to offend, has been a focus of a small body of research. To date, scholarly inquiry on this topic has employed two different approaches to study the relationship between motherhood or mothering and offending, each of which addresses different aspects of and mechanisms behind the relationship.

One approach treats motherhood as a major turning point in the life course that is accompanied by what Giordano and colleagues (2002) call a “cognitive shift”. In this case, motherhood represents a sort of subjective, internal transformation – or “deep change” (Caspi and Moffitt 1993) – that leads to enduring modifications in a person’s behaviour, such as desistance from crime. Essentially, the social capital and bonds invested in such conventional roles as motherhood (as well as marriage and employment, for example) can interact with and ameliorate childhood propensities toward offending (Sampson and Laub 1990). These investigations of and explanations for offending patterns over the life course typically use longitudinal designs to document broad time periods across the life course (e.g., Blokland and Nieuwbeerta 2005; Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993).

The other approach looks to the more objective changes in a woman’s life that come with the activity of mothering, or the care of children on a daily basis. From this perspective, changes in what Horney and colleagues (1995) refer to as “local life circumstances”, and their effects on women’s criminal activities, are of particular interest. Indeed, Horney et al. (1995) show that many life events are transient and that the transitions associated with them – which produce changes in local life circumstances – are related to short-term changes in criminal behaviour (see also Griffin and Armstrong 2003; McGloin et al. 2007; Piquero et al. 2002). Researchers in this tradition typically use life history calendar
data that captures month-by-month activities over a relatively short period of time (e.g., typically three years or less) to allow for a “more detailed mapping of the correspondence between offending and current circumstances” (Horney et al. 1995:656).

These different approaches to studying the association between maternal roles and offending have contributed to divergent findings about the nature of the relationship. For example, with regard to motherhood, most studies measure whether women have given birth or currently have children, but typically do not measure whether they are currently living with and/or actively caring for children. However, the status of motherhood and the activity of mothering may exert somewhat different and potentially contradictory effects on crime. Differentiating status from activity could account for inconsistency in the findings that show that maternal roles increase offending in some studies (e.g., Wakefield and Uggen 2004) yet decrease offending in other studies (e.g., Kreager et al. 2010). As I explain below, I focus specifically on the relationship between mothering and crime using a within-individual design to limit the possibility of confounding changes in the more abstract notion of motherhood, as a status, with changes in mothering as an activity.

1.4 The Present Study

In this study, I examine whether and how living with children produces changes in the offending behaviour of a group of women who fall outside of the mainstream depiction of the “good” mother – and for whose lives an idealized standard of motherhood may have little relevance. Using a multi-level analytic strategy, I focus specifically on whether and how mothering as an experience – that is, the daily activity of caring for children – affects criminal activity on a month-to-month basis among a sample of criminalized women. I provide a comprehensive account of the effect of mothering on crime by studying four types of offending behaviour: property offending, drug use, drug dealing, and the use of violence against intimate partners.

Two questions are central to my investigation. First, I ask: What is the proximate effect of mothering on women’s criminal offending? This question considers whether and to
what extent mothering shapes intra-individual patterns of offending among criminalized women. Second, I ask: What processes explain the relationship between mothering and crime? This question considers the extent to which strains, choices, and controls can account for intra-individual patterns between mothering and offending roles.

To answer my research questions, I use data that I helped to collect as part of the Women’s Experiences of Violence (WEV) project. In-depth interviews were conducted between 2001 and 2004 with 259 women incarcerated at Vanier Correctional Centre for Women, a provincial correctional facility in Ontario, Canada. Using a life history calendar methodology, the women were asked questions about their lives on a month-by-month basis in the three years prior to being incarcerated. In these structured interviews, women spent between two and six hours describing such aspects of their lives as their living arrangements, leisure pursuits, employment, drug and alcohol use, intimate relationships and criminal activities. In addition, women reported their experiences as users and targets of violence and provided a detailed narrative of each reported incident of violence to the interviewer. Women’s own descriptions of their lives provided me with rich quantitative and qualitative information about the context of their offending.

In examining the role of maternal responsibilities in women’s participation in criminal activity, the research in this dissertation contributes to a growing literature on life course influences on offending. I focus on events in women’s lives – as opposed to men’s – which have been less thoroughly investigated with respect to their influence on offending trajectories. In doing so, I assess the extent to which mothering is necessarily equivalent to conventional roles in men’s lives, such as marriage or military service, that lead to desistance from crime. I also highlight the problem of relying on conventional norms and stereotypes that surround mothering when considering how this social role shapes offending among a group of women who are unconventional in many ways. Indeed, the

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2 The WEV project is a multi-site study of incarcerated women that started with a seed grant from the (U.S.) National Consortium on Violence Research (NCOVR) to Professors Julie Horney, Sally Simpson, Rosemary Gartner, and Candace Kruttschnitt. Professor Rosemary Gartner was subsequently awarded a grant (410-2000-0030) by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to collect data in Ontario, Canada. Data were also collected in Baltimore, Maryland (Sally Simpson, PI) and in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Candace Kruttschnitt, PI) using the same study design, instrument, and procedures.

3 In Canada, provincial correctional facilities house offenders who are sentenced to less than two years.
assumption that female crime is a departure from “natural” female behaviour – that is, maternal, passive, and gentle – will likely hinder efforts to explain how mothering operates in criminalized women’s lives to shape their offending behaviour.

1.5 Description of Chapters

My examination of the relationship between mothering and offending is organized into seven chapters. In this chapter, I have framed my study around an important paradox: although the public imagination would lead us to believe that mothering and offending are incongruent activities, most incarcerated women are mothers. I also briefly discussed the ambiguity around whether and how being a mother should influence offending among criminalized women, noting that a small body of research has investigated this relationship but has been unable to offer a clear answer as to the nature of the mothering-offending relationship. I have suggested that because many criminalized women identify their children as an important source of strength in their lives, the relationship between mothering and offending warrants more scrutiny; a clearer understanding of how this social role is associated with offending may offer a potential avenue for reform among women who at times engage in crime.

In Chapter Two, I review in more detail research pertinent to my examination of the relationship between mothering and offending in the lives of criminalized women. I also outline various theoretical perspectives regarding the association between maternal responsibility and crime, and suggest how and why mothering may be associated with various types of offending behaviour. In particular, I discuss how maternal responsibilities may shape women’s local life circumstances in ways that will have implications for offending with respect to economic and emotional strains, opportunities for offending, and costs and benefits associated with crime. In the conclusion of Chapter Two, I outline the specific research hypotheses that frame my study.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research methods I use to address my research questions. I begin by discussing the type of data required to ascertain how intra-individual patterns of offending vary according to maternal responsibilities. Next, I
briefly describe data from the Women’s Experiences of Violence (WEV) project on which my analyses rely, and outline my sampling strategy and data collection procedures. I then explain the advantages of using a multi-level modeling technique for advancing our understanding of the relationship between mothering and offending. Chapter Three concludes with a description of my key independent variable – living with children – as well as my outcome and control measures.

My research results, which are based on generalized hierarchical linear models for nested or repeated measures data, are presented in Chapters Four through Six. In each of these chapters, the quantitative models highlight the relative contribution of different aspects of women’s lives to their offending, including living with children, their romantic relationships, their socio-economic context, and their routines. To supplement my quantitative analyses, I use qualitative evidence gathered during the interviews with incarcerated women to better understand their motivations for pursuing crime or, conversely, for avoiding crime. These insights from the women themselves guide my interpretation of the quantitative findings.

In Chapter Four, I examine the results from my analysis of the influence of mothering on criminalized women’s commission of property crime. Using a measure of property crime that includes theft, auto theft, burglary, fraud, and forgery, I find that living with children is significantly related to decreases in property crimes. Chapter Five reveals that while living with children promotes discontinuity in women’s daily and weekly use of illicit drugs, including crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, acid, speed, and ‘other’ drugs, women’s involvement in drug dealing is not influenced by mothering responsibilities. Finally, in Chapter Six I present the results of my analyses of women’s involvement in two types of intimate partner violence – ‘mutual’ violence in which women were both attacked by and attacked their intimate partners, and ‘sole’ violence in which women attacked their intimate partners but were not attacked by them. These analyses of women’s violence toward intimate partners reveal that their involvement in ‘mutual’ violence neither significantly increased nor decreased when they lived with children. In contrast, when women were living with children they were more likely to be the sole user of violence against their intimate partners.
In Chapter Seven, I provide a summary and discussion of the central research questions, the main findings, and their implications for both academic and policy audiences. I begin by reviewing the central issues that motivated my specific research questions. Following this, the chapter describes the main findings of my study. This includes a plausible explanation about why mothering exerts a non-uniform effect on criminalized women’s offending. The chapter continues by providing an overview of the theoretical and policy implications stemming from the research. I conclude by outlining the key limitations of my study and offering recommendations for how future research can extend work on the topic of the role of mothering in shaping offending trajectories.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the academic literature, theoretical concepts, and research objectives relevant to my examination of the relationship between mothering and offending among criminalized women. I begin by delineating several factors that affect the experience of mothering for all women. In addition, I note how criminalized women often live in environments of scarce resources that place them in a web of demands and constraints that intensify the struggle of mothering. I then outline the theoretical concepts that have guided sociological and criminological inquiries into mothering among criminalized women. In doing so, I identify various – and contradictory – expectations regarding the association between maternal responsibility and criminal activity. I review findings from research that has examined whether the maternal role shapes women’s involvement in non-violent and violent crime and explain how my study builds on it. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research questions that I address in the remainder of the dissertation and my expectations regarding how women’s participation in property, drug, and violent crimes will vary according to whether or not they have maternal responsibilities.

2.2 Factors Affecting Women’s Experiences of Mothering

Contemporary normative assumptions about motherhood expect that it will exert a profound effect on women’s lives (Chodorow 1978). The prevailing ideology in North America is that of “intensive” mothering, which declares that mothering should be exclusive, wholly child-centered, emotionally involving, and time-consuming (Hays 1996; Smart 1992; Kline 1995). Accordingly, discourses around mothering emphasize women’s “abnegation of the self, selflessness, and self-sacrifice” (Hartrick 1997). A “good” mother is portrayed in this ideology as completely fulfilled by her devotion to the care of others; she is expected to be self-sacrificing and “not a subject with her own needs and interests” (Bassin et al. 1994:2). In contrast, “bad” mothers are depicted as cruel and
self-centered, neglecting their children for such selfish reasons as personal fulfillment, leisure pursuits, material possessions, and status (Hays 1996; Weingarten et al. 1998).

The stereotype of the “good” mother is impossible to achieve, even for women living in the most privileged of circumstances (Chodorow 1978). There is a striking incompatibility between the socially constructed ideal of what “good” mothers ought to experience from their valued role and the reality of their day-to-day lives. Despite its potential for joy and emotional rewards, at the best of times, and in the best of situations, motherhood “restricts the freedom, increases the workload, raises the monetary needs, and generally complicates and constrains the life of the mother” (Lee 1998). Thus, irrespective of the extent to which women strive to reach prevailing ideals of motherhood, the major personal adjustment that motherhood demands is typically experienced as challenging by all women.

Nevertheless, the challenges of mothering are likely to be navigated differently by women, depending on their personal and social qualities as well as the contexts or circumstances in which the experiences occur (George 1980; Thoits 1992). For example, characteristics that positively influence how individual women experience motherhood include a planned pregnancy, higher income, good health of the mother and infant, a match between the mother’s preferred and actual situations, assigning high priority to one’s role as a parent, the greater availability of both instrumental and emotional support from a variety of sources, and a quality (marital) relationship (Fisher and Cooper 2000). As I discuss in more detail below, while criminalized women who are mothers share many of the experiences and anxieties as any other mother, they often carry out their mothering role in contexts that pose numerous challenges that intersect to seriously impede their ability to mother according to social expectations and personal desires. Understanding how mothering is associated with such key areas of women’s lives as their relationships, economic circumstances, social support, health, and identity is an important
precursor to understanding how maternal responsibility for children may, in turn, matter for criminalized women’s offending.⁴

(Maternal role models: Having a positive relationship with one’s mother shapes women’s own experience of motherhood (Fisher and Cooper 1990). A positive connection with one’s mother increases the chances that a woman will experience motherhood as fulfilling, will feel prepared for the work that motherhood entails, and will know what to expect from herself and her children (Elizabeth Fry Society 1994; Greene, Haney and Hurtado 2000). Conversely, women who lack a history of strong, pro-social ties with their mothers are disadvantaged when it comes to rearing their own children in terms of feeling confident about what they are supposed to do, and how they are supposed to act, as mothers.

The sorts of experiences associated with difficulty in knowing how to mother appropriately as an adult may be more common among criminalized than non-criminalized women. While some criminalized women are certainly exposed to positive mothering and enjoy a sense of stability, safety, acceptance and love, others are raised in what researchers have described as unstable, dysfunctional and disordered environments (Caputo 2008; Girshick 1999; Greene, Haney and Hurtado 2000; Richie 1996). The models of mothering that some criminalized women experience in their families of origin are far from ideal, and include emotional maltreatment, neglect, abandonment, as well as physical and sexual abuse. For example, the crack-addicted women in Sharpe’s (2005) study explained that estrangement from their mothers, their mothers’ substance abuse, and their mothers’ changing relationships with men made the roles associated with motherhood unclear. In addition, the experience of emotional disconnection in formative relationships was problematic for connecting to their own children (Elizabeth Fry Society 1994; Hannah-Moffat 2006; Sharpe 2005).

Relationships with intimate partners: A positive intimate partner relationship is another important predictor of maternal functioning (Belsky 1993). A mother’s satisfaction with

⁴ I do not mean to imply that criminalized women represent a monolithic group. Rather, the goal of this discussion is to highlight some of the life experiences that are more common among criminalized women than among non-criminalized women.
the status of her intimate relationship, especially with her husband, enhances her satisfaction with parenting, her responsiveness with her infant, her self-efficacy, and her self-esteem (Baumrind 1995). In addition, lower levels of maternal parenting stress are related to a strong relationship with one’s intimate partner (Belsky 1984; Melson, Windecker-Nelson and Schwartz 1998).

Strong, stable, and mutually-supportive intimate partner relationships are not the norm among criminalized women. Indeed, many criminalized women report having low expectations for the men in their lives and describe their dating and cohabiting relationships as relatively unstable and as providing minimal support (Girshick 1999; Powis et al. 2000; Richie 2003). The failure of fathers and other men to provide both financial and other forms of support for parenting – including childcare – is common among criminalized women (Ferraro and Moe 2003; Geller, Garfinkel and Western 2008). Fatherhood for many of the men with whom criminalized women are romantically involved is largely a nominal status. The gender roles associated with fatherhood – including provider, disciplinarian, and masculine role model – are “intermittent, transitory, and ambiguous” (Sharpe 2005:158). Consequently, many criminalized women bear the sole responsibility for supporting and caring for children.

**Social support:** Receiving support from people outside of women’s intimate relationships is also linked to positive maternal experiences. “Social support”, which may include cash, in-kind, and instrumental assistance along with emotional support (Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce 1990), predicts positive or negative feelings toward parenting (Suarez and Baker 1997) as well as parental psychological well-being (Rodgers 1998). When resources such as social support are not adequate to meet the demands faced by families, then maladjustment may occur, pushing women and their families toward a period of instability (Mulsow, Caldera, Pursley and Reifman 2002).

The social stigma attached to criminal lifestyles and incarceration often undermines the social support available to criminalized women. For example, many of the incarcerated women in Girshick’s (1999) study reported alienating their parents by their behaviour or their own family’s dysfunction, sometimes irrevocably severing the relationship. The
opportunity to participate in mutually-supportive relationships with women who share similar histories may likewise be unavailable to criminalized women as a result of parole conditions which prohibit them from associating with others who have a criminal record (Pollack 2008). Many criminalized women may also feel isolated from the communities in which they live; seeking assistance from mainstream institutions may not be seen as an option by criminalized women, because these institutions have often failed them in the past. Because of their concern about losing custody of their children, disclosing details of their current lifestyles to institutional representatives could be risky. Social marginalization thus adds to the complex terrain that many criminalized women have to navigate.

**Economic circumstances:** Research consistently indicates that mothering has a uniformly negative impact on economic circumstances (Belsky and Kelly 1994; Budig and England 2001; McLanahan and Kelly 1999; Turnbull 2001). Children increase economic strains on the family, as each dollar must go further – to buy more food, clothes, and living space, among other things. At the same level of family income, a family with children feels more economic pressure than one without children (Ross and Huber 1985). Moreover, the need for child care further magnifies the family’s economic hardship: in some cases, either one parent (typically the mother) does not work outside the home in order to care for children or else funds are needed for child care. Basically, children create an imperative for resources at the same time as they hamper their mother’s ability to secure them.

The economic consequences of raising children produce several adverse social outcomes for both mothers and their children. For mothers, a wage penalty results in lower lifetime earnings, increased poverty rates for female-headed households, and reduced bargaining power with intimate partners due to women’s increased economic dependence. In addition, financial pressure or deprivation undermines parents’ socioemotional resources and disrupts parent-child interactions and child development as a result (Conger and Conger 2000; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997). Low income may also negatively impact children’s development by preventing parents from purchasing essential and enriching materials, experiences, and services (Haveman and Wolfe 1994).
Poverty and hardship due to economic marginalization are not uncommon experiences among criminalized women. Working, especially at low-skilled, minimum wage jobs that often lack health insurance and other benefits, makes self-sufficiency challenging (Seccombe, James and Walters 1998; Comack and Brickley 2007; Turnbull 2001). Economic factors such as cutbacks in housing and welfare assistance also contribute to the economic marginalization of criminalized women (Chunn and Gavigan 2006; Comack and Balfour 2004). These circumstances culminate in a situation in which criminalized women may struggle to secure shelter, food, and other needs for themselves and their children.

*Physical and mental health:* While the care provided by mothers for their children is assumed to be something done for love and is therefore regarded in ideology as the antithesis of work (Lewis 2002), the work of responding to children’s needs is undoubtedly physically demanding and, at times, emotionally stressful. Research on single and divorced women in particular finds that children may be detrimental to their mother’s physical and psychological well-being, in large part because of economic hardships (McLanahan and Adams 1987; Moen 1983). The chronic strain of struggling to pay the bills and to feed and clothe children takes its toll, making parents feel run-down, hopeless, and worried (Ross and Huber 1985).

Evidence overwhelmingly shows that criminalized women suffer with personal stress, trauma, and fear in many stages of their lives which detract markedly from their overall well-being (Comack 1996; Radosh 2002; Richie 1996). The physical work of caring for children may thus take a particular toll on women who engage in a criminal lifestyle. In particular, violence and drug use may compromise women’s physical health and make the work of mothering even more challenging (DeHart 2005; Hanlon et al. 2005; Sloss and Harper 2004; Theidon 1995). For example, the short-term side-effects of drug use often leave women feeling ill, while prolonged use can impair their immune system (Sharpe 2005; Sterk 1999). Related to this, women in this population are at heightened risk of contracting hepatitis – and potentially contracting HIV – from drug use or infected partners, which deplete their energy stores and make daily tasks, including those related to mothering, difficult. Beatings by male partners (or others) that result in injuries as
severe as bruises or broken bones also hinder women’s ability to tend to young children. The fact that their health needs often go unmet only exacerbates the predicament of many criminalized women, who are reluctant to seek health care because they fear drug tests and/or identification as a victim of domestic abuse that could result in the loss of their children to protective services (Hanlon et al. 2005).

In addition to the physical demands of mothering, criminalized women are also particularly susceptible to feelings of maternal distress. Fear and guilt are emotions commonly expressed by women who perceive that their criminal lifestyles have either directly and/or indirectly harmed their children. Feelings of profound shame emerge when women recount physical and behavioral problems their children are perceived to have developed as a result of their mother’s criminal behavior (Elizabeth Fry Society 1994; Ferraro and Moe 2003). Women also report feeling anxiety surrounding losing custody of their children, both because they derive value and enjoyment from being around their children and because they are concerned about who will be available to provide their children with appropriate care in their absence (Powis et al. 2000).

Irrespective of their own shortcomings as mothers, criminalized women often voice concern that their children will fall victim to abuse during their mother’s incarceration (Radosh 2002).

Maternal identity: Though mothering is accompanied by numerous hardships, women almost universally, though to varying degrees, voice a sense of meaning, purpose, self-worth, fulfillment, commitment, and value that children bring to their lives (Chodorow 1978). Research on motherhood finds that being a mother ranks at the top of women’s “identity salience hierarchies” (Rogers and White 1998; Thoits 1992). Striving to mother within the parameters of the dominant ideology of intensive mothering, which requires emotional and labour intensity and children’s needs to take precedence over their own (Hays 1996), might therefore present women with an opportunity for critical self-reflection and personal improvement.

Criminalized women’s own accounts of their mothering experiences suggest that mothering often provides them with the motivation to change and to move away from
criminal lifestyles. By speaking of themselves as mothers, criminalized women are able to think of themselves as an asset and a valuable member of society, rather than only criminals. Most criminalized women are adamant that they exhibit behaviours associated with socially acceptable parenting practices. They express care for and commitment to their children’s well-being, to the extent they are able (Enos 2001; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Forsyth 2003; Sharpe 2005). The social significance of being a mother for criminalized women is heightened; being a mother provides them with strength and resilience they may not easily derive from other sources (Moe and Ferraro 2003). In this way, mothering may be central to sustaining perceptions of women’s self-worth by representing a valued and coveted status that enables them to claim a stake in conformity. Children may thus provide a unique opportunity for criminalized women to reappraise their lives and desist from crime.

In sum, considering the features of women’s lives that are linked with a positive experience of mothering provides insight into why criminalized women may struggle as mothers more than non-criminalized women. More specifically, because poor maternal role models, unsupportive intimate partners, insufficient social support, economic marginalization and poor health are not uncommon experiences for many criminalized women, they may be less well equipped to cope – physically, emotionally, and financially – with the relentless giving that comes with being a mother. At the same time, however, criminalized women speak about their children as a source of hope and inspiration for change. I turn now to considering different explanations regarding why and how mothering might shape women’s continued participation in, or, conversely, their movement away from, offending behaviour.

2.3 Theoretical Expectations Regarding the Mothering-Offending Relationship

Current perspectives in both sociology and criminology provide ample theoretical justification for expecting a relationship between mothering and participation in criminal activity. In what follows, I consider why these perspectives expect patterns of women’s offending to be susceptible to change as a result of the controls, marginalization, strains,
choices, and routines that circumscribe their lives. My goal is to present a variety of concepts relevant for explaining the ways in which mothering might be related to turning points in women’s criminal activity.

**Turning points:** To the extent that lives are dynamic and exogenously induced changes are ever-present, caring for children may act as a turning point or catalyst for change for criminalized women. “Turning points” are key events that occur at a particular stage in an individual’s life course that may alter its trajectory – in this case a criminal one – by either increasing or decreasing “social bonds to adult institutions of informal social control” (Sampson and Laub 1990:625). According to this perspective, turning points result from person-environment interactions and may steer a person away from a criminal path and toward a more normative trajectory, or vice versa, depending on how individuals adapt to the life event (Elder 1985; Warr 1998).

It is well-established in the criminological literature that good marriages and good jobs direct men with a history of offending towards more pro-social lifestyles (Farrington and West 1995; Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 1990; Sampson, Laub and Wimer 2006; Warr 1998). Similarly, mothering may be an important turning point in offending among women to the extent that the “successful establishment of bonds with conventional others and participation in conventional activities are major contingencies on the path that leads to conformity” (Shover 1996:126; Hirschi 1969). To the extent that women desire to establish a close relationship with their children, mothering may push women to respond more to informal means of social control, like gender-specific norms governing conventionality and avoidance of damage to reputation (Heidonsohn 1995). Mothering may also insulate women from the potentially criminogenic influences in their environment. Conversely, relational disconnections turn some women towards drug abuse, street life, and other types of offending behaviour (Covington 2007).

Empirical evidence supports this notion that, for some women, mothering represents an opportunity to redirect a life that has become so out of control that it needs a powerful shock to break its downward spiral (Edin and Kafalas 2005). In DeHart’s (2005) examination of criminalized women’s own perspectives on critical events in their lives,
women discuss caring for children as something that helped them cope and keep them away from trouble. Having a child created possibilities for reorientation, such as when women realized they were inflicting physical or emotional damage on their children (DeHart 2005; Elizabeth Fry Society 1994). Other studies of criminalized women have likewise demonstrated that mothering alters offending pathways by inhibiting their involvement in crime. Research has found that the transition to motherhood is associated with reductions in poor women’s delinquency and drug use trajectories (Kreager et al. 2010); that drug dealing activity decreased significantly among female drug-abusing probationers when they had children living with them (Griffin and Armstrong 2003); that desistance often occurs abruptly and is tied directly to childbearing (Graham and Bowling 1996); and that for teen mothers the likelihood of delinquent behaviour dropped with the birth of a child (Hope et al. 2003).

However, whether a particular ‘event’ in the life course, like mothering, affords transitory incentive or opportunity not to enact crime depends, in part, upon accompanying cognitive or psychological changes (Giordano et al. 2002). Rather than being an inherently pivotal life experience, mothering may only modify offending trajectories if women form an attachment that emerges from caring for children (Ganem and Agnew 2007; Sampson and Laub 1990). In addition, women may need to forge a connection between seeing their old (offending) behaviour as incompatible and with work of mothering. Simply loving one’s children is unlikely to trigger a reduction in offending; instead, women must “resonate with, move toward, or select the various catalysts for change” (Giordano et al. 2002). Said differently, while “the environment can provide a kind of scaffolding that makes possible the construction of significant life changes”, individuals must “attend to these new possibilities, discard old habits, and…craft a different way of life” (Giordano et al. 2002:1000).

The idea that there is a dynamic interplay between the individual and catalysts for change helps explain why some mothers fail to “hook” onto them, others find success despite earlier failures, and still others pursue change using limited resources (Giordano et al. 2002). Contrary to normative expectations about “good” mothers, many criminalized women do not see their criminal behaviour as incompatible with mothering. Among
women who embrace their maternal role, some disassociate their experiences as a mother from their offending behaviour (Giordano et al. 2002), while others see mothering and the effort to keep the family unit intact as necessitating criminal activity (Enos 2001; Sloss and Harper 2004; Richie 2003). Clearly, criminalized women express various viewpoints regarding the influence of children on their behaviour. To better understand how the same life event can, depending on women’s prior situation and their response, result in different pathways, it is useful to draw upon additional theoretical concepts that shed light on the role of marginalization, strains, choices and routines in shaping pathways to crime or conformity among women who are engaged in the work of mothering.

Marginalization: Social and economic marginalization is offered as a primary explanation for criminalized women’s involvement in crime (Heimer, Wittrock, and Unal 2006). Feminist perspectives argue that maternal responsibility for children has the potential to generate experiences of even greater inequality in the lives of criminalized women, who are already vulnerable to crime and violence as a result of the confluence of various kinds of disadvantage (Shaw and Dubois 1995; Turnbull 2001). Indeed, feminism’s usual response to issues around mothering has been to condemn the universally prescribed nature of the mother role and the ideology of motherhood as being primarily responsible for women’s oppression (Turnbull 2001). If one accepts that the work performed by all mothers tends to be invisible, trivialized, and/or devalued, the greatest challenges of mothering are arguably magnified for women with the fewest resources. Having limited access to class (or racial) privilege constricts the range of options available to minority mothers in particular (Baca Zinn 1990).

To the extent that criminalized women’s marginalized status intensifies the difficulties surrounding the job of mothering, it is relevant to the trajectory-modifying effect of living with children on offending. Abundant research shows that the nexus of demographic, social, and economic deficits criminalized women face contributes to their entry into crime, escalation of criminal behaviour, and recidivism (Browne, Miller and Maguin 1999; Caputo 2008; Comack 1996; Lake 1993; Maher 1997; Richie 1996, 2003; Widom 1995). For example, Richie’s (2003) study of incarcerated women reveals that half of the
women she interviewed engaged in illegal activity in response to situations of poverty and marginalization, as ways to maintain their families. Selling drugs or cashing bad checks to meet bills and turning to drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with the psychological pain of childhood abuses or the ongoing pain of domestic violence are among the pathways that lead women to jail (Caputo 2008; Daly 1992; Henriques and Manatu 2001). Economically disadvantaged women may feel compelled to find alternative ways of making money, including committing property crime, dealing drugs, and working in the sex trade. Mothers in Sloss and Harper’s study (2004) who worked as prostitutes explained that this type of work was necessary in order to meet their children’s needs. They explained that as mothers, they were willing to do a job they did not like, because they cared for their children and felt responsible for them. For most of the women in Richie’s study (2003), using illegal activity to accomplish subsistence goals was not successful, but instead resulted in arrest and removal from the community in which they were desperately trying to survive.

Strained lives: The barrage of stressors that criminalized women face as they struggle to raise their children in the face of few supports is another feature of their lives which may explain their involvement in crime and violence. Criminalized women experience many of the strains that correlate highly with crime, including discrimination, criminal victimization, secondary labour market employment, abusive relationships, and homelessness (Agnew 2001; Slocum et al. 2005). In addition, criminalized women who are raising children are often denounced for their deficiencies as mothers. Because most women accept, to varying degrees, the dominant discourse that constructs mothering as the ultimate fulfillment of women, perceived failure as a mother invokes feelings of distress and seems to have particularly devastating implications for feelings of self-worth (Elizabeth Fry Society 1994; Ogle et al. 1995).

At the same time as criminalized women are vulnerable to experiencing strain from a variety of sources, they also lack the money, power, and access to institutional resources to avoid, resolve, or eliminate their exposure to a variety of aggravations, annoyances, and inconveniences that more economically-advantaged people possess (Agnew and Broidy 1997; Bernard 1990). As a consequence of their “inability to escape legally”
from negative stimuli that pervade the criminogenic environments they inhabit, criminalized women are likely to experience negative affect, such as fear, despair, disappointment, and anger (Agnew 1992:58). In the absence of normative coping resources, these emotions energize individuals for action and lower inhibitions, and may cause them to deal with their feelings by instrumental, retaliatory, or escapist behaviour (Agnew 1992).

Compared to times when strains are low, periods in which women experience high strain are hypothesized to correspond with offending (Agnew 1997). In these latter periods, criminalized women may engage in either non-violent, self-destructive behavior or violence. For example, some women attempt to cope with strain by escaping using illicit substances (deHart 2005; Ferraro and Moe 2003). Drug use, in turn, often leads to other types of offending, most notably economically-motivated crimes to financially support addictions.

Obstacles to “good” mothering may also generate violent responses from criminalized women. For example, women whose domestic situations involve social isolation, either as a result of being tied to the home while engaged in the care of young children or because of the demands of an abusive and controlling partner, may experience intense physiological arousal. The possibility of harm to their children may also create an intense peak of stress and serve as an impetus for women to act violently. Indeed, a theme that emerges in the violence literature relates to mothers’ frustration and stress in response to their partners’ neglect of their children, as well as to situations that threaten to adversely affect the physical or emotional well-being of their children (Browne 1987; Miller 2005; Richie 1996; Theidon 1995). Thus, during periods in which caring for children generates stress that overwhelms women’s non-criminal coping mechanisms, they will feel pressure or incentive to engage in deviant coping behaviour (Agnew 1997).

**Constrained choices**: Much of the theory about women’s criminogenic processes supports the notion that they are forced to make hard choices with minimal options (Caputo 2008; Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004a; Lake 1993; Maher 1997; Richie 1996; Widom 1995). The constrained choices mothers experience may start as early as their
child’s conception. More specifically, limited options may impinge upon criminalized women’s ability to exercise free choice to become a mother. Indeed, the confluence of circumstances in many criminalized women’s lives, including addictions, casual and/or violent partners, and sexual abuse, means that they may not make an explicit choice to be pregnant. In such situations, women may not have the physical or emotional resources and support to make a decision about parenthood. In the absence of information and access to abortion, women may simply remain pregnant by doing nothing.

Some feminist theorists and practitioners suggest that given the restricted options and negative influences featured in criminalized women’s life stories, failure to choose a pathway involving criminal behaviour seems more remarkable than having chosen such a pathway (Fitzroy 2001). The lack of social support available to most criminalized women means that the choices that are theoretically available to them are in fact constricted or inordinately burdensome (Turnbull 2001). Nevertheless, to the extent that decisions to continue or to give up crime are based on a conscious appraisal of the costs and benefits of offending, women who persist in crime, as well as those who desist, are considered to be “reasoning decision-makers” (Cornish and Clarke 1986).

Recognizing the fact that “choices” do not float freely of structural restraints, living with children may serve to reconfigure the costs and benefits of crime for mothers. They may feel they have more to lose if their criminal activities jeopardize their ability to care for their children (Edin et al. 2005; Giordano et al. 2002; Leibrich 1996). To the extent that women value mothering, they might be expected to be deterred from situations and activities that could lead to victimization, resulting in injury or death, or eventual incarceration. For example, emotional and physical harm sustained from abusive partners, johns, and drug associates, among others, may interfere with the daily work of mothering and lead to temporary separation or permanent loss of contact with children. Criminal behaviour also becomes more costly and fraught with risk for mothers if they anticipate feeling shame and embarrassment if their children discover their illegal involvement.
Thus, for women who perceive that the potential cost of losing contact with children or experiencing deterioration in the mother-child relationship exceeds the expected rewards of offending, mothering would be expected to deter their involvement in crime. Conversely, permanently losing custody of children would be expected to reverse the cost-benefit calculation, thereby diminishing the costs of crime if women perceive they have “nothing left to lose” (Elizabeth Fry Society 1994).

Equally plausible, however, is the possibility that women may choose to continue to use drugs, commit theft, engage in prostitution, or remain in violent relationships for reasons of economic – and possibly physical – security for themselves and their children. For example, Forsyth (2003) found that drug dependency, in addition to hindering women’s ability to support themselves and their children, influenced women’s decisions to engage in crime. Concern about their physical safety may likewise supersede their fears of being held responsible by child protection authorities for putting their children at risk by engaging in crime or remaining in abusive relationships. Children may encumber women’s ability to leave partners who use violence and terror tactics that involve harm to them or their children when they threaten to leave (Ferraro 1997; Greaves et al. 2002; Johnson 1996; Roberts 1993).

It is clear that while criminalized women do possess a component of choice in committing their crimes, their choices are seriously constrained. In the face of these constraints, mothering may further trap women in criminogenic lifestyles by serving as a catalyst for economically-motivated and violent offences or, conversely, mothering might provide a powerful incentive to escape.

*Daily Routines:* By shaping the organization of women’s social activities across time and space, children may play an influential role in the criminal behaviour of their mothers. Routine activity and opportunity theories of crime suggest that lifestyles contribute significantly to both the volume and types of crime found in society by varying the confluence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and capable guardians (Cohen and Felson 1979). Essentially, social contingencies such as motherhood would be expected to increase involvement in the private sphere, thereby reducing offending by altering the
lifestyles of offenders and reducing the situations in which they are available to take advantage of criminal opportunities (Felson and Cohen 1979). Research evidence shows that for most women, mothering is a social role that imposes significant constraints on their freedom. Many of the activities of mothers who are responsible for the care of young children occur within the private sphere (Lewis 1992). Time devoted to activities related to caring for children is time unavailable for such activities as “hanging out” on the streets or in bars, using drugs, or perpetrating property crimes, and may therefore reduce an individual’s exposure to situations conducive to involvement in criminal behaviour (Horney et al. 1995; Osgood et al. 1996).

While criminalized women often live, work, and engage in leisure pursuits in risky neighborhoods that heighten their risk of crime, during the times they live with children they are likely to stay closer to home, thereby decreasing their relative risk of both offending and victimization. The dispersion of activities away from public places and towards households and families may therefore serve to decrease crime between non-intimates, though it may have the opposite effect among intimates. Because criminalized women do not necessarily carry out the work of mothering in a “safe” home environment, increased time at home might translate into increased exposure to potentially abusive intimate partners, leaving open the possibility that violence will ensue.

It would be naïve to assume, however, that living with children should automatically inhibit criminalized women’s substance use and other criminal involvements. Self-reports from criminalized women indicate that they continue to use drugs when they have children, sometimes in front of them or at times when children are away. Alternatively, children may accompany their mothers on drug runs or during the commission of other crimes (e.g., shop-lifting), or mothers may leave their children with relatives, babysitters, or alone (Baker and Carson 1999). Griffin and Armstrong (2003) found that there was no significant effect of mothering on non-drug crimes, including theft/shop-lifting, prostitution, fraudulent schemes, and other minor crimes. Studies of prostitute mothers similarly reveal that the presence of young children often does not alter women’s offending, especially if children are too young to be aware of their mothers’ activities. Kohm (2005) reported that “a prostitute’s drug dependencies perpetuated a cycle of crime
that even motherhood does not appear to break”, while Sharpe (1998) found that the presence of a child in the home did not lower the likelihood of injection drug use.

It is reasonable to hypothesize, however, that even if children do not cause women to entirely cease involvement in risky settings and criminal activities, during times in which women live with children they will probably spend less time in the public sphere and, when they are in public, will be more likely to be accompanied by a child. For example, mothers engaged in sex-work in Sloss and Harper’s (2004) study reported that they worked fewer hours as prostitutes because of childcare issues. At the very least, if women are actively engaged in the care of young children, their commission of property and drug offences should be hindered.

The foregoing review of concepts from theoretical explanations that are relevant to the relationship between mothering and offending highlights the potential complexity of the relationship. The controls, strains, choices and routines that confront criminalized women who are raising children leaves open the possibility that during the times in their lives when they are mothering, their offending patterns will change. As we have seen, the small body of empirical evidence on mothering and offending does little to simplify the complexities that emerge from relevant theoretical accounts. I turn now to discussing how the current study builds upon and extends the research in this area.

2.4 Research Objectives:

By giving priority to the maternal role in my analysis, I seek to highlight issues that are important for understanding the extent to which mothering translates into either a reduction or an acceleration in offending in criminalized women’s lives. Previous scholarship on this topic has demonstrated convincingly that the potential for such a relationship exists. This body of work has further established that the mothering-offending relationship is nuanced, and that additional work is needed to more fully uncover its meaning. My analyses build on the existing research in several ways to address a number of important gaps and shed further insight into the strength and nature
of this relationship. In particular, I aim to address five features of the extant literature that may be responsible for some of the variation in the findings across studies.

First, my research expands upon recent studies of the relationship between mothering and offending by focusing on women who actually live with children, as opposed to women who have ever given birth. Some researchers conflate being a mother with living with and caring for children. Indeed, measures of motherhood range from “parental status” (Wakefield and Uggen 2004) to self-reported birthdate of a first biological child (Kreager et al. 2010), attachment to child(ren) (Giordano et al. 2002), and whether children are present in the home (Griffin and Armstrong 2003; Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998). However, because criminalized women are at heightened risk of losing custody of their children (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001), giving birth is not synonymous with raising children. In the current study, I use a measure of mothering that allows me to analyze how offending patterns vary when women have regular physical contact with children compared to times when they do not.

Second, it is common in existing research to combine a variety of criminal activities into a single measure. However, this makes it impossible to determine whether the mothering-offending relationship varies according to offense type. For example, it is possible that when women live with children, their involvement in economically-motivated crime – which could be driven by a desire to provide for one’s children – will increase, whereas their involvement in drug use – which is typically viewed as self-indulgent and thus counter to providing for one’s children – will decrease. That is, different motivations for crime (e.g., economic need versus addiction) leave open the possibility that changes in mothering may differentially affect decisions to engage in various types of crime. To investigate this possibility, the current study considers the effect of mothering on four specific types of crime – property offending, illicit drug use, drug dealing, and violent offending against intimate partners.

Third, some efforts to disentangle the nature of the mothering-offending relationship have relied on research designs that compare groups of mothers and non-mothers on their offending (e.g., Hope et al. 2003). A weakness of this type of between-group approach
for clarifying how mothering affects offending is that it cannot rule out the possibility that characteristics associated with women’s willingness to engage in mothering may be associated with changes in their offending. For example, women with more self-control may be more willing to engage in mothering than women with less self-control. If such studies find lower levels of offending among mothers, this may be due to pre-existing differences in self control. To avoid this problem, I employ a within-individual research design in which each woman acts as her own control in order to rule out a broad class of alternative explanations that might explain the mothering-offending relationship.

Fourth, I use a sample of criminalized women, instead of samples of women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Kreager et al. 2010), early starting delinquents (Giordano et al. 2002), or drug users (Armstrong and Griffin 2007). Doing so allows me to comment upon whether a “motherhood effect” on offending exists even among a population of women who are comparatively deeply embedded within a criminal lifestyle.

Finally, scholarship has documented that criminalized women identify mothering as exerting a pivotal influence on their lives, including their offending (e.g., Ferraro and Moe 2003; Giordano et al. 2002; Sloss and Harper 2004). However, these studies are unable to assess the extent to which living with children results in actual change, as opposed to perceptions of change. This is especially troublesome given that many studies of criminalized women involve interviews that occur within carceral settings in which codes exist that may shape discourse about maternal experiences. In women’s prisons, “the grieving mother is the social norm” (Forsyth 2003). My analysis focuses on women’s recounting of the amount and type of crime they commit on a month-by-month basis, as opposed to their more general impressions about whether being a mother altered their propensity to offend.

2.5 Research questions:

Two main research questions guide my analysis. The first question asks: What is the proximate effect of mothering on women’s criminal offending? This question considers
whether and to what extent mothering shapes intra-individual patterns of offending among criminalized women. It involves empirically identifying and describing whether women are more or less likely to engage in a variety of criminal activities when they live with children compared to times when they do not.

It is difficult to hypothesize apriori how mothering will affect women’s offending trajectories for various types of crimes given that neither criminological and sociological theory nor empirical evidence consistently indicates the direction, strength, or interpretation of the relationship. Instead, they predict every possible outcome for the mothering-offending relationship: mothering decreases, increases, and exerts no effect on offending. Accordingly, I present three hypotheses to delineate the range of possibilities regarding the relationship between mothering and offending. The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Living with children decreases involvement in crime. Women’s involvement in crime will diminish during periods when they live with children to the extent that mothering strengthens informal controls, increases the costs of crime, and reduces the opportunities to offend.

H2: Living with children increases involvement in crime. Women’s involvement in crime will have a criminogenic effect on women during periods when they live with children to the extent that criminalized women who are caring for children feel particular pressures to resort to illegal methods of generating income because of the marginalized spaces they occupy.

H3: Living with children exerts no significant effect upon criminalized women’s involvement in crime. In other words, mothering is irrelevant to whether or not women commit crime.5

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5 An alternate explanation for a finding of “no effect” of mothering on offending is the role of countervailing pressures in criminalized women’s lives. For example, even though mothering may trigger redemptive desires among women with a history of offending (Kohm 2005), the circumstances in which these women live may prevent them from turning away from a life of crime.
The second question that guides this study asks: What processes explain the relationship between mothering and crime? This question considers the extent to which controls, strains, choices, and routines can account for intra-individual patterns of mothering and offending roles. By supplementing my quantitative analysis with qualitative evidence, I seek not only to establish the pattern of effects among a large sample of criminalized women, but also to glean a deeper understanding about the meaning of these patterns of intra-individual change.

2.6 Conclusion

I began this chapter by discussing factors that affect women’s experiences of mothering for all women. I also highlighted the particularly challenging contexts in which criminalized women often engage in the work of mothering. Next, I delineated the ways in which sociological and criminological concepts can be drawn upon to provide expectations about an array of possible connections between mothering and crime. I noted that a comparatively small body of literature has investigated the relationship between mothering and offending, but that, in its present state, it leaves the nature and direction of the relationship unclear and warranting further examination. With this in mind, I proposed how the current study will build upon and extend what is known about this relationship by addressing two research questions about the trajectory-modifying effects of living with children on criminalized women’s offending behaviour. I turn now to Chapter Three in which I discuss the data, sample, and methods I use to answer my research questions.
3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the data, sample, analytic strategy, and key measures I use to examine the relationship between mothering and criminalized women’s offending behaviour. I begin by discussing the type of data needed to address questions about whether and how mothering shapes intra-individual patterns of property and drug-related offences as well as such relatively rare events as violent offending. Next, I provide a brief overview of the project upon which my dissertation analysis relies and assess its strengths and weaknesses as a data source for answering my specific research questions. I then outline my sampling strategy, data collection procedures, analytic technique, and key measures, and discuss their respective implications for advancing and/or limiting my study of the relationship between mothering and criminal offending.

3.2 Data

In order to examine how mothering shapes the offending experiences of criminalized women, I require data with four key characteristics. First and foremost, the data must contain sufficient variation in the number of criminal incidents for analysis. While this may seem like an obvious requirement, it is nevertheless a challenging data issue. For example, particular types of offending, such as violent crime, are relatively rare even within criminalized populations. My research questions also necessitate that the outcome of interest – various types of criminal offending – not be a constant; that is, I need information from women who vary over time with respect to whether or not they commit crime. Second, data capturing the diversity of non-violent and violent crimes that women commit are needed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between mothering and offending. It is therefore important that my data are collected from a sample of women who have not been selected based on a particular type of offending history. Third, there are likely to be characteristics of women’s lives associated with their probability of offending that need to be statistically controlled when estimating the
relationship between mothering and crime. Information on such characteristics that vary over time (i.e., intra-individually) is thus needed. Finally, in order to examine the nature and direction of the relationship between mothering and crime, I need data that allow time-ordering of the independent and dependent variables. I turn now to a discussion of a data set that meets most of these needs.

Data Source: The Women’s Experiences of Violence (WEV) Project. My dissertation analyses rely upon data collected as part of the Canadian-based Women’s Experiences of Violence: Victimization and Offending in the Context of Women’s Lives study (WEV, hereafter). The primary objective of the WEV study was to learn more about women and violence by situating violent events within the context of their life circumstances over a three year period. It sought to understand the role of violence in women’s lives, and how violence arises out of, is embedded within, and has consequences for women’s relationships with others, their leisure and income-generating activities, and their neighborhoods and networks. To accomplish these goals, the WEV study gathered detailed information on incarcerated women’s lives, including their family and intimate relationships, their work, their routine activities, their criminal behavior and all forms of their violent experiences with intimate partners and non-partners.

The information collected for the WEV project fulfills most, although not all, of the aforementioned data needs. First, the WEV data set contains information from a sample of women who have been convicted of one or more crimes. Moreover, compared to non-criminalized populations, women in custody are more likely to have experienced violence as targets and/or users in childhood and adulthood with family members, caretakers, friends, acquaintances, intimate partners, co-workers, and strangers (Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983; Comack 1996; Girshick 1999; Maeve 2000; Richie 1996; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990). The data set thus includes information from a sufficient number of women who have experienced both non-violent and violent offending to make an analysis feasible. At the same time, because the women who were studied vary in the frequency of their offending over time, I am able to consider factors that differentiate periods when a woman does commit crime from periods when she does not.
The WEV data set is also an appropriate resource for my research because it captures information about women’s participation in several different types of non-violent and violent crime. Information about different types of crime – namely, property offences, drug use, drug dealing, and violent offending against intimate partners – allows for a comprehensive analysis of women’s participation in crime. These data allow me to examine the role of mothering in shaping various types of offending, thereby providing a more complete examination of the relationship between mothering and offending than would be possible with other data sources.

A third feature of the WEV data set involves the extensive detail it contains about characteristics of criminalized women’s lives aside from their offending. These data capture criminalized women’s lives across a variety of domains, including their intimate relationships, employment, income, housing conditions, stress, access to social support, and leisure activities, among others. I provide a detailed discussion below of the nature of the information obtained from the interviews when I outline my key measures.

Fourth, the WEV project collected three years worth of information from each respondent on a month-by-month basis, making it possible to order events in women’s lives sequentially. By systematically documenting the monthly variation in life circumstances, these data permit examination of how offending behaviour is embedded within women’s larger life circumstances. Accordingly, I am able to determine the temporal ordering of maternal responsibilities and the commission of crime.

While the WEV data set has important strengths that make it well-suited to my research goals, it also has some limitations for my analysis of the relationship between mothering and offending among criminalized women. There are two main limitations of the data I analyze. First, because the WEV project was not intended to examine the role of motherhood in criminalized women’s lives, information on certain key aspects of women’s experiences as mothers is not available in the data set. For example, I do not have systematic data on whether women live with their own biological children, as opposed to non-biological children, nor whether they have surrendered custody of their
children to the Children’s Aid Society (CAS). However, such information is important as criminalized women, to a much greater extent than non-criminalized women, are likely to lose legal custody of children, either temporarily or permanently. The WEV data set also does not include the following types of information that research identifies as relevant to understanding the role of motherhood in women’s lives: whether women have a planned pregnancy, whether women live with the child’s biological father, women’s expectations of motherhood, and women’s commitment to the motherhood role (Woollett and Marshall 2001). As a consequence, I am not able to examine how some aspects of mothering shape criminalized women’s experiences of offending.

A second limitation of the data set is the absence of any information about child abuse. The WEV study did not ask any questions about women’s use of violence against their children because federal law requires the reporting of all such incidences to authorities. As part of the informed consent procedure that preceded the commencement of the interview, we told women who participated in the WEV project about this legal requirement. Having done so, we anticipated that some women may have chosen not to participate in the study were we to question them about violence against children. To reduce the chances of refusals to participate, we therefore chose not to include questions about whether women themselves, or anyone else, had treated children violently.

The legal obligation to report incidents of child abuse similarly also would have restricted our ability to collect information about other people’s use of violence – including women’s intimate partners – against children. However, questions about threatened or actual violence towards children may be important for the purposes of my research. Violence against children by women’s partners is noted in the literature as a relevant factor in women’s experiences as users of violence in intimate relationships (Browne 1987; Miller 2005). The threat or actual harm to children by women’s intimate partners may also “compel” women to commit non-violent crime in an attempt to pacify their partners and protect their children from future abuse (Richie 1996). This is, however, an issue that cannot be addressed in my research.

6 While the WEV survey did not include a question regarding respondent’s contact with the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), interviewers did note whether respondents talked about any such involvement as well as the pertinent details surrounding contact with CAS.
3.3 Sample

The data I employ for my dissertation were collected in interviews with female inmates. The women who comprise the Canadian WEV sample were incarcerated at the Vanier Centre for Women, a provincial correctional facility located in Milton, Ontario. Vanier is a 333-bed medium and maximum security facility that houses remanded and sentenced female offenders (http://search.hipinfo.info/details.asp?RSN=14899). Interviews with 261 women incarcerated at the Vanier facility were conducted from 2001 to 2004.

**Recruitment.** Researchers obtained a sample from the population of women at Vanier by soliciting volunteers. To do this, the inmates on a unit were called to the common room by a correctional officer (CO). The CO introduced the two research assistants who were conducting the interviews, of whom I was one, and identified our affiliation with the University of Toronto. Next, the interviewers spent five to ten minutes explaining the nature of the WEV project, including the study’s purpose and the types of questions that would be asked during the interview. Inmates were invited to participate regardless of their committing offense or history of violence (i.e., we explained to the inmates that even though the study focused on violence, they need not be incarcerated for committing a violent offence nor have experienced violence to be included). We emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and told the women that we could not compensate them for their time. Whilst we clearly explained that there was no direct, individual benefit to participating, we encouraged inmates to consider the potential social benefit that could accrue to other women in similar situations as a result of the research findings.

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7 In Canada, adult women sentenced to incarceration for less than two years typically serve their sentences in provincial institutions operated by the Ministry of Public Safety and Security (MPSS). The Vanier Centre for Women is one such facility that is dedicated to housing women. Vanier was located in Brampton, ON at the start of the WEV project in 2001, but moved to its current location in Milton, ON in 2004.

8 Volunteers were recruited from units that housed sentenced women only. To avoid the potential legal threat that interviewers might be subpoenaed for information revealed during an interview, the sample was restricted to women for whom a decision of guilt had been rendered for their current offense. This strategy was necessary to avoid compromising the integrity of the confidentiality agreement made with participants.

9 Ministry rules prohibited us from giving monetary compensation to study volunteers. For the interviews at the Brampton location, interviewers were permitted to give juice boxes and granola bars to the respondents. The interviewers were prohibited from giving anything to inmates at the Milton location.
The prospective participants were instructed that they could decline any question during the interview and were further given the option to withdraw from participation once they met with the research assistants and learned more about the study, or at any time during the interview process. After answering any questions about the project, we invited interested individuals to approach us and we recorded their names and release dates. If inmates did not wish to sign up immediately, but decided to do so at a later date, we added their names to the list of volunteers at that time. Volunteers were interviewed based on the proximity of their release date so as to try to interview everyone who wished to participate. This recruiting process was repeated as needed.

Non-representative sample. As the foregoing discussion suggests, the WEV sample was not chosen randomly. A random sampling strategy was not possible largely as a result of the high rate of turnover of the provincial inmate population, and their mobility within the institution. Women at Vanier are in custody for relatively short periods during which time they change units within the correctional facility; constructing a list of names and then locating inmates was thus likely to be time-consuming and frequently unsuccessful. It is worth noting, however, that starting with a random sample would not necessarily result in a more representative sample of criminalized women. Ethical standards mandate that inmates be given the choice to participate or, conversely, to select out of research studies, meaning that all inmate samples ultimately remain self-selected (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2005).

The non-random, volunteer sample upon which my analyses rely is not representative of any known population. The women in the sample are likely to be unrepresentative of

10 Volunteers also heard about the study by word-of-mouth from other inmates. We encouraged women who were hesitant to volunteer to talk to other inmates who had participated in the study to find out what it was like. We also encouraged women to approach us when we were at the jail if they wanted more information before being added to the list of volunteers.

11 This method of recruiting volunteers likely enhanced our ability to conduct ethically responsible and methodologically sound research with a population of vulnerable participants. For example, we were able to convey accurate information about the nature of the study so that women could make an informed decision about whether to participate. Moreover, during our recruitment sessions, we sought to minimize the chances that inmates would feel coerced to participate in the study by emphasizing that it was completely the women’s choice to participate and that their decision would have no effect on their treatment by the institution. Had we relied on COs, discharge planners, social workers, or other Vanier employees to recruit on our behalf, we may have encountered such pitfalls.
women who commit non-violent and/or violent crime both because they are from an incarcerated population and because they volunteered to participate in the research. There are grounds for assuming that people selected from among those found in a particular setting differ from the larger population of interest (Lee 1993). For example, compared to female offenders who are not incarcerated, inmates may commit more crimes, may commit more crimes for which it is easier to be caught and convicted, and/or may be less able to avoid police detection. Moreover, the unpaid volunteers who participate in WEV may differ from inmates who chose not to be interviewed in important ways. For example, women who have more extreme life histories – including experiences with drugs, prostitution, or violence – may decline to participate in research for fear of perceived negative consequences, such as criminal charges, as well as psychic costs, including stress resulting from recalling unpleasant experiences. Conversely, women with more extreme experiences may be more eager to talk about their lives than those with less tumultuous pasts. It is also possible that women who have strong opinions about the criminal justice system, among other topics, may view the interview as a forum for voicing their ideas or concerns to a nonjudgmental listener. These are only some of ways in which volunteers in a custodial setting could differ from the wider population of women who have offending histories.

Despite using data collected from a non-random sample, I do not believe that potential sample bias will undermine my study on the relationship between mothering and criminalized women’s offending. Sample bias would pose a serious threat to my research if volunteers differ from those who decline to participate in the study with respect to the relationship between mothering and criminal offending. Even if women who volunteer are not representative of women who commit crime, there is no strong evidence to assume that this sample would bias my estimates of the relationships that are the focus of my study (i.e., mothering and various forms of non-violent and violent offending). In fact, a benefit of using data collected from this sample pertains to the fact that the WEV study itself did not focus on the issue of motherhood. As a result, respondents were not cued to think about their lives or the crimes they commit in relation to their mothering roles during recruitment into the study, thereby reducing the likelihood that women would systematically agree or refuse to participate on this basis. Nevertheless,
recognizing that sample selection issues are virtually unavoidable in inquiries into sensitive topics with vulnerable populations, I exercise caution when discussing the external validity of my findings.

*Sample Characteristics.* Table 3.1 provides socio-demographic information on the 259 women in my sample. Almost three-quarters of them self-identified as Caucasian, 14 percent as Aboriginal, 7 percent as Black, and 5 percent as a member of another racial group. In addition, a majority of the respondents had never been married (58 percent), and the vast majority (80 percent) had experienced either physical or sexual abuse during childhood. Eighty percent of the women in my sample (n=206) had given birth to at least one child. In the three years prior to their current incarceration, 55 of these women lived with children every month, 94 never lived with children, and 58 lived with children some of the time.

Women in this sample are also characterized by low levels of education and labour force participation, as well as economic adversity. For example, over half of the respondents (57 percent) had not graduated from high school, and roughly 40 percent had not been employed at any time during the three years preceding their incarceration. In general, respondents’ socio-economic status was quite low. For example, in the month immediately preceding their incarceration, 28 percent of women who reported any legal income earned less than $1,250. In addition, roughly two-thirds of respondents received some form of government assistance. Almost half of the women (49 percent) were serving time for income-generating offences, including property and drug crimes. Thus, while this is by no means a representative sample of women who have committed crime or who have been incarcerated, the backgrounds of this group of women are similar in important respects to those documented in previous research on criminalized women (Adelberg and Currie 1993; Carlen 1988; Comack and Brickey 2007; Daly 1998; Richie 2003; Shaw 1994).}

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12 I mentioned previously that 261 women were interviewed as part of the WEV project, though my analysis only includes 259 women. This small discrepancy is the result of two incomplete interviews that were dropped from my analysis.

13 In general, respondents in the WEV sample have similar characteristics to the larger population of women sentenced to provincial custody in Ontario with respect to three key characteristics for which comparable Ministry of Public Safety and Correctional Services data are available. The average age of
3.4 Interviews

In-depth interviews that ranged in length from one and a half to six hours were used to collect information from this sample of incarcerated women. The length of each interview depended primarily on: (1) the number of changes in respondents’ life circumstances, (2) their histories of violence, for which a detailed report was recorded for up to 44 violent incidents per respondent, and (3) their penchant for talking. Each interviewer completed a maximum of two interviews per day and, when necessary, interviews were conducted over two (or more) days.

Another female graduate student and I were responsible for conducting the interviews at Vanier.14 We underwent intensive training over a period of several months during which we were instructed in both interviewing techniques and the use of the computerized interview instrument. By practicing with the instrument, we gained knowledge of data coding and measurement issues, as well as increased our comfort with the questions asked of respondents.15 Before interviewing commenced at Vanier, the Toronto team

women interviewed for WEV is 33.8 years, while the average age of all provincially sentenced women in Ontario during the time of the WEV study was 32.7 years. Moreover, the overall age structure of the WEV sample is similar to that of the provincial profile: about one-third of women in both groups were aged 20 to 29 years, and another one-third of women were between 30 and 39 years.

Unfortunately, government policy on the collection of race statistics precludes a precise comparison based on race of the respondent. It is possible, however, to compare the proportion of respondents who report Aboriginal status. Slightly over ten percent of both the WEV sample (13.2 percent) and the provincial population (11.5 percent) identified themselves as Aboriginal. These figures are consistent with research documenting the over-representation of Aboriginal women in custodial settings, relative to their numbers in the general population (La Prairie 2002).

There is more disparity in the committing offences of women in the two groups. For both groups of women, property crimes comprise roughly one-third of their committing offenses. The WEV sample and provincial population are also similar with respect to the proportion convicted for drug-related offences; 14.7 percent and 11.2 percent, respectively, are incarcerated for such offences. However, a larger proportion of women in the WEV sample had been committed for violent crime (20.5 percent) compared to the population of provincially sentenced women (13.5 percent) (Government of Ontario 2003-2004). This is perhaps not surprising, as potential volunteers, upon hearing the title of the WEV project, may have determined their suitability as study participants based on their involvement in violence. For example, despite the fact that interviewers tried to make it clear that all inmates were invited to participate, women with histories of violence may have been inclined to volunteer while those with minimal or no histories of violence may have been more likely to dismiss the study on the basis that it was irrelevant to them.

14 I personally interviewed over 150 women for the WEV project between 2001 and 2004.
15 Thorough training was particularly important for the WEV project given the type of information being solicited from respondents. More specifically, many of the questions asked about sensitive information (e.g., women’s relationships, criminal behaviour, illegal income, physical and sexual violence, etc). Research shows that interviewers’ perceptions of question sensitivity may bias results (Lee 1993). Indeed, problems of obtaining reliable information on surveys dealing with sensitive topics may have more to do
traveled to Baltimore, MD to observe first-hand WEV interviews conducted at the Baltimore City Women’s Detention Centre.\textsuperscript{16}

Interviews at Vanier were conducted one-on-one in a private interview room. While both respondent and interviewer were visible to passers-by, the conversation inside the room was inaudible to other inmates and COs in the vicinity. Respondents who volunteered for the interview met the interviewers at a central meeting point on the unit, before proceeding to the interview room. Prior to the start of the interview, interviewers again explained the project and discussed the types of questions respondents would be asked. Informed consent procedures were carefully reviewed. Respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and were assured that the information obtained from the interviews would not be shared with correctional staff, or anyone else outside of the research team. Participants were told that they could refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time and without explanation. Further, they were informed that a decision to withdraw would not affect their present or future treatment by Vanier or the Correctional Services of Canada. This informed consent process typically took between five and ten minutes to complete.\textsuperscript{17}

with interviewers feeling uncomfortable about asking questions than with the interviewees being embarrassed. In face-to-face interviews in particular it may be apparent to the respondent that the interviewer is uncomfortable asking certain questions (Fowler and Mangione 1990). Because the other interviewer and I had not been personally exposed to many of the scenarios that were revealed to us during the interviews, it was crucially important that we feel comfortable asking questions (and hearing responses) to reduce this type of biasing effect and to create a non-judgmental interview environment.

\textsuperscript{16}All of the interviewers at the three WEV sites were female. Fowler and Mangione (1990) posit that for most surveys on most topics with most respondents, the demographic characteristics of the interviewers do not affect answers. However, in certain situations – including asking about sensitive topics – specific interviewer characteristics can significantly influence interviewee response. Moreover, feminist researchers have argued that, when both researcher and researched are women, the commonalities of experience that result from their sex helps to overcome the problem of respondents’ inhibition about disclosing sensitive information (Lee and Renzetti 1993). While being a woman doubtless improved the likelihood that respondents shared their life experiences with me, there were inevitable differences between myself and the respondents that were apparent. My experience interviewing revealed that female interviewers are not a cure-all for obtaining sensitive information in interviews. In addition to my gender, I have a variety of other discernable social and demographic characteristics, including age, class, and racial background, that may shape the interviewer-respondent relationship. Because of the often great differences in my life and the respondents’, there were genuine limits to our ability to establish a relationship that meets some ideal model (Fowler and Mangione 1990).

\textsuperscript{17}The consent procedure produced unexpected tension with some inmates because of the length of time devoted to the process. Rather than being concerned about the details of the project’s goals and assurances of confidentiality, it seemed that many respondents believed that their verbal acceptance of the invitation to participate should be sufficient to end the review of the consent agreement and begin the interview. Indeed, several respondents expressed the desire to “get on with it.”
To facilitate the interviews, the survey instrument was loaded onto laptop computers. A laptop was set up on a desk, in front of which the interviewer and respondent sat side-by-side so that both could see the screen. A paper calendar – the purpose of which will be elaborated in the next section – was also placed on the desk beside the computer. Given that good interviewer-respondent relationships are aided by conditions that promote disclosure and lead to optimum levels of reporting (Lee 1993), the research team sought to generate a sense that the interview was a co-operative effort between the interviewer and respondent.18 These arrangements increased rapport between the interviewer and the respondent by (1) generating a sense that the interviewer and respondent were on a ‘more equal footing,’ (2) alleviating any suspicion about what was being recorded on the laptop, and (3) helping to keep respondents engaged in the interview as they could watch as the screens changed and could see the progress through the interview.

Two features of these face-to-face interviews make this mode of data collection particularly valuable for advancing what is known about how the offending behaviour of criminalized women is embedded within the context of their lives. First, speaking directly with women themselves elicits information from those who arguably have a more intimate knowledge of the events in their own lives than anyone else. Second, the face-to-face interaction between researcher and respondent enables researchers to clarify questions and probe respondents to more fully explicate particular aspects of their past. In-depth interviews thus facilitate the collection of more information, as well as more detailed information, about criminalized women’s lives than would be possible using other methods of data collection.

Data obtained via self-reports nevertheless generate concerns about validity. The most common concern is whether respondents will provide honest reports of their violent behavior and other discrediting information. The concern that individual respondents may attempt to present favorable images of themselves to avoid potential personal and official repercussions seems especially salient when interviewing a group of incarcerated women about their participation in criminal and violent activity, among other things.

18 In order to proceed efficiently and avoid data entry errors, the interviewer read aloud the interview questions to the respondent and only the interviewer actually entered information into the laptop computer.
However, the self-report technique has been successful at producing valid and reliable data (Thornberry and Krohn 2000). While it is impossible to determine the extent to which social desirability influenced respondents’ self-reports, women in my sample did provide numerous reports of their life experiences that violated norms of “appropriate” social behavior. When presenting unfavorable images of themselves, respondents sometimes admitted that they were not proud of their behavior, but they wanted to be truthful about what they had done.

Of greater concern for my research is the possibility of systematic errors in reporting violence that are related to women’s responsibility for children. However, because respondents were not directed to think about their lives or their offending in relation to their mothering roles, norms about appropriate behaviour for mothers are less likely to have tainted respondents’ reports. It is possible, however, that compared to women without maternal responsibilities, women involved in the care of children may systematically underreport any offending that involves their children as participants, victims, bystanders, or as the source of conflict, because of the pervasive stigma surrounding child abuse and accompanying concerns about CAS involvement. Overall, however, the evidence leads me to conclude that the benefits of first-hand description of the context of criminalized women’s lives gained from in-depth interviews out-weigh the possibility that some respondents may misrepresent some portions of their recent past.

### 3.5 Life History Calendar Technique

A life history calendar technique was employed to document month-by-month retrospective self-report accounts of respondents’ life circumstances. Respondents were asked to consider a reference or “calendar” period that covered the three years prior to their current incarceration. To set up the calendar, respondents self-reported their most recent arrest date. If the arrest occurred on or after the 15th of a month, then that particular month was numbered month 36. Alternatively, if the arrest occurred on or before the 14th, then the preceding full month became month 36. The interviewer then

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19 The survey instrument is a modified version of the life events calendar Horney (2001) developed for use with male inmates.
numbered backwards on the calendar to month one. The life history calendar relied upon directed backward recall or reverse chronological order to gather information about women’s recent life histories. That is, all questions were formatted to ask initially about month 36, the month closest in time and thus the easiest to recall. Follow-up questions then asked about any changes in status during the calendar period. In practice, this means that all months during which the respondent was incarcerated were crossed out on the calendar (i.e., for these months, no questions were asked). For every activity that a respondent reported (e.g., living with a partner, using drugs, working, hanging out with friends, committing thefts, etc.), the interviewer placed a check beside the appropriate items for those months on the computerized calendar.

The primary purpose of the life history calendar technique is to improve recall by increasing respondents’ ability to place different activities within the same time frame. The fallibility of human memory means that as the time period since the experience lengthens, respondents rely less on recall and more on estimate (Bradburn et al. 1987; Foddy 1993; Sudman and Bradburn 1982). However, empirical evidence indicates that memories are stored as “autobiographical sequences” and that these sequences can be useful landmarks in time that help respondents remember other important events (Bradburn et al. 1987; Tanur 1992). Consequently, the life history calendar reduces the likelihood of telescoping, thereby increasing the accuracy of retrospective data (Axinn et al. 1999; Caspi et al. 1996; Junger-Tas and Marshall 1999; Roberts et al. 2005). Life history calendars have been used successfully in previous investigations of criminal offending and victimization (e.g., see Armstrong and Griffin 2007; Griffin and Armstrong 2003; Horney 2001; Roberts et al. 2005; Slocum et al. 2005; Yoshihama et al. 2005).

The life history technique is a methodological tool ideally suited to my research which requires time-ordered information about a host of life circumstances and offending behaviour. Obtaining such self-report information from a sample of criminalized women is no small feat, as their lives are typically characterized by features that are not conducive to easy recollection (e.g., multiple intimate partners, substance abuse, frequent residential moves, etc.). The life history calendar helps respondents relate, both mentally
and visually, the timing of several kinds of events by using events that are more easily remembered to provide reference points for recalling less salient events. In the WEV interview, items that were expected to be most salient in reconstructing life events over the three year time period were placed at the beginning of the survey (incarcerations and places of residence); subsequent questions built off these reference points. In addition, a paper calendar served as a visual memory aid. Before information was input into the laptop, it was recorded on a paper calendar and coloured highlighters were used to identify different events in women’s lives (e.g., blue signified residential moves, orange corresponded with changes in relationships, yellow represented incarcerations, and pink indicated violent incidents). This illustrates how, in practice, the life history calendar technique facilitates using the larger pattern of one’s recorded life events to recall the timing of specific events more accurately (Axinn et al. 1999; Caspi et al. 1996; Freedman et al. 1988).20 The life history calendar is well suited to providing a detailed mapping of the correspondence between mothering and participation in criminal activity.

### 3.6 Analytic Strategy

**Multilevel modeling.** Given my goal of modeling the structure and predictors of change in women’s offending over time, a multilevel modeling strategy offers four important strengths over alternative approaches. First, multilevel models estimate within-person variation in offending, while controlling for individual differences in the propensity to offend. Indeed, a major benefit of a within-individual approach is that it avoids potential selection problems that arise in between-group analyses. For example, comparisons between women who “mother” versus those who do not cannot rule out the possibility

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20 The respondents themselves echoed what research evidence shows regarding the effectiveness of the life events calendar in helping people reconstruct detailed information about their lives. Many respondents expressed their surprise at how much detail they were able to recall about the last three years. Moreover, the majority of respondents engaged seriously in the process of reconstructing their lives. They took time to try to place their life events in the correct calendar months, sometimes asking to go back to earlier portions of the interview to correct something. While only anecdotal evidence, the perceived utility of the life events calendar by people who have used it is worth noting.

In addition to feeling that the life events calendar was a good tool for helping them to remember their past life events, many respondents also said that they enjoyed constructing the calendar. For the vast majority of respondents, recording their life information in this format provided them with the opportunity to consider what the last three years of their life had been like. Some respondents requested a copy of their calendar, which was provided to them at the conclusion of the interview.
that there is some inherent, underlying characteristic that distinguishes between these two groups of women (e.g., women who become mothers may exhibit more self-control). A within-person analysis rules out a broad class of alternative explanations – i.e., any stable individual differences, measured or not – though it still cannot unequivocally establish a causal effect because it is possible that some variable that correlates over time with mothering, for which I have failed to control, is the true causal factor.

Second, repeated measures of month-to-month changes in mothering and crime over a three-year calendar period are, by nature, clustered or interdependent. Indeed, statistical dependence is always present when assessments are repeated on the same individual (Boyle and Willms 2003). For example, if a woman uses drugs in month $t$, she is also likely to use drugs in month $t-1$ and in month $t+1$. In contrast to OLS regression techniques that pool un-modeled contextual information into a single individual error term, multilevel modeling allows for correlated error structures by partitioning total residual variation or error among levels of the data hierarchy (Duncan, Jones, and Moon 1998). This latter strategy avoids the problem of inaccurate – i.e., too small – standard errors, and enables the explicit modeling of the interdependence of observations within individuals (Bickel 2007; Boyle and Willms 2003; Luke 2004).

A third important feature of a multilevel approach for my research is that intercepts and slopes may be permitted to vary from woman to woman. Rather than having one intercept for the whole model, as is the case in OLS, every woman has her own intercept in a multilevel model. Essentially, a different regression model is being estimated for each woman (Bickel 2007; Luke 2004). Regression coefficients are thus not assumed to apply equally to all women, meaning that each woman in the study may have a different average number of months in which she mothers and may experience a different effect of mothering on her criminal offending.

A fourth strength of multilevel models is the flexibility and efficiency with which they handle missing data compared to many traditional longitudinal approaches. Multilevel models weight results according to how many observations an individual contributes to the data (Luke 2004). This is important for my study, as the majority of women in my
sample (58 percent) were detained for at least one month during the calendar period. As discussed above, data for several variables were not collected when the respondents were detained for two or more weeks in a given month in custody or in in-patient treatment. Excluding months in which the respondent was off the street is not problematic; women with more time on the street have a larger number of observations and therefore contribute more information to the coefficient estimates.

**Model specifications.** I performed my analysis using Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Modeling (HLM) 6.05 software (Mason, Wong, Entwisle 1983; Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, and du Toit 2004). In particular, I used generalized hierarchical linear models (HGLM) for nested or repeated measures data because of the monthly measures of both my independent and dependent variables as well as the binary structure of my outcome variables, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section (Raudenbush et al. 2004). The Bernoulli model which I employed is similar to a logit regression model that produces predicted values of the binary outcomes, which reflect the probability that the outcome will take on a value of “1” (occurrence) rather than “0” (non-occurrence). I elaborate below my rationale for using group-mean centered models, and I outline my protocol for identifying random effects as well as reporting results from Laplace versus robust models.

In the context of my analysis, time periods (i.e., months) are nested within individuals, so that level-1 of the hierarchical model becomes the change analysis. In order to make the intercept more meaningful when studying individual change over time, I use group- or person-mean centering (Bickel 2007). Group-mean centering restricts level-1 parameter estimates to measuring within-individual change by partialing out each individual’s mean. The individual-specific mean for offending is subtracted from each individual’s value of offending at time t, so that the mean added to the intercept is unique to each woman. Essentially, group-mean centering focuses on within-individual change rather than between-individual differences by purposefully wiping out the latter. By knowing a woman’s average or mean level of offending over the entire calendar period, I am able to assess whether or not she offends more or less in months in which she “mothers”.
To ensure the best fit for my models, I tested for random coefficients to determine whether the effect of any independent variables on the dependent variable differs across women. In order to specify the random effects of variables, I adhered to the following two-step protocol: first, I always tested for possible random effects for the variables measuring mothering and time, and second, I tested for possible random effects for any other variables for which the standard error is twice the size in the robust model compared to the regular unit-specific model. Given that I used dichotomous outcomes with relatively low base rates and rather limited within-person variance, I did not anticipate that there would be much power for random coefficients to turn up significant. Nevertheless, I performed a rigorous check for random coefficients because failing to do so will result in mis-specified models and erroneous significance tests.

Following the strategy of other scholars who use multilevel modeling to analyze life history calendar data about local life circumstances and offending (Griffin and Armstrong 2007; Horney et al. 1995; Slocum et al. 2005), I estimated my models using EM Laplace approximation wherever possible. While both penalized quasi-likelihood (PQL) and Laplace estimates approximate maximum likelihood (ML), an advantage of Laplace over PQL is that it provides more accurate estimates of the coefficients than PQL (Raudenbush, Yang, and Yosef 2000). At the same time, however, Laplace is more computationally intensive than PQL. For example, as I demonstrate in the ensuing chapters, models in which I included random effects did not typically converge using Laplace approximation. In these instances, I present unit specific models with robust standard errors, which rely on PQL, as an alternative.21 Models with robust standard errors are useful for correcting the estimated standard error.

3.7 Key Measures

My key measures are informed by theory and empirical findings, discussed in Chapter 2, that suggest the characteristics and circumstances likely to differentiate individual women’s pattern of criminal offending over time according to whether or not they

21 Models with robust standard errors are suitable for datasets that contain a moderate to large number (i.e., over 100) of level-2 units. My analysis meets this requirement, as my sample contains 259 women.
“mother” at that time. My measures are derived from the WEV data and are coded in monthly intervals covering the three-year calendar period.\textsuperscript{22} Descriptive statistics for all time-varying variables are reported in Table 3.2.

Dependent variables. I use five dependent measures to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between mothering and women’s criminal offending. The effect of mothering was considered for the following outcomes: property crime, illicit drug use, drug dealing, and use of violence against an intimate partner. The first outcome – property crime – measures five different types of non-violent property offending, including burglary, theft, auto theft, fraud, and forgery. The next two outcome variables relate to women’s experiences in the drug economy. Drug use captures women’s regular use of six different types of illicit drugs, including crack cocaine, powdered cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, and other drugs, which typically include the non-prescription use of prescription drugs. A drug dealing variable measures whether women “made, sold, smuggled, or moved drugs.” The final outcome variables pertain to women’s use of violence against their intimate partners. Women were asked to indicate whether they had been involved in physical confrontations in which they used violence, either in mutually-violent conflicts with their partners or in conflicts in which women acted as sole offenders. Each of the above outcomes is measured as a binary variable, scored “1” if the respondent reported engaging in the behavior and “0” if she did not, for each month.

The data on the outcome measures reveals that women engaged in some type of offending during 59 percent of the 8249 calendar months that were included in my analysis. As expected, women’s self-reports indicate that the majority of these activities involve non-violent crimes, including drug use (45 percent), property crime (28 percent), and drug dealing (26 percent).\textsuperscript{23} Conversely, women’s lawbreaking involves the use of violence against intimate partners in only one percent of the calendar months. Table 3.2 also notes the variation or change in offending over time, whereby “change” is considered to occur whenever the woman’s status on a characteristic at time t is different from her status at t+1. Women experienced the greatest amount of change with respect to

\textsuperscript{22} Due to its length, a copy of the entire WEV survey instrument is not included in the appendix, but it is available upon request from the author.
\textsuperscript{23} Women may report engaging in more than one of these activities in a particular month.
property offending; 36 percent of the sample shifted from either committing property crime to not committing property crime or the converse, at least once during the calendar period. Women also underwent changes in their patterns of drug use (29 percent), drug dealing (20 percent), and their use of violence against intimate partners as mutual offenders (25 percent) and as sole offenders (16 percent). Further discussion of the dependent variables will be provided in the ensuing analysis chapters (Chapters 4-6).

**Independent variable.** Whether or not a woman lives with a child in a given month is the main independent variable in this study. This information was derived from a question that asked whether women lived with any children in a given month, regardless of whether they were the woman’s biological child. Overall, women reported living with a child in 32 percent of the calendar months. Roughly one-fifth of the sample (48 women) reported a change in whether or not they lived with children, while 156 said they never lived with children and 55 reported always living with children during their “free” calendar months.

This “lives with children” variable serves as a proxy for women’s maternal responsibilities in the absence of a more direct measure of whether or not women were living with and caring for children in the capacity of a “mother”. While the WEV study did not collect information about women’s experiences as mothers, it did ask two questions that link tangentially to mothering upon which I can draw to infer whether women take on maternal roles: (1) the number of children for whom the respondent is a natural mother and (2) whether the respondent lives with any children. As previously discussed, my decision to operationalize mothering according to whether women live with children as opposed to whether they have ever given birth relates to an important distinction between these often overlapping experiences. While women are typically considered to be mothers by virtue of giving birth to a child, women who lose custody of children no longer engage in the work of mothering. In contrast, living with children, by definition, means that women are involved in children’s lives, at least to some extent. Adults who share a physical dwelling with children presumably have an opportunity and, indeed, a responsibility to provide physical and emotional care. In this context,
“mothering” may occur regardless of the biological relationship, and may involve correcting children’s behaviour and/or modifying one’s own behaviour.

It is reasonable to expect that children will exert a different effect on women’s behaviour depending on the extent to which they are involved in each other’s lives. For example, there is no compelling reason to expect women’s day-to-day activities will be influenced by biological children with whom they have had no contact for several years. Alternatively, it is reasonable to anticipate that living in the same dwelling as biological children, step-children, or even friends’ children might shape different facets of women’s daily lives. I argue that women who live with children have the opportunity to nurture them – whether directly or indirectly – and, in turn, are more likely to be influenced by them, compared to women who do not live with children.\(^{24}\)

It is important to note, however, my ‘living with children’ measure does not perfectly capture the construct of interest (i.e., mothering) and has some unknown amount of error. However, any such error should reduce the chances that I will find an association between mothering and crime. As such, my measure represents a conservative test of the mothering-crime relationship and any observed relationship is likely to under-estimate the true relationship between mothering and crime. My measure of mothering accounts for the fluidity and complexity of the parental/family relationships that are more typical of criminalized women’s lives than those of more “stable” middle-class families.

**Control variables.** To isolate the effect of living with children on criminal offending, it is necessary to control for other variables that may shape women’s criminal behaviour. As the goal of this study is to measure the effect of living with children across several

\(^{24}\) I do not know definitively how many women lived with non-biological children during the calendar period. However, my impression based on my own interviewing and my review of all of the interviews is that fewer than ten women lived with non-biological children during the calendar period. I base this statement on two sources of information. First, by combining information about whether women have ever given birth to a child as well as whether they live with children, I can determine that no women in my sample who have never given birth live with children during the calendar period. However, I cannot identify whether women who have given birth at least once are living with their own children or non-biological children. Second, the notes section at the end of the interview captures women’s spontaneous comments about different aspects of their lives, of which children were often a major focus. In these discussions, the interviewer often clarified whether they were talking about biological children or not. While still unable to give precise measure of how many women live with non-biological children, the combination of evidence suggests that when women do live with children, they are primarily living with children for whom they are the natural mother.
criminal outcomes, the same key control variables are included in all of my analytic models (presented in Chapters 4-6), with only slight modification as necessitated by the particular outcome under consideration. Intended to capture different facets of women’s lives that research evidence links to their offending, the control variables I employ can be characterized into three broad categories: (1) women’s relationships with intimate partners (i.e., whether they live with an intimate partner, whether they are involved with a drug-using partner, and whether they are involved in a violent intimate partner relationship), (2) the context of women’s lives in terms of the socio-economic conditions they face (i.e., their level of income, whether they live in “transient” housing, whether they have access to support from friends and family, and whether they experience extreme stress), and (3) women’s activity patterns or how they spend their time (i.e., their leisure routines, their drug use, and their drug dealing). Because I am investigating intra-individual change, I also control for time.

**Lives with an intimate partner:** Romantic partners occupy a prominent position within the life history narratives of adult women who engage in crime (Giordano et al. 2003). Some feminist researchers argue that heterosexual relationships and traditional domestic arrangements restrict women’s lives, thereby operating as a source of social control over women (Hochschild 1989). To the extent that male intimate partners may monitor and attempt to control women’s behaviour, they exert direct social control. In their study of male offenders, Sampson and Laub (1993; 2003) argue that supportive intimate partnerships with women may offer routes out of delinquent trajectories by providing informal social control that protects individuals from participation in criminal and other antisocial activities (Sampson and Laub 1993). They argue that the growth of social bonds is like an investment process; as the investment in social bonds grows, the incentive for avoiding crime increases, because more is at stake (see also Nagin and Paternoster 1994). Sampson and Laub (2003) also suggest that living with intimate partners may influence desistance because it frequently leads to significant changes in everyday routine activities, especially with regard to one’s peer group. Following the above logic, attachment to an intimate might pull women away from non-normative female activities like drug dealing as well as reduce their drug use and related activities, including prostitution, by changing women’s investment in conventional roles, routines,
and sense of self. Involvement with an intimate partner means, at least in theory, that women have someone to care for and have someone to take care of them.

Cohabiting partners can prove very powerful “catalysts for change” in life direction; as co-residents, intimate partners have numerous opportunities for immediate, recurring influence (Giordano et al. 2002). Accordingly, I include living with a male intimate partner as a dichotomous control variable (0=not living with an intimate partner and 1=living with an intimate partner). This measure captures both marital and common-law relationships, but not same-sex relationships. Due to the comparatively low rates of marriage among criminalized women, I use a broad measure that includes both marital and common-law relationships.25 Same-sex cohabiting relationships are not examined in the current study due to the small number of women in my sample involved in these types of living arrangements. Over two-thirds of the women in my sample (184 women; 71 percent) report cohabiting with an intimate partner for some portion of the calendar period, and 139 women experience a change in status in terms of their living arrangements with intimate partners.

Drug-using partner: Though partnerships may offer routes out of criminal trajectories, criminalized women are likely to be exposed to and associate with criminogenic intimates, whether by choice or lack of opportunity (Gilfus 1993; Giordano et al. 2002). Several studies have reported that antisocial individuals are likely to meet, date, and establish relationships with persons who are also antisocial (Cairns and Cairns 1994; Krueger, Moffitt, Caspi, Bleske, and Silva 1998; Simons, Stewart, Gordon, Conger and Elder 2002). The normative orientation of their intimate partners is relevant to studies of women’s offending because while conventional partners are apt to promote socially acceptable activities, antisocial partners are likely to advance situations and opportunities involving criminal behaviour (Simons et al. 2002). For criminalized women, men are often central to their offending and detrimental to their desistance. Indeed, women with more extensive offending histories were often initiated into that behaviour by men and their offending is often with or for men (O’Brien 2001). Regardless of whether romantic

25 To date, no clear difference has been established regarding the effects of marriage, cohabitation, and non-cohabitation on women’s offending, as has been described among male offenders (Horney et al. 1995; Warr 1998).
partners are the initial source of exposure to women’s drug use, men often play an important role in women’s addictions by encouraging their drug abuse and illegal work (Gilfus 1993).

Lacking information about partners’ month-to-month involvement in different types of illegal activities, I include a measure of partners’ drug use as a proxy for their normative orientation. This construct was created by combining reports of six different types of drug use, including crack, cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, and other drugs. If women’s partners used any of these drugs on a weekly or daily basis in a given month, they were coded “1”, otherwise “0”. Many of the women reported that they were involved with drug-addicted partners: 94 women (36 percent) had a partner who used drugs daily or weekly during at least one month during the calendar period.

Violent intimate partner relationship: Victimization in formative and adult relationships is another key feature of criminalized women’s lives and can be a pathway into offending (Comack 1996; Daly 1992; Gilfus 1993; Girshick 1999; Richie 1996). Daly (1992:21) argues that the abuse experiences of criminalized women “spawn violence and illegal forms of economic gain.” Similarly, Richie (1996) coins the phrase “compelled to crime” to explain the co-variance between victimization in the private sphere and women’s involvement in illegal activities. Richie (1996) describes how many women’s offenses relate either directly or indirectly to physical or psychological abuse or control exerted by husbands or other male partners. More specifically, women report being pulled into illegal activities by their association with others who are dangerous to them in order to avoid abuse. Participating in illegal activities can enable women to postpone a violent episode, although not to avoid being battered altogether (Richie 2003). For example, by supplying drugs for their addicted partners, women are afforded a temporary respite from the abuse while their partner is using. Using drugs themselves also serves to numb the pain of physical abuse (Gilfus 1993). Finally, gaining economic self-sufficiency via earnings from illegal activities is also a strategy used by some women who are seeking to escape from an abusive intimate relationship.
Given that women’s paths to illegal activities are attributable, in part, to the presence or absence of violence in their intimate relationships, I include a measure that signals whether women’s relationships include violent conflict. Women who report incidents in which they are either targets of violence at the hands of partners and/or users of violence against their partners are coded “1”, and women who do not report being involved in incidents of partner violence are coded “0”. One hundred and thirty-four women report at least one violent conflict with their partner during the calendar period.

**Income**: Women’s socio-economic position is also central to their offending patterns. Research indicates that economic need is a common factor that leads women to commit crime. Daly (1998) notes that women are twice as likely as men to cite economic need as the reason for their offending. Non-violent crimes are often viewed by criminalized women as a survival strategy in the face of limited options; if women are unable to secure work at a living wage, whether as a result of having too few skills or for other reasons, they may “hustle” in order to earn income for food and a place to sleep (Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983; Daly 1998; Gilfus 1993; Miller 1986). Numerous studies of women’s involvement in stealing, writing bad checks, selling drugs, and turning tricks, link these activities to financial hardship and a lack of perceived alternatives for paying the bills (Bruckert and Parent 2006; Maher 1997; Pyett and Warr 1999). Moreover, acquiring money illegally to support a partner or care for a child is often regarded by women as consistent with their caretaking roles and responsibilities (Gilfus 1993; Girshick 1999).

Given the overwhelming consensus in the research literature that poverty is a crucial variable forming the context of women’s offending, I include a measure of personal income in my study. I derive my income variable from two questions on the WEV survey: (1) a nine-category variable capturing respondents’ income from employment (before taxes) and (2) a four-category variable capturing income from government social assistance, such as employment insurance, disability insurance, child benefits, etc. I combine these two types of income into a dichotomous measure of whether women earned above or below $1,250 monthly, or $15,000 annually.
Because the original income categories of the two original WEV variables are non-equidistant and leave the top categories open (e.g., more than $100,000 for employment income and more than $500 for income from social assistance), I code total income using two different strategies in order to ensure that my findings are robust and do not change dramatically as a result of my income measure. For a more conservative estimate of women’s total (legal) income, I add the lowest value in each income range, and for a more moderate estimate of income I add the midpoints in each range. For the mid-point coding, I assign a value to the top category by multiplying it by a factor of 1.1, 1.3, and 1.5 (see also, Dowd 2007; Hunt 2004). Again, my goal is to verify whether or not my results remain consistent, on the whole, when I code the income variable in different ways.

*Transient housing:* Given the low economic status of many criminalized women, safe and affordable housing is an urgent need (Pollack 2008; Richie 2003). Indeed, many criminalized women have experienced repeated periods of homelessness, a situation which elevates their risk of offending. For example, the limited research on homeless women attributes their increased offending risk to a greater likelihood of engaging in survival behaviors, such as sex work, pan-handling, stealing, etc., and their immediate living environment (Connolly 2000). Such crimes are often subsistence activities that bring women into contact with people in contexts in which more crime and/or violence are likely to occur. To test whether transient housing is related to various types of offending behaviour, I include a dichotomous variable that assigns a “1” to women who report living in shelters, cars, with different people, on the streets, or in other transient or temporary living situations, and a “0” to women who live in houses, apartments, rooming houses, trailers, or other more permanent dwellings.

*Social support:* Living in surroundings marked by a dearth of people to turn to for help also defines the context in which many criminalized women live (Pollack 2008; Richie 2003). Stigmatization because of past actions renders criminalized women vulnerable to social isolation. In addition, as a result of parole stipulations, criminalized women are often forbidden from associating with certain or all people who have a criminal record; this prohibition often limits potential social networks by cutting them off from receiving
and giving support to other similarly situated women (Pollack 2008). Yet at the same time, because they are often under- or unemployed, they frequently depend on family members or friends who themselves may have limited resources, public agencies that have rigid eligibility requirements for services, and/or episodic support from community-based agencies (Richie 2003). An undesirable consequence of having limited access to social support is that criminalized women may turn to crime as a way to cope financially (i.e., via property crime, drug dealing, and prostitution) and emotionally (i.e., via drug use and violence). As such, I include a measure that distinguishes women according to whether they had friends or relatives in the neighborhood who they felt they could turn to if they needed help (coded “1”) or not (coded “0”). Slightly over 40 percent of the women in my sample (N=108) reported at least one month during the calendar in which they did not have anyone whom they could ask for help.

**Stress:** Feelings of intense stress also create situations in which the likelihood of offending increases (Agnew 1992; Slocum et al. 2005). Criminalized populations are particularly likely to not only experience high levels of strain, but they also experience types of strain that Agnew (1992) hypothesizes as highly criminogenic, such as victimization. Suffering from addictions, losing a loved one as a result of violent conflict or drug over-dose, and losing custody of a child are among the types of strains that criminalized populations are more likely to face compared to people living more conventional lifestyles. Using data collected as part of the Baltimore WEV project, Slocum and colleagues (2005) argue that strain can account for changes in women’s offending, even among a group of individuals who are generally high in strain. Indeed, these authors find that changes in strain are associated with changes in violence, drug use, and property crime, and conclude that strain appears to play a key role in offending continuity and change.

To capture whether the women in my sample experience severe stress in a particular month, I measure severe or unusual stressors – as opposed to ordinary or common everyday stressors – in seven areas of women’s lives: financial issues, work, death of someone close, illness, partner problems, children, and other stressors. Women who report feeling severe stress related to any of these areas are coded as “1”, otherwise “0”.
The above-mentioned life events resulted in the women in my sample feeling severely stressed in 61 percent of the calendar months.

*Leisure activities:* It is well known that lifestyles and routine activities are a major source of variation in exposure to crime and victimization (Cohen and Felson 1979; Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo 1978; Osgood et al. 1996). Opportunities for crime are dependent on spatio-temporal differences in the likelihood of targets and offenders meeting in time and space according to their regular or routine activities. When applied to individual offending, routine activities theory predicts that adults’ involvement in crime will increase or decrease as their roles and relationships change their “daily round” of activities so as to present more or fewer opportunities for offending. The most widely used measure of opportunity or exposure to crime in the literature is the number of evening activities spent outside of the home (Cohen and Felson 1979; Meier and Miethe 1993).

I include information from three questions on the WEV survey that are relevant to defining how women spent their time. First, women were asked: “overall, how many evenings a week did you go out for fun and recreation each month, from zero to seven.” Second, women reported how often they went to bars, clubs, and pool halls, and third, how often they hung out with friends in unstructured, unorganized activities. These latter two questions were measured on a scale ranging from 0=never to 3=almost everyday. In order to derive an overall measure of women’s leisure activities, I used a two component solution in a varimax principle components analysis to produce a single index of how women spent their time. Inspection of the communalities and model KMO statistics indicated that this two-component solution was appropriate.

*Offending:* Aside from the contexts in which criminalized women live, the way they spend their time may also be linked to their propensity to commit crime. In light of strong empirical evidence that involvement in some types of criminal behaviour predicts participation in other types of crime, measures of women’s involvement in drug use, drug dealing, and prostitution are also used as controls in the current study when appropriate. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) explain that changes in more proximal “foreground”
priorities, such as those brought on by drug addiction, provoke changes in illegal earnings. Findings that a significant portion of “hard core” drug use is supported by criminal activity corroborate this argument (Jacobs 1999). For example, Uggen and Thompson (2003) find that drug use creates an economic imperative for offending, while Gilfus (1993) reports that criminalized women attribute their continuing motivation for illegal activities to their deepening addiction to drugs. Although some women may use earnings from legitimate jobs to purchase drugs, the majority support their habit with money earned through illegal – usually non-violent – activities, including theft, drug dealing, and prostitution.

Just as drug use can foster an incentive for offending, so too may prostitution provoke other types of lawbreaking. For example, some women report that their sex work is so “disgusting” that they have “to be high to do it” (Gilfus 1993:10). In addition, prostitution often creates conflict-ridden situations in which violence between partners and non-partners is likely. For women with partners, the demands of sex work may be discordant with both partners’ expectations of intimate relationships and, in turn, provoke resentment, jealousy, disapproval and disrespect on the part of male partners (Warr and Pyett 1999). Gilfus (1993) reports that battering episodes occur when male partners feel like punishing women for their work as prostitutes. When drug use, drug dealing, and prostitution serve as controls, binary coding indicating whether they engaged in the criminal activity (1) or did not engage (0) is employed.

Time: It is important to account for the process of maturation in intra-individual analyses. It is possible that effects related to gradual changes in offending are not attributable to the substantive local life circumstances variables. In my analysis, time is measured from one to 36, with 36 representing the most recent month and one representing the most distant month. Time and time-squared are both included as control variables because, as Horney and colleagues (1995:663) argue, “it would be unreasonable to assume that individual time trends are so consistent as to be linear.” With the inclusion of a second-order quadratic function of time, “changes over time in offending are attributed to substantive variables only if offending closely tracks that variable over time. More gradual or diffuse changes are instead attributable to the individual time
trend” (p. 663). Time and time-squared are centered around zero to allow for more stable estimates and to reduce the collinearity between these two variables.

### 3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the sample and data collection for my research. Analysis of the WEV data provides the opportunity to investigate whether and how the lives of criminalized women differ depending on whether they live with children in ways that influence offending behaviour. The first section of this chapter outlined the type of data I need to investigate my research questions. Next, I described how the WEV data enable me to achieve my research goals, while also noting the limits they place on my investigation. I then discussed the important design features of the WEV project, including sampling and interviewing using a life history calendar to record retrospective self-reports over a three year period. I delineated how these design features help and, in some ways, limit my ability to advance what is known about motherhood in the context of criminalized women’s lives. Finally, I outlined how I will analyze the life history calendar data using a multilevel modeling strategy and I defined my key measures.

In the next three chapters, I report my research findings. In chapter four, I examine the relationship between living with children and women’s participation in property crime. In chapter five, I present results relating to the effect of living with children on crimes related to women’s involvement in the drug economy, namely, drug use and drug dealing. Having examined these non-violent forms of offending, I turn to considering women’s use of violence against intimate partners in chapter six. The culmination of these three analyses aims to bring depth and complexity to the meaning and implications of living with children for women’s lawbreaking.
Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics for Static Variables (N=259)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
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<td>.22</td>
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<td>50+</td>
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<td>.06</td>
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<td>.74</td>
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<td>Aboriginal</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment (during calendar period)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never employed</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever employed</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong> (in month prior to incarceration)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earns &lt; $1,250/month</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earns ≥ $1,250/month</td>
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<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Received government assistance</strong> (during calendar period)</td>
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<td>.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Received government assistance</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>.68</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever married</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motherhood status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never a mother</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever a mother</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Committing offence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent crime</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property crime</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug crime</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical violation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crime</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experienced childhood abuse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at first crime</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 This is the woman’s age at the time of her interview. The mean age at the time of the interview was 33.8 (s.d.=9.22).
27 ‘Other crimes’ include impaired driving charges, uttering death threats, obstruction of justice, etc.
28 This measure includes both physical and sexual abuse. Physical abuse includes how often a primary caregiver: threw something at the respondent, twisted her arm or hair, gave her a sprain, bruise, or cut, used a knife or a gun on her, caused her to pass out, punched or hit her, caused her to go to the doctor, choked her, slammed her against a wall, beat her up, slapped her, burned or scalded her, threatened to hit or throw something at her, kicked her. Sexual abuse includes someone showing sex organs to the respondent or she to them, someone fondling or touched her or she them, and/or someone attempting or having intercourse with her or she them. Women were asked if they considered these experiences to be sexual abuse at the time the incidents occurred.
Table 3.2. Descriptive Statistics for Dynamic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Proportion of Months Occurred (sample mean across months)</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample with Change in Circumstances (change status)</th>
<th>Person-months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures of Criminal Offending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property crime</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.36 (92)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.29 (67)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dealing</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.20 (53)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent offending against intimate partner (mutual)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.25 (60)</td>
<td>6165(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent offending against intimate partner (sole)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.16 (39)</td>
<td>6165(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life circumstances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with child(ren)</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.19 (48)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with intimate partner</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.54 (139)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner uses drugs</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.30 (78)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent intimate relationship</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.52 (134)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal income +/-$15,000</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.37 (97)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient housing</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.19 (50)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.20 (51)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.47 (121)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.13 (34)</td>
<td>8249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) There are a smaller number of person-months for the variables measuring women’s use of violence against their intimate partners because women who were not involved in an intimate relationship at any time during the three year calendar period were excluded.
Chapter 4
Mothering and Property Crime

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the results from my analysis of the influence of mothering on criminalized women’s commission of property crime. The specific research question that guides this chapter is: To what extent does living with children alter the likelihood of property offending among criminalized women? As discussed in Chapter 2, several quantitative and qualitative investigations have produced contradictory findings with respect to the effect of mothering on offending, including theft, shoplifting, frauds and forgery (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Giordano et al. 2002; Kreager et al. 2010; Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998; Wakefield and Uggen 2004). Accordingly, my goal in this chapter is to determine which of the following three competing hypotheses best reflects the experiences of criminalized women: (1) children act as a “hook for change” such that criminalized women are less likely to commit property crime in months during which they live with children; (2) children exacerbate financial strains in criminalized women’s lives such that they are more likely to commit property crime in months during which they live with children; or (3) children exert no effect on offending such that living with children is not associated with criminalized women’s perpetration of property crime. By performing a rigorous quantitative test in which I control for many features of criminalized women’s lives that prior qualitative research identifies as relevant to their property offending, this analysis advances what is known about whether and how living with children shapes the offending behaviour of women who are embedded, to varying degrees, in a criminal lifestyle.

I begin this chapter by briefly reviewing the literature that has considered how mothering shapes women’s commission of property crime. Next, I define property crime and provide examples of the range of offences that the women in my sample commit. I proceed by describing the bivariate relationships between the independent variables and property crime. I then present step-wise multilevel models to identify the predictors of intra-individual property offending among criminalized women. These models highlight
the relative contribution of different aspects of women’s lives to their offending,
including living with children, their romantic relationships, their socio-economic context,
and their routines. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings from my
analysis, which I discuss in the context of the discrepant literature on the influence of
motherhood on property offending.

4.2 Literature Review

Before considering how living with children may factor into criminalized women’s
commission of property crime, it is first important to determine the meaning and nature
of this type of offending. Research on shoplifting identifies various offender
classification schemes which are particularly useful for thinking about the motives behind
a range of property-related offences, such as theft, fraud and forgery (Krasnovsky and
Lane 1998). Several typologies have been used to describe different categories of
offenders, including ‘booster’ and ‘snitch’ (Cameron 1964), ‘amateur’, ‘semi-
professional,’ ‘occasional’, ‘impulse’, and ‘episodic’ shoplifters (Moore 1984), and
‘rational’ and ‘nonsensical’ shoplifters (Schleuter, O’Neal, Hickey and Sellers 1989).
Despite the differences that exist between these classification schemes, they are alike in
their agreement that not all property offenders are alike. That is, groups of shoplifters
can be distinguished by their frequency of offending, use of stolen merchandise,
motivation, and attitude. For example, some thieves steal frequently when they perceive
an opportunity to shoplift; others plan shoplifting excursions with the intention of selling
the merchandise they have stolen; and still others steal very infrequently, just to see if
they can get away with it (Moore 1984).

Identifying the different reasons why women engage in property offending is important
for understanding the relationship between mothering and property crime. For example,
if women steal merchandise from stores, use stolen credit cards, write bad checks, or
defraud their employers to sustain themselves and their families economically, it is
reasonable to expect that living with children will intensify the need for money and thus
create more pressure to offend. Abundant research on criminalized women has focused
on their precarious financial situations, which are often compounded by their use of illicit
drugs. This body of scholarship provides support for the argument that criminalized women are primarily motivated to offend for economic gain and sustenance, rather than for thrill-seeking or due to high-impulsivity which causes them to simply react to temptation (Caputo 2008; Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983; Girshick 1999; Richie 1996; 2003).

In their quantitative study of a sample of individuals with an arrest history, Wakefield and Uggen (2004) find that motherhood increased illegal earnings; for women, parenthood was a significant positive predictor of illegal earnings, irrespective of marital or cohabitation status, which the authors attributed to the pressures of care-giving. The findings from qualitative studies also support the notion that the responsibilities of motherhood provide a motivation for women’s economically-based offenses. In her study of women’s involvement in illegal activities, Richie (2003:33) reports that some women engage in illegal activity as “…ways to secure resources, to avoid further deterioration, and to maintain their families,” while Ferraro and Moe (2003:19) find that women’s non-violent offences are “a rational, responsible action taken to meet their children’s needs.” Some of the women in Caputo’s study who specialized in shoplifting reported using shoplifting to earn money for their drugs, and used their legal earnings for other necessities (Caputo 2008).

Conversely, if women’s offending is more frivolous and less central to their economic survival, then living with children might prompt women to stop offending if they worry about being arrested and incarcerated and/or embarrassed by their behaviour. Kreager and colleagues (2010) argue that motherhood has an inhibiting effect on the commission of theft among women in disadvantaged communities. Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) similarly find that the presence of children lowered women’s risk of engaging in activities that generated illegal earnings. Indeed, Uggen and Kruttschnitt report that the presence of children has a large effect on female offenders’ self-reported likelihood of desistance from illegal earnings such that the hazard for women with children is roughly one-half (47%) of the hazard for women without, net of other covariates. This research evidence thus supports the position that children act as a disincentive to offending,
possibly because the threat of being separated from their children alters women’s cost-benefit analysis of offending.

Empirical support for contradictory accounts of the nature of the mothering-offending relationship is likely attributable, at least in part, to notable variation in measures of offending in investigations relating maternal care-giving to women’s commission of income-generating offences. Because the goal of previous investigations has not been to disentangle the relationship between women’s property offending per se as distinct from their economically-motivated crimes more generally, the range of offences included in outcome measures across different studies is understandably broad in scope. A review of the literature reveals that, with the exception of Kreager et al.’s (2010) study that includes an index of six theft offences, other investigations routinely combine property offending with other types of non-violent offending (e.g., drug dealing and prostitution) and occasionally violent offending. For example, the following offences comprise the outcome measures in the studies that inform this research: property crimes, violent crimes, and drug and alcohol use (Giordano et al. 2002); theft/shoplifting, fraudulent schemes, prostitution, and other minor crimes (Griffin and Armstrong 2003); and illegal earnings, with an emphasis on economic crimes like burglary, theft, and robbery (Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998; Wakefield and Uggen 2004). Other qualitative studies do not specify what crimes are captured in such general measures as “illegal activities” (Richie 2003) and “criminal activity” (Ferraro and Moe 2003).

As the foregoing discussion suggests, the small body of literature that is best poised to offer insight into the role of mothering in women’s property offending is thus hampered in its ability to do so because of inadequate attention to the diverse motives driving women’s offending as well as inconsistent definitions of property crime. Based on the existing scholarship, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about the nature and direction of the mothering-offending relationship.
4.3 Defining Property Crime

As defined in Chapter 3, property crime in this analysis encompasses five different types of offences – theft, auto theft, burglary, fraud, and forgery. Overall, more than half of the women in my sample (N=146; 56 percent) reported committing some form of property crime during the three year calendar period. Of those who said they committed property crimes, women were most likely to report committing theft (N=105; 72 percent), followed by forgery (N=53; 36 percent), fraud (N=45; 31 percent), burglary (N=36; 25 percent), and auto theft (N=19; 13 percent).²⁹

Theft and auto theft comprise the most and least common forms of property offending, respectively. Theft includes such activities as “stealing from a till or cash register, shoplifting, pick-pocketing, or taking something from someone without using force or threat of force.” Women in my sample reported shoplifting a range of items such as cheese, meat, seafood, razors, toothbrushes, Tylenol, Pampers, bed sheets, and clothing, which they either used themselves and/or sold at reduced cost to individuals or small retail businesses. Among the 105 women who reported committing theft during any of the 36 calendar months, the average number of months they engaged in this type of offending was 18.

Auto theft is defined as “stealing any cars, trucks, or motorcycles.” Women and their accomplices reported stealing cars and car parts (e.g., stereos) to sell or, very occasionally, to use themselves. Of the 19 women who reported engaging in auto theft, 13 of them did so in only one of the 36 calendar months.

Aside from theft, forgery and fraud were the next most common forms of property offending. Incidents in which women “use a stolen or bad credit card or pass a bad check” are counted as forgery. For example, one woman explained her scheme by saying: “I used to have someone steal cheques for me and I would go into the bank and write a cheque for under $500. They [tellers] don’t check the signature if the amount is under

²⁹ The number of women who commit the specific offences of theft, forgery, fraud, burglary, and auto theft is greater that the total number of women who report committing any property crime because women may engage in more than one type of offending.
$500” (ID 138). Other women reported making and/or stealing credit cards and using them to purchase goods for themselves.

Fraudulent schemes are categorized as “swindles or illegal cons of a person, business, or the government.” One woman in my sample conned members of the public under the pretense of collecting money for various charities; she would stand on the street and ask people to sponsor her on a pledge sheet, but would keep the money for herself. She explained: “I’m a quick talker and I can pretty much get what I want if I want it” (ID 155). A popular scheme for defrauding businesses involved stealing products and then returning them for a cash refund. Typical examples of government fraud included collecting welfare money despite being ineligible. One woman reported that she “…went onto aid legally because my husband and I separated, but I failed to tell them that we got back together and I continued to receive the cheque” (ID 132). Similarly, another woman collected $8,000 in unemployment insurance from the government despite the fact that she was working (ID 304). Of the women who committed forgeries and frauds, they engaged in this type of lawbreaking in an average of 11 and 12 months, respectively. In other words, as is the case with theft, women are not just more likely to commit these types of property crimes during the calendar period, but are also more likely to commit them often, compared to burglary and auto theft.

Burglary is defined as “breaking into a house, a car, or a business in order to take something.” For example, one woman reported committing burglaries during the summer months: “If your screen door was open, I was getting in. I would see people sitting on their couch watching t.v. and I would be upstairs ripping off their stuff” (ID 197). The acquisition of cheque books, among other possessions, was a common motivation for burglaries. Woman also reported breaking into stores to steal cartons of cigarettes, scratch tickets, bus tickets, and phone cards. Of the 36 women in my sample who committed at least one burglary, the average number of months they engaged in this type of offending was six.

My decision to aggregate these property crimes into a single measure, as opposed to performing five separate analyses on each type of crime, is two-fold.
First, the main goal of this dissertation is to present a comprehensive coverage of different categories of offending in order to compare the influence of mothering across, rather than within, broad categories of crime. The offences I include in my measure of property crime are similar to one another, and distinct from the types of offending I consider in subsequent chapters, to the extent that they involve the non-violent acquisition of money or property without offering anything in exchange (e.g., sex, drugs). The second reason for using a combined measure of property crime is that there is no strong indication that women specialize in a particular type of property offending. Indeed, roughly 43 percent (N=63) of women who committed any property crime reported committing two or more types of property offences during the calendar period.

4.4 Bivariate Associations between Property Crime, Mothering, and Other Life Circumstances

To determine if mothering is associated with criminalized women’s property offending, I turn to bivariate analysis. In addition to examining the bivariate association between my main independent variable – living with children – and the dependent variable – property crime – I also examine the associations between property crime and other variables included in my multivariate analyses as controls. When interpreting these bivariate relationships, it is important to remember that because my unit of analysis is a woman-month, rather than a woman, my sample size is sufficiently large (N=8249) that even substantively weak relationships will be statistically significant. I provide the results of this preliminary examination in a correlation matrix in Table 4.1.

Examining my key independent variable, the results demonstrate that living with children is related to property offending. Absent the inclusion of controls, criminalized women are significantly less likely to commit property crime in months during which they live with children. Living with children thus appears to have a pro-social effect on criminalized women’s propensity to commit property crime, though the magnitude of the association is quite small (-.071).
As expected, I also find significant positive relationships between property crime and several features of criminalized women’s life circumstances. More specifically, women are more likely to commit property crime in months in which they live with an intimate partner, are involved with a drug-addicted partner, live in transient housing, experience severe stress, abuse drugs, and in months nearer the end of the three-year calendar period. Most of these significant relationships are not strong, however, with the magnitude of the correlations ranging in size from -.022 to .384. Nevertheless, the findings that (1) drug use is a strong correlate of property offending, (2) romantic partners increase the likelihood that women will participate in property crime, and (3) features of disadvantaged contexts, such as transient living arrangements and severe stressors, co-vary with property offending corroborate the prior research (Daly 1998; Gilfus 1993; Richie 1996; 2003; Uggen and Thompson 2003).

While the above-mentioned life circumstances are all positively associated with the likelihood of committing property crime, earning an income greater than $1,250 per month and knowing someone in the neighborhood to turn to for help are negatively related to criminalized women’s property offending. At the bivariate level, only two variables – involvement in a violent intimate relationship and leisure activities – are not significantly correlated with property offending.

### 4.5 Multivariate Analysis: Models Predicting the Odds of Property Offending

A series of multilevel models isolates the effect of living with children on property offending among criminalized women. The Control Variables Model omits the measure of living with children, and illustrates the effects on intra-individual property offending patterns of all of the control variables, including those relating to women’s relationships with intimate partners, the socio-economic conditions women face, and women’s activity patterns or the ways they spend their leisure time. Time is also included as a control variable in each model to account for possible maturation over the three year calendar period. The Control Variables Model thus reveals the effect of each of the control variables on the dependent variable.
In Model 1, I include only two variables – living with children and time – in order to determine the baseline effect of mothering on property crime. Model 2 incorporates the effect of intimate relationships on property crime, while Model 3 includes dimensions of the socio-economic context in which women live. The types of activities in which women engage – both non-criminal and criminal – are included in Model 4. Models 1 thru 4 thus reveal the contribution of various dimensions of criminalized women’s lives to their property offending.

Models 4 and 5 represent variations of the full model. The key difference between these models is the omission of women’s drug use from the latter to ensure that the model is not “over-controlled” as a result of including one type of crime to predict another type of crime. Because using drugs is highly predictive of perpetrating property crime (Uggen and Thompson 2003), it is possible that drug use will absorb much of the explanatory power in Model 4, thereby overshadowing the effects of non-crime predictors of property offending. Model 5 permits me to ascertain whether the inclusion of women’s drug use dominates the model in a way that obscures the predictive capacity of other control variables. The results of these six step-wise regressions are provided in Table 4.2.

Performing a staged analysis allows me to assess the multiple ways that living with children may matter for criminalized women’s property offending. More specifically, I can decipher both the direct effects of mothering on property crime, as well as whether and how mothering works indirectly through other variables to predict women’s involvement in property crime. The findings presented below are all based on unit-specific models with robust standard errors. This was necessary because some of my property crime models include random effects for time and/or whether or not women have someone to turn to for help and support. While recent multilevel analyses of criminalized women’s offending have relied on Laplace models (e.g., Slocum et al. 2005; Griffin and Armstrong 2003), these studies have not included random effects. The inclusion of random effects in my models prevents Laplace models from converging, likely because random effects are computationally demanding. In order to maintain consistency for the purposes of comparing across the six step-wise models, I present the robust results for all models.
**Control Variable Model:** In this model, I regress property offending on all of the control variables. The results of the Control Variable Model indicate that many of the variables that were significantly associated with property offending at the bivariate level are no longer significant upon the inclusion of other controls. In fact, only drug use and time are significantly related to property offending.

As expected, drug use is a strong and highly significant predictor of property offending. The odds ratios provided in the Control Variables Model of Table 4.2 show that using drugs increases the odds of property offending by 9.9 times. In other words, criminalized women are far more likely to commit property crime in months in which they use illicit drugs compared to months in which they do not.

Time also significantly predicts women’s involvement in property crime. This means that, on the whole, women increase their property offending over the course of the three year calendar period. However, the significant random coefficient for time indicates that women’s property offending pathways differ over time; while some women increase their offending over the three year period, others decrease or offend at a stable rate. As such, assuming a fixed or average effect of time on property crime for all women will produce inaccurate results.

**Model 1:** Model 1 focuses on the effect of the main independent variable of interest – living with children – on the propensity for criminalized women to commit property crime. That is, Model 1 measures the effect of living with children on property offending, without controlling for other life circumstances included in later models. The results indicate that, controlling for time, living with children is significantly related to the likelihood that women will refrain from property crime. As was the case in the Control Variables Model, a random time effect is also positively associated with property

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30 Time exhibits a linear trend in the property crime models. For each of the models presented in this chapter, I also test whether there is a non-linear quadratic relationship between time and property offending. However, the variable measuring Time² is insignificant in all of the property crime models and is thus omitted for the sake of parsimony.

31 The variable measuring social support also has a significant random effect (p < .05). While including a random effects coefficient does not change the substantive meaning of the findings, it is statistically good practice.
offending, meaning that, on the whole, women are more likely to commit property crime later in the calendar period than they are earlier in the calendar period, though this pattern does not hold for all women.

**Model 2**: Model 2 incorporates measures of women’s intimate relationships, including whether they live with an intimate partner, whether they are involved with a drug-addicted partner, and whether their intimate relationship is violent. The results of this model indicate that although involvement in a violent relationship roughly doubles the odds that women will commit property crime, the relationship between living with children and property crime remains largely unchanged. Indeed, with the inclusion of relationship variables, women are still significantly less likely to commit property crime in months in which they reside with children. Neither living with an intimate partner nor involvement with a drug-using partner predicts criminalized women’s property offending, though a random effect of time remains significant.

**Model 3**: Measures of the social and economic conditions that circumscribe women’s lives are included in Model 3. Somewhat surprisingly, none of these features of the contexts in which criminalized women live are significantly related to their property offending. That is, earning more than $1,250 per month via legal employment, living in transient housing, having people to whom they can turn for help, or experiencing severe stress, do not predict the likelihood that women will engage in property crime.\(^{32}\) Conversely, living with children, involvement in a violent relationship, and time continue to influence property crime: living with children reduces the likelihood of property offending, while a violent intimate partner relationship increases the odds of offending. Once again, the addition of control variables does not substantially modify the relationship between living with children and property offending.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{32}\) To ensure that my results are not an artifact of the specific monthly income cut-off I employ, I ran Model 3 using four different cut-offs. In addition to running models using a $1,250 monthly (or $15,000 yearly) cut-off, I also ran models using the following income measures: $833 monthly (or $10,000 yearly), $2,083 monthly (or $25,000 yearly), and $2,917 monthly (or $35,000 yearly). This more rigorous test of income does not alter the pattern of results; none of these income measures are significantly related to criminalized women’s property offending.

\(^{33}\) Measures of legal income and employment cannot both be included in the property crime model due to multicollinearity. However, while earning a legal income and being legally employed are closely related phenomena, they nevertheless differ from one another to the extent that income captures women’s ability to
Model 4: Model 4 includes the various activities in which women engage and represents the full model. An index captures women’s leisure activities, including the number of evenings they spent out per week for fun and recreation, how often they hung out with friends, and how often they went to bars, clubs, and pool halls. Another measure depicts how criminalized women spent their time according to whether or not they engaged in regular (i.e., weekly or daily) drug use. While the more traditional measures of routine activities are not significantly related to women’s property offending, there is a strong and positive relationship between drug use and property offending. Similar to the Control Variables Model, women are significantly more likely to commit property crime in months in which they used drugs compared to months in which they did not. Drug use thus emerges as the strongest predictor of property offending for criminalized women. Also consistent with previous models, living with children and time predict property offending, though involvement in a violent intimate relationship is no longer significant in the full model. Living with children continues to influence criminalized women’s property offending, then, over-and-above their drug use.

I performed additional tests and employed alternative model specifications to examine the consistency and validity of the reported effects of living with children on property offending in Model 4. In addition to using four different income cut-offs and substituting employment for income as previously discussed, I also tested for both multicollinearity and interaction effects in models not shown. Inspection of both tolerance levels and variance inflation factors of the variables included in these models indicated that the variance inflation factors were well below accepted thresholds. Moreover, no interaction effects were found between living with children and drug use or time. These

afford material goods, whereas having a job represents a stake in conformity and is accompanied by responsibilities and structure. In other words, women in my sample who are coded “0” on income because they do not have a job (and receive no or very little money from government social assistance) may differ in important ways from women who are coded “0” on income because they earn an income less than $1,250 a month from their job. Accordingly, I re-estimated Models 3, 4, and 5 by replacing women’s legal income with a measure of whether or not they were legally employed. Under this different model specification, the pattern of results remains unchanged. Legal employment is not a significant predictor of criminalized women’s property offending in my models.

34 The lowest tolerance value in the property crime model is .738 and the highest variance inflation factor (VIF) value is 1.356. These values conform to the accepted thresholds for both tolerance and VIF, for which values below .20 and above 4.0, respectively, are problematic.
additional statistical tests and re-specifications of the models predicting property crime confirm that the results provided in this analysis are robust.

Model 5: The pattern of results in Model 5 conforms to that presented in Model 4, whereby living with children and time are significantly related to criminalized women’s property offending. Comparing Models 4 and 5 is useful because it reveals that while drug use exerts a strong effect on property offending, it does not quash other predictors. As such, it is appropriate to treat Model 4, which includes women’s drug use, as the final model for the purposes of interpretation and discussion.

Summary of Models: Despite the inclusion of theoretically relevant control variables, the negative relationship between living with children vis. a vis. property offending remains significant. The effect of living with children on offending varies marginally between the models. Taken together, these findings demonstrate convincingly that, among the criminalized women in my sample, living with children reduces the odds of committing such crimes as theft, auto theft, forgery, fraud, and burglary.

Drug use and time are two other variables that are consistently related to increased property offending across my models. A measure of whether women’s intimate relationships are violent, while significant in Models 2 and 3, ultimately does not reach significance in the Model 4, the final model. There is no evidence of either mediation or suppression effects in these models; the effects of living with children, drug use, and time appear to exert a direct influence on women’s property offending.

4.6 Discussion

The results presented in this chapter indicate that mothering is associated with significant reductions in property offending among a sample of criminalized women. These reductions persist when controlling for women’s relationships, socio-economic contexts, and leisure pursuits. Indeed, being enmeshed in life circumstances that include living with partners who may be abusive or drug-addicted, suffering from social and economic deficits, and engaging in criminal and non-criminal activities does not undermine the pro-social role of mothering in criminalized women’s lives. I now discuss this finding – that
women’s property offending is modified by living with children, as well as by drug use and the passage of time – in the context of the literature on the relationship between mothering and property offending.

Consistent with my first hypothesis, women reduce their property offending below their own baseline level in months in which they live with children. By employing a comprehensive measure composed exclusively of property offences, this finding represents an important step towards clarifying the mothering-property crime relationship. Specifically, I am able to conclude more definitively than much of the extant literature that living with children produces significant reductions in criminalized women’s involvement in theft, auto theft, forgery, fraud, and burglary. My results correspond with Kreager et al.’s (2010) analysis of women’s theft and burglary (including theft of $5 or less, theft $10-$50, theft $50-$100, theft of $100 or more, burglary/theft from a vehicle, and receive/possess/sell stolen property) which reveals that motherhood reduces these types of offences.

My findings also clarify the empirical picture regarding how motherhood shapes the likelihood of property offending in the lives of women who are comparatively deeply embedded within a criminal lifestyle. This represents an important contribution because some question has been raised about whether a “motherhood effect” might be restricted to women who are not entrenched in drug use and criminality. For example, Kreager et al. (2010) question whether their finding that motherhood exerts an inhibitory effect on property offending among a sample of women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods will hold among samples of women “at severe risk of institutionalization” (Kreager et al. 2010). Likewise, Giordano et al. (2002) speculate that their failure to find quantitative evidence of a motherhood effect relates to their focus on a sample of early-starting delinquents with a significant history of conduct problems. Because the samples with which the motherhood-offending relationship has been investigated have been comprised of groups of inmates or former inmates (Giordano et al. 2002; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Richie 2003; Wakefield and Uggen 2004), probationers (Griffin and Armstrong 2003), women in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Kreager et al. 2010), welfare recipients, hard-core drug users, recently released ex-offenders, and youth drop outs (Uggen and
Kruttschnitt 1998), among others, it is unclear how the relationship between mothering and property offending differs among specific groups of women.

The results of this analysis reveal that, despite their criminalized status and lifestyles, women alter their criminal behaviour when they are mothering; living with children is an important force driving month-to-month changes in criminalized women’s property offending. The criminal activities in which women may have previously engaged, then, do not render them beyond the influence of their mothering responsibilities.

In addition to addressing the two above-mentioned empirical gaps in the literature, my analysis also raises questions about a mechanism that is considered to be central to criminalized mother’s property offending, namely economic need. As discussed previously, a theme that emerges in interviews with criminalized women is that children intensify their economic burden, and financial strain acts as a precursor to their property offending (Caputo 2008; Richie 2003). Counter to the second hypothesis outlined at the outset of this chapter, however, my results show that women are not more likely to commit property crime in months during which they live with children. Moreover, women’s income does not predict property offending. To better understand why women’s socio-economic context does not matter more for their property offending, I draw upon direct accounts from women about their offending experiences to argue that future research should consider a broader range of motivations – beyond basic sustenance – for committing property crime.35

Competing explanations for how children shape the mothering-offending relationship may be premised upon different interpretations of – or assumptions about – why criminalized women engage in property crime. Prior research has shown that property offenders differ according to their commitment to financial earnings through crime: while professional thieves steal in order to sell their loot and thereby generate income,

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35 The examples and quotations presented below are not based on a systematic analysis of women’s reports of their property offending. In fact, narrative information about property crime was not collected from women during the WEV interview. Any statements made by respondents in which they link their experiences as mothers to their property offending were offered spontaneously. Interviewers encouraged women to elaborate on topics that were not necessarily central to the WEV original research goals, but that appeared to hold particular significance for the respondents. As such, the examples and quotes provided in this section are intended for illustrative purposes only.
nonprofessional thieves typically steal for their own consumption or to give away merchandise to others (Caputo 2008). As such, it is reasonable to expect that living with children might increase women’s offending if it is intended to help mothers survive in situations of extreme poverty, but living with children might decrease women’s offending if their main reason for committing crime is to obtain personal luxuries while saving money for some other purpose.

Anecdotal evidence from my sample suggests that some women do offend in order to provide essential items for themselves and their children. For example, a mother of four explained that her husband gave her a meager one hundred dollars a month for the family’s food and necessities and he would beat her if she asked for more money. To avoid abuse, she turned to theft, stealing the more expensive grocery items (e.g., deli meats and cheese) and purchasing the remaining items with her grocery budget (ID 132). Another respondent reported that she collected welfare money illegally when she continued to accept a cheque for herself and her daughter while she was living with her boyfriend, because her boyfriend (who was also the child’s father) was not giving her any money (ID 144). These accounts substantiate findings from previous scholarship showing that economic need motivates some women to commit property crime (Daly 1998; Girshick 1999; Miller 1986).

In addition to basic sustenance motivations, however, the women in my sample also articulated less imperative reasons for their property offences, including self-indulgence, convenience, and habit. For example, one woman reported that she stole food and clothing when she needed it. She elaborated: “I had to get through the month somehow. When you borrow money you have to pay it back…Then Christmas came along and I had to get gifts for other people. I got something for my son, I stole him a Point Zero jacket” (ID 313). Another woman reported that she committed theft for her kids so she could “spoil them and make sure they have everything they want” (ID 229). Habit is another reason that one woman reported stealing: “I steal from stores everyday. I have a hard time paying for things now, I’m so used to stealing. It’s pretty bad” (ID 113). In other words, while evidence from my interviews does not dispute the fact that low economic status sometimes motivates women’s property offending, economic desperation does not
appear to be the sole reason that women offend. For some women, money and goods acquired via property crime are a supplementary resource, rather than a means of sheer survival.

To the extent this is true, month-to-month changes in property offending may be linked to living with children in part due to women’s decision to stop committing crime for non-urgent reasons. It is reasonable to expect that women may be more inclined to cease offending during months in which they live with children; if they don’t need the goods/money, women may attempt to avoid the risk of separation from children due to incarceration and/or to avoid the embarrassment of children learning that their mothers are criminals. For example, one mother prioritized maintaining contact with her children over her property offending when she explained: “I won’t shoplift … because I don’t want to be in jail and away from my family…” (ID 132). The quotations presented above certainly demonstrate that some women do continue their pattern of property offending when they live with children, though this trend does not necessarily represent the aggregate. While my data prevent me from fully addressing this issue in my study, investigating the diverse reasons that women commit property crime warrants further analysis in order to better understand the mechanisms underlying patterns of women’s property offending.

In contrast to the contested literature in which I locate my finding that living with children decreases women’s property offending, there is wide consensus that drug use is associated with increased property offending (Anglin and Hser 1987; Inciardi 1979; Uggen and Thompson 2003). Comments from women in my sample which link their need for money to their need for drugs supports Uggen and Thompson’s (2003:151) assertion that drug use “creates an earnings imperative.” For example, one woman explained: “When we [she and her intimate partner] started using we had the drug use under control…until we ran out of money and we couldn’t pay the bills. Then reality kicked in. When I ran out of money, I started to steal” (ID 161). Another woman reported that “money would cause me a lot of stress because if I had drugs and money I had friends, but if I don’t have money, I don’t have drugs and I don’t have friends” (ID
Regular drug use thus emerges as a powerful predictor of property offending among the criminalized women in my sample.

Time is the final variable that consistently predicts property offending in my analysis. The relationship between time and property offending is characterized as positive, linear, and random. On the whole, then, women are more likely to commit property crime as time passes during the three-year calendar period. This upward trend may be an artifact of how the data were collected. More specifically, because women were asked to retrospectively report events that occurred during the previous three years of their lives, they may recall more easily the crimes they committed most recently in time (i.e., nearer the end of the calendar period). Another plausible explanation is that, because by design all women are incarcerated at the end of the calendar period, women’s lives may be unraveling over the calendar period and they may be engaging in more activities for which they may be incarcerated. However, it is important to note that time operates randomly among this sample, such that there is not a singular pattern that fits all women regarding the time-property offending relationship.

4.7 Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter focused on whether living with children affects the odds of property offending in the short-term among a sample of criminalized women. I have demonstrated that mothering is, in fact, a salient feature of criminalized women’s abstinence from property offending, controlling for their relationships, socio-economic contexts, and leisure activities. By demonstrating that living with children is significantly related to decreases in property crimes – as distinct from other forms of illegal income-generating activities – and that this relationship holds among a group of women who are relatively embedded in a criminal lifestyle, my results advance what is known about the role of mothering in women’s lawbreaking. The findings presented in this chapter also raise questions for future research about the association between low socio-economic status and various motivations for committing theft, auto theft, forgery, fraud, and burglary. Bringing the relationship between mothering and property offending among a sample of criminalized women to the forefront of investigation thus reveals similarities
and differences in previous work on the role of motherhood in women’s lawbreaking. It also highlights how different measures of property offending and an over-reliance on a single motivation as an explanation for why women commit property crime may account for the existence of contradictory research results on mothering-property offending relationship.

The results presented in this chapter also confirm that drug use is a strong and positive predictor of property offending among the women in my sample. As a large body of literature demonstrates, drug use significantly increases the likelihood that women will engage in property offending. Likewise, there is a positive relationship between property offending and time, though time does not exert a uniform effect on women’s offending behaviour.

I turn now to Chapter 5 in which I examine the effect of mothering on other types of offending. In particular, I analyze how living with children shapes the separate, but related, offences of drug use and drug dealing.
Table 4.1: Bivariate Relationships between Property Offending, Living with Children, and Control Variables (N=8249 woman-months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Property offending</th>
<th>Lives with children</th>
<th>Lives with intimate partner</th>
<th>Drug-using partner</th>
<th>Violent intimate relationship</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Transient housing</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Drug Use</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Time_2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property offending</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with children</td>
<td>-.071**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with intimate partner</td>
<td>.094**</td>
<td>.125**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-using partner</td>
<td>.194**</td>
<td>-.084**</td>
<td>.286**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent intimate relationship</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-.028*</td>
<td>.069**</td>
<td>.101**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.087**</td>
<td>.213**</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.064**</td>
<td>-.023*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient housing</td>
<td>.110**</td>
<td>-.221**</td>
<td>-.134**</td>
<td>.072**</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.126**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>-.077**</td>
<td>.120**</td>
<td>-.066**</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.044**</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.081**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
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<td>.040**</td>
<td>.192**</td>
<td>.062**</td>
<td>-.083**</td>
<td>.075**</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>-.165**</td>
<td>-.133**</td>
<td>.043**</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.156**</td>
<td>.136**</td>
<td>-.023*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>.355**</td>
<td>-.219**</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.384**</td>
<td>.041**</td>
<td>-.133**</td>
<td>.275**</td>
<td>-.053**</td>
<td>.094**</td>
<td>.172**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>.038**</td>
<td>-.023*</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.034**</td>
<td>-.063**</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.070**</td>
<td>-.028*</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time_2</td>
<td>.024*</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>-.022*</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.040**</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.043**</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.124**</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01
Table 4.2: Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Property Offending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
<td>e^B</td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
<td>e^B</td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with child(ren)</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>-1.852** (.686)</td>
<td>-1.798** (.614)</td>
<td>-1.595** (.580)</td>
<td>-1.524** (.569)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with partner</td>
<td>.533 (.414)</td>
<td>.387 (1.47)</td>
<td>.290 (1.34)</td>
<td>.455 (1.58)</td>
<td>.273 (1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-using partner</td>
<td>.078 (.617)</td>
<td>.451 (1.57)</td>
<td>.431 (1.54)</td>
<td>.039 (1.04)</td>
<td>.375 (1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Intimate Relationship</td>
<td>.484 (.299)</td>
<td>.675* (1.96)</td>
<td>.624* (1.87)</td>
<td>.582* (1.79)</td>
<td>.617* (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.234 (.599)</td>
<td>-.337 (.71)</td>
<td>-.337 (.71)</td>
<td>-.176 (.84)</td>
<td>-.323 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient housing</td>
<td>.325 (.409)</td>
<td>1.001 (2.72)</td>
<td>.111 (1.12)</td>
<td>.788 (2.20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>-.763 (.725)</td>
<td>-1.180+ (.719)</td>
<td>-.657 (.52)</td>
<td>-1.339+ (.725)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>.367 (.371)</td>
<td>.200 (1.22)</td>
<td>.345 (1.41)</td>
<td>.280 (1.32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index: Routine activities</td>
<td>.525 (.545)</td>
<td>- (1.180)</td>
<td>.534 (1.71)</td>
<td>.727 (2.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>2.291*** (.648)</td>
<td>- (2.253)</td>
<td>2.253*** (.665)</td>
<td>- (2.253)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>.037** (.013)</td>
<td>.043** (.014)</td>
<td>.042** (.014)</td>
<td>.041** (.013)</td>
<td>.035** (.013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ p ≤ .10, * p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001
Table 4.2a: Random Coefficients in Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Property Offending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Control Variables</td>
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<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help</td>
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<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>0.02634</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>0.02668</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>0.02697</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 4</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>0.02579</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help</td>
<td>10.11854</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 5</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>0.02775</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001
Chapter 5
Mothering and Drug Crimes

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the results from my analysis of the influence of mothering on criminalized women’s involvement in two types of drug offences: drug use and drug dealing. Evidence suggests that drug use is a relatively fluid activity, as opposed to a static or permanent habit, and that shifts in dependency patterns are not unusual among drug users (Boyd and Faith 1999; Erickson et al. 2000). To date, the body of scholarship focusing on maternal drug use has tended to emphasize its negative consequences for children (e.g. Kelley 1992). Much less attention has been devoted to considering whether mothering prompts women to move along a continuum from drug use towards abstinence, or vice versa. Similarly, the comparatively limited scholarship examining women’s involvement as drug dealers pays scant attention to the mothering-offending relationship. Accordingly, the question that guides this chapter is whether and to what extent living with children affects women’s commission of drug offences. By determining the nature of the relationship between women’s experiences of mothering and drug use and drug dealing, respectively, this analysis will allow me to build upon the findings from the previous chapter on mothering and property crime to assess whether mothering exerts a similar effect across all types of offending, or, conversely, whether its effects are offence-specific.

The division of this chapter is similar to that in Chapter 4. I begin by briefly reviewing the literature that has considered how mothering shapes women’s involvement as drug users and drug dealers. I then define the offending behaviour encompassed within my measures of drug use and drug dealing. To illustrate my discussion, I include specific examples of the offences in which the women in my sample engage. Next, I describe the bivariate relationships between the independent variables and drug use and drug dealing, focusing particular attention on the relationship between these offences and the main independent variable – living with children. I then present step-wise multilevel models to identify the relative contribution of different aspects of criminalized women’s lives to intra-individual change in their drug use and drug dealing. To conclude, I discuss the
main findings from my analysis in the context of the literature on mothering and the drug economy.

5.2 Literature Review

The literature on women’s involvement in the illicit drug economy suggests that mothering is likely to be related in complex and at times contradictory ways to drug use and drug dealing. Indeed, because different mechanisms typically drive women’s drug use and drug dealing activities, it is possible that mothering will exert a different effect on women’s month-to-month participation in these crimes. As I will discuss in more detail below, women’s drug use tends to be driven by the need to relieve emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical pain, whereas their drug dealing is more likely to be motivated by the need for income to support themselves and their families (Boyd 1999; Morgan and Joe 1996; 1997; Richie 1996). As such, while it is not the case that a binary distinction exists between women who use and deal drugs, it is nevertheless appropriate to distinguish between these two types of offences when considering their relationship to mothering.

The drug use as ‘self-medication’ hypothesis is a primary explanation for women’s consumption of illicit drugs (Anglin and Hser 1987; Elizabeth Fry Society 1994; Inciardi et al. 1993; Maher and Curtis 1992; Pollack 2002). According to this perspective, women use drugs as a coping mechanism, often in response to childhood victimization and abusive domestic relationships. In order to deal with situational and/or psychological problems and stresses, women turn to drugs to “numb the pain” (Richie 1996:123). For example, Caputo (2008) explains that the intentional and unintentional harms to which the drug-addicted women in her study were subjected during childhood triggered numerous reactions, including the internalization of abuse manifested in blame and self-harm. Notably, the drug and alcohol use to which these women were exposed early on in life became an “emotional crutch” for them (Caputo 2008:66). The battered women in Richie’s (1996:124) study described their drug use as a desperate attempt to establish a deeper connection with their intimate partners and to create emotional intimacy with their
abusers, while others attributed their drug use more directly to being battered and needing to relieve the pain of bruises and broken bones.

Such findings about the connection between victimization and substance use have unquestionably played a key role in unraveling women’s pathway(s) into the drug lifestyle, including their involvement in prostitution. However, Maher (1996:11) comments that a down-side of the tendency to locate women drug users within a familiar and sympathetic discourse of victimization is that it tends to preclude a broader examination of their condition. For example, in addition to detailing women’s entry into drug use, it is also important to consider how their offending trajectories may be influenced by changes in the life course, such as being responsible for the care of children.

Research on criminalized women’s own assessments of their drug use in the context of mothering suggests that the presence of children may have opposing effects. A theme that emerges from qualitative investigations is that incarcerated women often report that they will attempt to stop abusing drugs for the sake of their children. For example, Moe’s (2006) semi-structured life-history interviews with 30 incarcerated women reveal that criminalized women’s motivations for trying to stop using drugs were “almost universal and quite specific – concern for their future health and the welfare of their children” (p. 347). Likewise, a common sentiment expressed by the incarcerated mothers in Greene et al.’s (2000) study was that they wanted to be present and function as effective parents for their children, to stay away from drugs, and to avoid involvement with the people with whom they associated before they were incarcerated. Sensing their role as mothers – either psychologically or actually – may be in jeopardy as a result of their substance use,

36 Research documents the often strong connections between the drug use and prostitution (Anglin and Hser 1987; Boyd and Faith 1999; Erickson et al. 2000; Maher 1997; Romero-Daza et al. 2003; Sharpe 2005; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan 1996). In order to support their drug habit, women may engage in low-level sex-trade work in which they exchange sex for money or drugs in street-based settings (i.e., in cars, hotels, back alleys, etc.). Moreover, studies of criminalized women who engage in prostitution report that women use drugs to detach themselves from sex work. Despite the interconnections between prostitution and drug use, however, I do not investigate the relationship between mothering and prostitution in this study. Unfortunately, because very few women in my sample prostitute in months in which they also live with children (i.e., N=4), I cannot be confident in the results of statistical models measuring the mothering-prostitution relationship.
many women report reassessing their drug use and attempting to get “out of the life” (Rosenbaum 1979).

Though the fear of losing children may motivate some women to stop using drugs, many criminalized women do not desist from drug use (Baker and Carson 1999; Kearney et al. 1994). Despite knowing that drug use potentially exposes their children to a harmful lifestyle, many women are either unable or unwilling to break their cycle of addiction (Moe 2006). Among this population in particular, fear of losing children upon revealing addiction may pose a major obstacle to seeking treatment (Powis et al. 2000; Roberts 2007).

Unlike drug use, women’s involvement in drug dealing is often motivated by their need to find alternative ways of making money in the face of economic factors such as cutbacks in housing and welfare assistance (Boyd 2006). Earnings from drug selling are likely to surpass what criminalized women could expect from the legitimate, low-skilled, minimum wage jobs that are typically available to them. In this context, women may make a ‘rational’ choice to enter the drug market (Reuter et al. 1990). Drug dealing might be the most realistic means by which women can maintain their standard of living, or possibly provide a route to upward mobility, though this is less likely given that women typically occupy the lowest rungs of the drug economy (Maher 1997). For example, Boyd’s (1999) study of mothers who use illegal drugs in Canada revealed that women saw drug dealing as the most viable option for earning money to supplement inadequate incomes. Some women also engage in drug dealing as a means of sustaining their drug habit.

Research has examined the range of female roles and experiences in the drug economy, but mothering has not emerged as a key theme (Maher and Hudson 2007). There is, however, some mention of women’s familial responsibilities and their efforts to capitalize on gender stereotypes. For example, some studies have documented women’s capacity to juggle multiple roles, including the care of, and responsibility for, children, as well as “taking care of business” (Dunlap and Johnson 1996; Morgan and Joe 1996; Sterk 1999). Based on interviews with women in the illicit methamphetamine economy in three US
communities, Morgan and Joe (1996:139) conclude that “women would simultaneously experience lives as ‘citizens’ – that is, as good wives and mothers – as well as ‘outlaws’ – as users and sellers of illicit drugs.” One respondent in Morgan and Joe’s (1996) study reported that “…with my kids I have to sneak around and do what I’m doing without me taking too much time. So I have to do a little each day…I try to put what’s important first. Kids eat first and do homework first. But this [drug dealing] runs a real close second. I deal an hour or two each evening.” Similarly, Jacobs and Miller (1998) documented women dealers going to great lengths to present an image of the routine and everyday, including using their children in order to normalize their activities and to provide a screen for their drug dealing.

Though some of the comparatively sparse literature on the relationship between mothering and drug dealing suggests that these two activities are compatible, other researchers suggest otherwise. For example, Griffin and Armstrong’s (2003) analysis reveals that the presence of children in the home significantly decreases the probability of women’s drug-dealing by 35 percent. The discrepancy between Griffin and Armstrong’s (2003) results and the findings from other research may be attributable to different samples. More specifically, Griffin and Armstrong’s (2003) sample is comprised of women offenders who presented themselves for drug treatment and who were thus highly motivated to alter problematic behaviour patterns in their lives, namely drug offending. It is possible – and indeed likely – that living with children will be more pivotal for inhibiting drug dealing among women who demonstrate some commitment to desist from offending.

Whether onset, continuation, or desistance from drug use and drug dealing is more representative of the experience of most criminalized women who are living with children is thus unclear. The nature of the relationship between mothering and drug offences remains obscure, in part, because much of the research to date on mothering and drug offences has focused on women’s “stories about their mothering practices and not on their actual practices” (Baker and Carson 1999: 351). Indeed, what is missing from the literature on the relationship between mothering and drug crime is research on criminalized women’s actual drug use and dealing – as opposed to their aspirations about
desistance. I turn now to defining the specific behaviours that constitute my measure of women’s drug use and drug dealing which I use in my analyses to document the relationship between women’s involvement in these crimes during months in which they live with children.

### 5.3 Defining Drug Use and Drug Dealing

Drug use and drug dealing were relatively common among the women in my sample. Overall, 172 women (67 percent) reported involvement in drug offences in the three years preceding their current incarceration. More specifically, 152 women (59 percent) used some type of illicit drug during the three year calendar period and 99 women (38 percent) dealt drugs. Of the women who reported any involvement in drug use and/or drug dealing, 93 women (54 percent) committed only one of these offences, and 79 women (46 percent) engaged in both types of offending at some point during the 3 year calendar period. Moreover, 79 women (46 percent) committed both of these offences at least once during the same calendar month.

**Drug Use:** In this analysis, my measure of drug use is designed to capture women’s use of one or more of six different types of illicit drugs on a daily or weekly basis in a given month. These six drugs include crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, and ‘other’ drugs. I focus on regular as opposed to occasional drug users as drug consumption is likely to have a different social meaning for users who organize their lives around the activity than it does for recreational users who consume drugs as they would other commodities (Johnson et al. 1985). Similarly, I exclude such drugs as marijuana from my measure of drug use and focus instead on substances that are more likely to interfere with daily life. The women in my sample typically purchased their drugs from street dealers, though some women occasionally obtained ‘other’ drugs by

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37 ‘Other’ drugs typically included women’s non-prescription use of prescription drugs like Percocet, Morphine, Valium, Codeine, Demerol, Dilatus, Methadone, etc.
exchanging illicit drugs for prescription drugs with doctors (e.g., ID 120)\textsuperscript{38} and obtaining them fraudulently from hospitals (e.g., ID 118).\textsuperscript{39}

Among the women who reported using drugs regularly during the 36 calendar months (N=152), women were most likely to report using crack cocaine (100 women; 66 percent), followed by ‘other drugs’ (74 women; 49 percent), powder cocaine (59 women; 39 percent), heroin (28 women; 18 percent), speed (22 women; 14 percent), and acid (4 women; 3 percent).\textsuperscript{40} While women often reported having a “drug of choice,” these drug preferences were clearly not exclusive of one another; 80 women (53 percent) spoke of using multiple drugs during the calendar period. Sometimes the type of drug women consumed depended on what was most readily available. For example, one respondent who lived in Sudbury, ON reported that crack cocaine was not available until recently, so she typically used powder cocaine (ID 123). Another woman described a change in her drug habit over time by saying “I injected [crack] for eight years and I’ve been smoking crack for the last f**king ten” (ID 197). The average number of calendar months in which women used illicit substances was 24.

\textit{Drug Dealing:} The interview defined drug dealing as making, selling, smuggling, or moving drugs. For the purposes of my study, if women engaged in drug dealing at least once in a month, they were counted as dealers in that month.\textsuperscript{41} Of the 99 women who reported they dealt drugs during the calendar period, they did so an average of 21 months. Women’s experiences dealing drugs spanned a range of scenarios, including working with or for partners or dealers, playing a peripheral role in drug-dealing operations, and, less often, running a lucrative business. Several women explained that they played

\textsuperscript{38} For example, one woman reported “I had a doctor that I used to sell crack to and he would give me Percocets in return. I would sell the Percs as well as use them” (ID 120).
\textsuperscript{39} For example, one woman reported that she learned how to fake the symptoms of Crohn’s disease in order to be admitted to the hospital and prescribed Demerol. While she claimed to actually have a paralyzed bowel as a result of abusing Demerol, she was able to convince doctors that she was suffering from Crohn’s disease by learning the ‘correct’ terminology to describe her symptoms and having ultrasound images that resembled an obstructed bowel (ID 118).
\textsuperscript{40} The number of women who report using specific types of drugs (e.g., crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, and ‘other’ drugs) is greater than the total number of women who report any regular drug use because women may use more than one type of substance.
\textsuperscript{41} According to this measure of drug dealing, women who sold drugs once in a given month and women who sold drugs everyday during the month are similarly counted as having engaged in drug dealing in that month.
secondary roles in their partners’ or ex-partners’ drug-dealing business. For example, one woman reported that her husband was doing most of the drug selling and described her own involvement as “minor” (ID 173). Another woman bought drugs from her ex-husband and sold them primarily to friends. She described herself as doing “favours” for her friends, who knew she could get good “stuff” [drugs] and good prices from her ex-husband. Rather than actively seeking out customers, she acted as a go-between for her friends and her ex-husband (ID 267).

Conversely, other women sold drugs independently from their partners, and some reported generating sizable profits. One woman explained that though her husband knew she was selling drugs out of their house, he turned a blind eye “…because he didn’t want to be involved in it at all” (ID 150). Another woman, who reported being the biggest dealer in the mid-sized town where she was living, employed 25 people to service 50 customers who came three or four times a day. She found dealing very stressful because she knew she was being watched by the police and she “was always wondering when the cops were going to bust me” (ID 135). Women’s experiences in the drug trade, however, more typically involved working for dealers who made a cut of what they sold.

5.4 Bivariate Associations between Drug Use, Drug Dealing, Mothering, and Other Life Circumstances

An examination of bivariate correlations allows me to test the relationships between the independent variables to the two dependent variables considered in this chapter – drug use and drug dealing – prior to the inclusion of controls. I present the correlations between my independent variables – including living with children – and drug use and drug dealing in Table 5.1. The bivariate relationships between my independent and dependent variables offer some insight into the relationship between mothering and offending, though they should be interpreted cautiously as my sample size is sufficiently large (N=8,249 woman-months) that even substantively weak bivariate relationships emerge as statistically significant.
As shown in Table 5.1, living with children is significantly associated with criminalized women’s drug use ($r = -0.219$). In other words, women are less likely to regularly use illicit drugs in months during which they live with children. Only two other variables are negatively and significantly related to women’s drug use: earning a monthly income greater than $1,250 and knowing someone in the neighborhood to turn to for help.

I find significant positive relationships between drug use and several features of criminalized women’s life circumstances. For example, women are more likely to use drugs regularly in months during which they are involved with a drug-using partner, experience violent conflict with a partner, inhabit a transient dwelling, experience severe stress, have higher scores on the routine activities factor, deal drugs, and prostitute. The strongest correlates of drug use are the other illegal activities in which women themselves and/or their intimate partners are involved (drug dealing $r = 0.359$, prostitution $r = 0.436$, drug-using partner $r = 0.384$). As expected, when either women themselves or their intimate partners are involved in one of these crimes, there is a strong correlation to women’s engagement in other types of crime.

Just as living with children and regular drug use are negatively related, so too are living with children and drug dealing (see Table 5.1). Though the magnitude of the association between living with children and drug dealing is notably smaller ($r = -0.088$ compared to $r = -0.219$, respectively), criminalized women are significantly less likely to deal drugs in months during which they live with children, absent the inclusion of controls. Women are also less likely to deal drugs in months in which they live with an intimate partner, have a monthly income greater than $1,250$, and have someone in the neighbourhood to whom they can turn for help.

Women’s drug dealing in a given month co-varies positively with whether they have a drug-using partner, experience violent conflict with their partner, live in transient housing, experience severe stress, are more involved in leisure activities, and use drugs. The strongest correlates of women’s drug dealing include whether they use drugs ($r = 0.359$), whether they participate more in leisure activities ($r = 0.271$), and whether they
are involved with a drug-using partner (r=0.208). Finally, drug dealing is also positively and significantly associated with prostitution.

At the bivariate level then, living with children is uniformly associated with a reduction in drug use and drug dealing among this sample of criminalized women. In addition, a number of other life circumstances are associated with a reduction in both of these illicit activities. Earning a monthly income over $1,250 and having someone to turn to for help in the community act as protective factors for both outcomes; and living with an intimate partner is negatively associated with whether women deal drugs. Life circumstances that are positively associated with drug use and drug dealing are also fairly consistent across both types of offending. More specifically, having a drug-using partner, living in transient housing, experiencing severe stress, greater participation in leisure activities, and involvement in other forms of crime co-occur with drug use and drug dealing. These bivariate relationships conform to what might be expected based on the literature on criminalized women’s lives (Caputo 2008; Maher 1997; Sharpe 2005), though to better clarify the nature of the mothering-offending relationship, it is necessary to turn to multivariate analysis.

5.5 Multivariate Analysis: Models Predicting the Odds of Drug Use and Drug Dealing

In this section, I discuss the multilevel models I use to assess whether and how living with children shapes criminalized women’s drug use and drug dealing. Following the framework presented in Chapter 4, I discuss six models for each offence type: the Control Variables Model illustrates the effects of all of the control variables on intra-individual offending patterns; Model 1 includes measures of living with children and time to establish the baseline effect of mothering on offending; Model 2 incorporates the effect of intimate relationships on offending; Model 3 includes dimensions of the socio-economic contexts in which women live; Model 4 captures women’s involvement in both non-criminal and criminal activities; and Model 5 includes all of the above-mentioned variables, except women’s criminal activities. In general, the same independent variables are used in the models estimating the relationship between mothering and drug use and
drug dealing to facilitate comparisons across the different outcomes. The only exception is Model 4, which necessarily differs across the two outcomes to account for criminal activities predicting drug use and drug dealing: prostitution and drug dealing act as control variables in the model predicting drug use, and drug use acts as a control variable in the models predicting drug dealing.

I first present the results of these six step-wise multilevel logistic regression models for drug use (see Table 5.2) and then for drug dealing (see Table 5.3). In attempting to isolate the effect of living with children on criminalized women’s involvement in drug offences, I will be attentive to direct effects, indirect effects, and interaction effects. As was the case in my models assessing the relationship between mothering and property crime, the findings presented are all based on unit-specific models with robust standard errors. Random effects were relevant in some of the models for each outcome: the model estimating drug use includes random effects for time and social support (see Table 5.2a) and the model estimating drug dealing includes random effects for time (see Table 5.3a).

**Drug Use**

**Control Variable Model:** In this model, I regress drug use on all of the control variables. The results of the Control Variable Model, presented in Table 5.2, confirm the bivariate pattern of results regarding the anti-social influence of having a drug-using partner and being involved in drug dealing and prostitution. Indeed, involvement with an intimate partner who uses drugs is strongly and positively associated with whether or not a woman will use drugs. The odds ratios provided in the Control Variables Model show criminalized women are far more likely to use drugs in months in which they are involved with a drug-using intimate partner compared to months in which they are not. Likewise, women’s participation in drug dealing and prostitution also significantly predicts whether or not they use drugs: dealing drugs and working as a prostitute both increase women’s odds of using drugs.
In contrast, income acts as a protective factor against substance use. Earning more than $1,250 per month via legal employment reduces the odds that criminalized women will use drugs. This feature of women’s lives, and time, are the only variables in the Control Variables model that are significantly and negatively associated with drug use.

**Model 1:** Model 1 measures the effect of living with children on drug use, without controlling for other life circumstances included in later models. The results indicate that, controlling for time, living with children is significantly related to the likelihood that women will not use illicit drugs. This finding is consistent with the bivariate results which showed that living with children significantly decreased criminalized women’s drug use.

**Model 2:** Measures of women’s intimate relationships are included in Model 2. The results of this model again indicate that, controlling for time and women’s intimate relationships, living with children is significantly related to the likelihood that women will desist from using illicit drugs. Similarly, one feature of women’s intimate relationships – namely, whether their partners use illicit drugs – emerges as a strong predictor of whether or not women will themselves use drugs, as was the case in the Control Variables model. Other features of women’s intimate relationships, however, including whether they live with an intimate partner and whether they are involved in a violent relationship, do not affect their likelihood of drug use.

**Model 3:** Including measures of the social and economic conditions that circumscribe women’s lives modifies the relationship between living with children and drug use such that it becomes non-significant. The only feature of the contexts in which criminalized women live that is significantly related to their drug use is income.\(^{42}\) That is, earning

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\(^{42}\) I re-estimated Models 3, 4, and 5 by substituting women’s legal income with a measure of whether or not they were legally employed. Unlike income, which is significantly and negatively related to drug use, employment is not a significant predictor of criminalized women’s drug use. Clearly, income and employment are not synonymous. Given that I can only include one of these measures in my models because of problems of multicollinearity, I prefer to use the income measure because it more accurately captures the phenomenon of interest to me – women’s deprived socio-economic contexts. Women in my sample who are coded “0” on income because they do not have a job (and receive no or very little money from government social assistance) may differ in important ways from women who are coded “0” on income because they earn an income less than $1,250 a month from their job. This different model specification does not otherwise change the pattern of results in the drug-use model.
more than $1,250 per month via legal employment significantly decreases the odds that women will use drugs. 43 Living in transient housing, having people to whom they can turn for help, 44 and experiencing severe stress do not predict the likelihood that criminalized women will use drugs.

Model 4: Model 4 includes the various leisure activities in which women engage as well as other criminal activities in which they engage and represents the full model. In addition to an index capturing women’s routine activities (i.e., the number of evenings they spent out per week for fun and recreation, how often they hung out with friends, and how often they went to bars, clubs, and pool halls), two other measures depict whether or not they engaged in drug dealing and prostitution in a given month. The coefficient for living with children is significant in this model. Controlling for relationships, socio-economic contexts, and activities, living with children exerts a strong main effect on criminalized women’s drug use. Overall, women are less likely to use drugs in months in which they live with children compared to months in which they do not.

Another significant relationship that warrants attention in the model involves the relationship between criminalized women’s participation as drug dealers or prostitutes and their drug use. Consistent with the pattern of bivariate results, women are roughly seven times more likely to use drugs in months in which they deal drugs or prostitute, respectively, compared to months in which they do not. The more traditional measures of routine activities are not significantly related to women’s drug use in this model.

As was the case in the previous models, involvement with drug-using partners remains a strong predictor of women’s drug use. Indeed, having a partner who uses drugs increases the odds that a woman will use drugs; the effect of partners’ drug use is almost five times as large as the effect of women’s drug dealing on their drug use. Also consistent with

43 To ensure that my results are not an artifact of the specific monthly income cut-off I employ, I ran Model 3 using four different cut-offs. In addition to using a $1,250 monthly (or $15,000 yearly) cut-off, I also used the following income measures: $833 monthly (or $10,000 yearly), $2,083 monthly (or $25,000 yearly), and $2,917 monthly (or $35,000 yearly). This more rigorous test of income does not alter the pattern of results; in all cases, having a higher income significantly reduces criminalized women’s drug use.

44 The variable measuring social support has a significant random effect in Models 3, 4, and 5. While including a random effects coefficient does not change the substantive meaning of the findings, it is statistically good practice.
previous models, income is the only variable that significantly reduces the odds that women will use drugs.

To confirm that the results provided in this analysis of the effects of living with children on criminalized women’s drug use are robust, I performed the following tests and re-specifications in models not shown: (a) I substituted employment for income (see footnote 6); (b) I used four different income cut-offs (see footnote 7); (c) I tested for multicollinearity; and (d) I tested for interaction effects between living with children and drug-using partner, income, routine activities, time, and time\(^2\). The consistency and validity of my findings did not change as a result of any of these tests.

**Model 5:** The pattern of results in Model 5 largely conforms to Model 4. In both models, living with children significantly decreases the likelihood that women will use drugs. Other similarities across the models are that drug-using intimate partners exacerbate women’s own drug use and earning a monthly income greater than $1,250 protects against drug use. However, the exclusion of criminal activities in Model 5 produces different results from Model 4 to the extent that women’s non-criminal activities are significantly (and positively) related to drug use. In the absence of controls for drug dealing and prostitution, criminalized women were more likely to use drugs in months during which they participated more in certain types of activities outside the home. A comparison between Model 5 and previous models is thus useful for revealing that the strong effects of both drug dealing and prostitution on drug use in Model 4 conceal the influence of women’s non-criminal routine activities on their use of illicit drugs.

**Summary of Drug Use Models:** Overall, the models presented in Table 5.2 reveal that living with children decreases the odds that criminalized women will use illicit drugs on a weekly or daily basis. The relationship between living with children and drug use is consistently significant and negative across all but one of my step-wise models, though it approaches significance (at the p ≤ .05 level) in Model 3. Moreover, living with children produces a dramatic reduction in the likelihood that women will use powder cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, and ‘other’ drugs.

\[45\] The lowest tolerance value in the drug use model is .602 and the highest variance inflation factor (VIF) value is 1.662. These values conform to the accepted thresholds for both tolerance and VIF (Garson 2008).
Several other independent variables also exert a fairly consistent effect on women’s drug use across the step-wise models. Earning a legal monthly income of more than $1,250 is the only variable in my models that reduces the likelihood of drug use. The other variables that emerge as significant across the models all increase the likelihood that women will use drugs. More specifically, involvement with a substance-abusing intimate partner, and involvement in drug dealing and prostitution all increase the likelihood of drug use in the final model.

**Drug Dealing**

*Control Variable Model:* In this model, presented in Table 5.3, I regress drug dealing on all of the control variables to assess the effect of living with children on criminalized women’s drug dealing. Income is the only variable that reduces the likelihood of drug dealing; in months in which women earn a monthly legal income of $1,250 or more, they are less likely to deal drugs compared to months in which they earn less than $1,250. The women in my sample are more likely to deal drugs in months in which they live in non-permanent or transient housing – including living on the streets, in shelters and cars, or with different friends – compared to months in which they do not.

Women’s activities also influence their involvement in drug dealing. In particular, spending more time participating in non-criminal activities (i.e., going out in the evening for fun and recreation, hanging out with friends, and going to bars, clubs, and pool halls) and involvement in criminal activities (i.e., engaging in the illicit use of drugs) both increase the odds of dealing drugs. Once again, women’s participation in one type of offending (i.e., drug use) is highly predictive of their involvement in other types of crime (i.e., drug dealing).

*Model 1:* To establish the baseline effect of living with children on the propensity for drug dealing among criminalized women, I only include measures of living with children and time in Model 1. Contrary to the bivariate results presented in Table 5.2 which show that living with children is significantly and negatively correlated with dealing drugs, the multivariate results indicate that, controlling for time, living with children is not significantly related to drug dealing. A random time effect is positively associated with
drug dealing, meaning that, on the whole, women are more likely to deal drugs later in the calendar period than they are earlier in the calendar period, though this pattern does not hold for all women.

Model 2: In Model 2, I investigate whether characteristics of women’s intimate relationships predict whether or not they will deal drugs. The results of this model indicate that women’s drug dealing is not associated with their intimate relationships; whether women live with an intimate partner, whether they are involved with a drug-using partner, and whether they are involved in a violent intimate relationship do not influence whether they will deal drugs in a given month. The relationship between living with children and drug dealing is likewise insignificant in this model.

Model 3: I investigate the effect on drug dealing of key social and economic conditions that circumscribe criminalized women’s lives in Model 3. Consistent with the pattern of results in the Control Variable Model, earning $1,250 or more of monthly legal income and living in transient housing are strong predictors of whether or not women deal drugs in a given month. As expected, having a higher income acts as a protective factor against drug dealing;\textsuperscript{46} women in my sample are significantly less likely to deal drugs in months in which they earn $1,250 or more from legal employment.\textsuperscript{47} Conversely, not having a permanent home raises the likelihood that women will deal drugs. Living with children remains unrelated to whether or not women deal drugs.

Model 4: Model 4 represents the final model and includes measures of living with children, their intimate relationships, their socio-economic conditions, and aspects of their activities. Both lawful activities (i.e., evenings spent out for recreation, and time spent at bars and clubs and hanging out with friends) and criminal activities (i.e., drug use) predict whether women will deal drugs. Though women are significantly more

\textsuperscript{46} I re-estimated Models 3, 4, and 5 by substituting women’s legal income with a measure of whether or not they were legally employed. The results mimic those for income, whereby having a job reduces the likelihood that women will deal drugs (by 47 percent in the final model).

\textsuperscript{47} To verify that my results regarding the relationship between income and drug dealing are not an artifact of the specific monthly income cut-off I employ, I ran Model 3 using four different cut-offs: $833 monthly (or $10,000 yearly), $1,250 monthly (or $15,000 yearly), $2,083 monthly (or $25,000 yearly), and $2,917 monthly (or $35,000 yearly). This more rigorous test of income does not alter the pattern of results; in all cases, having a higher income significantly reduces the likelihood that criminalized women’s will deal drugs.
likely to deal drugs in months in which they engage in either of these lawful or criminal activities compared to months in which they do not, the effect of drug use on drug dealing is double the effect of women’s non-criminal activities. More specifically, time devoted to non-criminal leisure activities increases the odds of drug dealing by over 5 times, while using drugs increases the odds by almost 11.5 times.

The pattern of results in Model 4 closely mirrors the results in the Control Variable Model. As has been the case in all of the step-wise models predicting drug dealing, living with children is unrelated to whether or not criminalized women make, sell, move, or smuggle drugs. Conversely, features of women’s economic contexts – namely their income and the transience of their dwelling – are strong predictors of drug dealing among my sample. As expected, a higher income decreases the odds of dealing drugs while living in transient housing increases the likelihood of dealing. Supplemental analyses confirm that different specifications of this final model do not change the nature of the relationship between living with children and drug dealing.48

Model 5: The exclusion of women’s drug use activity from Model 5 does not alter the nature of the relationship between living with children and drug dealing. As is the case in previous models, living with children is unrelated to drug dealing, earning an income above $1,250 decreases dealing, and living in transient housing and participating in lawful leisure activities increases dealing.

Summary of Drug Dealing Models: Taken together, the results of the step-wise multilevel models presented in Table 5.5 indicate that criminalized women’s participation in drug dealing activity is not shaped by whether or not they live with children in a given month. Despite including several theoretically relevant control variables, a null relationship between living with children and drug dealing remains. The relationships between the other independent variables – capturing aspects of women’s relationships,
socio-economic contexts, and activities – and drug dealing also exhibit remarkable consistency across models, with four variables having a significant effect on drug dealing. Drug use is the strongest predictor of drug dealing, followed by living in transient housing and spending time engaging in leisure activities. Income is the only characteristic of women’s lives that is negatively related to the likelihood of dealing drugs.

5.6 Comparison of Multilevel Logistic Regression Models for Drug Use and Drug Dealing

Distilling the findings of the two foregoing analyses is an important first step to interpreting them using existing research on criminalized women’s experiences as mothers and drug users and dealers. As such, I briefly highlight the key similarities and differences in Model 4 across analyses of drug use and drug dealing (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3, respectively). I focus on two particular aspects of these models, including: (1) whether living with children influences drug offences, and (2) which independent variables have the most and the least influence on drug offences.

First, living with children shapes women’s use of drugs, but not their drug dealing. Indeed, while women who live with children experience a marked reduction in their drug use, women neither significantly increase nor decrease their drug dealing below their own baseline level when they live with children. Taken together, these findings bolster confidence that my measures and results are robust. Indeed, the failure to find a relationship between mothering and drug dealing cannot easily be attributed to poor construct validity of either the independent or dependent variables, or the absence of appropriate controls in the model; the significant relationship between mothering and drug use is based on a model that employs almost identical measures.

Second, women’s leisure activities and income emerge as the most important influences on their participation in drug use and drug dealing. Importantly, women’s participation in other types of criminal activity is a strong predictor of both outcomes: drug dealing and prostitution significantly increase drug use and drug use significantly increases drug
dealing. Criminalized women’s involvement in certain types of leisure activities outside the home also reliably predicts an increased likelihood of drug offences. The income variable likewise exhibits a consistent pattern, though in the opposite direction from the leisure activities variables, and decreases criminalized women’s drug offences.

While one feature of women’s intimate relationships – involvement with a drug-using partner – exerts a strong influence on women’s drug use, the same is not true for their drug dealing. Indeed, having a drug-using intimate partner exacerbates women’s drug use while none of the measures related to women’s intimate relationships (i.e., living with an intimate partner, involvement with a drug using partner, and involvement in a violent intimate relationship) reach statistical significance (at the $p \leq .05$ level or higher) in any of the drug dealing models. This latter finding is somewhat surprising given the evidence that women primarily access and maintain roles in the drug economy through links with men (Maher and Hudson 2007).

Criminalized women’s experience of severe or unusual stress is the only variable that never reaches statistical significance in either of the final models (or any of the previous step-wise models) for the two outcomes under consideration. All of the other control variables matter at least some of the time for either drug use and/or drug dealing.

I turn now to evaluating the results of my multilevel regression analyses in the context of the research literature.

5.7 Discussion

The results presented in this chapter indicate that although drug use and drug dealing are often inter-related offences (Erickson et al. 2000; Maher 1997; Romero-Daza et al. 2003; Sharpe 2005; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan 1996), they are nevertheless distinct in terms of their relationship to living with children. Indeed, the competing demands of mothering while using and dealing drugs elicit different responses from criminalized women: living with children reduces illicit substance use, though it does not affect whether or not women deal drugs. Drawing on previous investigations of criminalized women’s
experiences in the drug world as well as anecdotal comments from the women in my sample, I suggest four plausible explanations regarding why mothering appears to significantly reduce involvement in drug use, but not drug dealing. In addition to discussing the relationship between mothering and drug offences, I also briefly evaluate the role of income, intimate relationships, and severe stress on women’s commission of drug crime. My findings about the mothering-drug crime relationship, as well as other features of criminalized women’s participation in the drug economy, both support and challenge the extant literature, and raise important questions for future research.

Women’s reduction in drug use below their own baseline level in months in which they live with children supports the hypothesis that mothering decreases criminalized women’s offending in the short-term. In contrast, my findings relating to drug dealing support the hypothesis that mothering does not influence this type of offending. Thus, while my analysis of drug use and drug dealing affirms a theme regarding the “centrality” of women’s roles as mothers that is emphasized in research on criminalized women, it simultaneously refines this theme by suggesting that mothering is more “central” to some types of offending (i.e., drug use) than others (i.e., drug dealing).

My findings complement investigations that focus on women’s descriptions of their mothering and drug use by demonstrating that in the aggregate, the pattern suggested by numerous qualitative studies persists. In doing so, my analysis adds strong evidence in support of the hypothesis that mothering assists criminalized women’s attempts to reduce their use of illicit substances, at least in the short term.

In addition, the finding that women’s involvement in drug dealing is unaffected by their maternal responsibilities also contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that is still in need of much attention. In response to the suggestion that women’s participation in the drug economy is dictated by the amount of time they devote to household and childcare responsibilities (Rosenbaum 1981; Taylor 1993; Wilson 1993), my analysis indicates that mothering neither causes women to start nor stop dealing drugs. The women in my sample can and do juggle both drug dealing and mothering responsibilities.
A noteworthy feature of my findings is that the women in my sample were not asked to reflect on the connections between their law-breaking and their roles as mothers. As mentioned previously, the Women’s Experiences of Violence study from which the data for this analysis were derived was not designed to collect information about women’s mothering experiences. In fact, neither mothering nor drug offences were a core focus of the WEV study. Moreover, questions about drug using and dealing were not asked in close proximity of questions about living with children on the WEV survey instrument. These features of the WEV data distinguish them from data relied upon in many qualitative investigations on this topic and are advantageous for reducing the likelihood of response bias in my study, especially given the intense social disapproval of women who compromise gender, family, and domestic roles through their involvement in the drug economy (Campbell 2000).

It is important to note, however, that my findings cannot be generalized to women who never live with children. In other words, it is inappropriate to infer from my analysis that children represent a cure-all for women’s drug use. Instead, my analysis finds a reduction in the frequency of drug use among women who live with children for at least some portion of the calendar period. Arguably, the priorities of women who live with children some of the time differ from those of mothers who never live with children in terms of whether addiction trumps maintaining contact with children, or vice versa. For example, mothers who never live with children are likely to be more seriously committed to drug use and to have abandoned attempts to juggle addiction and mothering. Conversely, drug-using women who sometimes live with children are still attempting to negotiate the dual roles of mother and drug user.

One plausible explanation for my findings involves the different motivations behind women’s participation in drug use and drug dealing. As previously discussed, drug dealing is, at least in part, about making money. To the extent that children generate a need for resources, drug dealing may be more integrally related to women’s efforts to provide for their children’s physical needs by providing monetary relief (Boyd 2006). If this is the case, it is not surprising that significant reductions in women’s drug dealing do not emerge when they live with children. In contrast, women’s drug use depletes
resources that might otherwise be available to spend on children. As such, women’s drug use is arguably in direct competition with children’s needs. In the most extreme cases, children are denied such basic necessities as food and suitable clothing so that their mothers can maintain their drug habits.

Of course, if the opportunity to engage in drug crime does not exist, women’s motivation to do so is largely irrelevant. Accordingly, a second explanation that warrants consideration is that in order to actually carry out drug offending, women must inhabit environments in which they are able to purchase drugs for their own consumption and access drugs which they can sell to others, if they so desire. To the extent that using drugs involves establishing a relationship with only one criminal associate (i.e., a dealer), whereas dealing requires women to establish relationships with at least two types of criminal associates (i.e., dealers higher up the drug-dealing chain and buyers), using drugs is easier to accomplish than dealing drugs. Moreover, because drug dealing continues to be dominated by men, criminalized women who wish to deal drugs are more likely to be constrained by actors in their environment, who may be reluctant to engage in criminal partnerships with them (Maher 1997). In other words, there are likely to be more impediments to women’s ability to deal drugs than to use drugs. In this way, considering the context in which women engage in crime is important when thinking about their participation as drug users versus drug dealers.

A third interpretation for why mothering decreases drug use, but not drug dealing, involves the different characteristics associated with these related yet distinct activities. The experiences of using and dealing drugs are similar to the extent that they can doubtless interfere with mothering by drawing women away from home and children, sometimes forcing them to leave small children alone while they go out to “score” (Rosenbaum 1979). Yet while both drug use and drug dealing typically prompt women to lead “double lives” in an effort to protect their children from their illegal pursuits (Kearney et al. 1994; Sharpe 2005), on the whole, accomplishing the joint tasks of using drugs and mothering may be more difficult than dealing drugs and mothering.
Qualitative studies of women’s drug use document the difficulty faced by addicted mothers in terms of fulfilling primary caretaker responsibility for their children. For example, Rosenbaum (1979) explains that the psychoactive effects of heroin can produce a state of euphoria such that women are not in a position to carry out routine mothering tasks because they are “on the nod”. Research similarly finds that balancing motherhood and addiction to crack or cocaine is nearly impossible (Erickson et al. 2000; Sharpe 2005). The compulsive crack-use cycle and the self-centered experience of the crack high make self-sacrifice, nurturing, and focusing on the needs of children – which are characteristics of mothering – challenging (Sharpe 2005). For example, a woman in Sharpe’s (2005:172) study explains the often irreconcilable tensions between the crack-user lifestyle and the responsibilities of mothering by saying: “I got to the point where I didn’t want to do them things [care for her children] no more...The only thing I cared about was getting that next high. My kids was not important…Only crack was important.” A similar sentiment is expressed by a woman in my sample, who explained “I remember that one Christmas time I was pissed that I had to go shopping with my family. That’s how bad it took over my life. I walked around K-mart pissed. I remember my daughter saying ‘Come on mom, please get into a better mood and come shopping with us’. I remember that I got crack as soon as I came home” (ID 161). For many drug-addicted women, the exigencies of drug dependence pose formidable challenges to functioning as a mother (Hanlon et al. 2005).

Compared to drug use, drug dealing seems to occupy a more harmonious status with mothering. A notable distinction between drug use and drug dealing relates to the all-encompassing nature of these activities. Drug users’ lives are typically driven by the need for drugs, which sometimes leads them into related crimes including prostitution in order to finance their drug habits. In contrast, women dealers are likely to be involved in low-level dealing for relatively short periods of time (Anglin and Hser 1987; Boyd and Faith 1999; Maher 1997; Moe 2006). Women, in particular, are likely to drift into dealing as a result of their economic situation and/or illegal drug use and distribute small quantities to friends and acquaintances (also see Boyd 1999; Boyd and Faith 1999; Waldorf et al. 1991). Due to their somewhat marginal position in the lowest rungs of the drug economy (Maher 1997; Maher, Dunlap and Johnson 2002), women are likely to be
less heavily invested in dealing drugs as they are in using them. As such, the dual tasks of dealing and mothering may not be prohibitively onerous.

A related and complementary fourth explanation for why living with children reduces women’s drug use but exerts no effect on their drug dealing involves perceptions – both their own and society’s – of the (in)compatibility of drug offending and mothering. Given the pervasive and severe social stigma surrounding mothering and drug use (Campbell 2000), women who are committed to using drugs may be more likely to either lose or surrender custody of their children than women who are predominantly engaged in dealing drugs. Many drug-addicted women acknowledge that substance abuse, and the accompanying lifestyle, leaves them ill-equipped to provide adequate care for their children (Erickson et al. 2000). Upon recognizing their inability to parent because they cannot control their drug use, and wanting a better home for their children, women often voluntarily place children in another environment, typically with another family member (Maher 1996; Rosenbaum 1979). A woman I interviewed reached this point in her addiction when she explained: “My son walked in on me when I was using. That was when I decided they [children] had to go because we weren’t able to stop right then and I didn’t want them around to see us. My husband’s parents knew what was going on, but they didn’t know the extent of it. They were happy to take the kids, which was lucky” (ID 173). Retaining custody of children is a challenge faced by many drug-using women (Maher 1996; Moe 2006), as women themselves, along with child protection workers, recognize the incompatibility of active mothering and drug use.

To the extent that drug dealing is perceived as more manageable than drug use while living with children, it may take longer for drug dealers to come to the point of surrendering or involuntarily losing custody of their children. Anecdotal evidence from my study suggests that women perceive their drug dealing to be less damaging to their children than their drug use. For example, one woman distinguished between the harmful effects of these two activities on her child by explaining that her four-year old son knew how to weigh weed and was allowed to be present for drug sales, but was not allowed to be around people who were high or drunk (ID 249). Despite the illegality of both
activities, this mother sought to shelter her son from witnessing drug use, though she was prepared to go so far as to involve him in drug dealing.

In addition to addressing empirical gaps in the literature on mothering and drug use and dealing, my analysis simultaneously confirms some previous findings and raises questions about mothering in the context of criminalized women’s drug offending. For example, my results regarding the protective nature of income supports an abundant literature on this known correlate of drug using and dealing (Uggen and Thompson 2003). Conversely, my findings that characteristics of intimate relationships do not shape women’s decisions to deal drugs and that experiencing severe stress is unrelated to either drug use or dealing contradict expectations. I turn now to briefly discussing these findings as issues that warrant further attention.

Consistent with other scholarship linking lack of income to drug offences, earning a monthly income greater than $1,250 consistently emerges as significantly and negatively related to drug use and drug dealing in my study. The women in my study relayed a message of economic need, especially when talking about their involvement in drug dealing. One woman explained she dealt drugs because “Rent was too high, money was being cut back from the government, and [there was] not enough money for groceries. Everything was becoming unaffordable. I felt like I was claustrophobic and couldn’t get out” (ID 153). Another woman explained that because money was a big problem for her and her unemployed husband, she followed a friend’s advice and embarked on her first-ever illegal endeavor – growing marijuana (ID 180). However, as is the case to varying degrees in previous studies, my analysis cannot untangle the complicated relationship between poverty and the economics of drug use and drug dealing. That is, I cannot determine to what extent having little legal income prompts drug offending and/or conversely, to what extent drug addictions induce poverty. More work is thus required to unpack this relationship between income and criminalized women’s drug offending.

Clarifying the relationship between intimate partners and women’s drug dealing is another priority for future research. It is well-established that men tend to play a pivotal role in introducing women to drug crime – both to drug use (e.g., Caputo 2008; Richie
1996; Sharpe 2005) and to drug dealing (Griffin and Armstrong 2003; Maher and Hudson 2007). While my analysis corroborates previous findings that being involved with a substance-using partner is strongly and significantly related to women’s own use of drugs, living with an intimate partner, involvement with a drug-using partner, and involvement in a violent intimate relationship are not significantly related to women’s drug dealing (at the p ≤ .05 or higher). Based on previous research, however, I would expect whether women live with their partners or whether their partners use drugs to matter. Therefore, future investigations of the relationship between intimate partners and drug dealing might consider the following questions: Are intimate partners more important for introducing women to, rather than sustaining their involvement in, the drug economy? Does accounting for additional features of criminalized women’s lives significantly reduce the importance of intimate partners for their drug dealing? Answers to these questions may offer further insight into the role of intimate partners on women’s drug dealing activity.

Finally, it is somewhat perplexing that my measure of women’s experience of severe stress is not related to drug offending in my analysis. Criminalized women, in particular, are likely to occupy stressful surroundings and may feel pressure or incentive to engage in such deviant coping strategies as drug use. According to Agnew (1997), individuals should be more likely to offend during periods of high strain. Indeed, Slocum et al.’s (2005) intra-individual analysis of criminalized women finds that increases in negative life events are associated with an increased probability of using illicit substances. In order to understand why this relationship does not hold among all samples of criminalized women, the role of severe stressors on women’s offending deserves continued scrutiny.

### 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on whether living with children affects the odds that criminalized women will use illicit drugs and deal drugs. The results reveal that it is necessary to assess the mothering-offending relationship on a crime-by-crime basis, as mothering does not exert a uniform effect on these two related offences. Irrespective of their
criminalized status and lifestyles, living with children promotes discontinuity in women’s daily and weekly use of crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, acid, speed, and ‘other’ drugs in the short-term. Conversely, women’s involvement in drug dealing is beyond the influence of mothering responsibilities. Taken together, the results suggest that drug use and drug dealing offences, despite sharing a seemingly equally unharmonious status with mothering, are qualitatively different in terms of how women who live with children approach them.

Placing my analysis of women’s actual month-to-month drug-use patterns and mothering responsibilities alongside existing narratives of drug-using mothers’ rationales for their drug use enables deeper insight into the mothering-drug use relationship. I argue that the different motivations for offending, as well as the characteristics and perceptions associated with substance abuse and drug dealing, are important in the context of mothering. On the whole, drug use interferes more with mothering than does drug dealing. The evidence presented in this chapter thus represents an important step towards building more knowledge about how mothering shapes criminalized women’s offending behaviour.

The results presented in this chapter also raise issues that both corroborate and challenge extant research. More specifically, my analysis suggests that the interplay between low income and drug offences, the role of intimate partners in women’s drug offending, and the relationship between severe stress and drug crime all require further examination.

In the next chapter, I examine the effects of mothering on women’s use of violence against intimate partners. This third and final analysis chapter will allow me to round-out my examination of the influence of mothering on different types of offending: I will assess whether living with children (1) decreases women’s use of violence against intimate partners, as is the case for property crime and drug use, (2) increases women’s use of violence against intimate partners, or (3) has a null effect on violence, as is the case for drug dealing. I turn now to Chapter 6.
Table 5.1: Bivariate Relationships Between Drug Use, Drug Dealing, Living with Children, and Control Variables (N=8249)

<table>
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* p < .05, ** p < .01
### Table 5.2: Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Drug Use

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<th>Control Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
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<td>e^B</td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
<td>e^B</td>
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<td>- -</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>- -</td>
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<td>- -</td>
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<td>Time^2</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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*p ≤ .10, *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001
Table 5.2a: Random Coefficients in Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Drug Use

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Model 5</td>
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Table 5.3: Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Drug Dealing

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<th>Model 1 e^B</th>
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<th>Model 2 e^B</th>
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<th>Model 3 e^B</th>
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<th>Model 4 e^B</th>
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<th>Model 5 e^B</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lives with child(ren)</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>0.910 (1.114)</td>
<td>2.48</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-1.048† (0.609)</td>
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<td>0.234 (0.200)</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.270 (0.207)</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-1.170** (0.423)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-1.213** (.453)</td>
<td>-1.184** (.418)</td>
<td>-1.222** (.463)</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transient housing</td>
<td>2.137*** (0.536)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.724*** (0.597)</td>
<td>15.24</td>
<td>2.187*** (0.543)</td>
<td>8.91</td>
<td>2.039*** (0.557)</td>
<td>7.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>-0.869† (0.459)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.738 (.48)</td>
<td>-0.869† (.458)</td>
<td>-0.840† (.495)</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>-0.407 (.390)</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>-0.332 (0.378)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.401 (.408)</td>
<td>-0.326 (.386)</td>
<td>-0.407 (.390)</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index: Routine activities</td>
<td>1.657** (0.619)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.662** (0.615)</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>2.030** (0.586)</td>
<td>7.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>2.434*** (0.469)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.441*** (0.472)</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>0.040* (0.016)</td>
<td>0.051** (0.017)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.049** (0.017)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.042** (0.016)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.043** (0.016)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.046** (0.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time^2</td>
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<td>-0.004* (0.002)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.003* (0.002)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.004* (0.002)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.003* (0.001)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.003* (0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p ≤ .10, † p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001

Table 5.3a: Random Coefficients in Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Drug Dealing
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Model</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>P-value</th>
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<td>Control Variables Model</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Month</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Month</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>Model 4</td>
<td>Month</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model 5</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>0.02588</td>
<td>.000</td>
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Chapter 6
Mothering and Criminalized Women’s Violent Offending

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I examined the effects of mothering on criminalized women’s non-violent offending. In this chapter, I build on my previous findings by examining the relationship between mothering and violent offending in the context of criminalized women’s lives. The central question that drives my analyses in Chapter 6 is whether and to what extent living with children affects women’s violence against their intimate partners. While the literature on violence is scattered with discussions about the integral role children play in their mothers’ lives and its consequences for women’s use of violence (Browne 1987; Miller and Meloy 2006; Saunders 2002), the relationship between mothering and women’s violent offending has not been a central focus of inquiry. Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to examine if and how mothering shapes women’s propensity to use violence against their intimate partners, paying particular attention to whether the effect of living with children varies according to the type of violent exchange in which women engage with their intimate partners.

To answer the question that guides this chapter, I employ the same strategy as I did in the preceding chapters: controlling for criminalized women’s relationships, socio-economic contexts, and activities, I provide quantitative evidence about whether the daily responsibilities and demands of living with children affect month-to-month changes in violent offending, and buttress this with qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews with criminalized women. However, the division of this chapter differs slightly from previous chapters to the extent that I employ two measures of criminalized women’s

49 I focus solely on intimate partner violence in this chapter rather than also considering women’s use of violence against other types of opponents. My rationale for not examining the relationship between mothering and violent offending against non-partners is two-fold. First, the existing literature does not provide a compelling theoretical or conceptual framework for considering such a relationship. Indeed, mothering does not arise as a prominent theme in either quantitative or qualitative studies of women’s violent offending against non-partners. Second, I ran multilevel models comparable to the ones I present in this chapter for partner violence. However, the main independent variable of interest – living with children – was insignificant across all these non-partner violence models. It thus seems likely that living with children is not an important contributor to whether or not women use violence against relatives (parents, siblings, cousins, etc), friends, co-workers, neighbours, acquaintances, strangers, and anyone else other than intimate partners.
violent offending, for reasons that I explain below. Thus, in what follows, I begin with a brief review of the literature on how mothering shapes women’s use of violence against their intimate partners. I then define women’s offending experiences in incidents in which (1) women exchange violent blows with their partners and (2) women use violence against their partners in incidents in which their partners do not use violence against them. I illustrate this discussion with examples from women’s own descriptions of intimate partner conflicts. Next, I present bivariate relationships between the independent variables and women’s violent offending, followed by step-wise multi-level models that identify the predictors of intra-individual offending. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the main comparison that I identify in my analyses – namely, the effect of mothering on women’s use of violence against intimate partners in conflicts in which both parties use violence versus conflicts in which women alone aggress against their partners.

6.2 Literature Review

Scholars who study women at high risk of violence document the scope of women’s violent offending against their intimate partners, including situations in which they use violence entirely in self-defence, engage in “common couple” or mutual violence, and act as sole aggressors (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson and Daly 1992; Johnson and Ferraro 2000; Saunders 2002). However, an explicit focus on the role of mothering on women’s use of violence has been relatively neglected in the criminological research, which has instead investigated the extent to which children feature in women’s experiences as victims of intimate partner violence (e.g., Armstrong and Griffin 2007; Johnson 1996). Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence suggesting the existence of a connection between mothering and women’s violent offending upon which to build analyses of the mothering-violent offending relationship.

Understanding the meaning and nature of women’s violent offending against their male intimate partners is an important precursor to evaluating how living with children factors into such experiences. While there is controversy surrounding whether incidents in which both women and men use violence are really examples of mutual offending or
whether they represent women’s attempts at self-defence (Johnson 1995, 2000; Johnson and Ferraro 2000; Straus 2004; Straus and Gelles 1990), the bulk of evidence seems to suggest that women’s use of violence against their male partners looks quite different from men’s use of violence against their female partners (Dobash and Dobash 2004; Kimmel 2002). Indeed, the existence of gender parity in the nature of intimate partner violence is doubtful. For example, though rates at which women and men engage in violence may be roughly equal and thus suggest that violence in domestic relationships is largely reciprocal (Dasgupta 1999; Straus 2004; Straus and Gelles 1990), male intimate partners are more likely to initiate violence for the purpose of trying to control their partners, while female intimate partners are overwhelmingly more likely to be injured, require medical attention and hospitalization, and fear being killed than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada 2004).

Against this backdrop of gender asymmetry in violent offending among intimates, research evidence suggests that the costs and benefits of using violence are reconfigured for women who live with and care for children. Research documents how increased strain between couples over the demands of childcare and/or the desire to protect children from harms posed by neglectful or aggressive partners contributes to potentially volatile situations for criminalized women who live with children. For example, the tensions that children commonly foster between couples – over such things as household division of labour and time devoted to tending to children – may spur women to use violence against their intimate partners if they are unable to employ non-violent coping mechanisms (Agnew 2001). In addition, women may act violently to protect the physical or emotional well-being of children from harms posed by intimate partners in the form of neglect (e.g., not tending to a crying baby, not changing a dirty diaper, etc.) as well as more direct threats or actual harm to children (e.g., burning a baby with a bottle of milk that is too hot, hitting or shaking a child, etc.) (Browne 1987; Miller 2005; Richie 1996; Theidon 1995). Under such conditions, it seems plausible that living with children will increase the likelihood of violent offending by criminalized women.

Conversely, women may be less willing to use violence against their intimate partners if they feel they have “more to lose” or experience feelings of enhanced shame when
considering the reactions of their children (Edin et al. 2005; Giordano et al. 2002; Leibrich 1996). To the extent that women value mothering, they might attempt to avoid situations and activities that could jeopardize their children’s welfare and/or their own ability to care for children. For example, evidence suggests that women often attempt to shield their children from the emotional trauma of witnessing violence between themselves and their domestic partners (Johnson 1996; Radford and Hester 2006).

Another disincentive for engaging in violence for mothers is that violent offending may be accompanied by victimization (and subsequent injury or death), arrest (and subsequent incarceration), and/or the involvement of child welfare authorities, all of which threaten to separate women from children either temporarily or permanently. It is thus reasonable to expect that women who live with children may seek non-violent means to diffuse conflict with their intimate partners.

As the foregoing suggests, the different mechanisms that drive criminalized women to use violence do not suggest a clear direction of the relationship between mothering and violent offending against intimate partners. Instead, this relationship could operate in potentially contradictory ways, either increasing or decreasing women’s violent offending. Alternatively, if men, rather than women, are largely responsible for determining whether violent conflicts occur, then women’s own preferences about whether or not to engage in violence may be constrained to such an extent that living with children becomes largely irrelevant. In what follows, I attempt to expand what is known about mothering and violence in the context of criminalized women’s lives by clarifying the direction, strength, and interpretation of the relationship between living with children and criminalized women’s violent offending against intimate partners. To accomplish this goal, I place mothering at the forefront of inquiry and I am attentive to how living with children may shape offending in different types of violent intimate partner conflicts.

6.3 Defining Criminalized Women’s Violent Offending against Intimate Partners

Though violent offending is certainly more common among populations of criminalized women than among non-criminalized women (Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983;
Comack 1996; Maeve 2000; Richie 1996), less than half of the women in my sample (87 women; 36 percent) reported using violence against their intimate partners during the three year calendar period.50 Of the 87 women who did use violence against either current partners or ex-partners,51 they described 125 separate incidents. The number of times these 87 women used violence during the 36-month calendar period ranged from once (62 women; 71 percent), twice (14 women; 16 percent), three or more times (10 women; 11 percent), to a maximum of five times (one woman; one percent). Women were thus more likely to engage in non-violent offending, including using illicit drugs regularly (152 women, 59 percent), committing property crime (146 women, 56 percent), and dealing drugs (99 women, 38 percent), than in violent offending.

In this research, measures of violent offending focus on acts of serious violence, rather than less severe forms of physical aggression. As such, violence is measured according to whether women engaged in any of the following behaviours against intimate partners that are typical in physical fights and sexual assaults: used a weapon52, threw something53, punched or slapped, choked, kicked, threw their partner to the ground or against a wall, used force or the threat of force to take something from their partner54, or used force or the threat of force to make their partner have sexual relations with them. This measure of violent offending includes incidents in which women threatened or attempted to carry out any of these violent actions, even if they were not successfully accomplished. Women who reported involvement in at least one incident with any of the above-mentioned characteristics were coded as ‘1’ for violent offending in a given

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50 The descriptive statistics and analyses in this chapter rely on a sample of women who were involved in an intimate relationship for at least some portion of the three-year calendar period. This sub-sample is comprised of 239 women (compared to the full sample of 259 women).
51 The term ‘intimate partner’ was not specifically defined, but was instead left to the individual respondents to interpret. The vast majority of women identified their intimate partners without hesitation; fewer than five women asked for clarification regarding what was meant by the term. It is important to note that respondents’ intimate partners included both cohabiting and non-cohabiting male partners. Sexual relationships were not necessarily considered synonymous with intimate relationships.
52 Weapons include guns, knives, baseball bats, frying pans, scissors, sticks, etc.
53 Women threw such objects as rocks, bottles, small appliances, dishes, etc
54 This includes any incident where force or threats were used to obtain money, property, or drugs from an intimate partner.
month, and ‘0’ otherwise.\footnote{The information used in this analysis stems from violent incidents that stood out clearly in respondents’ minds. These are ‘unique’ or discrete incidents, rather than incidents about which the details ran together as a series and could not be clearly recalled because of their repeated nature.} Incidents that only involved pushing, shoving and grabbing were not coded as violent.

The three narratives presented below illustrate the common sources of conflict in which women used violence against their intimate partners as well as the qualitatively different dynamics of these violent incidents. Among the women in my sample, violent conflicts with intimate partners most frequently stemmed from perceived offensive behaviour (24%), sexual jealousy (24%), drugs (9%), money (7%), and challenges to authority (7%).\footnote{The women themselves define the primary issue that prompted the violent intimate partner incident. The remaining categories include: dispute over children (4%), substance abuse (2%), dispute over property (1.5%), verbal insult/physical gestures (1.5%), predatory physical attack (1.5%), dispute over sex (1%), physical affront (1%), and ‘other’ (18%).} When in conflict over these issues, women sometimes exchanged violent blows with their opponents willingly (e.g., in frustration) or more reluctantly (e.g., in an effort to defend themselves from attacks by their partners). At other times, women were violent towards intimate partners who did not respond in kind. For example, in the first and second narratives, the women and their partners are both ‘offenders’ – that is, they both use violence. However, women’s roles in these conflicts differ dramatically between being an aggressor (see Narrative 1) to using violence primarily in self-defence (see Narrative 2). In the third narrative, identifying the ‘offender’ is less problematic because the woman acted violently whereas her partner did not.

**Narrative 1:** We were just arguing and he walked out of the bedroom into the living room, and I hate when he walks away from me. I ran out and tackled him. He was sitting on the furnace and I tackled him to the floor. We both fell to the floor. We both got up. He grabbed me by my hair and dragged me to the kitchen, but before that he broke everything that was glass that we had in the house. We were arguing because I found out that he was in a strip club on a stage and a girl was taking loonies or twoonies or whatever out of his mouth. He tried to deny it, but I knew that he had done it. After he dragged me into the kitchen I think I started crying and I went into the bedroom. (ID 167).

**Narrative 2:** We were using cocaine and he wouldn’t give me any more but he was sitting there doing it in front of me. So I took 2 grams from him and he went to choke and hit me. We had been drinking and so I just...
grabbed a beer bottle and stabbed him in the head. He stood there yelling and looking at the blood. My roommate heard and saw the blood streaming out of his head and she called 9-1-1. (ID 103)

Narrative 3: I was folding laundry and arguing with him at his mom’s house. And there was a knife under a towel… I don’t even know how it got there but there was a knife under a towel. And every time I yelled at him he was laughing. And I just grabbed the knife and tried to stab him in the chest, but he hopped over the couch and I got [stabbed] his foot. He ran out of the house, and his mom started yelling at me. 57 (ID 100)

In order to capture some of the inherent complexity of criminalized women’s violent interactions with intimate partners, I measure offending in two ways. My first measure captures incidents of ‘mutual’ violence between women and their intimate partners (e.g., Narratives 1 and 2 above). These are conflicts in which women use violence against partners who likewise use violence against them. The term ‘mutual’ is intended to convey the reciprocal nature of the violent exchange; it is not meant to imply that the use of violence by women and their intimate partners is equal in other respects (e.g., in terms of who initiates the violence, the motive for using violence, the severity of the violent attack, etc.). My second measure of violent offending captures incidents in which women are the ‘sole’ users of violence – that is, women use violence against partners who do not respond violently (e.g., Narrative 3 above). My rationale for employing these two mutually exclusive variations of the variable measuring women’s violent offending – of which the former includes, and the latter excludes, women’s victimization – is to ensure that my analysis of the relationship between living with children and criminalized women’s use of violence is not obscured by a measure of offending that primarily captures self-defence.

57 The backdrop to this incident is that the respondent was angry because her partner told her that he would pick her up in an hour, and five hours later he had not yet arrived. The respondent found him at his mother’s house, where he was “just sitting there like an idiot.” The intimate partner’s inappropriate response (i.e., laughter) to the respondent’s frustration sparks a violent attack by the respondent from which her partner flees without retaliating.
6.4 Bivariate Associations between Criminalized Women’s Violent Offending, Mothering, and Other Life Circumstances

I begin to uncover the relationship between criminalized women’s life circumstances and their violent offending by examining the bivariate associations between my independent variables – including living with children – and the dependent variables – women’s use of mutual and sole violence in conflicts with intimate partners. These bivariate correlations – and the multivariate analyses that follow – rely on a sample of women who were involved in an intimate relationship for at least some portion of the three-year calendar period (i.e., 239 women and 6165 woman-months). Though smaller than the full sample on which the analyses in the previous two chapters were based (259 women and 8249 woman-months), the sample of women with intimate partners is sufficiently large that even substantively weak bivariate relationships may emerge as statistically significant. As such, the results of this descriptive analysis should be seen as simply providing the groundwork for the more sophisticated explanatory modeling that follows. I present the correlations between violent offending against intimate partners and mothering in Table 6.1.

Mutual Violent Offending against Intimate Partners: The correlations between criminalized women’s offending in mutually violent intimate partner conflicts, living with children, and other life circumstances are presented in Table 6.1 (column 1). Living with children is significantly and negatively correlated with participation in mutually violent conflicts with partners ($r=-.051$). The only other feature of women’s lives associated with a lesser likelihood of using violence against an intimate partner in mutually violent conflicts is earning a monthly income greater than $1,250. Conversely, being involved with a drug-using partner, living in transient housing, experiencing severe stress, participating more often in activities, using and dealing drugs, and time are all positively related to criminalized women’s use of violence against their intimate partners in conflicts in which they are also targets of violence.
Sole Violent Offending against Intimate Partners: While living with children is significantly associated with women’s offending in mutually violent exchanges with intimate partners, the same is not true of their participation in altercations in which they are the sole users of violence (see Table 6.1, column 2). Moreover, no other measure of features of women’s lives correlates negatively with their participation in incidents of intimate partner violence in which they alone offend. In contrast, three measures of criminalized women’s life circumstances – living with an intimate partner, involvement with a drug-using partner, and time\(^2\) – are significantly and positively associated with the likelihood of being the sole user of violence in an intimate-partner conflict.

### 6.5 Multivariate Analysis: Models Predicting the Odds of Criminalized Women’s Violent Offending against Intimate Partners

In this section, I discuss the multilevel models I use to assess whether and how living with children shapes criminalized women’s violent offending against intimate partners. I present two sets of step-wise multilevel analyses: one predicting women’s violent offending in mutually violent conflicts and the other predicting their sole use of violence (see Tables 6.2 and 6.3, respectively). Following the framework presented in chapters 4 and 5, I discuss six models for each outcome: the Control Variables Model illustrates the effects of all of the control variables on intra-individual violent offending patterns; Model 1 includes measures of living with children and time to establish a baseline effect of mothering on violent offending; Model 2 incorporates the effect of intimate relationships on violent offending; Model 3 includes dimensions of the socio-economic contexts in which women live; Model 4 captures women’s involvement in both non-criminal and criminal activities; and Model 5 includes all of the above-mentioned variables, except women’s criminal activities.

In general, I include the same independent variables in the models estimating the relationship between mothering and violent offending as I used in my analyses of non-
violent offending to facilitate comparisons across the different outcomes.\(^{58}\) An important exception is that the variable measuring whether women are involved in a violent intimate relationship is represented in these models as the dependent variable and is therefore omitted as a control variable. My presentation and discussion of results for violent and non-violent offending also differ insofar as I devote more attention to predictors of violent offending that only reach significance at the \(p < .10\) level. My rationale for this is that my models have inflated standard errors as a consequence of having a relatively small number of women who engage in violent offending, and achieving statistical significance is thus more difficult.\(^{59}\)

**Mutual Violent Offending against Intimate Partners**

**Control Variable Model:** I regress women’s offending in mutually violent intimate partner conflicts on all of the control variables in this model. Table 6.2 indicates that many of the relationships that were significant at the bivariate level are no longer significant upon the inclusion of other controls. Indeed, only two aspects of criminalized women’s lives – experiencing severe stress and drug dealing – are significantly related to whether or not they engage in mutually violent conflicts with their partners. Compared to months when they do not experience severe stress and deal drugs, women are more likely to engage in mutual intimate partner violence in months when they do.

**Model 1:** Including measures of living with children and time in Model 1 established the baseline effect of mothering on criminalized women’s propensity to engage in mutually violent intimate partner conflicts. Contrary to the bivariate results presented in Table 6.1 (column 1), which show that living with children is significantly and negatively correlated with women’s use of violence in incidents in which they are also targets of violence, the multivariate results indicate that, controlling for time, living with children is not significantly related to this type of violent offending.

\(^{58}\) Consistent with my previous analysis chapters, the findings I present are based on unit-specific models with robust standard errors.

\(^{59}\) Overall, 60 women engaged in mutual violence and 39 women engaged in violence as sole offenders against their intimate partners. However, only 11 women engaged in mutual violence in months during which they live with children, and eight women engaged in sole violence in months during which they lived with children.
Model 2: Model 2 reveals that neither the characteristics of criminalized women’s intimate relationships nor living with children plays a significant role in predicting whether or not they exchange violent blows with their intimate partners.

Model 3: Like the Control Variables Model, Model 3 reveals that experiencing severe stress in a given month significantly increases the likelihood that women will be involved in mutually violent intimate partner conflicts. Other key social and economic conditions that circumscribe criminalized women’s lives – including their income, whether they inhabit a transient dwelling, and whether they know people to whom they can turn for help – do not predict this type of violent offending. Living with children continues to be unrelated to criminalized women’s involvement in mutual violence with their intimate partners.

Model 4: Model 4, the final model, includes measures of living with children, intimate relationships, socio-economic conditions, and aspects of women’s activities. While women’s lawful activities do not shape their experiences of offending in mutually violent conflicts with their intimate partners, one type of criminal activity – namely drug dealing – significantly increases the likelihood of mutual violence in a given month. As was the case in previous models, experiencing severe stress continues to significantly increase the likelihood of violent offending. In contrast, the insignificant relationship between living with children and women’s mutually violent exchanges with their partners remains even after re-specification of the final model in supplemental analyses.60

Model 5: The removal of women’s criminal activities – namely, their drug use, drug dealing, and prostitution – does not alter the relationship between the effect of living with children on women’s participation in mutually violent conflicts with their intimate partners. On the contrary, with the exception of time, the pattern of results in Model 5 is identical to that in Model 4.

60 More specifically, using four different income cut-offs (i.e., $833, $1,250, $2,083, and $2,917 monthly, or $10,000, $15,000, $25,000 or $35,000 yearly), substituting employment for income, and testing for multicollinearity (the lowest tolerance value in the mutual offending model is .616 and the highest variance inflation factor (VIF) value is 1.624) confirm my results are robust. Because my main variable of interest – living with children – is not significant in any of the models, I did not test for interaction effects.
Summary of Mutual Violence Models: The results of the step-wise models presented in Table 6.2 repeatedly demonstrate that living with children does not change intra-individual patterns of involvement in mutually violent conflicts with intimate partners among a sample of criminalized women. The null relationship between living with children and mutual violence remains after the inclusion of theoretically relevant control variables. Two equally consistent findings are the significant role of experiencing severe stress and dealing drugs for heightening criminalized women’s likelihood of engaging in mutual violence with their partners. No feature of criminalized women’s lives included in these models reduces their odds of exchanging violent blows with their partners.

Sole Violent Offending against Intimate Partners

Control Variables Model: I regress incidents in which women are the sole users of violence against intimate partners on all of the control variables in this model. As Table 6.3 indicates, features of criminalized women’s relationships and socio-economic conditions predict their use of this type of violence. The likelihood that women will engage in incidents in which they use violence against intimate partners who do not reciprocate violently increases in months in which their partners use drugs, as well as when they experience severe stress.

Model 1: Model 1 measures the effect of living with children on women’s sole use of violence against intimate partners, without controlling for other life circumstances included in later models. The results indicate that, controlling for time, living with children is weakly (p < .10) but significantly related to the likelihood that women will use violence against their partners in incidents in which their partners do not use violence against them. This finding contradicts the bivariate results, which showed a very weak and insignificant effect (r=-.018) of living with children on criminalized women’s involvement as sole offenders in intimate partner disputes.61

Model 2: Incorporating measures of women’s intimate relationships in this model reveals that being involved with a drug-using partner significantly increases the odds that women

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61 This discrepancy between the bivariate and multivariate results is presumably explained by a small suppressor effect.
will be the sole users of violence in conflicts with their partners. Living with children again increases women’s risk of violent offending, though this effect only reaches significance at the p < .10 level.

**Model 3:** One measure of the economic and social conditions that typically characterize criminalized women’s lives – experiencing severe stress – is significantly related to the likelihood that they will use violence against intimate partners who do not use violence against them. Model 3 shows that women who experience severe stress in a given month are more likely to engage in violent conflicts in which they are sole offenders. However, accounting for criminalized women’s socio-economic context does not erase the detrimental effect seen in the previous model of being involved with a drug-using partner on violent offending. Finally, living with children continues to exert a positive and weakly significant effect (p < .10) on women’s sole use of violence against partners.

**Model 4:** This final model shows that neither women’s lawful activities nor their criminal activities are related to their involvement in violent conflicts with intimate partners in which they alone use violence. Conversely, two other features of their lives – involvement with a drug-using partner and severe stress – both elevate the likelihood that women will offend violently. Of particular importance, Model 4 shows that living with children continues to influence criminalized women’s involvement as sole users of violence in intimate partner conflicts, over-and-above other features of their life circumstances.

Model 5: The pattern of results in Model 5 conforms identically to Model 4. In both models, living with children weakly but significantly (p. < .10) increases the likelihood that women will be the sole users of violence in incidents with their intimate partners. Also consistent between Models 4 and 5 is that being involved with a drug-using partner and experiencing severe stress raise the likelihood that women will offend violently.

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62 I test the robustness of these results by performing the following supplementary analyses: using four different income cut-offs (i.e., $833, $1,250, $2,083, and $2,917 monthly, or $10,000, $15,000, $25,000 or $35,000 yearly), substituting employment for income, and testing for multicollinearity (the lowest tolerance value in the sole offending model is .616 and the highest variance inflation factor (VIF) value is 1.624).
Summary of Sole Violence Models: The results presented in Table 6.3 demonstrate that a positive relationship between living with children and women’s role as the sole users of violence in intimate partner conflicts remains significant, despite the inclusion of theoretically relevant control variables. While this relationship only ever reaches statistical significance at the p < .10 level, it is one of only three measures of features of criminalized women’s lives that significantly shapes their involvement in this specific type of offending. Two other aspects of women’s lives – their involvement with drug-using partners and their experience of severe stress – also increase the likelihood they will use violence against partners who do not respond in kind. No feature of criminalized women’s lives included in these models reduces their odds of engaging in this type of offending.

6.6 Comparison of Multilevel Logistic Regression Models for Women’s Mutual versus Sole Violent Offending against Intimate Partners

The evidence presented in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 indicates that the way in which criminalized women’s violent offending against intimate partners is measured (i.e., broadly to include experiences of victimization or more narrowly to exclude such experiences) matters for understanding its relationship to mothering. More specifically, analyses relying on a broad definition of women’s offending reveal that women neither significantly increase nor decrease their involvement in mutually violent conflicts with partners above or below their own baseline level when they live with children. In contrast, analyses relying on a narrower definition of women’s violent offending reveal that living with children is consistently and positively related to women’s sole use of violence in conflicts with intimate partners. In sum, mothering does not exert a consistent effect across all contexts in which women use violence against their intimate partners.

No features of women’s local life circumstances act as protective factors against their participation in violent intimate partner conflicts as either mutual or sole violent offenders. In contrast, three life circumstances enhance their likelihood of using violence against their intimate partners: women who report feeling severe stress are more likely to engage in violence with partners as both mutual and sole offenders; women who are
involved with a drug-using partner are significantly more likely to be sole offenders against partners; and women who deal drugs are significantly more likely to engage in mutual violence with their intimate partners. I turn now to discussing the key implications of these empirical findings.

6.7 Discussion

The results presented in this chapter indicate that the relationship between mothering and criminalized women’s violent offending against intimate partners varies according to the type of violent conflict in which they engage. Indeed, when women are living with children, they are neither significantly more nor less likely to be involved in mutual partner violence. In contrast, women are significantly more likely to be the sole users of violence against their partners in months when they live with children. Before offering a possible explanation as to why living with children exerts different effects on women’s use of violence according to the nature of the dispute, I first discuss two subsidiary findings that emerge from my analyses – namely, how often women in my sample offend violently when they live with children and the particular issues regarding children over which they come into conflict with their intimate partners. In addition to evaluating the above findings in the context of the research literature on the relationship between mothering and violent offending, I also draw upon women’s narratives of violence to better understand their motivations for pursuing a violent course of action against their intimate partners.63

Despite contributions of past scholarship on the relationship between mothering and violent offending among intimate partners, even basic descriptive information about how often women use violence when they live with children remains undocumented. The findings from the current analyses suggest that, among women who lived with children for at least some portion of the calendar period, over half of the incidents in which they

63 The women in my sample provided word-for-word accounts of their violent conflicts with partners. In these narratives, women described such features of the incidents as: what the fight was about, where it occurred, who was involved, how it ended, who was harmed, etc. These accounts are particularly valuable in the context of the current study because women were not directed to speak about their roles as mothers and/or their children. As such, women’s comments on the relationship between mothering and violent offending are spontaneous.
used violence against partners occurred in months when they lived with children. These women reported a total of 39 incidents in which they used violence against intimate partners (25 mutual and 14 sole violent incidents). Of these 39 incidents, 23 (59 percent) occurred in months when women lived with children (11 mutual incidents and 12 sole incidents). Of these 23 incidents, eight (four mutual incidents and four sole incidents) featured discussions of children. Knowing the prevalence with which women in my sample used violence against intimate partners when they live with children provides a useful baseline from which to examine the mothering-violent offending relationship. The figure presented here may be used as a point of comparison in future investigations.

The current study also demonstrates that the role children play in criminalized women’s descriptions of their violent encounters with intimate partners mirrors previous findings from largely non-criminalized populations. Indeed, two themes that dominate women’s descriptions of violent offending against intimate partners that involves children include: frustration over insufficient child-rearing support and children’s physical or emotional welfare. The narrative below – in which tension over the care of the woman’s young son causes her to exchange violent blows with her partner – illustrates elements of these themes:

I was sick with the flu. I asked Blair to take care of Desmond [respondent’s infant son], so that I could lay down. He said “it’s your son and you need to take care of him, he’s not my son.” I said Blair you are living here and I support you and I am telling you to take care of my son. We both started yelling at each other. He picked Desmond up – not violently – but roughly. And it looked like [Blair] was going to throw [Desmond]. I went and grabbed Desmond from him. He hit Desmond across the head. I ran into the bedroom with Desmond and put him in his crib and went back out and told [Blair] to get the f*** out. He argued with me and told me he wasn’t leaving…I started banging on the ceiling telling the neighbours to call the cops. Blair punched me in the face and I threw him against the wall. He came back and slapped me.

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64 Given that information was collected separately from women about the months in which they lived with children and about the months in which they offended violently, I am relatively confident that response bias did not affect women’s reports of how often they engaged in violent offending when they lived with children. However, I must assume that women’s descriptions of their violent confrontations with partners were affected by response bias; women were likely to underreport incidents involving children because of the laws governing child abuse, about which all respondents were informed prior to starting the interview. Consequently, I cannot make any claims about the representativeness of how frequently children feature in women’s narratives of violence.
me. I threw him against the wall and told him to get out. He pinned me on the couch and started repeatedly hitting me…He started tearing the place apart…At this point in time I had lost it. I beat the f*** out of him. Grabbed him by the hair of his head and escorted him to the sidewalk – told him to leave me alone and that I was charging him. I called the cops and gave a description. (ID 246).

The above narrative reflects prevalent themes relating to how a partner’s reluctance or refusal to assist in the work of childcare and/or their threatening actions may leave criminalized women feeling fearful and/or incensed, thus spurring them to respond violently.

A more notable finding emerging from these analyses of criminalized women’s violent offending against intimate partners is that living with children exerts no significant effect on mutual violence but significantly increases their use of sole violence. These results highlight the importance of accounting for the difference between types of female offending against intimate partners when considering the mothering-offending relationship. As I discuss in more detail below, both the extant literature and qualitative evidence from the women in my sample suggest that these two types of incidents differ in terms of (1) who plays the dominant role in the violence and (2) the associated costs and benefits of violence for women who are living with children.

In order to understand why living with children matters for criminalized women’s sole but not their mutual violent experiences, it is important to first consider the role that both they and their intimate partners play in violent incidents. After all, if women’s partners largely determine whether and how mutually violent altercations unfold, as previous research suggests is the case (Dasgupta 1999), the relevance of the presence of children to whether women use violence may be overridden by the threat of imminent harm. Indeed, the narratives reported by the women in my sample suggest that they have less freedom to act according to their own inclinations in incidents of mutual violence than in incidents of sole violence. Consistent with research on the dynamics of violent exchanges between intimate partners (Dasgupta 1999), women’s partners initiated the majority of mutually violent attacks (52 out of 85 cases, or 61 percent). Moreover, in situations where women initiated violence, their partners often subsequently dominated
how the exchange unfolds. Thus, to the extent that men direct violent conflicts among intimate partners, the presence of children may be largely irrelevant for whether a violent altercation actually ensues, even if women prefer to shield their children from such behaviour. In the context of mutual violence, women may feel “compelled” to use violence in response to their partner’s aggression (Richie 1996).

Conversely, women do not face the same constraints on their decision-making surrounding violence in sole violence incidents. In fact, the women in my sample who acted as sole users of violence in partner conflicts often articulated that they knew their partners well enough to be fairly confident, prior to their attack, that their partners would not use violence against them. For example, one woman explained that her partner “never hit a girl in his life” (ID 112), while another reported that “I knew he wouldn’t retaliate” (ID 153). The offence-specific effect of mothering on women’s use of violence may be partially explained if women’s behaviour is more tightly bound by the actions of their partners in incidents of mutual violence than in incidents of sole violence.

Women’s narratives of violence also suggest that the costs and benefits differ depending on the type of violent incident in ways that likely have particular relevance for women who live with children. At least three costs of violent offending exist that are more prevalent in incidents of mutual versus sole violent conflicts, especially for women who live with children. First, consistent with the literature showing that men typically inflict more harm on women in physical fights than vice versa (Flynn 1990), women in my sample who were involved in mutually violent incidents sustained comparatively severe injuries relative to women who were sole users of violence and thus avoided injury. For example, one mother reported that while a violent confrontation with her partner left him with bruises that did not require medical attention, she was “badly beaten” and suffered a broken nose from being “punched…repeatedly in [her] face” (ID 525). In another case, a mother explained that her partner “beat the s*** out of me…he stomped on my head four times. Then I was lying there and he kicked me on my stomach and my back…then he grabbed a chair and he slammed it on me two times” (ID 130). Another woman who was living with children reported that her irate partner’s punches left her “bleeding from my nose, and on my chin. I was a mess. My nose was really sore – it turned out that I had a
fractured nose and ended up with two black eyes” (ID 228). Compared to women who were neither harmed nor threatened with harm in disputes in which they were sole offenders, women involved in mutually violent incidents were thus vulnerable to sustaining injuries that threatened to interfere with their ability to engage in the work of mothering. Bruises, cuts, stab wounds, fractured or broken bones and internal injuries – which sometimes warrant hospital stays depending on their severity – are not conducive to being available to respond to children’s physical and emotional needs.

A second and related cost of violent offending that disproportionately affects women who engage in mutual violence compared to those who act as sole offenders involves attracting the attention of authorities. In the face of beatings from violent partners, women are more likely to resort to phoning the police for help, and neighbours may also contact law enforcement upon witnessing a domestic disturbance. The involvement of the police in mutually violent incidents may be particularly undesirable for women who live with children; these women risk separation from children if they are arrested for their participation in the violent exchange. Among women who lived with children in my sample, those who were involved in mutual violence with their partners reported some type of involvement on the part of law enforcement in seven out of 11 incidents. Conversely, the police were only involved in two out of 12 incidents in which women acted as sole offenders.

Women’s accounts of their involvement as mutual versus sole violent offenders revealed that not only were women more likely to contact the police for help in certain situations, but their intimate partners were actually reluctant to do so. For example, when women were involved in incidents of mutual violence in which they considered themselves to be at risk of significant harm from their partners, they were willing to contact the police either during or after the incident. One mother who was involved in a mutually violent conflict reported that she “was trying to use the phone to call the police” in the midst of a violent attack by her partner (ID 130), and another “called the cops and gave a description” of her partner following their violent exchange (ID 246). In stark contrast,

65 Women may be particularly concerned about being separated from children as it is becoming more common for both parties in a domestic violence incident to be arrested (Henning and Feder 2004).
both the women who acted as sole offenders and their partners seemed reticent to involve the authorities. Several women who participated in sole violent incidents exuded confidence that their partners would not contact the authorities to report their victimization. For example, one victim of his wife’s attack lamented that if he went to the police to say that his wife assaulted him, he would get charged, not his wife, despite the fact he had not broken the law (ID 176). As such, sensing in advance of their attack that their intimate partners would neither respond with violence nor report incidents of domestic violence to the police, the penalty to women who acted as sole offenders is smaller than for those women who participated in mutually violent conflicts.

Children’s emotional welfare is discussed in women’s narratives of violence as a third cost associated with offending that differentiates between incidents in which women are mutual versus sole users of violence against intimate partners. Among the women in my sample, both types of violent conflict were similar to the extent that they typically occurred at home, thereby increasing the likelihood that children were in the immediate vicinity of the dispute. Among respondents who lived with children, nine out of 11 of the mutually violent incidents and 11 out of 12 of the sole violent incidents happened at home. However, mutual and sole incidents differed in terms of the degree of violence to which children were exposed. For example, in one case of mutual violent offending, one- and three-year old boys witnessed their mother being badly beaten by their father as she pleaded with him to end the attack because her boys were “crying really scared” (ID 130). In contrast, the threat to children’s welfare was comparatively much less serious in an incident in which a woman acted as the sole offender by throwing a plate that missed her husband. This woman explained that her argument with her husband regarding his drug use was “on and off” because kids were home (ID 173). While many women who have experienced domestic violence express a desire to protect their children from the emotional harm associated with witnessing violence (Radford and Hester 2006), this may be truer in incidents of mutual violence which tend to involve more serious harm. Said differently, because incidents of sole violence tend to be less costly than incidents of mutual violence in terms of the emotional damage they are likely to inflict on children who witness them, children may be less likely to act as a foreground factor that inhibits women’s decision to act as sole aggressors against their intimate partners.
Whereas the costs of using violence against partners for women who live with children appear to be higher in incidents of mutual violence, the benefits of offending appear greater when women are the sole users of violence in intimate partner disputes. The ability to express frustration and anger whilst avoiding serious punishment is seemingly the biggest advantage of using violence against intimate partners who do not fight back. Women who acted as sole offenders sensed a freedom to act on the tensions that living with children often generated between themselves and their partners over such issues as their partner’s inability to properly prepare a bottle (ID 525); reluctance to care for an infant except when mother was out prostituting to get money to support their drug addiction (ID 112); emotional insecurity about the ability to provide for children (ID 176); refusal to help care for a child who is “not his son” (ID 246); and carelessness when smashing a glass that “lightly grazes” a child’s arm (ID 112). By expressing frustration without being victimized, involvement in incidents of sole violence thus provided women with benefits at minimal cost.

In the context of unconstrained decision-making, the foregoing evidence suggests that living with children would more likely suppress women’s desire to engage in mutually violent conflicts while exerting the opposite effect on their involvement in incidents as sole offenders. However, as we have seen, women’s actions are often highly constrained by their intimate partners. To the extent that the constraints placed on women’s ability to act according to their own assessment of the overall utility of violent offending differ between mutually violent versus solely violent incidents, the non-uniform effect of mothering on violent offending makes sense. Irrespective of their feelings about wanting to live in relationships free of violence, whether or not women actually engage in mutual violence is instead more heavily dependent upon the actions of their intimate partners.

In addition to contributing to the literature on violent offending in the context of criminalized mother’s lives, the evidence presented here simultaneously has important implications for understanding female offending more generally. A number of studies have documented the difference between types of male violence against partners (Johnson and Ferraro 2000; Macmillan and Gartner 1999). Of particular relevance is work that distinguishes between “common couple violence,” in which both partners use
violence of relatively low frequency, unconnected to control and unlikely to escalate or involve serious injury, and “patriarchal terrorism,” in which violence is one tactic in a general pattern of control and is more frequent, less likely to be mutual, and more likely to escalate and result in serious injury. My findings similarly suggest that differences exist between the types of violence women use against their intimate partners. Indeed, an aspect of women’s violent offending that is more prevalent in their narratives of sole violent incidents involves the feeling of power that women command in their relationships. For example, one woman said, “he [partner] wasn’t my boss and I could do whatever I wanted to do” (ID 142), while another woman explained that “I’m not going to listen to no man…no man is going to dominate me” (ID 307). Another woman illustrates her dominance over her partner by throwing a hot roast pan at him and then ordering him to “clean it up” (ID 225). While evidence from this study neither suggests that women’s use of sole violence against their partners is analogous to “patriarchal terrorism” nor that it is typical of women’s violent offending behaviour, it nevertheless represents an important dimension of women’s violent offending that warrants further investigation. My study draws attention to the fact that distinguishing between the types of violence in which women engage is important for understanding how life circumstances – including living with children – affect their offending.

The results of this study also identify other aspects of women’s lives that are significantly related to their use of violence against their intimate partners, including stress, drug-using partners, and drug dealing. For example, my finding that women who experience severe stress are more likely to engage in both mutual and sole violence is consistent with previous research that describes violence as a non-normative coping response to strain (Slocum et al. 2005). The meaning of my other two significant findings, however, is less clear and would benefit from more attention by researchers investigating women’s

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66 Women’s sole use of violence is not akin to patriarchal terrorism. Men use violence for different reasons than women (i.e., men use violence to control their intimate partners while women more often use violence to defend themselves or to relieve frustration). Research demonstrates that women are rarely the batterers in relationships, or “intimate terrorists”, even if they engage in hitting their partners (Miller and Meloy 2006). For example, none of the women I interviewed who acted as sole users of violence exhibited a history of dominating or controlling their intimate partners. Instead, incidents of sole violence – which were very rare even among the women who sometimes engaged in them – typically involved women lashing out at their partners in response to frustration. Women’s use of violence was not intended to make their partners comply with their demands.
involvement in intimate partner violence. Indeed, while research shows that drug use heightens the risk of domestic violence (Brookoff et al. 1997), why are women whose intimate partners use drugs significantly more likely to act as sole, rather than mutual, offenders? Similarly, why dealing drugs is significantly related to women’s involvement in mutual, but not sole, violence, also warrants further investigation.

6.8 Conclusion

In this final analysis chapter, I examined the influence of mothering on two different types of violent offending in which women may engage with their intimate partners – mutually violent conflicts in which both partners use violence and violent conflicts in which women alone aggress against their partner. This analysis revealed that mothering is an important feature of women’s life circumstances that shapes short-term patterns of intra-individual use of violence against intimate partners, though only in contexts in which women act as sole offenders. I argue that differences in costs, benefits, and degree of agency associated with different types of offending experiences explain why living with children does not have a uniform effect on women’s violent offending. Scholars who are interested in further understanding how aspects of women’s life circumstances affect their offending behaviour should thus be attentive to the specific type of violence in which women engage.

In the next chapter, I summarize the effects of mothering on criminalized women’s involvement in both non-violent and violent offending. This synthesis of the findings from chapters 4, 5, and 6 will allow me to (1) fill in gaps in the empirical literature regarding the influence of life circumstances on criminalized women’s offending, (2) review the major theoretical implications of the influence of mothering on offending, and (3) consider the relevance of these findings for actors working in the policy arena, both inside and outside of carceral settings.
Table 6.1: Bivariate Relationships Between Women’s Use of Violence against Intimate Partners, Living with Children, and Control Variables (N=6165)

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<th>Mutual violence vs. partner</th>
<th>Sole violence vs. partner</th>
<th>Lives with children</th>
<th>Lives with intimate partner</th>
<th>Drug-using partner</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Transient housing</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Routines</th>
<th>Drug use</th>
<th>Drug dealing</th>
<th>Prostitution</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Time²</th>
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* p < .05, ** p < .01
Table 6.2: Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Women’s Mutual Use of Violence against an Intimate Partner

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<td>B (SE B)</td>
<td>e^b</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>1.079* (0.471)</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.045* (0.475)</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index: Routine activities</td>
<td>-0.144 (0.412)</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>-0.141 (0.585)</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dealing</td>
<td>1.474* (0.646)</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution</td>
<td>-0.091 (0.903)</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>0.015 (0.011)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.021* (0.011)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.022* (0.011)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time^2</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .10, **p ≤ .05, ***p ≤ .001
Table 6.3: Multilevel Logistic Regression Predicting the Effect of Living with Children on Women’s Sole Use of Violence against an Intimate Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
<td>e^B</td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
<td>e^B</td>
<td>B (SE B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with child(ren)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.564*</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.512*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lives with partner</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-using partner</td>
<td>1.502*</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.372*</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.331*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient housing</td>
<td>-0.438</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index: Routine activities</td>
<td>-0.363</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
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<td>.51</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dealing</td>
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<td>.50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution</td>
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<td>.21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time^2</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ p ≤ .10, * p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001
Chapter 7
Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction
In this final chapter, I discuss the relevance of my research on the relationship between criminalized women’s mothering and offending experiences for both academic and policy audiences. I begin by reviewing the central issues that motivated my specific research questions. Next, I summarize the main findings from my analyses of the effect of mothering on various types of offending – namely, property, drug, and violent crime – and suggest why mothering exerts a non-uniform effect on criminalized women’s offending. I then provide an overview of the theoretical and policy implications stemming from this research. Finally, I outline the key limitations of my study and offer recommendations for how future research can extend work on this topic.

7.2 Mothering and Criminalized Women’s Offending
While it is widely known that most women convicted of crime or serving time in prison are mothers, little research has focused specifically on whether and how the daily activity of mothering and caring for children affects women’s criminal behaviour. Moreover, the complexity of the social worlds that criminalized women occupy leaves the nature of the mothering-offending relationship unclear. On the one hand, criminalized women often report that parenting is important to them (Forsyth 2003; Radosh 2002). Research on criminalized women describes mothering as a major focus of their lives and among their most important sources of identity (Brown and Bloom 2009; Girshick 1999). These women express concern for and commitment to their children’s well-being. On the other hand, however, the challenges of mothering are particularly onerous for women who are economically disadvantaged, marginalized, and socially isolated – that is, the types of women who are most likely to engage in crime (Byrne and Trew 2008). As a consequence, and despite any noble sentiments that motherhood may inspire, the influence of children on the lives of these women is complicated and equivocal.
Theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence from both criminology and sociology do little to sort out the complexity of the mothering-crime relationship. A number of key theoretical concepts suggest contradictory expectations regarding the nature of the mothering-crime relationship. Some concepts – such as opportunity, social control, and rational choice – lead to the expectation that women’s involvement in crime will diminish during periods in which they are living with children. If mothering reduces the opportunities to engage in crime, strengthens informal controls, and increases the costs of crime, it should discourage women’s criminal activities. Other concepts – such as strain – point to ways in which mothering may have criminogenic effects on women. If children create an imperative for resources that women cannot accommodate legally while simultaneously exacerbating psychological and emotional strains associated with caring for children, women may succumb to non-normative coping mechanisms, such as criminal behaviour.

To the extent that the effect of mothering on offending has been the focus of empirical investigation, the findings are likewise very mixed. Both quantitative and qualitative studies report every possible outcome regarding the mothering-crime relationship. More specifically, studies find that mothering decreases offending (DeHart 2005; Edin & Kefalas 2005; Graham & Bowling 1996; Griffin and Armstrong 2003; Hope et al. 2003; Kreager et al. 2010; Uggen & Kruttschnitt 1998), mothering increases offending (Ferraro and Moe 2003; Forsyth 2003; Richie 1996; Wakefield and Uggen 2004), and mothering does not exert any effect on offending (Giordano et al. 2002; Griffin and Armstrong 2003).

This dissertation has made a distinctive contribution to this research by addressing five features that may be responsible for some of the variation in the findings across studies. These features include how maternal roles are defined, the behaviours that constitute offending, whether perceptions of offending patterns or actual offending patterns are measured, the types of samples used to measure the mothering-offending relationship, and whether intra- versus inter-individual research designs are used. First, I apply a measure of mothering that captures whether women are currently living with children. A number of other studies measure only whether or not women have ever given birth to a
child (e.g., Kreager et al. 2010). However, because criminalized women are at heightened risk of losing custody of their children (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Richie 2001), giving birth is not synonymous with raising children. An advantage of my measure is that it allows me to analyze how offending patterns vary when women have regular physical contact with children compared to times when they do not.

Second, I consider four distinct types of offending (property offending, drug using, drug dealing, and violent offending against intimate partners), whereas other studies have tended to use measures of broader categories, such as “illegal earnings” (Wakefield and Uggen 2004), or drug versus non-drug crime (Griffin and Armstrong 2003). My approach makes it possible to determine whether the mothering-offending relationship varies according to offense type. Third, I focus on women’s actual offending as opposed to their perceptions of how mothering shapes their offending behaviour to avoid the possibility of incongruence between how women think their children shape their offending behaviour and how their children actually shape their offending patterns.

Fourth, I use a sample of criminalized women, instead of samples of women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Kreager et al. 2010), early starting delinquents (Giordano et al. 2002), or drug users (Griffin and Armstrong 2003), who may or may not be embedded in criminal lifestyles. This allows me to assess whether a “motherhood effect” exists even among women who are comparatively deeply embedded in offending. Fifth, using a within-individual, as opposed to between-individual, research design enables me to rule out the possibility that characteristics associated with women’s willingness to engage in mothering may be associated with changes in their offending.

Using monthly life history calendar information from a sample of 259 criminalized women in Ontario, Canada, I addressed two research questions related to whether living with children affects women’s propensity to commit non-violent and violent offences.

First, I asked: What is the proximate effect of mothering on women’s criminal behaviour? This question considers whether and to what extent mothering shapes intra-individual patterns of offending over the short-term among criminalized women. Said differently, I investigate whether living with children changes the offending behaviour of criminalized
women, even if the change is transient in nature. Second, I asked: What processes explain the relationship between mothering and crime? This question considers the extent to which strains, choices, and controls could account for intra-individual patterns between mothering and offending roles. By illuminating whether and how the daily responsibilities and demands of living with children matter for offending, the goal of this study is to further clarify how life course events shape criminalized women’s lives.

7.3 Summary of Findings

My findings reveal a non-uniform effect of mothering on criminalized women’s offending. More specifically, living with children discourages women from engaging in property crime and using drugs, makes no difference to whether or not they deal drugs or engage in ‘mutual’ violence with intimate partners, and increases their use of ‘sole’ violence against intimate partners. Identifying the heterogeneous nature of the mothering-offending relationship reinforces claims about the complexity of the maternal role in criminalized women’s lives. In addition, these findings prompt careful consideration of the nature of different offending experiences.

The results of Chapter 4 show a significant and negative relationship between living with children and property offending. Among the women in my sample who at times engaged in theft, auto theft, forgery, fraud, and burglary, living with children acted, at least temporarily, to discourage or restrict this type of offending. Conversely, when these same women did not have responsibility for the care of their or others’ children, many of them resorted to property crime. In discussing their motives for property crime, women identified both basic sustenance needs as well as less imperative reasons, including convenience, habit, and self-indulgence. Month-to-month changes in their property offending may be linked to living with children because women decide to stop committing crime for non-urgent reasons. Acquiring money and goods via property crime as a supplementary resource, rather than as a means of sheer survival, apparently was not considered to be worth the risk of being apprehended by police and separated from children because of incarceration. Thus, while living with children often created a
financial burden for criminalized women, it simultaneously increased the costs of offending and acted as a form of informal social control on their behaviour.

In analyses of criminalized women’s participation in the illegal drug economy in Chapter 5, I showed that children constrain women’s drug use but do not affect their drug dealing activities. Women experienced a marked reduction in their regular (i.e., daily or weekly) use of such drugs as crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, and ‘other’ drugs during months in which they lived with children. Even when taking into account theoretically relevant features of women’s lives, the pro-social influence of mothering on women’s drug use remained. In contrast, women neither significantly increased nor decreased their involvement in making, selling, smuggling, or moving drugs above or below their own baseline level when they lived with children. The dominant explanation that emerged from my qualitative evidence was that drug use was perceived to be more antithetical to the mothering role than drug dealing. By creating a toxic environment in which it was difficult to function as an effective parent, drug use was seen as jeopardizing women’s capability for mothering, psychologically and/or in practice. Accordingly, many women reported reassessing their drug use and attempting to “get out of the life” when they were living with children. In contrast, drug dealing, which was typically motivated by economic need, was not perceived to be as dangerous to children’s physical or emotional welfare and so posed less of a threat to the mother-child relationship. Women also described themselves as playing a more peripheral role in drug dealing activities, which were often directed by their intimate partners. Taken together, these findings suggest that the competing demands of mothering elicited different responses from criminalized women, depending on the type of drug crime under consideration.

In Chapter 6, I shifted my focus from women’s involvement in non-violent offenses to consider the effect of mothering on their use of violence. I again found that the effect of mothering on offending is not uniform, in this case across all types of violent incidents. My analyses of women’s violence toward intimate partners revealed that their involvement in ‘mutual’ violence (i.e., violence in which they were both attacked by and attacked their intimate partners) neither significantly increased nor decreased when they lived with children. In contrast, when women were living with children they were more
likely to be the sole user of violence against their intimate partners. Women’s narratives suggest that the costs and benefits of using violence differ depending on the type of violent incident in ways that likely have particular relevance for women who live with children. Moreover, women’s narratives of intimate partner violence suggest that they felt they had less freedom to act according to their own inclinations in incidents of mutual violence than in incidents of sole violence. The offence-specific effect of mothering on women’s use of violence is thus understandable if women’s behaviour is more tightly bound by the actions of their partners in mutual incidents than in sole incidents.

7.4 Explaining the Non-Uniform Effect of Mothering on Offending

The non-uniform effect of the maternal role across different offending contexts raises the question: Why does mothering represent an important “local life circumstance” for shaping month-to-month variation only for some types of illegal activity? To answer this question, it is helpful to consider the broader life circumstances in which criminalized women mother and commit crime.

Life course perspectives are particularly well-suited to interpreting the key findings of this study to the extent that they emphasize how offending trajectories are shaped by individual decisions made in conjunction with situational contexts and structural influences (Sampson and Laub 1990; Laub and Sampson 2003). However, life course perspectives are less helpful for clarifying why living with children increases women’s use of sole violence against their intimate partners.

Women’s accounts of their offending suggest that, despite being embedded within social environments that often challenge their ability to choose freely between various courses of action, they do consider the increased costs of crime that accompany mothering. Indeed, two themes emerge from women’s accounts of their offending that provide a plausible explanation for the non-uniform effect of mothering on crime. The first theme – which is evident in women’s accounts of their property offending and drug use – is about their individual motivation to choose to avoid crime for the sake of maintaining
healthy relationships with children. The second theme – which is evident in women’s accounts of their drug dealing and ‘mutual’ violent offending – is about the extent to which women’s situational contexts, broadly defined, constrain their offending behaviour.

The finding that women are less likely to commit property offences and use drugs when they live with children is consistent with a key premise of life course perspectives: offenders who secure pro-social bonds experience renewed social control which in turn alters their calculation of the costs and benefits of committing crime. Women are active agents whose motivation to protect valued relationships with children raises the stakes of their offending. Conflict with legal (e.g., police) and social (e.g., child welfare) authorities, as well as exposing children to harmful environments, is an undesirable consequence that women attempt to avoid. Prioritizing the goal of living with children over-and-above the benefits that accrue from property offending and drug use thus motivates women to find alternatives to – and resist the temptations of – these types of crime. A pro-social effect of mothering is thus evident in offending contexts in which women both perceive the costs of crime to be steep and in which they are comparatively free to act according to their preferences.

The absence of an effect of mothering on women’s drug dealing and their use of ‘mutual’ violence in exchanges with intimate partners also resonate with a major theme in life course perspectives: namely, that “situations vary in the extent to which they constrain behavioral choices” (Birkbeck and LaFree 1993:129). A key similarity between drug dealing and women’s involvement in mutually violent exchanges with their intimate partners is the limits each places on women’s agency. Actors in women’s environments, other than their children, may exert a strong influence on their participation in drug dealing. The reluctance of drug associates to “do business” with women may hinder their attempts to deal, while women’s intimate partners may either facilitate or pressure them to participate at the periphery of their dealing. Similarly, the offending preferences of women’s intimate partners may overwhelm their own motivation to refrain from mutual violence. Women’s intimate partners play a dominant role in mutual violence with respect to initiating violence and using more violence and with more serious
consequences. As such, women’s feelings about whether engaging in crime is likely to strengthen or weaken their relationships with their children are secondary to whether or not they deal drugs or engage in ‘mutual’ violence, both of which are more likely to centre around the actions of others in their social surroundings. Mothering thus appears to exert no effect on types of offending which are more tightly circumscribed by constraints in women’s environment, irrespective of their own judgments about the costs and benefits of crime.

As noted, a life course framework is more limited in its ability to explain why living with children increases the likelihood that women will act as sole aggressors against their intimate partners. Indeed, this finding is somewhat anomalous: to the extent that children represent “conventional others” to whom women feel an emotional attachment, life course perspectives would expect children to act as a source of informal social control on women’s offending. But perhaps the incongruence between the predicted and actual effect of mothering on women’s ‘sole’ use of violence is not entirely surprising. Behaving as the sole aggressor in intimate partner conflicts represents an unusual type of offending for women – and may involve individuals who are atypical with respect to their aggressive interpersonal styles or relationship dynamics. Consequently, concepts such as self-control and strain should be the focus in future inquiries into this unexpected finding about the effect of mothering on women’s sole use of violence against their intimate partners.

7.5 Implications of Key Findings

A major contribution of this study is that it encourages both academic and policy audiences to think differently about the role of mothering in criminalized women’s lives. To the extent that researchers have paid attention to mothering at all, they have typically treated motherhood in a naturalized way. That is, an assumption underlying much empirical investigation and social policy involves the notion that being a mother is so meaningful for women that it takes priority over all other goals and activities in their lives, including criminal behaviour. My research indicates that this may represent a
poorly theorized understanding of how mothering operates in the lives of criminalized women and may lead to social programs that do not achieve their desired results.

Theoretical Implications: Following Horney and colleagues’ (1995) suggestion that an appropriate direction for future research is to explore how local life circumstances affect offending across different groups, I focus on criminalized women, whose life circumstances have been less thoroughly investigated than men’s with respect to their offending trajectories. My findings indicate that life course perspectives offer a useful paradigm for explaining the relationship between maternal responsibility and crime. By studying what is considered to be a quintessential female social role and activity, I show that some of the same mechanisms that operate in men’s lives when they participate in such conventional activities as marriage and work also apply to women’s lives when they live with children.

Yet my findings only partially affirm life course predictions that mothering should decrease women’s offending. Women in my sample do not desist from drug dealing and violent offending when they live with children. The expectation that being a mother will result in conformity and desistance from offending is likely unmet for these particular crimes due to the failure to adequately account for the qualitative differences between the mothering role and other adult social roles as well as the difficult circumstances in which many criminalized women are compelled to parent. Taken together, these features of the maternal role render it unique from – and thus not directly comparable to – other types of conventional social roles that have been the focus in research on men’s offending. The women in my sample emerge as “limited agents” who negotiate motherhood within a context of poverty and domestic violence, among other social deficits (Connolly 2000:79). Essentially, these women are neither helpless victims of personal and social factors outside of their control nor choice makers wholly responsible for their own problems (Brown and Bloom 2009).

Devoting more attention to the role of individual agency in shaping offending trajectories seems prudent to better understand why mothering does not work in the predicted direction for those crimes that are more likely to be affected by constraints in the
environment, including women’s relationships with intimate partners. Sampson and Laub (2005:39) acknowledge that the role of agency is “a crucial ingredient in causation and thus will be a first-order challenge for future work in life-course criminology.” My study suggests that women may offend precisely because they are committed to maintaining their role as mothers. Said differently, women who place a high value on fostering healthy relationships with their children and who are invested in these relationships may nevertheless feel pressure to commit crime because they perceive they have no other option. As such, performing conventional social roles does not automatically redirect women’s crime trajectories in the anticipated direction. This highlights the importance of continuing to develop a better understanding of how women’s agency, which is constitutive of both the person and their environment (Sampson and Laub 2005), shapes offending behaviour among criminalized women who undertake maternal responsibilities.

The results of this study also highlight another aspect of criminalized women’s lives that warrants more theorizing: the influence on offending of simultaneously occupying multiple social roles. Women are often embedded in a web of relationships – most notably with intimate partners and children. For researchers devoted to better understanding criminalized women’s lives, a fruitful avenue of investigation would be to examine how competing social roles influence women’s offending. For example, how can the often conflicting influences of “risky” intimate partners (Pollack 2007) be reconciled within the life course framework with the more protective influence of children? This type of inquiry holds the possibility of further clarifying why children can and do make a difference for reducing their mother’s offending, but only in particular crime contexts.

Policy Implications: Motherhood is tacitly accepted as “the naturally desired and eventual ambition of normal women within correctional settings” (Hannah-Moffat 2006:239). Because most female offenders are mothers, for whom children are presumed to act as a key source of strength, the bulk of social and correctional policy directed towards criminalized women is guided by the assumption that teaching women to be “good” mothers will help them to be law-abiding. Indeed, gender-responsive
programming is premised on the notion that relationships are essential to women’s lives and that incorporating the concept of relationship into policies and programs enhances their effectiveness (Bloom et al. 2003:53). Focusing on women’s relationships is considered to be critical “to successfully addressing the reasons why women commit crime, the motivations behind their behaviours, how they can change their behaviour, and their integration into the community” (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2005:5).

The notion guiding the dominant penal ideology – that maternal capability fosters rehabilitative success – has some merit. My findings suggest that maternal roles are effective contexts for offending prevention and intervention. Qualitative evidence indicates that at least some of the women in my study did think about their children when choosing whether or not to offend; they had a sense of maternal responsibility and they wanted to “do right” by their children. Other research likewise suggests that parenting can be actively mobilized to reduce recidivism. For example, Brown and Bloom (2009:334) argue that motherhood “is a powerfully motivating force in the identities of many incarcerated women,” while Ferraro and Moe (2008:28) argue that “many examples illustrate the importance of children to women’s recovery from alcohol and drugs…”. Yet it is unlikely that parenting programs that encourage women to establish positive attachments to their children will necessarily deter them from committing crime. The results of my study show that living with children does not guarantee the promise of recovering a positive trajectory; children do not represent a panacea for offending (see also Brown and Bloom: 331-332).

I argue that the results of this study neither provide unequivocal support for nor against social and correctional policies and procedures related to keeping mothers and their children together. Instead, my findings highlight the need to think very carefully about the likely consequences for both women and their children of both temporary separations (through imprisonment) and/or more permanent separations (through terminating women’s legal custody of children). Regardless of one’s criminal background, being isolated from sources of support is undesirable. This may be especially true for criminalized women, who often have comparatively few stakes in conformity. To the extent that “history is not destiny” among criminalized women – that is, children act as a
support structure that encourages women to lead more stable, orderly lives, rather than lives involving crime – cutting women off from this source of support is likely to weaken their bonds to conventionality. Moreover, children typically experience difficulty adjusting to separation from their mothers. Even relatively short periods of separation may have enduring and adverse consequences for the future mother-child relationship (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999). Thus, the trend of cracking down on crime by sending offenders to jail to teach them a lesson and “viewing incarceration as simply punishment, and not as an issue of public health and safety, may ultimately fail to act in society’s best long-term interests” (Sampson cited in Coe 2004:15-16).

Policy-makers would be remiss to interpret offending by women who are mothers as simply a problem of poor decision-making. Indeed, the emphasis on personal accountability and the power of the individual to transform herself, the cornerstone of modern rehabilitation strategies, pays inadequate attention to the larger reality of criminalized women’s lives (Hannah-Moffat 2004). My findings suggest that taking a more holistic view of women’s lives will help to clarify women’s decision-making in the context of their current circumstances and past experiences. This echoes calls of other researchers to direct more attention to social and structural forces that shape women’s offending, rather than primarily addressing perceived individual shortcomings that lead to crime (Brown and Bloom 2009; Farrall 2002; Hannah-Moffat 2004; Maidment 2006; Pollack 2008). Such an approach will focus much needed attention in correctional programs on the types of supports that women need, such as access to shelters and affordable housing, access to counseling and rehabilitation without fear of losing custody of children, and importantly, the freedom to live in relationships without violence (Brown and Bloom 2009; Richie 2001). Without support from communities and governments, “the role of motherhood as a conventional identity and script for reform remains an open question in women’s desistance” (Brown and Bloom 2009:332).

7.6 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

I conclude by discussing the key limitations of the current study, and suggest how these limitations point to important avenues for future research on the relationship between
mothering and offending. The first limitation involves my use of a binary measure indicating whether or not women reported living with a child in a given month to capture my key explanatory concept – mothering. An advantage of this measure is that it represents a conservative test of the mothering-crime relationship; as such, any observed relationship is likely to under-estimate – rather than overstate – the true relationship between mothering and crime. Nevertheless, this measure has some unknown amount of error, because it does not allow me to assess the extent to which women are actively engaged in the work of caring for children. A more direct indicator of women’s monthly involvement in child care activities is preferable. For example, knowing the amount of time women devote to caring for children is a better gauge of women’s active participation in mothering. In addition, information about the nature of mother’s work – e.g., cooking, laundering, chauffeuring, supervising homework, accompanying children to extra-curricular activities, etc. – would be useful. These activities take place in different locations and differ in the extent to which they bring women into contact with other people, thereby shaping the amount of formal and informal controls women will experience, as well as their opportunities to commit crime.

A second limitation of this study involves my inability to account for women’s commitment to their maternal responsibilities. This lack of information about my key independent measure is problematic because, according to life course perspectives, “the quality, strength, and interdependence of social ties, more than the occurrence or timing of discrete life events, matters for offending” (Sampson and Laub 1993:21). Essentially, women who are more invested in mothering are expected to be less likely to offend than those women who are less invested. Because it is not merely the presence of bonds, but how much those bonds are valued, measuring the degree to which different criminalized women embrace motherhood should be an important consideration for future research. For example, the following questions would capture aspects of women’s commitment to their maternal role: (1) how often women know where their children are when they are away from home, (2) how often they know who their children are with when they are away from home, and (3) how often they ask their children what they are doing in school. An important obstacle to soliciting honest answers to these sorts of questions, however, is that they are value-laden and are thus susceptible to social desirability bias. It is possible
– and perhaps likely – that women will feel uncomfortable reporting that they do not assign a high priority to their role as a parent. As such, inquiries into women’s commitment to mothering need to be approached with appropriate sensitivity. Accounting for other personal and interpersonal characteristics relating to motherhood, including age at first child birth, whether the pregnancy was planned, the quality of the woman’s intimate relationship, and the availability of instrumental and emotional support women receive, is also desirable.

Third, in the current study, I do not attempt to measure whether becoming a mother for the first time matters more for women’s offending than the presence of subsequent children in their lives. Because life events differ in importance and impact, those events that involve great amounts of behavioral disruption are the most likely to demand adjustment by the individual (George 1980; Wheaton 1990). Arguably, women’s first transition into motherhood involves greater negotiation of new roles and relationships, and thereby results in more profound changes in women’s lives, than caring for additional children. Whether and how women’s month-to-month involvement in crime is shaped by their responsibility to their first born compared to their subsequent children is an empirical question that requires examination.

Fourth, while it is important to recognize the common ground shared by mothers, future research efforts should also investigate the extent to which demographic characteristics condition life circumstances which, in turn, influence offending. For example, there is reason to believe that race affects the relationship between mothering and crime (Arendell 2000; Collins 1994). Because mothering takes place within “specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender” (Collins 1994:56), having limited or no access to class and racial privilege restricts the range of options and resources available to minority mothers (Baca Zinn 1990). Moreover, mothering may hold greater salience for women of color, given racial and ethnic communities’ extended family ties and loyalties (McAdoo 1993). Further research is needed to identify how cultural and economic contexts variously shape mothers’ activities and understandings. One strategy for accomplishing this goal is to split the sample of criminalized women into particular groups of women (i.e., white, black, Aboriginal, Asian, and other visible
minority) to determine if some categories are more or less likely to experience intra-individual change in their offending behaviour during months when they undertake maternal responsibilities.

Finally, an important avenue for future research is to examine whether parenthood has similar short-term effects on men’s offending. While becoming a parent typically poses adaptive challenges for both women and men, longitudinal studies among non-criminalized populations indicate that gender differentiation is a notable feature of this transition. Given the difference in women’s and men’s experiences as they transition into parenthood, it is appropriate to consider women’s experiences of mothering as distinctive from men’s experiences of fathering (West and Zimmerman 1987). In contrast to men, many women claim that the greatest change in their lives is the birth of their first child – when they become mothers. Studies of people who do not have a history of offending report that women are more positively affected than men by the transition into parenthood. For example, women describe feeling a particular kind of social acceptance upon becoming mothers. At the same time, however, many mothers also report having more difficulty with this transition than their male partners (Walzer 1998). These findings are perhaps not surprising given that, in general, women still assume greater responsibility for childcare than do men.

It would be worthwhile, then, to replicate the current study using a sample of men who have a history of offending to see whether and to what extent their month-to-month involvement in property, drug, and violent offending changes as a result of living with children. Doing so will not only contribute to a growing literature on the role of fatherhood in offending (e.g., Edin, Nelson, and Paranal 2001; Knoester, Petts, and Eggebeen 2007), but it will also increase the generalizability of criminological theories and/or demonstrate their limits. In particular, the findings from such an investigation will contribute to a better understanding of the role of gender in life course perspectives.
References


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