

Gender Roles in Corrections: How Gendered Expectations Impact Female Correctional Officers

Samantha Hermary

Abstract

Compared to other organizations within the criminal justice system, the world of corrections is hidden from public view, and therefore, quickly forgotten. However, like many of these male-dominated organizations, there are significant issues regarding gender and women's roles in the job. With the considerable lack of research regarding correctional officers within Canada and the relatively small percentage of women in the correctional workforce, it is vital to expand this topic to understand the complication of a gendered role. Research has shown gendered issues among female correctional officers and the lack of the support they may receive. With all these persistent issues, we ask ourselves, why do women continue a career path that appears to be working against them? More specifically, how does gender influence women's experience in long-term careers in corrections? To answer this, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with women who maintained long-term roles in Correctional Service Canada (CSC). This presentation will discuss these women's gendered experiences working within a masculine organization, how their gender affected their relationships and job expectations, and how CSC may view them.

Introduction

Although women have been part of the labour force for some time, women continue to face unique workplace challenges throughout Canada, especially within predominantly masculine roles. CSC claims to be committed to creating a strong, diverse, and inclusive environment and The National Working Group for Women within CSC claims to identify and address barriers that women may face in the workplace, like developing their careers and aiding them with work-life balance (Correctional Service Canada, 2022). Yet, in a national survey completed in 2021, stated that 42% of female staff believed that Correction Services Canada (CSC) is diligent in preventing gendered discrimination in the workplace and 36% believe CSC has appropriate support measures for discrimination in place (Quorus Consulting Group, 2021).

Gendered stereotypes are prevalent within corrections with women and femininity being generalized as calming, emotional and responsible (Britton, 2003). The typical correctional officer (CO) is seen to be tough, strong, and stoic, the complete opposite traits of femininity, so as a female officer, you must play a different role even if it is not assigned to you. To push against hidden stereotypes can be exhausting even if the workplace seems equal on paper. Work satisfaction can differ between males and females in corrections (Lovrich & Stohr, 1993). Research of the gender differences between correctional employees within Canada is extremely limited and even more so within the western provinces. This research analyzes interview data from six women who have worked for Corrections Service Canada for the past ten years in western Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba). I explore the role that

gender plays in their previous or current positions and how CSC may apply expectations to their roles.

Literature Review

Gendered Organizations

Previous research on women working in prisons is limited, especially in Canada. With corrections being considered a gendered organization and the low percentage of women working with Correction Service Canada (CSC), it is evident that there may be issues regarding women working in a predominantly masculine environment. In *At Work in the Iron Cage: The Prison as a Gendered Organization*, Britton argues that corrections can be understood in the context of the “theory of gendered organizations” (Britton, 2003, p. 3). This theory argues that organizations should be seen as shaping pre-existing beliefs regarding gender, sexuality, race, and class through their practices rather than being a neutral environment being affected by attributions coming in (Britton, 2003, p. 3). In other words, organizations are set up to produce and maintain stereotypes rather than being affected by outside stereotypes by coming in. Historically, in the 1850s, women entered the correctional field as matrons who were responsible to “guide and discipline the fallen women” and to reintegrate them back into society with the virtues of middle-class femininity (Britton, 2003, p. 58). These women were expected to be college educated and have a drive for women’s social reform. Their work had a significant emphasis on emotional upkeep and retraining female inmates to have proper feministic traits. It was not until the 1970s, when women were allowed to be recognized as correctional officers, and two gendered models of the position emerged. These models fed into the ideal of masculine and feministic characteristics; men were expected to be militaristic, while women were encouraged to be more mentors to the inmates (Britton, 2003). With mentorship, women were also assumed to perform therapeutic roles for inmates, which they were never trained for (Britton, 2003). Mother-like roles were pushed and assumed by women to assist in reintegrating offenders into society without having any training regarding how to do so.

When looking at more modern correctional culture, Burdett, Gouliquer, and Poulin, (2018) argue that sexist correctional culture is still prevalent within Ontario and affects women’s abilities to fulfill their roles. Through interviews with women COs working in Ontario institutions, the researchers discovered that many women felt, that due to the hyper-masculinized environment of corrections, a conflict between feminine traits and the culture of corrections overall existed. The COs believed that due to the anti-feminine implications of their jobs, they were unable fulfill their duties entirely and were forced to rely on their male counterparts, making them feel incapable of their position (Burdett et al., 2018). Burdett et al. argue that due to the overbearing gendered expectations, the environment restricts women from crossing a particular line where they could prove their abilities. Male protectors tend to interfere before women present the “masculine” version of competence (Burdett et al., 2018). If there are forced restrictions on women’s ability to perform their jobs, how will they ever feel capable of performing their roles? How can they not only prove that to others but also themselves?

Hemmens et al (2002) argue that, even with the modernization of women in the workplace, there are still doubts regarding women’s abilities to work in corrections and their physical capabilities. It is not the lack of women that causes these doubts, but rather traditional

stereotypes that feed the discriminatory culture embedded in the organization. The authors argue that, though prisons and the staff within them generally share similar ideologies regarding gender, there are still beliefs that women do not function as well as men in the militaristic environment. The authors created a survey to determine the perceptions and attitudes of women in the correctional role and dispersed it in three prisons; it was evident that male COs, though they held generally positive opinions about women in the workplace, have concerns about their abilities and competency. The authors conclude that the sexist correctional culture still controls women's perception and abilities to do their jobs (Hemmens et al., 2002).

It is clear through the research that corrections is still an environment that, through the organization's culture, still possesses and maintains sexist attitudes. Burdett et al. (2018) believes that, due to the constant divide between both genders of COs, this culture is maintained. The discouragement of solidarity and harmony while maintaining masculine culture restricts women from growing and proving themselves (Burdett et al., 2018).

Masculine and Feminine Expectations and Roles

Through the experiences of women, there is evidence to suggest that there is a clear expectation between both genders, but, when looking into physical and mental training, it is suggested that all genders perform similarly. Hogan et al (2004) interviewed 192 correctional officers of both genders (96 men and 96 women) regarding how they would react when an inmate disobeyed a direct order. They described a scenario in which an inmate was ignoring and disobeying officers and asked participants to define what they would do to control the situation. Though they hypothesized that the males would be the aggressors and the females would rely on others or use communications, the results suggested otherwise. Reactions of both genders were very similar when assessing the threat and risk and the reliance on the backup was similar (Hogan et al., 2004). This research exemplifies that if the expectation of gender was excluded, many COs would perform their roles in similar ways and women could perform similarly to their male colleagues.

In *Women on Guard*, McMahon argues that this "masculine" role of CO has some feminine expectations regarding taking care of the inmates and ideally rehabilitating them with social support (McMahon, 1999). Although everyone is trained to carry the same emotional and physical requirements, gender still has an impact on the environment, either through assumptions or self-imposed gendered expectations. This idea has been supported through *Also Serving Time*, in which they found no evident difference between gender in their on-duty behaviours. However, many indicate gender differences in the relationships between inmates and COs (Ricciardelli, 2019).

It is common to expect male COs to be strong and unemotional since that is what pop culture has told us to expect, but research implies that this can be the case within the actual workplace. This belief can also be applied to the inmates; impacting the relationships between COs and inmates based on gender. McMahon (1999) found that the presence of women in a male institution "humanizes" the atmosphere. Male offenders tend to be less aggressive when working with female COs, whether because they represent a mother figure or the "manly" inhibition to protect a woman (McMahon, 1999). Women COs were seen to be faster at resolving issues since they are viewed as fair and respectful towards inmates. The only issue

regarding women working with male inmates does not come from the inmates themselves but rather from their colleagues. Many women fear that if they build a strong rapport with male inmates, it would be seen as flirting. There seems to be a fine line between flirting and treating inmates with the respect that female COs cannot escape, yet some believe women are the only ones who can build rapport (Ricciardelli, 2019). Gendered expectations restrict male COs not to show emotion to inmates since a woman must do so.

Gendered expectations also exist around the ways in which female COs perceive female inmates. Female COs were found to prefer to work with male inmates due to the emotional requirement of working with other women. Female inmates are seen to be overly emotional, usually due to their previous abuse and past trauma; they are also seen as needy, catty and competitive (Ricciardelli, 2019). Female inmates tend to also care about emotional anger rather than internalizing it as males will. This can lead to emotional explosions, long-term disagreements and ongoing issues that may never be resolved. Dealing with emotional trauma calls for a different skill set that male COs struggle with due to different social expectations. They become less tolerant when dealing with female inmates, leaving the responsibility to female COs (Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020).

Gendered Policy

Though training is similar between the genders, there are expectations found in the policy and generalizations in management that differentiate men and women. Regarding policies themselves, it was found that there are continuous expectations for women to be able to do various tasks while men are not held to the same standard. It was continuously mentioned that women work more due to the restrictions of men working with female inmates (Britton, 2003). However, this is understandable, it is due to sexual abuse history that female inmates struggle with trauma and unhealthy relationships with men (Correctional Investigator, 2021). Nevertheless, women are also expected to step in when working with male inmates without any restrictions meaning they work more for the same pay (Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020).

When it comes to working with management, women face issues that are common across different industries. Balancing work and home life is a struggle for female COs. Britton (2003) argues that the gendered organization does not believe the workplace must provide aid to women with families. Women are expected to maintain the homemaker roles whether they have jobs or not. Gendered organizations believe workers should put their jobs and lives in a separate reality from each other, yet this is unrealistic for many women, especially those with children. Providing basic needs, such as paid sick leave and paid maternity leave, still does not allow women to maintain both roles adequately and forces them to make decisions that their male coworkers may not have to (Britton, 2003). Additionally, women deal with more work stress and a lack of acknowledgement from the institutions, leading to restricted mobility within management (Burdett et al., 2018; McMahan, 1999; Ricciardelli, 2019).

It is evident that women are facing other challenges compared to their male counterparts so it may be difficult to understand as to why they maintain these careers for years and even decades. With constant judgement, self-doubt and lack of support, the environment that corrections expose women to create unnecessary stress that other positions may not. So, we

ask, why continue? Alternatively, how does gender influence the experiences of women in long term careers in corrections?

Methods

In order to shed light on this research question, I conducted a qualitative interview project. With the lack of research in western Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba), I conducted six qualitative semi-structured interviews with current members of Correction Services Canada. The interviews were done over online meeting software and the telephone when there were technical issues; the average time of the meetings was an hour and 15 minutes; the shortest being 40 minutes and the longest being an hour and 40 minutes. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, with the informant being the investigator's current work manager—the manager, who had previously worked for CSC, was in contact with previous colleagues. I provided the informant with a recruitment email with the sampling criteria, which was then sent out to possible participants (*see appendix 1 for Recruitment Email*). The requirements were that participants must identify as women who have worked for at least ten years and are currently employed by CSC. They ideally would also have experience working in a correctional officer position in western Canada at female or male correctional institutions. I received five emails back from the six possible participants that were contacted, and a participant had also recruited another colleague who brought my total up to six participants. I then completed an ethics application, which was then submitted and approved (*see appendix 2 for Ethics Approval*).

Sample

The participants had various experiences and backgrounds regarding their previous and current positions and geographical location within Western Canada. All participants have some experience working with inmates of all genders and male colleagues. Three worked as CO or Primary workers within female institutions and currently work with all genders in their current positions. One participant worked with male inmates for most of her career but has experience working with women when she was called to cover sick leave in women's institutions. One participant has only worked with female inmates, and the last has worked with both female and male inmates in her career as a CO. All participants currently work in parole or management within CSC and the average amount of time was 22.8 years that they have worked, the shortest being 13 years and the longest being 32 years.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews questions (*see appendix 3 for the interview guide*) were open-ended and allowed participants to apply the topic to any situation they could think of. I did not rely on the follow up questions extensively since some of the topics came up naturally. Probing for examples or recollections of memories lead to many topics outside of the probing questions but still relevant to the main topic.

I transcribed the interviews and left out certain filler words like “um”, “like” and “you know?” unless they added contextual relevancy. I indicated some of the filler words if they implied that the participant was thinking about a response. Many of the expressions that

participants said repeatedly were excluded like “you know” or “but like...”, which did not add to context or carry any meaning. The average page length of the transcripts was 11 pages with the shortest being 7 pages and longest being 14 pages.

Some issues arose with the online meeting software concerning accessibility. All interviews were audio recorded, and when the meeting software did not work, we resorted to over-the-phone interviews, which were then recorded through an external recording device. Some participants could not use GoogleMeet due to accessibility restrictions set in place by CSC’s network. These problems were predicted to happen to my current knowledge of internet restrictions within Government of Canada workplaces and security measures.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Within this project anonymity and confidentiality were maintained with a high level of importance due to the position the participants were in. Due to the small number of female institutions within Canada, using name and pseudonyms could lead to the discovery of the participants. While the data was collected under pseudonyms, these names will not be reported within this paper in the chance there is identifying factors from a participants experience that could be connected to certain institutions, events, and timelines.

Analysis

The coding process was used with MAXQDA 2022 which allowed me to upload transcripts and organize quotes based on my codes. I had thirty-five initial codes that were compiled through line-by-line coding, and I ended up with six complete sets of codes. The themes included “inmates”, “colleagues”, “challenges”, “women’s roles”, “management” and “why continue?”. In total I pulled 941 quotations from the transcripts with the most being under “working with female offenders” with 92 quotes.

Results

Definitions

There are three front-line roles within CSC that participants discussed in the interviews: Correctional Officer I, Correctional Officer II, and Primary workers. In order to make sense of the gendered differences we have to understand these positions. Correctional Officers I (CX I) are responsible for maintaining the responsibility for the security and safety of the institution. Their responsibilities include searching cells, conducting security checks, submitting reports, routine patrols and conducting inmate counts, along with much more; male institutions have CX I’s. A CX II works within a male Healing Lodge, and they have similar roles as the CX I’s but are responsible for more case management and paperwork. A Primary Worker is also a CX II, but who works at a female institution. A Primary Worker is responsible for tasks similar to CX I’s and CX II’s, plus many additional responsibilities. CSC’s Job Profiles website states that Primary Worker’s:

role is dual in nature as they perform security and case management-related duties. Not only do they maintain the safety and security of the institution through the application of strong dynamic and static security, but they also assist women offenders in achieving the

objectives of their correctional plan; this, in turn, helps the women successfully reintegrate into the community (Correctional Service Canada, 2022)

This means that not only are they responsible for CX II's responsibilities but also for creating and maintaining emotional requirements to help women reintegrate into society. They also have duties customarily done by parole officers in a male institution. Some qualifications include being compassionate and patient, establishing clear boundaries, having the ability to maintain composure in difficult situations and many more that are not required for the CX I and II positions (Correctional Service Canada, 2021).

Internalizing and Producing Expectations

Throughout my interviews, there was a common theme across all participants: their perspective on helping inmates. These women expressed the personal importance of being fair and supportive of the inmates and wanted to ensure they were setting them up for success in the outside world. All participants know that it is their job responsibility to prepare people for release and provide them with social skills and support once they are released. When asked about offenders, one participant expressed:

... reality is that they're in charge of their [position], and we're there to provide the resources and put into place what we can and being caring and compassionate, and the big one is not judging. They've already been judged.

The research continuously brought up the idea of a natural calming effect women can have when working in prisons. When asked about the expectation, one participant expressed:

Women have a calming effect in general, anywhere and, let's face it, we're good with our minds, we're good manipulators, so we can control a situation to go where we want it to go....

Some participants believed that women tend to be more communicative and talk down a situation rather than rely on physical force. One participant believed that due to her physical stature, she would excel with communication rather than physical force, especially when working with a male partner. She later stated that although she prefers it that way, some women choose to be more physical; another participant argues that it is more of a personality trait than a gendered concept. Two participants believed it was somewhat natural for women to be the calming factor, and all believed communication was the most effective way to handle tense situations.

When it comes to being fair, all participants emphasized the balance between being compassionate and understanding but also maintaining boundaries. One participant expressed that when working with female inmates, it would take hours to finish her walk since many offenders would love to come up and speak with her. Building rapport with inmates was essential to many participants for many reasons. It makes their jobs easier by knowing what they could be approaching and creates a safe environment many inmates may have lacked outside the institution. The topic of being fair but firm came up within each interview, with many

telling their inmates that their freedom is in their hands, even if it does not feel like it is and that they are there to hold them to a standard. When speaking to one participant, she said:

Sometimes, and throughout it, you're always trying to be a role model, and it feels like you have to be better than a male to do the same job that you can potentially be doing because of the fact that you're a woman. You have to be twice as good, and, you know, the silliest things that you think nobody pays attention to, like getting up for work every day, doing your job, being in a good mood, all that stuff; [inmates] see that, and they don't mind dealing with you.

Overall, the participants emphasized their preference for communication and the importance of treating offenders as someone who needs help rather than someone who needs to be punished. Many participants shared stories where they felt that situations would have been handled differently if one of the male colleagues were in their position, in which aggression or dismissal would have occurred rather than communicating with an inmate and resolving their issues.

Working With Inmates

When speaking about working with inmates, participants always make a point of setting healthy boundaries when working with inmates. Building a good rapport with inmates is important, but there is always a line they are not willing to cross. When speaking about boundaries, one of the participants provided an example where inmates asked if they could contact her through social media when they got out. She explained to the inmate:

You're leaving on parole or stat; you're not out for an expiry; you're still an inmate like you still are serving a sentence, so no. And, but even if you weren't, like, no, I met you because you're an offender. So yeah, but I mean also, I've watched co-workers not be able to do that.

Some of the participants were able to maintain strict boundaries throughout their positions, while some had created friendly relationships; none of them ever crossed professional boundaries. There was always a mental dissociation between them and their work; one participant argued that this dissociation is fundamental. When speaking about boundaries, she explained:

If somebody goes out and does well on parole, it's not because I did it, and in the same breath, if somebody goes out and returns very quickly, like some in a day or a week (laughs), that's not my fault either. It's always a (pause) it takes a while to get to that place where you don't feel a personal attachment to it...you can't take it personally, it's a job, you have a responsibility.

Many participants expressed the importance of self-preservation when speaking about being fair to inmates. One participant argued there was no reason to be hard on or mean to inmates because once they leave the institution does not mean they are gone forever. She gave me an example of when she ran into a released offender outside of work:

There's been a couple of times where I have run into inmates when [my kids] were young, and they were scary looking, and my kids were scared shitless. But he came up

and talked to me, and it was awkward, but I didn't have anything to worry about because I have that respect where I don't have to watch my back as much as someone who treated these guys horribly.

Another participant openly said:

My goal was always to not be the hostage. If they're going to take somebody, hostage, it's not going to be Grace (pseudonym), whom they just talked to about their kids and their family, who knows all their people; it's probably going to be the charge happy one who called them a bitch (laughs).

When discussing working with inmates, many women who worked with men while in their CO position admitted that they preferred working with men. Male inmates seemed to take them at their word. Many of them shared experiences where they would simply tell their male inmate to do something, and they would get it done. The inmates knew where they were and the culture of the prison, so everything was taken literally. Five participants had no experience where they felt their gender played a significant role when working with male inmates. One participant who has worked with primarily male Indigenous inmates expressed some concern when she started as a young woman. Not only did she feel like her gender made her stick out, but also her race. She explained,

I think it showed my naiveness and my inexperience in the job, so that played a part in treating me differently; because we are dealing with federal inmates, let us face it, the time they spent, this is what they know so I think it was easier for them to try and make me feel insecure as a female. So, I basically had to be phoney and fake my confidence, and meanwhile, it took me eight years to actually feel comfortable on the job, I feel. I mean, I had a lot of factors against me, but now I have a lot of respect from them because I can speak the language, and I'm fair in treating everyone the same. And I really believe in the Indigenous culture, so they see that, and my experience shows now because I am confident, and I know what I am doing.

When it came to working with female inmates, there were many different experiences, but common concepts were evident throughout. The female institutions within Canada hold a large population of Indigenous women. With that, many have a momentous amount of trauma, whether from generational trauma or victimization. So, when working with female inmates, there was a heavy presence of emotion since most women in institutions were victims at one point in their lives. All participants acknowledge that what these women have been through was horrific; one could not even comprehend how some have not given up completely. However, none of them ever allowed the victimization to view any of the inmates differently. They understood the complexities of working with female inmates and that these women had faced a lot, but it did not excuse what they had done.

One theme that kept occurring when speaking about working with female inmates was the drama. Since relationships would form within female prisons, there always seemed to be girlfriend drama or bullying within the institution. Words like catty, gossip, cliques and talkative come up a lot through interviews, not only regarding inmates but with female COs as well.

The connection between inmate and CO based on gender occasionally arose, especially when discussing being a mother. One participant gave me an example of when she was in the yard when she was pregnant.

But even being pregnant in prison was fun because you're working with a bunch of inmates who are moms, and I had like this high-ranking drug trafficker, and she just really wanted to sit down with me and talk about how important it was to make baby food from scratch and get me some tips on that. At one point, I was out in the yard very pregnant, and I was getting all these parenting tips, and then after I left, I was like, "What planet am I on?" I was talking to a sex offender, a woman who had killed her young child, a woman who had killed her baby, and they just wanted to talk about having babies, so yeah, it was a strange experience.

Colleagues

The research suggests that, generally, female COs had more issues working with their colleagues than working with inmates, but it was not as prolific in my interviews (Ricciardelli, 2019). When asked about colleagues, many participants said the camaraderie is vital when working in prison, especially when coping with the job's negative aspects. Many relied on their colleagues when asked how they personally dealt with workplace incidents. Going out for dinner after the end of a seven-day workweek, dark humour, and weekly chicken wings were common themes throughout the interviews. One participant said:

I think you develop this interesting camaraderie when you work in an institution, so you always have co-workers and, as weird as it may sound, we sometimes manage by finding humour where the average person on the street wouldn't find humour, and it's a coping mechanism.

The emphasis on partnership and teamwork was vital since it maintains safety and controls each other and the inmates. When asked about introducing male COs into women's institutions, one participant said she watched her male partners back. There were examples of when female inmates would catcall or make comments about the male officer's body as they did their walks. It seemed that the female COs had to both watch their male colleagues and female inmates when working. On the one hand, they want to protect the inmates from experiencing or triggering any sort of trauma that they have, but they also have to protect their male partners from facing any wrongful accusations. The female COs had a responsibility to keep everyone in check and had to be the leader or more dominant partner all the time to protect both inmate and male partner from each other. Though it seems like much work, many participants appreciate certain aspects that male COs bring in. One participant found that her male COs are the "sounding boards" of the institution; when working with many women, the stereotypical cliquy and drama-fueled characteristics can become overwhelming and affect inmates. This participant said:

...back in the day, it was only two, and I thank God for those two male staff. Just because they give a different perspective and a different tone in a meeting. They're... they really are good sounding boards, like our male staff really are good sounding boards, so the

males, for the most part, they're pretty good...they're fairly consistent with their conversations with residents, their reactions.

All participants who worked with women believed that having male officers is crucial in rehabilitating female inmates. One participant argued that, unfortunately, sometimes, some of these women can only have a positive male role model when they are in jail. It is important to ensure that when these women are released, they can function in an environment around men. It is unfair for these women to be locked up and hidden away from a world that men share; it does not allow them to be socially rehabilitated to keep them away from men. Though, from history and even more current news, there are male COs who abuse their power and abuse female inmates. When speaking about this, one participant said:

But more importantly, it makes me wonder how can somebody, through all of the screening and you know the competitions to get into these positions are ridiculous...and yet somebody gets in and victimizes a victim. Like women, for the most part, are victims, they come from horrible backgrounds, and they've been victimized repeatedly, often sexually abused. They come to jails where we're supposed to protect them, and they get revictimized by somebody who was hired to help them so recently that has left me feeling ashamed and embarrassed.

Many women who worked with male COs in female institutions never had any personal problems with their male staff. However, they all admitted that the men who have worked at women's institutions can still not perform in the same manner as their female colleagues. The emotional requirements it takes to work with women is something that they believe men still struggle with. Even COs who have worked with women for years still struggle with having specific conversations or aiding them when emotionally distressed. When speaking to one participant, she explained that a policy is in place when physically handling female inmates that male COs cannot be present. However, to work with female inmates, COs must undergo emotional training, meaning there are no restrictions regarding who may aid inmates. Nevertheless, many male COs are still uncomfortable or struggle with this concept. One participant said:

The men we have at our institutions, a lot of them are dads, a lot of them are like mid to late thirties, early forties, that kind of thing, kind of played the dad role, but there are still certain things they're like, "No, no, that's my wife's job," and they're not about to start that with a complete stranger. Those are conversations they would rather not get into, or they would rather get one of us to talk to an inmate.

When I asked another participant working with a male partner when an inmate is in emotional distress, she said:

... my partner, my gosh, he's so awkward... I think he is just awkward in life, but like he'll go through it. He just isn't good at it, but he tries his best. And so, we would work a whole board together and then a board apart, and so I've taught my one lifers on my caseload that if I'm not there, you gotta learn how to talk to him (laughs). It's sad because this lifer is just not comfortable with men, so I've been trying to like teach her by

the use of like “safe men” who she can start to interact with. So, for my partner who's so awkward, I'm like, “He's your go-to guy.” But he gets through it, and he's getting better, but it's not his strength area (laughs).

Most issues arose when male COs would transfer from maximum security men's prisons to women's prisons. Participants said there was an evident culture shock when these men came in, as the women's prisons were not run like men's. Some men could be misogynistic and abusive towards inmates and colleagues; others were told not to return to a women's institution. One participant shared an example where she could see a gender difference between the two different institutions through a female CO who had transferred from a men's institution to a women's and the struggles she faced in the new environment:

Turns out she was in the corner crying and incredibly angry because she came to the women's prison thinking that she would get every single holiday off because there were so many male workers at the male institution that it didn't matter if you worked holidays because somebody always wanted the over time, they didn't care they had to work Christmas; they didn't care if they had to work boxing day, they would take your shift and trade it for the overtime hours. She never had to work a stat holiday because there was always a man to do it.

But those who worked in men's prisons faced challenges to overcome or dismissing stereotypes from their male colleagues. One participant felt she was being watched when she first started because her male colleagues had heard the stories of female COs running away with inmates:

Because coming into a male jail, the stories that the male officers know of is women taking off with male offenders, so when a new woman comes in, they wanna know what you're like and how you're going to be to deal with inmates and stuff like that, right? While here, I come in, and I say, “Well, just to let you know that the female phenomenon of a female taking off with an inmate, I've seen in female jails where male officers take off with female offenders.”

One participant who only worked with males has been accused of being a “con-lover” since she is more empathetic and understanding to the inmates:

... just drives me up the wall because I tell my peers, “You know I'm not a con-lover; I'm doing my job the way we're supposed to do our job.”

Though not only male colleagues have caused unnecessary stress to our participants. One of the participants who has only worked with women has struggled to work with certain female COs. There are some COs whose attitude they put into the environment made it feel more stressful than it needed to be, especially for the inmates who are victims of the bullying they receive from their COs. When talking about the relationship between inmates and these bully COs, she said:

Like when I hear the comment... “I was her CO, and I didn't even have one conversation with her the whole time,”...seriously? You're bragging? Leave, please.

Overall, this is not a job anyone can do, and a learning curve and emotional expectations must be met. It is evident that a level of empathy must be met to work with women. But this creates a gendered and rehabilitation difference between male and female inmates, which restricts genders from working together since the emotional expectations vary based on the environment.

Gendered Management and Policy

Within a gendered organization, the expectations of each gender can be pretty evident when looking into the policy and regulations. As mentioned, male COs are restricted concerning physical control in a women's prison due to inmate trauma. Though this makes complete sense, it is clear that female COs are technically doing more work, but this is not the only situation where this disadvantage is evident. In men's prisons, women should not be called to handle a physical altercation unless there is no one else to do so, meaning women can be called to perform strip searches on male inmates in emergencies. Women are also expected to produce more descriptive and concise reports than their male counterparts; though this is not policy, it is generally normalized. Primary workers in women's prisons have the same pay level as a CX II position in men's prisons, but the roles are entirely different. Primary workers are responsible for tasks that both CX II and parole officers would be responsible for in men's prisons. When speaking about this, one participant said:

A lot of primary workers are very pissed off with the current model. Rightfully so, because they're doing far more work than their counterpart at a men's institution for the same amount of pay, but then you get the parole officers indignant because we are not getting paid. We're doing six times the amount of paperwork. Overall, workload-wise, women's institutions get dumped way more work... way more.

So even though women technically do more work than men in both men's and women's institutions, they do not receive aid from the workplace when it comes to external help. Childcare is a topic that has come up a few times. Participants expressed annoyance when discussing finding appropriate childcare and maintaining a mother's role when working shift work in corrections.

When speaking to one participant who was at home with her sick child, she explained that she was lucky to be able to work from home because, although she is married, she is still the primary caregiver due to the expectation of her being a mother. Another participant explained that she faced constant criticism from certain family members for not being around enough for her children since she worked shift work. Although women are encouraged to work in these positions, external factors and expectations restrict them from having complete freedom of choice. We encourage women to become these healthy mothers, but no one allows them to do so and hold a career they enjoy. CSC had previously shut down a program they offered to COs that allowed them to split shifts between two people. One participant explained that this program allowed mothers to spend more time at home with their children and have more independence since it was a less restrictive schedule. Once they shut the program down, many women had to quit since they could not simultaneously fulfill their roles at home and at work. At

this time, the participant believes that mothers were only ever in the program, never men. She said:

When I was there, from my experience, no man ever used it, and most of the women who used job share quit, like, nope, I can't go back to being a full-time shift worker; this is working out for me and my family, and I can't do full-time work, and when [management] said "take it or leave it," [the women] said they were leaving it, bye. So, it came at a cost, and the service lost some pretty decent employees because they're like, "You're not willing to work with me anymore; I told you what my needs are, and you're not listening to my needs, so..." And it's a crappy choice for some people to make because you had new people really upset going, "I don't really want to leave but, for me and my family, they're not really giving me a choice." So ...I don't know. I think overall, the government is very fair to the employee when it comes to like giving us time off if something comes up with our kids or unrelated leave and being allowed to work from home if you're in a job like a parole officer...but there are still areas where they keep saying, "Oh, we're inclusive and we're amazing." Well no, you're still not listening. At the end of the day, not every employee is going to be like, "Oh my god, I want job share," and then all of a sudden, you're gonna end up with zero employees; it's not gonna happen.

Overall, CSC has given female workers, especially primary workers, more work and higher expectations concerning emotional capabilities and productivity. Meanwhile, continuing to pay them the same as their male counterparts who do less work and refuse to provide external help for mothers, especially single mothers. Additionally, these women rarely receive validation from the higher-ups in management. One participant stated:

You're looking for like validation from your employer that you're doing job, and that's not really something that you get in the service... you're a living, breathing body, and you can be replaced with another living, breathing body.

Most of these women feel they get validation from the inmates who send them postcards or letters after release. They feel like CSC fails to recognize what it takes to help these people, the emotional toll, the critical thinking, the rapport building and the sacrifices these women have to make to fulfill their expectations.

Analysis

Throughout the data, when describing their work and their relationships with both inmates and colleagues the women in this study drew on ideas of caring, mentoring, and helping. Much of what they talked about seemed to frame their work in terms of being a mother. This was an unexpected finding, and to make sense of it, I drew on some of the mothering literature. Motherhood and womanhood have been considered synonymous identities, and feminist theorists continuously attempt to dissociate these roles from one another. Scientifically speaking, biological females are the only ones who can produce life, yet the word and role of "mother" has continuously changed. Mixed families, adoptive parents, same-sex couples, and single fathers; many have been able to fulfill the characteristics of being a mother, yet it still

defines a woman. “The institutionalization of motherhood through mothering ideologies is seen to define women and promotes standards by which they are judged, both as mother and non-mothers” (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2010, pp. 4-5). Women are still judged based on their mother-like characteristics; women should not be mean, but be fair and understanding, and they should want to be more empathetic to those who struggle inherently. In 2007, ninety women were surveyed about what they considered the key characteristics of being a mother. The top characteristics were “love and caring,” with 38% of women mentioned in their responses. The next four were the following: patience at 25%, calm and relaxed at 11%, listening and talking to children at 8%, understanding and sensitive at 7% and responsible at 7%. The article states that mothers feel like they must be able to have all the previously mentioned attributes along with disciplining their children, teaching them appropriate behaviour, and maintaining their daily tasks (Brown et al., 2007. pp. 6-7).

There are a lot of clear overlaps of characteristics between being a good mother and being a female correctional officer. The emotional labour, patience, and the ability to listen while still having control and teaching them appropriate behaviour; these are attributes that the participants exemplified. Both parents and corrections are responsible for preparing a person for the world and sending them off alone. Though CSC claims to have stepped away from the matron role, gender expectations of womanhood and motherhood coincide within the organization.

This is not to say some men do not fulfill these roles out there; there are good male COs and excellent fathers who have these attributes. There is just an overlay of expectation for women to be kind, caring and supportive parents while the father shows support in their own way. In a strange parallel, the gender roles of the correctional environment are similar to those of a household. The gendered stereotypes of the inmates can reflect what we could see in children, teenagers, and adolescents during their upbringing. The emotional teenage girl and the pent-up and angry boy are our expectations for children going through the phases of maturity.

Meanwhile, the parents are responsible for emotionally and physically preparing them for release by building social skills, enforcing responsibility, and providing support. The mother is the emotional one, the one who empathizes and is more hands-on with the kids, while the father is the stern distant supporter who is not afraid to help but refuses to pass certain boundaries. This picture could be placed within a prison setting with a few more boundaries.

All participants implied the importance of building rapport and relationships; some were sterner and more supportive. Some may have been more emotionally impactful, but none implied a relationship and allowed dissonance between them and the inmate. In all the roles, the participants described the importance of releasing a rehabilitated person was well understood because they knew the consequence if they did not. The role must be fulfilled completely to give the best chance to the inmate, and it is implied that the male COs fail to do this with their male inmates, which may be why CSC puts women in those positions. The Primary Worker definition differs significantly from the CX I role regarding responsibilities and the importance of rehabilitation. CXs are responsible for security; Primary Workers are responsible for the security and re-entering of women into society. The qualification CSC lists for Primary Workers are not qualifiers for CX positions; the role a mother plays cannot be replaced by a man, according to them. However, it is not just the Primary Workers but also the female CXs who work with male

inmates. Though there is no blatant policy saying women must be fairer or more communicative, it does not mean that it does not happen. The culture of the prison keeps the gender role alive. Still, the sexualization of women and the expectation for them to talk down a situation and to create a better rapport with inmates are still there.

The final family dynamic comparison is the importance of not judging; there is a level of connection a parent has with their child where they will continue to care for them. Many participants say they have seen inmates leave for a week and end up back in the system, but none of them implied those inmates are viewed differently. One participant had an inmate on a life imprisonment sentence, and while all the staff treated them like the “institutional pet,” she worked on getting this inmate parole. It is not their role to judge; it is their role to rehabilitate, as a proper mother should.

My original research question revolved around what keeps women in this career long term. This understanding of their work as “mothers” answers that question. The expectations that Primary Workers experience and carry more emotional labour than their male counterparts; these expectations align with feministic characteristics mentioned in the literature. There is a higher expectation for women to rehabilitate the inmates through patience and performing as role models; forcing them to produce proper citizens is an expectation a mother and COs face. But, through my interviews, the issues and reliance on male colleagues were not as prevalent as the research has presented. It is implied that both men and women play a role within the institution, but it is not fair since women seem responsible for more emotional expectations than men. But male COs are still expected to handle emotional situations; they just prefer to leave it to the women. Similar to a father and a mother, the responsibility is technically shared, but it is assumed the woman should take the lead.

These results may add to understanding the roles that are taken on within a prison environment and the expectations that are supposed to be fulfilled. The idea that male COs should have some sort of emotional training, but still not relied on to fulfill those needs, is prevalent throughout the interviews. My participants never implied that their experience caused them to review their position and that gender differences did not cause them to deter from completing their jobs. All believed that how they performed their jobs was the right way to do so, and I never sensed any doubt of their capabilities. None of these women even felt they had to perform differently from what they believed to be the correct way. Rather than working hard to fulfill external expectations, they created their own expectations and maintained them throughout their careers.

The literature implied that women feel like they need to conform to these masculine traits to survive working in corrections. Still, it rarely was implied that these feminine characteristics might aid the corrections environment, the rehabilitation of the inmates, and an ideal way to work within corrections. If women know their “natural” feminine characteristics produce more positive results, then they should not try to change their practices.

Conclusion

This project included a small sample size and very short time frame, and though this is valuable for the depth of the data, these results are, of course, not generalizable. Future research should expand this project across more institutions, or more COs, in order to see a larger and more

dynamic perspective, along with an expanded time frame. A limitation I encountered while organizing data is the realization that many of these women are of a certain age or generation. Some participants commented about newer employees that did not align with their beliefs, so I question if training or age affects the perspective COs may hold of their duties and inmates. One way to look into that is by expanding our sampling selection to include people of various ages or backgrounds. Another common factor among the participants was that they were all Caucasian, so asking a CO of a different ethnic background would add another level of understanding of expectations.

Much research can come out of this topic; it is a tiny piece in a giant puzzle that is barely filled. Again, this research can change its sampling requirements to include older or younger COs or COs of different backgrounds. You could ask male COs how they view this issue and if they believe their female colleagues face more challenges than they do. Alternatively, different perspectives may be offered by inmates and if they feel like the gender of the COs working can affect them and their environment. Another topic would be asking women who no longer work in CSC why they left and if that is a gendered topic because, from what it sounds like, there is little mobility for women in management.

The last question I asked the participants made some of them think: "What factors played into your decision to stay in corrections long term?" Some said money and stability, which is understandable; some women came out of school with no plan; some were single mothers, while some believed they were just built for this role. Most of them said that there was an emotional fulfillment to the job, that they felt they may have helped someone. One says she continues because she knows she can and likes to prove people wrong. Overall, there is an emotional fulfillment that these women gain when one of their inmates does not come back, and when no one is telling you are doing a good job, that silence can speak a thousand words.

References

- Britton, D. M. (2003). *At Work in the Iron Cage: The Prison as Gendered Organization*. New York University Press.
- Brown, S., Small, R., & Lumley, J. (2007, December 11). Being a 'good mother'. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 15(2), 185-200. DOI: 10.1080/02646839708404542
- Burdett, F., Gouliquer, L., & Poulin, C. (2018). Culture of Corrections: The Experiences of Women Correctional Officers. *Feminist Criminology*, 13(3), 329-349. Sage Journals. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085118767974>.
- Correctional Service Canada. (2021, December 20). *Make a difference: Become a primary worker/kimisinaw*. Correctional Service Canada / Service correctionnel Canada. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/002/002/002002-0009-en.shtml>.
- Correctional Service Canada. (2022, March 23). *Job profiles at CSC*. Correctional Service Canada / Service correctionnel Canada. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/003/001/003001-0004-en.shtml#Front-line_positions.
- Correctional Service Canada. (2022, February 11). *National Working Group for Women Employees*. Correctional Service Canada / Service correctionnel Canada. <https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/003/003/003003-0002-en.shtml>.
- Hemmens, C., Stohr, M. K., Schoeler, M., & Miller, B. (2002). One Step Up, Two Steps Back The Progression of Perceptions of Women's Work in Prisons and Jails. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30, 473-489.
- Hogan, N. L., Lambert, E. G., Hepburn, J. R., Burton, V. S., & Cullen, F. T. (2004). Is There a Difference? Exploring Male and Female Correctional Officers' Definition of and Response to Conflict Situations. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 15(3-4), 143-165.
- Huppatz, K., & Goodwin, S. (Eds.). (2010). *The Good Mother: Contemporary Motherhoods in Australia*. Sydney University Press.
- Lovrich, N. P., & Stohr, M. K. (1993, Summer). Gender and Jail Work: Correctional Policy Implications of Perceptual Diversity in the Work Force. *Policy Studies Review*, 12(1), 66-84.

- McMahon, M. W. (1999). *Women on Guard: Discrimination and Harassment in Corrections*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ricciardelli, R. (2019). *Also Serving Time: Canada's Provincial and Territorial Correctional Officers*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ricciardelli, R., & McKendy, L. (2020, November). Gender and Prison Work: The Experience of Female Provincial Correctional Officers in Canada. *The Prison Journal*, 100(5), 617-639. Sage Journals.
- Quorus Consulting Group. (2021). *2021 National Employment Equity Survey of Women Employees at Correction Service Canada*.
https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tps-gc/por-ef/correctional_services/2021/117-20-e/POR117-20-report.html.
- Zinger, I. (2020). Office of the correctional investigator annual report 2021-2022. *49th annual report of the correctional investigator*. Government of Canada.

Appendix A: Initial Recruitment Email

Hi,

My name is Samantha Hermary, I am an undergraduate Sociology student at MacEwan University.

I am looking for participants for a research project. My research question for this project is how does gender influence women's experiences in a long-term career in corrections? I am looking to conduct 1–2-hour long interviews with approximately 6 participants. To be eligible to participate you must be currently employed by CSC, have worked in corrections for at least 10 years, and identify as a woman.

If you meet these criteria and are interested in sitting with me for an online interview, please contact me at hermarys2@mymacewan.ca. I can provide more information or answer any questions you may have.

Thank you
Samantha

Appendix B: Ethics Approval

Approvals		
This application is pre-programmed to route to the following signing authority levels		
Role		Active
Division Signing Authority		<input type="checkbox"/>
Department Signing Authority		<input type="checkbox"/>
Faculty Signing Authority		<input type="checkbox"/>
Office of Research Services/Office of Research Ethics		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C: Interview Questions

This is a semi-structured interview guide. The interview may change based on the responses of participants. This identifies the main areas of questioning and potential follow-up/probing questions.

Interview Questions

- Can you tell me about your current position in corrections?
 - Timeline
- Over the course of your career, what are the ways that gender has impacted your work?
 - Did it have an impact on inmates, colleagues and management?

- Do you have an example of these situations?
 - How did that make you feel?
 - Is that usually how it happens?
 - Were there certain things you struggled with when working with female inmates?
 - How did you cope with these struggles?
 - How did that make you feel? Why does it make you feel this way?
 - (If applicable) Were there differences when working with male inmates?
 - Did you do anything to cope with these struggles?
- Did you ever feel like there were gendered expectations of being a woman working in corrections?
 - Do you believe it has impacted the way you performed at work? Could you tell me more about that?
 - Is there a specific situation you can recall?
 - Have you ever felt restricted in your role as a female CO?
 - What did you do?
 - Is this a constant feeling, or is it situational?
 - Did you feel a difference in restrictions as you progressed through your career?
- Has training changed in a way that challenges these gendered expectations?
 - Do you believe that the training has changed the culture?
 - Where do you see differences now compared to when you started?
 - Why do you think these changes have caused a shift in the culture overall?
- What factors played into your decision to stay in corrections long term?
 - Are there still gender constrictions in your current role?
 - Do you think that gender differences are still prevalent in corrections today? Do you think it's gotten better?
 - Why do (or don't) you think they have gotten better?
 - What do you think could make a difference within the culture?

Context Questions: If these haven't already been answered in the interview, they'll be asked as a conclusion

- How long have you worked in corrections?
- What positions have you worked in? How long?
- Have you worked outside of Western Canada in corrections?
- Have you worked in male prisons? What was your position, and how long?
- What is your current position?