

Women Guarding Men

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Abstract

Women working in the male dominated “society” of men’s prisons face many challenges. This study employs a convict criminology perspective to examine the different styles of “presentation of self” women implement in conducting their duties as corrections officers working in male prisons. The research asks the following questions: Do styles of presentation of self impact the effectiveness of women working as corrections officers in a men’s prisons? How are women corrections officers perceived by male prisoners and co-workers? Policy recommendations are suggested to improve the efficacy of female corrections officers.

About the authors

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Introduction

Numerous studies have been conducted analyzing the complex relationship between gender and presentation of self (e.g., Snyder, 1987; Leary, 1995; Weber, 2000). Nevertheless, very little research has reported the impact presentation of self has for female corrections officers whose job it is to guard men. In 2002, approximately twenty percent of corrections officers working in male prisons were women (Camp and Camp, 2003). This paper explores: 1) theoretical aspects of presentation of self, 2) how different styles of presentation of self by female guards are perceived by male prisoners and co-workers, and 3) policy recommendations intended to strengthen positive aspects of women working in men's prison facilities.

Literature and Commentary

Female corrections officers incorporate various styles of presentation of self to address the unique circumstances with which they deal while working in male prisons. These strategies are mechanism(s) to survive the surrealistic environment of men's prisons. Female corrections officers employ patterns of interaction and interpersonal skills that are products of their feminine socialization (Tewksbury and Clement, 1999). Female corrections officers commonly bring to their job alternatives to male corrections officer's typical response of physically controlling prisoners. Cadwaladr (1993) reports that female corrections officers have been repeatedly shown to react in a calmer and consequently more effective manner to volatile prisoners. They commonly rely on verbal skills to engage prisoners in discussion and talk through problems and issues that might otherwise trigger violent outbursts (Jenne and Kersting, 1996, 2002). Zimmer (1986) suggests the difference(s) between male and female corrections officers may be due to differing socialization experiences, as well as higher educational levels among female corrections officers.

The sparse prison literature which focuses on females working as guards in male prisons address topics which include the legal and social obstacles (discrimination) women encounter pursuing equal employment opportunities in corrections (Alpert, 1984; Cullen et al., 1985; Bartley, 1993; Mushlin, 1993; Collins, 1996; see also *Fillmore v. Eichkorn*, 1995; *Johnson v. Phelan*, 1995; *Hayes v. Marriot*, 1995), their ability to respond as aggressively as men toward prisoners (Kauffman, 1988; Cadwaladr, 1993), acceptance by their male counterparts (Zimmer, 1986; Fry and Glazer, 1987), and how they may lack the physical and psychological strength compared with their male “colleagues” (Zupan, 1992; Cadwaladr, 1993). Additional reasons for discrimination against women corrections officers by male prison staff include the fear that they will threaten institutional security by having sex with prisoners, or manage to get promoted by granting sexual favors to superiors (Jurik, 1985; Owen, 1985).

Most studies of women corrections officers are based on surveys or interviews of only corrections staff, and usually emphasize employment opportunities and working conditions. The research focus has been to compare the experience of female and male guards working in different corrections facilities, with little attention given to how male prisoners view women officers. For example, research findings include indications that women officers are "conned" less often than male guards by prisoners (Peterson, 1982), women corrections officers may do a better job in helping create a more relaxed atmosphere (Potter, 1980; Kauffman, 1988; Cadwaladr, 1993), female corrections officers possess considerable confidence in their job performance (Stohr, 1997), and women corrections officers experience more hostility from male co-workers than they do from male prisoners (Cullen et al., 1985; Zupan, 1986; Belknap, 1995).

Potential problems identified in the literature which relate to women guarding men include prisoner privacy (Jacobs and Zimmer, 1983, also see *Avery v. Perrin*, 1979; *Grummett v.*

Rushen, 1985; Michenfelder v. Summer, 1988; Klein v. Pyle, 1991; Timm v. Gunter, 1991; Riddick v. Sutton, 1992; Strickler v. Walters, 1993; Jordon v. Gardner, 1993; Canedy v. Boardman, 1994; Jones v. Harrison, 1994), and female officers attitudes towards prisoners (Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Zupan, 1986). Additionally, differences between how male and female corrections officers cope with the stress of working in prisons may be related to how their presentations of self are perceived by prisoners and co-workers.

Presentation of Self

People construct situation-specific gender roles. In other words, within the social structure “people participate in self-regulating conduct whereby they monitor their own and other’s action, and social structure both enables and constrains social action” (Giddens, 1984: 128). The bi-directional feedback between individual and “generalized other” (Mead, 1934) is the process whereby “salient role identity” is formed; the process of identifying with the “central self” or definition of self which directly impacts presentation of self (Messerschmidt, 1997). What is considered normative “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) for a particular social situation may vary among and between individuals. Goffman describes the various presentations of self as mechanisms of “impression management.”

Further, how individuals are perceived, and subsequently reacted to, is a function of “status sets” (Hughes, 1945; Becker, 1963). The status set consists of ascribed, achieved, and master status. An ascribed status is neither earned nor chosen; it is assigned to us. Ascribed statuses include biological factors such as race or sex; for example, European American male or African American female. An achieved status is one that is chosen or earned through individual effort; for example college professor. Master statuses may be achieved or ascribed and generally determines a person’s overall position in society; in industrial societies occupation is an example

of master status (Omi and Winant, 1994). The status set shapes our social interactions and therefore is salient in the analysis of presentation of self incorporated by women guarding men.

Although some feminist readers may have difficulty with our discussion, and take exception to our choice of words (e.g., hyper-masculine female, normative-feminine female, lady), we mean no offense and seek only to portray, as honestly as possible, how male prisoners perceive women corrections workers, and the presentations of self female corrections officers implement in navigating their way through the male dominated world of prison. After all, for those living the incarceration experience prisons are one-gender societies, socially backward, and culturally deprived.

Convict Criminology

The four co-authors of this article are ex-convict academics, who in total have served in excess of 25 years in prison. Murphy is an Assistant Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice who spent five years in Federal Medical Centers. Terry is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice who spent 12 years in state prisons in California and Oregon. Newbold is an Associate professor of Sociology and Criminology who served time in New Zealand prison. Richards is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice who served time in federal penitentiaries, corrections institutions, and camps. As ex-convicts, our task in this paper is to explain the “convict perspective” on women guarding men.¹ The discussion is based on the literature, our own experiences with incarceration, and that of male prisoners we knew in prison or have had the occasion to interview while conducting research. We have also consulted with the Convict Criminologists, our ex-convict colleagues who are employed at different universities as professors of Criminology, Criminal Justice, Sociology, or Social Work (Richards and Ross, 2001; Ross and Richards, 2003).

Is incorporating a normative-feminine female presentation of gender the most efficacious strategy for presentation of self for a female corrections officers, or is implementation of a hyper-masculine female most successful? The following sections are reports from the authors derived from their personal experiences in prison as well as academic research conducted since their release. As convicts we had opportunity to conduct “participant observation” working within a “captive audience” (Murphy, 2003). The following sections delineate the differing styles female corrections officers implement in presentation of self. The advantages and disadvantages contained in the following description lay foundation for a discussion of prison policy.

Daniel S. Murphy: Report on U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons

Having spent five years in Federal prison I had the opportunity to collect data as a participant-observer researcher. The following description is based in part upon my observations and informal interviews conducted with fellow prisoners and corrections staff. It was very common, but not the rule, for female officers to incorporate a hyper-masculine female presentation of self. From a sociological perspective I found the comparison between normative-feminine female presentation of self and hyper-masculine-female presentation of self quite interesting. Following are descriptions of each based upon my personal experience.

Hyper-Masculine Female Corrections Officer

“Ms-Mr Ed,” as she was referred to by many prisoners, illustrates a female corrections officer who implements the hyper-masculine female presentation of self. When I first encountered Ms-Mr Ed I did not realize she was a woman. She had her hair cropped short in military style and wore the traditional uniform of a male corrections officer that consists of slacks, shirt, and a tie. She wore her shirt loose concealing her female body. Ms-Mr Ed constantly chewed tobacco and her language paled even prison argot. She was muscular in build to the point I suspected steroid

use. Her strategy to command control was to out masculine those she guarded as well as the men with whom she worked.

Ms-Mr Ed was very aggressive in her style of maintaining control. She implemented the “legalistic style” (Wilson, 1968), viewing the rules of enforcement with almost religious fervor. She displayed characteristics of the sadistic “dictator style” (Schmallager, 2002) in her never ending enforcement of the rules and outright harassment. She was viewed with disdain. Her overzealous efforts were interpreted as acts of aggression and hostility. The prisoners saw her as the enemy; one who need be dealt with according to the strictures of the convict code. Because of the “hatred” she elicited, Ms-Mr Ed placed herself in a very tenuous position. The social tenet of not striking a woman did not apply to her. By her actions she invited retaliatory violence. Further, the male corrections officers organized efforts against her. The role she played was viewed by male corrections officers as destabilizing. One male guard referred to her as “gas being tossed on a fire with potential of making the whole joint blow.”

An example of how Ms-Mr Ed inflamed potentially volatile situations occurred in the chow hall. Ms-Mr Ed was in charge of the dining area when it became clear that a fight was on the verge of breaking out. When the brawl was about to erupt, Ms-Mr Ed jumped between the men in attempt to quell the violence. In this situation, one who was viewed as the enemy attempted to use force to derail the situation. Further, the individual attempting to curb the violence by a show of strength was a woman. Having a woman attempt to physically control the potential combatants was viewed by both participants as an attack on their masculinity. In an instant the situation escalated. Rather than diffuse the situation, my observation was that the use of the hyper-masculine female presentation of self escalated the violence. It took four additional

corrections officers to regain control and both of the combatants ended up in the “hole” (solitary confinement).

The hyper-masculine female presentation of self implemented by Ms-Mr Ed introduced tension and hostility into the prison environment. The negative consequences of this style of presentation of self far outweigh potential benefits. Prison is a violent place (Cohen and Felson, 1976; Butterfield, 2004). Escalating violence within the prison setting is antithetical to the mission statement of state and federal prisons: safety and security. Additionally, it can be argued that female corrections officers who implement the hyper-masculine female presentation of self place themselves in grave jeopardy. They are disdained by those they guard and subject to severe recompense as mandated by the convict code.

Normative-Feminine Female Corrections Officer

“Lady Guard” was a female corrections officer I encountered who implemented normative-feminine female presentation of self as she managed her duties working in a male prison. The manner in which she comported herself reflected that which much of society defines as normative female socialization. Her presence of self fell between hyper-feminine female and hyper-masculine female. She was referred to by many of the prisoners as a “lady.”

Lady Guard was highly respected by those in her charge. It was not the case that most of the men simply lusted after her; rather, they enjoyed talking with a lady. She was calm and orderly yet would make time to listen to the men. She did not command by orders, but rather managed by requests. Lady Guard wielded enormous authority predicated upon respect. When she calmly asked a prisoner to do something, the men typically complied. She acted like a lady and the prisoners responded as gentlemen.

In comparison, a mere few weeks after the cafeteria violence previously described, a very similar situation developed in the chow hall under Lady Guard's watch. This incident provides an example of the authority commanded out of respect intrinsic in the normative-feminine female presentation of self. A discussion between two prisoners quickly escalated into an argument on the verge of transitioning into violence. Lady guard approached the men and calmly asked one of the potential combatants to please come with her. After a moment's hesitation the individual complied. She did not make a big deal out of the situation nor did she place either of the men in a position that could be viewed as disrespect. Lady Guard and the individual calmly exited the chow hall. With calm reasoning, Lady Guard diffused what had the potential to become a very violent situation. Further, she did not inflame the situation thus eliminating the perceived need for revenge between the potential combatants.

A benefit associated with the normative-feminine female presentation of self was development of a safety network for Lady Guard. Many of the prisoners held her in high regard and treated her with the utmost respect. It was made very clear that if anyone were to hurt Lady Guard there would be severe sanctions. Given the strictures of the convict code, once a prisoner makes a statement of this nature if another were to injure Lady Guard those who made the protection statements were bound to enforce their proclamation.

Underscoring my personal observations, the following description provided by a male corrections officer elaborates upon the advantages and disadvantages intrinsic in the hyper-masculine female presentation of self versus the normative-feminine female presentation of self. In need be noted, the following quote was provided by a former student who had read a rough draft of the current article prior to the interview:

I started as a Corrections officer in 2001, and one of the first officers I worked with was a "hyper-masculine female." She had

no problem stepping right into a convict's face if she felt he was disrespecting her or failing to comply with her orders. She demanded others respect her, instead of performing her duties and interacting with others in a manner that deserved respect. I learned quickly that this was not the type of officer I wanted to be. She escalated potentially violent situations rather than diffusing them.

I have also worked with female officers who presented themselves as "normative-feminine" female, and were known as ladies. I agree that normative-feminine female will get better results, receive more respect, and create a healthier work environment for herself and her co-workers, while at the same time providing a sense of normalcy to a convict's world.

I have also worked with female officers who seem to vary between different presentations of self in an effort to find an approach that works. These officers sometimes run into trouble gaining respect from convicts and co-workers because of their hot-cold presentation of self.

The preceding quote underscores the impact of presentation of self implemented by female corrections officers as relates to their role(s) working within the world of a male prison. The respondent describes the positive elements of a normative-feminine female presentation of self and explains the hazards associated with hyper-masculine female presentation of self. Also delineated is the need for consistency in presentation of self whether a male or female corrections officer.

Charles M. Terry: Report on California and Oregon State Prisons

From a convict perspective, the existential nature of imprisonment might be characterized as shameful changelessness. Daily routines of prisoners in all penal facilities, regardless of the way they are classified, revolve around living lives of extreme powerlessness within social structures that have normalized brutal living conditions and degrading relationships between the keepers and the kept. Except for the faces of other convicts and prison officials that slowly come and go, and gradual shifts in the wider political economy that result in alterations of institutional policies, sentencing guideline amendments and so forth, it seems like nothing ever changes. However,

when we step back and broaden our vision by drawing from a historical perspective, we see that circumstances and social relationships inside penal facilities can and do change over time.

From my own vantage point as a convict (which spanned roughly 12 years between 1970 and 1990 in California and Oregon), as a friend of many current and former prisoners, and as an academic researcher, I have observed America's prison system undergoing an almost complete transformation during the past 30 years. With few exceptions, the cumulative effect of the relevant changes has made the prison experience increasingly painful and dehumanizing (Terry, 2003). Just a few examples include fewer programs (no-frills bill, elimination of Pell Grants, etc.), declining quality of medical care (Murphy, 2003), skyrocketing rates of imprisonment and overcrowding, the fragmentation of the prison culture, the growth of prison as an industry, mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines, "truth in sentencing" laws, heightened demonization of people defined as criminals, the politicization of crime, conceptions of prisoners as populations to be managed and controlled rather than understood and rehabilitated, and the entrance of women into the prison guard workforce.

One day, in 1975, I noticed someone who looked like a female walking toward me in a crowded corridor in the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC); an institution run by the California Department of Corrections (CDC). Now, keep in mind, the sight of a woman was *not* an ordinary feature of my everyday rounds and routines in that facility. For a second, I thought I might be hallucinating. Could this really be a female? All I was accustomed to was the hyper-masculine nature of everyday life marked by prison argot, hatred, humor, sporadic violence, endemic racism, sexism and homophobia, bodies that were buffed from years of weight lifting—many covered with prison-made tattoos, monotony, and the divergent types of male prison guard personalities that ranged from decent to aggressively sadistic.

As she got closer I noticed she was wearing a skirt and blouse stamped with the emblem of the CDC. Underneath the uniform was a young, probably 30 year old, good looking blond female that attracted the attention of every male in the vicinity. As it turned out, this particular woman (who was quickly nicknamed Raggedy Ann) was assigned to work shifts in the dorm where I lived with about 65 other men. Like a small number of other female guards I subsequently observed, she was able to maintain her femininity and simultaneously carry out her role as a prison official. Women like her could somehow earn the respect of the convict population, maintain positive relations with other guards, and still present themselves as caring, kind human beings. Unfortunately, within the female guard population that would swell in the years to come, women like this became a distinct minority.

Raggedy Ann is someone I'll never forget. For me, she was the first of her kind, like a pioneer traversing an alien frontier. Her sudden presence was an unexpected, welcome surprise. She was friendly, treated everyone with respect, and could have easily been defined as "eye candy" because of her looks. A note worth making is that attractiveness was not a prerequisite for being appreciated. I recall several other female guards, many who were not especially good looking, who were held in high regard by convicts. Their shared attribute was an ability and willingness to treat us like human beings rather than animals. Like other guards, you'd see them overseeing the chow line (to keep convicts from stealing extra food), walking around the yard to help maintain order, and so on. The difference was they were seen laughing, smiling, and interacting with men as women might do in the real world—without being tough, uptight, and antagonistic.

Normative-feminine female prison guards like Raggedy Ann face nearly insurmountable obstacles. The masculine norms of the prison setting require both convicts and guards to be

confident, tough, and aggressive. Gaining acceptance within the guard subculture is next to impossible for anyone perceived to be “prisoner friendly” or a threat to guard solidarity. “If women are generally less physically aggressive, less apt to take formal action, more nurturing, and have a higher need to affiliate, then they will contravene both sets of norms” (Crouch, 1999: 212). To whatever extent they are unable to adhere to both convict *and* guard norms, to that extent they are at a disadvantage and liable to become alienated. The more alienated female guards become, the more likely they will develop an intimate relationship with a convict, become increasingly hyper-masculine and miserable, or leave. Some women officers, like a Midwestern convict recently told me, “come in as a decent person but, you know, after awhile they hate everybody ‘cause they’ve been too dogged out. They don’t laugh no more. They don’t like nobody no more.” Many who undergo this process continue working despite their misery.

Over the years I witnessed several normative-feminine female guards come and go. I recall one in Oregon who seemed like a convict magnet in the recreation yard. Though I could never hear what was being said, I sensed that conversations with prisoners (who were constantly trying to talk to her) made her seem uncomfortable. I have no way of knowing whether it was the content (or implications) of what was being said, or the way she perceived the interaction might be judged by others that caused her discomfort. She did, however, seem shy, out of place and more and more withdrawn over time. Within a few short months she was gone. I remember another female guard, this one from California, who worked for perhaps six months before suddenly vanishing. Unlike the woman just mentioned, she seemed to be one of the few who could be kind to convicts without losing her dignity and self-respect. Not long after noticing her absence, I unexpectedly saw her again one last time in the visiting room. Instead of a CDC uniform, she was wearing a very short skirt and a low cut blouse. She was there visiting a

convict that I later learned she had been caught having sex with in a small janitorial supply room on the second tier.

With the passing of time I also noticed that hyper-masculinity seemed to be an inherent quality of many females who came to work inside the prisons I called home. A good percentage of them acted like “man haters.” They tended to be unbending, unapproachable, hardcore rule enforcers that projected images of fearlessness, anger and animosity at all times. Because of their short cropped hair cuts, body language, and styles of social interaction, many appeared to be lesbians. Regardless of their sexuality, I spent several years observing such women in relatively close proximity (i.e., I’d see them in the chow hall, recreation yard, taking count on the tier or in a dorm, or standing with other guards in huge shower rooms) without ever seeing even a hint of a smile cross their face.

Views from other males with prison experience (who refer to them with different language) depict a vast range of negative conceptions about hyper-masculine female guards. An ex-convict in California, for example, told me that during the 1980’s he started noticing a lot of “unwed mothers” working in the pen. When I asked what he meant, he said, “Mothers of children. They got a thing against guys. They got a bunch of kids at home, no daddy around, and now they got a job in the CDC controlling men.” When I asked him how they treated people, he shared an anecdote:

They were mean. Really mean. I remember coming outta the cell one time, and I didn’t come out fast enough. Cause when they open the cell, they want you at the cell door ready to come out. And I was dickin around doing something, and she tried to close the door. And alls you gotta do is put your foot on the door and it stops the door from closing. Ah, she got on that speaker, man, and started screaming at the top of her fucking lungs about me not letting that door close. And, you know, I thought ‘Oh my God, what did I do now, man?’ And she wouldn’t stop screaming. And the more she screamed, and the more she told me to do things, the

less I wanted to do. And it was hard to, you know, but there's nothing I could do. I had to do what she told me.

Failure to comply with her orders, he said, would have gotten him “an ass whipping and some hole [segregation/disciplinary unit] time.”

A convict from a Midwestern prison recently told me he believed some female guards are “out and out bitches” because “they have gotten fucked over by some dude in their lives and they come here to get even because they still have that resentment.” When I asked another prisoner whether he thought women worked in the pen because it was their best opportunity for employment, he said, “For some, no doubt. But I think that's the smallest percentage. I think the majority are there for a power trip over men.”

One of the most notorious, and perhaps shameful, aspects of imprisonment is the lack of privacy. Close proximity to others and overcrowded conditions often make bowel movements a public spectacle. Masturbating without being detected is often impossible. Seen within this context, hiring women to *watch* male prisoners seems clearly problematic. Their mere presence during shower activities, strip searches, or other normal prison activities can obviously induce shame. Regardless of any particular personal disposition, the mere fact that the “watcher” is female can add tremendously to levels of frustration and powerlessness already stretched beyond ordinary limits. A friend I did time with in Oregon during the 1980's wrote me a few years after I was released about a new “inmate management unit” (IMU). As in many other super max segregation units that sprang up across the country during the 1990's, female guards are employed to help run the place:

We're trapped in a little cell 24 hours a day (or 23 for five days, and 24 two days) and subjected to this psychotic noise and sleep deprivation. Then there's the design of the place. We're watched 24 hours a day. Try to take a shit and wipe your ass with a female cop watching you (Terry, 2000 p. 111).

The degree to which male convicts are starved for sexual gratification must be addressed in this discussion. Except for the very few who are able to enjoy occasional conjugal visits (not allowed in most jurisdictions) with their wives, or the even fewer who manage to make it into a second tier supply room with a willing female guard, sexual relations with females do not exist. Imagine living as a male heterosexual with absolutely no chance of having sex with a woman for many years.

One of the few means available for distinguishing and reinforcing one's sexuality as a man in the upside-down world of the prison comes from using language and humor that might be considered raunchy and sexist without a clear understanding of the social context from which it comes. Stories about sexual escapades with women on the outside are told repeatedly. While I did time, musical entertainment shows like Hee Haw, Soul Train, and American Bandstand were popular among convicts. Based on audience comments, I can say with certainty that music was *not* the object of attention for many viewers. When a beautiful woman appeared on the screen, or during daily conversations about well known female celebrities, you'd commonly hear things like, "I'd walk through a mile of her shit just to see where it came from," or "Sheeeeit, she'd have to *pay* me."

The higher the security of any given male penal facility, the more it will be shaped by hyper-masculinity. Guys locked up in level four institutions (high security) who are never getting out or doing stretches of time that span decades seem to naturally develop strategies of living that are more deeply rooted in anger, hopelessness, and fear than their counterparts in lower security settings who are able to see "daylight" at the end of their sentences. The presence of female guards in these higher security pens can be perceived as cruel and unusual punishment. Not only are they untouchable, they are also a constant reminder of what can never be obtained.

This is why many men, including myself, would prefer prisons without female guards. It is also likely that the higher the level of security in any particular prison, the more females would be pressured to develop and maintain hyper-masculine orientations. Though normative-feminine female guards might possibly mitigate the pains of imprisonment in such facilities, it is my contention that the pressure they will be face to become hyper-masculine in conjunction with the sexual pains they create for convicts because of their gender are valid reasons for implementing policies that bar them from working in higher security facilities.

In general, I believe the use of female guards in male prisons should be kept to a minimum because the positive impact they can have is arguably diminished by their potential for creating conflict. To reduce the shame associated with incarceration, as well as for reasons addressed above, I feel that female guards should be assigned to lower security institutions and restricted from areas where privacy is an issue.

Greg Newbold: Report on New Zealand Prisons

Although New Zealand prides itself in being the first country in the world to grant women the vote (1893), it was relatively late in integrating women into some employment areas, such as law enforcement and prisons. By 1914 most large cities in North America, as well as many European cities, had appointed female constables however it was 1941, following intense lobbying from women's organizations, before the first female constables were appointed in New Zealand (Butler, Winfree and Newbold, 2003: 304). In prisons, likewise, female corrections officers were restricted to women's institutions until relatively late. Not until 1985, following the example of Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States (Lashlie, 2002: 29), did New Zealand assign its first female officer to work in a male prison.

Why Employ Women in Men's Prisons?

Apart from employment equity considerations, there are a number of reasons why the service of women in male prisons is favored. The most compelling is that all-male environments are unnatural, and nurture an aggressive macho culture that can impede a prisoner's chances of successful post-release adjustment. The presence of women 'softens' the prison environment and normalizes it to an extent by introducing a feminine atmosphere. Moreover, in a criminal world where the status of women is typically marginal (Newbold, 1989), and where many men are imprisoned for crimes against them, the presence of women as authority figures may prompt men to revisit traditional attitudes in which women are portrayed primarily as housekeepers, subordinates and sexual playthings.

For the most part, the fears that some officers had for women's safety and vicariously their own, proved unfounded. Attacks on women have been rare and, for the most part, physical confrontations have continued to be male-on-male. This is probably because of the fact that, where a prisoner may gain some peer prestige from knocking a male officer to the ground, no such kudos follows attacks on women. In a world where male pride remains strong, men who assault women are disdained as bullies and cowards, and may be subjected to retaliatory attacks by chivalrous prisoners. Moreover, the fact that women are illegitimate targets of violence forces prisoners to attempt to resolve differences with verbally, rather than resorting to the fist.

There were no women officers in prisons when I was a prisoner in the 1970s, but observations I have made and numerous conversations I have had with officers and prisoners confirm that relationships between male prisoners and female officers are generally relaxed and easy in New Zealand. Lashlie (2002) supports this, reporting that during her five years at *Wi Tako* and *Ohura*, she experienced few problems. Male officers in New Zealand often develop

friendly, joking relationships with long-term prisoners, and so, too, do women (see Newbold, 1982). Anecdotally, it appears that some women also forge a maternal, protective role toward certain prisoners, and some prisoners, lacking motherly figures in their own lives, reciprocate.

Conflict: Male v. Female Guards

Contrary to the expectations of certain cynics, the principal difficulties that women prison officers have faced in men's prisons have not been with prisoners, but with their own male colleagues. This in fact was a problem that a number of female officers and administrators had predicted when the policy was being mooted in the mid-1980s (*NZ Herald*, June 25, 1985). We have seen that in some institutions, women were employed in the face of opposition from male staff. And true to expectations, although some officers accepted the situation and even welcomed it, others remained resentful. Lashlie (2002) reports that during her time as prisons EEO coordinator (1990-1993), although she personally had experienced few difficulties as an officer, she came across numerous examples of women being ignored, ridiculed, insulted, assaulted, and subjected to indecent suggestions by male staff.

Particularly in the 1980s, when the policy was new and many women worked with men alone, the atmosphere of hostility, isolation and rejection caused some to resign. At Invercargill (medium security) Prison, for example, a 1991 inquiry found that the first female officer there had been placed by herself in a yard with male prisoners, had received obscene phone calls, had been subjected to unsubstantiated sexual accusations, and had her handbag put in a toilet bowl, by male colleagues. As a result, several staff were disciplined and the officer herself had to be transferred to another institution (*Dominion*, July 24, 1990).

“Love:” Women and the Men They Guard

As women’s presence became more firmly established, these issues reduced. At the same time, problems with inappropriate relationships between women and male prisoners increased. In 1989 an prisoner at Auckland (medium security) Prison, assisted by a prison officer’s wife with whom he was having an affair (*NZ Herald*, July 8, 1989), escaped, and between mid-1989 and mid-1990, four female prison officers resigned after falling in love with prisoners, two of whom were serving life sentences for murder (*Press*, May 7, 1990). Thereafter, publicity about officers having sexual relations with prisoners came sporadically, although most cases were shielded by the quiet resignations of officers concerned.

Accusations of male officers having sex with prisoners emerged as well. In 1998, it was revealed that a prisoner at Arohata women’s prison had become pregnant by an officer (*Dominion*, August 12, 1998), prompting opposition justice spokesman Phil Goff to announce that he had received 13 allegations and/or evidence of sexual relationships between corrections staff and prisoners or former prisoners (*Press*, September 29, 1998). For the most of the 1990s publicity of prison love affairs remained intermittent but 2002 saw the recognition of a growing problem. In July 2002, the prison officers’ union announced that it knew of at least five women officers who had resigned or been dismissed in the previous two years as a result of inappropriate relations with male prisoners and demanded remedial action from the Department of Corrections (*Press*, July 8, 2002). Eight months later it was revealed that a rapist serving 11 years after drugging young girls for sex had fathered a child to an officer at the medium security prison in Christchurch (*Press*, March 7, 2003).

The call for action that the prison officers’ union made in 2002 apparently had little effect. At Auckland Prison, where 70 out of 220 guards were now female, two women officers

were fired in 2004 after being accused of smuggling contraband to their gang-member lovers. A third was charged with criminal fraud (*NZ Herald*, January 16, 2004). A few months later it was disclosed that a young prisoner, serving 12 years for a series of highly publicized gang rapes and sodomy, had fathered the child of an officer at Waikeria Prison (*Sunday Star-Times*, May 8, 2004). In the furor that followed, Minister of Corrections Paul Swain was forced to admit that since December 1999, 17 female and four male officers had been investigated for having affairs with prisoners of the opposite sex. Of the 21 officers involved, two had been dismissed, eight had resigned, eight cases had not been proven, and one was still being investigated (*NZ Herald*, May 21, 2004).

Therefore, women working in male prisons present a bifurcate reality. Arguments may be made that the women “normalize” the environment by introducing femininity into the masculine society of prison. This may have the effect of calming the volatile nature of prison while concomitantly preparing prisoners for reentry into society. However, as with the military and like organizations, introducing women as correctional officers in the male dominated world of prison where heterosexual relations are forbidden may in fact inflame the stresses and strains with which male prisoners are forced to deal.

Stephen C. Richards: Report on U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons

I did time in nine different U.S. federal prisons in the 1980’s. As I remember, women were still more likely to be working in minimum or medium security rather than maximum-security institutions. I do not remember any women guards working at United States Penitentiaries Atlanta, Terre Haute, Marion, or Leavenworth. This may be because I spent only short stretches in these maximum-security prisons, most of this in “hold over” units waiting for transit, or in solitary confinement.

I do remember female officers working cellblocks in medium-security Federal Corrections Institutions (e.g., FCI Talledega, FCI Oxford). Still, they were few and far between in the 1980's. The numbers have grown since. Nevertheless, high security federal prisons were and remain a difficult place for women to work "mainline" as corrections officers. The longer the sentences, the bigger the institution, and the higher the security level, the more dangerous it is for convicts and staff.

Hyper-Masculine Female versus Normative-Feminine Female Corrections Officer?

Over the past ten years I have interviewed hundreds of federal prisoners, spent many afternoons and evenings in prison visiting rooms (prisoners call this the "dance floor") and toured numerous federal prisons. Many of these prison visiting rooms have been staffed by at least one woman officer. Then again, it is easier duty than supervising the tiers and looks good to the public.

The federal convicts I visit with comment on the dispositions of "hacks" (guards). They will say, "That one is a good guy" or "Look out for that SOB." They are quick to label female hacks, clearly favoring the normative-feminine female over the hyper-masculine female corrections officer. Their perceptions may well be misinformed, as they live day-to-day in an all male world where their ability to judge women by dress and demeanor has been seriously compromised.

The prisoners miss the mere sight of feminine looking women. A trip to the visiting room gives them a rare opportunity to view females. Typically, they are polite and respectful towards other prisoners' women folk. They scan the visiting room and spot attractive ladies.

On one occasion, I recall three prisoners discussing their perceptions of the sexual preferences of two female officers working the visiting room in a Federal Corrections Institution. The two officers wore the same federal blue blazers, white shirt, red tie, and grey slacks as the

male staff. The uniform is masculine and serves to mask feminine figure. Both of these women wore crew cuts, heavy combat type boots, and no make-up. The prisoners knew the guards and were convinced they were butch lovers, as they always seemed to be together. I checked it out. At least on that evening, as the two female officers performed their visiting room duty, it did appear that they worked together, almost as if they were somehow sisters or best friends. And, maybe that is all they were. The perceptions of the convicts notwithstanding, it remains difficult and a bit risky to label any individual and guess their sexuality from mere wearing of a uniform and hair style.

Conclusion

Given the social context of an all-male prison population, women corrections officers are faced with the daunting task of trying to keep order in a social structure within which they may not be entirely welcome. Female officers may employ different strategies or presentations of self to do their job. Some female guards present themselves as being tougher than both the prisoners they supervise and the male guards with whom they work; attempting to “out masculine” the men. We suggest that this strategy often creates more problems than it solves. Implementing the hyper-masculine female presentation of self often fans the smoldering sentiment of resentment and antagonism which is an underlying tension in prison.

Based upon research within the prison setting, the authors suggest a normative-feminine female presentation of gender is far more successful within the context of the male “prison world.” The antagonism generated by hyper-masculine-female is ameliorated when a female corrections officer presents herself as a “lady.” In fact, we observed male prisoners responding as “gentlemen” to normative-feminine female corrections officer. By presenting herself as a lady the female corrections officer commands more authority and respect. A network of protection

may form around the “lady” guard. Prisoners respected these officers and let it be known that if a prisoner were to assault a “lady” guard recompense would be swift and severe. The network of protection allows the female officer to perform her duties effectively while commanding the respect of prisoners.

Policy Recommendations

1. We suggest surveying women corrections officers to explore how they might be trained and deployed in their occupation. Special attention should be paid to their innovative ideas for improving conditions for both prisoners and staff.
2. Implementation of “Corrections Officer Basic Training” (COBT) will enhance the development of social skills and cognitive self-change. Such training would improve officer/prisoner and officer/officer relations. COBT training also emphasizes techniques to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations and avoid unnecessary conflict or harm.
3. While we understand the concern of women prison employees to be treated as equals and be given every opportunity for career advancement, we do not think this requires women to be trained to perform their duties as men. We suggest that female officers may have new ideas for managing prisoners. The unique contributions of women should be supported and valued.
4. Role playing would be useful in corrections officer training. Practicing presentations of self in realistic situations that might occur in the prison setting would prepare female corrections officers for the reactions they will receive from prisoners. Role playing should emphasize the use of conversation and negotiation
5. Pairing newly hired female corrections officers with well respected female officer mentors will provide insight as to what to expect when working with male prisoners.

6. We need to restore some dignity to corrections. Women officers should not be required to patrol male housing units and shower rooms, or conduct strip searches of men. These duties disrespect both the women officers and male prisoners. They compromise the women officers' ability to manage men, and contribute to prisoner resentment of staff and encourage disorder in cellblocks and dormitories. Though prisoners are not guaranteed a right to privacy while incarcerated, it is humiliating and degrading for prisoners to be observed in their living areas (bathrooms, showers) by an officer of the opposite sex. This approach should be incorporated in corrections officer training programs.

7. Since an important objective of rehabilitation is to alter anti-social value systems, exposing men to situations where women present authoritative role models is an essential part of the reform process. Moreover, having women work in men's prisons helps reduce the artificial world of men's prisons.

8. Given that nearly all convicts will someday have to readjust to freedom, the creation of an environment that replicates external society as closely as possible within the requirements of custody is commended. Normalization of the prison world is a step toward this goal and thus it seems that on balance, the rewards of a co-sexual prison staffing policy far outweigh the occasional managerial deficits that the policy might produce.

9. Considering the recent scandal in the Federal Bureau of Prisons with male officers assaulting female prisoners (FCI Tallahassee, June 2006; over 160 male officers have now been arrested in the federal system prison for assaulting female prisoners), it should be no surprise that male prisoners have concerns about being guarded by women. We do not support the idea that male officers should patrol female cellblocks, dorms, and showers. In either case, male or female prisoners should not be supervised by opposite gender in specific circumstances.

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Note

¹ For illustrations of the “convict criminology” literature see the following: Irwin, 1970, 1980, 1985, 2005; Newbold, 1982/ 1985, 1989, 2003; Jones, 1995, 2003; Terry, 1997, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Richards, 1998, 2003; Austin and Irwin, 2001; Murphy, 2001, 2003; 2004; Richards and Ross, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Richards, Terry, and Murphy, 2002; Ross and Richards, 2002, 2003; Austin, Richards, and Jones, 2003a, 2003b; Mobley, 2003; Richards, Austin, and Jones, 2004.