Unspoken Commandments:

Contemporary correctional officer work cultures and their influence on prison conditions

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

I draw on interviews with 131 Canadian correctional officers (or COs), all of whom work in four western Canadian prisons. Building on existing Canadian and international CO research, my dissertation analyzes specific facets of CO workplace cultures in provincial prisons in Western Canada. Provincial prisons, which house prisoners who are awaiting trial or are sentenced to less than two years of custody, house the largest group of prisoners in Canada, but are comparatively under-researched. In this dissertation, I examine how officers practice and enact their roles as COs, detailing specific features of their habitus and demonstrating how it shapes workplace and occupational cultures, attitudes, and behaviours in unproductive ways. The broader, guiding question for this dissertation is as follows: how do officer workplace and occupational cultures shape prisons and prison operations? To answer this, I examine how the CO habitus shapes officer cultural values, and in turn demonstrate how these cultural values impact the daily operation of provincial prisons.

This dissertation is broken into three central chapters, with a methodological addendum representing chapter four. Each of these chapters targets a specific aspect of how officer cultures function on a day-to-day basis. Chapter 1 focuses on how COs discuss and enact gendered organizational lenses within their work, demonstrating how gender distinctly shapes the perspectives and experiences of new COs. I conclude by discussing the central role that gendered organizational lenses play in helping officers deal with broader organizational shifts.

In Chapter 2, I focus on how COs interact with use of force. Specifically, I examine how COs use and interact with force as a means of coercive governance, structuring how prison staff maintain control of prison environments. This article differs notably from other research on the

topic, as I demonstrate how actions that are often discussed as "corruption" are often directly informed by how COs interact with broader organizational frameworks.

In Chapter 3, I examine how COs perceive themselves as vulnerable. Building off of Sierra-Arévalo's concept of a "danger imperative," I argue that COs interpret nearly every decision they make through a lens of personal vulnerability. I provide specific details of how COs do this, identify the broader importance of vulnerability to COs, and identify points that officers routinely identify when discussing themselves as vulnerable. Finally, in Chapter 4, I discuss my own positionality as a former CO, and identify the specific features of my interaction with officer culture and how that impacted my research.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by William J. Schultz. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Unlocking Extremism: Examining Perspectives on Radicalization among Correctional Officers in Alberta" (Pro00062785, April 1, 2016).

The research conducted for this thesis forms part of the University of Alberta Prisons Project, a research collaboration led by Professors Sandra Bucerius and Kevin Haggerty, University of Alberta Department of Sociology (Pro00061614, February 2016). I conducted 110 of the correctional officer interviews in this project under their auspices. The entirety of this dissertation is my original work, including literature review, articles, analysis, and conclusion. Chapter 3 of this dissertation has been published as W. J. Schultz, "Correctional officers and the use of force as an organizational behavior," *Criminology,* vol. 61, issue 3. I was responsible for the data collection and analysis as well as the manuscript composition. A. Kohl, S. Bucerius, and K. Haggerty contributed to the creation of the coding scheme used to organize these data, but the articles are my work.

Acknowledgement

So many people supported me over the last six years that I don't know how I can thank you all appropriately. I'll start with my all-star academic cast, who pushed me to levels I didn't believe I could ever reach. Sandra Bucerius and Kevin Haggerty: Thank you for your friendship, guidance, mentorship, and loyalty to me over the years, and for pushing me to be better. I never would have made it without your help and willingness to stick with me, and I look forward to many more collaborations to come. To my broader academic support cast, sincere thanks to you as well. Karen Hughes and Harvey Krahn, thanks for being supportive over the years, for giving me new ideas, and for your insightful comments as my committee members. Likewise, thank you Eric Beauregard for stepping in as my external. And, thanks to the large group of people who made big impacts in short periods of time. Ben Crewe and Alison Liebling: thanks for hosting me so wonderfully in Cambridge, and thanks to Daria Przybylska, Deborah Kant, Ailie Rennie, Sophie Ellis and everyone else for your friendship and enthusiastic discussions of all things prisons. At the U of A, thanks to Justin Tetrault, Luca Berardi, Prof Collins Ifeonu, and all of the other UAPP team members for your friendship and support. At MacEwan, thanks to Michael Gulayets and all my wonderful coworkers for being so welcoming as I adjusted to being a "real" academic over the last year. Finally, thanks to everyone at the U of A who have supported me over the years in various ways: Sarah Dorow, Gillian Stevens, Amy Kaler, Alison Dunwoody, Naomi Kroegman, Cristina Stasia, Lois Harder and those I am inevitably forgetting at this point.

I owe a big thanks to my funders, as well. Sincere thanks to the Vanier Canada scholarships, the Killam Trusts, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, and the University of Alberta. I would not have been able to do this without you.

As for my personal supports: Breanna, I couldn't have finished this without your support over the last year. I love you, and thanks so much for your incredible support over the last couple years. To my parents and siblings, thanks for all your support over the last six years, even when you thought I was crazy for sticking with it. To all the Pioneer Ranch Camp people: Thanks for letting me come out and recharge in nature over the last six years. The time I spent at camp was incredibly valuable in helping me to recharge. And, to my friends, thanks for being there to support and distract me when I was dealing with the chaos of trying to put a dissertation together.

Finally: sincere thanks to all the COs who spoke to me about their experiences and perspectives. This work is dedicated to you. I don't have the whole picture, and I don't claim that I have all the answers. But: you told me your stories, and I was listening. As you read this, I hope you can see that, and recognize what I discuss. You continue to make an impossible job look easy.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Culture 9
Context: Correctional Officers and Prison Research 14
Literature Review: Correctional Officer Research 17
Early CO research 19
Officer research in the 1990s and 2000s 25
The rebirth of North American prison research 28
The ''Wellness Revolution'' 30
Stream 1: Professional orientation 31
Stream 2: Taint management 39
Stream 3: The Wellness Revolution 43
Canadian research 49
Research Questions 58
Methods and Research Design 61
Research Sites and Project Design 61
Ethics and Participant Recruitment 65
Figure 1: UAPP Interview Breakdown 68
Field Notes and Participant Observation 68
Interview Methods 70
Thematic Data Analysis 71
Positionality within the Research 71
Conclusion 76
Paper 1: Gendered organizational logics and correctional officer work cultures 78
Abstract: 78
Introduction 79
Literature Review 80
Methods 84
Findings 87
Theme 1: Setting the expectations 87
Theme 2: Fighting to belong 90

Theme 3: Testing each other....93
Theme 4: Getting big fast....96
Theme 5: Sexual identity....100
Discussion....104
Conclusion....107
Paper 2: Correctional officers and the use of force as an organizational behavior....109
Abstract....109
Introduction....110
Literature Review....111
Methods....115
Findings....118
Bureaucratic responsibilitization....120
Coercive control in a managerialist framework....126
Constructing and outsourcing use of force....129
Discussion, Future Research Areas, and Limitations....137
Conclusion....143
Paper 3: "There's a difference between putting yourself in harm's way and going to work expecting to get hurt": Vulnerability as a structuring feature of the CO habitus....145
Abstract....145
Introduction....146
Literature review....147
Methods....151
Findings....154
Incarcerated people as a source of vulnerability....155
Officers and Managers....160
The Dark Side of Officer Solidarity....165
Discussion....168
Conclusion....174
Paper 4: Insider Positionality and Team Ethnography in Prison Research....175
Abstract....175
Introduction....176
Literature Review....178
Methods....183

Initiation 185
Return 189
Putting on a comfortable role 194
Cleft habitus 199
Discussion 205
Conclusion 208
Concluding Remarks 212
References 218
Appendix I: Interview Prompt Guide 256
Appendix II: Officer Coding Scheme 257

Introduction

Ashley Smith spent over 1000 days in solitary confinement before her death in custody in 2007. She was only 19 years old. As news outlets spread troubling details around her passing, many began asking questions about the role played by prison staff. The eventual fatality inquest released hours of prison security video that detailed Smith's rampantly self-destructive behaviour, including multiple incidents where prison staff forcibly interrupted Ashley's suicide attempts. Correctional officers watched Smith die: "She had tied a piece of cloth around her neck while guards stood outside her cell door and watched. They had been ordered by senior staff not to enter her cell as long as she was breathing" (CBC News, 2013). After examining the evidence, a coroner's jury declared Ashley's death a homicide. The jury directly cited management decisions, officer actions/inactions, and Ashley's time in solitary confinement as causal factors in her death (Carlson, 2013).

In retrospect, Ashley Smith's death represents the opening act in a new and unsettled phase for Canadian prisons. Prisons and penitentiaries have traditionally operated outside of the public limelight (Britton, 2003; Garland, 1990), but in the 15 years since Ashley's passing, Canadian prisons have become staples in news cycles. Critiques of prison COVID policies have emerged across the country during the pandemic (Smellie, 2022). Likewise, devastating investigations by national news outlets including the CBC and The Globe and Mail have detailed widespread overuse of administrative segregation practices in both federal and provincial prisons, causing public outcry and significant legal challenges against prison administrators (The Globe and Mail, 2017; T. Wright, 2019).[1] Ashley's death also focused media attention on

[1] The most widely-known cases are those of Ashley Smith, Edward Snowshoe (who committed suicide after 162 days in solitary at the Edmonton Institution), Richard Wolfe (who died of natural causes, but spent 640 continuous days in solitary as a result of multiple threats to his life), and Adam Capay (who spent 1,636 days in solitary, was

correctional officers (or COs), traditionally an ignored branch of Canadian law enforcement (Ricciardelli, 2019). During the Smith inquiry, many observers questioned why prison staff stood by, videotaping her death, rather than intervening (Bromwich & Kilty, 2017). Although the fatality inquest exonerated the officers involved in Smith's case, inconsistencies in the CO role have subsequently undergone widespread public scrutiny. CO actions have actively contributed to prisoner deaths and mistreatment in some institutions, and accusations of violence and officer malfeasance are common (Balfour, 2017; Fumamo & Culbert, 2019; Quenneville, 2019; Simons, 2018). Simultaneously, strikes—both official and unofficial 'wildcat' work-stoppages—have occurred across the country over the past decade, many of them based on officer safety concerns around prisoner-on-officer violence (D. Bell, 2017; Cotter, 2017; Grant, 2017; Kergin, 2019).

Several high-profile cases have also drawn pictures of odious CO workplace cultures in major Canadian prisons. A police investigation at Edmonton Institution, a federal prison in Alberta,[2] in 2018 resulted in charges and legal action against several COs—for crimes, including sexual assault, which were committed against coworkers and other prison staff (Simons, 2018; Wakefield, 2018; Wakefield & Junker, 2019). Despite charges, investigations, and dismissals, observers suggest deep-set problems continue to exist (Wakefield, 2018, 2021b)—so much so that Canada's Correctional investigator singled out the Edmonton Institution for a "toxic and troubled workplace culture where dysfunction, abuse of power, and harassment have festered for years" (Zinger, 2022, p. 13). At Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre, a provincial prison in the same province, staff repeatedly leaked harassment complaints to local media, which culminated with the dismissal of the director and assistant director in late 2021 (Hamilton, 2021;

essentially "forgotten" by the Ontario prison system, and was only released when prison staff tipped off the Ontario correctional investigator)

[2] Federal prisons hold people sentenced to more than two years in custody. Provincial prisons house people who are awaiting trial, or who are sentenced to less than two years in custody.

Wakefield, 2021a). And, in late 2019, a scathing report commissioned by the Alberta Government into conditions at the Edmonton Remand Centre (ERC) detailed widespread issues, including inappropriate relationships between supervisors and subordinates, pornography use during work hours, sexual harassment, and nepotism. The authors—an external consulting firm—stated that "It will take time, effort, and some financial resources to make [ERC] the healthy and respectful workplace it could be" (TLS Enterprises, 2019, p. 1). Even this statement highlights the depth of the issues at play, as the authors' passive wording deliberately frames the issue as one which *could* be addressed, with *some* financial resources, but leaves open the question of whether interest in such changes exists.

Canada has entered an era of active correctional reform, one shaped by factors external to the prison—notably, shifting social values, activism, investigative journalism, strikes, and legislative and court decisions. Discussions about prison abolition have also moved into the mainstream, garnering attention from major news outlets and in broader public discourse (Lopez, 2020). Yet, pressures towards prison reform do not guarantee positive change. Strong unions represent COs federally and in every Canadian province, and major prison reforms require active and tacit union approval for effective implementation. Interest groups/factions within larger unions influence this process, as local groups agitate for and engage in militancy on specific issues (Wakefield, 2021a). Disconnects between policymakers, union leaders, and union members mean that COs often interpret prison reform measures in noticeably different ways than the authors of such reforms intended and are willing to block correctional "best practices" when said practices are perceived to endanger officer safety (Mouallem, 2016). This is consistent with U.S. research which demonstrates that CO unions and interest groups are uninterested in prison reform, especially when reforms might reduce officer control and/or discretion (Aviram, 2016;

Page, 2011). Consequently, although officers and CO unions may abide by reforms due to their legal responsibility, research suggests that officers are often unlikely to consistently support prison reforms, instead viewing them as threats to their position within the broader institution (Lerman & Page, 2012; Page, 2011).

Building on a body of Canadian CO research, my dissertation analyzes specific facets of CO workplace cultures in provincial prisons in Western Canada. Provincial prisons, which house prisoners who are awaiting trial or are sentenced to less than two years of custody, house the largest group of prisoners in Canada, but are comparatively under-researched (Malakieh, 2020; Ricciardelli, 2019). My research examines how officers practice and enact their roles as COs, detailing specific features of their habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021) and demonstrating how it shapes workplace and occupational cultures, attitudes, and behaviours in unproductive ways.

In this dissertation, I examine how the CO habitus shapes officer cultural values. In turn, I demonstrate how these cultural values impact the daily operation of provincial prisons. The broader, guiding question for this dissertation overall is as follows: how do officer workplace and occupational cultures shape prisons and prison operations? To address this question, I ask a range of smaller questions, targeting each query at a specific aspect of how officer cultures function on a day-to-day basis. I answer these in three separate articles. In article 1, I ask:

1. How do COs describe gendered organizational logics within their work, and what influence do such logics have on day-to-day prison work?
2. What role do gendered organizational logics play in shaping the perspectives and experiences of new staff?
3. What role does organizational shift play in highlighting gender as a cultural tool?

In paper #2, I ask:

1. What role does physical coercion play in shaping how COs maintain order and perform their duties?
2. How do bureaucratic structures in prisons interact with sanctioned and unsanctioned use-of-force by prison staff?
3. What influence do organizational cultures have on officer use of coercive force?

And, in paper #3, I ask:

1. How do COs perceive themselves as vulnerable?
2. Which specific factors do officers point to when discussing their personal vulnerability?
3. How and why do perceptions of work-related vulnerability shape the larger officer habitus?

Together, these research questions provide new insight into the origins and impacts of officer workplace cultures on the day-to-day operations of prisons in Western Canada.

I structure this paper-based dissertation as follows. In my introduction, I provide a broader review of the international literature on CO work cultures including historical and modern trends influencing how researchers perceive and approach prison work. I situate CO literature within the broader field of prison research, as well as related literature on culture, work, and organizations. In this section, I provide the definitions of culture I employ through the remainder of the dissertation. I also provide a broad outline of the Canadian prison system, Canadian prison research, and the contextual factors that shape the setting where I did my research. This all serves to situate the topics I analyze in my chapters. Furthermore, I will explain

the relevance of my methodological addendum, which discusses the unique role my positionality played in shaping how I interacted with these data.

Following the introduction, I analyze three interrelated topics, each of which looks at CO habitus and work cultures from a slightly different angle. First, I discuss the structural influence of gender on officer workplace cultures. Prisons are masculine institutions, shaped by gendered organizational logics (Acker, 2006; Britton, 2003; Zimmer, 1987). I follow Acker (2012) in defining gendered organizational logics as

> … the organizing processes in which inequalities are built into job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the work place, and rules, both explicit and implicit, for behavior at work … [they] usually includes definitions of gendered behaviors, both acceptable and unacceptable … I see this idea as referring to common understandings about how organizations are put together, the constituent parts, how the whole thing works (pp. 215-217).

Such logics serve as structuring factors within the prisons, and shape how officers perceive their environment and act toward prisoners and toward each other. Britton (2003) has outlined how these expectations function in prisons at a macro-level; building off her work, I demonstrate how these logics shaped micro-level officer interactions in Canadian prisons, as officers employed gender as a distinctive tool used to negotiate day-to-day prison operations (Swidler, 1986). I plan to submit this article to a journal which considers the sociology of work and gender, such as *Gender, Work and Organization,* or *Work, Employment and Society.*

Second, I outline how officers perceived themselves as vulnerable on a day-to-day basis. There is a significant body of literature on CO perceptions of risk and fear of victimization (J.

Gordon & Baker, 2017; Higgins et al., 2023; Lambert et al., 2018; Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013). In this paper I expand on the literature, demonstrating that perceived vulnerability serves as a broader structuring feature of the CO habitus. I argue that such perceptions of vulnerability function in similar ways to perceived danger among police officers (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). COs described themselves as targets for assaults by prisoners, the inevitable victim of poor management decisions, patsies for dishonest coworkers, and unable to talk about these things with people outside of their work. Physical vulnerability, in the form of assaultive prisoners, was far less prominent in this theme than it is in other literature on the subject. Instead, officers described relatively quotidian features of daily life as distinctive sources of vulnerability. I argue that perceptions of vulnerability were one of the most influential structuring factors for officers in the prisons I entered. This paper is currently under its third review at *Justice Quarterly.*

Perceptions of vulnerability and structuring cultural factors directly shape my third theme. In a setting where they felt constantly at risk, COs used and relied on unique strategies to maintain control of prisons. Order maintenance and security were the primary goals of COs, something described in every meaningful piece of prisons research, and prison policies detail formal procedures for maintaining order (Arnold, 2016; Crewe, 2009; Liebling, 2006; Liebling, Price, et al., 2011). However, the officers I interviewed described using informal disciplinary measures carefully designed to side-step formal policy regulations. These varied, but often included coercive force. Rather than focus on discretion and negotiation (Ibsen, 2013; Liebling, Price, et al., 2011; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995), my participants described a carefully mediated tension between formal and informal control methods. Overall, these informal methods played a significant role in shaping prison work for officers across the data. This paper is accepted and will be published in the November issue of *Criminology.*

I conclude with a chapter detailing the specific and unique methodological implications of my work. My positionality as a former CO influenced my perspective and actions within this project (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bucerius, 2013; Marquart, 1986a). In this section, I reflect on my positionality, and analyze some of the unique tensions my positionality caused for the broader research team I worked with. I anticipate submitting this article to a journal that focuses on qualitative sociological methods, such as *Qualitative Research.*

I theorize that the three central themes of my dissertation—gendered organizational logics, coercive organizational cultures, and perceptions of vulnerability—act in combination, shaping and directing how Western Canadian provincial COs interact with their work. Given the role officers play in prisons, this influences how effectively institutions operate, with consequences for prisoners, managers, and officers. As I will demonstrate, officers are capable of undoing or undermining reform efforts on a day-to-day basis (Lerman & Page, 2012; Page, 2011). Of course, opposition to reform springs from many sources. Prominent officers may influence their peers, reforms may fall victim to internecine conflict between managers and staff, or personal/ideological ideas (such as hard-on-crime or war-on-drugs beliefs) can shape how individual officers or groups of COs react to proposed reforms (Page, 2011). However, as my research demonstrates, workplace and occupational cultures interact with perceptions of vulnerability to influence officer behaviour and play an ongoing role in shaping prisons.

A brief note before I begin. Limited amounts of Canadian prison research exist, meaning that much of the introduction focuses on U.S. and U.K.-based research. I review the relevant Canadian research toward the end of the introduction, once I have situated my research questions within the broader body of international CO literature. In the same place, I review contextual differences between these three nations that are relevant to the broader themes of my work.

Culture

Before I begin my overview of CO research, I must take a moment to discuss and define culture. Workplace, occupational, and organizational culture all represent key themes linking modern and historical CO research and help situate this work within broader bodies of sociological thought. Consequently, a clear understanding of the topic is crucial.

Culture is difficult to define and operates on several different levels. Debates around the 'right' way to define culture were a major feature of anthropological work for a period in the mid-20th century, and largely centred on whether culture was a subjective psychological construct, or whether it existed within broader social webs (Geertz, 1973). Clifford Geertz, one of the primary figures in these debates, suggested culture was a symbol of sorts: "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs …" (Geertz, 1973, p. 311). Contemporary work has applied the concept of culture to specific settings such as workplaces and organizations; discussions in these spaces now struggle with questions about whether culture is something that organizations *have* or whether culture is something that organizations *are* (Huw et al., 2000; Whelan, 2017).

Theoretical debates over the location and nature of culture sometimes overlook an important point. While the *nature* of culture is not always clear, observers generally agree that culture shapes organizational outcomes in a variety of meaningful ways. As Whelan (2017) states:

> the dominant view in the organisational and management literature is that culture is a variable in organisations. That is, culture is something that exists within organisations, can be identified and analysed and can be linked to various outcomes of an organisation such as organisational performance (p. 117).

While debate is ongoing, many organizational and management scholars suggest we can roughly analyze culture on two levels. First, organizational culture is broadly understood to play a role in shaping outcomes of a given workplace setting, and typically relates to a broader set of values, beliefs, and ways of doing work that shape the larger outcomes of a group. Some scholars have argued that we can understand organizational culture from an integration perspective (Martin et al., 2006), which essentially argues that culture is a top-down set of principles, values, opinions, and approaches that all members of an organization share (Whelan, 2017, p. 117). Such perspectives emphasize the influence of top-level managers and leaders, framing them as 'culture holders' who define and set the tone for everyone in an organization. Other researchers have critiqued this perspective, pointing out that the influence of top-level managers is dramatically overstated, and suggest that top-level managers are generally unsuccessful when they set out to unilaterally change the culture of an organization. These scholars instead argue for a

> … *differentiation* perspective in which it is argued there is usually no integrated organisational culture, with consensus on beliefs, values and attitudes occurring only within subcultural boundaries such as units within organisations. Thus, the first perspective argues that all organisations have a culture while the second perspective argues that organisations are comprised only of subcultures (Whelan, 2017, pp. 117-118; emphasis in original).

Scholars such as Schein (2010, 2017) point out that these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. While some organizations may possess integrated, consistent, leader-driven organizational cultures that operate from the top-down, others may only possess differentiated cultures that operate from the bottom-up through the emergence of subcultures—smaller, bottom-up cultures that shape the behaviours and "personality" (Schein, 2010) of a specific

group or groups of people. Still other organizations possess both—something notable in literature on paramilitary organizations such as police and corrections, where researchers have observed broad, top-down organizational cultures coming into conflict with conservative, resistant subcultures that have distinctive group values (Campeau, 2018, 2019; Haggerty & Ericson, 1997; Higgins et al., 2022, 2023; Mears et al., 2022; Whelan, 2017).

In this dissertation, I follow Schein (2010) in defining organizational culture as the "personality" of a broader organization: "just as our personality and character guide and constrain our behaviour, so does culture *guide and constrain the behaviour of members of a group through the shared norms that are held in that group*" (p. 14, emphasis added). Such a personality emerges from long-term, accumulated learning, usually in response to "its problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (Schein, 2017, p. 6), and influence things like how organizations react to gender, race, inequality, and more (Acker, 1990; Britton, 1997; Hochschild, 1983). Importantly, the lessons learned by groups through this process create "… a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness" (Schein, 2017, p. 6).

Importantly, organizational culture is not always the most influential factor that shapes the behaviour and actions of individuals. Scholars have identified workplace and occupational cultures in a range of settings, including health care, education, law enforcement, government, strip clubs, and much more (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Casey, 1999; Kilminster et al., 2006; Kimura, 2006; Loftus, 2010; Trautner, 2005). Such cultures are often—but not always—comprised of subcultures that operate on smaller group levels, as Whelan (2017) identifies above. Some researchers examine workplace and occupational cultures separately, but when it comes to law enforcement organizations such as police and corrections, they are often collapsed

into a single unit of analysis (Campeau, 2015; Higgins et al., 2022, 2023; Whelan, 2017), something that reflects the broader paramilitary structure of law enforcement organizations. These occupational cultures tend to shape the actions of front-line workers. Looking at police officers, Campeau (2015) defines such cultures as "…encompass[ing] a complex system of values and attitudes that define the normative social world of police" (Campeau, 2015, p. 671). With respect to COs, the existent research suggests that COs possess a distinctive occupational culture that is measurably different than broader organizational cultures, and distinctly influences the way officers do their work on a day-to-day basis (Higgins et al., 2022, 2023).

I argue that in paramilitary organizations like corrections, organizational cultures often take integrationist characteristics, as strong managerialist leanings (Liebling, Price et al., 2011), common experiences such as corrections training (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2022), institutional histories (Rubin, 2023), and shared ways of doing work (Britton, 2003). These all create a broader culture shared by most people who are associated with correctional organizations, while also creating and maintaining distinctive cultural artifacts (Schein, 2017). However, I simultaneously agree with a broad range of prison scholars (Arnold, 2007; Crawley, 2004a; Higgins et al., 2022, 2023; Kauffman, 1988; Tracy, 2006) who argue that correctional officers possess distinctive occupational subcultures, that both contribute to and come into conflict with broader organizational cultures (Schein, 2017; Whelan, 2017). Within this framework, officers learn to effectively perform and embody distinctive working personalities (Skolnick, 1966) that relate to the unique duties of being a CO. Some authors refer to this as the CO habitus, which I will discuss momentarily (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Schultz, 2022). These occupational subcultures distinctly shape individual and group experiences, as well as how groups go about their daily duties (Schein, 2010; Whelan, 2017). Furthermore, such occupational subcultures,

which are also “taken for granted as basic assumptions” (Schein, 2017, p. 6) play a distinctive role in shaping working personalities and the values expressed by COs in specific places. While I recognize that some authors differentiate between workplace and occupational cultures, I refer to these concepts interchangeably1. In doing so, I follow the broader example of scholars applying cultural sociological concepts such as habitus to law enforcement personnel (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Lerman & Page, 2012; Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). Furthermore, my data and arguments primarily examine how occupational cultures operate across multiple locations, making them, rather than workplace cultures, the most consistent part of my analysis.

Culture—whether organizational or occupational—directly informs action. Work in the field of cultural sociology (Bourdieu, 1986; Campeau, 2015) have helped develop a broader picture of how individuals use culture to inform the decisions they make every day. Swidler’s (1986) definition of culture as a “tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems” (p. 273) specifically highlights the connection between culture and action. Swidler further argues that the “tool kit” of culture helps inform “strategies of action,” which people use to form and shape their own responses. Though not entirely causal, culture, in this viewpoint, helps people shape, justify, and carry out strategies of action in everyday life. Campeau (2019) agrees, suggesting that culture represents “a set of resources deployed by actors to make sense of experiences, such as one’s social positioning in a hierarchy, daily routines, or a changing environment” (2019, p. 70). I employ a similar perspective in my research, demonstrating how COs use occupational and organizational cultural values as tools to shape their work (Swidler, 1986).

Context: Correctional Officers and Prison Research

Prisons are key social institutions. Incarceration and fines serve as the primary means of societal punishment—and of the two, only incarceration is considered to be a 'real' punishment by many observers (Garland, 1990). However, influenced by neoliberal government spending decisions in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. (Aviram, 2016; Ilcan, 2009; Peck, 2010), prisons now occupy a secondary social role as a major provider of human services, including housing, health and dental care, addictions management, and adult education. In Canada, remand centres and provincial prisons are well-known as spaces where disadvantaged people—particularly those with substance use disorders and mental health issues—can access services that are not readily available in the community (Bucerius et al., 2020; Pelvin, 2019). This has theoretical implications. Building off Foucault's and Wacquant's concepts of embodied and emplaced power (Foucault, 1982, 1995; Wacquant, 2009, 2013), Peck (2010) has described prisons as ambidextrous spaces, which punish and provide welfare services simultaneously. A significant body of Scandinavian scholarship has outlined this in detail, demonstrating how prison has become a space for simultaneous behaviour modification and active service provision (P. Smith & Ugelvik, 2017; Schneider, 2021; Ystanes & Ugelvik, 2019). This work reinforces the role that incarceration plays in neoliberal society (Garland, 1990; Simon, 2014).

COs stand at the centre of this dynamic. Trained primarily to provide security and maintain control of prisons, they also find themselves responsible for prisoner[3] rehabilitation,

[3] The past ten years have seen broad shifts in terminology around incarcerated people. The stigmatizing impact of labels such as "inmate," "felon," "offender" and "convict" are now well-recognized, and most journals now require person-centred language such as "incarcerated person," or "person in custody". In our research, we found that incarcerated people themselves often prefer terms they are familiar with, such as "inmate" or "prisoner." Incarcerated people in other studies have also pointed out that discussions around terminology neglect to address the day-to-day challenges of living in carceral facilities (Cox, 2020). In this dissertation, I employ both person-centred language and the term "prisoner." I view "prisoner" as a term which actively reflects the state of being incarcerated,

either directly or indirectly. Some authors describe this as a conflict between security and human services work (Cook & Lane, 2013; Johnson & Price, 1981). Others, more bluntly, describe it as an ideological conflict between beliefs that incarcerated people must be punished and beliefs that prisoners deserve another chance (Hemmens & Stohr, 2000).

Scholars have provided support for both sides of this argument. Some officers (especially those working with women and juvenile offenders) embody the concept of *parens patriae,*[4] taking personal responsibly for helping rehabilitate and pseudo-parent the prisoners under their charge (Inderbitzin, 2006, 2007). Officers who take this orientation are heavily involved in rehabilitative efforts. This is a common professional orientation in Scandinavian prisons (Eriksson & Pratt, 2014), although it is also described as a source of frustration for incarcerated people who perceive that such viewpoints take away their agency (Ibsen, 2013; P. Smith & Ugelvik, 2017). However, in Canada and the U.S., attitudes like these—which some authors describe as forcible rehabilitation—are more closely linked to therapeutic policing models than they are to correctional theory (Stuart, 2016). This is likely related to the heavy impact of mass incarceration, as well as to the harsher nature of incarceration in anglophone countries (Eriksson & Pratt, 2014).

In contrast, Scott (2012), applying Stanley Cohen's (2001) work, points out that some COs are "so committed to the rightness of the human suffering taking place in prison that there are no guilty feelings to be neutralised" (p. 172). Through this process, a certain proportion of COs frame prison as a "distinct moral realm from the outside world," where prisoner pain and suffering is a good and desirable outcome, as it makes prison a 'real' deterrent (Scott, 2012).

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while maintaining a human focus. However, in the chapters which are currently under submission, I employ person-centred language to fall in line with editorial requirements.

[4] Latin, lit: "father of the people." Usually employed in terms of the state's legal responsibility for people unable to care for themselves.

This perspective owes much to the broader concept of lesser eligibility, which states that life in prison should be 'worse' or 'tougher' than life outside of prison, to maintain the deterrent function of incarceration (Schneider, 2021). By "plac[ing] prisoners beyond normal conventions of morality altogether" (Scott, 2012, p. 184), officers who ascribe to this branch of thinking do not make rehabilitation or prisoner living conditions a priority of their work, and often use punishing ideas to justify mistreating incarcerated people. Although *parens patriae* and lesser eligibility are opposite poles on a broad continuum of officer beliefs, researchers generally describe a sharp contrast between competing logics of security and human services orientations for prison staff (Acker, 1990 Britton, 2003). Officers tend to align themselves with one side or the other—and even if they do not make a conscious choice, individual professional orientations often skew toward one or the other of these perspectives (Arnold, 2016; Britton, 2003; Crawley, 2004a; Higgins et al., 2022; Liebling, 2011; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995).

Because of their unique role and influence on prison settings, we must view COs within the broader context of prisons research. Prisons are notoriously difficult to access for researchers, and therefore, prisoners tend to serve as the focal point of most qualitative research. COs serve as secondary figures in these perspectives (Crewe, 2009). Many authors emphasize the voluntary, agential nature of CO work, contrasting it to the involuntary nature of incarceration (Crawley, 2004a; Kauffman, 1988; Lombardo, 1989; Schultz, 2022). Consequently, COs often serve as little more than two-dimensional figures in prison research, whose major role is to act as foils for prisoner complaints. At one point, this trope was so common that Liebling (2000) described prison officers as "the invisible ghosts of penality" (p. 338) and invoked G.K. Chesterton's metaphorical "invisible man" to describe the presence-yet-absence of CO complaints, struggles, and perspectives in prison research (Arnold et al., 2007). This incisive critique has helped spur

new research on COs, and prison ethnographers have renewed their efforts to discuss officer perspectives alongside prisoner interviews (Arnold, 2016; Crewe, 2009; Ricciardelli, 2019). However, prisoners and officers often view each other with antipathy, something discussed across a wide range of research (Liebling, 2001; Liebling & Williams, 2018; Patenaude, 2004). Consequently, researchers who attempt to speak to both prisoners and officers frequently find themselves classified as being on the 'other' side by one of the groups, complicating research access (Crewe, 2009; Crewe & Ievins, 2015; Liebling, 2001).

Literature Review: Correctional Officer Research

Research on COs reflects the broader history of prisons and incarceration, especially as it developed in the United States (U.S.) and United Kingdom (U.K.). Most correctional history is based on U.S. and British experiences, as innovations and colonial practices by these two countries shaped the practices of a wide swathe of modern nation-states.[5] Incarceration initially emerged as a 'humane' means of punishment in the 18th and 19th centuries (Foucault, 1995; Garland, 1990; Ignatieff, 1981; Rubin & Reiter, 2018). 'Humane,' in this case, essentially meant that incarceration, a psychological punishment, replaced torture and physical destruction. Reflecting this, early prison staff had a notorious reputation as brutal and unskilled turnkeys responsible for little more than strict custodial duties (Britton, 2003). Reformers such as English legal thinker Lord Blackstone described gaolers as "a merciless race of men, and, by being conversant in scenes of misery, steeled against any tender sensation" (1759 [2016]). Researchers by and large concurred with this portrait, framing officers as brutal, sadistic, and uncaring figures

[5] This is a generalization, as significant work on incarceration now exists in a broad range of national contexts. However, U.S. and U.K. experiences strongly influenced the broader philosophical development of Canadian prisons. I will discuss Canadian correctional histories in more detail below.

well into the 20th century (Mathiesen, 1965). At best, early research framed jail guards as overworked, underpaid, and unable to manage prisons thorough anything except coercion and brute violence (Clemmer, 1958; Jacobs, 1979). Even Sykes' foundational book *The Society of Captives* describes officers as only tentatively in control of the prison, relying on problematic and corrupt relationships with incarcerated people as a primary means of maintaining order within the institution (Sykes, 1958).

While this picture is an over-simplification (among others, see Rubin & Reiter, 2018; Simon, 2000a), the early 20th century saw little social reform when it came to prison conditions. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that prisons emerged onto the broader public's consciousness. In the U.S., prisoners like George Jackson, author of *Soledad Brother,* became significant pop-culture figures, writing books and voluminous correspondence from inside prison (Hamm, 2013). The notorious 1971 Attica prison riot sparked widespread questions about oppressive practices by prison officials, leading to a broader reform movement which peaked with Johnny Cash's live album recorded at Folsom Prison. *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison,* which has sold over 3 million copies to date, made Cash a prominent prison-reform advocate in the U.S., even meeting President Richard Nixon in 1972 to discuss the topic (Hamm, 2013).

Prison reform emerged as a broader social movement (Hamm, 2013), pressuring administrators and lawmakers into acting on prison conditions. The results were significant, as prisons were re-envisioned as rehabilitative institutions, rather than sites of confinement (Garland, 1990). Officers were reformed too: rather than simply 'guarding' prisoners, prison staff were now expected to provide rehabilitative services to prisoners, helping them to become productive members of society (Britton, 2003). To reflect these changes in training and outlook, 'prison guards' were rebranded as 'correctional officers' (Toch, 1978). Of course, minimal

changes occurred in the core institutional aspects of prison itself (Garland, 1990), leading to role conflicts between security and rehabilitative orientations which continue to the present day (Cook & Lane, 2013; Higgins et al., 2022; Tait, 2011).

Early CO research

The 1970s and 1980s were a golden age of sorts when it came to prison officers, and many of the most influential early articles on COs emerged from this period. Much of this work centred on early understandings of officer culture, leading to some of the most influential typologies and descriptions of CO values and beliefs. Prison staff possess a distinctive occupational culture, one that is specific to prison work and sets them apart from other law enforcement personnel as well as members of the public. Scholars have identified a range of shared beliefs, customs, attitudes, and perspectives across many different prison contexts. While individual institutions vary, authors generally agree with Arnold et al.'s assessment:

> [W]e know there is, or often has been, a widely shared prison officer culture, or 'working personality,' characterized roughly by insularity, group solidarity among officers, pragmatism, suspiciousness, cynicism, conservatism, machismo and distance from senior management (Arnold et al., 2007, p. 484).

This working personality—which I argue is a part of the occupational subculture of prison officers—has similarities to police officer behavioural codes and occupational cultures (Farkas & Manning, 1997; Loftus, 2010), but also has important differences (Crawley, 2004a). As Lerman and Page (2012) have described, COs are grounded within the occupational role of being a 'correctional officer,' which shapes their beliefs and outlooks on how to run a prison the "right" way (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). Many researchers have discussed CO workplace

cultures, and the complexities and importance of culturally "becoming" a CO (Higgins et al., 2022; Liebling et al., 2011; Ricciardelli, 2022; Tait, 2011). The experience of being a correctional officer shapes and mediates individual officers' experience of corrections and outlooks on life (Eriksson, 2021; Garrihy, 2021), influencing how values and social mores are passed along to new staff (Lerman & Page, 2012). Scholars have described prison work as 'domestic work,' given the widespread service provision role that officers play (Tracy & Scott, 2006). While COs present themselves as 'tough' they are also more likely than police to peacefully resolve situations, usually citing the influence of long-term relationships between officers and incarcerated people that stand at the core of prison work (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011).

Several touchstone works on COs and CO culture were authored between the mid 1970s and late 1980s. Toch (1978), Klofas and Toch (1982), Zimmer (1986), Lombardo (1989), Kauffman (1988) and Marquart (1986a, 1986b) each did extensive work on American CO subcultures and behavioural codes, providing findings that continue to inform officer research today. Klofas and Toch focused on the influence of officer subcultures, challenging the myth that a deterministic officer code structured CO behaviour. Prior to this point, officers were perceived as abiding by a deterministic code, one which directly reflected the so-called 'convict code' used by incarcerated people (Clemmer, 1958; Sykes, 1958). Toch's assessment of prison staff was especially scathing, as he suggested that the COs of the period were "… a residue of the dark ages[, requiring] 20/20 vision, the IQ of an imbecile, a high threshold for boredom, and a basement position in Maslow's hierarchy" (Toch, 1978, p. 20). Despite these criticisms, Toch and Klofas carefully examined the contrasts between CO professionalism and the day-to-day reality of prison work. By unpicking the intertwined nuances of work cultures, professional

orientation, and rehabilitative stances, they determined that officer subcultures—while influential—were far more variable and context-specific than widely assumed at the time (Klofas & Toch, 1982). Toch also challenged simplistic professionalization efforts, pointing out the extensive need for staff training and cultural shifts that extended beyond relabelling the role of 'prison guard' (Toch, 1978).

Subsequent studies reinforced Kofas and Toch's pioneering work. Marquart, who worked as a Texas prison guard during his PhD research, wrote extensively about his experiences, influencing Adler and Adler's (1987) landmark discussion of insider/outsider positionality in ethnographic research. He described his experiences of doing insider research in prison, highlighting the importance of positionality in shaping what officers were willing to share with him. One of Marquart's crucial findings centred on the forms of violence he both witnessed and participated in. He provided a detailed framework on how officers deliberately employed coercive measures as a means of control within the institution (Marquart, 1986a, 1986b). Although dated, Marquart's work remains important for two reasons. First, his work set the tone for insider research with COs—an important point, as many of the most influential articles on CO culture and experiences drew and continue to draw on insider methodology. Second, his work represents one of the only detailed qualitative portraits we possess of how COs engage with use-of-force (Worley et al., 2022). His work is not well known, for reasons I discuss more extensively in Chapter 3.

Lombardo (1989), a prison educator in New York State, built on the insider research theme by using a carefully designed semi-ethnographic method to detail the social characteristics of COs in the state prison where he worked. Many of his participants described feeling trapped by the job. The psychological stress of prison work often negatively impacted their lives and

relationships outside of work, and the social taint of doing "dirty work" (Hughes, 1951; Press, 2021) as a prison guard often meant that more attractive careers were not readily available. COs described themselves as economic captives of prison work, unable to metaphorically 'escape' from prison work without dramatically reducing quality of life for themselves and their families (Lombardo, 1989). The title of Lombardo's book—*Guards Imprisoned*—hints at this, and the relevance of his work and findings has recently re-emerged in the new and rapidly-growing body of officer wellness research (Ricciardelli, 2019).

Kauffman (1988)—also a former CO—built on Lombardo and Marquart's work by detailing horrifying conditions in the Massachusetts prison system, specifically at Walpole Penitentiary. Her participants discussed extreme levels of violence, poisonous officer/management relationships, family breakdowns, serious substance abuse, and psychological effects of work which—although undiagnosed—bear strong resemblance to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Kauffman also detailed a strong and durable 'officer code' that existed in her research setting and shaped the behaviour and outlooks of her participants. She suggested the 'rules' of this code were as follows (Kauffman, 1988, pp. 85–117):

- Always go to the aid of an officer in distress
- Don't smuggle
- Don't rat
- Never make a fellow officer look bad in front of inmates
- Always support an officer in a dispute with a prisoner
- Always support officer sanctions against inmates
- Don't be a white hat[6]
- Maintain officer solidarity against all outside groups
- Show positive concern for fellow officers

This list, which Kauffman defines and analyzes in careful detail, highlights some of the most important values to officers in her setting. These values shaped the way officers did their work,

[6] Slang term, which roughly translates as being an apologist or suck-up to management.

and influenced what officers described as important, implicitly shaping the broader workplace culture. Furthermore, her work pushes back against some of Klofas and Toch's (1982) conclusions, suggesting that specific, detailed behaviour codes maintained some influence in shaping CO outlooks toward incarcerated people, especially in prisons with more extreme examples of violence and volatility. Kauffman's codification remains one of the most influential descriptions of the so-called 'officer code,' as she provides careful and specific analysis of exactly how these code values shape officers' work on a local level. Importantly, Kauffman's work is also one of the last codifications of officer subculture produced. Conditions for prison research changed in the 1990s, and officer research largely ceased in the U.S. and Canada for nearly 20 years.[7] Consequently, Kauffman's work represents the last careful analysis of officer subculture codes before managerialist policies shifted the scope of officer discretionary powers (Liebling, 2006). For this reason, although the broader values that Kauffman describes are still important, the modern applicability of the specific code she describes is open to some debate (Tait, 2011).

The authors described so far focused on culture and codes, reflecting the larger structural-functionalist emphasis in sociological and criminological research of the time (McCorkel, 2003). However, these sources almost entirely overlooked gender and race. This gap reflects a larger oversight in mid-20th century prisons research, as well as in sociology more generally: even Sykes' *Society of Captives,* widely considered the most influential piece of prison research ever written, did not consider race (Crewe et al., 2022; Reisig, 2001). One of the few discussions of race during this period came from Jacobs' (1977, 1979) work. Jacobs broadly outlined how civil rights and other broader social movements made race a point of tension within Stateville

[7] Discussed in more detail below. Likewise, I discuss Canadian CO research (which essentially did not exist until the mid-2000s) in more detail below.

Penitentiary during the 1960s and 1970s. However, Jacobs described these tensions from the perspective of white officers and black prisoners, as he had difficulty building relationships with young black prison officers. Racial tension among officers exacerbated already-low commitment to prison work among young black COs, leading to a vicious cycle of massive churn and institutional racism (Jacobs, 1977). Scholarship on how officers interact with race is still spotty, although new efforts are shedding more light on the subject (Bhui & Foster, 2013; Martin-Howard, 2022). Overall, minority-identifying officers report inequalities in how they are treated, and distinctive challenges in how they relate to incarcerated people who look like themselves (Bhui & Foster, 2013).

Researchers had more success highlighting the role of gender during this period. Zimmer's (1986, 1987) work was particularly important. Interviewing women COs in Rhode Island and New York, Zimmer drew a careful picture of how women officers face significant and meaningful barriers on account of their gender, which they must overcome to 'succeed' in prison work. Her book is one of the first that discussed the gendered nature of prison work. While Britton (2003) later expanded on this theme at length, Zimmer's sometimes graphic descriptive accounts of the sexual harassment women COs experienced sets her work apart from Britton's theoretical analysis of how gender serves as an organizational logic in prison. Gender has since emerged as one of the most important areas of focus for CO research, as well as for prisons research more generally (Ricciardelli, 2015), and Zimmer's pioneering efforts are well-respected for shedding light on inequality within the CO ranks.

Officer research in the 1990s and 2000s

During the 1980s, prison became a primary means of dealing with social problems in the U.S. Harsh neoliberal approaches to social disorder, such as 'Tough-on-Crime' or the 'War on Drugs,' steadily emerged as default political approaches to dealing with social issues including the crack epidemic (Simon, 2014). The hopeful rehabilitative prison norms of the 1970s were replaced by cynical 'nothing works' perspectives in the 1980s (Martinson, 1974), and mass incarceration in the 1990s and 2000s (Garland, 1990, 2001; Simon, 2014). With the emergence of tough-on-crime tropes and 'waste management' models of incarceration (Feeley & Simon, 1992), research access in prison became far more complex, and North American qualitative prison research of all kinds experienced a significant drop for a ten-to-twenty-year period (Simon, 2000b; Wacquant, 2002). During this period, most qualitative prison research (on both prisoners and COs) came from U.K.-based researchers. Deeply influenced by Sir Anthony Bottoms' work on social order (Bottoms, 1999), much of this research drew upon concepts of morality and legitimacy in helping to maintain order—specifically, how prisoners perceived officer actions as 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate,' and how these perceptions shaped voluntary compliance with prison rules and laws (Sparks et al., 1996).

Work by Bottoms, Liebling, Crewe, and Crawley became highly influential in shaping our understanding of CO behaviour during this period, and their work now serves as an international reference point for qualitative CO research. Bottoms' work on the day-to-day decision-making practices of prison staff culminated in the landmark 1996 book *Prisons and the Problem of Order* (Sparks et al., 1996), which compared and contrasted staff and management approaches at Long Lartin and Albany prisons. Building off Beetham's (2013) work, Sparks et al. highlight the role of legitimacy—roughly defined as recognizing that "… there are variable

conditions which render it more or less likely that prisoners will accept, however conditionally, the authority of their custodians" (Sparks & Bottoms, 1995, p. 47). They concluded that perceptions of legitimacy represented the most significant difference between the two institutions in question:

> …many of the dimensions of prison life which we detail, from the self-policing of staff conduct and informal on-the-spot negotiations to formal grievance procedures and law suits are unintelligible without reference to implicit (albeit not necessarily consensually shared) conceptions of legitimacy amongst prisoners and staff (Sparks et al., 1996, p. 87).

Their findings encouraged prison staff and administrators to intentionally create legitimate environments, where correctional staff continually develop and reinforce the conditions for voluntary compliance. Since then, researchers have productively applied the concept of legitimacy in a wide range of national settings (Hamm, 2013; Williams & Liebling, 2022), and legitimate practice often stands as an aspirational goal of prison reform efforts.

Liebling has directly applied concepts of legitimacy to the day-to-day work of prison staff. In *The Prison Officer,* Liebling, Price, and Shefer (2011) describe how officers address conflicts between rehabilitation and security orientations. Liebling also wrote numerous articles on officer discretion and negotiation (Liebling, 2001; Liebling & Williams, 2018), and prisoner perceptions of prison and CO legitimacy (Arnold et al., 2007). Perhaps most importantly for this dissertation, Liebling also identified the widespread growth of managerialism and bureaucratization in prisons as a key component of this process (Liebling, 2006). Although managerialism is a broad term, we can generally define it as a centralization of power by bureaucratic and administrative structures within the prison through a process of prescribing and enforcing rules and procedures (Weber, 1998). As Liebling puts it, "The way the prison's power

to punish is *organized* ... has been radically transformed. More power flows, more effectively, particularly at the top of the organization (Liebling, 2006, p. 427; emphasis in original).

Managerialism represents the modern realization of criminal justice system bureaucratization processes first recognized by Weber (1998), and later applied to prisons and punishment by Garland (1990). Modern managerialist practices are considered to be 'normal' and 'best-practices' for directing prisons in a just and considered way, something implicitly shown by the reliance on policy changes as the most significant prison reform intervention currently employed (Ekstedt & Griffiths, 1988; McGuin, 2015). Yet managerialism is not without warts, as increasing centralization of power with administrators has led to a loss of autonomy and status among front-line prison staff. This in turn has led to increasing alienation among COs and other front-line workers (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Jacobs, 1977; McGuin, 2015). As Liebling puts it, "… I am personally in favour of the effective management of prisons, … [but] there have been some losses of trust and confidence between staff and managers in British prisons which can have dangerous and unintended consequences" (2006, p. 427).

Other British scholars have also examined the influence of managerialism on officer actions. Crawley's (2002, 2004a, 2004b) extensive work on emotional presentation and how prison work influenced the psychological and emotional health of COs has demonstrated that the mental health struggles faced by American COs (Kauffman, 1988) are patterns and routinized features of CO work, rather than an exceptional phenomenon associated with a single disorganized prison. And in one of the most detailed prison ethnographies conducted to date, Crewe (2009) demonstrates how officers use 'soft' power and negotiation to help maintain control on prison units, rather than relying on rules, regulations, or coercion (Crewe, 2006, 2011). Crewe's ongoing work is a particularly valuable contribution to understanding how prison

officers do their work in the 21st century, and how their efforts are perceived and experienced by incarcerated people.

The rebirth of North American prison research

Shortly after the turn of the millennium, Johnathan Simon and Loïc Wacquant independently lamented the near-total lack of qualitative prisons research in North America (Simon, 2000b; Wacquant, 2002). Assessing the state of prison research in the U.S., Simon stated that "the conditions of life in the vast expanse of male prisons in the US has become largely invisible even to the best informed Americans" (2000b, p. 290). Wacquant went even further, pointing out that:

> That observational studies depicting the everyday world of inmates all but vanished just as the United States was settling into mass incarceration and other advanced countries were gingerly clearing their own road towards the penal state. *The ethnography of the prison thus went into eclipse at the very moment when it was most urgently needed on both scientific and political grounds* (Wacquant, 2002, p. 385, emphasis in original).

These incisive critiques helped spur an ongoing wave of prison research, meaning that qualitative work has re-emerged in the North American sociological and criminological mainstream.

Much of this work has focused on prisoner experiences, and it is worth briefly discussing a few highlights of this literature, as officer research often reflects these findings in some manner. McCorkel's (2003) work highlights the role of gender in punishment, describing how gendered expectations of prison shape the experience of incarcerated women in significant and extremely negative ways. Comfort's (2007) research builds on this, describing how the families of incarcerated people experience secondary prisonization, as prisoners' loved ones are forced to

learn the processes of incarceration and experience significant social stigma (McKay et al., 2019). Haney's (2018) work on incarcerated fathers shows how legal requirements drive incarcerated men away from their children, even when they wish to remain in contact (Edin & Nelson, 2013).

Research on prison gangs and prison order has also expanded greatly. Much of this is based on literature review and document analysis rather than first-hand research (Skarbek, 2014), but several notable exceptions exist. Pyrooz and Decker's (2019) extensive work in Texas has provided detailed insights into prison gang membership, providing demographic information and details concerning how gangs control or do not control prisons. Their work has also identified differences between gang recruitment and violent extremist recruitment in prisons (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015; Pyrooz et al., 2018). Likewise, Walker's (2016, 2022) auto-ethnographic discussion of race as an ordering feature of prison life in California—and, crucially, of the active role staff play in creating and maintaining racial segregation—has influenced the broader discussion of how prisons operate.

A growing range of research has also centred on COs and how their actions shape the day-to-day operations of prisons. In examining these perspectives, authors have looked at both broader organizational cultures as well as more specific, detailed occupational subcultures.[8] Much of the work on occupational cultures has interacted with gender. For instance, I have mentioned Britton's (1997, 2003) work in passing; her work examines U.S. prison history, detailing how men's prisons became the only 'real' kind of prison in America. Through extensive CO interviews, she develops Zimmer (1987) and Acker's (1990) work to argue that we can only understand prison cultures if we view prisons as inherently gendered organizations,

[8] I will discuss these below.

with long and consequential histories of masculinity and violence (Britton, 2003). These histories create broader social frameworks, structuring societal perceptions of what 'real' prisoners, and 'real' COs, look like. Such frameworks, a component of broader gendered organizational logics, shape the day-to-day work and perspectives of all people in prison (Acker, 1990). Britton's work primarily focuses on how such logics influence women prisoners and officers, but her broader critique of how gender serves to structure the 'right' way of approaching prisons is a provocative contribution to the larger body of literature, one subsequently developed by a wide range of scholars (Bandyopadhyay, 2006; Jewkes, 2005; McCorkel, 2003; Ricciardelli et al., 2015).

The ''Wellness Revolution''

CO research has experienced a meaningful rebirth since the beginning of the 2010s. New books (Ricciardelli, 2019), special issues of journals (H. P. Smith, 2021), and a significant increase in original research (Eriksson, 2021; Frost & Monterio, 2020; Garrihy, 2021; Higgins et al., 2022, 2023; McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2022; H. P. Smith, 2021) have all shed new light on broader perceptions of prison work. As a result, CO research is entering the criminological mainstream in ways it has struggled to accomplish previously.

Framings of COs within these works have also changed. Early research focused on officer cultures, codes, and professional orientation, and was largely drawn from ethnographic studies. In fact, the majority of mid-20th century U.S. prison research, including the work of Sykes (1958), Jacobs (1977), Irwin (1980), Marquart (1986), Lombardo (1989) and others were either ethnographic or semi-ethnographic. With a few notable exceptions (Chenault, 2014; Gibson-Light, 2022), this style of research has faded, and most prison research now takes place through semi-structured interviews or quantitative survey methods. This may help explain the

noticeable shifts in prison officer research, as contemporary studies have typically fallen into one of three general streams: culture and professional orientation, taint management, and officer wellness. Authors within these streams tend to focus on different aspects of the CO role, leading to siloed approaches that highlight specific aspects of prison work and downplay others. While this is likely unintentional, such efforts have influenced how we perceive prison work.

Stream 1: Professional orientation

Professional orientation represents the first and most traditional approach to CO research, and hearkens back to the work of Kauffman, Lombardo, Klofas and Toch, and others. Much of it focuses on occupational subcultures. Authors in this stream highlight differences in attitude, outlook, and work approaches to explain how officers do their work (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011; Tait, 2011). The goal of such research is often to describe the specific factors that make a 'good' officer, detailing the importance of morality, decency, and attitudes toward incarcerated people (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011; Tait, 2011). Some of the most influential pieces of work in this stream rely on a sort of craft work perspective. While craft work is often a general category, it can be understood as

> …a phenomenon that is culturally and socially constructed, as the result of agreed-upon patterns of action and language that are the outcome of social relations … [Success] is understood to depend on the experience of the maker, whose virtuoso skills are the result of continuous practice. Acquired virtuosity involves the body as well as the mind of the craft worker, in using raw materials, tools and techniques to make things (E. Bell et al., 2018, pp. 1-2).

COs employ virtuoso skills (Becker, 1978) to 'make' legitimacy, order, peace, quiet, and good governance. This is sometimes referred to as "jail craft" (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011; Podmore, 2012), an unwritten, unspoken, and tacit approaches to prison work that define how prison staff 'really' do their work. These factors distinctly contribute to the moral values that implicitly shape prisons (Liebling, 2011; Liebling & Arnold, 2004). While a range of approaches are used within this stream, aspects of so-called jail craft usually represent the explicit or implicit object of examination.

Researchers have discussed and described specific features of jail craft, using social theory to approach traditional topics in new and innovative ways. Liebling's work is a central pillar of this stream. In *The Prison Officer,* Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011) use appreciative inquiry—which focuses on the strengths of organizations and can be over-simplified as asking questions about the good parts of prison work—to build a picture of how officers accomplish their duties on a day-to-day basis. Their findings suggest that effective and productive relationships are a central component of doing a 'good job' as an officer, as relationships permit COs to deal with issues quickly and unofficially. Discretion, and understanding what to productively ignore and overlook in pursuit of peaceable relationships, is another key aspect of the CO role. Liebling et al. describe this as "peace keeping" and "The 'very hard work' involved in re-establishing order, in retaining or restoring relationships and in keeping communication flowing" (2011, pp. 9, 10) stands at the centre of much of Liebling's work. Overall, Liebling et al. suggest that managerialist developments in prison have altered the prison officer role, shifting officers' focus from jail craft to policy compliance, something they note as having occurred between the first and second edition of their work and suggest is ongoing (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011, p. 1). Liebling et al.'s work remains the most comprehensive description of how prison

staff do their work on a day-to-day basis and is the foundation for much of the subsequent research on this topic.

Ibsen's (2013) examination of Norwegian prisons focuses on the tension between control and negotiation. He outlines officer control as focusing on soft power (Crewe, 2011), where power is effectively exercised through favours—something he experienced working as a part-time officer while doing his research (Ibsen, 2013). Ibsen's findings suggest that COs use their discretion to provide wide-ranging favours for incarcerated people; punishments, in this setting, refer to the removal of favourable discretionary decisions, rather than the implication of official sanctions. There are questions about whether this portrait is context-specific to the Nordic countries, or whether it is generalizable to a larger international setting (Eriksson & Pratt, 2014). However, Ibsen's discussion of discretion is important, as it centres this practice as a significant aspect of CO work and life.

Control, discretion, and employee autonomy are themes in a wide range of research around how employees complete their duties, especially in the sociology of work. A meaningful portion centres on the interaction between surveillance and discretion. In his work on the panopticon, Foucault (1995) famously compared prisons to factories, drawing attention to how surveillance functions in workplaces more broadly. Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) apply Foucault's *leitmotif* to the workplace in more detail, arguing that surveillance—a social sorting practice, one where the ongoing collection of data is used to place people in social categories for the purpose of official and unofficial governance (Lyon, 2007; Haggerty & Ericson, 2007)—has shifted in unexpected ways over the past 30 years. On one hand, surveillance increases the supervision employees experience, something driven by dramatic increases in the monitoring abilities of technology (Zuboff, 1988, 2019; Barker, 1993). But on the other hand, surveillance

also provide employees with greater room for certain forms of latitude. Rather than being strictly bureaucratic spaces where every action is controlled and mandated (Weber 1998), research suggests supervisors may, in some cases, delegate decision-making to employees with surprising results:

> "…this process reveals an interesting contradiction in the nature of organizational power – delegation is a double-edged sword, being able to increase the power of the delegating agency, so long as it can retain authority, and undermine it if the obedience of the delegating agency cannot be assured. In principle, delegation could simultaneously increase the power of the delegator and empower the delegated" (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992, pp. 281-282).

Surveillance, rather than being total, sometimes creates more space for employees to make discretionary decisions, especially when tacit bargains over the sorts of behaviour that are considered 'appropriate' exist between employees and managers (Barker, 1993; Ericson, 2006). However, increased discretion does not necessarily lead to lower levels of control, something that is especially noticeable when examining how organizational cultures shape teamwork and co-worker interactions. For instance, Sewell (1998) argues that "We can no longer dismiss surveillance as a mere contextual factor in group dynamics, for … it is deeply implicated in shaping the very social relations of teamwork that actually make teams operate effectively" (p. 422). Discretion, in this picture, is not simply an individual behaviour, but instead shapes broader social relationships and occupational cultures. The upshot of this is that discretion and self-governing behaviour by employees can increase coercive controls in a workplace; as Barker (1993) phrases it, "…the irony of the change in this postbureaucratic organization is that, instead

of loosening, the iron cage of rule-based, rational control, as Max Weber called it, actually became tighter" (p. 408).

Little of this work has influenced discussions around COs. While there is some research on how horizontal surveillance impacts social dynamics among incarcerated people (Gibson-Light, 2022), the broader interaction between peer surveillance and CO discretion is not well-understood. Instead, most of the CO discretion research has made careful use of Giddens (1990) and Bourdieu's (1986) cultural social theory. Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Giddens' theory of structuration each set individual actions within a nexus of structure and agency. Bourdieu's work describes the importance of fields, capital, and habitus in shaping how people perceive and interact with their surroundings. Certain actions and cultural symbols possess value, or capital (Bourdieu, 1986), something that people exercise within specific fields, circumscribed spaces that structure without restrictively constraining (Bourdieu, 1994). People interpret their fields and employ their capital using their embodied habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as a "generative and unifying principle" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 340) deposited within people that helps structure their actions and shape their perspectives. Such frameworks often operate on an unconscious of semi-conscious level, as Bourdieu points out: "[Habitus are] systems of durable, transposable dispositions … embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 53–54). Given that such dispositions are internalized, they have deeply structuring impacts on both individual and group behaviours. As Bourdieu and Wacquant put it,

> A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16).

Each person possesses a habitus, that simultaneously structures personal action and provides a range of agential decision-making (Lee & Kramer, 2013). And, work and cultural settings also possess distinctive habitus, which are passed on to new members of a setting. Overall, such habitus deeply influence the perspectives and outlooks of the people in these spaces.

Structuration theory, developed by Giddens (1990, 1991), likewise describes the broader *praxis* of agency and structure (I. Cohen, 1989). Giddens' careful analysis of people's decision-making processes bears many similarities to Bourdieu's work, so much so that the two are frequently conflated. However, there are crucial, if nuanced, differences in their theoretical approach which shapes the broader outcome of each theory. While Bourdieu's work draws from French philosophical traditions and focuses on broader social structures, Giddens develops on Goffman's (1959) intense, micro-sociological focus. Structuration provides a bridge between micro-sociological and macro-sociological perspectives, demonstrating how day-to-day interactions reflect broader structures, values, and vice versa (I. Cohen, 1989). Unlike Bourdieu, Giddens' description of structuration focuses on the positive influence structures have on human action, rather than emphasizing their limiting effect; structures, in this view, are the direct product of human action, and possess functional roles. As Whittington puts it, this means that "structuration theory allows for innovation and change. Structural principles are only relatively enduring, with the struggles of the everyday liable to amend them" (2015, p. 151). The productive and intentional nature of individual actions in this portrait presents an important contrast to Bourdieu's habitus, where "people are like card-players, seizing chances in the flow of the game, often through intuition as much as reason. For Bourdieu, agency is largely opportunistic" (Whittington, 2015, p. 151).

Structuration and habitus are both useful tools in helping to understand CO cultural outlooks. Essentially, these concepts allow researchers to examine subcultural behavioural codes without falling victim to the weaknesses of detailed codifications. Such codifications—Kauffman's (1988) careful list of the CO cultural viewpoints, described earlier, is just one example—are useful, but tend to be fragile. Codifications are inflexible, do not transfer well between jurisdictions, and even limited counterexamples tend to challenge the overall validity of specific frameworks. Structuration and habitus, therefore, provide researchers with flexible frameworks which can be shaped to fit the specific factors that shape officer perspectives in different settings.

New research has highlighted the importance of looking at broader working personalities of officers, rather than focusing on strict and overly deterministic subcultural codes (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Lerman & Page, 2012). At least within the North American research field, habitus has emerged as the more commonly used concept. For instance, Haggerty and Bucerius (2020), describe how habitus helps individual COs understand how to figuratively "play the game" in the specific social field of prison, and gives them a set of tools to anticipate and deal with emerging challenges (p. 4). In some ways, habitus' major critique—its tendency to become an overbearing structure, reducing individual agency to opportunism or luck (Whittington, 2015)—becomes a useful feature of studying deeply conservative and sometimes repressive CO occupational cultures. In prison settings, CO occupational cultures represent a significant and inflexible structure, one which often pushes officers to engage in actions they personally question (Higgins et al., 2022, 2023; Press, 2021). Viewing such structures as part of a broader workplace habitus permits for a more flexible reading and analysis of culture, while reducing most of the analytical issues described above.

Researchers have productively employed this flexibility. In one of the more comprehensive attempts to discuss officer subcultures and mindsets, Lerman and Page (2012) use habitus to address location-based inconsistencies between existing CO subcultural typologies. They use habitus to advance an embedded perspective of prison work, suggesting that officers share characteristics that arise from both their work (the 'field' of prison) and their location (the 'field' of their state, in this case) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Lerman & Page, 2012). Each of these factors shape the habitus values officers express. Lerman and Page found evidence of a consistent and strong CO habitus that was shared by officers across all prisons, but also identified factors which suggest such habitus may vary "… to a degree across states because of the embedded nature of imprisonment" (Lerman & Page, 2012, p. 510). Their work reinforces the importance of external factors, such as political environment, in shaping CO work approaches—something Page expands on more extensively in a comprehensive examination of how CO unions in California and New York directly influence law and public policy through lobbying, public activism, and anti-prison-reform union actions (Page, 2011).

Haggerty and Bucerius (2020) developed this framework in more depth by examining how officer habitus influences discretionary decisions on a day-to-day basis. They carefully detail how officers enforce and fail to enforce rules, justifying and explaining such decisions through broader perceptions and reflections on the 'right' way to maintain order in prison. Such decisions—a crucial part of so-called 'jail craft' (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011; Podmore, 2012)—are framed and reproduced based on officers' lived experience, as well as a broader shared cultural standpoint (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). By examining how officers make discretionary decisions, Haggerty and Bucerius highlight the role of officer habitus in the day-to-day operations of the prison, specifically demonstrating how officers use habitus to anticipate "the

future of the game" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 25; Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021, p. 140), something that directly informs the decisions they make. The contribution of this article is important in terms of informing how officers frame discretion, but it is also an innovative contribution in that it demonstrates the applicability of Bourdieu's work in explaining the day-to-day actions and decisions of front-line COs.

The professional orientation stream remains at the core of CO research and represents the best portrait of what officers do on a day-to-day basis, as well as the mindsets that influence their decision-making. In this dissertation, I engage deeply with the professional orientation literature, with a particular focus on managerialism (Paper 2 and 3), as well as with officer habitus and broader cultural perspectives (Papers 1, 2, and 3). My work advances the professional orientation literature, by demonstrating how culture directly impacts the day-to-day actions of officers in meaningful ways.

Stream 2: Taint management

The second stream of new research has centred on taint management. Taint management literature focuses on so-called 'dirty work,' defined as "job duties that others likely view as disgusting, degrading, or morally insulting" (Tracy & Scott, 2006, p. 9). Developed by Hughes (1958) and expanded on by Emerson and Pollner (1976), the concept of 'dirty work' encompasses jobs that carry a physical, social, or moral taint—even when such jobs are essential for the functioning of society (Press, 2021). Research links physical taint to jobs associated with dirt and danger, such as garbage removal (Tracy & Scott, 2006). Social taint is more commonly associated with servile positions, or jobs that involve extended contact with stigmatized others (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Tracy, 2004). Moral taint is associated with socially dubious

professions, such as sex work or stripping (Trautner, 2005). Workers who perform jobs with elements of taint are coloured by their association, leading to active management strategies. Such strategies are meticulously detailed in a wide range of research. Typically, response include *reframing* or neutralizing the work (Sykes & Matza, 1957), *recalibrating* external standards, *refocusing* on the 'good' parts of the job, and *depersonalization* to create psychological distance from specific aspects of work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Eriksson, 2021; Garrihy, 2021; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Some workers also engage in *social weighing*, a form of boundary work where sympathetic voices are amplified and critical voices are demonized (Eriksson, 2021; Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

Early researchers often discussed how prison guards perceived themselves as tainted outsiders (Kauffman, 1988; Lombardo, 1989), but the specifics of how COs managed taint were not wholistically analyzed until Tracy's work in the early 2000s. Tracy discusses the emotional effects of correctional work on officers, demonstrating how black humor and other subcultural behaviours serve as protective frameworks against the significant and poisonous emotional labour prison engenders. For Tracy's participants, taint was a constant part of the CO role, shaping work, relationships, and psychological health in meaningful ways (Tracy, 2003). Her work is bleak, as it draws a portrait of officers as over-stressed, over-worked, and largely forgotten, facing both social stigma and significant mental health issues.

Surprisingly, given Tracy's research and the relevance of taint to correctional work, researchers did not extensively use taint management to analyze CO experiences until recently (Press, 2021). However, officer taint management has re-emerged as a major area of study over the past several years. Chenault and Collins (2019) examined how officers managed the stigma of prison work, focusing on storytelling among prison staff. They suggest that

> Correctional officers acquire social taint by their interactions with inmates who are, arguably, the most stigmatized in society. Referred to as a contagion effect, criminal stigma 'rubs onto' officers, and outsiders sometimes regard officers as being not so different from the population they control (Chenault & Collins, 2019, p. 4).

Chenault and Collins go on to suggest that the 'domestic' nature of prison work—i.e., how officers provide human services and supports for incarcerated people—adds a further level of gendered stigma to the work (Britton, 2003; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Officers in their study primarily use reframing to manage stigma. For instance, Chenault and Collins quote one participant who directly compares policing to corrections work, suggesting "that correctional officers have a much more difficult job that police officers could not effectively perform" (2019, p. 13). Officers consistently tell stories that reinforce the 'special' nature of correctional work, repeatedly driving home messages that prison officers have 'special' skills, doing a 'hard' job that other people would be incapable of accomplishing. Via these methods, Chenault and Collins argue that officers use stories to manage stigma and create a quasi-heroic persona that allows prison staff to deal with the 'dirty work' of prison (Chenault & Collins, 2019).

Likewise, Garrihy examined taint management among Irish prison officers, and suggested that many 'good' features of jail craft among his participants also created sources of stress and cognitive dissonance that tainted their interactions with people outside of prison (2021, p. 7). Black humor, a classic form of cognitive defense employed by COs, often led to awkward social situations and even ostracization from people who did not understand the prison context. Garrity further suggests that prison officers' association with people with addiction and mental health issues became a source of taint, leading to distinctive occupational cultures among COs. Overall, Garrihy argues that the taint of prison work plays a key role in shaping negative mental

health and stress outcomes among officers. Crucially, he also draws links between these outcomes and the overall operation of the prison, suggesting that "the occupational environment, cultures and mental health of officers directly impact prisoners' psychological care and experiences" (Garrihy, 2021, p. 14).

Provocatively, Garrihy concludes with a broader critique of the prison, pointing out that "An environment and workplace that provokes anxieties necessitating such psychological processes and defences to manage within it while causing pernicious effects on staff who feel tainted from multiple sources are distinctly problematic" (2021, p. 14). His conclusion—which cites Mathiesen (1965) and other core abolitionist texts—places officer mental health and cultural responses within the broader environment of the prison. As a result, Garrihy suggests officer workplace cultures directly reflect the broader structural shortcomings of prisons.

Eriksson (2021) examines unique ways officers encounter and manage the taint of prison work in Australia. Published just weeks after Garrihy's work, Eriksson's work found that officers widely identified as being part of a tainted and 'forgotten profession,' one which only received attention when something went wrong (Eriksson, 2021, p. 5). Carefully identifying how officers engage with specific taint management strategies, Eriksson draws a picture of how officers create an 'honourable' identity in opposition to the social taint they perceived and experienced. Like Tracy, Eriksson's participants suggested they were reluctant to talk about work to outsiders (see also Schultz, 2022), and engaged in specific strategies designed to mitigate the taint of correctional work. Eriksson details how officers reframe, refocus, and recalibrate their work, emphasizing the importance of their role and demonizing critical external voices (Chenault & Collins, 2019). In-group/out-group differentiation played an important role in shaping the overall dynamics of the prisons she entered, influencing relationships between

officers and a wide range of other prison staff (Eriksson, 2021, p. 13). Overall, Eriksson argues that stigma attached to the CO role and subsequent taint management strategies negatively shape prison environments—so much so she suggests that officer taint management may represent a root cause of differences between 'harder' anglophone prison practices (Chenault & Collins, 2019; Garrihy, 2021), and (ostensibly) rehabilitative Nordic prison practices (Eriksson, 2021; Eriksson & Pratt, 2014).

Taint management is a growing area of CO research, one that provides a detailed backdrop for how officers interact with people outside of the prison environment. Within my dissertation, I interact with taint management in Paper 2, using it to explain (in part) why officers perceive themselves as highly vulnerable. Taint management also appears in my methodological addendum, as my positionality was, in part, impacted by broader themes within the taint management literature.

Stream 3: The Wellness Revolution

Professionalism literature builds on and develops the historical body of CO research, while taint management approaches CO work cultures from a management literature perspective, highlighting psychological approaches and their role in shaping officer culture. Officer wellness, the third major approach, represents a unique shift in officer research. Rather than focus on traditional objects of analysis like culture and professionalism, researchers in this stream concentrate almost entirely on CO stress and mental health. Officer mental health is not a new area of analysis, dating back nearly 30 years (Frost & Monteiro, 2020). Early research on COs tended to focus on workplace cultures. However, many articles contained significant references to work-related stress and mental health, including depression and PTSD, alcoholism and drug

use, and slavish adherence to protective subcultures (Kauffman, 1988; Lombardo, 1989). Likewise, early research drew clear connections between correctional work and poor physical health outcomes, including hypertension, chronic diseases, alcoholism and drug use, and a host of other problems. Researchers have developed these findings in a more systematic and detailed fashion, using a diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds to do so (Buden et al., 2016, 2017; Cheek, 1984; Cheek & Miller, 1983; Ferdik & Smith, 2016; Frost & Monteiro, 2020; Morse et al., 2011; Warren et al., 2015).

These efforts have led to a modern renaissance of CO mental health research, and CO stress literature has emerged as one of the fastest-growing areas of research on criminal justice workers (Evers et al., 2020; H. Smith, 2021; Trounson et al., 2019). Literature on CO mental health and stress is so widespread, it is arguably emerging as a central pillar in our understanding of prison work (Arnold, 2016; Frost & Monteiro, 2021; Ricciardelli, 2019).

Researchers have consistently demonstrated that stress and mental health issues directly influence the work COs do on a day-to-day basis. Lambert's work, some of the most comprehensive in this area, discusses how stress influences prison officers' execution of their duties (Lambert, Hogan, et al., 2006). His work suggests that procedural justice and relationships between management and officers play a key role in shaping how comfortable officers feel with the prison environment, which in turn shapes their broader mental health (Lambert et al., 2007; Lambert, Paoline, et al., 2006). Likewise, he has suggested that absenteeism and so-called 'presenteeism,' where staff are physically present but are too stressed out and exhausted to effectively manage the prison environment where they work, represent a major structural challenge in the operation of U.S. prisons (Lambert et al., 2005). In recent years, Lambert and co-authors have examined how these feelings of stress play out into broader perceptions of job

dangerousness, something that shapes how COs treat managers, incarcerated people, and each other (Hogan & Lambert, 2020; Lambert et al., 2018; Worley et al., 2022).

Authors have built off Lambert's work in recent years, employing some of his findings to examine mental health, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD], and suicidal ideation among COs. The findings of these projects are both important and disturbing and have driven widespread headlines about first-responder PTSD (Crawford, 2017; Lisitsina, 2015; Yuzda, 2018). Originally considered to be a military-specific disorder that only affected combat veterans, research now suggests that police, fire, and emergency medical personnel experience significant levels of PTSD (Boden et al., 2013; Purtle et al., 2016). Data suggests that COs also face high levels of PTSD, even compared to other first responders. While sources estimate that military-related PTSD affects between five and twenty percent of military personnel (Carleton et al., 2018a; James & Todak, 2018; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008), researchers have consistently found that between twenty and thirty-six percent of COs show signs of diagnosable PTSD (Carleton, Afifi, Turner, Taillieu, Duranceau, et al., 2018).

Variations in these statistics depend on jurisdiction, but few authors debate the seriousness or urgency of officer mental health concerns (Lerman et al., 2022). Carleton et al. (2018a; 2018b), who recently analyzed mental health data collected from COs working in Saskatchewan, Canada, reported that over 54% of surveyed correctional staff reported a personal mental health issue of some kind, including 24.8% who met the threshold for diagnosable PTSD (2018a, pp. 58–59; Carlton et al. 2018b). The study drew a connection between mental health and the closed and highly controlled nature of prison work:

> Differences [in mental health scores among first responders] may also be based on populations being served, such as for correctional workers who engage with incarcerated

> persons in extraordinary environments that can reasonably be hypothesized to increase risk for developing a mental disorder (Carleton et al. 2018a, p. 60).

Findings such as Carleton et al.'s (2018) are well-known in the sociology of work. For instance, Karasek's (1979) pioneering work on job strain suggested that work characterized by high demands and limited control over those demands leads to stress, job strain, and a host of negative outcomes. Karasek's job strain model has been successfully applied to a wide range of workplace settings (Carayon, 1993; Karasek et al., 1982; Sargent & Terry, 2000), and recent research suggests that higher levels of job strain lead to increased mortality rates over time (Amiri & Behnezhad, 2020).

Criminologists have not yet fully implemented job strain research to law enforcement (see Lambert et al., 2013, for an exception), meaning that most discussions about CO health, stress, and mental health tend to be couched in more descriptive terms. Schultz (2022) briefly discusses officer drug use as a means of medicating against these forms of stress. He also suggests that suicidal ideation is a significant issue for COs, something also hinted at by Kauffman (1988) and Cheek (1984). Recently, a significant research project headed by Frost has comprehensively examined suicide and suicidal ideation among COs in Massachusetts, the same jurisdiction where Kauffman's research took place. In a range of articles, Frost and co-authors suggest that suicide is a major issue among COs, and detail specific factors surrounding at least 20 COs who died by suicide in a five-year period between 2010 and 2015 (Frost & Monteiro, 2021).

Frost's research provides a research-backed foundation for concerns about officer suicide, which—likely due to access issues—have not previously been examined in depth.

Frost's project specifically links suicide to CO cultures and workplace environments. Families of suicide victims cited mental health concerns, specifically depression and addition, as major themes among officers who had taken their own lives. Furthermore, "… family members and friends tied the substance abuse problems directly to correctional work and an occupational culture in which going out after work for drinks is the norm" (Frost & Monteiro, 2021, p. 13). Importantly, occupational context also seemed to play a significant role:

> Across many of the officer suicides studied, extensive exposures to violence and expectations that officers should be tough and 'suck it up' together with the stigma associated with both mental illness and help-seeking in the occupational culture in corrections interacted with those known individual-level risk factors for suicide (Frost & Monteiro, 2021, p. 16).

Being 'tough' and 'hard' is a common theme in the literature on CO work cultures, as are personality changes because of prison work (Arnold, 2016; Crawley, 2004b; Higgins et al., 2022; Ricciardelli et al., 2015). However, these features also represent barriers to help-seeking. Within Frost et al.'s research, institutional culture—specifically, hypermasculinity among officers, as well as mental health stigma (Garrihy, 2021)—was reinforced by structural barriers within the broader institution, as contentious and punitive relationships with managers and a lack of confidentiality in the reporting process made mental health struggles a 'risk' that officers tended to 'hide' (Wills et al., 2021). Officers described "sucking it up and dealing with it" (Frost & Monteiro, 2020, p. 1291), persevering despite psychological damage to maintain and secure the financial benefits of retirement, pension, and health insurance. Retirement did not bring peace for a sub-section of Frost's participants, who committed suicide shortly after leaving prison work.

Overall, Frost et al. suggest that suicide levels among officers are directly related to structural features of prison work, individual and social psychological factors, and elements of officer workplace culture (Frost & Monteiro, 2020, p. 1295, 2021). Distressingly, Frost and Monteiro also suggest this is not limited to their jurisdiction:

> As we present our findings around the country, we are regularly approached by other departments who express that they too are increasingly concerned about what they perceive to be a significant increase in correction officer suicide in recent years. We have learned over these past five years that the cluster of officer suicides in Massachusetts that we had hoped might be an anomaly may not be an anomaly at all (Frost & Monteiro, 2020, p. 1296)

Wellness literature is the fastest-growing area in CO research, and as the brief review here hints at, authors have relied on aspects of wellness to explain nearly every aspect of the CO experience. Researchers now use stress and mental health to explain officer professionalism, as well as negative attitudes toward incarcerated people (Higgins et al., 2022, 2023). Other authors use stress and mental health to explain taint and taint management, something both Eriksson and Garrihy mention in passing (Eriksson, 2021; Garrihy, 2021). The shift here is noticeable: prison staff are no longer perceived as unsympathetic characters (Toch, 1978), but instead are perceived as sad and damaged individuals, harmed by the broader structural injustices of their workplace (Ricciardelli, 2019).

To a certain extent, the wellness literature is laudable for how it redresses a significant historical gap in our understanding of prison work (Liebling, 2000). Frost's suicide research forces us to reconsider the broader consequences of CO work. Likewise, the wellness literature

helps us understand how the high-stress, low-control demands of prison work impacts broader CO health (Karasek, 1979; Lambert et al., 2013). Yet despite these important contributions, a close and critical reading of the wellness literature also reveals flaws, especially when it comes to how this body of work discusses CO work cultures. Although the broader body of wellness literature repeatedly discusses culture as an important variable in shaping officer wellness (Wills et al., 2021), few authors in this area dig into how culture functions as a variable in shaping CO wellness. Instead, authors in this area focus on job strain and the negative structural effects of prison work (Higgins et al., 2022; Karasek, 1979; Ricciardelli, 2019).

In some of these articles, sympathy appears to exculpate problematic cultural behaviours: instead of examining the origins of negative cultural values, the focus on *consequences* of correctional work mean that we have little insight into how these issues shape culture and habitus (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2022). This is problematic: ethnographic research with COs describe culture as a key factor that officers identify when discussing positive and negative impacts on individual wellness (Chenault, 2014; Tracy, 2003), meaning that its exclusion here represents a notable oversight. Overall, while the wellness literature has done much to explain the nuances of day-to-day prison work, its lack of close engagement with officer culture and professionalism suggests that it is limited in its broader ability to explain exactly how COs engage with their work on a day-to-day basis.

Canadian research

The picture I have drawn so far relies on U.S. and U.K.-based research, with small tastes of international sources. Likewise, the histories of corrections I have detailed are largely American. This is an intentional decision: Canadian research on COs did not meaningfully exist

until the mid-2000s, and Canadian prison research more broadly is only now beginning to undergo the same sort of research renaissance U.S. and U.K. prisons experienced twenty years ago.[9]

Many of the broader social shifts described above (i.e., rehabilitative shifts, neoliberalism, and mass incarceration) are similar in Canada to the U.S., reflecting the close connections between the two countries. However, several differences that reflect Canada's current and historical ties to the U.K. make the Canadian prison context contextually unique. Originally, Canadian laws and punishments were set by the British parliament, and included banishment, workhouses, and transportation (Ekstedt & Griffiths, 1988). Significant portions of what is now Ontario and Western Canada were also governed and policed by the Hudson's Bay Company, which had its own courts and punishments until the mid 1860s. American ideals of penitence and solitary confinement deeply influenced the building of Canada's first purpose-built jail, the Kingston Penitentiary, in 1835—up to and including rules of silence, which initially forbade prisoners from speaking to each other, and extraordinary levels of corporal punishment (Ekstedt & Griffiths, 1988; McCoy, 2012). Poor living conditions, excessive violence, and limited rehabilitation largely defined Canadian prisons until the 1950s, when prison administrators began implementing wider vocational training and treatment models (Ekstedt & Griffiths, 1988). Although this has shifted in succeeding years, notably underneath the Harper conservative government (McElligott, 2017; Zinger, 2016), treatment and rehabilitative programming remain a staple of Canadian correctional policy—or, more accurately, remain a

[9] One note regarding formatting. I consistently use Canadian spellings of words like colour, behaviour, and the like throughout this dissertation. However, in papers 2 and 3, I have employed U.S. spellings (color, behavior, etc.). This is due to the formatting requirements of U.S. journals and is not an error.

staple of what prison administrators claim that their institutions do (Gaucher & Lowman, 1998; Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005).

Canada faces several unique pressures which differentiate prison policies from those of the U.S. and UK. Although not widely discussed, these factors play a key role in shaping Canadian prisons. First, although most observers focus on American experiences in the so-called 'War on Drugs,' Canada participated by implementing its own harsh drug laws during the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney enthusiastically endorsed 'War on Drugs' policies within days of U.S. President Reagan's initial announcement (Jensen & Gerber, 1993). Consistent with American approaches, many Canadian drug laws unfairly penalized racialized and indigent minorities, specifically targeting immigrant and Indigenous populations (T. Gordon, 2006). 'Tough-on-crime' messages also filled Canadian political dialogues though the 1990s and early 2000s, especially as it related to youth crime (Hogeveen, 2005).

Although Canadian politicians made figurative hay with tough-on-crime dialogues, the reality of how laws were implemented on a day-to-day basis subtly differed from legislator polemics, something less common in the U.S. (Doob & Sprott, 2006). Therefore, although Canadian incarceration rates increased through the 1990s and early 2000s, prison populations never reached the scale of American incarceration (Boyd & Faith, 1999). Canada's pre-COVID rate of 127 prisoners per hundred thousand population (Malakieh, 2020) continues to lag the world average of 145 prisoners per *hundred thousand, and is far behind the U.S. rate of 655 per hundred thousand (Walmsley, 2018).*[10] According to the Institute of Criminal Policy Research,

[10] These statistics are intentionally dated. I have used older statistics that more closely reflect the time the data for this dissertation was collected. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted prison populations in Canada, as courts incarcerated far fewer people as a safety measure. The most recent statistics suggest that Canada currently has a rate of 104 prisoners per 100,000 population (Fair & Walmsley, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2022). This reflects COVID-related decarceration policies, and is likely to rebound to higher levels over the coming years. That said, it is too soon to conclusively identify trends in Canada's carceral population.

Canada's incarceration rate per hundred thousand ranks 47th in the world—although Canada has the third-highest incarceration rate in the G7 group of industrial countries[11] (Walmsley, 2018).

Second, race issues look different in Canadian prisons than they do in the U.S. or U.K. Indigenous Canadians are incarcerated at over ten times the rate of non-Indigenous Canadians (Tetrault et al., 2020; Tetrault, 2022). Despite representing only 4.5% of the Canadian population, Indigenous people made up over 31% of people in provincial custody, and 29% of people in federal prisons in 2018/2019 (Malakieh, 2020, p. 5)—a proportion which far exceeds the notorious over-incarceration rates of black men in the U.S. (Gilmore, 2015). Overincarceration of indigenous peoples was even higher in the province where I did my research (Tetrault et al., 2020), and ranges up to 71% of incarcerated people in some Canadian provinces (Malakeih, 2020). Indigenous overincarceration is a defining feature of Canadian prisons, and distinctly shapes the social dynamics of prisons across Western Canada (Bucerius et al., 2023). In addition, Canadian incarceration rates are staggeringly high for prisoners who are remanded, or awaiting trial (Pelvin, 2019). Consequently, although race and mass incarceration are more contested terms in Canada, this may owe more to wilful blindness on the part of observers than it does to the measurable empirical facts (Tetrault et al., 2020).

Third, Canada's implementation of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 empowered courts to make decisions that directly influenced day-to-day prison management practices. Courts have not hesitated to use these powers, leading to significant changes including the implementation of new provincial and federal prison charters, the creation of prison ombuds

[11] G7 incarceration rates, in order, per hundred thousand population: United States – 655, United Kingdom – 140 (England and Wales only), Canada – 114, France – 100, Italy – 98, Germany – 75, Japan – 41 (Walmsley, 2018). These statistics are drawn from Walmsley's (2018) work (the most recent available)—hence the gap between the rate of 114 reported here, and the Statistics Canada number of 127 (Malakeih, 2020). Furthermore: it is important to remember that incarceration rates are an imperfect measure, as sentencing philosophies vary widely between the countries in question, and incarceration and crime rates do not always reflect each other. As a rough measure, they still possess utility, which is why I have employed them here.

offices, and prisoner voting rights (Parkes, 2007). Contrary to widespread complaints and tropes in conservative media outlets, this has not meant that prisoners receive better or more comprehensive legal protections than other members of society (Jackson, 2002; Kerr, 2015). But the Charter's influence on prison management over the past 30 years has played a significant role in shaping Canadian prisons and prison administration (Parkes, 2007)—and has also played a role in shaping the discretionary powers available to Canadian COs on a day-to-day basis. Importantly, a court decision revolutionized prisoner disciplinary processes in my research sites in 2003, a decision which reverberated through my participants' interviews despite nearly 20 years of subsequent policy development and changes in correctional practice.

Fourth, the unique design of Canadian federalism directly shapes prison design and practice in Canada. Significant tensions existed between francophone Lower Canada and anglophone Upper Canada in the 1860s, threatening the project of Canadian Confederation. The constitutional founders addressed this tension in large part through a separation of powers between the central Federal government, and the regional Provincial governments. Prisons, courts, and law enforcement were significant parts of this bargain. Sections 91 and 92 of the British North America Act 1867—Canada's original constitution—stated as much:

> S. 91: "It shall be lawful for the Queen, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons, to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of Canada, the exclusive legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada that is to say,—
>
> 27. The criminal law, except the constitution of courts of criminal jurisdiction, but including the procedure in criminal matters.
>
> 28. The establishment, maintenance, and management of penitentiaries.

> S. 92: "In each province the Legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to matters coming within the classes of subjects next herein-after enumerated; that is to say,
>
> 6: The establishment, maintenance, and management of public and reformatory prisons in and for the province.
>
> 14: The administration of justice in the province, including the constitution, maintenance, and organization of provincial courts, both of civil and of criminal jurisdiction, and including procedure in civil matters in those courts.
>
> 15: The imposition of punishment, by fine, penalty, or imprisonment, for enforcing any law of the province made in relation to any matter coming within any of the classes of subjects enumerated in this section." (*The British North America Act*, 1867)

This constitutional horse-trade created a two-tiered and uniquely Canadian system of laws and punishment. Criminal laws are set by the federal government but enforced by the provincial governments. Provincial governments administer courts and prosecutions but enforce federal laws. Police enforce federal laws but are paid and organized differently depending on the province in question. And crucially, federal and provincial governments divide the administration of prisons. All prisoners serving longer than two years in custody are wards of the federal government, spending time in federal penitentiaries. All prisoners serving less than two years in custody, or who are awaiting trial—or remanded—are wards of the provincial government. This separation creates unique challenges, as prisons can vary between provinces, and between provinces and federal institutions (Pelvin, 2019; Weinrath, 2016).

As stated earlier, Canadian prison research has not undergone the same widespread renaissance seen in the U.S. and Britain over the past decade. Instead, Canadian scholarship has

largely focused on critical and abolitionist perspectives. Activist scholarship critiquing the injustices perpetrated by Canadian prisons has defined the field over the past 20 years and has played a major role in spearheading legislative and juridical reforms such as the ones surrounding Ashley Smith's death mentioned in the start of this introduction (Doob & Sprott, 2006; Hannah-Moffat, 2011; Piché et al., 2022; Zinger, 2016). Although this body of literature has accomplished much, it has simultaneously limited researchers' ability to enter prisons. Encountering scholars who focus almost exclusively on the numerous harms of prison and advocate for abolition, some correctional administrators now view researchers as either unhelpful in reforming their institutions, or as a threat to the workings of their institutions.

Against this backdrop, most Canadian prison research consequently relies on interviews conducted with former prisoners, or prisoners recently released from custody (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; Ricciardelli, 2015). Although this approach has propelled significant advances, it also comes with important caveats. Notably, given the complex nature of prisonization, institutionalization, and subcultures, there are concerns about the consistency of in-prison and out-of-prison accounts, as the pressures on released individuals are notably different than the pressures on currently incarcerated people (Ricciardelli, 2015). Questions also exist about how representative these samples are, as many papers appear to draw from groups of individuals who are actively seeking to highlight the deficits of Canadian prison systems.

Several exceptions deserve specific mention. First, Weinrath (2009, 2016) conducted interviews with prisoners and prison staff in Manitoba and Alberta. His work centred on gang membership and prison programming and has limited reflections on CO work. However, some of his conclusions, especially around how officers maintain order, have significant relevance and reflect Liebling et al.'s (2011) findings around jail craft and legitimacy. Second, Waldram (2007,

2009, 2015) conducted detailed ethnographic work with federally incarcerated sex offenders. His Canadian work, which focuses on prisoner subcultures, boundary work, and rehabilitative efforts, identifies prison staff as suspicious and suggested that their attitudes directly hindered his work. However, he does not discuss this extensively (Waldram, 2009). Third, Pelvin (2019) conducted detailed qualitative interviews with 120 remanded prisoners in Ontario. Her work is important, as it is the first work which qualitatively discusses the pressures of expanding remanded populations in Canada—but again, it does not extensively touch on the concerns or perspectives of officers in these institutions.

Fourth, Bucerius and Haggerty's work with the University of Alberta Prisons Project (UAPP) has shifted our broader understanding of prison conditions in Canada. Much of the UAPP's publishing focus has centred around the experiences of incarcerated people, discussing race and multiculturism in prison (Tetrault, 2022; Tetrault et al., 2020), the experiences of incarcerated women (Bucerius et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2019), and radicalization narratives (Bucerius et al., 2023; Schultz et al., 2020). Several of their articles have also addressed prison staff. I have already discussed their work in showing how officer discretion is a product of a broader prison work habitus (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), and their research has also shown how a search for control and perceptions of dangerousness play a key role in shaping how prison staff perceive and act toward incarcerated people (Schultz et al., 2021). Likewise, their work on fentanyl trafficking in western Canadian prisons demonstrates how COs associate illegal opioids with widespread perceptions of dangerousness (Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019). Finally, Schultz's (2022) book chapter, drawn from UAPP data, introduces broader themes around officer culture in Canadian prisons, suggesting that perceptions of vulnerability play a significant role in shaping poor mental health for COs in western Canada.

Fifth, Ricciardelli's work has dominated Canadian correctional research over the past decade. Ricciardelli and her co-authors have widely investigated Canadian COs at both federal and provincial levels. Ricciardelli's early work focuses on hegemonic masculinity, demonstrating how gendered expressions of power, control, and violence shape officer behaviour (Ricciardelli, 2015, 2017; Ricciardelli et al., 2015). She also describes widespread perceptions of threat which many provincial COs outline when discussing their work (Ricciardelli, 2019; Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013).

Recently, Ricciardelli's work has focused on two different areas. First, she is a key part of a large-scale quantitative project which has detailed serious mental health concerns faced by Canadian provincial COs (Carleton et al., 2018a; Carleton et al., 2018b; Carleton et al., 2019). These findings, discussed in more detail in the officer wellness section, suggest Canadian prisons have serious problems around officer culture and mental health. Second, Ricciardelli's close connections with the federal Correctional Services of Canada allowed her the opportunity to go through the training process for federal COs. Her ethnographic research from this setting plays a key role in helping understand the role training plays in organizational orientation (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2022): she identifies the importance of organizational values and ethics as a formal part of organizational initiation, and suggests that building relationships is a crucial component of successful research in prisons (Ricciardelli, 2022). With co-authors, she continues to expand on CO orientation, identifying specific features 'good' officers possess in the eyes of their colleagues (Cassiano et al., 2022), as well as broader cultural factors that influence relationships between officers on a day-to-day basis (McKendy & Ricciardelli, 2022). The scale and detail of Ricciardelli's work means that her research is a major resource for anyone working on the experiences of Canadian prison staff.

Research Questions

This literature review demonstrates that many questions about COs remain unanswered. While we have a significant understanding of officer culture, we are not wholly clear on how organizational culture impacts officer actions, where negative occupational cultural values emerge from, why officers embrace deeply problematic cultural viewpoints wholeheartedly (Higgins et al., 2022, 2023), or the role wellness plays on culture and vise versa. Likewise, although we know that officer mental health is a serious issue, we do not have a clear picture of how officer wellness influences specific aspects of day-to-day prison operations. And, although many researchers have discussed problematic behaviour by prison staff in a wide range of jurisdictions (Novisky et al., 2021; Symkovych, 2019), the specific justifications officers use for engaging in illegal and problematic behaviours also remain shrouded.

My dissertation examines these factors in detail, drawing connections between officer culture, officer wellness, day-to-day prison operations, and broader organizational behaviours and logics. In paper 1, I ask the following research questions:

1. How do COs describe gendered organizational logics, and what influence do they have on day-to-day prison work?
2. What role do gendered organizational logics play in shaping the perspectives and experiences of new staff?
3. What role does organizational shift play in highlighting gender as a cultural tool?

Researchers have repeatedly discussed the role of hyper-masculinity in shaping the overall officer habitus (Eriksson, 2021; Ricciardelli, 2017). However, researchers have tended to focus on individual exercises of gender, rather than focusing on the organizational role gender plays in shaping the officer habitus. Drawing on Britton (2003) and Swidler's (1986) work, I argue that

prison work is fundamentally gendered (Acker, 1990; Zimmer, 1986). Gender and gendered behaviour are sedimented into the broader officer culture in meaningful ways (Adorjan et al., 2021), many of which operate under the surface. However, in moments of broader organizational shift, officers draw on gender as a key tool to help them navigate uncertain moments within the prison (Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986). The consequences of this are significant, as organizational shift and churn lead to significant, long-lasting negative effects on the broader officer population, ranging from steroid use to harassment to open homophobia. I conclude paper 1 by arguing that the highly gendered nature of CO culture may be a consequence of larger gendered organizational logics at play within the prison, rather than an expression of individual hypermasculinity as others have argued (Ricciardelli, 2017). By doing so, I focus on the structural factors that influence officer behaviour, rather than examining individual characteristics.

I build on my structural focus in paper 2. Officer use-of-force is a controversial topic, one usually discussed in terms of abuse, corruption, and individual malfeasance (Novisky et al., 2021). Consequently, we know little about the cultural and structural factors that inform officer use-of-force. Therefore, in paper 2, I ask the following research questions:

4. What role does violence play in shaping how COs maintain order and perform their duties?
5. How do the bureaucratic structures of prisons interact with sanctioned and unsanctioned use-of-force by prison staff?
6. What influence do organizational cultures have on coercive force?

I argue that the broader managerialist shift in prison administration (Liebling, Price, et al., 2011) has altered how officers use force. Officers discuss coercive force in ways that have little to do

with legality or illegality; instead, officers describe coercive violence as an organizational behaviour, one that bureaucratic structures and processes within the prison directly influence. Organizational cultures also shape and influence use of force decisions, by justifying and excusing problematic use of force exercises rather than preventing them. I conclude by arguing that culture, bureaucratic structures, and organizational behaviours play a significant role in shaping the use and misuse of violence in prison, something that fills a distinct research gap and pushes back against frameworks that describe violence as a form of individual malfeasance.

In paper 1, I focus on the origins of culture. In paper 2, I focus on how such cultures shaped the day-to-day operations of prisons. In paper 3, I describe how culture and prison operations influence officer wellness and interactions with others including incarcerated people and managers. I ask the following questions:

7. How do COs perceive themselves as vulnerable on a day-to-day basis?
8. Which specific factors do officers point to when discussing their personal vulnerability?
9. How and why do perceptions of work-related vulnerability influence the larger officer habitus?

Wellness research has separated itself from the broader professional orientation literature in recent years. In this paper, I argue this is a mistake, drawing direct connections between officers' wellness and perceptions of vulnerability and their professionalism and actions on a day-to-day basis. I argue that perceptions of vulnerability shape how officers act, and influence culture and habitus within the prison every day. Through this examination, I show that concerns about individual wellness lead to problematic outcomes for both COs and incarcerated people under their care.

Methods and Research Design

I draw my data from the University of Alberta Prisons Project (UAPP). Dr. Sandra Bucerius and Dr. Kevin Haggerty began this project in 2016. Together with a team of research assistants, they have conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation in both federal and provincial prisons across Western Canada.[12] I have worked on this project since its inception and draw on data I helped collect in provincial prisons between October 2016 and November 2017. However, the data remain property of the UAPP. I will briefly discuss the UAPP and notable characteristics of the prisons where we did research. I will then briefly outline my positionality in relation to the data, before outlining more detailed methodological considerations around participant recruitment, interview processes, and data analysis.

Research Sites and Project Design

The UAPP received access to four provincial prisons in Western Canada in 2016. As part of the agreement with the correctional ministry, we do not identify the province where we did our research, nor do we identify the exact prisons we entered. Consequently, all names in this data, of both prisons and participants, are randomly generated pseudonyms, with no relation to personal or physical characteristics. The prisons varied widely in terms of age, architectural design, security level, and institutional culture. Each possessed unique characteristics which shaped CO experiences. Rocky View Remand Centre (RVRC hereafter) was the largest prison we entered, housing between 1700 and 1800 prisoners during our research. This institution was massive—so much so that over 50% of all prisoner movements in the province occurred at

[12] In Canada, prisoners who are awaiting trial, or prisoners who are sentenced to less than two years in custody, are wards of the provincial government. Prisoners who are found guilty and sentenced to more than two years in prison are wards of the federal government.

RVRC every day (personal communication, RVRC manager)—and possessed the largest group of COs in the province. RVRC was the newest institution in our sample, as the provincial government built it in the early 2010s in response to decades of overcrowding and violence at the original RVRC (referred to as 'Old RVRC' by my participants). 'New' RVRC was one of the most technologically advanced prisons in Canada when we did our research, with remotely controlled doors, locks, and cameras. Prisoners had access to phones, gym equipment, and video-based visiting stations on their living units—all technologies designed to ensure that prisoners never left the units unless they were going to court or required medical treatment.

RVRC was an open-concept, or direct supervision prison. In practical effect, this meant that there was no glass 'bubble', or protective space, for officers (a designed typically referred to as 'closed concept' by officers and managers). Instead, COs sat at slightly raised desks mounted on the floor of the individual living units, and directly interacted with incarcerated people on a moment-by-moment basis. Although experts consider direct-supervision prisons to be the most well-rounded form of high-security prison design currently available (Wener, 2006), the shift from closed-concept to open-concept caused chaos at RVRC. When 'new' RVRC opened, the workplace culture from 'old' RVRC did not go away. This culture was stubborn, negative, aggressive, and meant that prison staff viewed prisoners—and, by extension, open-concept units—as direct threats to their safety. Direct supervision was a major safety concern cited by union members during a 2013 labour dispute at RVRC, where officers claimed imminent danger and walked off the job. Safety concerns, and other long-term legacies of the strike, continued to shape officer/manager relationships at RVRC during our research access. As a workplace, RVRC had a reputation as possessing an extremely negative culture, something that led to harsh exercises of officer occupational cultures. Furthermore, the broader organizational culture of the

institution was chaotic and unclear, meaning that there were limited exercises of formal and informal leadership. Officers did not always know each other, meaning that informal social controls were not as influential. While this had mixed results, it often ended up giving officers tacit permission to behave badly toward incarcerated people and toward each other.

Crestwood Remand Institution (CRI) was smaller than RVRC but was more volatile in certain ways. CRI held between 700 and 800 prisoners in a space designed for about half of those numbers. Due to the massive overcrowding, CRI experienced the highest levels of prisoner on prisoner and prisoner-on-officer violence in our sample. Unlike RVRC, CRI had a cohesive officer culture, one where most COs described widespread officer solidarity. However, during our research access, CRI was experiencing a significant outbreak of the illegal narcotic fentanyl (see Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019, for more information). This presented a massive security concern to COs at CRI, and most of the officers we interviewed there described feeling vulnerable from drug exposure (Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019). Consequently, CRI experienced massive staff turn-over during our research.

Both RVRC and CRI were remand-only prisons. In other words, they exclusively housed prisoners who were awaiting trial, and who were therefore considered legally innocent. Remand institutions have far fewer programs than sentenced institutions, and far higher prisoner turn-over. In fact, over half of Canadian remand prisoners are incarcerated for less than a week, and three-quarters are incarcerated for less than one month (Malakieh, 2019, 2020; Reitano, 2017). This led to instability at CRI and RVRC. COs in both institutions detailed unstable and variable environments, which influenced their day-to-day roles and responsibilities. In contrast, officers at Silverside Correctional Centre (SCC) and Harbour Bay Correctional Centre (HBCC) had large proportions of sentenced prisoners, who had completed their court processes and were serving

their sentences. Officers at these prisons detailed fewer issues than officers at CRI and RVRC. In fact, they drew direct contrasts between the relative stability—some used the words “boring” or “quiet”—of their centres and the higher-event remand centres. To officers and prisoners alike, remand status meant uncertainty, instability, violence, and complexity.

SCC, which was physically close to RVRC, possessed a noticeably different staff and prisoner culture than the larger remand centre. During our research access, SCC housed between 450 and 550 prisoners in open-concept, direct-supervision living units. Approximately two-thirds of these prisoners were remanded. RVRC, despite its massive size, faced significant overcrowding during our research access, and the ‘extra’ remanded prisoners were housed at SCC. Built in the late 1980s, SCC was designed as a sentenced facility, and was intended to house minimum- and medium-security sentenced prisoners, not maximum-security remand offenders as it did when we entered. Despite the preponderance of remanded prisoners, SCC offered more programming than RVRC, and allowed prisoners to go outdoors regularly. And, despite the mix of sentenced and remanded prisoners, SCC possessed a relaxed and laid-back staffing culture—something which COs and managers frequently cited when discussing the differences between RVRC and SCC.

Finally, HBCC was the smallest prison we entered, housing only 350 prisoners. It was by far the oldest. A mixture of Auburn-style cellblocks and open dormitories, 60 years of correctional history were inscribed into the architectural design of the prison. On one end, prisoners in minimum-security direct-supervision dormitories spent most of the day outside on prisoner work crews, while on the others, prisoners languished on cell blocks complete with bars, gang-locks, and poor visibility. The physical variations in the prison—complicated further by the fact that approximately 75% of the prisoner population were listed as protective custody status

due to sex charges or prior gang membership—meant that officers used a wide variety of strategies to take and maintain control of the units. HBCC was located near CRI, and like CRI, officers at HBCC reported strong feelings of solidarity when compared to SCC and RVRC. However, they also discussed perceptions of vulnerability, a consequence of drug overdoses and serious assaults in the year leading up to our research access.

Ethics and Participant Recruitment

The CO interviews I use in this project are closely related to the prisoner interviews we conducted as part of the UAPP. Officers often volunteered to provide counterpoints to prisoner interviews, and many participants discuss the challenges of working with prisoners. Consequently, I will give a brief overview of the UAPP's methods, contextualizing how officer data fit into the larger project, before outlining my specific actions in recruiting and interviewing COs.

The UAPP received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board in early 2016, and I received a related-but-separate ethics approval for my Masters' research as part of the same project (Research Ethics Board approvals Pro00061614 and Pro00062785, respectively). These ethics approvals both permitted for future use of research data, meaning that they were sufficient to cover my use of these data here. The first prison we entered was RVRC, in September 2016. SCC followed in November/December 2016, HBCC in May 2017, and CRI in August/September 2017. Our access periods varied, ranging from 14 days at CRI, 21 days at SCC, and approximately 18 days at both HBCC and RVRC.[13] Access periods

[13] Importantly, I was taking PhD classes in Fall 2017. Consequently, I was only able to spend two full days at CRI—and, although I still interviewed most of the COs we spoke to there, I did not have the same opportunities to access institutional back-stages as I did at SCC, RVRC, and HBCC.

depended on the physical location of the prison, as well as limitations imposed on us by correctional administrators at each institution. To make the most of the limited timeframes, principal investigators Drs. Sandra Bucerius and Kevin Haggerty put together a research team, largely composed of their graduate students. At least ten people have conducted semi-structured interviews as part of the UAPP: two principal investigators, one post-doctoral researcher, six doctoral students, and one Master's student.

We entered each prison as a group, ranging from two to a maximum of eight people on any given day. Each team member made public announcements to prisoners on individual prison living units, explaining that the research project was examining group membership, life histories, and experiences within prisons. One researcher typically took responsibility for a single unit in a prison, simultaneously creating consistency across interviews and allowing team members to disperse across multiple units and multiple areas of the prison on a given day. We interviewed prisoners from every area of the prison, excluding health care and mental health units. If prisoners wished to participate, they were allowed to volunteer. We did not provide any inducements, but most prisoners participated enthusiastically. As prisoners are often transferred between different institutions as part of the sentencing process, we frequently ran into the same individuals at multiple prisons. Many of these individuals vouched for us with the remainder of the inmate population, and frequently asked if we would interview them a second and even third time. By the end of our access, we had interviewed 587 individual prisoners, sometimes more than once.

Unsurprisingly, we had to change our recruitment tactics when targeting COs. Officers were more restrained than prisoners, and we encountered resistance from some staff (notably at RVRC) who believed we would use prisoner accounts to vilify officers. We started by making

informal presentations to officers at pre-shift staff 'musters,' as well as through general emails sent to staff across each prison. Muster presentations netted few volunteers, as officers were suspicious of our motivations. We had more luck recruiting staff on an informal basis, through extended contact. Frequently, staff watched my teammates conduct prisoner interviews on 'their' units for several days and engaged in multiple personal interactions with research team members. Through this, they were able to assess our intentions, and made their decision to participate on this basis. My colleagues recruited 22 CO participants this way.

The correctional agency did not provide any official statistics on staffing or prisoner populations, meaning I am not able to detail the exact proportions of CO gender in the agency. However, our observations and discussions suggested that between one-in-four and one-in-five officers were women. CRI, RVRC, and SCC all housed women prisoners, meaning that each prison had a substantial proportion of women officers to work on these units. Our data are roughly in line with this, as men outnumber women by a 5-to-1 ratio (See Figure 1). My recruitment methods[14] may have influenced this. Due to the division of labour within our team, I spent more time on men's, instead of women's, units, which meant that I had access to proportionally more men than women officers. However, women represented a larger proportion of the officers who signed up for interviews from muster presentations and email advertisements, redressing some of this slant. Overall, the proportion of men and women officers is roughly representative of the officer population, according to our observations. And women officers were eager to discuss the gendered nature of the work they encountered, specifically outlining the complex pressures they faced as COs.

[14] Described below.

Figure 1: UAPP Interview Breakdown

Staff Interviews	RVRC	SCC	HBCC	CRI	
Men	35	36	28	11	**110 Men**
Women	3	8	4	6	**21 Women**
Total	*38*	*44*	*32*	*17*	***131 Total***

Field Notes and Participant Observation

Several broader methodological philosophies guided our data collection for this project. First, we used semi-structured interviews, and drew on the general tenants of Grounded Theory to design these interviews. As is common in Grounded Theory, we employed a prompt guide[15] to help spark conversations on specific topics we were interested in (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, we also allowed participants' unique perspectives, life experiences, and opinions to shape the overall direction of the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Consequently, while participants all spoke to the semi-structured questions, they also had the opportunity to discuss a wider range of topics that impacted their lives and daily routines. The broader findings of this dissertation are grounded in themes that emerged from the data. Specifically, when given prompts such as "Tell me about your job," officers often wanted to discuss occupational and organizational culture at length, meaning that some of the most important data that this dissertation emerged from participant experiences and perspectives rather than carefully designed questioning (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

We strengthened our data by actively engaging in semi-ethnographic participant observation while inside the prison (Delamont, 2004). Each day, team members set aside a

[15] See Appendix I for the officer prompt guide.

minimum of one hour after leaving the prison, and wrote up individual field notes (Creese et al., 2017). We noted our observations, feelings, perceptions, and personal struggles, and documented the many short conversations with prisoners or COs which occurred off-tape. We also noted our impressions—both positive and negative—about how our teammates were reacting to various issues within the prison. Each day, we shared copies of our fieldnotes with Drs. Bucerius and Haggerty, who kept copies of the notes for future reference. They also protected the confidentiality of the fieldnotes, due to their potentially detrimental effect on team dynamics.

I also noted down extensive experiences and conversations which I had with officers outside of interview settings. Many officers, particularly at SCC and RVRC, were willing to talk to me, but were not willing to go on record. However, they were willing to let me take notes, which I used to recreate the conversation in fieldnotes as soon as possible after I left the jail. I was also able to take brief voice memos while in the prison, detailing specific instances which I was able to write up in detail after leaving prison for the day. I have not included these participants in the final total of 131 officer participants. Instead, I use their perspectives to provide context through fieldnote excerpts.

My fieldnotes also allow me to describe several unusual access experiences I encountered while doing interviews. The most notable of these came at RVRC. Due to my connections and training, COs and managers allowed me onto the maximum-security segregation area of the prison, known as Max Pod. While there, a prisoner covered the windows and camera in his cell; the manager on duty—who I had worked for at SCC—called out the prison tactical team to 'extract' the prisoner from his cell, while also allowing me to watch the entire incident from 'pod control.' I was able to detail this event in my field notes, due to my observations. Although this

incident was not part of my recorded data, it provided me a direct window into how officers use both formal and informal social control measures to manage their units.

Interview Methods

Overall, interviews with COs averaged approximately 50 minutes. We guaranteed all our participants full anonymity and confidentiality. Interviewers provided each participant with a consent form (See Appendix I). This detailed ethics approval information, benefits and potential side-effects of research participation, and provided participants with the contact information for the principal investigators (Drs. Bucerius and Haggerty). When I interviewed officers, I also provided them with my personal University of Alberta business card, which detailed my name, phone number, email, and departmental address. The consent form also detailed confidentiality and anonymity considerations and explained data maintenance provisions. Importantly, it also provided instructions for how they could remove their data from the project after the interview should they want to do so, something I also explained in more detail to my participants. No participants took advantage of this option.

Once we had provided these details, we asked participants for their consent to digitally record the interviews. All the officer represented in the larger sample consented. Once we had finished the interview, I uploaded the digital recording to a secure cloud-based file, then transcribed it verbatim using ExpressScribe and Microsoft Word. I transcribed between 50 and 60% of the officer interviews. A hired transcriber completed the remainder.

Thematic Data Analysis

The principal investigators and three research assistants co-developed two coding schemes, one for prisoners and one for officers (See Appendix II). For the officer code, I worked with another UAPP research assistant. We began by choosing a random selection of six officer interviews. Using these, we identified the most common themes emerging from the data. We each compiled individual lists of these themes and compared them. Identifying points of high and low overlap, we revisited the transcripts, tweaking our definitions to represent the source data more closely. We then identified and discussed remaining disagreements and oversights, editing and testing the scheme until it had a reasonably high level of inter-coder overlap. We then involved Drs. Haggerty and Bucerius in the process, and all four of us coded the data using another interview transcript. We identified further strengths and weaknesses, which we addressed through more edits to the coding scheme. We continued this process until we consistently reached 85-90% overlap between coders, thereby ensuring inter-rater reliability. Once we had reached this level of consistency, I used Nvivo software to code each officer transcript line-by-line. Our coding scheme identified 30 major themes, with 79 attendant sub-themes (See Appendix II).

Positionality within the Research

Researcher positionality is a key consideration irrespective of the project at hand (Bucerius, 2013; Hoang, 2015). My own relationship to the data I use in this project is unique, although it also reflects a distinctive trend in CO research (Adler & Adler, 1987; Marquart, 1986b). Before starting my MA in 2015, I worked as a CO at SCC. I started as a temporary, 'wage' officer in May 2010, about six months after my 20th birthday. As a wage, I worked on-

call, covering for employees who were on summer or Christmas vacations. I did this part-time throughout my undergraduate degree, and when I graduated in 2013, I became a full-time CO. I completed a nine-week provincially mandated training course in 2014 and worked every front-line staff position in the prison during my time at SCC.

Initially, I enjoyed my work. As a teenager, I had dreamed of becoming a police officer, and as a CO I had a uniform, responsibilities, and routine opportunities to engage in risky edgework (Stout et al., 2018). However, after several years, my mental health started to suffer. The constant stress of the prison environment—defined by hostility, threatened, and actual violence—noticeably changed my personality and how I interacted with people outside of prison (Garrihy, 2021; Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013). In public spaces, I did not feel comfortable unless I had my back to the wall—something my family did not understand, and something I consciously hid from them (Kauffman, 1988; Tracy, 2003, 2004). In late 2014, I realized that the costs of prison work were greater than the benefits and began looking for other work. Following the failure of several other job applications, I applied to university in early 2015. Grad school represented my best chance to get out of jail literally and metaphorically, and I seized it. When I walked out of the prison for the last time, I told my family, friends, and coworkers I was trading a steady paycheck for my mental health. It took eight months before I felt comfortable having strangers stand behind me in crowded public spaces.

Each of the three chapters in this dissertation has some relation to my experience as a CO. First, I had both positive and negative experiences with officer cultures within my work. My socialization process was by no means easy—in fact, I was initially shunned, because when I started, the director of SCC was a family friend who lived several miles from my parents' farm. Consequently, other officers excluded me from conversations and social events, or at best, made

lewd jokes about my 'relationship' with the centre director. Over a matter of months and years, I was able to 'prove' myself through hard work and cultural performance, and other officers eventually accepted me as a member of the CO group. Second, I experienced a constant sense of vulnerability from my work, even though SCC was by no means a hyper-violent space. In fact, vulnerability, often couched in complaints about managers, policy, and management requests, was a constant topic of conversation between my coworkers. I participated in these conversations, which reflected the stress my coworkers and I felt but did not discuss in other contexts (Evers et al., 2020). Third, as I learned how to control prison units, I engaged in both formal and informal social control tactics. In retrospect, I would classify some of the strategies I employed as problematic from moral and ethical perspectives, although they were not explicitly illegal. At the time, I felt I had no other option, as formal rules and regulations were insufficient to control prison living units. Because of these experiences, I have come to see how formal rules tacitly enabled and encouraged informal control methods, despite their quasi-legal nature.

To be clear, the themes I identify here are not autoethnographic. Rather, as I shall demonstrate, the themes I discuss were major points of discussion among COs in each of the four prisons where I did interviews. Although I experienced these themes first-hand, I do not draw on my own experiences as support for my work. That said, my fieldnotes are deeply personal, especially as I now read them with the benefit of three years' separation. The research period was extremely challenging on an individual level, as my identity as a researcher clashed with my identity as a former CO, in unique and unexpected ways. During this period, I often discussed and described my role-confusion and "trusted outsider" status (Bucerius, 2013) within my fieldnotes. Consequently, my fieldnotes from this period have a wealth of information relating to observations, subcultural group membership, role confusion, and CO behaviour. I view them as

indicative of the cultural and subcultural mindsets I encountered and experienced through my research. However, given the conflicted nature of these notes, I use them with caution. In other words, I use them as contextual, supporting, data, rather than core data for my papers, with one exception: in my methodological addendum, I use my fieldnotes to discuss my positionality in detail.

I have not worked in a prison since August 2015. Consequently, my experiences as a CO shape my thinking in different ways than they once did. During data collection, my experiences and deep engagement in the CO subculture played a key role in helping me recruit officer participants. And significantly, the cultural mindsets of being a CO influenced my interviewing style and approaches, especially in my early interviews (notably, at RVRC and SCC). My positionality as a CO was a vitally important part of my identity when I collected these data. However, in the intervening years, my positionality has shifted. In fact, when I read my fieldnotes from 2016 and 2017, I feel as if a stranger wrote them, a person whose values and perspectives were sculpted by experiences which are no longer salient in my life. I am not trying to downplay the actions, mindsets, and perspectives which shaped me as an officer—after all, I spent a significant and formative part of my life as a CO. However, prison work is now something that I once did, rather than serving as a master status. I still empathize with my former coworkers, and vividly remember the experiences I went through in prison—but the shifts in my positionality are important, as they now allow me to critically revisit perspectives which I once whole-heartedly espoused. My evolving positionality has strongly influenced my conclusions in this dissertation, as I am now able to critique actions and mindsets I once took for granted.

My positionality and history meant that I was able to approach officers in different ways than my colleagues. As a former CO, I had extensive social capital within each prison we entered

(Bourdieu, 1986). This was unquestionably useful—but it sometimes created surreal, and even ridiculous, moments. For instance, when we arrived at HBCC, the third prison in our study, we agreed that I would not mention my CO status to anyone to determine whether it played a role in shaping how officers related to us as a team. This pact lasted approximately five minutes—which is how long it took for one of my former coworkers to recognize me, enthusiastically greet me, and introduce me to other officers as a former CO. As this vignette demonstrates, my social capital, social networks, and experience helped me create rapport with officers in each of the prisons we entered.

Rapport quickly led to officer recruitment. As Officer Matt put it, "You've actually got an insight. An inside insight, instead of just like—if you were an academic and had no foot in the door experience, it wouldn't be worth talking to you, because you would hear half these stories and you would have an uneducated spin on it." My positionality had benefits and drawbacks, but as officers presented a unique set of challenges when it came to recruitment, the principal investigators and I decided I would focus on interviewing COs. Although I interviewed approximately 40 prisoners, split between RVRC, SCC and HBCC, I spent most of my time speaking with and observing COs, leaving the lions' share of prisoner interviews to my teammates. As a result, of the 131 total staff participants, I interviewed 111, most of whom I also recruited personally. Additionally, the vast majority of my fieldnotes and observations focused on the backstage behaviour of officers within the prison, as well as the interactions between officers, prisoners, managers, and researchers.

Because of my pre-existing relationships and unique status within the prisons we entered, my recruitment methods were different than my colleagues. Generally, I employed chain referral, or snowball, sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Maxwell, 2013), with slight twists. At

RVRC, SCC, and HBCC, I was able to freely walk around the institution. I frequently invited myself onto units and into officer-specific spaces and struck up conversations with the officers who were working there. As they were usually not busy, they were often curious, and willing to talk. This led to two types of interviews. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews at officer stations on prisoner living units, during officers' daily work. This strategy worked particularly well at RVRC, where it is was difficult to make connections with officers due to the workplace culture. Often, other officers would join the conversation part-way through and would begin to volunteer their perspectives and thoughts on specific topics. As a result, several interviews have multiple participants, each volunteering and discussing different perspectives on specific aspects of correctional work. Second, I conducted more typical semi-structured interviews in private meeting rooms, restaurants, coffee shops, and in two cases, at officers' homes. Many of these interviews sprang from my initial work in the prison: for instance, at RVRC, I met and had initial conversations with officers on living units, who later agreed to meet me and do an interview away from the prison setting. Analyzing what officers told me when their colleagues were present, compared to what they would discus when they were not on prison property, was deeply revealing in helping outline some of the unique and unspoken pressures which officers faced daily.

Conclusion

Ashley Smith's death represented the start of a new period for Canadian corrections, one defined by prison reform, judicial and media activism, and open criticism of 'business-as-usual' prison administration practices (T. Wright, 2019). Influential figures now frame prison reform in urgent terms; to quote Ivan Zinger, Canada's Correctional Investigator, "Something's got to

change. Something's got to be done" (Ling, 2019). COs face significant changes in their jobs and their workplaces because of potential prison reforms—but, if history is any judge, COs will also play a direct role in shaping how these reforms are created, instituted, and implemented, for better or worse (Lerman & Page, 2012; Mouallem, 2016; Page, 2011).

This research represents a new window into helping understand prisons as workplaces, and as social institutions. By examining CO workplace cultures, I will demonstrate how gendered organizational logics influence how COs do their job on a day-to-day basis, shaping both officer and prisoner experiences. By describing perceptions of vulnerability, I will show how stress and perceptions of risk affect officer decision-making, while also reinforcing negative workplace cultures. And, finally, by outlining the contrast between formal and informal social control measures on prison units, I will demonstrate shortcomings and loopholes in existing policy approaches, thereby helping policymakers develop effective reforms. Of course, these are aspirational goals. However, by shedding light on the day-to-day experiences of Canadian COs—who remain one of the least-understood groups of law enforcement officials in the country—my work will help both academic bodies of knowledge and practitioners in the field. Drawing from gender, sociology of work, and criminological literature, this proposal brings a wide range of theoretical perspectives to focus on a complex-yet-vital social institution, one with significant influence for everyone who lives and works there.

Paper 1: Gendered organizational logics and correctional officer work cultures

Abstract:

Prisons are notoriously masculine institutions, and gender plays a distinctive role in shaping correctional officer (CO) cultures. Drawing on Swidler's conceptualization of culture as a toolbox, I examine how prison staff draw on gendered organizational logics that shape stereotypes of what an 'ideal' CO should look like to bridge moments of organizational and cultural transition. Officers attach important symbolism to violence, justifying fights with incarcerated people. Likewise, standing up to harassment like a 'man' is crucial for achieving group membership. Steroid use allows officers to 'get big' and meet broader gendered organizational logics, and gay officers are required to do extra forms of work to 'prove' they belong. Overall, this study demonstrates that gendered organizational logics serve as cultural 'tools' helping COs to navigate uncertain moments, shaping prisons in problematic ways.

Introduction

Prisons are deeply masculine institutions, governed by gendered behavioral codes at every level (Britton, 2003). Academics have discussed the influence of these codes for decades, suggesting they serve as a primary cause of violence and negative behaviours among incarcerated people (Gear, 2007; C. Haney, 2011; Jewkes, 2005; Ricciardelli, 2015). Likewise, research has consistently identified the role that hypermasculine norms play in structuring correctional officer behaviour (Britton & Logan, 2008; Burdett et al., 2018; Ricciardelli, 2019; Tracy & Scott, 2006; Zimmer, 1987). Gender and sexual identity have consequently taken roles as important areas for correctional research, and within this work, authors often highlight how gender plays a structural role in shaping the behaviour of people who live and work in prison. Building on the work of Hochschild (1983), Acker (1990), and Britton (2003), this line of thought suggests the gendered organizational logics of prison directly influence the actions and attitudes of people in correctional institutions. These logics, which Acker defines as the underlying assumptions and practices that construct most contemporary work organizations" (1990, p. 147), distinctly shape how COs interacts with each other.

Researchers often employ culture to explain why prison staff react to gender and sexual identity in specific ways. Correctional officer, or CO, occupational and workplace cultures impact how prison staff treat transgender and non-binary people (Adorjan et al., 2021), and cultures of perceived threats and solidarity shape performed hypermasculinity (Ricciardelli, 2015). However, the exact processes of how and why officers interpret gender and sexual identity in the way they do are still not clear. I argue that culture and gender/sexual identity have a synergistic relationship, one where officers lean on broader organizational logics and ideal worker stereotypes (Acker, 1990; Kelly et al., 2010) to help bridge moments of cultural

transition, using gendered logics as tools to help address a lack of cultural continuity (Swidler, 1986). To examine the broader influence of gendered organizational logics and culture in prison, I draw on interviews with 131 COs to ask the following questions: 1. How do COs describe gendered organizational logics, and what influence do they have on day-to-day prison work? 2. What role do gendered organizational logics play in shaping the perspectives and experiences of new staff? And, 3. What role does organizational shift play in highlighting gender and sexual identity as cultural tools?

Literature Review

Researchers have described the significant role that occupational subcultures play in shaping the way COs do their job. Older literature describes an 'officer code,' a distinctive and masculine behavioural standard which shares characteristics with police officer cultures (Crawley, 2004b; Kauffman, 1988; Klofas & Toch, 1982; Loftus, 2010; Zimmer, 1986). Newer sources propose a less rigid but equally influential officer habitus, or working personality, that shapes officer behaviour (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Lerman & Page, 2012). Overall, researchers agree that shared group values continue to influence how COs view their workplace, as well as how they interact with other officers, incarcerated people, and prison management on a day-to-day basis (Higgins et al., 2023; Liebling, Arnold, et al., 2011; Mears et al., 2022; Ricciardelli, 2017).

While spatial, national-cultural, and political factors seem to influence the values in question (Damsa, 2021), there is general agreement around the following three points. First, COs view group solidarity as a crucial component of their job, perceiving other officers as the only 'real' protection against the uncertainty that frequently characterizes prison work (Ricciardelli et

al., 2022). Solidarity is perceived as a crucial tool in helping officers to maintain control of the prison environment, something COs describe as their most important goal (Rubin & Reiter, 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022; Schultz et al., 2021). Second, officers draw clear distinctions around acceptable ways of behaving, especially toward incarcerated people (Cook & Lane, 2013; Higgins et al., 2022). In contrast to the stated rehabilitative goals of many carceral institutions (Garland, 1990), COs often express cynical and oppositional views toward incarcerated people, establishing and reinforcing figurative boundaries between 'good officers' and 'bad inmates' (Garrihy, 2021; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Although the strength of such dichotomies varies depending on the setting (Higgins et al., 2022; Ibsen, 2013), most researchers in adult prisons report that hostile relationships between COs and incarcerated people are typical, even when officers express deeply-held beliefs in rehabilitation and rehabilitative norms (Crawley, 2004b; Tait, 2011).

Third, COs enact distinct forms of hypermasculinity. While research describes masculinity as a key component shaping stereotypes of ideal workers in a wide range of settings (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2003; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Kelly et al., 2010), research on COs suggests masculinity is an explicit part of how officers do their work (Ricciardelli, 2015). Officer behaviours are distinctively and purposely gendered, reflecting the violence and hypermasculinity of prisons (especially high-security men's prisons) more generally (Britton, 2003; Mears et al., 2022; Ricciardelli, 2015). COs describe hyper-masculinity as a protective factor that reduces the risk of victimization, something reflected in most literature on CO codes and work cultures (Adorjan et al., 2021; Arnold, 2016; Tracy & Scott, 2006). However, research on CO masculinities also takes broader organizational bents, suggesting that societal perceptions of incarceration structure the 'expected' performances of prison staff. As Britton (2003) argues,

the societal labels of ‘inmates,’ ‘prisoners,’ and ‘prison guards’ all possess masculine social characteristics, something reflected in the explicitly masculinized nature of prisons and incarceration (Comfort, 2003). The gendered presumptions that shape prison negatively impact people who do not possess stereotypically masculine characteristics (McCorkel, 2003), in ways that meet or exceed the consequences faced by non-ideal workers in other research settings (Hochschild, 1997).

Such presumptions underpin broader organizational logics. Building on Hochschild’s (1983) work, Acker (1990) defined gendered organizational logics as meaning “that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (p. 146). Acker further suggests that these logics consist of “the underlying assumptions and practices that construct most contemporary work organizations” (1990, p. 147). Under this conceptualization, assumptions and presuppositions about gender simultaneously construct and structure workplaces, thereby shifting gender from an embodied characteristic performed by individuals into a broader feature of work (Britton & Logan, 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Such logics are key building blocks for larger organizational cultures, which maintain and reinforce gendered presuppositions and ultimately reproduce inequality within the workforce of a given organization (Gherardi, 1995; Trautner, 2005).

Gendered organizational logics shape macro and micro perspectives on what prison is, and should be (Britton, 2003). Such logics, consisting of pre-existing assumptions and practices about how CO work ‘should’ be done, impact how COs act and react toward each other and toward incarcerated people and shape their broader cultural values (Higgins et al., 2022). In other words, gendered organizational logics impact both organizational and occupational cultures. The

"ideal worker" (Acker, 1990) stereotype of a CO is a man, who engages in (hyper)masculine behaviours both in how they control prison units and how they reproduce workplace cultural values (Ricciardelli, 2017). In this setting, women COs rarely meet the ideal worker standard and are forced to do additional forms of work, as they continually encounter "a gendered substructure that is reproduced daily in practical work activities" (Acker, 1990, p. 147; Britton, 2003). Even when they regularly meet or exceed the extra expectations placed upon them, women COs consistently describe feeling like outsiders, continually expected to prove they can meet the ideal worker standard (Acker, 1990; Zimmer, 1987). Such issues are further exacerbated when the COs in question are racialized individuals (Martin-Howard, 2022). However, although women COs usually bear the brunt of gendered organizational logics, these ideas influence all prison staff by constructing and shaping the cultural space that influences individual actions, outlooks, perspectives, and mindsets (Britton & Logan, 2008; Tracy & Scott, 2006; Trautner, 2005).

Gaps still exist in this picture, despite the significant existing body of gender research. For instance, while we know that women COs generally experience poorer outcomes than their male counterparts (Britton, 2003; Martin-Howard, 2021; Zimmer, 1987), the specifics of how gendered logics construct and influence CO occupational cultures and the day-to-day actions of prison staff are still not clear (Acker, 1990; Seymour, 2019). Likewise, there is little research on how non-binary COs experience such cultures. Researchers describe such cultures as important and widespread, but their origins and utility are still not well-understood (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Higgins et al., 2022; Lerman & Page, 2012). However, there are hints that gendered organizational logics serve as signposts officers use to navigate uncertain, transitory moments. Drawing on Swidler's (1986) work, Adorjan et al. (2021) have shown that officer culture represents a distinctive 'tool' for officers as they navigate instability. Adorjan et al.'s research

discusses how cisgendered COs react to transgendered COs, something shaped and framed through lenses of what it means to be a 'good' officer. Their arguments provide hints on how officer cultures influence CO reactions to gender and sexual orientation, but I argue the inverse is also true: sexual identity, and the larger gendered organizational lenses of prison, influence the way officers see the world, providing crucial tools and specific guidelines on how to behave in moments of uncertainty. To use Swidler's words, "culture and structural circumstance seem to reinforce each other" (1986, p. 278) in significant ways when we begin to examine how prison staff use gender to shape their work. Examining how officers employ the 'tool' of gender in unsettled moments allows us to shed new insight into the gendered organizational logics that shape CO cultures (Acker, 1990; Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986).

Methods

I draw the data for this paper from 131 semi-structured interviews conducted with officers at four prisons in Western Canada. These took place as part of the University of Alberta Prisons Project, a larger team-based endeavour which involved two principal investigators and between four and six graduate research assistants.

Each of the four prisons had distinctive characteristics. Rocky View Remand Centre (RVRC) held approximately 1,700 individuals awaiting trial. RVRC was a volatile space, and officers and incarcerated people both suggested that violence and volatility were regular parts of RVRC life. Significant levels of staff turn-over occurred at RVRC, meaning many of the officers who worked there had less experience than officers at other institutions. Crestwood Remand Institution (CRI) was also a remand institution, and although it was smaller than RVRC

(approximately 700 individuals) it also experienced high levels of volatility. In addition, CRI experienced high levels of fentanyl overdoses during or research access.

Silverside Correctional Centre (SCC) was a medium-sized sentenced prison, housing approximately 500 remanded individuals as well as people sentenced to less than two years in custody (Weinrath, 2016). Compared to the remand centres, SCC experienced far less volatility and violence, and officers suggested staff turn-over was less of an issue than at RVRC, which was located nearby. Finally, Harbour Bay Correctional Centre (HBCC) housed approximately 350 sentenced men. HBCC was the oldest, and the most relaxed, of the four institutions. Comparatively, it had an older and more mature group of officers, with a greater percentage of COs who had worked in corrections for over 10 years.

Twenty-one officers identified as women, and the remaining 110 identified as men. Ten participants came from visible minority groups, and the remainder of the participants identified as white. This sample is roughly representative of the officer population in the prisons in question and reflects past research that describes CO populations as overrepresenting white, cisgendered men (Adorjan et al., 2021). I recruited COs in several different ways, ranging from announcements at pre-shift staff briefings to emails sent to all prison staff. Officers commonly signed up or volunteered after having seen members of the broader research team frequent 'their' units for several days, and after having had the opportunity to ask us questions about the study. We also relied on chain referral, or snowball, sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) to recruit additional officers.

My experience as a CO (see Schultz, 2022) assisted in the recruiting process. Having spent five years as a CO at Silverside Correctional Centre[16] before entering graduate school, I

[16] All location and participant names are pseudonyms

was able to quickly build rapport with many officers, especially ones who I knew or had worked with. Consequently, I spent much of my time interviewing and observing COs while the remainder of the research team mostly interviewed incarcerated people. This helped to increase officer participation at each prison we entered, and I interviewed 110 of the 131 participants. Importantly, I also collected a large body of field notes during this process, as I observed banter and interactions between officers which provided insight into how COs employed gender and culture. These notes included comments from officers who did not wish to be recorded; such comments provided support for the themes of this paper above and beyond the 131 interview participants. In these cases, I crafted quick voice and written memos, which I transcribed into detailed fieldnotes after leaving the prison each day. These fieldnotes provided a rich body of contextual data and helped flesh out concepts which COs fleetingly alluded to in their interviews (Maxwell, 2013).

Staff interviews averaged approximately 50 minutes, and I digitally recorded them in cases where officers provided consent. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, the study's principal investigators, another research assistant, and I identified the themes emerging from the data using six randomly drawn transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). We placed these themes into a detailed coding scheme, then tested and tweaked the scheme against other randomly drawn transcripts. Once we had reached between 85 to 90% inter-coder-overlap (thereby ensuring inter-rater reliability), we coded the remaining transcripts line-by-line using Nvivo 11 software (QSR International, 2017).

Findings

Work on gender, sexual orientation and COs often focuses on the experiences of women officers. Women in these data described a complex mix of experiences in their work. Although most told me they felt a sense of belonging in their roles, they also detailed specific forms of extra work they repeatedly had to undertake to prove they could fit the expectation of the CO role (Burdett et al., 2018). Overall, women described experiencing a difficult mix of harassment, lesser eligibility, and gendered interactions between themselves, male officers, and incarcerated men. These themes generally fit within the existing body of contemporary research on women COs (Britton, 2003; Britton & Logan, 2008; Burdett et al., 2018; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). However, all officers—both women and men—discussed the larger role of gendered workplace cultures that shaped the ways they did their work. Irrespective of gender or sexual identity, COs described routinely drawing on gendered organizational lenses, using them as tools to negotiate unsettled moments (Adorjan et al., 2021). Importantly, many participants described such tactics as negative, creating a poisonous hypermasculine workplace environment that caused stress and discomfort for all prison staff.

Theme 1: Setting the expectations

Officers in each of the four prisons we entered suggested that the correctional agency in question was experiencing a radical cultural transition, something that upended ‘old’ ways of doing work. Traditional cultural approaches disappeared as long-standing employees retired, and officers who remained described struggling to maintain long-held cultural values. Ricky (SCC), a seasoned officer with about 15 years’ experience, told me that “You don’t have any COs left. All the old guys are gone. You’re about five years too late for this. Most of our COs have got less

than three years' experience." Retirements, mass hires, hostility toward management, and tension between old and new officers diluted broader workplace cultures, creating a situation where younger staff had little informal guidance on the 'right' way to do the job. As Carrie (RVRC) put it, "The consistency isn't there … They can't nail down that consistency, because management hasn't been demanding it, number one. Ever since that mass hire—people have been getting away with ridiculous things." Experienced officers like Ricky and Carrie expressed concern about the cultural shifts they observed and suggested that new officers had limited opportunity to learn the 'right' way to do the job from experienced peers.

Mass hires and cultural instability impacted how officers did their work. This was particularly the case at RVRC, the largest prison in our study, where officers described a lack of experienced and level-headed mentors among the officer cadre. Officers with a year's experience were considered veterans, even though they often lacked a subtle grasp of jail craft and how to do the job 'right.' Vickie, a 30-year-veteran of SCC, described the results:

> When they were building the new jail, there was this big push to get all these staff. They were looking at hundreds and hundreds of them. I understand that there's been such a big turnover in staff that they've been hired right and left and—I don't know if it's the younger generation or whatever. But I find a lot of the newer staff that come in here have this chip on their shoulder, this power thing, that I'm the boss and I can yell and scream and do whatever I want to you. And you have to listen to me because I'm a CO.

Younger officers lacked stable cultural reference points and sources of informal guidance about the 'right' ways to do prison work. These methods, referred to as "peacekeeping" and "jail craft" in other literature (Liebling, Arnold, et al., 2011; Podmore, 2012), were passed along through informal peer mentorship. Faced with a lack of appropriate mentors, inexperienced staff—the

younger generation Vickie refers to—employed the most accessible tools available to negotiate the prison environment (Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986). Frequently, these tools were organizational logics that provided stereotypical images of what officers 'should' be (Britton, 2003; Britton & Logan, 2008). As Zach, a 20-year veteran of HBCC, described: "I'm sure you can remember being new. It's such a macho mind fuck, and especially for a young guy … You don't know what jail's like until you get here. You just see Prison Break, all those shows."

The importance of gendered organizational lenses, and how officers used them to fill the gaps left by retired culture-holders, became clear when officers discussed their perspectives of the nine-week intensive role-playing and legal training that all full-time staff completed:

> *Jennifer (SCC):* I worked with [an experienced officer] for a bit [before I went through training]. And she goes, 'I'm so glad you worked on the units first, before you went to training. Because training will teach you how to smash cons into concrete, and that's all they want you to do.' And she was so right.

Research on officer training describes how new officers are immediately inculcated into broader cultures of risk and aggression (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2022), and seasoned COs described training as causing as many problems as it solved. Officers like Jennifer criticized the larger philosophy of training, pointing out that they had received two days of tactical communication training, and three weeks of instruction in use-of-force. As Jennifer succinctly puts it, officers described training as learning how to 'smash' incarcerated people, leading to scathing indictments like Cody's (SCC): "Ninety percent of our training, is 'If you talk to them, they're going to figure out where you live and burn your house."

Although experienced officers like Cody and Jennifer expressed disgust with training, their comments specifically detail a moment where they observed the impact of gendered

organizational lenses. Training was a crucial moment in the career trajectory of a CO, where the larger correctional apparatus provided key clues as to the 'right,' or 'proper' way that officers should behave. Training provided an initiation into the organizational culture of prison (Acker, 2012), providing guidance toward the 'right' way to do the job and shaped the larger officer habitus (Lerman & Page, 2012). These moments served to reinforce aggressive, hypermasculine ideas as a core component of how COs should act—something which had problematic consequences:

> *Katherine:* That's how he [Jeremy] described his restraining techniques to me was, 'I've learned how to strangle prisoners today.'
>
> *Jeremy:* And there was a guy on my course, when we finished it, 'I can't wait to go back to the centre. I'm going to go see if this works.'

Jeremy and Katherine, a couple who had worked in corrections in another commonwealth country before moving to Canada and working at SCC, were scathing about how training practices influenced new staff. Young officers, perceiving aggressive training practices as a sort of institutional blessing, were notorious for using overly aggressive tactics against incarcerated people, even when other techniques would have proven more effective. This led to active mistreatment of incarcerated people, and reinforced new and problematic cultural perspectives that quickly became cemented into place (Adorjan et al., 2021).

Theme 2: Fighting to belong

Training implicitly communicated organizational values to officers. Suspicion, aggression, and implicit hyper-masculinity were central components of these logics, and shaped how officers perceived each other (Ricciardelli, 2017). Such ideas influenced the training

regimen in specific ways, prioritizing aggression. Officers suggested this directly influenced cultural outlooks among prison staff:

> *Jared (CRI):* It [fighting] is still part of the job but the fact is, and the problem I ran into a couple months ago, is you don't really get accepted until you get into a 44 [fight]. I struggled for about six months where [coworkers said] "Oh fucking Jared, he's such a bitch," you know, "He didn't fight, he won't fight anybody, he doesn't have the parts."

Officers applied a wide range of symbolism to fighting and use of force, which had little relation to discussions of legitimacy or necessity (Sparks et al., 1996; Symkovych, 2019). Violence acted as a crucial and symbolic tool that allowed officers to prove they were 'good' and 'tough' enough to meet the informal masculinized standard that governed the officer cadre (Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986):

> *Zach (HBCC):* People on our shift, they're busting his [a new recruit's] balls, 'Oh my god, when are you going to pop your Code 44 [fight] cherry, when are you gonna pop your 44 cherry.' Now this kid, his head's already spun just being here. You have this job, you have your uniform, you must be a tough guy. You're trying to live up to that silliness. And then you throw that in the mix now, it's like steroids for their insecurity. Now they're making dumb decisions. They're searching for it. They're creating problems where they don't have to try and get that opportunity to prove [themselves.

Zach, who described prison orientation as a "macho mind fuck" earlier, clearly demonstrates the larger symbolism fighting possessed. Willingness to use violence served as a key symbol that an officer was capable of living up to the hypermasculine gendered expectations of the job, something sign-posted by the explicitly sexualized language—"popping the cherry"—officers used to describe confrontations. Fighting reflected on the 'manhood' of officers, and the goal of

achieving a sufficiently 'good' fight became a hegemonically masculine goal for COs, feeding the insecurity of new staff (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Facing spoken and unspoken expectations that directly challenged their 'manhood,' experienced officers like Zach told me that young men officers regularly made "dumb decisions," searching for fights to prove that they were good enough to be considered a 'real' CO. Success or failure in these encounters was relatively unimportant; instead, fights between officers and incarcerated people served as a crucial and symbolic moment where officers performed their toughness and strength (Goffman, 1959), thereby demonstrating their ability to match up to the larger expectations of what the CO should be (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Cultural symbolism around fighting reflected a broader, masculinized expectation of what a 'good' officer was and impacted how officers accepted or rejected each other. This was particularly clear in cases where officers failed to engage in fights or failed to engage in fights the correct way. COs carefully watched each other, judging individual responses. New officers faced consequences if they failed to engage in an available fight, or engaged in the wrong way:

> *Quinton (RVRC):* [He] did the wrong thing about it and did not jump into the code. He did not go in to go help. Stood on the outside—not knowing what to do. […] Nicest guy in the world, he had absolutely no training, no idea what to do—but because that happened, he's no longer part of the [officer] group. And until something happens where he can prove himself—honestly, if he went out tomorrow, and he got into a code with a guy and got his ass kicked, he'd be in like that. You got your ass kicked? Everybody's coming in to rush and help you out.

On one hand, Quinton describes a young CO he was mentoring. This officer made a significant mistake on his third day: not knowing what he was supposed to do in the case of a violent

confrontation, he did nothing. As a result, his erstwhile coworkers excoriated him, to a point where COs refused to work with him and actively requested his termination. However, on the other hand, Quinton describes his own experience:

> I wasn't immediately liked when I started … I was used to helping people and all that. I wasn't used to officer stuff—especially [the intake unit]. That's the place where guys really got licked on. And that was new for me. I didn't know what to expect, so they didn't know what to do with me. Couple fights in, all of a sudden, I became part of the guys.

Quinton described himself as "weird" when he started, as he was used to "helping people and all that"—values that had little worth in the larger frame of CO culture at RVRC. It was not until he had an extremely violent and public fight with a group of incarcerated men that other officers accepted him as "part of the guys." The fight he describes served as an initiation rite, allowing him to meet the expected standard and join the 'in-group' of officers (Acker, 1990). COs told me that significant, even gratuitous, displays of masculinized hyper-aggression were the only way to redeem themselves after breaching a cultural norm. Fighting became a tool to prove you had the guts, or 'parts' to be a member of the larger CO group (Swidler, 1986), a lesson passed along to new staff searching to prove themselves.

Theme 3: Testing each other

Officers also used highly gendered forms of harassment to test new staff and see if they met the hypermasculine standard expected. This led to a challenging and corrosive workplace culture. As Laura (RVRC) put it, "When I came over from SCC—they're [other officers] like,

'Oh, SCC, you've come to real jail now. Let's treat this person like shit' kinda thing." Officers specifically leaned on masculinized standards to challenge and test new officers:

> *Matthew (SCC):* [When I started] I wasn't really aware of how this place worked. I'm an observer. I come into a place, and I watch—I do what I'm told. I didn't understand when I first came here. And it wasn't until you get a little more senior and you see new people come in that you understand how new people are viewed. Like, I know people called me a flop-dick and stuff like that—I didn't believe it at the time, but I do now … When you come into this place, you expect people to be decent, because you don't know. They don't give people a chance to start.

New officers described experiencing significant levels of harassment and hazing, which tested them on many personal levels. Nor did other officers help new recruits; rather, they watched and judged their response in explicitly masculinized terms:

> *Harry (RVRC):* [Another officer] just antagonized me for three days. Finally at the end of day three, I snapped, I lost it on him. And one thing led to another, we were both in the [manager's] office … I actually got a lot of praise for how I handled it, from everybody. I was shocked, I was like—really? Like, you guys actually, like—like me? They actually said, good work name, we hated that guy too. You're a great CO, don't let him get to you … It was a big thing for me actually.
>
> *Interviewer:* Really! So, you almost got the in group, by putting up—
>
> *Harry:* Yeah. I stood up for myself. I was a "man."

Officers watched young staff, seeing how they responded to the harassment they experienced. As Harry describes, it was not until he "stood up" to the harassment and bullying that his coworkers accepted him (Acker, 1990)—or, as he put it, showed them they "like, liked" him. Fighting back

against bullying, and thereby proving that he was a 'man,' permitted Harry entry into the CO group in new and productive ways, reinforcing the message that masculinized aggression—even toward other officers—was a crucial part of being a 'good' CO. Such performances and interactions often played a role in establishing dominance and social hierarchies.

These forms of harassment served as important tools that officers used to establish and maintain the 'right ways' to do their work. Such actions also ensured that new coworkers met the 'ideal worker' standard that implicitly governed CO actions (Acker, 1990; Britton & Logan, 2008). Hazing allowed experienced officers to communicate the standards expected to new officers and helped them police group membership. As Zach (HBCC) told me, "If you weren't fitting in, you're made to feel extremely unwelcome … [That's our] only way of weeding out the unsuitable people here. Because we're a union environment." Reflecting this, experienced officers—even sympathetic ones—described harassment as a crucial part of the organizational initiation, one that helped to maintain staff safety:

> *Samuel (SCC):* But we do it in the sense of—I think it's to toughen you up. if you can't take it from the guys sitting next to you, are you going to be able to take it from one of these guys and not lose your cool? Not likely. This one guy, they [other officers] used to call him Fuzzy. And at one point, he stood up and said, 'I'm tired of that. I don't want to hear that.' And I was like—bravo! … Stand-up guy—he's trainable.

Other COs described Samuel as one of the most supportive officers at the prison where he worked, relating his mentorship contributions in glowing, positive terms. Yet, he spent a substantial amount of time in our interview justifying harassment as a reasonable and rational way that officers could use to 'toughen' each other up, irrespective of the personal damage such interactions portended. These interactions were distinctly and intentionally masculinized, forcing

officers to measure up to a specific standard. As Samuel points out, the officer nicknamed Fuzzy was able to gain respect once he stood up for himself and pushed back against his harassers in a way that fit the masculinized expectations of the CO role, much like Harry described earlier.

Theme 4: Getting big fast

Gendered perspectives on prison work prioritized aggressive masculinity, supported problematic use-of-force decisions, and promoted harassment. These logics also supported explicit performances of masculine appearance, most notably through problematic steroid-using behaviours. As Ricardo (SCC) told me off recorder,

> Steroid [use is] so bad, they used to call it the [X] shift diet, because there were so many people doing it. There was even a story that they were going to hire an undercover cop as a CO to try and bust it, it was so bad. […] Someone got busted for dealing, someone else ratted, and there was a bunch of fights in the parking lot and stuff over it (Field note, November 2016).

Steroid use among officers was an open secret among officers and managers in each of the four institutions, but officers at RVRC described it as a particularly common practice. While possession of steroids was not illegal, trafficking was, and individuals often denied or obfuscated use to avoid inquiries from managers, police, or others. Consequently, while few officers admitted to personal use, many described seeing coworkers use illicit substances to get 'big,' usually with the goal of fitting in. Some older officers recognized the deeper problems being 'big' created and attempted to police younger officers' actions. Richard, an officer at SCC with over 30 years of experience, related his conversation with a younger officer from RVRC:

> [I was talking to a new officer, and] he was telling me, 'Yeah, when you come to this prison, you feel like you have to fit in, so you start using steroids. But ain't I amazing now?' [*performs an arm flex*]. I looked at him, and I said, 'You fucking retard.' He's like, 'What?' And I said it again—'You're a retard. All that muscle—it's fake strength.' (Field note, December 2016).

Steroid use served two purposes for officers. First, as Richard implies here, steroid use allowed COs to 'fit in' to the aggressive, macho officer culture. Faheem, also speaking off recorder, told me that "new people come on, they feel pressured, they want to fit in, so they start doing steroids as well to fit in." Steroid-built 'fake strength' may have been performative, as Richard mentions, but being 'big' allowed officers to embody masculinity in obvious and visible ways, thereby allowing officers to fit the larger gendered expectation of their role (Acker, 1989, 2012; Britton, 1997; Maycock, 2022; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). The only unusual aspect of this excerpt is that Richard criticized this officer to his face, something his experience and social capital permitted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Second, officers viewed steroids as a tool that allowed them to maintain control of the prison environment more effectively, by ensuring that they were 'big' and muscular. Officers believed that being 'big' would make incarcerated people hesitate before assaulting an officer. Tim, a five-year veteran at RVRC, spoke for many officers when he candidly defended steroid use:

> *Tim (RVRC):* [There's] a ton of steroids here. Law enforcement—there's going to be steroids, guys feel they want to be bigger and stronger, because they're going to have to fight guys at some point, right? Is it heavy on the tactical side? Maybe […] Do I have a problem with the tactical team using? No. I wanted the biggest, meanest—excuse my

> language—motherfuckers to destroy, to do whatever needs to be done when the tactical team has to come in.

Being 'big' is a consistent theme within literature on prison masculinities, and women officers' comparative lack of physical size is a commonly cited as a reason for why they cannot meet the 'ideal' standard of being a CO (Burdett et al., 2018; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As Maycock has put it, "Muscularity and size are key aspects of being seen as 'hard' and subsequently being left alone within prison" (2022, p. 4), something examined in the context of incarcerated men but not conclusively shown to impact prison staff. Likewise, maintaining control of the prison environment is one of the strongest consistent themes in CO literature (Schultz et al., 2021). However, the organizational lenses at play meant that officers justified significant levels of force to support this point. Tim's comments here are a good example and were representative of many officers' perspectives: steroid use was justifiable, as it allowed officers to increase their firm control over the prison environment. And, by pointing to the inherent risk and masculinity of their 'law enforcement' job, officers were able to address cognitive dissonance that might emerge from their use of steroids (Hoberman, 2017; Tracy & Scott, 2006).

Officers suggested that the broader organization of corrections was aware of widespread steroid use. Dan, a high-level manager, told me as much as we discussed RVRC staff:

> *Dan (SCC):* Unfortunately, sadly, in numerous enforcement fields, where you've got these A-type personalities, and then all of a sudden you start beefing up on steroids, which are personality changing … You can't be putting synthetic chemicals into your body, and expect that you're not going to have some form of adverse reaction to your personality.

Although officers in each prison used steroids, the cultural change and instability at RVRC contributed to a particular concentration of use there. Officers suggested that the lack of cultural arbiters meant that gendered logics served as crucial tools new staff used to interpret their work. (Swidler, 1986). Tacit actions on the part of managers and administrators supported these claims, as notorious steroid-users at this institution were provided with promotions and status symbols, subtly reinforcing using behaviours (Hoberman, 2017). One of the most obvious ways this occurred was through selection to the tactical response team, which responded to distinctive threat situations—for instance, hostage takings and weapons complaints. Officers described 'tac team' members as an elite cadre, embodying everything it meant to be a 'good' CO. Team membership, therefore, was a coveted status symbol. As Jason described it,

> *Jason (RVRC):* I'm like stalemated 'cause I'm not on the tac team, so I gotta get on the Tac Team. I tried when I first came over here, and no-one knew me. because it's like a boy's club, right? But you have to make—it's like *Survivor*,[17] man. You gotta make all these alliances, and friends, and hang out with people. Instead of being like, "Na, he's good at the job," y'know?

Tac team membership was a goal for officers, especially men who embodied hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Steroid use was rampant among tac team members—so much so that officers perceived the institution as deliberately, albeit quietly, rewarding use. Ricky, who spoke off recorder about former coworkers at RVRC, put it this way: "They reinforce it: all their tac team guys are on juice, and they're the ones who get hired for overtime and the like. It's fucked" (field note, November 2016). Because the institution typically looked the other way on steroid use unless officers committed an egregious breach of protocols,

[17] A reality television show, where contestants make alliances with other competitors and vote each other off the literal or figurative island where the contest takes place.

officers viewed performance enhancers as an acceptable part of the job, something that could potentially lead to a meaningful and symbolic status within their work. Consequently, the institutional attitude toward steroid use served to reinforce the aggressive and hypermasculine organizational culture of the prison overall (Britton, 2003; Hoberman, 2017; Swidler, 1986).

Theme 5: Sexual identity

Expectations of what an officer 'should' be directly shaped the experiences of non-cisgendered officers (Adorjan et al., 2021). Officers described specific differences in how they perceived non-binary officers, drawing on broader organizational logics to justify their perspectives (Britton, 1997). This was particularly obvious when officers described sexual identity among their coworkers. People who identified as lesbian were relatively common in the CO cadre. As Stephen put it, "Lots of lesbians [work here], which, it's known that—I mean, I don't know if it's known. But it's urban legend that they're drawn to jobs in uniform, whether it be military or masculine jobs." Many officers noted this, echoing and reproducing stereotypical portraits of lesbian women as being attracted to masculine jobs (Colvin, 2020; Mennicke et al., 2018). Such stereotypes were used as ways for lesbian people to meet the 'ideal worker' standard that shaped implicit views of what COs should be (Acker, 1990; Britton & Logan, 2008). However, as problematic as these framings were, most officers framed lesbian people as a 'normal' part of correctional work, repeatedly mentioning their perceived ability to meet 'masculine' aspects of the CO role. Consequently, harassment of lesbian people typically took quieter and subtler forms (Mallory et al., 2014; Mennicke et al., 2018).

Gay men were not able to access similar perceptions of normalcy, as their sexual identity transgressed the valorized hypermasculinity underpinning 'ideal' CO stereotypes. Consequently,

gay COs challenged the hypermasculine status quo of officer organizational culture (Mennicke et al., 2018; Ricciardelli, 2017). Nick, an openly gay officer, described his experience in stark terms:

> *Nick (SCC):* I talked to a police commissioner right before I got into corrections and I was like "I don't know what to do, like I'm not flamboyant […]." He was like "Hide it, as best as you can for as long as you can, you hide it." So, I lied. I lied through my face. I didn't have a choice. I was terrified. Absolutely mortified. Like, I've been open since I was nineteen years old. […] Lesbians, they're everywhere, rampant at [every institution]. The men, they're not there. How many [gay] men have you worked with?
>
> *Interviewer:* You're the first one who's ever admitted it to me.
>
> *Nick:* Exactly. […] Select people did know and I knew it was going to get around and eventually, I just kind of said "Fuck it, let's do it." I got called a faggot, walking down the [hallways]. Nobody would work with me. People refused to work with me.

Nick and Josh, another openly gay officer, described experiencing significant pressure from coworkers for their perceived failure to meet the 'requirements' for being a CO. Both Nick and Josh had worked at RVRC at the beginning of careers and had faced significant levels of harassment. Their identity represented a challenge to the heteronormative masculine organizational culture of the institution, leading to homophobia and hazing from other officers. Unlike the harassment described earlier, Nick's experience did not have any productive justification attached to it; rather than 'toughening up' officers to prepare them for the job, the abuse he faced was directly intended to eliminate 'unsuitable outsiders' who could not meet the masculinized expectations associated with being an officer (Acker, 1990).

Tellingly, Nick's experience occurred at RVRC, and both he and Josh moved to SCC to escape harassment. While neither officer suggested SCC officers were perfect—many officers discussed experiencing hazing upon starting work at SCC—both Nick and Josh described SCC's culture as more stable, and easier to negotiate. SCC had a significant proportion of sentenced prisoners, who officers described as calmer and less volatile than the remanded individuals held at RVRC. Consequently, officer/prisoner relationships were less hostile. SCC also had a much higher proportion of older, experienced officers, who were able to teach new staff the 'right' way to do the job and relate to coworkers. Consequently, aggressive hypermasculinity had less salience in shaping in-group rituals than it did at RVRC (Acker, 1990; Britton & Logan, 2008). Likewise, the smaller size of the prison meant that managers and officers had more opportunities to develop personal relationships, leading to informal problem-solving and more productive uses of discretion. All these factors meant that hypermasculine behavioural codes—while still prevalent—played a less central role in how officers employed and interpreted culture (Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986).

Despite this, cisgender officers continued to carefully watch their gay counterparts to determine whether they were doing the job 'right.' This usually meant living up to a strict and masculinized code, enacted through personal presentation. The way that these officers carried themselves was crucial, as Johnathan described:

> *Johnathan (SCC):* [another CO's] son is like flamboyantly gay. But apparently, he wants to join corrections. And so [the CO's] talking to people like Josh and Nick, asking them how do you think it would go, like my son wanting to join? They're like no, no. And not because he's gay, it's because he's very flamboyant about it. […] Josh and Nick, you walk by them, have a cup of coffee with them and you wouldn't know the difference.

> They're, quote-unquote, a normal person. But if you have something who's flamboyant and flaunts it, that makes it uncomfortable.

The deep-set heteronormativity of the CO culture is particularly clear in this excerpt. Officers viewed non-binary coworkers such as Nick and Josh with suspicion and discomfort, perceiving them as outsiders who breached cultural norms around sexual identity (Britton, 1997). This was even the case for Johnathan, who worked closely with both officers and described them both as personal friends. However, because Josh and Nick presented in relatively masculinized terms, they were able to fit in enough to function among their coworkers—something the 'flamboyant' man Johnathan describes here would ostensibly not be able to accomplish.

Gay officers described performing specific actions and tasks to fit into the larger organizational logics of prison. Nick and Josh had to live up to an explicitly masculinized standard at every step, or face expulsion from the larger CO group. Even a momentary failure to be a "quote-unquote normal person," as Jonathan euphemistically describes in his excerpt above, influenced how gay officers were perceived in relation to the larger masculinized organizational logics. Such judgements also extended to how gay officers reacted to harassment and inappropriate comments:

> *Nick:* It's good because nobody understands, like nobody sees it like that [as harassment]. My mom for instance: I remember when, I couldn't tell anyone and she'd be like 'well, call human resources.' I'm like, that's not the way it works, not in corrections. They [people outside corrections] don't get that you can't tell people.
>
> *Interviewer:* It's the hyper-masculine 'you got to be the real man' thing.
>
> *Nick:* And that's the thing. If you're not, then you're a little bitch.

Nick and Josh both suggested that dealing with coworkers' expectations and stereotypes was a significant part of their day-to-day work, and represented a significant, added form of emotional labour (Britton, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). Often, such labour was comparatively minor, taking the form of micro-aggressions and jokes. But, as Nick implies in this excerpt, a crucial part of 'dealing with' harassment and derogatory treatment was being 'tough' and 'manning up.' Being 'tough' when dealing with harassment was even more important for gay officers than it was for new officers. Although they faced significantly higher levels of harassment and aggression from their coworkers than any other officer I interviewed, they simultaneously perceived themselves as unable to access formal complaint systems. As Nick implies in his comments above, complaining about harassment would have labelled gay officers as "a little bitch," irrespective of whether their complaints were justified. Through this, the CO cadre forced gay officers to repeatedly demonstrate their ability to meet the unwritten masculinized standards which governed the CO role, while also doing far higher amounts of emotional labour than anyone else in the institution (Hochschild, 1983).

Discussion

Masculinity is well-established as one of the most important factors shaping CO behaviour, especially when it comes to understanding mistreatment women officers face (Burdett et al., 2018; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020; Zimmer, 1986). And researchers have described the crucial role that gendered organizational logics play in constructing and shaping the broader organizational culture of prisons as organizations (Britton, 2003; Britton & Logan, 2008; Zimmer, 1987). However, gendered organizational logics' role as a *tool used by officers to negotiate moments of cultural uncertainty* is less clear (Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986). This

paper builds on previous research by suggesting that COs implicitly and explicitly use these logics, especially hypermasculine stereotypes around what an 'ideal worker' looks like, as a tool to negotiate unsettled moments within the broader organizational culture (Adorjan et al., 2021).

The generational transition that all four prisons experienced during our research led to dramatic cultural shifts. Old ways of doing prison work were lost, as experienced and respected officers who had historically passed along the tenants of CO occupational cultures retired. New and inexperienced COs leaned on gendered organizational logics to fill these gaps, as institutional training regimes sent implicit messages about the risky nature of correctional work and tacitly approved masculinized aggression as a baseline for officer behaviour (Ferdik, 2018; Symkovych, 2019). The larger masculine organizational lenses communicated by training and promotional practices had long-lasting impacts, baking problematic and aggressive attitudes into officers from the earliest stage of their orientation (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2022).

This was particularly the case when it came to fighting and steroid use. Social pressures around steroid use have long been an open secret among law enforcement personnel (Hoberman, 2017), and this paper supports long-held suspicions around the connections between masculinity, institutional culture, and steroids. Stereotypes about what a CO should look like, exacerbated by cultural values highlighting the risks of prison work (Ferdik, 2018), created a tacit reward system reinforcing steroid use from both an institutional and cultural perspective. COs received active rewards for being 'big;' health consequences, as well as stereotypical ''roid rages' against incarcerated people which sometimes cost officers their jobs, were framed as minor, manageable, and individual risks (Hoberman, 2017). Officers even justified such actions as 'good,' in that they allowed officers to achieve implicit organizational goals through hypermasculine manhood acts (Britton, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

These messages reproduced hypermasculine expression as the 'normal' and 'right' way to do prison work, creating distinctive forms of tension in the daily practices of COs (Britton & Logan, 2008). The organizational logics of prison work also manifested themselves in officer attitudes toward fighting, and toward each other. Researchers have sometimes framed aggressive attitudes among COs as a sort of chicken-or-the-egg dilemma: does prison work attract individuals who are naturally hyper-masculine and aggressive, or does prison work make individuals more hyper-masculine and aggressive? There is little doubt that the masculinized nature of prison work self-selects individuals who are attracted to the volatile nature of prison work (Stout et al., 2018)—but this paper also suggests that the organizational cultures shaping prison work ensure that officers place cultural weight behind hypermasculine aggression. This is especially clear in (to use Zach's words) the 'macho mind fuck' young officers experience. If officers choose to de-escalate rather than escalate a confrontation, peers will question their decision, potentially impacting their cultural standing. As a result, fighting and aggression becomes a crucial tool in helping officers to 'prove' they meet the unwritten expectations of their work, even when officers have little desire to fight (Acker, 1990; Adorjan et al., 2021).

The influence of such logics is particularly clear in the experience of non-binary officers. Gay COs described extra forms of work they do to prove they 'belong,' outlining specific masculinized frameworks that dramatically impact their experiences. Demonstrating their ability to 'fit' in the macho CO culture represented a distinctive challenge for gay men, as other officers were on the watch for any sort of 'flamboyant' behaviour which would have demonstrated that the officers in question did not fit into the larger cultural milieu. In this case, gay officers drew on organizational logics in distinctive ways to 'prove' they belonged. For instance, as Nick describes, gay officers were more likely to put up with harassment than they were to report it, to

prevent any insinuation that their behaviour was not in line with the broader organizational lenses at play (Britton, 2003; Zimmer, 1986).

Culture, gender, and sexual identity interact in meaningful ways in each of the themes in this paper. When faced with cultural instability, officers leaned on gendered organizational lenses, using them as tools to shape their perspectives and actions (Swidler, 1986). The synergetic relationship between culture and masculinity sidelined other possible approaches to prison work (Tait, 2011), meaning that presenting as a hyper-masculine 'tough guy' became a primary tool officers used to navigate instability. The problematic culture at RVRC is clear evidence of this: higher levels of uncertainty and cultural churn led directly to increased masculinized presentation, as officers sought landmarks to navigate the uncertainty they experienced (Adorjan et al., 2021). Problematic gendered cultures and harassment of non-binary officers resulted from larger structural shifts in the organization logics that shaped the prisons in question, rather than emerging as a general feature of prisons as has been argued (Sabo et al., 2001; Sykes, 1958).

Conclusion

Examining the impact of gendered organizational lenses on officer cultures is a complex but important task. Understanding how officers employ these logics is crucial, as it provides evidence about how COs draw on stereotypes of gender and sexual identity and allow these views to be sedimented into lasting cultural milieus (Adorjan et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986). Examining the detailed sites where officers draw on such logics allows us to reframe the role of masculinized codes, as well. Rather than viewing gender as an individual accomplishment, this approach allows us to look at how gender acts as a structuring force in prison, while

simultaneously serving as a crucial tool that individual officers employ when trying to find the 'right' way to do their work (Britton, 2003; Swidler, 1986).

The process described here has problematic consequences. The officers I interviewed employed these logics so extensively that hyper-masculinized codes became an inescapable part of the work environment, something demonstrated in the devastating treatment faced by gay officers. In this case, the unsettled cultural moment we encountered during our research reified and strengthened the most problematic aspects of correctional work, as officers drew on masculinized stereotypes so extensively that they knew no other way to do the job (Adorjan et al., 2021). However, this also drives home the importance of the topic: by identifying how officers draw on gender and sexual identity as both a tool and as a structuring element of prison work, we can identify the source of problematic cultures. While this is a difficult process, it may also provide new lenses for proposing and shaping change in positive ways.

Paper 2: Correctional officers and the use of force as an organizational behavior

Abstract

Over the past 30 years, bureaucratic managerialism has reshaped how prison staff maintain order, replacing coercive, 'old-school' measures with policies and graduated disciplinary models. While these shifts have successfully reduced how often correctional officers (COs) use force as a disciplinary measure against incarcerated people, the implementation of managerialist approaches disguises deep problems in how use of force policies are interpreted and employed. Drawing on 131 semi-structured interviews with Canadian COs, I show how managers and prison staff interpret and negotiate policies to justify using force to maintain order. COs frame policies and management supervision as checks on their actions, but also suggest that inconsistencies in policy implementation reduce the credibility of managerial restrictions. These inconsistencies, along with tacit bargains between managers and COs, facilitate specific use of force strategies by COs. These strategies, which I define as 'construction' and 'outsourcing,' allow COs to justify using coercive force. I conclude by discussing the broader organizational implications of these findings.

KEYWORDS Correctional officers, use of force, prison management, policy

Introduction

Violence by prison staff against incarcerated people is a feature of prison literature going back to the foundation of the modern penitentiary (Garland, 1990). However, the last 30 years have seen major shifts in how coercive force is employed. In the 1980s, coercive force was a regular feature of correctional officer (or CO) work (Marquart, 1986a). In contrast, modern managerialist frameworks have reduced the discretionary power COs possess, and bureaucratic restrictions carefully shape how, when, and why officers employ force. Use of force models, which place strict limits on what is and is not permissible, ensure that uses of force in prison are legitimate and (legally) justified (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2013; Meško & Hacin, 2020). These models allow administrators to defend the use of force in prison as reasonable, with no connection to historic abuses (Dolovich, 2020).

Bureaucratic frameworks treat violence by prison staff as an aberration and suggest that modern examples of staff brutality have their source in individual corruption or poisonous workplace cultures (Higgins et al., 2022; Rembert et al., 2023; Ross, 2013). While influential, this perspective blinds us to how force fits into prisons' modern organizational framework and disguises the specific mechanisms COs use to justify coercion. Consequently, while we know that violence against incarcerated people remains a significant problem, we have little insight into the structures and mechanisms that reproduce these behaviors (Novisky et al., 2022).

I discuss these issues by drawing on interviews with 131 Canadian COs to analyze the following questions: 1. What role does physical coercion play in shaping how correctional officers maintain order and perform their duties? And 2. How do bureaucratic structures in prisons interact with sanctioned and unsanctioned use of force by prison staff? In answering

these questions, I challenge frameworks that describe coercive force as an individual behavior and demonstrate how force reflects broader organizational characteristics and cultures.

Literature Review

Violence, use of force, and coercion are complex topics, and are subject to extensive debate (Terrill, 2014). The involuntary nature of incarceration means that scholars use coercion as both an analytical lens for specific use of force incidents (Marquart, 1986a), and as a broader critique of incarceration (Wacquant, 2001). Here, I focus on how COs employ force as means of institutional, disciplinary control, intended to shape behavior. Recognizing the complexity of the discussion, I employ Terrill's (2005) definition of coercion as "acts that threaten or inflict physical harm on citizens, including forms of both verbal and physical force" (p. 115). With reference to this definition, I employ "physical coercion" and "use of force" interchangeably.

Prisons and physical coercion have a closely intertwined history. Violence was a primary means of maintaining control in early penitentiaries, something that remained central to prison operations into the late 20th century (Dolovich, 2020; Rubin & Reiter, 2018). Marquart (1986a, 1986b) described the specific mechanisms of how COs used violence to control prisons, suggesting that incarcerated people who "frequently broke the rules or engaged in serious violations … were unofficially controlled by the guards through verbal intimidation and various degrees of physical punitive force" (Marquart, 1986a, p. 350). Officers used a carefully laddered set of coercive measures as disciplinary interventions. COs began with verbal threats, which steadily increased through low-end "tune ups" and "attention getters" to more extreme "ass whippings" and severe beatings (Marquart, 1986a, pp. 351–354). Institutional managers tried to

intervene in these actions but were rarely successful, as officer solidarity and insufficient surveillance meant that COs were usually able to neutralize brutality investigations.

Forty years later, Marquart's work remains the only account that details the mechanisms around how COs engage with use of force decisions (Rembert et al., 2023; see Symkovich, 2019, for a partial exception). Liebling (2000) famously assessed the prison officers of this period as "representing everything that is dangerous and unpalatable about the use of power" (p. 338), and contemporary observers often frame Marquart's account as an outdated, unsavory way of doing prison work, something standing in contrast to modern, bureaucratic institutions run under managerialist principles. As Worley et al. (2022) state, "it is likely that neither the officer subculture nor prison administration openly embraces violence as a means to control inmates, as in the past" (p. 4). Shifts in how power is organized in the prison have driven this change (Liebling et al., 2011), as managerialist practices now reduce the power COs like Marquart's participants once wielded (Liebling, 2006). Large bodies of policies script the expected response to every aspect of daily prison life, removing decision-making authority from front-line COs and centralizing it with bureaucratic figures away from the day-to-day interactions of prison work (Bennett, 2023; Liebling et al., 2011). Discretion is a part of this picture (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), but by creating a professional, bureaucratic management philosophy that ensures front-line COs follow policy, prison administrators have centralized power and eliminated many unsavory aspects of prison work (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2013).

Managerialism has revolutionized the organizational cultures of North American and European prisons, something we can see in the literature on how COs manage prisons. Research from the 1980s highlights brutal and coercive practices as a routine feature of maintaining order (Kauffman, 1988; Marquart, 1986a; Worley et al., 2022). Such practices are absent in newer

literature, which focuses on how prison staff carefully negotiate policy rules and regulations to maintain institutional control (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). Part of this gap is due to limited official data on use of force (Rembert et al., 2023), but research suggests shifts in how COs do their work play an equally substantial role. Liebling et al. (2011) describes modern CO work as peacekeeping, a form of prison management based on institutional legitimacy, communication, and relationship-building. Crawley (2004) describes power in prisons as "a negotiated affair, with prison officers having much less power than is often pretended, and prisoners rather more" (pp. 1-2, emphasis in original). And Ricciardelli's (2019) research with Canadian COs details how officers carefully tailor their actions to fit management expectations, even when they resent such intrusions.

Even negative descriptions of CO culture and use of force highlight the influence of managerialism. Griffin's (2002) research with Arizona jail officers suggests that supervisory quality plays a role in shaping officer use of force decisions (see also Cook & Lane, 2013; Turney & Conner, 2019). More recently, Higgins et al. (2022) suggest that Kentucky COs engage in danger-based othering to create negative portraits of incarcerated people. Their participants make threats of violence against incarcerated people, using dangerousness to maintain a "warped badge of honor" (2022, pp. 2–3). While lurid, Higgins et al. conclude that such narratives are at least partially cultural performance, as officers describe management controls as restricting their ability to carry out threats. The authors conclude that CO cultures are a major cause of official mistreatment (see also Bharara et al., 2014), framing such cultures as counter to the broader managerial ethos of the prison system.

This literature shows how managerialism has reshaped the strategies COs use to keep order in prisons. Research on order maintenance rarely discusses coercion, and instead focuses

on how COs use policy-approved "soft power" measures (Crewe, 2011), even when making discretionary decisions (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). Research on CO use of force further highlights this shift: in contrast to the normalized and tactical role of violence in Marquart's (1986a, 1986b) work, modern research primarily discusses CO use of force as brutal, corrupt, and criminal, even when it is common (Novisky et al., 2022; Rembert et al., 2023; Worley et al., 2022). Reflecting this, most observers now describe CO violence as emerging from individual characteristics such as individual "bad apples," poisonous work cultures, and officer corruption (Carter, 2020; Higgins et al., 2022).

Framing CO use of force as an individual decision that violates the managerialist ethos of modern prisons blinds us to two crucial points. First, CO excessive force against incarcerated people is common, so much so that recent work has described it as "an inevitable feature" of incarceration (Rembert et al., 2023, p. 105). Describing these actions as deviant is accurate (Novisky et al., 2022), but limits the scope of our analysis, and leaves us unable to recognize nuanced mechanisms officers use to engage with use of force decisions. In consequence, Marquart's (1986a) insightful but outdated research remains our only portrait of how COs justify problematic uses of force in their daily practice, something that complicates efforts to interrupt and prevent the mistreatment of incarcerated people (Rembert et al, 2023; Worley et al., 2022). Second, framing CO use of force as an individual decision allows prison administrators to escape scrutiny around how organizational decisions shape coercion. While we understand that structural features of prison impact use of force decisions (Novisky et al., 2022), the specifics of exactly what 'structural features' mean are fuzzy, limiting our insights into how they shape use of force decisions. In consequence, we possess no cohesive picture of how force fits into the broader organizational framework of prison (Wooldredge, 2020).

Methods

I draw on 131 CO interviews conducted with the University of Alberta Prisons Project, a qualitative research study conducted in Western Canadian provincial prisons. Provincial prisons consist of remand and sentenced institutions and house the largest proportion of incarcerated people in Canada (Malakieh, 2020). Sentenced institutions hold adults serving less than two years in custody. Remand institutions house people awaiting trial, ranging from individuals accused of nuisance offences to individuals accused of murder and terrorism.

Participants worked at four different institutions. Rocky View Remand Center (RVRC) held approximately 1,700 remanded men and women, while Crestwood Remand Institution (CRI) held around 800. Silverside Correctional Centre (SCC) held about 500 men and women, about two-thirds of whom were remanded. Finally, Harbor Bay Correctional Centre (HBCC), held approximately 350 sentenced men. These institutions are representative of Western Canadian institutions in terms of size, population, and programming. Fifty-five participants worked at RVRC and CRI, and the remaining 76 worked at SCC and HBCC. This represented approximately 5% of officers at the remand centers, and about 20% of officers at the sentenced prisons. Ten officers were BIPOC, 21 were women, and the remainder were white men, a breakdown which approximates the demographic profile of COs working in these institutions. Service time ranged from 40 years to less than a year and averaged about ten years. The sentenced institutions had more long-serving officers, while the remand centers experienced high levels of staff turnover and had more young officers. Eight participants were managers, and the remainder were line staff.

I conducted these interviews as part of a larger research team, consisting of two principal investigators and between four and six research assistants (see Bucerius et al., 2023; Schultz et

al., 2021). Our research agreement granted us access to each institution for between two and four weeks. We recruited officers in several different ways. First, administrators sent mass emails to every CO, inviting all staff to participate. Second, we made in-person announcements at pre-shift "muster" meetings, where we again invited all staff to participate and handed out sign-up sheets. Many COs were wary, and these methods had limited success. Our most successful recruitment strategy came through a version of chain referral, or "snowball" sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). After several days of getting to know us, officers became more willing to speak to us, and often agreed to participate when we asked them directly, or when another officer vouched for us.

Most interviews took place inside the prison, in empty offices or on unit control panels. Others took place in nearby coffee shops. We conducted most interviews one-on-one, but 16 interviews at unit panels involved between two and five officers. These interviews, labelled as 'group interviews,' represent 37 of the 131 total participants. As Higgins et al. (2022) have shown, the presence of others did not seem to prevent COs from reflecting on sensitive topics. Rather, some of these interviews provided deep insight into use of force, supporting Kvale's suggestion that "In the case of sensitive taboo topics, the group interaction may facilitate expression of viewpoints usually not accessible" (2007, p. 72). Interviews averaged about 50 minutes, were digitally recorded, and were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

We used a generalized prompt guide to ensure consistency between interviews. Questions included, "Tell us a little bit about your job responsibilities and work history in the correctional system", and "What are best practices for prison management?" Interviews were wide-ranging: while each CO answered the original prompts, officers also discussed topics relating to their personal experience, expertise, and interest (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because officers' perspectives shaped the interviews, we collected data on subjects we had not originally

anticipated (see also Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). How to effectively maintain control of the prison was a consistent theme that emerged from these discussions (Rubin & Reiter, 2018), and COs often framed use of force as a key tactic, leading to the themes presented here.

My role within the team was slightly different than that of my colleagues, as I worked as a CO at SCC for five years before entering graduate school and knew officers at each institution. My lived insight had limitations, as I was not able to rely on naivete when asking questions, something qualitative researchers have described as a methodological strength (Bucerius, 2013). But my connections allowed me to build rapport with officers when discussing sensitive topics such as use of force, and helped me recruit managers, a notoriously risk-adverse group (Rembert et al., 2023). Given my positionality, I interviewed 110 of the 131 participants. Other team members interviewed the remaining 21 COs.

My status also allowed me to interact with officers in back-stage settings (Goffman, 1959), such as in offices and lunchrooms. It also allowed me to conduct semi-ethnographic "deep hanging out" (Geertz, 1998) in non-prison settings, as COs invited me to play ice hockey and attend events such as weekend brunches and Christmas parties. As is common in ethnographic research (Bucerius, 2013, 2014), I introduced myself as a researcher when I first entered these spaces, and explained I was conducting long-term participant observation. Officers who knew me were often eager to chat, while COs who did not know me took the opportunity to question me about the broader research project, and sometimes signed up for formal interviews after speaking to me. In these spaces, officers casually discussed use of force incidents, analyzing colleagues' decisions, and informally assessing whether they were appropriate ("smart") or inappropriate ("stupid"). These conversations were not always drawn from representative groups of officers but provided detailed insight into broader cultural mores around force. When ethically

appropriate, I created short voice and written memos of conversations and used these cues to recreate discussions in fieldnotes after leaving the setting. These fieldnotes, which cumulatively measure over 190 single-spaced pages, provided secondary participant observation data I use to triangulate interview themes (Delamont, 2004).

Given my positionality, the study PIs and I agreed that a co-developed coding scheme was crucial to help establish analytical validity. I therefore worked with the PIs and another team member to code a set of six randomly chosen interview transcripts. Drawing on grounded theory principles (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we individually read each interview and identified major themes emerging out of the data (Charmaz, 2014). We compared our results, adjusting our definitions to fit competing readings of the data. We then tested the adjusted scheme against randomly chosen interview transcripts, and tweaked definitions until we consistently achieved between 85 to 90% coder overlap. Through this process, we established interrater consistency and reliability. We then coded each transcript line-by-line using Nvivo 12 software, resulting in codes on "Violence by COs against incarcerated people" (n = 68, 241 references), "Managing units by unofficial rules" (n=85, 387 references), and "Managing units with cleaners " (n=49, 110 references). As is common in qualitative research, the quotes used are representative of larger themes.

Findings

COs suggested institutional culture impacted how they perceived use of force. Twenty-three officers had worked at more than one of the institutions, and detailed specific differences between the institutional cultures. They described the remand centers as volatile and unstable, and suggested officers there had a harsh and punitive attitude toward incarcerated people, even

though they were awaiting trial and were therefore legally innocent. In contrast, COs at SCC and HBCC described a relaxed and casual approach, though SCC also held several hundred remanded individuals. Remand staff highlighted the instability and volatility of their institutions as evidence that they did 'real' prison work, critiquing the 'soft' approaches they saw at SCC and HBCC. In turn, COs at SCC and HBCC criticized remand officers' 'hard-ass' approaches as unnecessary, pointing out the success of peacekeeping measures they employed (Liebling et al., 2011). These differences impacted the occupational cultures around use of force in noticeable ways. Remand COs were involved in fights more frequently and told me they rarely had time to build relationships with people on their units. They also described using force as a routine and expected part of their job, something that reflects research with U.S. jail COs (Cook & Lane, 2013; Griffin, 2002; Turney & Conner, 2019). In contrast, officers from the sentenced prisons suggested they usually had time to build relationships with incarcerated individuals, and the cultures of these centers meant that COs defaulted to discretionary peacekeeping options before using force (Ibsen, 2013; Liebling et al., 2011). The cultural differences between these spaces were notable, and shaped day-to-day use of force decisions (Cook & Lane, 2013; Higgins et al., 2022). Unsurprisingly, HBCC and SCC had far fewer use of force incidents overall.

Crucially however, the differences between remand and sentenced institutions largely evaporated when officers discussed how they used force as a disciplinary measure, as opposed to describing random or unavoidable incidents. COs across the data employed culture in similar ways (Higgins et al., 2022), and when they discussed how force helped them maintain institutional control, officers in each prison described using force thoughtfully and intentionally, with specific goals in mind. Officers from remand centers described force as the most useful tool they possessed to maintain order, while COs from sentenced prisons suggested that coercive

forms of "hard power" silently underpinned the success of "soft power" and peacekeeping options in their institutions (Crewe, 2011). Whether or not an incarcerated individual was awaiting trial and legally considered innocent, or sentenced and legally considered guilty, never entered these discussions. Rather, officers leaned on broader cultures of control (Rubin & Reiter, 2018) to justify force as a disciplinary measure. COs in remand centers used these tactics more frequently, but officers described disciplinary force as an organizational behavior functioning in similar ways in each prison.

Bureaucratic responsibilitization

COs described control and order maintenance as the raison d'etre of their work (Rubin & Reiter, 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022; Schultz et al., 2021). Importantly, when officers discussed the specific techniques they used to maintain order, they started by listing "soft power" control measures such as active listening, discretion, and managing minor privileges (Crewe, 2011). In combination, these tactics were the most common intervention officers employed, reflecting a broad range of literature on order maintenance (Ibsen, 2013; Liebling et al., 2011; Meško & Hacin, 2020). Haggerty and Bucerius' (2021) article, drawn from the same data, details these approaches.

Prison administrators incentivized such measures by ensuring COs followed regulations and took institutional rehabilitative goals seriously. Shane (30 years, HBCC), a high-level manager, described the thought process motivating management actions:

> The traditional role of the correctional officer is obsolete really. And it's no longer appropriate for officers in my view to take the position that they're just guards … twenty-first century corrections demands a different profile of officer than previously. And that's

> because of the nature of the business, the expectations of the business, the profile of the inmates … It's everything to this type of environment.

Shane discussed techniques he used to speed the evolution of officer attitudes toward "twenty-first century corrections." COs were unionized, meaning that administrators could not unilaterally discipline staff, but managers effectively used a carrot-and-stick approach to promotions and opportunities, rewarding staff who fell in line with the organizational vision and subtly undermining union messages. Technology played a role in this, as Dan, a high-level manager at SCC, described:

> I do video audits here as well, quarterly, where I review eight hours of video from a living unit and make sure we're abiding by policy and procedures. Rounds, searches, inspections, movements, all that stuff … We are trying to educate staff through video and coaching with their own shift managers. Every time there is a [fight] or use of restraints, I review it … Video is here. If you use it properly, it'll be your best friend. If you don't use it properly, it could very well be the nail in your coffin when something goes to court.

Managers carefully supervised CO actions, especially when it came to use of force. Dan describes an educational process designed to change officer behavior through surveillance. Nor was this process benign, as policy permitted no tolerance for misconduct. As Greg (CRI, 4 years) told me, "Managers have called police on officers that work here because of an incident that they have done … that kind of thing is running through our minds all the time" (Group interview). Supporting this, Dan went on to tell me that he frequently testified against COs in court cases.

Officers knew they faced disciplinary sanctions for breaching use of force guidelines, and carefully scripted their actions to fit inside policy frameworks (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022). Elijah, a 15-year veteran who worked in the prison disciplinary system at HBCC, told me

"Policy is really clear. They expect you to use a progressive discipline model. You start with warnings, violations, and then charges" (Group interview). Officers outlined the intricacies of discretion and negotiating policy expectations (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), but described policy as the most influential factor shaping their routines. Zach, a 17-year veteran of HBCC, described CO work as "a policy and procedures job. Everything is supposed to be black and white. If this, policy dictates that." Within this framework, officers described themselves as having limited discretion when it came to maintaining order: "We have less and less options as to how we can approach and deal with it [disorder]. There's a lot more oversight over us. … it feels like we can be penalized a lot more. It feels like we're being very much managed a lot more than back in the day" (Charles, HBCC, 3 years, group interview).

Officers suggested that management scrutiny was especially intense when it came to CO use of force decisions:

> *Clint (RVRC, 3 years)*: That's a *VERY* slippery slope. You gotta be *very, very* careful … I certainly wouldn't slap an inmate or punch an inmate unprovoked. Because I'll lose my job and be [criminally] charged. Assault—yeah. It's not worth it. They teach that little portion of legal [in corrections training] for a reason (emphasis in original).

As Clint suggests, managers carefully scrutinized use of force incidents, something that shifted CO actions in productive ways. While discretion served as an important source of flexibility in some areas (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), officers repeatedly stated that neither union protections nor managerially permitted discretion extended to use of force. Greg provided an example of how oversight had changed his thinking about use of force: "It's like, 'Maybe I shouldn't get into a fight right now, maybe we should deal with this differently,' which is how most of us think."

Greg and Clint described management supervision as a productive deterrent when it came to using force. However, COs also identified fundamental inconsistencies in how management interpreted and enforced policies, something that diminished the perceived legitimacy of the broader managerial project (Liebling et al., 2011; Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2022). Clint hints at this with his comments about why administrators taught "that little portion of legal" in corrections training. Heather (CRI, 25 years) worked on a maximum-security unit with 100 incarcerated men housed in half that many cells. Placement staff labelled each individual as a 'cell sharing risk,' meaning that management expected officers to assign everyone a single cell. Facing a mathematical impossibility, officers consequently had no choice except to sign off on 'doubling up' individuals, meaning they assumed liability for any subsequent incident:

> *Heather*: It's the government way of saying if these two guys are put together and there happens to be a disagreement and one of them beats the crap out of each other and worst case scenario kills the other guy, they come back to us and they go "It said right here that there was a cell sharing risk between the two of them, why did you put them together?" … they're pretty much forcing us to say yes, just to get a room. You don't have a choice.
>
> *Interviewer*: You don't have a choice, the actual design of the institution forces you to do it, but—
>
> *Heather*: You are completely liable because you're the person who said yes.

Here, Heather describes how officers perceived institutional rules. In principle, policies are framed as organizational aspirations, an impartial and legitimate form of regulation which reinforce best-practices and reduce malfeasance (Campeau, 2015). In practice, COs regularly experienced a loose coupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) between organizational expectations and day-to-day practice, which left officers liable for broader failings of the institution.

The impact of loose coupling was exaggerated by situations where managers quietly encouraged officers not to follow institutional policies:

> *Craig (SCC)*: If you're following procedures and policy and stuff like that, you'll get a talking to from a manager about how you're being too strict on a unit and how you're causing too many problems. Or you'll get transferred to another unit … They divert the problem by sending you somewhere else if you're unwilling to change.

Managers informally attempted to structure officer discretion, by instructing COs to be flexible in terms of how they enforced policies. The goal of such actions was to smooth institutional operations (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), but COs were still liable if something went wrong. Recognizing his liability, Craig told me he had pushed back against discretionary expectations and had consequently lost desirable work placements and promotional opportunities.

The inconsistencies officers described led them to interpret policy frameworks as forms of legal responsibilitization designed to reduce institutional liability by shifting it onto individual COs (Campeau, 2018). Martin (HBCC, 10 years) suggested that managers only took prison safety regulations seriously when they permitted staff discipline: "[Managers are] showing time after time that they aren't concerned about staff safety unless we're doing something wrong that they can break us on." Matt (RVRC, 5 years), agreed, stating that "It's frustrating from our side of things, because if something goes wrong, the easiest thing for [management] to do is just say, 'Why weren't the officers following the job?" Specific instances of perceived mendacity reinforced such themes. Stephanie (SCC, 4 years) described an incident where police charged a CO following an ambiguous confrontation in an incarcerated man's cell. The prison director testified against the CO in the subsequent trial, undermining evidence that officers like Stephanie believed exonerated the CO in question:

> *Stephanie:* [The prison director] threw him under the bus … right in court, the [incarcerated man] said that he was roughed up in the cell by the response team, on the way to medical, not by the officer … He [the CO] is getting crucified by management for being attacked.

Actions like Stephanie, Martin, and Matt describe were part of a larger ontology that shaped how officers viewed policy. COs described discretion as expected, encouraged, and (re)enforced by managers—until something went wrong, where formal disciplinary proceedings suddenly imposed a rigid interpretation of policy compliance. Ostensible duplicity like what Stephanie describes here strengthened this dynamic, leading COs to believe that managers would lie to protect the institution. As Jared (CRI, 3 years) put it, "certain managers are out to screw you … I'm just wary about what I do."

This ontology created contradictions between organizational expectations and day-to-day policy interpretation. Officers described policies as general guidelines rather than firm rules at best (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), and punitive, responsibilitizing tools at worst. Elisa, a nine-year veteran at HBCC, was forthright about how she experienced this gap: "Policy becomes a guideline … It's really odd cause you're like 'Okay, if I do this, somehow I need to be able to justify what I'm doing, but I know that if this goes sideways, I'm getting shit.'" In this dynamic, the broader managerial project lost legitimacy in the eyes of officers (Liebling et al., 2011; Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2022), reducing the efficacy of policy restrictions as brakes on officer actions.

Coercive control in a managerialist framework

The loose coupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) between official rules and unofficial expectations strongly influenced how COs answered questions around maintaining institutional control. COs had little respect for official disciplinary measures, which they viewed as another meaningless policy that did little to help control disruptive behavior. Noah (HBCC, 8 years) provided a common narrative when he excoriated the independent adjudication system that dispensed disciplinary measures to incarcerated people: "Personally, I think it's useless. I mean, in my professional opinion, the internal disciplinary process that we have with the adjudicators is useless. We call it kangaroo court. So do the inmates. They're not consistent." Clint agreed, stating that "I only ever charge an inmate if a manager tells me I'm charging him … I know the charges don't stick. There's loopholes left, right, and center." COs perceived management-approved disciplinary measures such as institutional charges, lockups, and removal of privileges as fatally flawed. Ryan (RVRC, 6 years), who worked on a mental health segregation unit, explained it this way: "We use charges, but they don't care … I always go, the 'I'm your friend' route, and then I try and 'dad' them to death, and if that doesn't work, I'll go from there. I'm your friend, I'm going to dad you, and then we're going to fight. Those are the options I have. That's all I got" (Group interview).

Facing issues like Ryan describes, COs described official disciplinary models as ineffective—especially when they compared such approaches to 'old-school' disciplinary measures:

> *Jason (RVRC, 15 years):* Y'know, there's something—old school corrections too. There's something to be said about that. Some of these guys need a fucking beating! Some of them don't learn, some of them do, y'know?

> *Sheldon (RVRC, 4 years):* Well, it's [old school corrections] still around. It's just hiding in the shadows. Never really went away. Every once in a while, it'll come out (Group interview).

"Old-school" beatings like Jason describes were illegal and explicitly banned by prison regulations. However, primed by inconsistent policy enforcement and the perceived failure of official disciplinary measures, officers viewed these rules as guidelines designed to shift liability to staff, rather than prohibitions. This fine difference had discernible consequences. Believing themselves to be guilty in the eyes of the institution no matter what happened, officers expressed few compunctions about using force as a means of control. As Sheldon describes, this encouraged the continued use of "old-school" methods, albeit "in the shadows" of the institution.

Primed by organizational cultures around policy interpretation and enforcement (Campeau, 2018), officers told me that *managerialist approaches changed how and where such "old school" methods were employed, rather than eliminating them.* Tim, who had worked for five years on the most volatile units at RVRC and SCC, fleshed out this contention, justifying coercive force as a disciplinary method and locating it within the nexus of policy interpretation:

> *Tim:* Sometimes, you get a guy that's so low functioning … some guys just need, they have trouble understanding, so they need to get sorted out. And other guys … they won't stop until they get that. They respect force. So, once they get tooled or beaten by somebody else, they understand that. By us reacting less and less, the inmates know this. And they're feeling safer and safer, and they're getting bolder and bolder. And you're seeing more staff assaults. And they know we're limited in our retaliation—what we can do as professionals. We're losing control … force has its way of maintaining control and

order in an institution, but in here, if you use excessive force, then you're fired and losing your job. So—they're [management] telling us, "Do your job, but just don't get caught."

Tim described working at the center of a structured contradiction. Governed and limited by the policies that controlled use of force, officers simultaneously found themselves faced with situations where they perceived force as the only option to maintain institutional order. Participants told me they received instructions from management that they 'do their job,' with studiously limited guidance on exactly what that entailed. The subsequent interpretive dynamic shifted from officer to officer. Thomas (HBCC, 30 years), an experienced sergeant, was critical: "We can't do it the old school way, 'cause really, hitting a guy is not gonna make him change his behavior down the road." However, Thomas spoke for a minority, as officers like Ethan (6 years, RVRC) interpreted matters differently: "Some of these new staff that doesn't want to fight—are you fucking kidding me? That's why they teach control tactics … You're going to get into a fight. It's like saying, you want to be a cop, but you don't want to use a pistol. What's wrong with you?" As Ethan's words imply, the organizational dynamics of prison work meant that the largest and most influential group of officers supported using force as a disciplinary measure. Further, experienced COs described force as an unofficial part of maintaining order, something they passed on to younger staff.

The relationship between force and supervision created tacit agreements between COs and managers. Ericson (2007), applying work by Ignatieff, describes tacit contracts between police and potential offenders where police turn a blind eye to minor crimes in exchange for information. These contracts implicitly shape what police consider a 'real' crime and subsequently enforce. In the prisons I entered, similar contracts existed between managers and officers. Lane, a front-line manager, described an 'if you do it don't tell me' approach to control

measures: “When you’re working on the back units, you know every unit’s doing some shady stuff. But you don’t really care, as long as it doesn’t come to your notice. Have at ‘er, just as long as I don’t know about it. Go ahead” (field note, December 2016). Tacit agreements between managers and front-line officers opened the door for significant uses of force:

> *Ricky (SCC, 16 years):* You gotta run the prison … Management knows. There’s been a few incidents over the years, where staff have been assaulted and stuff like that. And they know full well we kicked the shit out of the guy. And it’s not investigated, it’s not looked into, it’s just, “That needed to happen,” right?

The contradiction and implicit responsibilitization at the center of this dynamic created distinctive forms of risk that officers negotiated carefully. Ricky demonstrates this by describing how managers tacitly condoned assaults where officers provided enough plausible deniability. Yet, while officers discussed tacit bargains around use of force within the managerialist framework, they did so alongside the possibility of investigations and disciplinary actions, emphasizing the importance of doing such actions ‘correctly.’

Constructing and outsourcing use of force

By carefully considering legality and policy interpretation, COs crafted strategies enabling them to use force within the prison’s bureaucratic framework. There were distinctive ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to do this:

> *Tyler (RVRC, 2 years):* Yeah. He [an incarcerated man] calls me onto fight, I lose my cool. I got in trouble for this. Almost got fired. I grabbed the kid and slapped him across the face. I think he needed it, personally, but you can’t—I learned something about this

> place. That's not how you solve your problems. That's *not* how you solve your problems here. These guys win when I do that (emphasis in original).

Learning the proper, or 'smart,' way to use force was a crucial part of officer socialization. Tyler described this incident as a mistake: not only had he broken prison policy boundaries and received official discipline for this assault, but he had let incarcerated people "win" the encounter by losing his temper. Officers described such thuggish brutality as a 'stupid' mistake and employed strategies to make sure coworkers did not engage in it. Heather, a 25-year veteran of CRI, described the resulting dynamic as "I have to watch out for you, you have to watch out for me because if I start to go to town on the guy, for whatever reason, you need to get me off of him. You need to see that I've lost it and I need to be either physically pulled off or told to get the fuck out." These restrictions created distinct limits on what kinds of force were appropriate, and helped officers protect themselves. COs viewed coworkers who pushed such limits as hazards: "I think the ones who are absolute idiots are going to cause problems for the rest of us. Everybody else is like, 'Get rid of those guys'" (Anna, RVRC, 5 years). Heather agreed, stating that "Any officer who would hit an inmate in handcuffs should be fired … how stupid are you!?"

Officers suggested that effective, disciplinary force was unemotional and carefully controlled. Both Tyler and Heather's excerpts describe emotion, rather than legality, as the most significant problem when it came to force, something Zach (HBCC, 17 years) expanded on:

> I was taught how to do it. When, where, how … If you're going to do that [beat someone], you can't be emotional. You can't be one of the people involved in it cause you're not thinking straight. No, you're out purely for revenge. You have to be goal oriented. You're doing this to get whatever result—either to install fear or to stop them from doing what they're doing in that moment, whatever it may be. You have to know

> why you're doing it and you have to know when you've gained that. The second you've gained it you have to stop. Otherwise, it's just a beating and it means nothing to them. It just makes them angry and, and resentful and now they've got a score to settle.

COs described the 'smart' way to use force as limited, in the sense that it stopped upon the achievement of specific objectives. Tactical, unemotional use of force was a valuable skill for COs, so much so that experienced officers unofficially taught it to younger staff. It was also something that some experienced front-line managers, like Joe, encouraged in subtle ways:

> You need to have some fuckin' knuckle draggers in the background, and you gotta harness them. And there'll be a time that you'll have to release 'em. And it's gonna happen. You *need* them. You cannot fault them for what they do. They are *so*. *Good.* At what they do (Field note, December 2016; emphasis in original).

Officers and managers never openly discussed the tacit bargain around violence, but it was well-understood by all parties. Managers knew COs, especially "knuckle draggers" like Joe describes, were using force in ways that violated prison policy and/or criminal law. Officers, in turn, knew that they could employ such measures if they did it the 'right,' or 'smart,' way, thereby providing a cloak of plausible deniability.

COs created and maintained plausible deniability through two distinctive tactics. Rich (HBCC, 3 years) unintentionally provided a detailed explanation of the first tactic when critiquing a "stupid" coworker:

> You're too stupid to create a situation [where] the inmate swings on *you*. You just go and swing at the inmate. One of these days, you're going to go to jail because one of these inmates will be smart enough to say, "The video of that, I want this guy charged." And

management is going to review it and they're going to look at that and go "Okay." 'Cause [we don't] have a strong enough union to be fighting stuff like that (emphasis in original).

Here, Rich describes the process of construction. I define construction as a process where COs preemptively create justifications for use of force decisions before acting. Construction deliberately considers policy and legal proscriptions when shaping action and is broader than provocation or incitation. COs told me that effectively constructed incidents helped underpin their ability to maintain institutional control by 'sending a message' to incarcerated people about who 'ran' the units. Carrie (SCC/RVRC, 10 years) told me that "If I'm responding to a fight, and you're in a fight, you're getting your ass drug across the frickin' floor and I'm doing my job. Plain and simple."

Constructing use of force incidents with an eye toward justification served as a potent strategy for officers, as it allowed them to use significant levels of force without breaching legal or policy restrictions, thereby preempting managerial investigations and maintaining union protections. In other words, construction allowed COs to use 'old-school' methods without falling afoul of the modern policy regime. Quinton (RVRC, 4 years) describes how he constructed one incident:

> He kinda gives me like a green-light thing. Not a hard green light, but enough that I could justify it. Gave him the gears, he gets dragged out of the unit. I hit him once and he dropped, and then it was cuffs. But he was out for probably a minute… it was a good hit. It was a solid hit, and it looked like I worked him over. His feet are dragging and his head was down and all that. And all of a sudden, the unit knew, you don't punk this CO, because if you do I'm going to come and deal with you.

This situation was typical of a constructed incident, one which allowed officers to "send a message" to the remainder of the unit. Here, Quinton describes looking for "a green light"—which means that the individual "kinda" provided justification for the use of force. Quinton deliberately sought out this justification before "dropping" the individual, even though the "green light" in question was not a direct or distinctive threat to his safety (what he later described to me as a "hard green light"). Instead, this "green light" provided the bare minimum needed to justify the use of force he describes here. Consequently, Quinton's response had little to do with the level of threat presented by the incarcerated individual, but instead centered on seizing an opportunity to use disciplinary force. Tellingly, Quinton's comments focus on the practical utility of this incident, especially the message it sent to other incarcerated people. An effectively constructed incident like this allowed COs to reap the ostensible disciplinary benefits of using force, while also meeting the bureaucratic standards that governed such actions.

Despite the care officers put into constructing incidents, using force was always a risky decision. CO union protections were limited, and brutality complaints often led to dismissal and criminal charges. Officers were aware of these limits, and shared cautionary tales of 'stupid' officers who had gone too far:

> *Carrie:* They were blatantly stupid. Like, there's cameras everywhere, and guys [COs] beat the shit out of an inmate [while] he was handcuffed! Right on camera, kneed him like 16 times in the head and then dragged him by his ankles. He got fired.

Intelligent decision-making was a crucial part of using force, and officers valued colleagues who were 'smart' in how they constructed incidents. Jessica (CRI, 11 years) told me "We have some good ones [officers], smart ones. You call them if you need something done." Being 'smart' in how COs used force was crucial—as Carrie, who also described force as "doing my job" several

paragraphs ago, points out in her excoriation of "stupid" and brutal coworkers. Officers were aware that union protections and tacit bargains with managers had limits and knew policy frameworks were weighted against them. As Roddy (RVRC, 5 years) described, "If the managers catch you, you're in big trouble. But the inmates and officers both know, and the inmates respect it, and the inmates listen to it" (Field note, March 2017). This necessitated intelligent and risk-focused decision-making, as front-line COs could not count on managers interpreting use of force incidents sympathetically. Such risks limited the scope of construction.

The inherent risks of "going hands-on" led to outsourcing, a second form of disciplinary control. I define outsourcing as a practice where COs explicitly or implicitly employ coercive power relationships between incarcerated people to maintain institutional order. Josh (7 years at SCC and RVRC) described outsourcing this way: "[My partner and I], sometimes we'd just lock only the tier rep[18] and cleaners up … It's like you can't run your own unit properly, you guys are locked up for the shift. And we did it once or twice last year and the unit ran like perfect [after they were released], like for months after that." Outsourcing shifted responsibility for unit management onto influential incarcerated people, as COs like Josh informally punished these individuals for failing to control the actions of the larger group. The intent of such actions was to employ power relationships between incarcerated people in place of officer interventions. Tony (RVRC, 40 years) elaborated, stating that "If it's not a physical kind of punishment they [COs] render against the inmate, they manipulate things on the unit. Y'know, to somehow get back."

Officers manipulated social dynamics in specific ways to outsource coercive force. Manipulations like Josh and Tony describe were as common as they were effective:

[18] Cleaners and tier reps were influential incarcerated people who served as the main liaison between officers and the broader incarcerated population in exchange for extra privileges.

> *Ricky:* Oh, you mean how we use the inmates for our own ends? I do that too. Easiest way to settle something down. Let's say you have someone covering up [the windows and cameras]—I just cancel all exercise and tell the heavies on the unit that exercise is cancelled because of this guy. Just wait a little while, and presto! Everything comes off the window, the camera's uncovered … (Field note, December 2016).

Officers did not make these decisions thoughtlessly, and nor were such actions a result of corruption, laziness, or loss of control, as other researchers have suggested (Calavita & Jenness, 2015; Walker, 2022). Rather, officers deliberately employed the structural advantages they possessed to give 'heavy' individuals—people who possessed weighty amounts of street capital (Sandberg, 2008)—a meaningful stake in maintaining institutional order.

Officers framed outsourcing as a crucial part of prison work, a 'smart' strategy allowing them to extend forms of coercive power beyond what they could personally justify within policy strictures. Chan (RVRC, 10 years) spelled out how he intentionally considered power relationships when he assigned housing arrangements on a maximum-security gang unit:

> I organized my units like this: the gang guys were all on one corner, and the heavies were all on the bottom tier. The troublemakers were on the middle tier. If the punks decided to make trouble and flood the cells, the heavies would get wet, and the heavies would take care of that. By having the heavies on the bottom tier, [I] was actually controlling the unit. … It happens all the time. You're talking to the heavies, you say—"Listen: either I take care of it, or you take care of it." "Why are we on lockup boss!?" "These punks are running everything, they're ruining everything. So either you take care of it or I take care of it. No beatings or anything, that's too far. I don't want paperwork. But you settle it—you take care of it." And they do.

Actions like Chan describes here allowed officers to harness power dynamics between incarcerated people—what Walker (2022) describes as "the politics"—for their own purposes, thereby incentivizing rule compliance. Crucially, there were limits to these practices. Chan specifies "no beatings", as that was "too far", and Josh went on to tell me that he punished his "idiot heavies" for punching someone in the face and leaving marks that a manager asked questions about. Such limits ensured outsourcing did not attract overt management attention, thereby allowing it to occur within policy boundaries.

Enlisting incarcerated people into the project of maintaining prison order represented a potent control measure for officers who struggled to gain voluntary compliance. Outsourced control represented a modified re-emergence of coercive power to complement "soft power" approaches (Crewe, 2011), with limited risk of detection. However, officers had to carefully monitor such measures. Warren, a 30-year veteran of SCC, stated:

> You've got to be real careful. It's good, and it works for you, if you give them a little bit of power. But you can't give them so much that they run the unit—you can't give up control of the unit. It works for a while, but when you do something they don't like, [it backfires].

As Warren's comments imply, outsourcing control was a delicate process. On one hand, the risks inherent to the process were more manageable than going 'hands-on,' and had equivalent payoffs if orchestrated correctly. But on the other hand, using 'heavies' to do the dirty work of coercive control meant that officers effectively gave away their authority, with uncertain results. Each officer approached this differently. Chan and Josh clearly spelled out their expectations to the people on their unit, while Warren more subtly structured housing arrangements and rewards to accomplish the same goals (Ibsen, 2013). COs carefully balanced how much authority they

delegated: too much, and officers lost control of units, requiring major interventions, and attracting management criticism and investigation. Usefully, incarcerated people bore the worst consequences of failed outsourcing, as officers carefully structured such actions to maintain plausible deniability. Outsourcing control complemented hands-on uses of force, and the ethos of maintaining institutional control far exceeded the potential risk of detection or problems around the welfare of incarcerated people (Schultz et al., 2021).

Discussion, Future Research Areas, and Limitations

Researchers have discussed the role of organizational culture in shaping problematic behaviors among police officers (Campeau, 2018; Ericson, 2007), but much less work exists around organizational behavior in prisons. This article partially fills this gap and suggests that viewing CO use of force as an organizational behavior may serve as a useful tool in theorizing inappropriate actions. Concerningly, this view suggests that policy interventions intended to reduce officer brutality may be ineffective, challenging trends that focus on creating policy solutions to these issues.

The data presented here have implications for prisons, as well as for law enforcement more generally. For prisons, understanding CO use of force as an organizational behavior—an expected part of the job that officers skillfully negotiate—drives home the scope of the problem. Research has framed CO brutality as actions committed by ‘bad apples’ who use officer culture to justify breaking institutional rules (Higgins et al., 2022). These data instead suggest force represents an ingrained, systemic way of doing prison work with benefits for many institutional actors, something that has not changed since Marquart’s research (1986a; Rembert et al., 2023). This is particularly obvious when we examine how tacit contracts influence construction and

outsourcing decisions. Tacit contracts allow COs to work around policy frameworks if they effectively meet the relevant bureaucratic metrics that govern use of force (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997). For the COs I interviewed, a meaningful portion of doing their job involves finding the sweet spot where they could effectively construct and/or outsource force while still providing managers with plausible deniability. For many COs, policy compliance means interpreting the rules in such a way that allows them to employ disciplinary force without triggering investigations, thereby—in their minds—effectively maintaining institutional control.

Rembert et al. (2023) have described CO excessive use of force as "an inevitable feature of corrections work" (p. 105), and many researchers have tried to explain this by examining CO occupational cultures. Higgins et al.'s (2022) work describes how COs employ cultural norms to create a "warped badge of honor," justifying negative attitudes (and, by implication, actions) toward incarcerated people. Likewise, Mears et al.'s (2022) work suggests that exposure to harsh carceral settings leads officers to dehumanize incarcerated people. This article builds on these findings, but also highlights the key role broader organizational frameworks play in shaping CO use of force. Occupational cultures justified COs' use of force and were a primary means that older officers used to teach 'old-school' mindsets and techniques to new recruits. Furthermore, cultures were key tools COs used to differentiate between 'smart' and 'stupid' uses of force (Swidler, 1986). But in contrast to research which suggests COs act brutally because of cultures that defy the broader managerial project, my participants carefully negotiated organizational frameworks when making use of force decisions. Tacit bargains, implicit responsibilitization, and loose couplings between policy and day-to-day practice all worked to create an organizational blind spot in the prisons I entered, a blind spot which implicitly coached COs to use disciplinary use of force as part of their job. These structures spurred use of force decisions,

but the same factors that created this blind spot also created limits on what actions officers could justify, necessitating construction and outsourcing to create plausible deniability. When presented with moments where force was an option, my participants relied on occupational cultures to recognize the opportunity (Higgins et al., 2022; Mears et al., 2022), but ended up making the decision based on whether the opportunity was 'smart' with relation to broader organizational frameworks.

By examining how COs think about organizational frameworks when making use of force decisions, we can understand how structural aspects of prison administration shape physical coercion. The differences between 'smart' and 'stupid' uses of force are particularly useful in outlining these nuances. Officers openly critiqued brutality, describing thuggish coworkers as 'stupid' and over-emotional, and portraying their actions as a hazard. Their critiques related to how these individuals used force, rather than the use of force itself, as my participants contrasted mindless brutality with focused, 'smart' uses of force that silently underpinned the soft power measures they employed every day (Crewe, 2011). In this manner, use of force served as an effective means of 'sending a message' to incarcerated people without drawing attention to themselves. Officers framed construction as 'doing my job,' while co-opting institutional politics (Walker, 2022) allowed COs to productively subvert prison subcultural dynamics in support of institutional goals (Roth, 2020; Skarbek, 2014).

These manipulations and interpretations of broader organizational frameworks were so common that COs regularly pointed to them as marking the difference between a 'good' and a 'bad' officer. 'Good' officers, who knew how to construct and outsource force without losing control, were able to achieve organizational goals by significantly reducing institutional disorder without drawing management attention. 'Bad' officers, who were brutal or were unable to

effectively outsource control, drew managerial attention to themselves. Construction and outsourcing were critical tools within this dialectic (Swidler, 1986), and consequently, officers described them as normalized actions expected of them by policy, managers, coworkers, and (in some cases) even incarcerated people. Understood in this disturbingly utilitarian manner, prison staff framed coercive control as an organizational behavior, a required element of doing a 'good' job with productive and useful outcomes.

The distressingly quotidian way officers describe use of force also provides clues into why officer cultures continue to reproduce archaic 'old school' values, despite years of managerial interventions (Higgins et al., 2022). Broader organizational frameworks ensure that prison work takes place outside of the public eye, meaning that COs transmit cultural values with limited external challenge. This represents a clear difference between COs and police officers: while police cultures are a concern (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021), police officers' use of force decisions are increasingly subject to challenges in the media and from online civilian observation and adjudication (Singh, 2017). Such challenges draw public attention and force change, even if it is slow and reluctant. CO cultures rarely experience these forms of challenge, making change glacial at best and nonexistent at worst, and ensuring that 'old school' beliefs continue to exist underneath the surface (Arnold, 2016; Higgins et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the utility of disciplinary use of force to the broader institution ensures that tacit bargains between officers and management subtly reinforces the status quo, even when organizational messaging clearly states such actions are inappropriate (Campeau, 2018). The resulting position resembles Rubin and Reiter's (2018) assessment of prison reform:

> [P]enal technologies that are useful for administrative control purposes may fail to serve reformers' and politicians' purpose *a la mode*; thus, while it may appear that

> the field has moved away from supporting such technologies, administrators may continue to use them, albeit privately or quietly (p. 1610).

To COs and some administrators, coercive force represents a key penal technology, one which helps them accomplish their goal of maintaining order. Framing coercive force as an individual decision operating outside of the broader scope of prison operations (Carter, 2020; Rembert et al., 2023) allows administrators to "serve reformers' and politicians' purposes" (Rubin & Reiter, 2018, p. 1610) and highlight the 'humane' and rights-based nature of modern prisons—at least, when it comes to public-facing narratives. Yet, structured discretion and tacit bargains around the use of force send a different message to front-line prison staff, who recognize both the hypocrisy of the situation and the opportunities such bargains afford them. The loose coupling between policy and enforcement (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) ensures that 'old school' cultural mores are reproduced alongside and underneath more palatable organizational goals.

To be clear, I do not intend this article as a critique of prison managers, who do difficult work with limited resources. Individual managers represent the face of the broader organization, and typically find themselves with more pressure, fewer protections, and less discretionary ability than the officers who critique them. If anything, these data highlight our need for new research on prison managers' perspectives and relationships with COs. However, management decisions reveal significant flaws in the broader reforms which have transformed prisons over the past 30 years (Liebling et al., 2011). Bureaucratic managerialism was implemented to increase efficiency and prevent abuses, but flaws in the broader project are becoming increasingly clear (Bennett, 2023; Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2022). While managerialism has brought positive reforms into practice, loose couplings and tacit bargains (Ericson, 2007; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) have simultaneously reproduced problematic 'old-school' methods within

modern bureaucratic frameworks. New reforms, such as civilian oversight boards for prisons or policies eliminating tacit bargains, represent accessible short-term fixes. However, band-aid solutions such as new policies ignore larger systemic problems. Managerialism represents a meaningful reform intended to transform prisons—yet the day-to-day pressures of managing prisons appear to have co-opted the original intent of these reforms (Rubin & Reiter, 2018). Managerialism's active role in shaping CO use of force decisions drives home the weaknesses of modern prison reform efforts, most of which are based around policy change (Page, 2011). This necessitates broader discussions around the nature of policy reforms in prisons and the philosophies used to justify them.

This article also has relevance to a broader scope of criminological research. While the organizational behavior of prison staff represents the main object of analysis here, the findings have relevance to the exercise of power in the criminal legal system more generally. Concepts like construction and 'green lights' may have utility in helping explain how groups like police officers justify problematic use of force incidents or stop and search policies.[19] Understanding how other criminal justice actors perceive the interpretation and implementation of policies within their workplaces may also reveal bureaucratic blind spots unique to those agencies, thereby explaining inconsistencies between organizational mission and day-to-day actions (Campeau, 2018; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Looking for organizational blind spots and examining how criminal justice actors perceive and engage with such blind spots seems an obvious area for future research.

This article also has limitations that point to areas for future research. Examining use of force in another prison system, or in countries with different political climates and/or attitudes

[19] My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this insightful point.

around officer-management relationships, may reveal different officer perspectives on policy frameworks (Symkovich, 2019). Alternatively, such research may reveal different forms of tacit bargains due to differences in hierarchical relationships. My positionality as a former CO meant officers were comfortable discussing use of force decisions with me, but other researchers may uncover different insights into management-staff relationships, something worthy of far more investigation when it comes to understanding modern prisons (McGuin, 2015). Finally, I focus on the perspectives of front-line prison staff. Research with managers, administrators, and political actors on the same topic may reveal different nuances around use of force, something that emphasizes a need for research with criminal legal system decision-makers.

Conclusion

Prisons have radically changed over the past 30 years (Liebling et al., 2011). Yet, despite meaningful shifts in the way prisons are organized, I argue that coercive use of force continues to play a central role in how prison staff maintain order. On one hand, this is no surprise, as returning citizens have suggested as much for years (Novisky et al., 2022). On the other hand, the role that organizational cultures play in shaping force are under-theorized, setting this article apart from other accounts. Although the violence described here is different from what Marquart (1986a) outlined, this article demonstrates that coercive force and "hard" power continue to play a role in underpinning "soft power" measures that characterize modern prisons (Crewe, 2011). So-called "misconduct" may not therefore represent a dramatic breach of normative standards (Rembert et al., 2023). Instead, I suggest that we may be better able to understand CO brutality complaints as actions breaching the tacit bargains that govern use of force within prisons' managerial frameworks (Ericson, 2007; Bennett, 2023). Attempting to understand CO violence

outside of the organizational cultures of the modern, bureaucratic prison limits our ability to meaningfully intervene and prevent unethical uses of force.

Unfortunately, the implications of this article also suggest such interventions may be difficult. Attempts to "fix" organizational behaviors usually imply the creation and implementation of new reforms or more policies (Petersilia & Cullen, 2015). This approach represents a distinctive problem when we consider force as an organizational behavior, given how COs describe policy as a major influence on their use of force decisions. Soberingly, this article also suggests that modern best-practices in managing prisons may be fundamentally flawed. Tacit bargains, "green lights," construction and outsourcing all represent significant gaps in the managerial project and suggest that "soft power" may still rely on the continued existence of "hard power" in modified form (Crewe, 2011). The implications of such findings are complex, requiring a broader and more critical approach to prison research.

Paper 3: "There's a difference between putting yourself in harm's way and going to work expecting to get hurt": Vulnerability as a structuring feature of the CO habitus

Abstract

Research on correctional officers (COs) has expanded over the past two decades, giving us a broad picture into the mental health, culture, and discretionary practices of a traditionally overlooked branch of law enforcement. However, important gaps in this portrait remain. Drawing on 131 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Canadian correctional officers, I argue that perceptions of vulnerability powerfully shape the CO habitus by creating and sustaining a vulnerability axiom, a cultural heuristic that frames how officers perceive their position within prisons. Officers describe themselves as vulnerable to threats posed by incarcerated people, managers, and other officers, and act in specific and sometimes problematic ways to mediate these threats. The vulnerability axiom shapes how COs perceive their position within the prison, impacting relationships with managers and incarcerated people and shaping officer control behaviors. I conclude by discussing how vulnerability may help to reframe future CO research.

Keywords: Correctional Officers; Perceived risk; Prison work; Violence; Officer subcultures

Introduction

"I feel vulnerable." Jared, an athletic and fit correctional officer in his early thirties, looked away quietly as he told me this. He pointed at his Apple watch, and continued: "I wear this, and it tells me my heart rate. It spikes when I'm on the units. It's kind of background noise to me now, but the stress of being on the unit is always there too, right." He paused again, trying to find the words that described how running a massive, volatile maximum-security unit made him feel. "I get anxious, the guys are banging on the door, we're on the brink of a riot here, and it's like you gotta go. But it's like, the stress of the job—the stress of the job does bug me and judgement is out there too." Themes of stress and vulnerability shaped the way Jared lived his life, framing how he made decisions both in and outside of the prison where he worked.

Modern research on correctional officers (COs) tends to focus on either culture or mental health. Culture research frames COs as conservative, control-focused, and suspicious, with varying levels of professionalism and distinctive cultural attributes including reactionary attitudes toward change and hostility toward incarcerated people (Higgins et al., 2022; Liebling & Kant, 2018). Mental health research has emerged more recently, and suggests that work-related stress strongly influences how officers approach prison work (Smith, 2021; Worley et al., 2022). While researchers have detailed components of officer work cultures (Eriksson, 2021; Mears et al., 2022) and have shown that stress shapes how COs do their job (Ricciardelli et al., 2022), there is limited connection between these areas of study.

In this article, I argue that CO research has unintentionally overlooked an influential factor shaping how officers approach prison work. I draw on 131 semi-structured interviews with Canadian COs to show that perceptions of vulnerability profoundly influence COs' job approaches, thereby shaping mental health outcomes, CO cultures, and the treatment of

incarcerated people. I build on Sierra-Arévalo's (2021) danger imperative concept to demonstrate how such perceptions create a *vulnerability axiom*—a cultural heuristic that structures the CO habitus, shaping how officers interpret their work and act toward others. I describe the scope and influence of the vulnerability axiom by answering three research questions: 1). How do COs perceive themselves as vulnerable? 2). Which specific factors do officers point to when discussing their personal vulnerability? and 3). How and why do perceptions of work-related vulnerability impact the larger officer habitus?

Literature review

Researchers have successfully examined many aspects of CO work, providing clear portraits of what officers 'do' on a day-to-day basis. A mix of communication, productive relationships, legitimate rule enforcement and discretion allows officers to peacefully maintain institutional order (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Liebling et al., 2011). Professional orientation shapes individual approaches, as officers who emphasize therapeutic interventions provide higher levels of rehabilitative and care-focused service, while officers with security-based mindsets focus on custody and control (Ferdik, 2018). Jurisdiction and political climate play a role, as prison staff in some European countries provide higher levels of care and rehabilitation to incarcerated people than officers in Anglophone countries, who typically place greater emphasis on control and security (Eriksson & Pratt, 2014; Horowitz et al., 2021).

Such orientations overlap with work cultures. Researchers now suggest that security level, volatility, local, and national context all influence unique officer cultures (Higgins et al., 2022; Liebling & Kant, 2018; Mears et al., 2022; Palmen et al., 2022). Some scholars expand on this by applying Bourdieu's social theory to describe a broader CO habitus—a structuring yet

flexible “set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16), which provides individual and collective cues for ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ conduct. Habitus is more nuanced and analytically flexible than culture, shaping group and individual actions and perceptions. In prisons, officer habitus impacts operational decisions like discretion (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), and personal outlooks like philosophies of punishment (Lerman & Page, 2012).

We understand many parts of the CO habitus. Researchers describe COs as conservative, cynical, and loyal to other officers (Arnold, 2016). Aggressive hypermasculinity is considered an asset, although less so in therapeutic prisons (Higgins et al., 2022; Horowitz et al., 2021). Officers carefully differentiate themselves from the people they guard, contributing to hostility between COs and incarcerated people, and to efforts to manage the social taint of prison work (Eriksson, 2021; Garrihy, 2021). These differentiations drive home the importance of prison security. Maintaining control represents a *raison d’être* for officers (Rubin & Reiter, 2018; Schultz et al., 2021), so much so that Schoenfeld and Everly suggest that control represents the foundation of the officer habitus: “without exception and regardless of personal beliefs or values, officers rationalized workplace behavioral norms and beliefs by invoking ‘security’” (2022, p. 9). Yet despite repeated descriptions that highlight the importance of control, researchers still debate why it holds such sway in shaping CO behaviors (Worley et al., 2022).

Academics continue to discuss the origins of the officer habitus, as well as workplace cultures more widely (Mears et al., 2022; Ricciardelli, 2019). Research on CO mental health partially drives this debate, as it supplies a portrait of prison work that sometimes contradicts culture scholarship. Researchers have described how stress impacts officer turn-over, highlighting the importance of individual coping skills in preventing burn-out (Harney &

Lerman, 2021). Concerningly, we now know that suicide represents a major crisis for COs, something exacerbated by a general reluctance among officers to seek help (Wills et al., 2021). Some researchers even suggest that concerns about stress and mental health shape the broader officer habitus (Schultz, 2022). Ricciardelli et al. (2022) have detailed how pervasive uncertainty feeds high levels of mental health diagnosis among COs, suggesting that job-related instability explains why nearly 50% of Canadian COs meet the criteria for at least one mental health injury. Overall, some authors now argue that work stress, rather than culture, may be a primary cause of problematic behavior toward incarcerated people (Worley et al., 2022).

Existing research provides us with a helpful picture of CO cultural viewpoints on one hand, and mental health on the other. However, important gaps in this portrait remain. Researchers fiercely debate the root causes of the CO habitus, especially why officers place such high value on control (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Ibsen, 2013; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022). Likewise, little consensus exists around how we should view officer mental health when it comes to inappropriate actions toward incarcerated people (Ricciardelli et al., 2022; Worley et al., 2022). Despite careful work on danger and risk perceptions (Ferdik, 2018), there is no consensus on how we can best bridge the divide between these areas of research (Higgins et al., 2023).

The scope of these gaps become clearer when we compare CO research to research on police officers. Scholars have examined how the organizational cultures of police agencies impact officer habitus (Campeau, 2018), and have carefully detailed how specific perceptions shape the way officers interact with the world and relate with members of the public. Sierra-Arévalo's (2021) ethnographic work with front-line police officers is particularly notable here, demonstrating how overarching perceptions of danger shape officer cultures and actions. A danger imperative—a structuring heuristic that places specific types of policing-related risk at

the center of how officers perceive the world—informs the police officer habitus, shaping almost every decision individuals make with costly consequences. Sierra-Arévalo describes how the danger imperative rationalizes and validates questionable lethal use-of-force decisions in officer training and real-world scenarios. Likewise, he describes how the danger imperative reduces officer seatbelt use, as officers perceive seatbelts as impeding their sidearm access. This leads to far higher rates of accident injuries among police officers than expected (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021).

Despite working in volatile institutions characterized by danger, violence, and psychological threat (Worley et al., 2022), we have comparatively little understanding of how something like a danger imperative may shape the CO habitus and the subsequent work officers do. Hints exist that a broad, overarching risk framework may affect CO behavior and decision-making. For instance, Bucerius and Haggerty (2019) peripherally mention how fears of illicit opioid contamination shapes COs' work, while Eriksson (2021) and Garrihy (2021) describe how officers attempt to protect their families from the negative realities of their job. Likewise, Ferdik (2018) and Lambert et al. (2018) have outlined how COs perceive incarcerated people as threats. However, these articles employ violence as the primary operationalization of 'threat,' meaning they cannot explain officer reactions to risks beyond assault. This is an important gap: as Sierra-Arévalo's (2021) work shows, the police officer danger imperative extends far beyond violence, impacting mundane decisions like seatbelt usage and officer-civilian interactions.

Although limited, these findings suggest that broadening the scope of how COs perceive themselves as vulnerable is a crucial step in helping to reframe how we understand prison work (Ricciardelli et al., 2022; Trounson et al., 2019; Worley et al., 2022). Unfortunately, literature around CO mental health/perceived job dangerousness does not cohesively interact with literature on CO professionalism, culture and habitus (Lerman & Page, 2012; Liebling & Kant,

2018). As a result, there is little insight into how these findings combine to shape the broader CO habitus or the actions officers undertake every day (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). This paper addresses this gap, demonstrating how broader risk perceptions create a vulnerability axiom within the CO habitus, a cultural heuristic that influences and shapes officer beliefs and actions toward incarcerated people, prison managers, and each other.

Methods

I draw on data collected as part of the University of Alberta Prisons Project, a qualitative research project interviewing incarcerated people and COs at four provincial prisons in Western Canada. Two of these prisons were maximum-security remand centers. Exclusively housing men and women awaiting trials, remand centers house the largest portion of incarcerated people in Canada (Malakieh, 2020). Remand centers are volatile spaces, housing everyone from accused murderers to alleged terrorists to people serving time in lieu of paying fines, and provide limited programming or recreational opportunities (Pelvin, 2019). One of these centers held 1700 men and women, and experienced frequent violence and significant gang activity. The other center held approximately 700 incarcerated people and was dealing with a wave of opioid overdoses during our access (Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019).

The other two institutions were medium-security sentenced prisons, housing people sentenced to less than two years in custody. One of these held approximately 350 men, while the other held 500 sentenced and remanded men and women. These two centers were notably different from the remand centers, as they were less crowded and provided more educational and recreation opportunities. COs and incarcerated people both suggested these institutions were more relaxed and provided better opportunities to develop professional relationships, something

they used comparatively to critique the remand centers. However, the sentenced institutions had experienced increased levels of staff assaults in the months before our research access. The gravity and long-term consequences of these incidents flattened out cultural differences between the institutions, as officers in each prison described vulnerability in a comparable manner.

In total, 131 COs participated. 55 officers worked at the two remand centers, while the other 76 worked at the two sentenced prisons. About 20 participants had worked at more than one prison and discussed cultural similarities and differences, including detailed comparative reflections on the respective risks of working in each center. These participants highlighted the existence of a shared officer habitus that functioned in similar ways across all four institutions.

I interviewed 80 percent of the officers in the sample while the study's principal investigators interviewed the other 20 percent. The officers we interviewed ranged from rookies who had been working for less than a year, to veterans who were in the process of retiring after 40 years on the job. Most participants were white men. Of the 131 total participants, 21 were women, and 10 were visible minorities. This proportion roughly matched the representative breakdown of officers working in the institutions.

We recruited participants and collected data in several different ways.[20] First, prison administrators sent emails to all officers, inviting COs to participate. Second, we did announcements at daily staff briefings, explaining the purpose of our research. Third, we conducted semi-ethnographic "deep hanging out" in official and unofficial settings (Geertz, 1998). Many COs saw us go onto 'their' units for days or weeks before they agreed to participate in an interview. This approach, which bore similarities to chain referral (or snowball) sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), proved highly successful, helping us recruit over 50% of our

[20] University of Alberta Research Ethics Board approvals Pro00061614 and Pro00062785.

participants. Interviews took place in prison offices, during quiet moments on prison units, or at nearby restaurants. All participants agreed to be recorded. Reflecting the semi-ethnographic methods employed in each prison, I also took detailed fieldnotes of my observations while in the prison, which I label as field notes when quoted. Afterward, interviews were transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and assigned randomly generated pseudonyms.

My positionality shaped both participant recruitment and data analysis. I spent five years working as a CO in one of the sentenced prisons before starting graduate school in 2015. Consequently, many participants accepted me as an insider (Marquart, 1986), something that allowed me to attend unofficial officer events such as weekend brunches and ice hockey games. On one hand, my positionality meant officers were willing to share unique perspectives on prison work and eagerly discussed the parts of officer life that made them feel vulnerable. But, on the other hand, I did not have ability to ask questions naïvely—something other qualitative researchers have discussed as an advantage (Bucerius, 2013).

Given my positionality, the project's principal investigators and I determined that a team-developed data coding system would help establish consistency within the analysis. Following transcription, I worked with the principal investigators and another research assistant to develop a thematic coding scheme. We each read six randomly chosen interviews, and identified shared themes arising from the data (Charmaz, 2014). We complied these themes into a systemized coding scheme, then tested the coding scheme against more randomly chosen interview transcripts, tweaking the scheme to improve accuracy until we reached between 85 and 90% inter-coder overlap. At this point, we conducted line-by-line coding of each transcript, allowing the themes in the data to organically emerge.

Findings

Broader than perceived risk (Ferdik, 2018), and interacting with many day-to-day issues that have little connection with violence or physical danger (Ricciardelli et al., 2022; Worley et al., 2022), COs describe perceptions of vulnerability as a central part of their mindsets. Regardless of institution, officers consistently define vulnerability as an axiomatic truism (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), a persistent, self-evident, and self-reinforcing factor informing their approaches to life and work. In aggregate, these perceptions form a *vulnerability axiom,* a distinctive heuristic tool that shapes COs' habitus, influencing their workplace cultures and informing actions toward other people. The vulnerability axiom emphasizes real and perceived threats, reinforcing preconceptions and shaping how officers view the world. Although the vulnerability axiom shares some characteristics with police officers' danger imperative (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021), the axiom possesses unique characteristics reflecting the distinctive nature of CO work. Serving as a central feature of the CO habitus, the vulnerability axiom draws disconnected areas of prison work together, creating a framework that routinely shapes officer conduct.

Three distinctive themes emerge from officer discussions of the vulnerability axiom. First, COs describe incarcerated people as a source of perceived vulnerability, motivating unique and sometimes problematic efforts to maintain institutional control. Second, officers describe the relationship between prison staff and prison management as troubled, framing management decisions as a direct threat to their safety (McGuin, 2015). Third, officers rely on a strong sense of solidarity to protect themselves against incarcerated people and managers (Arnold, 2016). However, officers also frame solidarity as an unpalatable trade-off that creates other types of vulnerability, and reluctantly justify it by pointing to other sources of vulnerability they

encounter. These three themes help map out the contours of the vulnerability axiom and describe its broader influence.

Incarcerated people as a source of vulnerability

COs consistently identified incarcerated people as a threat to their personal safety, a well-established research finding (Ferdik, 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2022). Outnumbered by a ratio of between 25:1 and 36:1, officers in each prison discussed the numerical superiority of incarcerated people as a regular aspect of day-to-day life:

> *Ben:* You know, you can say you're fearless as you want or whatever and we can operate like that. But I think, underlining all that, you have to recognize that it's precarious. There's three of you and seventy-five convicted, probably violent offenders.

Numerical inferiority was a visible factor officers experienced every day. While it was a part of the job, COs suggested it served as an ever-present reminder of the precariousness of prison work and described tailoring their responses to volatile situations with a realistic assessment of the position incarcerated people held (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021).

The numerical superiority of incarcerated people meant that officers consistently found themselves in situations where they were vulnerable to assault. Officers have traditionally trusted in established, legitimate relationships with incarcerated people to reduce the risk of assaults (Liebling et al., 2011). As Matt described, "A lot of these things, if you can realize that there's ten small things that lead up to a big thing, if you can catch five of those small things and talk him down, that doubles the amount of time before you have a big thing right?" While officers typically founded these relationships on effective communication, transactions played a significant role, as COs provided services, goods (like extra food trays), and discretion in

exchange for peace and order on prison units (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Ibsen, 2013). The transactional nature of such relationships meant they quickly fell apart when COs failed to provide a benefit. This did little to reduce the broader sense of vulnerability officers encountered:

> *Jack:* Yeah, obviously, you wonder, 'cause I've told a guy "No." Is he going to assault me now, right? 'Cause I've told a guy "No, you're not doing this. This is what policy says. Therefore nothing is happening." You wonder, am I going to get sucker-punched?

As Jack implies, officers perceived incarcerated people as a constant source of unpredictability, who might respond to a negative answer violently irrespective of prior relationships (Ricciardelli et al., 2022). The constant, unspoken question Jack describes—"Am I going to get sucker-punched for doing my job?"—was one many officers described, as COs framed assault as a realistic outcome for enforcing basic rules, irrespective of clarity and farness.

The vulnerability officers perceived from everyday encounters with incarcerated people introduced a sense of precarity into prison work. Officers consistently described searching for and implementing strategies to reduce their vulnerability. While discretion was one response (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), officers highlighted control as the most important intervention:

> *Darnell:* I'm not here to change lives. I'm here to do three things: care, custody and control are like my three biggest things. It's a shitty way to think about it, but at the end of the day, it's [all I can do].

As Darnell implied here, COs framed control as the most crucial part of their work, something that represented the difference between success and failure (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022). Matt, discussing criticism he had received in a performance review, unwittingly outlined this: "[A manager] was like, 'It's a direct relation on how good an officer they are, because they obviously can't control the inmates on their unit.'" Importantly however, control had little to do with a

desire to hold or maintain power (Calavita & Jenness, 2015). Rather, officers described control as a distinctive intervention designed to reduce personal perceptions of vulnerability.

The importance of control was particularly clear when officers discussed violent incidents. Officers expressed a *laissez-faire* attitude toward violence where they perceived themselves as in control of the situation. Ryan provided a detailed example: "The guy in [cell] 31. Last week, he came charging at me, but he was naked. And he took a swing at me, but I just closed the door. I don't want to fight a naked guy [laughter]." Ryan managed a violent incident through the simple expedient of closing a door, thereby turning an altercation into a farcical scenario which he played for comedic effect.

Officers used control to differentiate between various forms of violence. COs downplayed controlled incidents like Ryan describes, describing them as 'part of the job.' In Blake's words, "You have to do your job, at the end of the day. And you know what you signed up for." Officers described controlled use-of-force incidents as a routine part of their work, outlining strategies that helped them manage potential risks. The importance of control in shaping how officers perceived violence was particularly clear when officers compared controlled incidents to uncontrolled assaults:

> *Shane:* [Before, inmates] would never cross certain boundaries. Those boundaries are blurred now—there's really no boundaries. And I think that's a contributor for officers when they think about the unpredictability of offenders. You would never have seen that [assault] before. That's the worst assault I've seen in my thirty-two years in corrections.

Officers in all four prisons brought up two serious assaults, one at a sentenced prison and another at a remand institution, which had occurred in the weeks before the interviews. The assault Shane references took place at a comparatively quiet sentenced prison, and involved two young

men who attempted to beat an officer to death. Officers described this attack as unprovoked and unexpected, and struggled to find a reason for such a violent action. The perceived senselessness of the assault shifted officer perceptions of their position within the prison:

> *Phillip:* There's a difference between going to work and putting yourself in harm's way and going to work expecting to get hurt. There's a big, there's a *huge* divide there. And when you're going to work not knowing if you're going to come home? Because that's how it's gotten.

Unpredicted and violent assaults sent shockwaves through the broader CO community, highlighting officers' perceived vulnerability and reducing their sense of control (Ricciardelli et al., 2022). Officers like Phillip depicted assaults as an increasingly common feature of prison work and described "expecting to get hurt," something that markedly increased officer perceptions of vulnerability. The increasing unpredictability of assaults also flattened out cultural distinctions between institutions underneath a broader, shared perception that officers were constantly at risk, no matter the setting.

In the face of a perceived increase in assaults, officers reinforced the importance of maintaining control by any means necessary. Officers like Sandy described control as the only realistic means of addressing heightened risk levels: "The inmates have gotten far less respectful and far more violent where our counter to that is becoming far more timid and far less controlling." Unsurprisingly, control quickly became an end that justified problematic means:

> *Ricky:* You still have to maintain authority in the jail. And how have you maintained authority in a jail for hundreds of years? Violence. … You have to remember—we are outnumbered. I've got two dumb-asses [COs] on a unit with seventy-five guys—how do you maintain control?

The vulnerability axiom centered personal risk within the CO habitus, meaning officers regularly made operational decisions with relation to their individual vulnerability. Officers described control—or as Ricky phrases it here, authority—as the only thing that protected them from unprovoked and unpredictable attacks. The desire to establish and maintain control was strong enough that many officers justified problematic actions, like the use of force Ricky and Sandy imply here. Crucially however, officers described their emphasis on control as an effort designed to reduce their personal vulnerability, framing control as a deterrent that prevented assaults.

Such outlooks informed officer cultures. Recent work has highlighted the important role CO cultures play in misconduct toward incarcerated people (Higgins et al., 2022; Mears et al., 2022), something officers in this sample agreed with:

> *Mitchell:* [Officer culture is] awful. My theory is, it's based on a lie that we keep telling ourselves. That we're in control, right? This comes back to the whole, "We think we're in control but we're not because there's fifty of them and there's two of us on a unit" thing, right? So we have to tell ourselves this lie, that we have the illusion of control, and the whole culture is a feedback system to give us confidence.

As Mitchell implied, officer culture informed problematic actions (Higgins et al., 2022; Mears et al., 2022). However, Mitchell and officers like him centered perceived vulnerability as the reason for these actions. Problematic and coercive actions served as efforts to gain and retain control over incarcerated people, which in turn served as a soothing 'lie' designed to provide 'illusions of safety' about assault risks. The upshot of this complex situation meant that officers routinely supported problematic and forceful actions toward incarcerated people but justified these actions as distinctive interventions to reduce personal vulnerability. To phrase this differently, officers

like Mitchell described problematic cultural viewpoints (Higgins et al., 2022) as a symptom of the vulnerability axiom's influence within the broader officer habitus.

Officers and Managers

Vulnerability stood at the center of officer relationships with incarcerated people, shaping actions both productive (relationship-building) and damaging (forcible control) in terms of day-to-day prison management. Likewise, perceptions of vulnerability shaped officer-manager relationships. COs described a contested relationship with prison administrators. On one hand, officers described individual supervisors as supportive. As Cathy, a young officer with less than a year's experience, put it, "There's a lot of managers you can approach if you have an issue and they're really good about working it through with you and giving you direction." COs described professional, positive relationships with front-line supervisors who managed the prison on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, officers excoriated distant, upper-level administrators. In her next breath, Cathy caveated her statement: "And like, there's some managers I definitely wouldn't approach with anything, just go the opposite way." Clint was even more blunt: "I've got a family outside this building, my loyalty is to my family. My loyalty is not to these ding-dongs upstairs. Because I can't trust, and don't trust our management to [take care of] us. No." Likewise, Greg was deeply ambivalent about how management treated front-line officers: "I feel like managers don't have my back if something were to go south, if I were to get charged by this inmate for whatever reason, I feel like they would nitpick at the littlest things."

Management interpretations of officer actions played a direct role in shaping how COs engaged with their work (Liebling et al., 2011). Alyssa built on Greg's implication, outlined how

prison bureaucracy often left COs feeling exposed, especially in cases where a situation reflected poorly on management decisions:

> *Alyssa:* [Corrections is] a high-risk job and it's a high risk in almost every aspect you look at. Feeling unsupported by management is probably the worst part. Like if you have managers that will throw you under the bus to save their own skin, that's an unnerving way to feel about your job.

Officers expressed frustration with management interventions in the prison, believing that in the case of an incident, management would 'side with the inmates' and 'screw' officers, thereby reducing institutional liability. Even when officers admitted that managerial interventions were justified, they still framed superiors as adversaries. Heather pulled no punches in describing this: "Yep, because that's often how a lot of shit happens. We're at the bottom of the shit pile, so whenever shit comes down, it always lands on us. No matter what happens in the jail, they'll nail one of us quicker than anybody."

Conflict between managers and staff is a well-established theme in the CO literature, as are descriptions of disgruntled prison staff (Jacobs, 1977; McGuin, 2015). Officers typically failed to identify the structural pressures that shaped management decisions, such as the important role managerialism played in shaping prison administration more generally (Liebling, 2006). These oversights reduced the veracity of some complaints. But officers also identified concrete ways that harsh managerial oversight changed their work:

> *Greg:* I'm hesitant. [A prisoner] came charging at me but then he stopped right before me. And you know what, I hesitated because I feel like the bosses don't have our backs and they're going to critique, like "Maybe you should have backed out of the cell as fast as you could" but I was, I was confined in there, I only had a split second to think and I

> hesitated. And when you hesitate, hesitation gets you killed. And I hesitated because those kinds of things are running through your mind all the time, like the managers don't have your back, the managers never support you. I've been told the managers have called police on members that work here because of an incident that they have done. I have been told that by multiple sources and multiple times, it's managers that have called [the police]. So that kind of thing is running through our minds all the time.

In the CO training that Greg went through, officers learned to instantly react at the first sign of violence. A presentation slide delivered to new CO recruits[21] about the legality of force drove this home, specifying that in the case of incidents like Greg describes, officers were permitted to "fight for life, no holds barred. … [use] as much force as necessary to stop the undesired behavior" (*Field note, 2018*). Consequently, what Greg described here is not simply a cautious hesitation. Rather, it represents a distinct breach in the institutionally mandated use-of-force model, as well as a direct contravention of institutional training. Although CO failure to follow training best-practices is not surprising (Calavita & Jenness, 2015; Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021), the role Greg ascribes to a hostile management environment is. His comments suggest that managerial interventions led COs to second-guess their training, even in situations characterized by significant danger. Furthermore, his comments suggest that officers expected investigation of every decision, no matter how justifiable, creating an atmosphere of uneasy resentment.

Many officer complaints and critiques arose from perceptions that managers had little understanding of the work front-line COs did every day. Officers described management orders as directly threatening their health and safety. By exclusively focusing on the potential risks they faced, officers suggested that managers had little sympathy for the consequences officers

[21] Unofficially provided by a participant.

experienced. Tension here was particularly obvious when it came to new and emerging threats, such as exposure to comparatively unknown drugs like fentanyl:[22]

> *Heather:* Now with all the stuff that's coming in, you don't know what the hell you're getting into. So it's like you want to do your job, but you want to be protected properly and to know that the management actually gives a flying fuck … it's terrifying. I don't wanna not come home to my kids. I don't want to overdose. I'm not afraid of the inmates. That's not it, I'm not ever worried about the inmates … I'm never so much worried about my personal safety from that aspect as I am from a 'Do what management tells you and go in and search the room,' you know what I mean? It's more of a—I don't know how to describe it. I'm more afraid of getting told what to do and getting hurt because of it than just doing my job.

Heather spoke for many officers when she described receiving orders from management telling her to do something that she perceived as excessively risky, leading her to fear for her safety. In Heather's case such perceptions related to environmental drug exposure, which was a key issue at the time (Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019). However, officers also provided examples where managers officially or unofficially ordered COs to do something exposing them to the risk of violence, legal liability, or even prisoner escape. If they failed to comply with these orders, officers faced disciplinary action or open conflict with management. However, if they complied, officers perceived themselves as placing their safety, careers, and even health in jeopardy. COs described this dynamic as an impossible bind: while they perceived themselves as physically vulnerable for *doing* something, they also perceived themselves as facing career risks for *not*

[22] Fentanyl was emerging as a drug of concern during these interviews. Bucerius and Haggerty's (2019) article analyzes this in detail.

doing these actions.[23] These situations created massive stress, driving home the ubiquity of vulnerability and harming mental health. As Laura put it, "Some people can't handle it, right? They get really stressed, overworked, or whatever, and they take everything personally—the job itself, the managers, the inmates. You can't take this job personally or you're going to die."

This dynamic left COs with a powerless sense of anomie toward their work. Officers expressed resentment against the bureaucratic, managerialist system that enabled decisions they perceived as unfair, believing that officers would automatically receive blame for problems irrespective of fault (Liebling, 2006; McGuin, 2015). Moreover, COs perceived managers as being on the lookout for any sort of non-compliance or mistake, which represented a threat to an officer's career security and advancement. As Liam put it, "You're gonna get fired, you're done, they'll just can [fire] you. Even though they all do worse shit, way worse. You're fired. So that's what I mean." Heather, continuing her comments from above, agreed:

> *Heather:* The one thing you need to remember about this job, is that you are a number, you are replaceable, and this is a business. The sooner you can understand that you can be replaced like that *(snaps fingers)*, no matter how many years you've been in here, the better off you're going to be.

Officers like Heather viewed themselves as disposable, easy targets for managers looking to reduce institutional liability. Consequently, officers perceived managers as a distinct threat to their health, safety, and career security. These attitudes permeated the officer habitus, impacting both cynical and positive officers. Consequently, even quotidian interactions between COs and managers were characterized by hostility, suspicion, and distrust.

[23] My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this insightful point

The Dark Side of Officer Solidarity

In the face of perceived assault risks from incarcerated people and apparent threats to health and career security from management, officers told me the only people they trusted were other COs. The CO literature describes officer solidarity as a crucial part of prison work, representing a protective structure that helps officers manage the challenges of prison work (Chenault, 2014; Eriksson, 2021). Officer solidarity also enables serious injustices in the prison, by enabling unprofessional and even illegal behavior by officers (Calavita & Jenness, 2015; Higgins et al., 2022). Yet, although researchers often critique CO solidarity, officers described it as a crucial part of their work that allowed them to manage perceived vulnerability from incarcerated people and prison bureaucracy.

Officers described their coworkers as a central reason they were able to do their job. The word trust was the most common theme tying all 131 officer interviews together. COs described earning trust, proving trust, needing to trust, broken trust, and how they demonstrated trust to other officers in deep and profound ways:

> *Jared:* I wouldn't be in this career if I didn't [trust my coworkers]. If I had any doubt and my safety was in jeopardy or someone didn't have my back in a situation … I would be out of this. I would quit tomorrow … At the end of the day though, everybody has each other's back, and that's the way it should be and that's the way it's supposed to run, too.

Although officers complained about coworkers and expressed dissatisfaction with institutional politics, every CO described trust as being a crucial part of effective prison work—something they contrasted with their distrust of managers. Officers directly connected trust to broader perceptions of vulnerability. As Mason put it, "If I know that I'm working with somebody that I

don't truly trust, then I'm not gonna feel comfortable." Elsa expanded on this, explaining how trust allowed officers to be comfortable with the volatility and violence they observed:

> *Elsa:* Our trust has to be high because, you know, if I'm getting the crap kicked out of me, I need to know there's going to be four people behind me … I choose to believe that our staff are okay and not doing [illegal actions]. 'Cause otherwise, you're gonna to just turn on each other and that's not a good environment.

Yet although officers in each institution performed their group loyalty in emphatic terms (Goffman, 1959), most admitted that solidarity created as many forms of vulnerability as it protected them against. Young COs described situations where older officers made unethical and illegal decisions, demanding silence because of their status. Others described incompetent coworkers and deceitful officers who manufactured confrontations with incarcerated people for entertainment. The worst of these situations ended up under police investigation, forcing officers into a choice between perjuring themselves and maintaining solidarity, or telling the truth—described as 'ratting' on coworkers—and breaching the all-important sense of trust (Lerman & Page, 2012; Schultz, 2022). Consequently, although officers discussed CO solidarity as the backbone of their work, some did so reluctantly, identifying inconsistencies between their assertions and the daily reality they encountered.

A common area of tension centered around using force. Violence between officers and incarcerated people was commonplace. While officers and managers both stated that most use-of-force incidents were legally justifiable, they also admitted that each prison had COs who were willing to commit illegal assaults.[24] As mentioned in the first theme, most COs justified force as an effective way to 'send a message,' thereby reinforcing CO's institutional control (Marquart,

[24] Discussed in detail in Schultz, under review.

1986). Yet, although officers discussed the utility of force as a control mechanism, their description of how such incidents affected them individually recentered personal vulnerability. Violent officers relied on officer solidarity as cover for questionable actions, and as a result, officers who disagreed with problematic force found themselves in complex situations:

> *Matt:* That's the thing that's almost terrifying. You go into a code [fight]—there's certain officers that I work with, I'm like, "Alright, if he decides to go and fight an inmate, I have to have a game-plan in mind." There's a potential lawsuit—yes, I could lose my job, but that's not the worst thing. I could be dragged down and potentially charged, right? … But my go-to is, if there's a fight, I'll restrain the legs. Once he [the prisoner] gets on the ground, I just grab his legs and stand there, kinda backed out, holding his legs and looking at the camera.

Matt described a common situation. COs who found themselves involved in a problematic use of force event faced investigation alongside their colleagues, even if they had little to do with the incident. These officers found themselves caught on the figurative horns of a dilemma, as they had to either break subcultural rules and 'rat out' their colleagues or lie to investigators and perjure themselves. Officers like Matt devised specific strategies to mitigate these risks: by (in his words) "restraining the legs," Matt was able to fulfil officer subcultural expectations by participating in the fight. However, his actions simultaneously allowed him to avoid the 'bad' parts of the fight, thereby reducing his risks of managerial investigation and discipline.

Even though officers repeatedly described trust and solidarity as crucial parts of the CO habitus (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Lerman & Page, 2012), some did so reluctantly, aware of how vulnerable they were to coworkers who took advantage of that trust:

> *Elizabeth:* Like if staff don't like each other, I've had staff [at two prisons] say, "If [specific officer] was getting assaulted, I'd be slow to call a code." That's hard to hear because everything you do is on that unit. I depend on my partner to be watching my back. If I get dragged into a cell, I depend on him to be calling a code, saying what cell I got dragged in … I'm dependent on my partner watching me, so it's hard to hear comments like that. Like, that hits hard when [my partner] says "I'd be slow to call a code on him."

Officers like Elizabeth were aware that the support and backup of their coworkers was more conditional than they cared to admit. Officers who stood up for themselves against the unspoken rules of officer solidarity, or who had raised the ire of their coworkers, faced the risk of reprisals. As Elizabeth described, such reprisals even included the possibility that officers would not respond to an assault, leaving a coworker vulnerable to life-altering injuries or death.

Officers depended on each other and described trust in their coworkers as a crucial part of doing their job. However, these descriptions sometimes had a performative aspect (Goffman, 1959): officers chose to openly trust their coworkers because facing the alternative would have been impossible to deal with. Consequently, although officer solidarity was one of the most important factors in helping prison staff survive the prison environment, COs also described solidarity as a distinctive source of perceived vulnerability.

Discussion

COs across these data described perceived vulnerability as a structuring feature of their habitus. Vulnerability served as a lens impacting how officer viewed many aspects of their work, as no matter the setting, COs described themselves as vulnerable (Ricciardelli et al., 2022).

Officers like Jared, quoted in the introduction, described vulnerability as a major contributing factor to the stress and mental health challenges they experienced (Schultz, 2022), while others connected vulnerability to problematic cultural viewpoints (Higgins et al., 2022; Mears et al., 2022). This highlights the utility of considering vulnerability as an axiom, a taken-for-granted and self-evident cultural heuristic that officers consistently apply to each scenario they encounter. Considering vulnerability as an axiom allows us to consider how it possesses an anticipatory function in the officer habitus, meaning officers may preemptively assume they are vulnerable irrespective of the situation in question. In other words, officers may inflate 'perceived' threats, conflating them with 'real' risks (Lambert et al., 2018). Yet despite this, the perceptions shaped by the vulnerability axiom impact the broader CO habitus in important and noticeable ways, irrespective of the 'true' risks presented by any given theme.

Sierra-Arévalo's (2021) danger imperative provides a useful framework for examining the implications of the vulnerability axiom. The danger imperative centers the possibility of violence by police clients, meaning that police officers make and justify extreme responses—including lethal use of force—by the perceived dangerousness of what a situation *could become,* rather than what a situation *is* (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). The data presented here suggest that vulnerability serves a similar function for COs. Officers cite perceived vulnerability as something that preemptively shapes how they interact with incarcerated people, affecting everything from relationship-building to use of force. Likewise, perceived vulnerability shapes subcultural solidarity and colors how officers interpret management decisions.

However, there are important differences that highlight the unique nature of prison work, and the need for a corrections-specific concept. The risks COs describe are broader than what Sierra-Arévalo (2021) outlines, meaning that 'danger' is only one part of a larger framework for

prison staff. For instance, officers frame prison administrators as a source of vulnerability, reflecting the unique influence of managerialist logics on the prison environment (Bennett, 2016). Confrontational relationships between officers and administrators, especially when COs perceive managerial decisions as placing officers at risk, reinforce staff solidarity and tacitly emphasize the 'disposable' nature of prison staff. The 'disposable' nature of corrections work sharply contrasts with the 'heroic' framing of policing that operates on both individual and organizational levels (Sierra-Arévalo, 2019), reinforcing the vulnerability COs perceive.

Viewing vulnerability as an axiomatic component of the CO habitus allows us to reframe how we view prison work. First, the vulnerability axiom allows us to expand our understanding of the broader CO habitus. While work on this concept has expanded in recent years (Lerman & Page, 2012; Schultz, 2022), understanding how vulnerability serves to structure the "mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16) that inform the 'right' ways to do prison work gives us deeper insight into CO decision-making processes (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021).

Second, the vulnerability axiom allows us to reframe CO solidarity within the broader habitus. Believing themselves to be at risk from a wide range of amorphous but significant threats, officers closed ranks to reduce the impact of such threats. Solidarity perversely reinforces the saliency of vulnerability: despite describing coworkers as a source of risk, officers described threats originating *outside* of the CO cadre as far more threatening to them in personal and career terms, justifying continued reinforcement of problematic staff cultures (Ferdik, 2018; Higgins et al., 2022). Officers' pressing need to protect themselves against perceived threats to their safety subsumed larger questions of justice, abuse, and legality, and drove home the relevance of CO solidarity despite shifts in prison operations (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022).

Vulnerability also helps us to understand the distressing role of CO culture in shaping problematic control behaviors, including illegal violence. The need to retain and maintain control over the prison environment is one of the most well-established and consistent features of CO research (Rubin & Reiter, 2018; Schultz et al., 2021), and is typically discussed in terms of security, power, or culture (Higgins et al., 2022; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022; Worley et al., 2022). These data reinforce the saliency of control when trying to understand CO actions, as officers consistently described attempts to gain, maintain, or retain control. Crucially however, officers simultaneously framed these efforts in terms of their personal vulnerability. By highlighting perceived vulnerability as a central feature of the CO habitus, we can reconceptualize officers' pursuit of institutional control as an intervention designed to reduce their own vulnerability.

By reframing control as an attempt to address the vulnerability axiom, we can also see how vulnerability provides officers with a proscriptive justification for problematic actions against incarcerated people. The excerpts discussing control demonstrate the logical progression between officer vulnerability and actions designed to 'send a message' about who 'controlled' the prison, as officers perceived 'messages' as an effective way to prevent assaults. Research has examined how officer cultures play a role in shaping problematic use of force (Higgins et al., 2022; Mears et al., 2022). Within these data, the vulnerability axiom helped officers address cognitive dissonance about problematic actions by driving home their perceived 'necessity' in terms of establishing control. As Mitchell put it in the first theme, such actions were part of a 'feedback system' that addressed perceived vulnerability. By examining such actions through the lens of vulnerability, we can demonstrate how they relate to the broader CO habitus, providing connections to other aspects of prison work. Likewise, such an approach may provide an

explanation for why increases in officer training, professionalism, and surveillance have not eliminated or even meaningfully reduced the specter of CO brutality (Higgins et al., 2022; Worley et al., 2022).

The vulnerability axiom may also provide new methods of examining mental health and officer cultures. Until recently (Worley et al., 2022), academics have examined CO culture and mental health as separate concepts (Higgins et al., 2022; Ricciardelli et al., 2022). Examining perceived vulnerability as a structuring feature of the CO habitus allows us to link these areas of research, as officers suggest that job-related stress and problematic cultural viewpoints both arise from efforts to address the vulnerability axiom. The vulnerability axiom may provide an analytical connection between siloed concepts like uncertainty (Ricciardelli et al., 2022), risk perceptions (Ferdik, 2018), and poor mental health (Worley et al., 2022). Future researchers may be able to use vulnerability as a tool to analyze connections between these areas, shedding new insight into how COs impact prisons and vice versa (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022).

Third, the vulnerability axiom allows us to re-examine confrontational relationships between COs and prison managers (McGuin, 2015). Over the last 30 years, the centralization of power in management and bureaucratic positions has reshaped prison operations and reduced officer decision-making powers (Bennett, 2016; Liebling et al., 2011). Although this is unquestionably best practices, the COs quoted here describe managerialism as a source of vulnerability. Officers describe themselves as powerless, vulnerable from things managers expected them to do, and vulnerable if they refused to follow orders. In extreme cases, COs suggested managers strategically employed their positions at the levers of power (Liebling, 2006) to unfairly shift blame onto officers to reduce institutional liability and described situations where management supervision caused them to question their training.

This conflict centered on the axiomatic presumptions of vulnerability that shaped how officers perceived management orders. While some orders were inappropriate and directly threatened individual welfare, some officers also described quotidian requests to do their work as a threat to their safety. Such suspicious and reactionary views increased tension and alienation from organizational goals (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022). Reflecting this, officers rarely mentioned the complex pressures managers faced, focusing instead on a broader narrative highlighting their own vulnerability within the prison. In this case, the vulnerability axiom likely inflamed relationships between officers and managers, complicating prison operations, reducing trust and creating resentment among all parties. Overall, by actively limiting the scope of officer actions, management decision-making processes reduced problematic exercises of discretion. However, the broader perception that managers were uncaring and would 'screw' COs at the first opportunity created resentment and a sense of powerlessness among front-line officers, thereby perversely reinforcing the vulnerability axiom's influence within the CO habitus.

As prison managers are often leaders in implementing prison reforms, this relationship has broader implications. The vulnerability axiom shapes how COs view a wide range of subjects, implying that officers will always assess prison reform efforts through a lens of individual vulnerability and collective solidarity irrespective of the inherent worthiness of the reform in question. Consequently, prison reform efforts which fail to address CO safety concerns are likely to encounter significant resistance from officers and union members—an important factor, and one which reflects findings in a range of international settings (Calavita & Jenness, 2015; Lerman & Page, 2012). Given the central role prison staff play in shaping the direction and philosophy of a prison, such considerations may determine the success or failure of new reforms.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the central role of vulnerability within the CO habitus. Officers described themselves as vulnerable from a range of sources and centered their own vulnerability when making decisions about how to act. In combination, I argue that we can best understand these perceptions as part of a broader vulnerability axiom, a central heuristic lens that informs the broader CO habitus and shapes officer responses to managers, incarcerated people, and each other.

Centering vulnerability lets us understand COs and their worldview differently. It is likely an open debate as to whether the threats described in this paper are as deadly serious as officers describe—but, for officers, this is often a case where perceptions are more important than any reality. Consequently, understanding how vulnerability shapes officer perceptions takes on new urgency in future research. Understanding vulnerability's role in shaping the officer habitus is not synonymous with sympathy for the actions that such perceptions engender, either—a necessary caveat given the controversial nature of some of the themes described here. However, understanding how such perceptions shape the day-to-day work of front-line COs may help in the pursuit of new kinds of prison reform, with productive outcomes for officers, managers, and incarcerated people.

Paper 4: Insider Positionality and Team Ethnography in Prison Research

Abstract

Team research has emerged as an important approach within the qualitative methodological landscape, permitting diverse perspectives to inform research directions. New participant-centred research approaches frame insiders as crucial components of research teams, helping to smooth access and build meaningful, rather than extractive, relationships between researchers and communities. Little is known about the perspectives of insiders within research teams, however, especially when the research site in question is complex and is shaped by distinctive subcultural rules. I draw on my own experiences as an insider within a larger research team to discuss some of the unique methodological challenges of this relationship. I discuss how my positionality was both an asset and detriment to the larger research team and demonstrate how cleft habitus created significant complexities in creating a unified approach and message. I conclude by discussing how the unique challenges of working with insiders in subculturally-bound spaces can inform future team research.

Keywords

insider positionality; team research; methods; prison ethnography; habitus

Introduction

Reflection has played a significant role in recent sociological and criminological ethnographies. Much of this work cites Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) call for a reflexive sociology as a starting point, although reflexivity has a longer history in gender and feminist studies, cultural anthropology, and some branches of sociology. Within contemporary research, scholars have used reflexivity to understand the impact of individual personality on research, as well as to negotiate the pragmatics of day-to-day research challenges. Some of the richest accounts of reflexive inquiry come from ethnographies (see Bourgois, 2003; Bucerius, 2014; Hoang, 2015 among others), but these articles and monographs are almost entirely based on individual researchers and participant-researcher relationships (Sandberg & Ibarra Rojas, 2021). Consequently, we have little insight into the positional reflexivity of researchers doing other forms of work, such as team research. This represents a gap, as over the past 30 years, team research—and especially, team ethnography—have also evolved to reflect the post-modern focus on reflexivity in qualitative research (Bartunek & Louis, 1996; Copes & Vieraitas, 2022). One key shift has focused on team composition. Specifically, many observers now consider so-called 'insiders'—people who have "regular and intimate contact with members of the group being studied" and possess "membership" in the research setting (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 8)—to be crucial parts of research teams.

Despite the key role that insiders play within research teams, their perspectives remain muted in the criminological literature. We know little about how access, rapport, and pragmatics work in team research, and have do not possess a clear picture of how insiders relate to the reflexive shift when compared to more typical researchers (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Even newer articles fail to comprehensively discuss how insiders in teams shape criminological

methods (Haggerty, Bucerius & Berardi, 2022), although some new work consider teams research in more depth (Copes & Vieraitas, 2022; Sandberg & Rojas, 2021). This is not to say that insider research does not exist in criminological research: work by Contreras (2013), Hoang (2015) on sex workers, and Panfil (2017) on queer and gay gang members have comprehensively demonstrated the utility of insider perspectives in crime ethnographies. Likewise, Bucerius' (2014) work as a trusted outsider—defined as an external researcher trusted with inside knowledge (Bucerius, 2013, p. 691)—reinforces the utility of approaching complex research sites from an insider perspective. When it comes to team research, however, insider perspectives are under-represented (Vaughn et al., 2018), as insider research continues to fit within the lone hero archetype (Sandberg & Rojas, 2021). The unique perspectives and values possessed by research insiders are muted by the urgency of presenting a consistent message from the team, even though consistency within team messaging is often a complex task of construction in and of itself (Mauthner & Doucet, 2008).

I follow Mauthner and Doucet (2008) in arguing that creating a unified team voice represents a significant methodological challenge and add to their analysis by suggesting that insider team members make this process even more complex. The pressures, experiences, and relationships possessed by insiders create unique challenges for research teams, especially when the research takes place in a space with highly distinctive cultural or subcultural meanings. In this paper, I draw on my experience as an insider working with a team of researchers within a Canadian prison system to answer the following questions. 1. What challenges do former correctional officers face in conducting prison research? 2. How do subcultural ties between insider researchers and study participants impact the dynamics of team research? and 3. How does team membership challenge insider ties to subculturally-bound research locations?

Literature Review

Researchers have discussed field roles in reference to sociological research since the work of the Chicago School in the early 20th century (Adler & Adler, 1987). In the first work on explicitly codified research roles, Gold (1958) and Junker (1960) categorized fieldworkers as complete observers, observer-as-participants, participant-as-observers, or complete participants (Adler & Adler, 1987). An explicit commitment to objectivism informed these roles. As Bucerius puts it, "underlying these roles is the degree of belonging a researcher achieves, which is influenced by his or her participation in group activities, commitment to group values and norms, and level of group affiliation" (2013, p. 691). The Chicago school's strongly-held adherence to a scientific sociology, an explicitly objectivist perspective which sought to avoid any perceived influence on research participants, underpinned these neatly-organized research roles—and especially, which roles were appropriate and inappropriate for a researcher (Adler & Adler, 1987; O'Reilly, 2009). Researcher objectivity was thought to enhance reliability and validity and becoming too close to participants or a research site was a source of severe criticism (Maxwell, 2013; O'Reilly, 2009).

Beginning in the 1980s, authors like Adler and Adler (1987) began pointing out the inherent contradiction of pursuing an objectivist viewpoint, instead highlighting the important role that researchers played in creating and influencing research roles (O'Reilly, 2009). The Adlers drew on existing ethnographies to redefine membership roles along a spectrum, running from peripheral group membership to complete group adherence. The most comprehensive of the roles they outlined was what they referred to as the "Complete membership role," where the researcher was an accepted and respected member of the group or subculture under study (Adler

& Adler, 1987). In newer literature, authors tend to describe this sort of positionality as 'Insider/Outsider' research (O'Reilly, 2009).

Insider researchers serve two major purposes in the development of qualitative team research. First, insiders bring unique experiential knowledge to bear on the research-design process, with significant and meaningful results on the final product (R. Wright et al., 2001). Second, insiders provide unique interpretations of data based on their values and experiences, thereby ostensibly helping to prevent exploitative research practices (Vaughn et al., 2018). These reasons, among many others, are key points influencing why major funding agencies now require team research with unique and vulnerable populations to include community insiders, often referred to as community-based researchers (CIHR et al., 2014).

Such positionality is crucial. As Bartunek and Louis (1996, p. 1) put it, "People who are insiders to a setting being studied often have a view of the setting and any findings about it quite different from that of the outside researchers who are conducting the study." Different is not synonymous with better: critics have panned insider ethnographies for lacking scholarly detachment and failing to provide critiques which force researchers to think about the factors at play behind a cross-cultural context (O'Reilly, 2009). There are important risks for inside researchers—notably, over-rapport, which can foster uncritical forms of cultural celebration (Maxwell, 2013; McGinn, 2008; O'Reilly, 2009; Fleisher, 1989). Danger also exists in conducting research in a place where exit is not easy, desirable, or even possible (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bartunek & Louis, 1996; Contreras, 2013).

Critiques of insider positionality typically come from other researchers, as the communities discussed by insiders often possess a jaded view of traditional scholarly inquiry (Sandberg & Rojas, 2021). As Contreras (2013, p. 17) puts it,

> Most inner-city ethnographies have been done by upper-middle-class and elite-educated researchers. For them, fieldwork is often their first sustained contact both with poor people of color and with exciting and unfamiliar social phenomena—the streets, the sounds, the language, the black and brown bodies. They admit their race and class privileges and discuss how these might have influenced their observations. Then they provide wonderful ethnographic insight, mostly for upper-middle-class readers who are just like them but who would never travel to those exotic worlds.

As one of the 'black and brown bodies' he describes, Contreras' description is equal parts satirical and poignant—yet his point is well-made: broadly criticizing insider research overlooks the voyeuristic and historically colonial influence which ethnography can have on a research site (O'Reilly, 2009). Furthermore, it ignores acknowledgements that qualitative researchers *are* the research instrument in important and meaningful ways, something which demands a close and personal involvement with the research field (Presser & Sandberg, 2015).

Although these tensions persist, insider research has emerged as an important method of accessing sensitive, complex spaces. This is especially the case when considering partner-based research styles, which ensure that community members have a distinctive role in the research and are believed to help level some of the problematic power differentials which exist between researcher and research community (Sandberg & Rojas, 2021; Vaughn et al., 2018). Team-based research frequently includes inside perspectives, helping address the inequities of research relationships while simultaneously providing external challenges to the preconceived notions of insiders. Consequently, team-based research, especially participatory action research and community-based participatory research, have emerged as standards of social science methods in

a wide range of settings (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Sandberg & Rojas, 2021; Vaughn et al., 2018).

Researchers have extensively discussed the challenges of this form of research, specifically unpacking the dual problem of creating a unified message among team members while also managing the perceived and actual power dynamics that all teams possess. Messaging is usually the most significant issue at play. Unlike solo research, team research must negotiate how to communicate conclusions (Mauthner & Doucet, 2008). This is not always an easy or straightforward process, as Creese and Blackledge (2012) demonstrate:

> When a team of researchers makes meaning from the voices of others the histories, biographies, and ideologies of the individual researchers come into contact and come into view as they clash, disagree, argue, negotiate, barter, compromise, and even come to agreement. As they do so their histories, biographies, and ideologies inform the process of meaning-making (p. 317).

The process of negotiating team dynamics is a crucial part of team-based research (Erikson & Stull, 1998). Debates and discussions within teams often serve to create a richer and more useful interpretation of the primary data. However, debates can also be deeply divisive, highlighting conflicts and power imbalances within a team (Sandberg & Rojas, 2021). As Vaughn et al. (2018) put it, “Despite the insider knowledge held by peers, it is more common, and perhaps expected, that the researchers or providers control the research/intervention process, including how financial and other resources will be distributed (p. 771). Local subcultural values and insider habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) further complicate the team dynamic, as insiders place different weight on specific aspects of the research field.

Habitus is an important part of this conversation, as it possesses a complex relationship with insider research. Defined in part by Bourdieu as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions … embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 53–54), insider researchers do not always conclusively discuss the impact of individual habitus, or alternatively relate to habitus in broad terms, justified by Bourdieu's call to scientific reflexivity (2003; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Although many insider research projects describe the complex and often difficult experiences of returning to do research within a personalized space (Contreras, 2013; Swistun & Auyero, 2008), the impact of conflicting habitus, and how this impacts the research and research process, is less well-understood. This is particularly the case when it comes to a so-called cleft habitus, which Bourdieu describes as the transition between and simultaneous possession of two distinct, and sometimes competing, habitus (Bourdieu, 2004). Cleft habitus, typically used to discuss things like social mobility (Lee & Kramer, 2013), often serves as a tension point for people transitioning between different roles, such as insider researchers.

Addressing and managing individual disagreements is a crucial part in supervising team research projects, as debates around meaning-making often become significant factors in creating divisions between team members (Erikson & Stull, 1998; Gerstl-Pepin & Gunzenhauser, 2002; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015). Such issues serve as a central methodological challenge of team research. Yet, research insights into how insider status create and sustain such divisions within teams remain limited, meaning that we have few insights into how teams can effectively manage such challenges.

Methods

I draw on my fieldnotes and experiences working within the University of Alberta Prisons Project (UAPP), a large-scale qualitative, semi-ethnographic research project that has interviewed over 800 incarcerated people and 200 prison staff in both provincial and federal prisons across Western Canada.[25] I specifically draw on my fieldnotes and interview excerpts collected in four Western Canadian provincial prisons. Two of the institutions I entered were large remand centres. Rocky View Remand Centre[26] (RVRC) was one of Canada's largest prisons, housing over 1700 individuals, while Crestwood Remand Institution (CRI) housed approximately 800 people. These institutions, which hold people awaiting trial, were overcrowded during my access, and prison staff and incarcerated people described violence and drug overdoses as regular parts of daily life. Correctional officers (COs) and incarcerated people expressed significant levels of antipathy toward each other, as well as suspicion toward outsiders.

In comparison, Silverside Correctional Centre (SCC) was far more relaxed, even though it still held nearly 500 incarcerated men and women. People at SCC had more opportunities to attend programs, engage in recreational activities, and prison staff had more positive relationships with incarcerated people as a result. Harbour Bay Correctional Centre (HBCC) had a similar culture to SCC, as it was relatively small (around 350 incarcerated people) and had extensive programming options available to help incarcerated people fill time. While these two institutions were less violent and were more relaxed than the larger remand centres, COs and incarcerated people both told me these institutions experienced violence and drug overdoses and

[25] Research Ethics Board approvals Pro00061614 and Pro00062785
[26] All institutional and participant names are pseudonyms

suggested that distinctive subcultural values played a significant role in shaping how people interacted with each other.

Our team had limited access to each prison, something influenced by the physical location of each institution as well as limitations imposed on us by correctional administrators. Depending on the institution, our access ranged from a low of 14 days at CRI, to a high of 21 days at SCC. To make the most of the limited timeframes, the study's principal investigators (PIs) assembled a team consisting of themselves and four to six research assistants, primarily drawn from a body of graduate students who had interests in prison research. Inside the prisons, individual researchers typically took responsibility for a single unit in a prison, simultaneously creating consistency across interviews and allowing team members to disperse across multiple units and multiple areas of the prison on a given day.

My positionality within the broader research team was unique. Before beginning my graduate education in 2015, I spent five years working as a CO at SCC. As a result, I knew officers and incarcerated people in each of the institutions we entered. My extensive social networks allowed me to build rapport with officers in different ways than my research colleagues and gained me admission to back-stage locations both in and outside of the prison. COs seemed to be far more willing to speak with me as a result, and although I interviewed incarcerated people in several institutions, I spent much of my time moving between units and speaking with COs. As a result, of 131 total staff participants, I interviewed 110, or over 80 percent of our final officer sample.

Participant observation was a particularly important part of my data collection. Officers often came up to me to converse about specific topics, complain about the institution or other staff, or reflect on their perceptions of correctional work and our research project. Many of these

individuals did not wish to do a formal interview but had specific points they wished to discuss. I detailed these interactions and conversations in rough fieldnotes and voice memos as soon as possible after these discussions, then created detailed, long-form fieldnotes after leaving the institutions. These fieldnotes provide a wealth of methodological detail, describing the backstage behaviour of officers within the prison, as well as the interactions between officers, prisoners, managers, and researchers. More importantly, these notes also provided detailed methodological reflections about my own positionality in terms of the research team.

Initiation

I began working as a CO as a 20-year-old undergraduate student. The prison in my rural community was hiring staff to cover vacation absences during busy summer months, and I needed a job to pay off my university education. SCC had a reputation as being an 'easy' prison, one characterized by legitimate power relationships between officers and incarcerated people (Sparks et al., 1996). However, easy was a relative term: although the institution was not constantly in the grips of violent confrontations, SCC still experienced gang battles, self-harming behaviours, fights between staff and incarcerated people, and complex social hierarchies and codes that shaped the 'right' way to do the job (Lerman & Page, 2012).

Learning how to negotiate these challenges represented a massive challenge, especially since the incarcerated men on my unit took gleeful advantage of my inexperience. For instance, one individual 'muscled' (threatened) two other people, stealing several doses of prescribed opioids that they had 'cheeked.'[27] Consuming these, he went into drug-induced cardiac arrest on the floor in front of my partner and me. After we had saved his live and were investigating the

[27] "Cheeking" was a specific method of diverting medications, which incarcerated people consumed under supervision.

incident, I realized I had observed him steal the drugs earlier in the day but had assumed that the threats I witnessed were merely a friendly conversation. Likewise, I also vividly remember the first fight I encountered. As I observed two people running into the bathroom and my partner rushing to respond, I froze – unable to respond.

My mistakes were honest and perhaps predictable for someone new to this occupation, but they placed my coworkers at risk. Experienced officers tested new staff and did not accept them until they had proven themselves to be competent. I had failed these early tests and had to work to overcome my errors—something exacerbated when my coworkers discovered that I grew up in the same rural town where the prison director lived, and assumed I was an informant for upper management. One veteran officer directly confronted me with this in my early days, crudely and graphically implying that I had gotten the job due to nepotism: "So, I hear you know the director. How's that dick taste? Does he ever tell you to quit squirming?" Distrusted by my coworkers and lacking the necessary 'street smarts' to effectively manage the units I oversaw, I worked for a year before I proved myself as a 'good' officer in the eyes of managers and other COs. Perseverance and not letting significant amounts of informal harassment distract me from the task at hand garnered me some trust. Responding to fights between officers and incarcerated people garnered me a positive reputation, further building my status within the prison. Likewise, as I increased in expertise and confidence, I was able to do a better job in managing complex situations with incarcerated people, especially after my shift manager assigned me to manage the medical department—a notoriously complex and busy position, requiring strong work ethic, careful organizational skills, and the ability to manage conflicts and confrontations single-handedly. Through these measures, I slowly garnered a reputation as a trustworthy and reliable colleague, one who could be trusted as a 'good' work partner (Marquart, 1986b).

A key aspect of my orientation into prison work was learning how to effectively engage with the CO habitus. Bourdieu describes habitus as a "generative and unifying principle" that underlies the mindsets of people in a particular setting (1994, p. 340). The strength of the CO habitus is profound: as Lerman and Page (2012) have described, COs are grounded within the occupational role of being a 'correctional officer,' which shapes their beliefs and outlooks on how to run a prison the 'right' way (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021). Many researchers have discussed CO workplace cultures, and the complexities and importance of culturally 'becoming' a CO (Higgins et al., 2022; Liebling, Price, et al., 2011; Ricciardelli, 2022; Tait, 2011). The experience of being a CO shapes and mediates individual officers' experience of corrections and outlooks on life (Eriksson, 2021; Garrihy, 2021), influencing how values and social mores are passed along to new staff (Lerman & Page, 2012; Tracy & Scott, 2006).

My experience corresponded with this characterization. After I had 'proven' myself as a 'good' officer, the COs I worked with became my closest friends. We helped each other, visited each other, dated each other, and played ice hockey and drank together. Even when officers had personal disputes, we did so in the context of being on the same team. We spoke in terms of "going to war" alongside our colleagues (Schultz, 2022), focusing on the risks we faced every day, and invested deeply in our identities as COs—so much so that I still tell people that I 'grew up' in prison. The prison officer habitus shaped how we thought and lived, becoming a key identity marker:

> I have identified as a prison guard since I started working in 2010, even if I was only part-time. Even after I quit, I have often introduced myself as an ex-prison guard or discuss prison as my area of interest/expertise in polite conversation (Field note, October 2016).

As COs, we reinforced our identity markers through active boundary work, symbolically derogating incarcerated people as 'mopes,' 'cons,' 'shit-birds,' or just 'inmates,' rejecting their claims to dignity and humanity through the labels we assigned to them (Higgins et al., 2022; Lamont & Fournier, 1992).[28] Incarcerated people reflected and repaid our scorn (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019), contributing to a fundamentally divided and hostile setting that deeply shaped the mindsets of everyone who worked and lived in the prison.

It was impossible to be healthy in such an environment, and by 2015, I found the constant stress and instability was negatively reshaping my personality. Two incidents drove this home. In one, I was refereeing a community soccer tournament, and had an angry soccer parent start yelling at me over a call I had made. Instead of ignoring the situation, I responded aggressively, telling the individuals to shut up and stop questioning my calls. This response was not something that reflected my personality, and the aggressiveness of my response surprised and humiliated me almost as much as it offended the spectators. However, this response was directly in line with the CO personality I had actively cultivated within the prison where I worked. In the second, a friend jokingly threw a surprise punch toward my face, to see my reaction. Startled, my instincts took over, and I aggressively took them to the ground in a restraining hold.

These socially embarrassing incidents were external manifestations of deeper problems. I felt uncomfortable in crowded rooms, held doors for friends so they would not be behind my back, chose restaurant seats that faced the door, and avoided spaces like malls where I faced a higher chance of encountering formerly incarcerated people (Tracy, 2003). I found myself struggling to determine what 'normal' reactions to situations were: was edgy and touchy

[28] To be clear, these are not labels or attitudes that I hold today, and nor am I comfortable with the fact that I once participated in these forms of boundary work. However, such attitudes were key parts of our work, and represented central aspects of the CO habitus.

aggression in standing up for myself appropriate, as was called for at work? Were people who found me intimidating, scary, or rude as a result of my aggression simply too 'soft'? Incidents like the two I describe above showed me that the lines of my life were blurring, and shocked me into realizing I was not able to clearly differentiate between the attitudes I held as a CO and the beliefs I held as an individual. What is more, incidents showed me that I was no longer capable of managing my stress and led me to look for work outside of corrections. I applied to university in early 2015; grad school represented my best chance to 'get out of the jail' in both a literal and a figurative sense, and I seized it. When I walked out of the prison for the last time, I told my family, friends, and coworkers I was trading a steady paycheck for my mental health.

Return

While graduate school represented a new opportunity for me, my alignment with the officer habitus left marks that fundamentally shaped my perspective. Interested in examining the environment that had shaped me, I joined the University of Alberta Prisons Project in 2016 and returned to the prison where I had worked a little over a year after I had left.

Leaving prison work had helped my mental health and stress levels, and I had partially disconnected myself from the officer habitus that shaped my life so deeply (Lerman & Page, 2012). With the confidence born of inexperience, I believed that I was 'over' my CO days and attitudes, a belief I blithely communicated to the Project's principal investigators (PIs). I discovered that I was wrong in the first institution we entered, and quickly found myself drawn back into the CO habitus I had only just left—as this fieldnote, taken on my first day back, notes:

> I really got the prison "feel" again when I walked onto [the first unit]. I recognized it again—that tension in my gut, wondering who's behind me, checking to see who's looking at me and how (Field note, August 2016).

I had not expected such an immediate and dramatic pull back toward the CO habitus, especially because of the role it had played in my mental health struggles. I had even told the study's PIs as much when we completed ethics applications for this research. Yet, re-entering the prison forced me to reconsider my experiences:

> I grew up in this place. I can feel myself slipping back into the CO role, and I'm concerned about that. I will be better, heathier, once I'm out of here. But, I have so many people I care about here (December 2016).

My positionality quickly became a challenge I found myself struggling with. I was not a CO anymore—but neither was I a pure researcher, as I carried the weight of my experiences each time I entered the prison. The tension of this was obvious to my teammates, as they observed both mental and physical changes in my behaviour as we entered institutions:

> I felt a jet of adrenaline run into my system as soon as I turned off the road into the jail's parking lot. It clearly showed, because [a team member] laughed at me and told me I looked like Arnold Schwarzenegger in that pose. It wasn't intentional; it was the unconscious "attack dog" feeling; the feeling of being "ready" I always got when I heard raised voices or someone slam a door on the unit, or when I heard the exterior doors of the prison slam behind me, locking me inside (Field note, April 2017).

Re-entering prisons as a researcher put me in contact with an unconscious residual identity and set of cultural values, something former coworkers emphasized and magnified in

unexpected ways. Many of the officers I interviewed felt trapped in their jobs, hating many aspects of the work they did on a day-to-day basis, and seeing little worth in what they did (Schultz, 2022). As Pierce, one of my former managers, put it, "Corrections is like the participant medal of law enforcement. They'll take anyone, and no-one fails." Most only stayed in the job out of economic necessity, even though they were conscious of the personal costs of doing their work (Ricciardelli, 2019; Schultz, 2022). In this context, many officers viewed my return as a revelation. Unlike most COs who quit, I had returned—and did so as a researcher, something that they perceived as honouring their experiences. As Pierce put it, "Geez Schultzy, you're basically the wind beneath our wings, taking our message to the world!" (Field note, December 2016). Officers saw me as someone who understood and cared about the issues they faced, and trusted me with significant elements of their personal lives as a result. Their interview comments repeatedly demonstrated this. Phillip told me "I wish I was brave enough to do what you're doing and go back to school," a thought that Hogan agreed with: "I'd do something like you're doing—go around checking out different jails and listening to COs bitch. It'd be fun."

Researchers have described strong levels of social solidarity between COs, as well as suspicion toward outsiders. Building trust with officers is cited as a key, and sometimes insurmountable, challenge to collecting data within carceral settings (Carter & Thomson, 2022; Crewe, 2009). My deeply embedded position meant that I had little trouble achieving officers' trust in any of the four prisons. Matt, who I had never met, told me "You've actually got an insight. An inside insight, instead of just like—if you were an academic and had no foot in the door experience, it wouldn't be worth talking to you, because you would hear half these stories and you would have an uneducated spin on it." My 'inside insight' let officers discuss complex topics in ways that are not well-described in the corrections literature. Many were critical of the

workplace environment and cultures they observed on a day-to-day basis, excoriating managers, coworkers, and the structural deficits of prison. Cody told me that "Our department is almost in a failed state, in my opinion. Our success rate is so low that if we were a school/hospital/treatment centre, we would be investigated" (Field note, April 2018). A sergeant, frustrated by the blatantly thuggish actions of his subordinates, was scathing: "I just need better people! These guys are unbelievable. I've never seen anyone hit a con in cuffs before I came to this shift. None of them actually know how to talk to cons. They think that every single con needs a beating" (Field note, December 2016).

Officers did not appear to self-censor or put a good spin on these actions when undertaken in front of me, as they knew I had done the job and assumed that I was still sympathetic to their actions, no matter how problematic. As Darnell put it, "You have your experience, you know. You know how it is." And, they drew direct connections between my identity and their willingness to talk (Kauffman, 1988):

Will: Would you also mind if I put [this] on a recorder?

Carrie: Oh yeah. I trust ya. And I don't trust ANYBODY. But I trust you.

Suspicious and insular officer cultures usually suppress their willingness to discuss controversial topics (Tracy, 2004). But, because officers understood that I was familiar with their work, many sought me out privately to discuss topics that were taboo or were extremely problematic. During and after our discussions, officers frequently told me that it was the first time they had discussed the problematic aspects of their work, as they often felt like they had to hide what they did from coworkers for cultural reasons (Higgins et al., 2022), and from family for health reasons (Garrihy, 2021). Consequently, my positionality allowed me to get insights into sensitive topics, like violence, use of force, and even drug use, to an extent that surprised me (Schultz, 2022).

My positionality also informed my relationships with management. Managers, recognizing my experience and training, provided tacit permission for me to access spaces in each prison that are usually out of bounds for researchers or outsiders. The most extreme example of this occurred at a large remand centre. A CO I went through training with tipped me off that an incarcerated man in a maximum-security unit had 'covered up' his camera and windows. Doing so is a well-known rule infraction, and prison staff and administrators officially view such an action as a major security risk to either the institution or an incarcerated person who might be engaging in self harm. Management had consequently authorized the tactical team to perform a 'cell extraction.' I slipped onto the unit, standing inconspicuously in a back corner—until the duty manager, who I had worked for previously, came onto the unit, looked at me, and said, "Will the Thrill! You'd better get upstairs off camera before the team gets here" (Field note, October 2016). 'Upstairs' referred to the remote pod control station, where an officer controlled all doors on the unit and had feeds from most cameras in the prison. Our research team was initially not allowed to access these spaces, as they were the most secure locations in the prison—but with this permission, I gained access immediately. Arriving, I discovered that I knew the CO working there; he provided play-by-play analysis of the live video streams, as we watched the tactical team force the door, pepper spray and subdue the incarcerated man, handcuff him, and remove him from the unit. These are not the types of encounters that researchers are routinely invited to observe.

Managers did not just provide unofficial access to restricted spaces. Some of them even offered me jobs:

> The rest of the [research] team is literally sitting in the room being briefed on the security precautions for the centre, and just down the hallway the deputy director of the centre is doing his best to hire me back onto staff (November 2016).

I was offered a job twice during our research, and managers described me as a different figure because of my experience. As Dan, a high-level manager, put it, "You can understand, you can empathize, you can sympathize with the good, the bad, the ugly. You've been there, you've watched it." Because of this, managers gave me *carte blanche* to access places like maximum-security segregation units, which my collaborators were not able to access in the first two prisons we entered.

Putting on a comfortable role

My connections with the officer habitus quickly led to role confusion and ethical dilemmas concerning how I interacted with incarcerated people. Such individuals recognized me in each prison we entered, including many who had lived on units under my supervision. I was direct and honest with these individuals, explained my new role in detail to try and show them I was no longer a CO or associated with the prison. I also provided detailed informed consent documents, as well as careful, thorough lay explanations. A portion of incarcerated people understandably continued to view me with suspicion. For instance, one individual told other incarcerated people on his unit at RVRC that I was a former officer, leading many individuals to shun my interview requests. However, with other incarcerated people, my new status—combined with my previous reputation as a 'firm but fair' officer—helped to overcome distrust and led to some deeply insightful interviews. Kyle, who had been on a unit under my supervision for nearly two years, reflected on how he viewed me professionally:

> And you were consistent. You were the same guy every day. I knew if I seen you escorting the nurse around at med-line that you better show up with this amount of water. Don't ask the nurse stupid questions. Like you're the same guy consistently. There's guys that respect that. You're not trying to be somebody's buddy. And I don't have no respect for that kind of stuff.

Nor was Kyle the only one. Most of the incarcerated people who had known me as a CO found joy in telling stories about how they had tricked me. This was particularly the case with Freddie, whom I had once hired as my unit's laundry worker. Several months before I resigned, a co-worker had discovered a hole in the chain-link fence of the recreation yard on the unit where we worked. This discovery, a major security breach, caused a commotion including general lockdowns and extensive searches. Freddie provided crucial insight we had completely missed:

> Freddie: I was the one that picked it out (laughing). The bottom of the fencing, you take it, you bend it like this, you can literally shimmy it all the way through. We did it behind the camera. They'd go out and they'd run to the door and they'd take all the [cigarette] butts and then they'd come back and we'd smoke 'em. [… we did it for] at least a month and a half. We could've escaped – could've escaped from there so many times, it was ridiculous (laughter).
>
> Will: I tried so darned hard to – I was trying to do my best! (laughter)
>
> Freddie: But your best is never good enough when you're up against 20-30 criminals, right? You never know what's goin' on, and the thing is you guys are always distracted. You guys are always doing paperwork, you guys are always doing the computer, you guys are always distracted and you guys never really have enough time to actually watch everybody.

As these excerpts demonstrate, incarcerated people were willing to speak to me, sometimes (as in Freddie's case) in embarrassingly thorough detail. My role as an officer, in this case, may have played an opposite role to what I had expected. While I had expected that my former role would prevent me from being able to interview incarcerated people, comments from people like Kyle and Freddie suggested that my reputation as someone who was (in Kyle's words) "the same guy consistently" meant that professional relationships fostered and developed during my working years continued to play a role in facilitating my interviews, as the power differentials that had once existed melted away in stories, reflection, and reminiscence.

Clear ethical protections helped to establish trust and respect between incarcerated people and myself. However, this was not always easy, and was sometimes out of my control, as an incident on a tense and disorganized unit which had recently experienced a major search showed. An incarcerated man volunteered for an interview but dictated that we sit at a common table area, in full view of the rest of the unit and within hearing distance of both officers and other incarcerated people. He interrogated me on my role, and after ten minutes of loud proclamations about how awful and corrupt all prison staff were, ended the interview. The officers managing the unit watched our exchange with barely contained rage, as they viewed his behaviour as a tactical maneuver intended to humiliate them and undermine their power. I then began another interview, during which I heard yelling from outside the interview room. When I emerged, I found the officers had locked the first man in his cell for being rude to me. Recognizing the massive ethical implications of this action, I asked them to release him. As researchers, we obviously could not be in a situation where our interviewees might be punished for anything that they said to us – even if they insisted on saying negative things about COs loudly and within earshot of the officers. When the officers demurred, I insisted that he be released. After a few

minutes of argument, they released him, and I publicly apologized to the incarcerated man for the misunderstanding.

This situation presented a unique ethical challenge, something that became clear later that evening when I messaged the senior officer on the unit:

> Will: Sorry about the confusion with that guy today. I asked you to pop [release] him because we have to walk a bit of a line. I'm not a con-lover by any extent, but if they start saying they have to talk to us or they get locked up, we're screwed.
>
> Officer: Yeah, no worries, I kind of figured that was the reasoning, it was against you, so I figured you should have some say if he was locked up or not.
>
> (Field note, September 2016)

I knew the senior officer on this unit, and reached out to him via Facebook, apologizing for the confusion. My torn allegiances are visible in how I expressed my sentiments: my problematic word-choice—"I'm not a con-lover"—was drawn from my CO habitus, as was the entire apology itself. After all, the man in question had every right to refuse an interview, even though he had been manipulative and rude in doing so. Interestingly, this officer's response showed the somewhat unique influence I possessed, as he suggested I should have a 'say' in the punishment of this individual. Overall, while the ethics of this ended up being problematic and spoke to power differentials I had not expected, it also demonstrates the complexities I faced in negotiating my cleft habitus (Lee & Kramer, 2013), as I subtly used my word-choices and attitudes here to demonstrate I was, in some way, aligned with the CO 'side' and was not threatening the subcultural boundaries that played such a significant role in governing CO/incarcerated person relationships.

My role confusion grew and became more intense as the project carried along, coming to a head when I returned the prison where I had worked:

> I cannot lose the habit of saying "we" when talking about officer culture. Plus, I have this odd habit of slipping back into CO mode. It's getting too strong to control. For instance, today I saw something orange in an inmate's pocket. It looked like a razor. I immediately thought about informing a staff member to have him check the inmate's pocket to be sure it wasn't a weapon, and very nearly said it out loud. I'm having serious difficulties separating my roles here. I can't interview inmates anymore—or not here, anyway.
>
> It's like an unstoppable urge; I'm not consciously doing it. I'm reacting—and as soon as I react, I violate my role as a researcher. And it plays back to something else: when I sit down in a place where I have worked, my hypervigilance returns. I had forgotten how hyper-aware I was when I worked. Getting [an officer] to check that guy's pocket yesterday though—that was solely because I saw a flash of orange which might have been a razor. When I worked, I was hyper-aware to all those small details—so much so that you could honestly have called me paranoid. I jumped on tiny stuff, and I saw everything. That's slipped away. And now it's coming back (Field note, December 2016).

Incarcerated people signed out shaving razors housed in highly visible orange casings. As an officer, I learned to be hypervigilant, as a flash of orange might imply a disguised weapon. This training resurfaced unexpectedly: noticing a flash of orange in a pocket, I instinctually started to say something to the officer on duty, only stopping myself at the absolute last second. In retrospect, this represented an ethical breach of my researcher role, something I agonized over in my fieldnotes that night. I did not share this incident with the PIs or my team members until

much later, but I began deeply reflecting on how I could continue to function as a researcher given my conflicts. Until this point, I had been interviewing incarcerated people and officers in roughly equal numbers, but this incident showed me my connection to the officer habitus was too deep to effectively balance my roles. Realizing this, I spoke to the study PIs, giving them a general sense that I was struggling with my split habitus—although, importantly, it was not until much later I told them just how deeply this struggle affected me. They supported my decision and agreed that it would be best if I exclusively interviewed COs going forward, something I did in the remaining two prisons.

Cleft habitus

My relationship with COs across the project placed me into quiet, and occasionally open, conflict with the other researchers on my team. Other interviewers openly joked that my role in the project was to "go visit with your friends," and less subtly suggested that I was too close to the officers. The other research assistants were all well-trained sociologists, and several had extensively read critical prison literature. This meant they were deeply conscious of the inequalities, injustices, and power imbalances in prison. Because of their attention to these topics—which, for most of them, represented the extent of their experience with law enforcement personnel—my experience as a former CO became a tension point, and led to open criticism of my perspectives. Although my team's critiques were legitimate, their disapproval of my friends and former coworkers frequently hit a nerve, and I fiercely defended my participants. This soon created conflict: my teammates perceived me as blindly loyal to the officers I interviewed and criticized me for what they saw as my inability to critique the injustices we observed in prison. I, in turn, grew frustrated by what I viewed as a simplistic view of the prison.

Their constant criticism of officers led me to question the impact they could have on my participants:

> [By being part of this team], I have, for all intents and purposes, turned a spotlight onto a dirty floor. There are large clean patches, but there are patches which aren't very pretty to look at. And so I return to betrayal. I staunchly believe that the majority of correctional officers are good people—solid people, who are doing the best they can. Just as firmly, I believe that there are dirty guards who abuse the process, abuse inmates, and mess up the clean officers … But, in trying to show the dirt, do I condemn the clean officers to be painted with the same brush? And I am placing my people into a situation where, whether they realize it or not, they are vulnerable?" (Field note, October 2016).

The sense of being torn between two loyalties haunted me. I felt a deep sense of commitment to the research work we were doing, as I knew first-hand just how problematic prisons could be. My goal in becoming a prison researcher was to understand and explain the factors which led to the problematic behaviours and actions we all observed, and I intimately understood where the figurative 'bodies were buried' in the prisons we entered:

> My mental health is better now, because I know there were a lot of people who I didn't trust at the jail. Although I don't fully trust my people from the university right now, I don't suspect them of doing illegal things which will affect me—unlike some of my former coworkers (Field note, December 2016).

I felt a sense of commitment to finding and highlighting these issues: questionable and illegal actions by officers played a significant role in tainting my experience as a CO, something I knew was a crucial and poorly understood component of prison work. I specifically asked officers for their reflections on these sorts of incidents, including drug use and excessive use-of-force. Many

officers gave me detailed examples, implicating themselves while also discussing how such incidents had harmed their mental health. Yet, in doing so, some of them reminded me that I was actively transgressing the expectations of the CO code (Schultz, 2022). Discussing a series of deeply concerning, illegal actions committed by officers in another institution, one former co-worker warned me about the consequences of publicizing such information, telling me that "If you open your mouth Willie, watch where you park. Just watch where you park. Because they'll find you" (Field note, November 2016). These reminders echoed in my mind as I continued to work and impacted how I engaged with some of the data I collected. For instance, even though these data are protected through ethical approvals, anonymization, and the usual methodological best practices of slightly altering stories to protect individual identity, I have still waited nearly seven years since doing these interviews to carefully interact and analyze the more 'dangerous' pieces of information. Although not the only reason, the risks hinted at in my co-worker's warning are a significant part of why I have delayed this paper so long.

The pressure cooker of competing loyalties forced an even larger wedge between my research team and me. Over the year of our interviews, and subsequent year of our coding and analytical work, initial disagreements crystallized into everything from tactful disagreement to open hostility. My team members did not understand how deeply prison work impacted me, nor did they realize the sensitive balance I was trying to walk. The study PIs supported me and saw value in my unique perspectives and access, but did not know how to navigate the complex, raw, and emotionally layered state these struggles placed me in. Nor were they fully aware of how these discussions impacted our team dynamics. While the PIs did their best to support all of us and resolve conflicts in a productive and fair manner, I still felt that I could not rely on my team

members to service as confidants, as they could not see the nuances I encountered everywhere. Their criticisms led to defensiveness and fear in my work:

> Bringing people inside the prison has not been a seamless experience for me. I don't really know if I can trust them. I don't feel like I can trust about half of the team. I was far more ready to trust my former coworkers, who I knew would play by a specific, definable set of rules—i.e., if I'm attacked, they'll come. As it is with my [research] group, I've brought people into the prison who don't know the rules, and don't necessarily follow the same code. In other words, they are a threat to my other people. And after the last month, I'm really not sure I did the right thing (December 2016).

Torn between my conflicting habitus of being a CO and being a researcher (Bourdieu, 2004), I began to lean into my identity as a CO, seeking safety and security in a place and space I understood and in which I belonged—something I longed for in my still new and uncomfortable role as an academic. I repeatedly referred to officer code values such as loyalty and solidarity in my fieldnotes, calling prison staff 'my people,' and reflecting deeply on whether I might be in the process of betraying them through my work as a researcher.

Trust served as a central feature of this internal struggle. I often observed my team members violate subcultural codes with officers and incarcerated people. Other research assistants openly critiqued officer decisions and responses, without fully understanding the code values or mental health struggles that often informed them (Schultz, 2022). In some cases, these critiques came back to me from officers, as COs who knew me checked in to see if I 'vouched' for the trustworthiness of my teammates, or whether I agreed with a specific critique someone had openly expressed in front of officers. In one case, a team member asked me to deliver a poem to an incarcerated person in the segregation unit, as she could not access this unit. While I

complied, I found myself in a state of considerable unease with this request, as it represented a security breach that officers and institutional managers would have frowned upon. Furthermore, I was only able to accomplish this request through taking advantage of the goodwill of former coworkers, who trusted me to access the most secure space in the prison.

Such decisions led me to invest significant amounts of my social capital into the project, in ways both visible (helping my colleagues to negotiate specific situations) and invisible (quietly vouching for the trustworthiness of my research collaborators to officers in private settings). As these events became more common, I voluntarily assumed a significant amount of responsibility for the project—something visible in my comments about how I take responsibility for 'bringing people into the prison.' While my positionality obviously played a role in shaping our research, I was in practice simply another research assistant on a team and had no formal status in terms of negotiating access or data ownership. Yet despite this, I deeply invested my capital in this project, taking every opportunity to drive the project forward in meaningful ways. I searched for ways to find and collect 'dirty secrets' and insider knowledge to position myself as a gatekeeper within the research project, someone who could 'protect' COs from any potential criticism that emerged from the broader research project. My connection to the data, and fears of what my team members would say if they found the 'real' story about what happened in the prisons, led to increasing tension between myself and my teammates as I increasingly overstepped my position in a conscious effort to maintain my unique relationship with the research setting.

The conflict between my two roles led me to question my identity in deep and distinctive ways, speaking to the cleft habitus that I experienced as a researcher:

> What this study has done is eliminated my monopoly of knowledge. I can't explain what I know anymore, without being corrected or challenged … the time I spent working in prison doesn't seem to matter. I have lost my expertise. And I did not have it taken from me: I gave it away. Is there a benefit for me? I don't know. I have not perceived one over the past three weeks. Instead, I have felt strongly, strongly drawn to the COs who I've talked to. I belong [with them] … This is a fragile time for me. I am developing a new identity, but that requires the disassembly of my past identification, for the structural bricks of the old shall be repurposed to be the foundation of the new. And although the blueprint of the new is far more attractive than the realization of the old, dreams and actuality do not always mesh when one makes leaps of faith (Field note, October 2016).

As this excerpt suggests, the research process was personally challenging process for me. The study PIs supported me, and I worked with the team as best I could—but at the same time, I never felt I was truly 'one of them' due to our lack of shared values and experiences. I also seriously considered returning to prison work, so much so that I twice began the process of withdrawing from graduate school. The study PIs, understanding my struggles, convinced me to stay in academia, although my reticence to share the extent of my struggles meant they were unable to give me the detailed advice and references to counselling I likely needed. The disagreements we experienced led me to question why I had joined the project in the first place, leaving me feeling like someone who had given too much and received little in return. As I faced upheaval within the research team, I found myself drawn ever closer to my former work colleagues, finding solace in the familiar, protective, and structured habitus of being a CO.

Discussion

These reflections outline the complexity that insiders may face in team ethnographies. My insider status provided me surprising access in the prisons I entered. I leveraged relationships with COs in each prison, facilitating access for our team and collecting a unique body of interviews. COs were eager to speak to me, and shared sensitive topics that related to my past identity as an officer. In consequence, my insider status allowed me to avoid many of the complexities that prison researchers, including other former COs, have faced in their relationships with prison staff (Carter & Thomson, 2022; Crewe, 2009).

However, my status also created unique complications, especially in relation to incarcerated people. Traditionally, encounters between incarcerated people and COs are hostile, something that researchers have assumed eliminates the possibility of effective connection (Patenaude, 2004). However, in my case, incarcerated people who had known me for months or years volunteered to do interviews once I had explained my new role and told them they had full ability to leave at any moment they chose. People like Kyle and Freddie spoke to me at long and personal length, even teasing me for my professional failures and reflecting on how they perceived my abilities and professionalism as an officer. My success here is a provocative contribution to the literature. Prison research typically describes COs and incarcerated people as diametrically opposite within the prison environment, possessing incompatible master statuses that are fundamentally incompatible and feed confrontation (Higgins et al., 2022). However, interactions with people like Kyle and Freddie demonstrate that individual relationships may bridge these gaps. My reputation and status as a ‘good guard’ who was ‘fair’ in previous work interactions smoothed our research relationships, although this did not play out in all cases. Of course, power dynamics play a significant role in shaping interactions between officers and

incarcerated people, a factor CO researchers must take with the utmost seriousness (Carter & Thomson, 2022). However, when handled correctly, and when incarcerated people have full agency in choosing whether to participate, these narratives demonstrate that prior status as an officer may not be a barrier to interviewing incarcerated people (Patenaude, 2004).

Researchers have used insider status to great effect when studying difficult-to-access locations (Contreras, 2013; Hoang, 2015), and scholars including Marquart (1986a; 1986b) and Walker (2016) have demonstrated its efficacy in prison settings. This paper suggests that team research also benefits from insider perspectives when it comes to studying prisons. Likewise, the team setting can allow insiders to negotiate some of the ethical and technical complexities they face (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bartunek & Louis, 1996). However, teams must balance this against the potential dangers of insider research with law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies are subculturally bound institutions, with unique pressures and cultures that complicate research access in distinctive ways (Stuart, 2016; Waddington, 1999), and these cultures do not evaporate when individuals leave the setting. Moskos, speaking about his ethnographic work with police officers in Baltimore, put it this way:

> Most days I don't miss being a cop; being a professor is a better job. But I do miss working with people willing to risk their life for me. And as a police officer, I would risk my life for others, even for those I didn't know, and even those I knew I didn't like. That's part of the job. As a professor, my colleagues are great, but there's not a single person at [my university] I would die for … Danger creates a bond. (Moskos, 2008, p. 1)

Moskos' words here speak to something important, highlighting the bonds created in edgework-defined careers such as policing and corrections (Stout et al., 2018). My experience suggests these connections retain their influence and may resurface for insiders during the research

process, especially when there are perceived value conflicts between researchers and participants.

Cleft habitus also has a distinctive influence on this process (Lee & Kramer, 2013). I was drawn back into the CO group and mindset upon re-entering the prisons, in powerful ways I had not expected. In contrast to the tension, conflict, and insecurity I felt as a junior academic, I felt welcomed and at home within the group where I had spent the five previous years. This led to an extraordinary level of openness among the officers I interviewed—but it also led to methodological and ethical concerns. At points, I was too close to my participants—not in the sense of pursuing a false and manufactured objectivity (Adler & Adler, 1987; Bourdieu, 2004), but in the sense that I forgot my researcher role to a level that, years later, leaves me uncomfortable. The team tensions also meant that I was not forthcoming with the principal investigators on the project. Torn between the team and the people who I had 'gone to war' with, I withdrew and kept my reflections to my personal fieldnotes, as it seemed the only place safe to discuss the distressing pressures of my research experience and the personal changes I appeared to be undergoing.

Interestingly, my ethical challenges are not unique, even though insider ethnographies among prison staff are not common. Marquart (1986a) worked as a CO while doing his PhD research and describes a violent fight with an incarcerated person as one of the most important moments he had in his research. Fleisher (1989) worked as a prison psychologist and describes losing perspective, something he only realized when an academic colleague expressed disgust at his open and vocal support for staff violence against incarcerated people. Chenault (2014) worked as an officer as well and describes hiding his researcher status from incarcerated people. These incidents suggest the ethical struggles I describe may have deeper roots in the prison

environment, at least for insider studies. For instance, deep commitment to the officer habitus led Marquart to commit violence, and Fleisher to openly support it. If nothing else, this drives home the important role that officer power roles continue to hold in the mindset of former prison staff (Carter & Thomson, 2022; Patenaude, 2004).

Conclusion

Team research represents one of the most important developments in qualitative research over the past 30 years (Copes & Vieraitas, 2022; Sandberg & Rojas, 2021). Yet, team research also comes with significant challenges, which are often disguised by the judicious use of 'we' when describing research activities (Mauthner & Doucet, 2008). This paper makes several methodological contributions to team ethnographies, especially those relating to prison. Carter and Thomson (2022) have suggested that research conducted by former COs deserves scrutiny and skepticism. The intensity of the cleft habitus I experienced within my research, and the consequent methodological impacts this had on our team's data collection drives home the crucial insight of their point (Bourdieu, 2004; Lee & Kramer, 2013).

First, I suggest that trust between 'insider' and 'outsider' team members may not emerge naturally. Insiders may perceive themselves as losing something important through the research process—a perception which criticism by outside members can unintentionally heighten. This is especially the case in politically charged spaces like prisons, where outsiders may perceive insiders as uncritical of systemic problems, and insiders may perceive outsiders as misunderstanding the importance of cultural values. In our work, the composition and maintenance of research team trust and dynamics proved to be an ongoing and challenging process, but also a key factor in the long-term success of our team. In my case, the study PIs

spent significant time working with me, providing alternative interpretations of the situations we encountered, and attempting to bridge the gaps between me and other team members. We also had the opportunity to interact regularly in non-academic settings, which allowed us to build relationships when trust was tenuous within the team overall. This represents a significant best practices lesson for future research, as the PIs had to manage my complex relationship with the data in notably different ways than that of my team members. While this unquestionably represented significant amounts of extra work, it also has led to unique data collection and innovative contributions over a longer period.

Second, these data suggest that re-entering subculturally bound locations can prove dangerously attractive for insiders and former insiders, especially when comparative assessments of current and past status are easily accessible. Contreras (2013) discusses this in his work on drug robbers, describing how his connections and friendships with the 'stickup kids' created gaps between him and his academic colleagues. Within research teams, the distinct gap in experience and perspective between outsiders and insiders can quickly lead to conflict, especially when insiders perceive that they are 'giving' more than they 'receive' from the research. This was certainly what occurred in my case, as I often reflected on the research process as a painful experience characterized by personal loss. The question about whether this situation is unique to my personal experience with prison work, or whether such insights also apply to a broader range of insider research, is one that deserves more exploration, especially as discussions of positionality continue to grow.

Crucially, these perceptions are rarely logical, meaning that emotion may prove to be formidable barrier to successfully keeping a team together. Often, strong emotions like the ones I describe lead to team failure (Erikson & Stull, 1998). However, I suggest that instead of being

viewed as a failure, the emergence of such strong emotional attachment on the part of insiders may, instead, be indicative of a kind of success. In my case, the emotional conflicts I describe emerged because we had successfully hit the crux of complex issues which officers invested with deep subcultural meaning and values. While I did not recognize this for several years, my deep emotional reaction at the time was partially motivated by the fact that I had successfully 'betrayed' my insider status as a CO. This has led to innovative and unique insights into how officer habitus impacts a wide range of actions within the prison, but at the time very nearly led me to leave academia and begin a new career.

Third, in subculturally bound field sites, insiders may possess unique channels to access 'hidden' information. This is a key reason why insiders are useful members of research teams, but it also may lead to ethical choices that occur beyond the purview or observation of the rest of the team. In my case, my insider status provided me quick access to data which ranged from concerning, to disturbing, to blatantly criminal. As an insider, I was the only one in my team who heard stories which confirmed the presence of illegal violence and drug use among officers, at levels which far exceeded what we had expected. I faced a choice about whether to share this information with my research team, or whether to quietly suppress the information, thereby denying my critical team members ammunition for their broader institutional critiques. I initially kept these data to myself, saving the most disturbing and implicatory portions of my fieldnotes for personal reflection. It was only later in the process, once I had built trust with the study PIs and confirmed that they had no intention of demonizing the people I had worked with and considered friends, that I shared this information more openly. As an insider, deeply torn between two states of belonging, I perceived my decision to hide certain things as a moral choice, one that I perceived to be the best way that I could 'protect' the officers I interviewed.

The conflict between my CO habitus and researcher habitus played a key role in creating tension between me and my fellow researchers, something that impacted the forms of analysis we were initially able to conduct. Yet, while the complexities of this situation should not be downplayed, the insights into how the study PIs and I were able to resolve and work through my cleft habitus continues to provide methodological insight. My positionality allowed me to collect unique perspectives on sensitive topics, while the study PIs' patience and willingness to invest in long-term relationships allowed time to resolve and productively address the complex emotional landscape my cleft habitus created within our team. This, in turn, has allowed me to resolve many of the relationship gaps within the broader research team that were initially created during our data collection.

Overall, this article demonstrates the significant complexity that insiders may bring to team research. While insider perspectives are useful in helping to secure access, and are crucial in preventing exploitative research practices, insiders may also arrive in teams with significantly different experiences and values than people whose main experience is in the academy. The research context in question influences how these value differences play out. In some cases, cleft habitus may play no role in shaping the data—but, in others, it may create significant complexity in data collection and promulgation. This is especially important when considering subculturally bound spaces, something common in criminological ethnography (Haggerty, Bucerius & Berardi, 2022). In these spaces, how insiders manage and negotiate their cleft habitus may make the difference between team success and team disintegration, especially if the insiders find themselves privy to complex and controversial information. Yet, by carefully managing such conflicts early in the process, I argue that insiders can be crucial and useful components of such research, allowing for unique and important data collection on a range of issues.

Concluding Remarks

As COs, we were often bored. We dealt with a rush of activity immediately after shift change, as we oversaw meal service, supervised medication dispensation, sent individuals to their programs, and ensured people going to court were prepared for transfer. But, after the first hour, the day slowed, and our tasks became far more menial. We unenthusiastically pat-down searched a few people and rifled through two cells to fulfil our policy obligations for the day and walked around the unit twice an hour to ensure that managers could not discipline us for failing to conduct our security rounds. We answered phones, sending people for medical appointments or for police interviews. And occasionally, a manager, supervisor, or other officer would come onto the unit, providing a spark of conversation, controversy, gossip, or variety.

Mostly though, we sat and waited. We waited for something to happen—a question from an incarcerated person, a call from somewhere outside the unit, a complaint, a fight, anything at all that might break the monotony. And as we waited, we talked. News of the day was a common topic, as was the results of the ice hockey or football game that had occurred the night before. Gossip about who was dating who within the officer cadre was a key news item, as were lurid stories of what sorts of drunken trouble other officers had gotten into over days off. Sometimes, a broader philosophical discussion of punishment and society would emerge, one that almost inevitably framed us as tainted by the job we did. In our conclusions, we universally agreed that we were underappreciated in our role as society's last defense against the 'predators' we guarded.

Yet, almost inevitably, after sports, news, gossip, and complaint were exhausted, discussions of culture emerged. Experienced officers were careful with these conversations, reserving them for well-known work partners, good friends, and people who would not spread

damaging gossip to the next group of people in the next quiet moment. Trust was a key element of these discussions, something new officers quickly learned, usually the hard way. While nearly every officer had complaints and thoughts about the work cultures they encountered, there were 'right' and 'wrong' people to express such thoughts to. Complaints about the hypermasculinity, violence, and nepotism of a specific supervisor, expressed to the 'wrong' individual, would be grist for the next day's conversations across the institution, and would inevitably return to the supervisor in question. In contrast, the same complaints expressed to the 'right' person would lead to advice and strategy for how to appropriately manage the challenge in question. The key, as a new officer, was to quickly identify which of your coworkers was an appropriate one to ask questions of and discuss workplace challenges.

There were nuances to the discussions of culture that took place in these quiet moments. Some topics were always safe to discuss, as there was a perceived universality to the theme. In these conversations, managers—even the 'nice' ones—were always out to get officers and would side with the institution and 'screw' COs in the case of a problematic incident. Incarcerated people were discussed as debased, violent, volatile, and never to be trusted. We discussed our mental health in open or shaded tones, discussing our stress, frustration, and fatigue, planning vacations, days off, retirements, and future dreams.

Many of these open discussions fit nicely into the literature about COs, whether it be mental health, work taint, professional orientation, or hypermasculinity. Yet, in the quiet conversations—the ones characterized by high levels of trust, with people who were willing to 'really' talk to each other—the tone changed. We critiqued our own culture, expressing concern about the violent inclinations of certain officers, and how they were training young staff in the 'wrong' way. We quietly warned each other about other officers, especially senior staff who had

historically enacted predatory inclinations toward younger women officers. As people (almost inevitably) broke up with partners they had dated before beginning prison work, we discussed which officer they would start dating next. We discussed and assessed problematic incidents of violence we had witnessed and exchanged advice about how to manage these incidents—both in terms of institutional paperwork requirements, and in terms of subcultural expectations. And we mourned popular coworkers who could no longer handle the job and who were quitting and moving on, or who were going on full-time nights to escape the stress they experienced during day shift. Sometimes, these losses also meant attending funerals, as well-loved older officers passed away shortly after retirement, or as officer suicides at other centres sent ripples through the provincial CO cadre.

These discussions happened weekly, if not daily. We often repeated the same stories and themes, with no answers as to why these topics were so common. And, as we lost people, experiences, opportunities, and things that we valued, we increasingly found ourselves feeling more vulnerable and isolated—until one day, I found I was the officer leaving, as I could no longer handle the bleakness of the work and realized there was nowhere else in the prison I could go to escape it.

This dissertation represents my best effort to answer some of the questions we asked of ourselves in those quiet moments. It is my effort to explain the things we all experienced as difficult and painful parts of the work. I have organized it around the most common themes we encountered as officers, analyzing the hypermasculinity we performed, vulnerability we perceived, violence we enacted, and trust we relied on. Admittedly, these questions are personal, as I cannot separate my own experiences from these data. Yet, I also believe I have succeeded in

critiquing perspectives I once held, while also demonstrating the impact of culture and habitus on the broader experience and actions of COs in my data.

Habitus, and how officers engage with it and find themselves challenged by it, represents the central object of examination throughout each article. While some researchers have employed habitus in their examination of CO actions (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021; Lerman & Page, 2012), it is not yet a common object of analysis within the broader CO literature. Each of my articles interact with habitus in some way, describing and showing how CO cultures emerge from the habitus and field of prison. By centralizing habitus, we can see how vulnerability and violence play a role in shaping the broader attitudes officers express. Likewise, by examining habitus, we can see why officers put up with and reproduce distressing levels of gendered harassment, all to maintain their status as 'real men.'

By focusing on how broader strands of the officer habitus inform a range of cultural outcomes, this dissertation reveals shared themes that can be applied to a broader range of prisons, irrespective of jurisdictions. It also challenges some of the existing bodies of literature that currently dominate the field. Perhaps the most notable existing body of research this dissertation challenges is the wellness literature. While the growing focus on officer mental health is welcome in how it has reframed CO experiences and has brought officer perspectives into the criminological mainstream, it has done so by artificially separating officer habitus (and, by extension, culture) from individual experiences of stress and mental health.

My work here challenges this differentiation, as each of my papers shows how culture, and habitus, impacts individual action in a range of ways. This allows for a far more critical examination of the officer wellness literature. For instance, officers describe engaging in problematic use of force incidents as simply 'part of the job,' something justified by the broader

organizational culture. Yet in doing so, officers describe themselves as vulnerable, both to managerial investigation, and to other officers who push the envelope too far. Officers describe these issues as key vectors of long-term stress and mental health—a far more complex and problematic lens than any I have encountered in the officer wellness literature. By centring habitus and culture at the core of the CO experience, we can critically engage with officer mental health literature, bringing sympathetic discussions of officer wellbeing (Ricciardelli et al., 2022) into direct contact to critical assessments of officer culture (Higgins et al., 2022). Through this approach, we can approach the broader complexities of prison work in ways that are both more detailed and productive than existing literature allows.

In many ways, the arguments I posit in this dissertation raise more questions than they answer. For example, the broader critique of policy as a means of changing prisons that I raise in paper 2 challenges prison reform projects from a new perspective (Rubin, 2023). Likewise, the question of vulnerability raised in chapter 3 challenges broader discussions of officer culture, and the deeply problematic attitudes described in chapter 1 raises urgent questions about how officers do their work. These are all key areas for future research, and criminology's success in answering these issues may determine the health and sustainability of prisons as a social institution going forward.

Yet, by describing new aspects of how prison staff do their job, I argue that I have revealed new information about how one of the most overlooked groups in the criminal justice system do their work, with broad implications for how we engage with punishment, rehabilitation, reform, and much more. This also fits the zeitgeist of the moment when it comes to prisons in Canada. Ashley Smith's death represented the start of a new period for Canadian corrections, one defined by prison reform, judicial and media activism, and open criticism of

'business-as-usual' prison administration practices (T. Wright, 2019). Influential figures now frame prison reform in urgent terms; to quote Ivan Zinger, Canada's Correctional Investigator, "Something's got to change. Something's got to be done" (Ling, 2019). COs face significant changes in their jobs and their workplaces because of potential prison reforms—but, if past history is any judge, COs will also play a direct role in shaping how these reforms are created, instituted, and implemented, for better or worse (Lerman & Page, 2012; Mouallem, 2016; Page, 2011). Understanding how CO culture and habitus plays into CO decisions and work will help policymakers to overcome opposition, with hopefully positive impacts for the broader prison system overall.

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Appendix I: Interview Prompt Guide

Prompts for staff

I. **Tell us a little bit about your job responsibilities and work history in the correctional system.**

II. **Tell us a little bit about the different groups that you have encountered in this prison and the challenges/risks they pose.**
(prompt into group differences – especially with respect to gangs and other extremist groups – are there differences?/prompt into whether they see any as particularly challenging to the routine and security of the prison? Are risks directed at other inmates or staff?/would you identify any of these groups as extremist groups or as radicalizing people (probe into definition of staff member)

III. **Tell us about who becomes part extremists groups?**
(who is attracted and why (certain "types" of inmates?)?/is there active recruitment?/ how do people come to join? are some people not allowed to join)

IV. **How do radicalized inmates change the routine of the prison?** (prompt into formal and informal ways of engaging these inmates). Is prison different for radicalized inmates versus others (other routines/access to resources etc.)

V. **How do staff members identify radicalized inmates?** (prompt into behavioural cues, signs/tattoos/formal vs informal identification process).

VI. Is there a formal response to radicalized inmates? Is there formal training?

VII. What are best practices?

VIII. Final thoughts- anything we did not ask?

Appendix II: Officer Coding Scheme

If you are unable to resolve uncertainty about the relevance of particular sub-categories, place code into main category
Re, Will's status within interviews: If Will's comments/introduction is vital to explain/confirm what the participant is saying (some form of yes, yeah, I agree, etc.) please code. Otherwise, if Will's comments seem to be irrelevant, please ignore.

Addiction

- Discussion/description/mention of addiction issues within the inmate population. Consider whether this should be dual-coded with **Drugs** or **Alcohol,** but **Drugs** should not automatically be coded here.

Alcohol

- **Regulation of brew**
- **Officer use**

Bully-Chan

- Any mention of Johnny Jackknife, AKA "Bully"
- Any mention of Nick Chan, head of FOB @ CRC

Check offs

- People exiting/transferring between living unit(s).
- CONSIDER WHETHER SHOULD BE DOUBLE CODED AS **MANAGING UNITS**
  - **By officers**
    - Officers remove an inmate from a unit, voluntarily or otherwise (include incidents where inmates are moved due to security concerns)
  - **By inmates**
    - Inmates telling officers to take another inmate off the unit, or movements due to inmate violence (dual-code with **Inmate Violence**)
  - **By self**
    - Removing yourself from the unit

CO Culture

- Expectations of officers/self by officers/self, and CO norms within/around/about prison
  - **Group mentality/CO subculture/officer code**
    - Officers behaving as a group/gang—include brotherhood, back-up, etc.
    - Include FAILURE to follow these norms
    - Mentions of POLITICS—officer, workplace, etc.

- **Officers and management**
  - Any discussion of interactions/thoughts of/perceptions of 'the boss'
- **Attitudes about the job/inmates/coworkers (not management)**
  - Individual views on the job
  - Any discussion of 'doing the job/job approaches' should be coded as **unit management or rules-discretion**

    - **Job**
      - Include: discussions about 'how to do the job right'—being a 'good' officer, 'how people do the job wrong'— (not necessarily **Corruption**)
    - **Inmates**
      - Explicit attitudes about inmates—i.e., explaining how awful they are, wishing they were dead, etc.
    - **Coworkers**
      - Opinions, perspectives, thoughts on coworkers
        - Code closely with **Group mentality/CO subculture/officer code**
- **Career History/Career hopes**
  - Past work experience; HOPES or PLANS for future career, IN or OUTside of corrections
- **Officer/prison staff corruption**
  - Illegal conduct by correctional employee
  - Smuggling drugs, 'excessive force,' 'blind spots,' EXPLICITLY UNREASONABLE USE OF FORCE Consider double coding with **Drugs, violence, discretion, unofficial unit control tactics**
  - DO NOT 'read in' to code. EXPLICIT mentions of illegality or rights violations.
- **Vulnerability**
  - Vulnerability refers to threat(s) to physical or emotional person, health, job security, family (**life outside**) from inmates/officers/management/system

<u>Contraband and Searches</u>

- Officer discussions of finding/seizing contraband—i.e., shanks, kites, newspapers, garbage, etc.
- Officer discussions around how/why they search, and the unique issues accompanying searches.

<u>Criminal Justice System</u>

- Discussions/descriptions/Interactions between prison/prison staff and other criminal justice system institutions external to prison
  - **Interactions with cops/other enforcement/emergency service**
  - **Interactions with courts**

Female Inmates

- Any mention or discussion of female inmates, including differences between female and male inmates.

Gangs

- Any mention of the word 'gang' or discussion of an individual who is gang-connected
  - **Gang violence**
    - Use/threat of physical force due to any form of gang activity, including weapons. DUAL CODE with **Violence**
  - **Drugs**
    - Any mention of drugs which is directly connected to gang activity
    - DUAL CODE under **DRUGS**
  - **Leadership**
    - Discussion of who is in charge of a gang(s)
    - Watch for following names (indicates known leaders; passage may not refer to gang activity): Desjarlais, Farmer, Bully/Jackknife, Joseph (Joey) Pataken, Gorjack (Fabeek or Gorjak Gorjack), Nick Chan
  - **Race/ethnicity**
  - **Bail**
    - Gangs paying bail:
    - Consider if related to protection/drugs; IF SO DUAL-CODE
  - **Check offs**
    - People leaving units because of gang activity
  - **Recruitment**
    - Discussion of how gang members recruit new members
  - **Gang exit**
    - How people leave gangs, consequences, etc.
  - **Relationship with street**
    - How gang activity within the prison is influenced by relationships/activity/etc. outside of the prison
  - **Protection**
    - Any mention of safety/protection from, or provided by a gang
  - **Incentives**
    - Any discussion of why people join gangs
  - **Gang management BY INSTITUTION**
    - How the institution/officers react and deal with gang activity

Illegal drugs

- Any discussion of the use, prescription, administration of illegal medication, INCLUDING officer use of steroids
- Consider whether to double-code with **Prison Economy**
  - **Regulation**

        - Officer/institutional attempts to control/prevent/change drug flow/use WITHIN the prison
    - **Entry**
        - How drugs enter the prison
        - If mentioned in context of officer drug smuggling, consider whether it should be dual-coded underneath major code of **Relationships** and/or **Officer Culture**
    - **Fentanyl/Opioids**
        - Explicit officer discussion of how Fentanyl/illegal opioids are impacting their work/workplace**.** Code closely with **OVERDOSES** and **MENTAL HEALTH**
    - **Officer use**
    - **INMATE Overdoses**
        - Code mentions of Narcan/Naloxone here
        - Code discussions/perceptions of officer overdoses here (perceived or actual makes little difference; perceptions arguably make bigger influence)
        - Code closely with **STRESS/PTSD/MENTAL HEALTH**
    - **OFFICER overdoses**
        - Officers talking about officer overdoses/panic attacks
        - Code closely with **STRESS/PTSD/MENTAL HEALTH**
    - **Inmate use**
        - Discussion/description/conversation about inmate drug use. When possible, only code underneath one of **Entry, Regulation** or **Inmate Use** for specificity purposes

<u>Inmate culture</u>

- Discussions/descriptions/conversations surrounding the inmate mentality, subculture, rules and beliefs
    - **Inmate Resistance/Strategies against INSTITUTION/Officers**
        - Discussion/description/explanation of how inmates
        - 'push back' against officers/institutional rules to survive
        - Benefit from jail (E.g., lawsuits against CO's)
        - Consider whether to dual-code with **Violence: Inmates against Officers** or **CJS**
    - **Inmate Resistance/Strategies against OTHER INMATES**
        - Discussion/description/explanation of how inmates 'push back/resist other inmates—can include joining group for protection, etc.
        - Consider whether to dual-code with **Violence: Inmates against inmates, or Gangs**
    - **Inmate code**
        - Discussion/description of/interaction with unofficial inmate 'rules'
        - Any mention of INMATE POLITICS
    - **Inmate Vulnerability**

        - Vulnerability refers to threat(s) to physical or emotional person, health, job security, family (**life outside**) from inmates/officers/management/system

Perceptions of Research and Researchers

- **Insider-Outsider**
    - Any discussion of Will's identity as a former Correctional Officer/comparisons between Will and other members of research team by RESPONDENTS
- **Influence on Routines**
    - Any discussion on how research has impacted prison routines in any way (including prisoner attitudes, or how officers have reacted to researchers on units/in prisons)

Institution differences

- Any discussion/description/conversation about similarities/differences between individual prisons, INCLUDING Federal/Provincial corrections
    - **Unit differences**
        - Discussion/description of how individual units within the prison are the same or different

Legal Drugs
Any discussion of the use, prescription, administration, or abuse of legal/prescribed medication

- **Regulation**
- **Entry/diversion from prescribed use**
- **Officer use**
- **Inmate use**

Life outside the walls - CO'S

- Any off-duty interactions/tasks that are relevant to/affected by their job

Life outside the walls – INMATES

- **Recidivism/desistance/rehabilitation**
    - Correctional officer discussion about the (in)effectiveness of jail in addressing crime and deviant behaviour
    - Consider whether to dual-code with Programming
- **Other factors—structural, relational, etc.**
- **Inmate Charges**
    - Conversations about Inmate criminal records: charges, why they're held, past criminal record (e.g., 'this is his tenth stay) etc.

Managing units/prisons

How daily life within a living unit/other prison post is *managed, governed, implemented, and disciplined*. It implies action rather than inaction/resistance. It will also have significant relationship to **Rules.** Dual-coding is acceptable; check relationships

- **By inmates**
  - How inmates control/influence unit life. Implies deliberate action as a group--i.e, inmates 'checking off' another inmate is Unit Management, whereas inmates resisting officers/rules (covering cameras etc.) is **Inmate Resistance**
  - Consider whether to double code with **Cleaner** and **Inmate Resistance**
- **By Cleaners/Tier Reps/Heavies**
  - Consider whether should be double-coded with **Inmates**
- **By officers—via official rules**
  - If unsure whether something is official/unofficial, dual-code
  - Consider whether discussion involves mention of **discretion**; if so dual-code
- **By officers—via unofficial rules (discretion)**
  - Includes PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION of inmates by staff
  - Includes use of inmate subculture against inmates by staff
  - Consider whether 'unofficial unit management by officers' should be double-coded with **discretion**

Media/Public Perception

- Discussions of media attention about corrections, or public perception of how corrections is viewed

Mental health

Descriptions of mental health problems, issues, acting out because of mental health issues. Include any discussion/description of SUICIDE or SELF-HARM. Situations which cause severe emotional distress (i.e., death of prisoner's family member, officers responding to traumatic situation) should be coded here. However, DOES NOT include emotional outbursts. For example, if a prisoner had a breakdown after being deined release, it would be coded here—but if a prisoner had a fit/emotional outburst because they were denied release, it would NOT be coded

- **Inmate mental health**
- **Officer stress, PTSD, Mental Health**

PC – Protective Custody

Discussions/conversations about Protective custody

- **Skinners**
  - Any discussion of sex offenders/offences
  - Dual-code with **Inmate Code/CO culture,** if applicable
- **Gangs**
  - People in PC because of gang(s)
  - Consider dual-coding with **Gang Exit**

- **Other References to PC**
    - Reasons/discussions of PC which are not directly related to gangs or sex offences
    - ANY MENTION OF POD 5 OR MAX ALPHA, ANY MENTION TO PHOENIX/ROCKY MOUNTAIN PROGRAM

Prison economy

- Any description/discussion about the reciprocal exchange of items or services between INMATES, for some form of gain. Includes explicit discussion of 'paying' people.
- Does not include favours between inmates/CO's (CO's giving cleaners extra food should be under **Unit Management** or **Constructive Relationships—**use discretion)
- Although this WILL include **Drugs** (double-code if so), **Drugs** DO NOT automatically imply **Economy**

Programming

- **Effectiveness of internal programming**
- **Effectiveness of external programming**
- **Boot camp**
- **Access to programs**
    - Include access to religious services/paraphernalia/leaders etc.
- **Lack of programs**

Radicalization

Description/discussion of any "radical" groups/individuals/ideologies/religions, INCLUDING the application of "Radical" to any group/individual—consider whether should be dual-*coded* with **Gangs** and/or **Religion**. Include any mention of TERRORISM, EXTREMISM—i.e., mention of ISIS

- **Recruitment**
- **Leaders**
- **Institutional management of radicals**
    - Institutional/management/officer decisions related to 'controlling' radicals
    - Consider whether to dual-code with **Unit Management**
- **Religious**
    - Mentions of religiously-motivated radicalization or terrorism. NOT EXCLUSIVE TO ISLAM
    - Any mention of ISIS/ISIL
- **Non-religious**
    - Examples include Freemen on the Land and White Supremacy
    - consider whether White Supremacy should be double-coded with **Gang**
- **Mental Health**
    - Dual-code with **Mental Health**
- **Race/ethnicity**

- NOTE: Do not let perception of personal racism influence coding. Discussions of Muslims are unlikely to be positive (REMEMBER: This is PARTICIPANT-focused coding). If unsure, DO NOT hesitate to place discussions of Religion underneath Radicalization

Relationship between guards and inmates

Discussion/description of interactions between officers and inmates. Implies an action/verbal exchange—inmates/officers act TOWARD the other. DOES NOT imply pre-existing structural relationship—i.e., long-term Segregation inmates automatically hating staff. Initiated by either party.

- **Constructive interactions/relationships**
  - Relationships which are RESPECTFUL, positive, enable the avoidance of violence, or examples of productive/positive exchanges
  - HAVE LOW STANDARD. IF INMATES/OFFICERS ARE TALKING AND NOT SWEARING/FIGHTING/DISCIPLINING, CODE HERE
- **Damaging interactions/relationships**
  - Relationships which are negative, or encourage interpersonal breakdown—violent, manipulative, challenging, threatening.
  - Can be initiated on either side of relationship—EVERYTHING ELSE
  - Include illegal action here (i.e., drug smuggling), even if for mutual benefit

Religion

Any discussion/description of identifiable religion/cult/religious group. Consider whether it should be dual-coded with **Radical.** Discussion of RELIGION—not necessarily groups. I.e, ISIS does not *necessarily* mean religion—but discussions of "Islam/Muslim/etc." do. Place non-religious ideologies (for example Freemen) under **Radical**

- **Conversion**
- **Islam**
- **Others**

Remand/Remand Status

- Discussion about remand prisons
- Discussions about the uncertainties of awaiting trial/being remanded, and its effects on the inmate. This is intended to cover the uncertainty of being a remand inmate--being held with no idea about your future, conviction/acquittal, etc.
- Ensure any conversation about "pleading out" to ensure release is coded here

Rules

- **Official, institutional rules**
  - Official institution rules which provide a baseline for behaviour within the prison

    - Includes any description of institutional charges, UNIT PLACEMENT, movement between units, punishment of offenders via official methods
- **Officer Discretion (or, Job Approaches)**
    - Discussions, descriptions, or examples of variations from 'official rules' by individual officers including how/why punishment choices were made (i.e., 24-hour lockup vs. charges)
    - Consider whether it needs to be dual-coded with **Unit Management**
    - If it is an example of someone 'just doing their job,' code under **Unit Management by Officers, Official Rules**
        - ·Differences between **discretion** and **official rules** is unlikely to be explicit. DUAL-CODE IF UNSURE.
    - **Institutional discretion (how "the prison" or "they" make decisions)**
        - §Discussion of How correctional institutions make decisions (i.e., whether to move people between prisons at a given time or not, etc. Can include discussions of security rating decisions)
    - **Street charges**
        - §How inmates OR CO's can get street charges as a result of action within the prison within the prison

Segregation/Solitary Confinement

- Discussions about inmates' experiences in solitary confinement/segregation ("the hole").
- Discussions about the unique challenges/benefits/practices of running segregation units.

Terminology

- Argot/slang used by officers/inmates
- Anything unusual

Violence

Any description or discussion of physical force OR threats of physical force between/ against any person(s)

- **Among inmates**
    - Any discussion/description/suggestion of use of physical force or weapons (of any kind) between inmates. Does not necessarily have to occur
    - Includes threats or MUSCLING
- **Among guards**
    - Any discussion or implication of use of force between officers
- **Guards on Inmates (Legal and Illegal)**
    - Any use or discussion of use of physical force against inmates by officers
    - Includes ANY mention of double-dooring**,** AND threats of violence against inmates
- **Inmates on guards**
    - Any discussion/implication of use/threats of use of physical force against officers by inmates
    - Dual-code with **Inmate Resistance**