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Maintaining Order and Following the Rules: Gender Differences in Punishing Inmate Misconduct

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For this article, we examine gender differences in how staff members address inmate misconduct. Using in-depth interviews with forty-three correctional employees, we focus on how their various disciplinary styles create interpersonal conflict between staff members. We find that over half of interviewees are identified as "formal responders" who consistently punish inmate misconduct with formal sanctions, even if doing so creates conflict within the organization. However, female formal responders also claim that they work closely with male inmates to explain the importance of following the rules. They state that this puts them at odds with their male co-workers who misinterpret this behavior as instigating sexual relationships.

Although there is a large body of literature focusing on prison inmates, we know less about the daily problems of prison employees (Crawley 2004). This is not to say that prison staff members are understudied but rather, we know less about interpersonal conflict and deviance from their perspective (Worley and Worley 2011). This article adds to this discussion by focusing on how prison employees describe conflict in this total institution. We use data collected from in-depth interviews conducted with forty-three members of correctional staff in four adult male prisons to outline how they posit their co-workers as rule followers or rule breakers.

Primarily, we allowed them to describe interpersonal problems between themselves and inmates, as well as, between staff members. They explain that these problems were interconnected. Staff members argue with one another about how to deal with problem inmates. They state that conflict stems from the pressure to follow official rules. Employees that refuse to adhere to the policies are believed to put others in jeopardy of being harmed. Also, they believe that inconsistency creates disorder and tension. These staff members abide by the rules and insist on using formal sanctions to punish inmates. We find that 53% of men and 55% of the women in our study are classified as "formal responders" who consistently follow the rules and use formal sanctions to do so. Others are less rigid with the rules and believe this helps maintain order; we call these interviewees, "informal responders." Although more than half of the women were classified as "formal responders," they were more likely to verbally explain the rules to the inmates

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and work to create a healthy working relationship with them. In theory, this should be the best of both worlds where formal rules are followed and inmates are counseled about their behavior. However, women claim that their ability to work with the inmates puts them at odds with their male co-workers. Specifically, they state that they are accused of developing inappropriate, sexual relationships with inmates. The ability to verbally communicate with the inmates puts females in jeopardy of being labeled as deviant. These findings update our understanding of problems faced by female correctional staff by allowing interviewees to discuss the tension between their ability to work with inmates and co-workers.

Early studies focused on female correctional officers as taking a softer approach in their job and this could reduce tension among the inmate population (Kissel and Katasampes 1980). Others pointed out that women were more likely to experience job burnout resulting from the stress of working in the prison environment (Cullen et al. 1985; Zupan 1986). This stress emerges from working in a hyper-masculine environment with male staff members who devalue their contribution to the job (Zimmer 1987). A good deal of studies focus on how women build a rapport with the inmates but are labeled as weak or less punitive than their male counterparts (Gordon 2006; Hemmens and Stohr 2000).

Women are more adept at verbal communication and this helps them work with inmates, as a problem population (Carlson et al. 2003). Britton (1997, 2003) pointed out that, although women are better at verbal communications, this may not help them get raises or promotions since the physical work of controlling violent inmates is considered more valuable. In short, gender norms matter in this hyper-masculine environment and men and women might develop their own style of control. Although we have a small sample ($N = 43$), our findings suggest that, for females, their skills are still likely to be undervalued and misinterpreted as deviant behavior.

This article is organized as follows: first, we outline the literature on correctional staff, paying particular attention to issues surrounding gender. We then present qualitative data from employees working in a Midwest prison system. We conclude with a discussion about gender roles in the institution of prison.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Research on prison staff often focuses on problems between staff members and inmates. For example, Lahm (2009) studied assaults between inmates and staff and found that young men who are prone to aggression were more likely to assault others. Her findings held true across all security levels. Jiang and Fisher-Giorlando (2002) found that inmates are more likely to assault staff in lock-down units:

> Inmates residing in lock-down cell blocks have less freedom than do those residing in working cell blocks and dormitories and may feel more deprived than do their counterparts in working cell blocks. Accordingly, they experience higher levels of deprivation that in turn lead to higher frustration and violence. (353)

The primary focus of these studies is on the relationship between these two seemingly adversarial groups and the chance of a violent outcome.

Scholars also focused on staff misconduct and deviance; however, these studies are less common than studies on inmate misconduct. Worley and Worley (2011) used surveys with staff members in Texas facilities and found that the majority of respondents believed that their coworkers were involved in deviant and/or illegal activities while on duty. This was especially true if respondents believed that someone in administration "cared for" them:

> It could be that these subjects recognized inappropriate behaviors that were committed by other staff members and were, therefore, more likely to feel immersed in a dangerous environment. These respondents may have felt the need to strengthen alliances with other employees and their supervisors in order to cope with the burden of working among deviant peers. (315)

They build on the previous work that focuses on how staff members experience stressors and job burnout (Carlson et al. 2003; Garland 2004). For example, Carlson, Anson, and Thomas (2003) found that female officers were not more likely to experience job burnout than their male counterparts. They argue that earlier studies (Cullen et al. 1985; Zupan 1986) took place in the years when women began entering into this all male institution. Zimmer (1987) pointed out that female guards were evaluated by their supervisors, "according to occupational standards created for men" (427). This standard created a bias against women who did not act like men. She also notes that daily activities that reduce violence, including the ability to work well with inmates, are not easily measured on job performance evaluations. This also hurts women who may approach their job by developing positive interpersonal relationships with inmates (Zimmer 1987).

Gordon (2006), found that female correctional officers take a more "human service role" than their male counterparts. This posits female staff as valuing rehabilitation over punishment as a way to reduce recidivism (Gordon 2006). Hemmens and Stohr (2000) found that female prison staff are believed to be more "nurturing" in their job. Moreover, women were also more likely to agree to the statement, "Correctional staff should make an effort to answer the questions of the inmates" (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:338), which indicates that they perceive their job as service oriented. Others argue that, "women have better communication skills resulting in higher quality interactions with the inmates" (Carlson et al. 2003:285). In other words, female employees may possess verbal and interpersonal skills that help them work with prisoners.

Britton (1997) also discussed this issue but warned that this does not necessarily benefit female correctional officers:

> These perceived "strengths" of women have not resulted in substantial benefits, at least not yet: there were only three female supervisors in the men's prison I studied, and national statistics indicate that women constitute less than 10 percent of wardens, superintendents, and supervisors in adult correctional institutions, including women's prisons. (813)

She stated that valuable skills include dealing with violent men and maintaining order. Promotions are based on their ability to work with high-risk offenders and reduce violence when necessary. The official job training for officers is asexual in that gender is never mentioned; however, the "default" inmate discussed in their classes is an aggressive or violent male which relegates female inmates as, something else (Britton 1997):

> The use of the men's prison as a model in training not only leaves officers unprepared but it also causes female inmates to appear to be excessively privileged (women are allowed "girly stuff"), and,

> in the view of many COs I interviewed there, is one of the many things that indicates that women's institutions are not "real prisons." (807)

She points out that, before the 1970s, women only worked in women's prison and the emergence of women into these roles forced administrators to create "gender neutral" rules and policies yet they still maintain a gendered organization in the assumptions of these policies (see also Britton 2003). Women are believed to be better verbal processors and caregivers and men are adept at physically controlling their environment. These bifurcated abilities may help men more so than women (Britton 1997).

Although there are benefits to positive interpersonal relationships between inmates and staff, this opens the door to serious problems such as sexual abuse. A growing concern for prison administrators is the fact that positive working relationships sometimes evolve into sexual relationships. Beck and colleagues (2010) found that 39,122 male prison inmates in the United States reported having sexual relationships with prison staff members between 2008–2009. Approximately 69% of these incidents involved a female staff member. Marquart, Barnhill, and Balshaw-Biddle (2001) analyzed these relationships in a Southern prison system and found that these cases often involved a "lovesick" employee who "fantasized about a life together when the inmate was released" (901). The majority of their cases (75%) involved female employees with male inmates. They sent love letters to these inmates and believed that the inmate was a boyfriend (Marquart et al. 2001).

Sex between inmates and prison staff is illegal as inmates cannot legally consent (Koscheski et al. 2002). Therefore, any sexual relationship between inmates and employees could result in formal charges. This behavior would also bring unwanted attention to the prison and force administrators to deal with the public embarrassment of a sex scandal. It seems obvious that prison administrators and staff members would pay close attention to any possible sexual relationships between employees and inmates.

Drawing from these studies, several themes emerge about prison employees. First, for obvious reasons, scholars focus a good deal of attention on the potential safety threats faced by prison workers. These employees work with a criminal population who is not necessarily afraid to use violence in this total institution. This reality creates stressors for prison workers as they learn to adapt to their work environment. It is safe to say that prison workers use whatever skills they have to maintain order and reduce the chance of violence. If these previous studies are correct, there are differences in how men and women approach their work.

Women occupied important positions in this institution for several decades. However, it is not likely that they have overcome all barriers in an environment that has mostly male inmates and mostly male employees. With the growing concern about sexual relationships between inmates and staff, there is a spotlight placed on female workers who must engage in public displays that posit them as helpful and appropriate. To examine this issue further, we allowed interviewees to focus on the important issue of verbal communication between inmates and staff members. As previous studies point out (Britton 1997; Carlson et al. 2003), women excel at communicating with predominately male inmate populations. However, what does this mean for the social and gender dynamics between staff members? If Brittan (1997) is correct, the communication skills women bring to their jobs will informally help complete tasks with inmates but are not appreciated from an administrative perspective.

DATA AND METHODS

For this study, we use data collected in 2011 with prison staff members in a Midwest state. Our study focused on how inmates and staff define "disrespect" and how they link disrespect to violence. We had prison administrators announce to their employees that researchers were looking for subjects to participate in a study on inmate violence and disrespect. We asked to interview anyone who works directly with inmates on a daily basis. Once we conducted our first round of interviews with staff members, we employed a snowball sampling technique (Morgan 2008) to ask them to speak with fellow co-workers about our project. A total of forty-three subjects participated in this study. These four facilities employ approximately two thousand employees that work directly with inmates so our sample size is very low. We made it clear that any employee that works with inmates was invited to join the study. The low response rate was not a surprise. We presume that many employees distrust researchers and others have no time for these interviews.

We contend that our study is not representative to all employees. However, we provide an interesting case study of prison workers who consented to in-depth interviews that provided thick descriptions (Becker 1998) of interpersonal conflict in these institutions. This was a non-random sample that included interviewees from four facilities that serve male inmates. The average age of our interviewees was thirty-nine years old. We interviewed thirty-two males and eleven females. Table 1 shows the job titles and age of those willing to be interviewed.

The majority of employees in these facilities are white (90%), and African Americans and Hispanics make up .04% and .03% of the employees, respectively. The majority of our interviewees are white (91%) and .04% of our interviewees are Hispanic. We were unable to interview any African Americans in our study. This is not uncommon as African Americans and Latinos are still underrepresented in prison work. This is likely due to the fact that many prisons are located in rural areas where African Americans and Hispanics are less likely to live. Also, people of color may be more hesitant to work in an institution that is historically fraught with racism (Levan 2012).

These employees work at one of four state facilities that house male inmates ranging from minimum to maximum-security levels. Drawing from the data Table 1, a total of twenty-eight

TABLE 1
Age and Job Titles of Interviewees

Variable	*Number (n = 43)*	*Mean*
Current Age		39
Job Title		
Correctional Officer	6	
Case Manager	2	
Unit Caseworker	9	
Shift Supervisor	1	
Lieutenant	4	
Sergeant	3	
Corporal	14	
Unit Manager	2	
Translator	1	
Recreations Officer	1	

(65%) interviewees work as correctional staff. This facility uses a military hierarchy to denote job titles. Those entering into the system are "correctional officers" and, as they rise through the ranks, their titles change to Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and so on. However, they are all correctional officers. Other interviewees work with inmates to help them with housing problems or parole or programming issues. This prison system has inmate population of approximately 4,200 men and women.

As this was voluntary, we were unable to procure any interviews from the women's prison in this state even though we made every effort to do so. Those who participated in the study made claims that they are concerned about researchers and we had to reiterate that this was a confidential study. This could explain why we had such a hard time getting volunteers for this study. These people work in small towns and rural communities where government jobs are scarce. They made it clear that they were concerned about keeping their jobs. It took us a good deal of time to build trust with these employees. In two of the facilities, many employees stated that that they were angry we were there and were afraid we were "starting trouble." This could also explain why we had a difficult time getting interviews. When we did interviews, we read the consent form to the subject. They were told that they could refuse to answer any question that embarrassed them or made them uncomfortable. At no time did anyone refuse to answer questions. We met with interviewees in private homes, public places and, with permission from the administration, the prison interview rooms.

As outlined in Table 2, we interviewed twenty-one people from the minimum-security prison and twenty-two from the medium to maximum-security prisons. A total of eleven (26%) of interviewees worked at more than one of these facilities and they explained that transfers between prisons are common. In fact, they sometimes compared their current location to other prisons because they have firsthand knowledge about both facilities. These data are limited in that this is a non-random and rather small sample. However, the wide range of employees gave us thick descriptions (Becker 1998) of social interactions between inmates and staff from various perspectives.

Respondents were interviewed using a survey instrument (62 questions) that asked open-ended questions about their relationships with each other and the inmates. We outline the questions used for this article in Table 3. The researcher would read the survey to the participant and write down his or her responses. We asked specific questions about the cause of conflict between staff members. As others show, there is a high turnover in the field of corrections that is attributed to job burnout (Tipton 2002; Wright 1993). The average time in service for the correctional staff

TABLE 2
Security Level

Variable	*Number (n = 43)*
Prison Security Level	
Correctional Institution #1—Adult Male (Minimum, Medium)	21
Correctional Institution #2—Adult Male (Medium, Maximum)	6
Correctional Institution #3—Adult Male (Minimum, Medium, and Maximum)	4
Correctional Institution #4 – Adult Male (Medium, Maximum, and Death Row)	12

TABLE 3
Survey Questions

Open ended question
If inmates argue or have verbal fights with the staff, what is this typically about?
If inmates get into physical fights with the staff, what is this typically about?
Can you give a personal example when staff did not show respect to another staff member here in prison?
Have you been in any verbal fights or arguments with staff members in front of inmates? Explain what happened the last time this happened.
What could we do to train staff to be more respectful to others in prison?

is eight years in service and twelve years in service for non-correctional staff. Those working in case management jobs have worked in this system longer.

We employ an open coding technique (Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1990), to examine these data. This type of coding requires that we read the interviewed line-by-line, to examine gender differences in issues regarding rules, verbal communication, and conflict. This allows us to create categories, or open codes, based on specific answers from interviewees (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), allowed us to develop a theoretical understanding of our qualitative interviews. More specifically, we coded these data into three categories: (1) formal responders; (2) informal responders; (3) no mention of rules, to describe how interviewees handle problems with the inmates. To increase reliability (Babbie 1989), especially intercoder reliability (Kurasaki 2000), we used four coders to assign these codes individually and contextualize them in accordance to the above three categories. Three coders completed the first round and a fourth recoded the entire data set to verify the previous responses.

We found stark differences between women and men who were "formal responders" in how they punish inmates. Only one female respondent claimed to approach this issue from a draconian position grounded in not allowing inmates to get away with any infraction. Men who were formal responders made similar claims and argued that inmates must follow the rules without hesitation. They commonly claimed that they were "in charge" and the inmates need to fall in line. They also claim that they are fair in doing so because everyone is given the same punishment for the same offense.

Others argued that the rules are not as important as maintaining order and there is some wiggle room to consider the context of the situation. We call these interviewees "informal responders" who used verbal skills or "warnings" to combat bad behavior. They sometimes claim that they ignore bad behavior and that it depends on the context of the situation. However, we found that women were more likely to be formal responders who also use verbal skills. They would take someone to administrative segregation or write them up and verbally counsel them on proper behavior or the problems associated with prison violence.

The use of an open coding technique (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990) allowed us to identify key differences in how interviewees describe their tactics with the inmates. This also allowed us to construct memos (Charmaz 2006) that create "conceptual categories" (91) about gender, communication, and conflict. Also, this technique allowed us to explore some subtle differences in how men and women use their skills to control their work environment.

FINDINGS

As we coded our data, the concept of "rules" became a key component in the narrative responses of our interviewees. Specifically, interviewees explain that inmates break the rules and are angry with staff members for responding to their behavior. However, there were differences in how they respond to rule violations. As outlined in Table 4, there were few differences between whether or not men or women used formal administrative responses or informal "warnings" or interventions to address bad behavior. Also, correctional officers were not more likely to use formal sanctions than their non-correctional counterparts.

For example, Thomas, a correctional officer and Sergeant, explained that he could choose to write up inmates or let them off. However, this causes some problems: "One time, I didn't write up a guy for wearing his shorts on the yard. The next time I did and he argued with me. I told him that the first one was a warning. I guess he was angry because I wasn't consistent but I can write him up, or not."

Informal responders claimed that each situation is different and they choose to whether or not to write up the inmates. Some of the correctional staff stated that they give warnings or threaten the inmates but rarely write them up. Robert, a correctional officer and corporal, told this story:

> They can't be in shorts in the yard, that's the rule. I saw a guy in shorts and told him to go change or get off the yard. He yelled, "Fuck you that's fucked up cuz it's hot." It was hot but that's not the point, I have to treat everyone the same. It told him to change or I would write him up, so he changed.

He also stated:

> This is a dangerous place to be. You don't want to be a hard-ass to the guys when you don't have to. If you can talk it out, you do better. Some of the young guys haven't figured that out. If you poke an animal, they will attack. If you are calm, the animal will remain calm. That understanding comes with age.

Informal responders were quick to point out that prison is a dangerous place and it is sometimes best to give inmates some leeway in order to keep the peace. They believe that they avoid conflict if they can talk with the inmates and work out the problem. In fact, an inmate yelled and swore at Robert and he responded with a threat of the write up and the inmate complied. Carl, a correctional officer and corporal explained that sometimes the staff get out of line and do not write up the inmates because they believe the conflict was "mutual":

TABLE 4
Formal and Informal Responders by Gender and Job Type

Variable	*Formal responders*	*Informal responders*
Male Interviewees		
Correctional Staff	11	9
Non-Correctional Staff	6	6
Female Interviewees		
Correctional Staff	3	4
Non-Correctional Staff	3	1

> One of the guys told an inmate to stop doing something and he turned around and yelled and cursed at him. He yelled at the officer for just doing his job. They usually get written up for this. If the officer did something to deserve it, like yelled first, he won't write him up. This time, he didn't write him up so I assume that it was mutual.

Carl also explained his technique with working with the inmates:

> A long time ago, the word got out that I do my job and show the inmates respect. If you see the inmates with me and the other guys, it's night and day. They show me a lot of respect and kindness because I respect them. Even if they argue with me, there's no cursing or yelling. We can disagree and talk about it. We can agree to disagree and move on. No need to yell.

As Carl points out, respectful behavior is mutual. These men believe that treating inmates humanely reduces violence and conflict. They argue that talking through the issues makes more sense than writing up the inmate or taking them to administrative segregation. Also, this reduces work for these officers. Some, like Sheila, a correctional officer, explain that it is contextual and based on the offense:

> I really don't fight with them but they argue about the rules. I follow the rules. I don't necessarily write them up for every little thing. That costs money and my time and I would rather take them aside and give them a talk about their behavior. If it's a big thing, if they assault someone or have contraband, I have to take action. If they pass food to someone, I'll tell them that this is an offense and they need to knock it off. I've had guys whine about that.

According to these interviewees, there are many reasons why formal responses are not the best option. They believe that they save time, money, and reduce violence if they work with the inmates and reduce the number of write-ups.

Others explain that they will follow the rules even if that creates conflict and we identify these interviewees as formal responders. They explain that this sometimes creates problems between inmates and staff. Mark, a correctional officer and corporal, explains that the rules are final, even though he does not necessarily agree with them:

> They argue with us about the rules. They think the rules are stupid, maybe they are. That's not for me to decide, they need to follow them. I've only fought with them over the rules. I have to follow the rules and they have to follow the rules. If we don't, we have chaos here.

What is especially interesting is that Mark believes that following the rules maintains order. At the same time, Sheila and Carl argue that order is maintained if you consider the context of the situation and use alternate means when necessary. Others, like Simon, who is a unit manager, claim that shutting down an argument with an inmate is the best way to avoid problems:

> An inmate was telling me how grievances should be handled. He stated that I was not professional in my response. I told him, "your opinion does not matter here; you need to do what I tell you to do." And he backed down. They know to back down here. They know we use the seg unit seriously.

He gave an example of how he solves problems:

> I had an inmate that had an empty bunk and he liked that because he didn't have to share his cell. I brought in another inmate and explained to the guy that we need the bunk. He was unreceptive. He said he did not want a cellie. He said that he would just create problems with the other inmate, which is disrespectful. I told him, "I'm telling you to get along with this guy, it's your job to take care of it

> and get along" and he said, "I told you this is a problem, why are you bringing him in here?" I told him, "he's here so deal with it and don't bother him. I don't want to come back here." He complied because he knows I can take care of things. It's best to just go along with the plan and follow the rules.

Clarice, a case manager, echoes Simon's argument and demands that everyone, staff and inmates alike, follow the rules:

> I end up dealing with staff members who are too lenient with the inmates. This one guy was letting someone have a pass because it wasn't a "big problem" so I walked over and pulled out the rules and read it to both of them. Then the officer told me that I embarrassed him and made a big deal about nothing. I told him to follow the rules or find another job. When I started, I made it clear that I was going to follow the rules. That's my reputation now so it's not worth it to fight with me. I am fair and consistent.

The formal responders tend to focus on the fact that they have to work harder because they follow the rules. They also believe that consistency means fairness. If they write up everyone for the infractions, they cannot be accused of favoritism. However, this makes them appear to be the bad guy with the inmates. Brad, a unit manager, explains the problems with being a formal responder:

> We do have some inconsistent staff here so I may write up a guy for something while other guys won't. Then they really get mad and say, "I've done this a hundred times, why are you busting me now?" It's a good question. The guys who ignore this stuff make it harder on the rest of us. We need to be consistent and fair.

A few interviewees claim that, as you gain experience, you learn better ways to deal with the inmates. James, a caseworker with thirty-two years of experience, stated:

> My nickname is "old man" and it's a sign of respect. If I show up, the guys say, "hey old man, what's going on?" and we'll talk. If one argues with me, others will say, "hey, listen to the old man, he's going to help you." The older you are in here, the more respect you get. The young guys haven't earned their respect. Some of them won't earn it.

Studies show that inmates are more likely to assault staff in high-security lock-down sections of the prison while being closely supervised (Jiang and Fisher-Giorlando 2002). Also, Colvin (2007) finds that staff members who use a high level of force alienate the inmates and this increases the chance of violence. However, it is not possible to determine which approach is best for those in our sample. Some claim that oral communication is very important, sometimes more important than enforcing the rules. They believe that this works because it reduces the chance that inmates retaliate or cause problems. Formal responders believe that they treat inmates fairly if they consistently follow the rules. As Brad pointed out, this sometimes means more work and blowback from the inmates. In all cases, safety is the key concern and the differences involve how each person addresses the issue of personal safety.

As we coded our data, we found that female formal responders explain that they follow the rules but also use their communication skills to make this process easier. Marianne, a caseworker, states that she is tough but, at the same time, works with the inmates to get them the help they need:

> A lot of inmates respect me here. I am a woman and that makes it hard sometimes. I have to be very firm with them and take no crap. I'm not their friend but I can help them make their stretch easier and

> help them with programs if they really want it. I only help those who are ready for help. For the most part, the staff tries to help the inmates when they can.

She told this story about how a male co-worker undermined her authority:

> I told an inmate to do something and he went to another staff member and he let him get away with not doing it. He went to the guy behind my back because he knew that this guy lets him get away with everything. Now I look like the bad guy. I told him that he has to follow the rules and the guy told me that I shouldn't care so much about the inmates. I don't even want to know what the Hell that means.

Marianne said that she is tough but the inmate rehabilitation comes first. However, her "tough but fair" stance creates problems with co-workers who are too lenient. Also, she brings up an issue that is echoed by other female employees. They state that their male co-workers become suspicious if they work too closely with inmates. Jessica, a correctional officer, made a similar claim but stated that lesbians do not have this problem:

> They fight when they are angry and they should take that out of the prison. They get mad when the females talk to the inmates and they make it clear that they do not trust them. A few of the women here have female partners and they are the lucky ones, they get a pass. The rest of the women are not to be trusted by the guys.

She also stated that there should be better communication between inmates and staff. She told this story about a male officer:

> The other officer was being stupid and mouthy. I told him to stop teasing the inmates. That's not called for and it puts us in danger. I said, "you don't know how to talk to them so shut up" and he told me to shut up. A lot of people are rude and disrespectful because they know they can get away with it. They are liked by the higher ups.

Sheila, a correctional officer, explained that being a lesbian shields her from harassment from her co-workers:

> I have extremely good communication skills and I am a talker. I talk to these guys and set them straight. The guys in here may intimidate a lot of women but, I talk to them and we work a lot of things out that way. I'm gay and that gives me some leeway to work close with the inmates because no one thinks I'm collaborating with them. The inmates tell me that I'm "one of the good ones" meaning that I take my job seriously and want them to get out on parole.

At the same time, she explains that some male co-workers still have a problem with women and others ignore this problem:

> It doesn't happen often but someone will say something, call us "bitch" or something and the other guys in uniform look the other way. I have been here a long time and the guys know that I won't fraternize with the inmates so it's not so hard for me. Other guys will interfere with the women and not let them do their job and the other guys ignore it.

It is highly likely that this mistrust stems from the concern about women engaging in sexual relationships with male inmates (Marquart et al. 2001). In fact, Beck and colleagues (2010) found that: "Among the 39,121 male prison inmates who had been victims of staff sexual misconduct, 69% reported sexual activity with female staff; an additional 16% reported sexual activity with both female and male staff" (24).

Of course, this gives men an advantage over women. This could posit friendly or helpful women as instigating a sexual relationship with inmates. Men, on the other hand, would not be burdened with the same public scrutiny even though 16% of reported relationships involved a male employee (Beck et al. 2010).

The heteronormative response is to assume that there is something suspicious about a female employee helping a male inmate. This double standard puts women in the position of either helping the inmates or distancing themselves from the inmates. As Sheila points out, lesbians may have an advantage. They can work closely with the inmates and not face the problem of public speculation about their intentions.

As we coded these data, we found that many of these arguments centered on male staff members interfering with female employees who are working with inmates. More specifically, female interviewees claimed that male co-workers undermined their authority in front of the inmates. There were no male interviewees who claimed that they were suspected of having improper or sexual relationships with the inmates.

None of the male interviewees claimed to distrust the women with the inmates. However, Wesley, a caseworker, argued that this is something they have to keep an eye on:

> I see a lot of dirty stuff here. I think some of the guys do drugs together and they date the ladies. We have a problem with the ladies having relationships with the inmates. Too much fooling around. Some of the women do just fine and some of them fool around with the inmates and then they get talked into bringing in drugs.

Wesley's statement highlights the problem with fraternization. This behavior could lead to other criminal acts. Wesley justifies his position by focusing on the bigger issue of drug trafficking. However, this puts a spotlight on women who are trying to help the inmates and gives men a pass. Brittany, a correctional officer and corporal, explained that her male co-workers do not trust her with the inmates. She believes this is because she is fairly new to the job:

> They are hard on the women. The guys will interrupt them with the inmates or drill them about what the inmate wanted. They are worried that the women get turned out so they think they have to babysit them. It makes me very uncomfortable and I can't get the inmates to respect me if they do this. I guess it will get better when I've been here for a while.

This creates tension for women who are using their verbal skills to communicate with the inmates. Although Wesley might be justified in focusing on the prison drug trade, this creates a culture of distrust between men and women.

We note that some male interviewees also stressed the importance of open communication with inmates. However, men do not experience the problem of having to explain their actions. If men verbally counsel the inmates or help them get into programs, they are going above and beyond the call of duty. If some of the women do the same thing, they claim that this makes them suspect in the eyes of their co-workers. Also, the male employees sometimes harass women, and this causes another layer of problems. Devon, a correctional officer and corporal, stated that the men must respect the females in order to set an example for the inmates:

> They harass the women and make them look dumb in front of the inmates. It's not all of them but it's enough to make me mad. It's going to cause problems because the inmates already say sexual stuff to women here all the time and this makes it worse. If they think the women are incompetent, they won't listen to them about the rules. They won't follow orders.

As interviewees describe these issues, they point out that this is a security issue. If the staff members are in conflict, inmates may be ignored. If women are prevented from helping them, inmates may become frustrated and lash out. Overall, there is a common theme of concern about their safety that cuts through most of these issues. Monica, a caseworker, explained that she follows the rules, but when others lash out at the inmates, this creates bigger problems for everyone. She gave examples of the staff members yelling or cursing at the inmates:

> Staff called "You piece of shit! You're going to be here forever" and the inmate said, "I'm leaving!" and the staff member said back, "You'll be back, I know for sure." It depends on the relationship. You can say that in a certain way and it's okay, or you can say it another way and they know that they're being disrespectful. We get called on that—it's grievable. It never helps anyone to be like that, especially in this setting. No matter how pissed you are, why make it any worse?

Noreen, a correctional officer and Sergeant, explained that there would be fewer problems if supervisors were harsher on those not following the rules:

> If the supervisors would do more to squash it in a public setting. If there is a witness to a situation, the staff member should go beyond just the negative and explain the situation and turn it into a positive. Supervisors have to sell the institution and the policies to drown out the negative voices.

Yvonne, a correctional officer and corporal, also discussed an incident when the staff broke the rules and tormented a mentally ill inmate:

> An inmate down in seg, he's been there from day one and will stay there. His biggest fear, he hallucinates that his mom is going to shoot him. They took him out in full restraints to go to clinic or something. Several guards, and there was a wet floor sign, and the one behind him tripped the sign to make it snap shut like a gunshot. He flipped out. That's extremely disrespectful. He's not all there, and violent.

Beverly, a correctional officer, gave an example of when staff members intentionally torment the inmates rather than help them. She explains that this is not a part of their job:

> There are too many problems here. The problem is that the guys say shit to the inmates all the time. They make fun of the chi-mos [a term used for child molesters] and they say, "You are never getting out of here." Our job means working with the inmates and teaching them right from wrong. If we act stupider than them, we lost this battle. I once saw a guy who laughed when a guy fell in the mud on the yard. Here he is working the yard, doing his job and he's laughing with the inmates like he's one of them.

As interviewees point out, the problem goes beyond the issue of whether or not to enforce the rules. Some staff members break the rules and interfere with co-workers. Some harass or bother the women and inmates. As Yvonne and Beverly point out, this creates serious problems where the staff may be putting themselves or others in bad situations where inmates may lash out at each other or the employees.

Finally, women who actively work with inmates explain that they are prone to harassment or complaints from their co-workers. Melinda, a lieutenant and a supervisor explained that this is a big problem:

> I have almost daily verbal disagreements with staff, it's par for the course. They bring me something to my office and I explain that they didn't follow protocol or something and they get angry and expect

> me to tell them, "that it's okay, you can do what you want." I had one guy spit on me and I had him written up. He didn't call me a bitch but he wanted to, I could tell. He broke the rules and I turned him in and he said I was taking the inmate's side over his. No, I am following the rules. Don't walk into my office bragging about how you took care of an inmate in a manner that is unacceptable and expect me to look the other way.

It seems as if the problems these women describe centers on the fact that they seem generally interested in helping the inmates and some of their co-workers interpret this as some kind of betrayal. As Melinda points out, they formulate an "us versus them" dynamic and any kindness towards the inmates is viewed as either fraternization or a betrayal of trust.

Florence, a case manager, made a similar argument and explained how her co-workers interfere with her ability to do her job:

> No two staff members are the same. They forget this and they think that everyone should think like them. The officers think they can do my job and they try to step in and tell me what to say or how to act. They will get into a conversation I'm having with an inmate. They try to tell me what to do. I don't know if it's a female thing, it might be. I usually get along with the officers, some of them are my best friends. There is just little trust between some of the guys and the female staff and it causes problems.

She went on to explain that their job would be easier if they explained the rules to the inmates instead of just making demands:

> The guys won't explain why the rules are important. Instead, they bark an order and expect them to jump to attention. They are not going to do that. They are not some four-year old children, they are adults and we think that acting tough and barking orders will help. I tell you, this is why they attack some of these guys. I'm surprised it doesn't happen more often.

Our findings suggest that there are several gender related issues between staff members. This is not to say that all men undermine their female counterparts. In fact, some of them defended them and their abilities. The issues about rule enforcement is interesting in that there are tensions between the formal and informal responders and, more importantly, how rules are followed and how they respond to the inmates. Clearly, men have an advantage because they are not suspected of having sex with the inmates. This puts women in a precarious position where they want to do their job but face problems with their co-workers for doing so.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Although we used a small sample size, we were able to present qualitative data that highlighted important issues surrounding gender, formal rules, and interpersonal conflict. Primarily, we find tensions between those using formal responses to inmate misconduct and those using other methods. In Wilson's (1968) classic book on policing styles, he identified those who had a legalistic style of policing. These "by the book" officers treated everyone the same and all lawbreakers were handled formally. Those using the service style of policing took an informal approach and found other ways to handle non-serious offenders. This keeps them out of the system and builds a relationship between these officers and the public they serve.

It is remarkable that the people in our sample would take a similar approach to doing their job. Both groups believe they are doing the right thing and both are highly critical of the other. Our findings also show how these styles create tension between these groups. More importantly, our findings show men and women differ in this field of work. The problem of fraternization between female employees and male inmates created a culture of distrust between co-workers in this total institution.

Formal responders claim that inmates must follow instructions and backed up their arguments with the formal power they receive as prison workers. There is no middle ground with some of formal responders who describe their world as black and white. Again, this is done to maintain order and to justify their position as authority figures. They understand that this causes more work as they argue with co-workers but their status, as a legitimate authority figure, is not in question. They consider consistency the central component in keeping order.

Informal responders believe that they prevent problems and help inmates by giving warnings or talking to them about their behavior. Sykes (1958) was the first to describe the political economies of prison where inmates and guards work together informally to solve many problems. It makes sense that these two groups will not be in a state of constant war and some compromise is expected. However, this opens the door for serious problems like sexual relationships and the exchange of contraband (Worley et al. 2003; Worley and Worley 2011). Worley and Worley (2011) point out that survey respondents from the Texas correctional system often claim that "some employees let inmates break the rules" (309) and this is a common source of staff misconduct. Informal responders; however, justify their actions by discussing the value of rehabilitation and common ground. Obviously, some appear cavalier and argue that they use formal sanctions as they see fit. Others describe the need to help the inmates and avoid problems. The inconsistent methods used by these interviewees are described as dangerous by the formal responders.

More interestingly, we find that women often follow the rules and use verbal communication to correct behavior. They take an authoritative position of consistently punishing the inmates but working with them to reduce inmate misconduct. The ability of female prison workers to effectively use verbal communication is documented elsewhere (Britton 1997; Carlson et al. 2003). However, we add to this discussion by focusing on how this skill leads to conflict between male and female employees. According to our interviewees, conflict centers on the fact that this behavior is misinterpreted as fraternization. Clearly, this is a serious problem as the overwhelming majority of sexual abuse cases involve a female employee and a male inmate (Beck et al. 2010). It appears that the problem of sexual abuse in prison created a norm of suspicion about women working with inmates.

According to the findings of Marquart and colleagues(2001), the majority of sexual relationships between inmates and staff involve a "lovesick" employee and:

> These involved "romantic idealism," in which the employee disregarded the offender's personal history, placed the inmate on a pedestal, and fantasized about life together when the inmate was released. Their love was regarded as so extraordinary that employee policies and ethical codes were irrelevant. (901)

They also found that 75% of these relationships involved a female worker and male inmate. These "lovesick" females psychologically constructed the inmates as free men who were not under state control. Thus, they come to identify with the inmate on a personal level that instigates the sexual relationship (Marquart et al. 2001).

According to our findings, some female employees have learned to use the best of both worlds. They strictly follow rules but help the inmates better themselves. They do not describe the "lovesick" scenario as outlined by Marquart and colleagues (2001). Instead, they want to follow the rules, even if this creates problems between themselves and their co-workers. They want to rehabilitate the inmates and this indicates that they do not treat them as free men living in prison. Their problems stem from the mistrust of their co-workers who see them as suspect because they are female.

Clearly, this creates serious problems as this behavior undermines the authority of these women. This also sets a bad example in front of inmates who are prone to engage in sexual harassment. As Brittan (1997) points out, there are specific benefits for men working in prison:

> To the extent that they collaborate with (or at least fail to resist) the ongoing construction of occupational masculinity, male officers gain status. Simply by virtue of being male, they are perceived by supervisors, coworkers, and administrators (and perhaps by themselves as well) as more capable of doing their jobs, as "real officers" and thus, by definition, "real men." Even male officers working in women's prison benefit, given training's emphasis on violence and the belief that dealing with such incidents is central to the role of men in these institutions. (813)

In the gendered organization of prison, the hierarchy of duties provides rewards for those doing difficult work. Many organizations create gender-neutral policies regarding raises and promotions but the type of jobs occupied by women are often constructed as less difficult or dangerous. This reinforces gender inequality by devaluing work consistently done by women while maintaining male privilege (Brittan 1997).

Our findings indicate that the reports of sexual misconduct created a new hurdle for women in this institution. Although Beck and colleagues (2010) found that 16% of the reported sexual abuse cases involved male employees, women describe being targeted as possible offenders. This behavior somewhat disrupts the continuity of the gendered organization as men, and lesbians, are allowed to freely work with inmates while non-lesbian women are not. This is especially interesting in light of the fact that women in our study claim that their ability to follow the rules and interact with the inmates benefits the inmates and reduces problems. Their male counterparts somehow identify this as a betrayal to their fellow officers or accuse them of fraternization. In any event, it prevents women from doing the dangerous work of dealing with violent offenders, despite their ability to calmly interact with inmates in a non-aggressive fashion.

Future studies should focus on these issues in other state and federal prisons. Although we made every effort, we had no respondents from the women's prison. Studies are greatly needed in women's prisons to evaluate similar issues regarding male staff and female inmates. Finally, quantitative studies are needed to evaluate the possible connection between formal responders and inmate violence. Formal responders in this study admit that this causes problems with the inmates. A follow-up study is needed to see if this increases their chance of an inmate assault.

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