BREAKING INTO JAIL:
WOMEN WORKING IN A MEN'S JAIL

by

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to present a detailed picture of what it is like to be a woman working as a guard in a "men's" jail. In-depth interviews with 21 female guards, 6 managers and 17 women working in jobs usually held by women in a jail (nurses, clerks, librarians) were used to explore the experiences of women in choosing to become jail guards and the consequences of being a woman in the men's world of the jail. Whenever possible, the actual words of the participants are included in the text.

The dominant idea which organizes the research is that female guards in a men's jail find themselves in a confusing position. On the one hand, to be female is to be different, to be an outsider. On the other hand, female guards have much in common with, and are sympathetic to, their male peers.

This research finds that female guards apply for, and accept, the job for financial reasons. Guards express feelings of frustration with management, boredom and isolation. Female guards see themselves as competent, but having a less aggressive manner of carrying out their duties than some of their male peers. Yet they receive unsolicited and unwanted paternalistic protection which serves to reinforce women's differences and devaluation in the organization. Female guards experience both personal and sexual harassment. These problems are compounded by jail culture, by the comradeship of male and female officers and by the token status of women. Harassment becomes normalized and accepted by both men and women.
Three patterns emerge which describe how female guards cope with the challenges and frustrations of their jobs. First, they have much in common with their male peers and are accepted to a greater or lesser degree in the workplace. Second, they tolerate difficulties, including personal and sexual harassment, in part because the benefits of complaining are outweighed by the costs. Finally, some female guards withdraw from the workplace in one way or another: they avoid superfluous contact with fellow-workers, go on stress leave, become apathetic or quit.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about women who work in a men's jail. It developed out of my experiences working as a correctional officer in a men's jail. I had accepted the job under duress as a part of the British Columbia government's restraint policies of the early 1980s. Feeling much like a conscript, I was interested in why other women would choose such a job. Moreover, the job put me into intimate contact with guards and their sub-culture, an experience which sparked my interest in discovering more about their social relations. None of the literature I had read or images I had seen on television or in movies corresponded to my own experience working as a guard. Guards have what Blanchfield (1985:4) calls a "perennial image problem". The media, the way in which most people learn about jails or prisons, highlight the sensational. One only hears about prisons when there is a hostage taking, a riot, or an allegation of undue force. Jails, meanwhile, are secretive and dislike negative publicity. As well as being a non-traditional work place for women, prisons and jails are unusual work places in themselves. Female guards are an especially interesting aspect of the prison enterprise.

This topic proved to be timely. Women working in highly "male" jobs such as guards and soldiers have received recent media attention. The planning, research, writing and revision period coincided with the Persian Gulf war which marked the first involvement of American women troops in combat zones (Denniston, 1991:A6), and allegations of discrimination and harassment of women working in the Canadian military (Bell, 1992:b4; Bolan, 1992:A1, B1). At the end of the writing period, two
women alleged they were the victims of a gang-rape by male guards at a provincially run training centre for guards in Ontario (Duncason, 1992:A4; "Gang Rape...", 15 July 1992: A18; "Coverup..." 1992: A9; "Allegations..." 1992:A7.).

The purpose of this research, based upon in-depth interviews with female guards, clerks, professionals (nurses and librarians) and interviews with both male and female managers in one jail for men, is to 1) explore the experiences of women choosing to become prison guards and 2) explore the consequences of being a woman in the men's world of the prison. I used the interview method because I wanted to document female guards' experience, needs and concerns. This inquiry is intended to be part of the research literature of women who work in jobs conventionally or predominantly held by men.

I approach the subject from different angles. Each is intended to add to a picture, and thus an understanding, of what it is like to be a woman working as a guard in a men's jail. The dominant idea which organizes the research is that female guards in men's prisons find themselves in a confusing position. On one hand, to be female is to be different and an outsider. On the other hand, female guards have much in common with, and are sympathetic to, their male peers. The work of female correctional officers in a jail for men highlights the problems of all women doing "men's work".

The questions I attempt to answer include: How and why have women come to work in such a highly male-dominated job? Did they consider the male-dominated nature of the job before accepting it? Are female guards different in any identifiable way from other women who work in the jail, for instance do they have
differing life and work experiences? Do female guards encounter difficulties that male guards do not? What are the bases of solidarity and differences women perceive between themselves and their male peers? Do female guards face the same problems, such as sexual harassment, as other women? What forms does the harassment take? If female guards are indeed harassed, do they complain about it, and if not, why not? In what ways does the fact that the work place is a jail complicate problems like sexual harassment? How do women cope with a hostile male environment?

This research has five major parts. First, I consider the social and individual conditions which facilitated women’s work in prisons for men. I trace the circumstances under which women come to work in prisons for men, by piecing together the sequence of events which led to the employment of women as guards in men’s prisons.

In order to address the questions of why and how individual women come to work in a "man’s job", I compare the women who are correctional officers with two other groups of women who also work in the jail, but in jobs that are conventionally "women’s work", namely office workers and professionals (nurses and librarians). The comparison keeps the overall work organization the same, since the correctional officers, clerks and professionals all work in the same jail. The conditions of their work differ only in the conventionally masculine or feminine character of the work.

Understanding why women choose the job is important. The discussion illustrates similarities and differences between women working in typically "female" jobs and women working as guards. This research finds that female guards, like male
guards, discover the job in a casual way. Female guards apply for, and accept, the job for financial reasons. They are more likely than clerks, nurses and professional women to have previous experience in "men's" jobs. The correctional officers I interviewed were much more likely than other women working in the jail to volunteer information about backgrounds which were dysfunctional in some way, for example to have been victims of child abuse, to being the adult children of alcoholics and so on. Correctional officers tend to be younger, and better educated than clerks.

The second part of this research addresses the work environment. Female guards are not simply working women, but women working in a specific and somewhat unusual job. Jails have a particular culture and are typified by a potential for violence, conflict, isolation, a paramilitary hierarchy, boredom and a lack of prestige. The circumstances of female guards must be understood in the context of working in a jail. This discussion also relates to sources of difference and solidarity between male and female guards. I include a comparison with clerks, nurses and librarians, a comparison which allows me to analyze the impact of being female as distinct from the impact of being a female guard in a male jail. I found widespread feelings of frustration with management, boredom and isolation among the guards and clerks. In contrast, nurses and directors' secretaries, both positions with a high degree of autonomy, were relatively satisfied with their work and with management.

Included in the discussion of the work environment is a chapter outlining differing working styles of male and female guards. This discussion is important because female guards report that their male peers express fears that a female guard
may not be able to provide adequate backup in an emergency, such as breaking up a fight. This fear is used as a rationale for the exclusion of women from many duties which bring esteem and acceptance. Female guards see themselves as competent, yet having a less aggressive manner of carrying out their duties than some of their male peers. Yet they receive unsolicited and unwanted paternalistic protection which serves to reinforce women's differences and devaluation in the organization.

Chapter eight, drawing on the experiences and perspectives of female guards, deals with personal and sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a common problem for women. In a jail it is compounded by the culture of the jail, by the comradeship of male and female officers and by the token status of women. Sexual harassment is assumed to be a natural and inevitable cost of working in a jail. Harassment becomes normalized and accepted by both men and women.

Chapter nine of this thesis will address the ways in which female correctional officers cope with the challenges and frustrations of their jobs. It addresses the ways female guards respond to sometimes hostile colleagues, a negative work environment and a paramilitary hierarchy. The primary focus of the analysis is on the relationship of female guards with peers, bosses, inmates and the organization itself. The types of strategies female guards use to cope with their jobs and relationships highlight their inferior status. Three main processes were evident. First, female guards have much in common with their male peers and thus are accepted to a greater or lesser degree. Second, they tolerate the difficulties of the job and seek to maintain harmonious relationships with their male peers. They do not complain about personal and sexual harassment, in part because they feel their complaints would not
be heard or acted on. Finally, some women withdraw from the workplace in one way or another. They avoid superfluous contact with fellow-workers, they may go on stress leave, become apathetic, or resign.

Finally, this thesis will look at some directions for change. The changes I envision would, in the first place, heighten awareness of the problems facing female guards. Second, changes would emphasize ameliorative action. I propose that extensive training and sensitization be developed about the problems and frustrations of female staff. Such training should start with managers. Further, I propose screening for, and elimination of, inappropriate job candidates; that policy be altered to include both personal and sexual forms of harassment; and that harassers face real, significant consequences for their actions. Mechanisms for complaint should be developed outside the paramilitary chain of command. Finally, I propose that management should explore alternatives to the paramilitary hierarchy, for example, more participatory styles of management which include recognition for individual contributions to the organization.

In conclusion, this research is about the experiences of women choosing to become guards in a men's jail and the consequences of that choice. Female guards work in an exceptionally masculine environment. They have much in common with their male peers and are sympathetic to them. Yet some of these male peers treat female guards as different and inferior. Female guards cope with their circumstances because they tolerate discrimination, including sexual harassment, and because they withdraw from peers in one way or another. This research is intended to develop a greater understanding of what it is like to be a female guard in a men's jail.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis relates to several areas of research literature. These areas encompass male and female guards, the occupational choice of guards, prison culture, and various forms of discrimination against women in the work-place, including personal and sexual harassment.

The problems of being a female guard relative to those of being a guard are central to this thesis. Not only are female guards working in a non-traditional job, they are working in a particular type of institution, the jail. Women who work as correctional officers share many of the characteristics of women in other male-dominated jobs, especially women in the police and the military. Furthermore, female correctional officers face sexist attitudes and discriminatory behaviour in the workplace. They are subjected to sexual harassment, paternalism, and isolation. Very little has been written about prison guards (see Sykes, 1958; Lombardo, 1981; Crouch, 1980) and even less about women working in prisons (Petersen, 1982:438; Flowers, 1987:xv; Moyer, 1985:6-7; Feinman, 1980:39,49-50). Academics have neglected women in their research (Smith, 1987:61). Women working as guards are even more neglected. Feinman notes that there were no studies of women working as correctional officers until 1979, although women have been employed as guards, or "matrons", since the early nineteenth century (Feinman, 1980:49-50). Moyer (1985) reviews the literature on women in the justice system in the introduction to a collection of writings on the topic. Moyer notes that little has been written on this subject because relatively few women have been either prisoners or professionals,
and both policy development and research have been controlled by men interested in preserving the status quo. Moyer writes: "this official reality does not include research on women" (Moyer, 1985:15).

Women in the related, male dominated jobs of policing and the military have received more attention in research literature than women working as correctional officers. The United States military has conducted numerous studies on women soldiers (Williams, 1989:58-61). Flowers wrote a critical examination of research on the "triptite" issues of "female crime victims, female criminals, and female professionals in criminal justice" (Flowers, 1987:xvi). Flowers (1987:169) notes that female police officers have been given the most attention in the literature on women working in the justice system.

Women working in prison are rarely seen by the world at large. Many people may not even realize that women work as guards in men's jails. Faith (1987:181) reviews the "distorted and destructive" images of prison women on television and the movies. Faith writes that when female guards are depicted at all, it is as cold, "predatory", "masculine" women: "sadistic latchkey guards who stalk vulnerable prisoners" (Faith, 1987:183-84).

Jurik and Halemba (1984) utilized questionnaires from 40 female and 139 male guards to compare work-related attitudes and found that organizational structure and working conditions were more important than gender in determining attitudes of guards.

Jurik (1985:291) interviewed 20 female and 10 male guards and 16 "other" staff in an American state prison to describe "interactional and organizational barriers
to advancement" of female guards in men’s prisons. Jurik found that female guards experienced stress from having to adjust to the male-dominated environment of the prison.

Flynn (1982) traces the history of women working in the criminal justice system and found their progress to be "painfully slow and fraught with difficulties". The correctional system only accepted women in its ranks as a result of persistent external pressure for the elimination of racial and sexual discriminatory practice and policy (Flynn, 1982:333).

Szockyj (1989) distributed a questionnaire to inmates and interviewed male and female correctional officers, inmates and supervisors in a Canadian remand centre. Szockyj assesses interactive and physical abilities, acceptance of female officers and privacy of inmates (1989:320). She reports the presence of women allowed for the development of a less "macho" prison environment, both inmates and male officers tended to be protective of female staff, although women reported that a small segment of the male officers did not accept female guards. Furthermore, inmates value women for a less confrontational style of interaction. Women are seen, however, as less effective when physical strength is required (Szockyj, 1989:322).

Other studies address the case law decisions which have led to the employment of female guards in men’s prisons (Matusewitch, 1980; Rafter and Stanko, 1982; Feinman, 1980; Parisi, 1984) or address the work styles of women as they adapt to the job (Etheridge, Hale and Hambrick, 1984; Pollock, 1986). This material is
invaluable in tracing the process by which women have become employed as guards in men’s jails.

Zimmer’s *Women Guarding Men* (1986) is the most extensive study of women working as correctional officers. Zimmer interviewed seventy female guards, one hundred male guards, 37 inmates and several administrators in New York and Rhode Island prisons. Her emphasis was on the problems female correctional officers face and their strategies for handling them. Zimmer found that male guards are resentful of women in male prisons (Zimmer, 1986:155). Female guards adapt to their jobs in three ways: (1) by avoiding contact with inmates and performing only some guard duties in protected areas of the prison (the "modified" role); (2) by adopting a manner including inflexible adherence to formal rules and regulation which downplay femaleness ("institutional" role) or (3) by seeking support and acceptance from inmates, performing all the regular duties of a guard, and relying on superior communications abilities in preference to physical abilities ("inventive" role) (Zimmer, 1986:146).

Research studies suggest that women develop less confrontational relationships with inmates than do male guards. Inmates are either neutral or positive about women correctional officers. Male inmates comply with orders and even assist with supervision of other inmates. Problems on the job tend to be related to fellow officers rather than to inmates (Zimmer, 1987:421; Zimmer, 1986:10; Szockyj 1989:320-321; Fry and Glaser, 1987:41, Jurik and Halem, 1984:559).

Petersen (1982) worked as a correctional officer in a men’s prison in Wisconsin. She based her research on participant observation, questionnaires, and
interviews with male and female correctional officers at three Wisconsin prisons. She found that while male officers resent female officers, females are "received quite positively" by inmates (Petersen, 1982:452). Petersen writes: "The fact that even inmates were aware of the hostility of male officers toward female officers is significant because officers are counselled in their training, by the officer subculture and by their supervisors, to present a unified front to inmates" (Petersen: 453).

One of the focal points of my research relates to how and why women choose to become correctional officers. Most studies of men working as correctional officers ask why men choose the job. Most men accept the job because it was the best opportunity available, the highest paid, the most secure and not subject to layoffs. Few actively search out the job but "drift" into it (Jacobs, 1981; Webb and Morris, 1978:32; Ross, 1981; Crouch and Marquart, 1980; Jacobs and Retsky, 1980: 186-187). Jacobs (1981:42) asked respondents why they chose the job. More than one half (fifty-seven percent) cited reasons unrelated to corrections. They just needed a job. Only one in ten mentioned aspirations specifically related to a career in corrections (Jacobs, 1981:42). Crouch and Marquart (1980:65-69) concluded that the decision to take the job appears to be somewhat accidental, although some men join the force as a stepping stone to other jobs in federal prisons (which pay more money) or the police.

Lombardo (1981) interviewed 39 correctional officers while employed as a teacher in the prison school and found that guards did not have long-standing aspirations to work as guards. Instead, they were attracted by financial security and pay (Lombardo, 1981:20).
Susan Martin (1980:60-62) conducted a study based on interviews with twenty-seven policemen and twenty-eight policewomen. Martin found that many female police officers indicated they came from poor families. Many had aspired to become police officers since childhood, while others appear to have joined the police force "by chance rather than choice" (Martin, Susan, 1980:65).

Zimmer gathered material related to the occupational choice of female guards. Zimmer (1986:41) reports that most females sought the guard job for financial security. In Zimmer's study, several of the female guards had worked in "female" jobs in the prisons. Because of a lack of other advancement opportunities, they greatly increased their wages by becoming guards.

Bass and Davis conduct workshops for survivors of child abuse. Their practical manual for assisting survivors of abuse was based upon their experiences in these workshops and on fifty in-depth interviews. Bass and Davis write that survivors develop self-sufficiency, a sense of humour, and the ability to cope in crisis situations. Survivors typically excel in crisis, emergency oriented jobs (1988:40,45). This insight proved relevant to the career choice of some of the female guards.

Women working as correctional officers typically face hostility and resentment from male co-workers and supervisors, often in the form of sexual harassment, paternalism, exclusion from informal social networks, sex-role stereotyping, higher performance expectations and inadequate training. Parisi (1984:96) suggests that many men have begun to develop more favourable attitudes towards women working as correctional officers. As barriers decline, however, harassment often remains in subtle forms.
Sakowski (1985/86) interviewed three of the eight women initially hired as correctional officers in Canada. She spoke with them in 1978 and again in 1983. Sakowski found that female guards experienced "intense hostility" directed at them by their male peers. Over the period of five years, sexual harassment became more subtle and included speculation about the sexual activities of the female guards (1985/86:52).

A recent survey of guards commissioned by Correctional Services Canada (Jamieson, Beals, Lalonde and Associates, 1990) notes that Canadian prisons have had some success in bringing women into the male-dominated sectors of the system. These women, however, share disillusionment, isolation, and a frustration with the work-place as a whole. Barriers to female correctional officers include discriminatory attitudes and behaviours of men towards women, and "a persistent, underlying ethos that corrections work is men's business" (Jamieson, Beals, Lalonde, 1990:i-ii). Within Correctional Services Canada, "the general approach has been to place the onus on women to adapt to the male-dominated organizational culture, rather than on the organizational culture to adjust its practices to the reality of women's equal participation" (Jamieson, Beals, Lalonde, 1990:ii).

Research suggests that women typically experience varying forms of discrimination when they enter previously closed occupations. Women receive different job assignments than men, different treatment in training, are excluded from informal social networks, are victims of sexual harassment, and face paternalistic attitudes on the part of peers and supervisors. For example, harassment makes women police officers hesitant to participate in after-work activities (Martin, S.,
Lunneborg (1990:84) describes how women get inferior training when instructors and foremen channel them into less demanding jobs out of misplaced protectiveness. Women may, as a result, be bypassed for promotion due to lack of experience.

One form of discrimination is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a common problem for women in work and educational settings (Backhouse and Cohen, 1978; Kadar, 1988; Grahame, 1985; Allgeier and McCormick, 1983; Stanko, 1985; Deaux and Ullman, 1983:28-29). All seventy female guards studied by Zimmer described some form of harassment, although women differed in their evaluation of the seriousness of the harassment. Sexual harassment included teasing, spreading rumours (i.e. that individual women are lesbians or are sexually involved with supervisors or inmates), or purposeful ignoring of women officers to the point of pretending that they do not exist (Zimmer, 1986:95). However, Zimmer (1986:95) writes: "a great deal of the men’s direct opposition is too subtle to be classified as sexual harassment". Instead, Zimmer’s respondents described a shared experience of "working in a job in which they are unwanted and unappreciated by nearly everyone in their work environment" (Zimmer, 1986:53).

Women in the American military have a higher dropout rate than men. Williams (1989) interviewed female marines, male nurses, military policy makers and female veterans of World War II. Williams suggests women leave the military as a result of sexual harassment and the inability of males to accept women in the job. The military, in turn, blame women for failing to adapt to the job and consequently attempt to justify barring women from the military. This justification contradicts their
own numerous studies which have found no crucial difference in the performance of duties of male and female marines (Williams, 1989:58-61).

One recurring type of sexual harassment faced by women in policing, the military and corrections takes the form of gossip and rumours. Women in "men's jobs" are often assumed by colleagues to be lesbians (Martin, 1980:99-100) or subject to rumours that they are sexually involved with peers or supervisors (Martin, 1988:14; Owen, 1985-86:55; Sakowski, 1985-86:53). Petersen reports that she heard rumours about alleged sexual behaviour of "almost two-thirds of all female officers employed in Wisconsin’s male facilities" (Petersen, 1982: 453). The rumours circulated widely. Military women, like their counterparts in police and corrections, have been subjected to massive "slander campaigns" that they are either "prostitutes or lesbians". During World War II, these allegations so distressed the War Department that the FBI was asked to conduct an extensive investigation. The investigation concluded that military servicemen were the source of the rumours (Williams, 1989:31,37).

The research about male guards has been primarily set in the United States. Jacobs (1981) administered questionnaires to nine hundred and twenty nine Illinois prison guards. Webb and Morris (1978) based their research on participant observation during ten years experience in an American penitentiary. Jacobs and Retsky (1980) developed their ethnography from interviews with thirty guards at Statesville Penitentiary in Joliet, Illinois and their own contact with prisons. Crouch and Marquart (1980) based their research on formal and informal interviews with male officers in a Midwestern American prison.

A prison is a large bureaucratic organization, so Kanter's study of an American multinational is relevant to this thesis in two ways. First, both guards and Kanter's subjects work in large organizations in which individual workers have varying degrees of power attached to their jobs. Second, like women in Kanter's firm, female guards working in "men's" prisons and jails are relatively few in number. Kanter (1977:6, 249) describes the "numerically scarce" as tokens. Tokens are treated by the majority group as "representatives of their category rather than independent individuals" (Kanter, 1977:6). Tokens feel pressure to conform to group norms and to avoid mistakes. Kanter writes that tokens try to become "socially invisible" in
order not to "stand out". They are isolated from peer networks (Kanter, 1977:248-249).

Kanter goes on to observe that people of both sexes lower expectations and develop networks with others in similar situations when they are placed in powerless positions with low mobility (Kanter, 1977:137). Such individuals disengage in some way, have a lack of commitment to the organization, withdraw from responsibilities and form alliances with peers who also have few opportunities for advancement (Kanter, 1977:140-149).

Jurik and Halemba (1984:564) found that although women experience difficulties with male co-workers, job satisfaction levels were closely related to working conditions and position in organizational structure rather than gender.

In the preceding literature review, the major concepts of women working in male-dominated jobs, especially the police, the military and prisons are highlighted. The research discussed above highlights some of the issues that are important when discussing women working as correctional officers in prisons for men. The discussion includes the concepts of career choice, prison culture and discriminatory behaviour in the work-place, especially sexual harassment. This is a largely unexplored domain. Female guards work in a jail setting, typically characterized by cynicism and a high degree of job stress. In addition, women working as correctional officers share the characteristics of other women in "men's jobs". They face problems including discrimination, exclusion from informal social networks, sexual harassment, paternalistic attitudes on the part of supervisors and co-workers and token status.
CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This research sets out to discover what it is to be a female guard working in a "men's" jail. Through a series of interviews, I attempt to answer questions about how and why women have come to work in this job, and their differences from and sources of solidarity with male peers. Finally, this thesis attempts to explain how female correctional officers cope with their jobs and suggests some directions for change. The research site is the modern, urban, Canadian jail I worked in for a year in the early 1980s. The jail houses one hundred and fifty adult men awaiting trial or bail. It is tiny compared to the monster American prisons housing hundreds or thousands of inmates that have been most often written about. Generalizations to other institutions must take into account the particular context in which this study was carried out.

The environment of this jail is considered "soft" by those who designed it. Whether a maximum security jail can ever be "soft" is doubtful. However, unlike the prisons of the popular media, it is not surrounded by turrets with armed guards. To the casual observer it resembles an office building or even an apartment building. The inside of the jail is also unlike the media image. There are no bars or tiers, rather "living units" housing up to seventeen prisoners.

What is perhaps most important for the purposes of this research is that the institution was designed to accommodate women as correctional officers. The privacy of inmates, a central issue in the integration of female guards into male prisons, is ensured by design features including enclosed shower stalls. Inmates have
individual cells called "rooms" with solid doors and long, narrow observation windows. Toilets are placed in a concealed area of the cell in all but segregation units. Separate change facilities for women correctional officers were also included in the design. It must have been assumed that female officers would remain few in number as the change area quickly became, and remains, cramped and overcrowded.

The jail was designed to create a "normalized" environment, and employing female guards was part of this normalizing process. In the words of managers, hiring women as correctional officers was seen as providing a more normal environment for both prisoners and staff, an environment which was meant "to mirror a small community". Hiring women was seen as "better reflecting society" as a whole, as healthy for inmates who have to return to "the real world". It also has been seen to have a good effect on staffing, allowing a "less macho" environment to develop.

In many respects, the female guards working in this jail have more legitimacy than those working in other maximum security prisons for men, primarily because women have been employed as guards since the jail opened. In most other instances, women were superimposed upon existing institutions and their attendant hierarchical structures. This jail is small and new. Men and women are trained together and, with the exception of one post requiring "skin frisks", women are assigned to perform all duties within the jail.

When the jail opened, six women were hired as correctional officers along with about one hundred and twenty men. When the research was conducted, there were twenty women working as correctional officers. Although their numbers have increased, female correctional officers are still "pioneers". They are relatively few in
number and new to the system. Female guards have gained more, but not total, credibility. In the day to day world of the jail their presence seems ordinary. Still, the job remains essentially male. Female correctional officers are performing an unusual job in an organization which is, at some levels, still hostile to them.

This research was conducted with a series of in-depth interviews with female guards, managers, clerks, nurses and librarians over the winter of 1990-91. A total of twenty-nine letters were sent to correctional officers or former correctional officers who had worked at the jail at some point. Of the twenty-nine current or former correctional officers I contacted, I interviewed twenty-one. This represents approximately half of the women who have ever worked as guards in the jail. I interviewed seventeen of thirty-two women I contacted who had worked in jobs more usually held by women in the jail, namely clerks, nurses and librarians.

In addition to interviews with women, I conducted six interviews with managers. Some managers work in the jail while others are employed elsewhere in the correctional hierarchy, such as personnel and the training academy. These interviews were conducted with a view to gathering historical and procedural information.

Over the period of research and writing, I had numerous informal discussions with correctional officers, both male and female. These conversations helped to fill in gaps and to add different perspectives. I also had informal conversations with former inmates. I sometimes initiated discussions about the employment of women as guards. Former inmates tended to be neutral or supportive of the employment of
women as correctional officers. Typically they would report "The women treat us better, they will help us more" or even "They are nicer to look at".

I kept a journal throughout the planning, research, writing and revision stages of this project. I also kept files of media clippings which related in some way to the topic.

The interviews were intended to present a picture of what it is like to be a woman working as a guard in a "men's" jail. I was interested in a method which would allow me to rely on the words and observations of women who actually work in the job. I interviewed both female guards and women working in traditionally "female" jobs so that I could compare the experiences of being a woman as distinct from being a female guard in the same jail. The clerks are particularly interesting from the perspective of career choice in that they have access to information about the job of correctional officer and would likely have much to gain financially, but choose not to become guards.

The interviews were semi-structured and were comprised of both open-ended and closed questions. The closed questions gathered comparative background information and remained consistent for all respondents.

Given that a major focus of the research was how and why women choose to become correctional officers, the similarities and differences between officers, clerks, nurses and librarians were noted. I asked questions about age, education, prior work experience, position, length of service, marital status, mother's and fathers' occupations and educations, and the number and occupations of siblings. I also asked: "As a child, did you have any particular career in mind?" and "Did your
parents express any career preference for you when you were growing up?" These questions related to career choice and gathered information about family background. I asked "What did you like or didn’t like about school?" and "How would you describe the group of people you associated with in high school?" These were intended to start the respondent discussing themselves in greater detail, and to get some sense of how they see themselves as people.

Other questions related to career choice were: "How did you hear about the job?" "Why did you choose the job?" "Did you apply specifically at this jail, or would you have been prepared to work in any jail?" "What is the reaction of your family and friends to your job choice?" "What persons or factors helped you decide whether or not to accept the job?" I also asked the clerks: "Would you consider working as a correctional officer? Why or Why not?"

There is a potential for violence in a jail, and applicants for correctional officer positions must pass a physical fitness assessment. I thought it possible that women who choose to work as guards might have long standing physical fitness interests, or at least maintain a higher level of physical fitness than other women who work in the jail. I was also interested in how female guards perceive their physical abilities, and whether it was a factor in career choice. Finally, these questions opened a discussion of the duties and frustrations of the job, including a discussion of male attitudes towards female officers. I asked "What kinds of physical fitness activities do you participate in?" and "Did you have to prepare extensively for the physical fitness test, or were you already fit?" I went on to ask "Do you participate in sports now?" and "Have you found physical fitness to be vital to your job? In what ways?"
Prison work is a largely hidden occupation. Since few people have ever been in a prison, it seems reasonable to suppose that the knowledge that most people have of prisons is based upon media reports and movies, largely negative images and reports of sensational incidents. I was interested in knowing how such images affect women's consideration of the job. I asked: "Some of the stereotypes about prison guards are that they are all vicious brutes, or, conversely, that prisons coddle prisoners. Did these types of images affect your career choice in any way?"

Using a similar rationale, I asked: "Had you ever been inside a prison before starting to work in one?" "What did you expect working in a prison to be like? Does the reality differ from your expectation?"

Prisons which house male inmates are an exceptionally male environment. This fact, too, might deter many women from the job. I asked: "Prisons have historically been a male domain. Did this make a difference when you were considering the job? In what ways?"

Employment opportunities have greatly increased for women over the past twenty years, often as a result of feminist challenges to the status quo. Most of the young women I interviewed entered the work-force after many employment barriers had been reduced or eliminated and are working in a highly male-dominated job. I was interested in how these women perceived the opportunities available to them and whether they considered themselves feminists. I asked: "How have the changing roles of women in society affected your life, if at all?" and "Do you consider yourself a feminist?"
One of my purposes is to describe what it is like to be a female guard working in a men's jail. I therefore asked questions that were meant to introduce a discussion about what it was like to be a guard. These open questions were exploratory and were used to elicit the respondents' point of view about various issues related to working in the jail: "What were the main obstacles to becoming a prison guard? How did you overcome them?"; "Could you please describe your duties?"; "What are the greatest rewards of your job?"; "What are the worst things about the job?"; "What do you see as possibilities for advancement in your job?"; "In what ways does management encourage and/or assist women on the job?"; "If you left the prison as a workplace, why did you do so?"

My original intent had been to write exclusively about career choice. It became increasingly impossible to limit the topic, however. The greatest surprise I found came in response to a question about management and working in a jail. Respondents used the term management to describe local managers, the correctional hierarchy and in some instances the criminal justice system as a whole. Many expressed a great deal of animosity toward managers and supervisors as well as a general feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction. As I read for the project, it became increasingly clear that these concerns paralleled the concerns described in the literature about guards generally.

One of the issues that came up early in the interviews was the issue of sexual harassment. As it was clearly a problem for some women, I asked "Sexual harassment is a common problem for women. Is this an issue in the jail?" In
extended discussions about sexual harassment I asked: "What would happen if a woman complained about sexual harassment?"

The interviews varied in length from forty-five minutes to four hours with most lasting less than one hour. The interviews with the correctional officers were typically much longer than those with nurses, clerks or librarians. Many of the correctional officers were initially very guarded in their responses, but warmed to the interview. Questions about harassment, bosses, and hierarchy typically elicited lengthy responses.

The average age of the correctional officers I interviewed was twenty-four years when they were hired. Of the twenty-one, six have a university degree. All but two have some post-secondary education with an average of two years of college. Six of the seventeen librarians, nurses and clerks have grade 12 education and the remainder at least one year of post-secondary education. The librarians have a Masters degree. The average age of the librarians, nurses and clerks was thirty-three years at hiring. Several are in their forties, two in their fifties.

All but two of the correctional officer's mothers worked outside the home when their children were small, most often in traditionally female roles as sales clerks, "cleaning ladies" or secretaries. One correctional officer reported that her mother has a university degree. Two others have some university. Eight of the correctional officers describe themselves as first generation Canadians. Their fathers' backgrounds are much more diverse than their mothers'. Four fathers of guards have college educations, several hold professional or managerial positions, and others are employed in skilled trades or blue collar positions. Siblings of these women tended
to work in sex-typical jobs. Five correctional officers, however, reported family members in corrections, the police or the military.

The families of the seventeen clerks, nurses and librarians tended to work within a much narrower range of activities than those of guards. Six of the mothers were homemakers. One was a teacher. Others worked in sales and service occupations. Fathers worked in blue collar occupations. None of the fathers was college educated. Siblings worked in typically "male" or "female" jobs. Several of these women also reported being first generation Canadians. Two had family members in criminal justice occupations.

The correctional officers were much less likely than nurses, clerks and librarians to report typically "female" work histories. Although many had worked in food services such as restaurants and fast food places, in dry cleaners, as chambermaids, in old folks' homes and in retail stores, some correctional officers had more nontraditional work experiences. Three had work experience with the police and several of the correctional officers had previous experience in jobs usually held by men, including skilled trades. Only two reported previous employment as correctional officers at other institutions. None had worked in typically female jobs in a prison.

The clerks, nurses and librarians had little work experience outside of their fields. Only one had experience in a "men's" job. There does not seem to be a difference between the women working in clerical or professional roles with respect to job histories.
Clerks were the group most likely to be mothers. Three clerks are divorced, four are married with no children, three are married with grown children and one is separated. Of the correctional officers, eleven were single while working at the jail. Several reported having been in relationships with or marrying correctional officers. One is a single parent and two of the married correctional officers have children.

There are particular problems in studying a prison or jail, partly related to guards' distrust of outsiders. I received the support of the prison administration throughout the research. Gaining entry had no doubt been facilitated by the fact that I knew the managers before approaching them about conducting this research. However, most of the women I interviewed did not know me. Many told me that they had initially viewed my letter with suspicion. Several told me they threw it away. Some said that their initial reaction was to ask themselves "What does management want now?" A number of women said they participated in the interview only after receiving the endorsement of other women who had already been interviewed. I was pleased when several women told me they had enjoyed the interview. They told me they would recommend it to their friends because it would "be good for them" in a cathartic or even therapeutic manner. One young woman said "Some people are just going to be relieved to get this off their mind". Another agreed to the interview "because this research needs to be done".

I requested that respondents contact me by telephone, but very few did. I made follow-up telephone calls to the women, often by phoning them at work, a process that was very time consuming. I had to telephone the jail, determine which
women were working, and on which unit. When I called, I often discovered they had traded posts or shifts. I did not want to draw unnecessary attention to them at work, and tried to be as subtle as possible in this process. A clerk assisted me in this. I suggested that respondents select the site of the interview, which took place in my office, in restaurants, a shopping mall, at a park and in the women's homes.

I faced many ethical dilemmas in writing this thesis. The population base for the study is very small and the jail is a small, closed community with a relatively short history. Comments might be easily traced back to individual women. My challenge was to depict accurately a range of views and events while maintaining confidentiality. To this end, tape recorded interviews were stored in a locked cupboard and were erased after transcription and assigned a number rather than attached to a name. A correctional officer read early drafts of the thesis and pointed out quotations and descriptions which might identify individuals. Some details were changed to protect individual women from embarrassment or harm. All names were deleted and some comments were edited for brevity or clarity. All but two of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were photocopied and duplicates used for sorting and analysis. A series of numbers rather than names was used to keep track of the interviews in order to maintain confidentiality.

Another dilemma involves the use of terms. Correctional officers are called such, even though they do not have a mandate to correct anything or anybody. The term came into use in the nineteen fifties and sixties with the shift to treatment models in corrections. The term "guard" is no longer used in the correctional establishment, although widely used in the media and research literature. Some
correctional officers are offended by the term "guard" and exclusively refer to themselves and other officers as "correctional officers". Others use the terms interchangeably. As many women call themselves by both terms, and the literature uses both titles, both are used in this research as context dictates. Likewise, the terms "jail" and "prison" are used interchangeably. Most research has been conducted in prisons which house sentenced inmates for long terms. There is virtually none related to smaller, local jail settings which house inmates early in custody and for short periods of time (Flowers, 1987:176-178; Moyer, 1985:23). All jails and prisons share the inherent function of confining and controlling inmates, are male dominated, paramilitary hierarchical organizations. The similarities between prisons and jails greatly outweigh the differences.

This research draws on women's experiences and their interpretations of these experiences. Given that so little has been written about correctional officers, and much less on women working as correctional officers, it seems appropriate that much of this research be descriptive. Whenever possible, I use the actual words of the participants. They show themselves to be intelligent, articulate and insightful. Most quotations were chosen for inclusion in the document because they illustrate usual responses to questions. As in any group, however, the women I interviewed have diverse opinions. In some cases, the quotes illustrate a unique point of view. When views are unique, I have indicated such in the text.

The use of qualitative methods which see the world through the eyes of subjects is preferred by many feminist researchers (Mackie, 1983:19; Jaggar, 1983:377-385). Jaggar (1983:384) writes that "Women's subordinate status means
that unlike men, women do not have an interest in mystifying reality and so are likely to develop a clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world". Dorothy Smith (1987) proposes a sociology for women that starts with the actual experiences of women in their everyday lives. In the introduction and conclusions to her collection of essays on feminist methodologies, Harding notes that research by and for women should be both based on women's experiences and describe the relationship of the researcher to the subjects (Harding, 1978:7-8, 181). I have tried to do this in the following study.

In conclusion, this research is meant to discover why and how women choose to become correctional officers in "men's" prisons, and the consequences of that choice. The research is based on interviews with female guards, clerks, nurses and librarians in a men's jail. Subsidiary interviews are with managers. My purpose is to develop an understanding of what it is like to be a female guard in a "men's jail", based upon the experiences and observations of female guards themselves.
CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS FACILITATING WOMEN'S WORK IN PRISONS FOR MEN

This chapter is about the historical events which contributed to the employment of women as guards in "men's" jails. This discussion provides answers to the question of why and how women have come to work in "men's" jails. The discussion also provides important background to the topic and demonstrates the different relationships of men and women to prisons. Women are new to the prison system as guards in men's prisons. A number of events including pressure for prison reform, the women’s movement, and equal opportunities legislation combined to form the circumstances for women to take the first steps into the male-dominated job of correctional officer.

The introduction of women working as guards in "men’s" jails took place at a time of great change in policy and practice in the prison system. During the nineteen seventies, concurrent with the introduction of female guards, prisons came under critical examination. Ekstedt and Griffiths (1988:v, 315-319, 321) describe numerous internal investigations and inquiries which were conducted in Canadian prisons in response to violence and overcrowding. Prisons were, and some remain, archaic with appalling conditions. Disturbances, riots and hostage takings took place in Canada’s prison system in the 1970s. The inquiries which resulted from these events made recommendations for reform of the penal system. Prisons became increasingly bureaucratized. Managers began to review policy with greater concern for the legal rights of inmates, attempted to instill professionalism among staff and
to seek innovative change. Younger and more highly educated recruits were sought for correctional officer positions. Supervision of officers, documentation and accountability increased, sometimes with the assistance of new technical developments. For example, in modern prisons computers control doors, cameras monitor hallways, and officers videotape unusual incidents.

Legislative changes and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms have affected both the prison system and the employment of women. The Charter of Rights and Freedom came into effect in Canada in 1982. Civil rights increasingly influenced policies and practice in prisons as a result of court challenges initiated by inmates (Ekstedt and Griffiths: 325). At the same time, women argued that discrimination was denying them access to well-paying, often prestigious, male jobs.

The idea of hiring women as correctional officers developed in the context of such trends. Not only had barriers broken down through court challenges against discriminatory hiring practices, but women are presumed to be more empathetic and caring. They are thus suited to less punitive correctional philosophy and practice. The idea of hiring women as correctional officers was opposed by most within the bureaucracy and considered somewhat foolhardy by many. Yet policy makers made the decision to hire women. It was an inexpensive way of showing efforts at reconciling several problems facing prisons. A respondent recalled that in the jail I studied:

They (managers) went in knowing they had to accept women as guards and (they were) not sure that they were going to be able to do it. It was the "in" thing. This was one area in corrections where we could show
innovation. "We'll get our token women. Fine if they can do it, and if they don't work out, they don't work out".

Women are not new to prisons. They have had, rather, a different role in them. Historically, women have extended the feminine roles of caring and nurturing into the prison system. The history of women working in prisons is associated with reform movements which attempted to ease the lives of prisoners (Feinman 1980:4; 40-46). Women have argued for more humane treatment of prisoners. Some of the first women to work in prisons were Christian women of "upstanding" moral character who saw themselves as role models. Feinman (1980:4) describes the reform efforts of sixth century Byzantine empress Theodora who attempted to assist prostitutes by confining them to a convent rather than a prison in the hope of "uplifting" them morally and spiritually.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Moral Reform Society are examples of organizations established to improve the circumstances of women including those in conflict with the law (Feinman, 1980:40). The most notable female prison reformer was Elizabeth Fry. Fry was a wealthy nineteenth century British philanthropist. She championed the rights of women confined to prisons. These prisoners were subjected to deprivation, brutality and sexual exploitation by their male guards. Fry was instrumental in securing separate facilities for women under the supervision of female guards (Blanchfield, 1985:6; Feinman, 1980:42-43).

In the United States, Elizabeth Farnham, a "feminist, reformer, wife of a lawyer" and intellectual introduced a literacy program into the women's unit of Sing
Sing penitentiary during the 1840s (Feinman:44). Feinman (1980:44) reports that Farnham "tried to make the prison environment like a home and have staff and inmates behave like a family".

The first women who worked in prisons as guards supervised women and youths during arrest and imprisonment. Women were first appointed as custodians in the United States in 1822. These "matrons" supervised female inmates. Parisi reports that matrons were considered "softer" than male guards (Parisi 1984:92-93). A Canadian matron was first hired at Kingston Penitentiary in 1835 to guard three women prisoners confined there (Blanchfield, 1985:6).

Women working in prisons continue to be associated with reform. The modern integration of the prison system can be understood in the context of the reformist trends of liberal feminism. Equality is a central goal of liberal feminism and personal autonomy is valued highly. Liberal feminists believe the state, by way of the courts, has an obligation to protect individual freedom. The courts must protect the pursuit of economic goals based on merit, not sex. Women should, therefore, be allowed to work in virtually any job. Access to jobs should be dependent upon individual abilities and wishes rather than gender.

In the United States, women argued that they should be allowed to work as correctional officers in "men's" prisons on the grounds that correctional hiring policies which excluded them were discriminatory. The first women were hired as correctional officers in men's prisons in California in the early 1970s (Parisi, 1984:95).
In the United States, the 1972 Amendments to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on race, creed, colour, sex or national origin. This amendment ensured that women could not be discriminated against by public institutions. Under this legislation, women began legal challenges against correctional and law enforcement agencies (Martin, Susan, 1980:43; Pollock, 1986:9; Fry and Glaser, 1987:40; Zimmer, 1986:4-11; Flynn, 1982).

Men tried to prevent women from coming to work in the prison system. Flowers (1987:174-175) reports that ninety percent of American state correctional systems did not commence hiring women as correctional officers until ordered to as a result of legal challenges under the 1972 Amendments. Male inmates initially challenged the use of female guards on the grounds that their rights to privacy were violated. In the United States, half of the court challenges related to the employment of female guards in male prisons resulted from inmate-initiated actions (Parisi, 1984:99-100).

A national study of the employment of women as correctional officers in American prisons reports that by December 1978, all but four American states employed women as correctional officers in prisons for men. Women comprised an average 6.6% of correctional officers in state prisons for men, in most cases the direct result of the requirements of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Flynn, 1982:324). Although the history of women working in Canadian prison has not been written in any systematic fashion, similar pressures seem to have been taking place in Canada. In 1977, on the advice of the Human Rights Commission, the Parliamentary Sub-committee on the Penitentiary System and the Public Service
Commission recommended that women be hired as correctional officers in all-male federal prisons. Eight women were hired and began training for a Saskatchewan institution in March, 1978 (Canada, Sept. 1980:1). By 1983, all federal correctional institutions for men in Canada had female correctional officers.

The RCMP initially hired women to guard both male and female prisoners, but in January 1981 reversed the policy. The RCMP, like many American institutions, argued that the privacy rights of male prisoners were violated by the use of female guards (Amiel, 1987:9). Canadian inmates have made the same argument. Inmates initially challenged the use of female guards in prisons for men. In July 1990, the Canadian Federal Court of Appeal ruled that the privacy rights of inmates were not violated should they be seen naked or frisked by a female correctional officer.

The correctional officers I interviewed are a different generation from the feminists who cleared the way with court challenges. The battles allowing women to work in men’s prisons had almost all been won when the jail they work at opened. The correctional officers I interviewed are generally young. For the most part, they were born in the 1960s and entered the work force in the late 1970s and 1980s. They grew up expecting to work outside the home. They take equality for granted, expecting that any job they might choose would be open to them. They are, however, well aware that life and work circumstances have changed for women over the past twenty years and acknowledge that feminism paved the way for change:

If I had been born twenty years previous, I would have been the miserablest person on earth. I am not a home
person. I will never be. I’m very career oriented, that’s very important to me. I’m not saying that being a mother and staying home and raising kids isn’t a purpose, but on an intellectual basis, I need more. So I’m glad that I was born when I was and not 20 years prior. (Correctional Officer)

I have always believed that we (women) could do anything we wanted to do. It’s my mothers generation that believes that they have to be kind of the submissive type. My mother and I have arguments about that. (Correctional Officer)

Well, I think that if the world wasn’t changing, I probably wouldn’t find myself in a career like this because it is a male dominated field. Maybe I would be teaching, maybe I would be in social work. I’m not sure. If things didn’t change years ago, I think it would be a lot harder than it is today. (Correctional Officer).

My respondents share many values with feminism yet do not identify with it. They strongly believe that women should work at any job they choose. They, too, highly value personal autonomy. They are modern, assertive young women. To them, feminism means liberal feminism. Feminism means women wanting social equality with men and equal pay for equal work, goals which many believe have already been achieved. They are, after all, working at a "man’s job". However, they describe feminism as "bra burning", man hating and extremism. Many correctional officers explain that one of the reasons why they chose the job was that they like men. Many of the men they work with treat them as equals. They have husbands and boyfriends. They are hostile to sentiments seen as anti-male.
Some correctional officers call themselves feminists. Others have an aversion to being labelled, but remain sympathetic to feminist aims, especially regarding such issues as equal pay. One reported:

I don’t like that term (feminist). I don’t like labelling of any kind. I consider myself to be a strong, assertive woman. And I resent being labelled as this or that. But, I am active in a couple of organizations that are pro-woman. (Correctional Officer)

In conclusion, women have worked in prisons since medieval times, often hoping to make things better. Modern women have entered into one of the last prison domains, working as guards in prisons for men. They, like other women, have increased opportunities as a result of the women’s movement. The employment of women as guards in prisons for men was concurrent with calls for the reform of Canadian prisons. Hiring female guards served to appease the pressure for equal employment rights for women, was a means of showing innovation, and suited calls for a more humane prison system. This helps to explain why and how women came to work in "men’s" jails. The question remains: Why would women choose such a job? This question will be explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5: WHY WOMEN CHOOSE TO WORK IN A JAIL

This chapter addresses the question of why women would choose to become guards in a men's jail. The chapter emphasizes the differences and similarities between female guards and other women who work in the jail, but in jobs usually performed by women. The chapter explores factors which are aspects of occupational choice. The questions I explore include: Do female guards consider the male dominated nature of the job before accepting it? Was it part of a well thought out plan, perhaps to move on to another job? Do the ways in which female guards and other women hear about the job in the jail differ? How does the reaction of family and friends differ for female guards and other women? Were clerks or others more likely to have had prior jail experience or preconceived ideas about what working in a jail would be like? How are the work histories of guards and other women working in the jail similar or different? Do guards perceive themselves in different ways, or have life experiences that brought them to the job?

Correctional officers, clerks and professionals hear about the job in much the same way. Surprisingly few of the women of either group had friends or relatives working in the prison system before joining the service. Word of mouth was, however, a significant factor in exposing these women to the work opportunity, especially for correctional officers. Seventeen of the correctional officers reported word of mouth as the source of prison job information. Within this group, four women mentioned university professors who counselled their classes that working in a prison was a "stepping stone" to other criminal justice jobs. Three mentioned
seeing an advertisement. One woman was transferred into the jail involuntarily. Six clerks, nurses or librarians reported word of mouth, seven reported an advertisement or government posting and two described lateral transfers within government. Of those who reported word of mouth, especially within the correctional officer group, many described the source of information in very tenuous terms: a chance meeting, a friend of a friend, and so on. Some women heard about the job "by accident". Two of the correctional officers and two clerks did not even know they were applying to a jail.

Many people would not work in a prison, no matter what the pay. Women who work as correctional officers face particular impediments. Not only must they be willing to work in a job that is highly unusual for a woman, they must be willing to work in what many might see as an unattractive job. Most people learn about prisons from movies and television. Both emphasize sensational incidents. The popular image of the prison would give job candidates pause for thought, to consider whether they really wanted to work in a prison. The prison workers I interviewed reported that they had few preconceived ideas about what the job would be like, except for rather sensational ideas from movies. Not only did they not have a clear idea of what to expect, they did not make a great effort to find out. The jail offers tours to potential recruits and employees which were the chief and usually only source of information upon which the decision to accept the job was based for women working in all jobs at the jail.

I asked the women if they had sought advice or if there were individuals or counsellors who were helpful in making a decision as to whether they should take
the job or not. Most did not seek advice, an illustration of the surprisingly casual nature of their decision. More than half of the correctional officers and most of the clerks reported that they did not discuss the job with anyone. A correctional officer explained:

No, I really didn’t think about it. I go in, sail in, go for it! Both feet! And then I think, well, "I guess I’ll sink or swim".

Many women just "needed to work" or needed a change. The job was available and they applied, without giving it much thought:

It was just that I had to get a job. (Someone) told my husband and he told me. That was it. I didn’t even know the place existed until I needed the job. (Correctional officer)

If anything, I accepted the job because what I was doing previous, I wasn’t enjoying. I just accepted the job as a change, something new. (Correctional officer)

I didn’t really want it, but if you’re offered something and you’re looking....I would have preferred close to home, I would have preferred more money, but you know, when you are actually offered the job. (Clerk)

Ten of the correctional officers reported "needing a job" or that it was "just a job". They were attracted by the relatively high wage, job security and benefits and stay for the same reasons. Six mentioned other reasons such as needing a challenge or a change. One mentioned curiosity. Only one correctional officer mentioned having sought the job with notions of a rehabilitative role. She "thought everyone could be rehabilitated", an idea which she describes as "really naive".
Most clerks and librarians reported financial need. Two were single parents when they were hired. Two "wanted to work". A nurse reported that she accepted the job because she knew the institution needed someone to fill a particular position.

When the women chose to do the job, family and friends' reactions ranged from "terrified" to "excitement, envy, pride". While six of the correctional officers reported that their families were supportive or very supportive of their decision, most reported that family members expressed concerns, primarily for physical safety. Clerks, nurses and librarians were as likely as correctional officers to experience these reactions from family and friends. A correctional officer reported that her family thought she would be "killed the first day". One correctional officer did not even explain the nature of her job to her husband, presumably in anticipation of a negative response. She lead him to believe that she was working as a secretary. The game was up when she could not explain why she had to work shifts. Others reported that family and friends acted with disbelief. Female correctional officers were apparently unlike the image, the personality, the physical appearance or the level of intelligence that guards are assumed to have:

Like I know one guy says "You're too nice to work in a prison. You can't work there". Most of them don't really believe that I'm working there. (Correctional Officer)

"You're going to be a GUARD!!!! Oh, you can't do that" and I go "Why?" "Well, you're too smart". Well, guards aren't dumb, they're just like everyone else. They were all, you know, like out of touch with it. (Correctional Officer)
A stable, government job, especially a well paid job with benefits, is something seen as a godsend. A correctional officer explained "My family thinks I have a nice, cushy, union job. There was nothing negative about it." Those women who have friends or relatives in a related profession, such as the police or in the corrections system, understandably had least difficulties. Working in a prison is "not a big deal". Women gave little or no thought to the male-dominated aspects of the job. Several correctional officers mentioned that being "male-dominated" made the job more attractive. Female correctional officers might have more opportunities for advancement because of possible affirmative action policies. Others had bad experiences working with women and looked forward to an all-male environment. Clerks felt that the female nature of their work group meant that the fact that the jail is male-dominated was an irrelevant issue. A nurse noted that it is flattering to be the center of men's constant notice and attention.

Correctional officers were much more likely than nurses, librarians or clerks to express prior interest in "men's jobs". All respondents were asked if they had a particular job in mind when they were children. Seven of the twenty-one correctional officers said that as children they thought of becoming police officers. This ranged, apparently, from a passing idea to a strong preference. One officer even explained that she aspired to become a correctional officer as a child. Five correctional officers and one professional woman reported wanting to become veterinarians. Only three of the correctional officers aspired to what would be considered "traditionally female" jobs (nursing, teacher, hairdresser) as children.
As children, clerks, nurses and librarians were less likely than correctional officers to have aspired to jobs usually performed by men. Eight of the seventeen nurses, clerks and librarians mentioned nursing, social work, fashion design or secretarial work when asked if they had a particular job in mind when they were children. Three mentioned jobs usually performed by men. Three stated that they did not have a particular career in mind, while the remainder described neutral jobs. A clerk explained: "I grew up in an age when a woman just had a job until you got married. What a laugh, eh?"

Clerks were more likely than correctional officers to have prior, first hand experience in a prison setting. Eight of the twenty-one correctional officers I interviewed had been inside a prison before starting to work in one, almost always on a tour arranged as a part of a criminology class. Nine of the clerks, nurses and librarians, however, had been inside a prison, for a broad set of reasons. Two had visited prisoners. A woman reported that a relative had been incarcerated. Others had been on tours or had some work experience that had brought them into a prison. Two had relatives working in the prison system.

While clerks were unlikely to express having had reservations about accepting the job, some correctional officers expressed reluctance about accepting it. Although many female guards aspired to "men's" jobs, the specific job of correctional officer had never suggested itself as a possibility. A correctional officer described her introduction to the occupation:

(A friend) said, "Why don't you come and get a job like this?" And I thought, "Oh, knuckle dragging? I can't
imagine it". You’re ignorant, you don’t have an idea and you’re thinking "I don’t know about this". So he says, "You’ve got common sense, you can do it." Basically I came for a tour and I thought "Oh, well, maybe" and I put in an application.

While correctional officers tended to have varied work histories, clerks, nurses and librarians tended to stay within a narrow range of jobs women usually perform. Clerks are the group with the least education and have the most limited opportunities for advancement. They were also most likely to choose a job and stick with it. Their work histories tend to be confined to the type of job they are currently working in.

The casual way in which all of these prison workers made the choice to work in the jail contrasted sharply with how managers viewed the process by which women choose to become correctional officers. Managers described the decision for a woman to work as a correctional officer as a carefully thought out career move, a stepping stone to another job in probation or police, both seen as more desirable. This is perhaps a result of the fact that some of the first women hired received such advancement. An administrator summarized this view:

For women, it tends to be part of a long term plan to go on to probation or police. The women tend to bring better skills. They have thought a lot about the job before applying and self select. The men are here for the paycheck and stay for it.

Another explained:
The women that apply have screened themselves. With men you’re getting everything from the kid that’s graduated from highschool to people who have retired. Whereas the women most of them have thought long and hard about it, I presume. If you talk to them, most of them have a pretty clear idea of what their career path is going to be. The women have thought this is the way to get into police or whatever. You’re looking at two different mind sets.

Six of the correctional officers reported that the job was primarily a "stepping stone", but this appears to have been a vague motivation, a secondary consideration even for women who did go on to jobs in police or other areas of corrections. Two women described job offers from police which they turned down in favour of staying at the jail. Those women who had been encouraged by professors to use the job as a stepping stone tended to be those women who had a definite "plan" in mind. These tended to be some of the first women to join the jail as correctional officers. They also tended to be the women with university degrees, who likely have better job advancement prospects in any event. For correctional officers for whom the job was part of a plan, the plan was rather vague and often went hand in hand with, or was surpassed by, financial need:

I was considering the police department in the back of my mind. It was something that I was dabbling with, so that was an advantage. No, well (it was) financial factors. I wanted to become independent and work and that was about it. (Correctional Officer)

Further evidence that the job is not a stepping stone to police or probation was suggested when I asked "What do you see as possibilities for advancement in
your job?". Respondents did not tend to look outside the prison hierarchy, but inside it. Nine of the correctional officers mentioned possibilities for advancement within the prison hierarchy, while eleven saw few possibilities for any form of advancement.

A jail is based on a paramilitary hierarchy. There are few supervisors and many correctional officers. Most will never be promoted and they know it. Guards who have been promoted, who have gone on to other jobs inside or outside the correctional system, are understandably more optimistic about further advancement. They also describe a much broader range of opportunities as possible.

In contrast to the correctional officers, the clerks and librarians were most likely to describe the job as a stepping stone. More than a third of these women reported choosing the job as a stepping stone or as a part of a career plan, making this a more significant factor for this group. While clerks had been more likely to apply for the job as a stepping stone than guards, they were more likely to abandon the idea. They found that in reality they have few promotional opportunities. The clearest "stepping stone" the jail offers is for the librarians, recent university graduates looking for a first professional position in which to gain job experience. Advancement opportunities for nurses are confined to the position of "Head Nurse".

It may be that correctional officers over-report a career plan during the job interview in an attempt to impress the interviewers. The stepping stone concept is presented to potential recruits in a pre-interview recruitment film. By presenting themselves as looking for advancement, they demonstrate themselves as active and motivated potential employees. Describing oneself as seeking advancement also explains in some satisfactory manner why they would consider such an unusual job.
Managers’ assumptions that women work in the jail only as a stepping stone to other criminal justice system jobs has potentially negative implications for women. However unconsciously, female correctional officers are treated differently from male peers. Women may be excluded from being channelled into better positions within the jail which might lead to promotion. If managers assume that female officers are using the job as a stepping stone, they also presumably assume that these officers have less commitment to the organization, that they will soon leave. Women’s concerns, therefore, can be more easily dismissed.

The suggestion that women use the job as a stepping stone implies that women have opportunities for advancement. It seems likely that a young woman with two years of post secondary education is working in a job that is relatively well paying compared to many of her friends and contemporaries. It is often likely the most money she has ever made, since most have worked primarily in low-paid service jobs. Many women are well aware that their job prospects are restricted. Women accept the job of correctional officer for the money and stay for it.

Most clerks appear to have the most conservative notions about the proper roles for men and women and are concerned about maintaining femininity in traditional ways. Clerks are aware of opportunities to work as correctional officers, typically could use the financial gain such a move would ensure, but choose not to take advantage of these opportunities. Most did not even consider the job of correctional officer, fearing that they might change in ways that conflict with their beliefs about the proper role of women, becoming coarser, or unfeminine in some way. Many pointed out that the language of some of the female correctional officers
was punctuated with profanities. One clerk explains that women working as correctional officers "become like the men" and "tend to lose some of their femininity".

Some clerks considered the possibility of applying for the job of correctional officer, but all but one rejected the idea. Not only do they fear the loss of femininity, they mentioned shift work, the lack of acceptance by male guards, potential hostility from inmates, and the futility of the prison system as reasons for lack of interest. Clerks reported that the reality of the job simply does not appeal. One clerk explained:

I don’t have any compassion for people who do things to children or women. Children especially. Therefore, I couldn’t even pretend to want to be nice to them. I just couldn’t. And I’m probably wrong because I would prejudge, but that’s the way I am. So I couldn’t even pretend to take care of them in the jail. That to me would be a depressing job, and life’s too short.

One striking discovery which differentiates correctional officers from other women working in the jail relates to the content and quantity of information officers reported about their family backgrounds and life histories. Correctional officers were much more likely than clerks and professionals to give unsolicited reports of troubled family backgrounds, broken homes, having been victims of child abuse, having an alcoholic parent, and various forms of teenage rebellion. I do not mean to suggest that they all came from disrupted homes, but it was a characteristic that became a strong thread in interviews. Whether or not there is a higher incidence of such backgrounds among correctional officers than other women (clerks, nurses, librarians)
is difficult to tell, but there was a higher incidence of self-reports even though I did not ask questions about abuse or alcoholic families, but rather general questions about their formative years (How would you describe the group of people you associated with as a teenager? Can you tell me what jobs you have held? What did you like or didn’t you like about school?).

Many of the correctional officers describe their lives and their jobs as outsiders, as rebels, and as survivors. A correctional officer told me "Although we were all different, we were all rebels. You’d have to be, even to consider the job".

Another correctional officer described her teenage years in this way:

I guess I was your rebellious kind of an A student. Growing up as a teenager is traumatic enough, never mind if your family life is unstable. So because of that it was very difficult for me to concentrate in school and after a while I just thought, "Fuck this. Why am I even going?" It was rebelling. It was my way of saying "Screw you. You’re screwed up and you’re telling me to take all these educational courses when I can’t keep up because my home life is a mess and my life is a mess and so why should I?"  (Correctional Officer)

Women working as correctional officers describe themselves as independent, strong-willed and self-aware. One correctional officer described her female peers in this way:

Women who work in prisons are much more secure in themselves as individuals. I don’t think women who work in prisons are part of groups. They’re very individual. Usually quite outspoken, which is probably usually to their detriment. They are women who are comfortable with themselves. I don’t think you could work in an institution and last more than three weeks if
you went in not knowing who you were. You’d learn quickly or you’d quickly leave.

Female guards use the lessons of childhood as a means of understanding the adult world. They often appear to see themselves as outsiders. After describing coming from an alcoholic home, one correctional officer explained:

I look at the guards and I look at the inmates and they are the same people, probably generally the same kinds of background. Just the flip side of the same coin. I see these guys going out after work, getting drunk. All they want is their little toys. They’re doing the same thing as the guys in the joint and they don’t even see it. Blindness. I’m on the outside, looking in and I don’t know if I want to be a part of it.

Other correctional officers described having been on the periphery of the drug culture and described how it helped them to do the job. A correctional officer described using her rebellious life experience to perform the job:

Well, I actually think what has helped a lot is that I was living a lifestyle that a lot of these guys, the inmates, did. So I know where they’re coming from. A lot of these people have just got drug problems which has led to other things. So I can relate to that kind of thing.

Another correctional officer reflected on the meaning of the unhappy events in her life. She sees herself as a self-reliant survivor who grew from her negative experiences. She made reference to her own strengths and capacity. She, too, used her experience in an everyday understanding of life:
My childhood experience was that I was a fighter. Yeah, I was beaten. Yeah, I was raped, sexually abused, physically abused, emotionally abused, mentally abused, you name it. But I came out of that on my own. I didn’t end up as a street kid, I didn’t end up as some druggy or some alcoholic or whatever. Like I said, at sixteen I was working at a respectable job. I wasn’t a hooker. I had my own apartment and I was buying my own furniture. To me, physical strength means nothing. One distinct characteristic was that (the women who work at the jail) didn’t lead a sheltered life. I don’t think you would see very many women who had an upper class, white picket fence type family upbringing in that kind of a job. They had quite similar backgrounds to mine in one way or another. They all had inner strength in that they didn’t feel sorry for themselves, they didn’t dwell on the past. They turned it around and used it as a positive thing. To grow. It allowed them to give that strength and an understanding of other individuals. I don’t care if it’s the jail or in a counselling job where you don’t have to worry about wearing a chair over your head, you still need to be able to read people correctly within the first five minutes of meeting them. That’s important.

Not only did correctional officers tend to report backgrounds that were unfavourable, for example having had abusive or alcoholic parents, having been deserted by fathers, or having had major moves which caused them distress, they described ways in which these events profoundly affected their lives. Female guards were certainly more introspective than clerks and professionals during the interviews. It may be that guards draw on their own lives and experiences to understand and define their jobs. They work closely with inmates who may also have troubled pasts. They are working in a social context characterized by conflict and a degree of personal risk and have time to be reflective: they work alone; the job is boring. The job is not one that is usual for women, so they have few role models. They have to
develop their own understanding of reality and draw on their life experiences to do so.

It seems that correctional officers value individuality highly. Correctional officers appear to have a tendency to see things in individual terms. While their life experiences give them the tenacity to survive in highly isolating and difficult circumstances, this tendency also puts a huge burden on the individual. Their strong sense of individual responsibility appears to make them assume responsibility for dealing with challenges on their own. In other words, their belief system says they must rely on their own resources.

Survivors of abuse or dysfunctional families may be better able to cope in the harsh environment of a jail. Not only are they able to "read" or assess people, they have developed the ability to cope in conflict-prone situations. Bass and Davis (1988:40, 45) note that "survivors" of abuse excel in emergency oriented jobs. Female correctional officers, too, have the ability to cope in crisis, stress-prone situations.

In conclusion, all the women who work in the jail have much in common. They hear about the job in the same way, often by word of mouth. They needed a job, heard about an opportunity and applied for it without giving it much thought. Some had no idea what the job would be like, or even that it was in a jail. They accept the job for the money. Yet women who work as correctional officers are different in some ways from other women who work in the jail. The differences appear early in life. Guards tend to have early aspirations to non-traditional jobs, and tend to have a wide variety of job experience. They are younger. Guards are
much more likely to report disrupted early lives. They are survivors. When an opportunity presented itself in the form of a highly non-traditional job, female correctional officers decided to give it a try.
CHAPTER 6: THE WORK ENVIRONMENT OF THE JAIL

This chapter focuses on the work environment. The chapter begins to address the question of the basis of solidarity and differences between male and female guards. It also probes the question of what it is like to be a guard. The chapter includes a comparison of female guards with clerks, nurses and professionals in the jail regarding attitudes toward the job, supervisors and the jail itself. This comparison differentiates the impact of being a female working in a jail from being a female guard in a jail.

Although correctional officers face the difficulties that other women face when they do "men's" jobs, the problems of women guards are subsumed by the aggravations and distress of working in a jail. A jail environment produces demoralization and a sense of frustration for both inmates and workers. Major complaints from workers are related to an organizational culture characterized by a lack of promotional opportunities, by a paramilitary hierarchy which fosters a lack of autonomy, by what guards refer to as "negativity" and by social isolation. Ironically, these rather negative attributes promote comradeship and a sense of solidarity among guards.

Almost every women I interviewed complained about some aspect of the institution. When I asked my respondents to describe the worst things about the job they list a broad range of issues: management indecisiveness; the pay; perceived favouritism in promotions and job assignments; individuals who are perceived to have been promoted beyond their experience and skill levels; supervisors who are
supported by senior managers even when they are perceived by guards to be clearly wrong; managers who are seen as "gods"; isolation; boredom; budgetary restraint and "bean counters" who make inappropriate policy without consultation; and the slowness of the bureaucratic process. In contrast to this overwhelmingly negative list, one woman reported that there is "nothing negative about the job".

Correctional officers are working within systems dominated by seniority, union contracts, volumes of written rules and regulations, and well-defined areas of responsibility. Systems of rules are developed that govern behaviour and ensure discipline, as well as consistent and effective responses to crisis situations, with a strong emphasis on security and control.

Power resides at the top of the hierarchy. Correctional officers are supervised by Principal Officers (POs) who in turn are supervised by Senior Correctional Officers (SCOs). At the time of writing, two women were employed as senior correctional officers. The administration or management component consists of three male directors. The jail is a pyramidal hierarchy with a clearly defined chain of command. Policies are developed at the top of the hierarchy and passed down through the chain of command to be sometimes met with resentment by line officers. Officers are expected to follow orders from supervisors or face charges of insubordination. A correctional officer commented: "They (managers and supervisors) have the power to squash you like a bug or raise you like a star".

Another characteristic of a pyramidal hierarchy is lack of opportunity, as there are few supervisors and many line correctional officers. Lack of opportunity has increased as the government reduced spending and jails have been subjected to
massive restraint policies. For example, some positions were declared redundant and have not been re-opened. Many senior officials accepted early retirement packages during times of restraint and were replaced by younger individuals who are unlikely to retire soon. Current middle managers are relatively young. As a result, opportunities for advancement for present or new employees at the bottom of the hierarchy are reduced.

Many guards suspect that power in the jail is used unfairly, particularly in reference to promotions. For example, many feel that promotions are based on favouritism rather than merit. Some correctional officers are cynical about possibilities for advancement, believing that only "brown nosers", "sucks" or those "good at political games" would be promoted.

The lack of opportunity is complicated for female officers. Correctional management has reported an intention to promote more women. Women, however, fear a backlash if they appear to be promoted too quickly. Several women expressed the unsolicited opinion that women in general should not be promoted beyond their skills and levels of experience. Typically they felt "I don't want to be promoted because I'm female. I want to be promoted because I'm good". They expressed strong, negative feelings about affirmative action initiatives. They fear such initiatives would further isolate them and breed even more resentment from men. They were not moved by my suggestion that more women in senior levels will change the workplace in any substantial way.

In a jail, lack of opportunity is not balanced by other rewards, such as esteem or prestige. The job is characterized by boredom punctuated by highly stressful,
although infrequent, potentially dangerous incidents. The job carries a great burden of responsibility, but little recognition. For example, should there be a suicide, an assault, a hostage taking or a riot, the officer's actions will be the subject of inquiries, media and perhaps police and judicial scrutiny. Yet, there are few channels to gain recognition. It is what a correctional officer described as "a thankless job with few pats on the back."

Because the operation of a jail is dependent on routine and written policies and procedures and because power is concentrated at the top of a hierarchy, there is little room for independent action. The correctional officers I interviewed expressed a high degree of cynicism about their work. They have few opportunities to demonstrate innovation and describe a work environment characterized by feelings of demoralization, inconsistent messages and feelings of isolation.

Women consistently described "negativity" as the worst thing about the jail. "Negativity" is a term widely used by guards as a means of understanding the social relations and prevalent attitudes in the institution. The terms "negativity" and "negative" are used to define typical attitudes of correctional officers and inmates alike and encompasses any number of chronic complaints about working in a jail:

The worst thing about the job is the negativity. Negativity from the inmates and negativity with staff and, I think, a lot of frustration with management. Maybe not getting much support from management on issues. (Correctional officer)
The worst thing was that when somebody was negative, they were the most negative of negatives. I mean like whether they were prisoners or they were staff. It was just unbearable. There were some really rotten people there, on both sides of the bars. Because you have to have something positive when you go to work to a difficult job. You need some balance for the rotten things. By the end I couldn’t find it. (Librarian)

"Negativity" is also tied to feelings about prisons and their ability to rectify problems of crime. A jail is a place in which people, some of whom have committed heinous crimes which violate the rights of others, are held against their will. Some officers expressed a feeling of futility about incarceration. This is especially an issue in a remand centre. Given the pre-trial status of inmates, few programs are offered. Little work is available for prisoners and rehabilitation is virtually non-existent. Several correctional officers pondered what it would be like to work in an institution housing sentenced individuals, hopeful that these would be more than mere warehouses for inmates.

Boredom, combined with "negativity", was a major source of job dissatisfaction for most correctional officers. Correctional officers may not leave their post. They have little variety in day to day tasks. My respondents bemoaned the dull, repetitive nature of the job:

It’s kind of a stagnant job. There aren’t any rewards, number one and it’s just boring. I try not to let it get boring, I’ll do things so that I don’t get bored. It’s just a stagnant job that doesn’t get you anywhere and there are no rewards in it. (Correctional Officer)
Workers feel that criticism will have negative consequences. They will be branded as chronic complainers. If an individual is unwilling to follow orders without question, they risk being seen as trouble makers and will be forced out of the organization. A correctional officer explained: "It's tough in there, but you smile and grin and bear it and you don't say anything wrong and you don't do anything wrong and you're fine."

One might argue that the unhappiness these women report suggests that they are merely a few malcontents unsuited to the job. Even more, one might argue that the very characteristics which led women to the job pose problems once they get into it. Women who work as correctional officers are in some ways rebels, risk takers and independent. There is a tension between the discipline imposed by the bureaucracy and values and characteristics of the women who have chosen to work within it. This is too simple an explanation for their sense of frustration, however. Negative opinions about the jail are widely held by guards. The difficulties, resentments and frustrations the group of women I interviewed parallel the complaints described by male guards in the academic literature. The informal discussions I had with male officers point to the same issues. Lastly, clerks and librarians expressed similar frustrations.

Tannenbaum (1966:39-44) writes that persons at higher levels in an organization are generally more satisfied with their jobs. This satisfaction is related to authority, status and skill. Tannenbaum writes:

These highly involved and interested persons feel relatively little dissatisfaction regarding authority, self-
esteem, and self-actualization. It should not be surprising therefore to find them wondering occasionally why everyone in the organization does not have the same enthusiastic view they have. On the other hand, persons on the bottom of the hierarchy live in a psychologically depressed area, and each of them has considerable support from his fellow workers for his relatively jaundiced view of organizational life. (Tannenbaum, 1966:46)

All but two of the female guards work at the lowest ranks in the hierarchy. Those at the lowest ranks of a prison are highly replaceable. Guards work alone in units containing up to seventeen inmates. Their authority over inmates is largely confined to withholding or granting small privileges or frustrating requests. If guards wish to penalize prisoners, the most readily available practice is to do so in a passive manner. For example, "losing" a request to make a long distance telephone call, tardily delivering mail, issuing charges for minor rule infractions, "forgetting" to process a request.

The problems of the paramilitary jail system are problems for both male and female guards. The organizational climate fosters frustration and cynicism for both. In a large, complex bureaucracy, the needs, and contributions of individuals are often overlooked. There are few sources of recognition.

It's a very biased and it's a very frustrating place to work. What I particularly feel sad about is that over the years, some incredibly intelligent, nice, generally concerned people are just treated like so much flotsam and jetsam. I've seen it have an effect on their personal lives and how they relate. There are some very, very good people in corrections who are not noticed and not given any recognition. Men and women. They are sort of the base of the pyramid. Take them away and the
whole house of cards comes down. They just sort of work stoically, supporting this massive bureaucracy, or they leave. (Correctional officer)

Female correctional officers share feelings of frustration and impotence with male peers. Shop talk and gossip are prevalent in a jail and rumours reinforce the negative. Gossip, increased by boredom, is often about unpopular management decisions, anticipated policy change, and bosses. Female and male peers face the challenges and frustrations of a difficult job. Shared frustrations have the effect of increasing peer solidarity.

To add to the "negativity" and frustrations of the job, female correctional officers are sceptical about the support of managers and supervisors. Only five describe managers as "very supportive", or "very much encouraging". An additional five describe them in more neutral terms, that is, they treat "everyone alike". Eleven reported that managers are not supportive of women in the jail. Some of these women are extremely cynical about managers. Indeed, "management games" and "management politics" were significant aspects of the job described by many of the women I interviewed. When asked if management is supportive of women, a correctional officer replied:

No. If a SCO or PO was sitting in the room and a derogatory remark was made about women, they wouldn't say anything. You never saw upper management.

Another correctional officer described being at a point of distress. Through her rage and cynicism, this woman expressed the frustrations which arise when
individual and bureaucratic needs clash. She felt her personal needs would not be easily met by the inflexible bureaucracy and the supervisors and managers who carry out the bureaucratic mandate:

I really need some time off. If I go to a supervisor they’ll say I have to go to (a director). I shouldn’t have to go to "god" to get a little bit of time off. You know, I’m trying not to inconvenience people, but if I died tomorrow, what would it matter to them? They couldn’t care less if I dropped dead tomorrow.

A librarian explained:

I think the very top people were so removed with administrative things, I didn’t find much assistance from them. I don’t know if that was because of the burden of their duties or what. I found the SCOs were a different matter. I found that some were very good and others were not. I didn’t think negative feelings about women were very obvious. I think it was more subtle. I think a lot of them had very old fashioned ideas about women and women’s abilities and I don’t think there was anything really blatant that you could point your finger at, but I think the general feeling wasn’t that supportive of women.

A correctional officer was more blunt:

I don’t think upper management is really aware of what goes on. I think they’re all caught up in budgets and ethics and standards and have got their heads buried in a bunch of manuals. I don’t think the prison system is anti-female. That would be a stupid statement. I think they (managers) have got bags over their heads.
The women who were most likely to see managers as supportive were those with higher status, a degree of autonomy, and those with access to persons in positions of power. For example, those women who had been promoted were more committed to the organization and less critical of it. They have a greater degree of independence, move more freely about the building, and make important decisions. Similarly, contrasting junior clerks with relatively privileged directors’ secretaries and nurses illustrates the relationship between access to those in power, feelings of satisfaction and of autonomy.

Most clerks have a low status, low paying job. They expressed a feeling of being "caught in the middle" between management and correctional staff. Clerical workers in junior positions were prone to describe frustrations with the workplace and with management. Their work is undervalued. Clerks are "part of the framework. They’re just ignored. They’re not seen as part of what’s going on". Yet the tasks they perform have a significant impact on the lives of everyone in the jail. For example, clerks handle payroll. A late cheque can have disastrous effects on the family budget, plans, and mortgage payments. The clerk receives the brunt of anger if such a situation occurs. Yet, when checks are on time, it is taken for granted.

Clerks describe a lack of communication, and continuity. Supervisors in the jail, Principal Officers and Senior Correctional Officers, work rotating shifts. Authority therefore changes from day to day as different supervisors require clerks to carry out tasks in different ways. This was a source of frustration. A clerk lamented: "There’s a lot of discouragement and no encouragement" and a prevailing feeling of
distrust. People are loathe to engage in meaningful communication about important matters:

Basically for anybody to work you need some kind of continuity, whereby if you know that if you have a problem that you think is genuine and real, you have a person you can go and sit there and talk about it. I think people are so afraid that someone is going to try and hang them. And that really is unfortunate, because all that does is lead to a whole pile of holes in the system. (Clerk)

The sentiments described by clerks is in sharp contrast to the perceptions of the directors' secretaries. Directors' secretaries have access to people in positions of authority with whom they can share their concerns and describe being treated with "dignity and respect".

Directors' secretaries are in a relatively privileged position. They have a great deal of knowledge about important matters and describe themselves as having access to managers, opportunities not available to other workers. A directors' secretary described her relatively privileged position:

They've always encouraged something further, more advancement, achieving your goals. They're very encouraging. I was really impressed. They're exceptional. They would help you every inch of the way. The greatest reward was being treated very well and being included in all the decisions and being valued.

Like the directors' secretaries, nurses work in a situation with a relatively large degree of autonomy compared to clerks. Both of the nurses I interviewed compared
their working conditions favourably to those of nurses in hospitals. Nurses working in the jail report that they have a great deal of independence, and use the full range of their training. They work in a clearly "helping" relationship to inmates, diffusing some of the more hostile reactions which correctional officers are prone to:

Nursing here is more independent than in a hospital. The doctor is only here part time. There is more respect, more of a collegial relationship with the psychologist and the psychiatrist. In a hospital, I'd never felt very respected as a nurse. I saw nurses being put down by doctors. The hierarchy here doesn't bother me. Some nurses might say "How can you work in such a dirty place and with those kind of people?" I felt more violated working in a hospital. There's more dirt in the form of faeces, blood, urine. Here the inmates are all (medically) independent. I find it harder to take abuse from the general public.

(I tell new nurses) once they start working as a nurse in a prison, they won't want to go back anywhere else if they stick it out for awhile. You have got so much responsibility. In hospitals, the doctors can be very grandiose and so can some of the nurses. When you're alone (in the prison) on night or afternoon shifts, you make decisions. There's a lot of confidence and responsibility that you don't get in other places. The experience that you get is phenomenal.

In summary, this chapter addresses the questions of solidarity and differences between female correctional officers and their male peers. Further, it begins to address the question of what it is like to be a jail guard. Working in a jail means feeling like a very small cog in a huge bureaucratic machine. Feelings of frustration, boredom and powerlessness are widespread. Feelings of satisfaction are closely tied
to autonomy and access to powerful persons within the hierarchy. The frustrations of the job result in peer solidarity, but solidarity which is often based on the unpleasant aspects of the job. These frustrations, boredom and isolation make guards feel increasingly sympathetic to others in the work place, and perhaps more tolerant of behaviour that would otherwise be unacceptable.
Like the previous chapter, this chapter addresses the commonality and differences between men and women who work as guards and what it is like to work as a guard. The emphasis, however, is on how the working styles of male and female guards differ. The chapter explores the ways in which female guards describe being treated as "different" from their male peers and are consequently excluded from systems of support and esteem.

Guard work can be divided into three general types of tasks: tasks involved with life maintenance, tasks pertaining to social relations and tasks related to security matters. A discussion of these tasks, including a discussion of the use of force, is important because it illustrates how women are successful in this job. It is important to understand that physical prowess and size are not more important than communications ability in performing the job. This discussion illustrates the value of the skills women bring to the job and questions an important rationale that men use to argue for the exclusion of women from men's prisons.

Guards perform activities associated with what might be called life maintenance or biological necessity. Guards deliver food on trays to inmates, issue institutional clothing and mediate access to medical and psychological services. Given that large groups of people are confined to a limited physical space, a degree of cleanliness is necessary. Guards ensure inmates' compliance with cleanliness standards. Many of my respondents mentioned the unpleasant task of ordering "grown men to clean pubic hairs off their toilets".
The skills needed to achieve these ends can be performed by a person of either sex. They are largely dependent upon fairness and common sense. Moreover it could be argued that stereotypically female attributes of empathy and listening facilitate the tasks. For example, one life maintenance task relates to the prevention of suicide. This task requires a high degree of listening skills, empathy and the ability to evaluate and interpret the meaning of communication.

Second, guards perform tasks pertaining to social relations. These encompass relations between inmates and other inmates, inmates and guards, and inmates and others such as lawyers, courts, counsellors and family. For example, within the living unit there are struggles for power in the inmate hierarchy. Inmates bully and intimidate other inmates. Some inmates are ostracized as "rats" or "skinner", they have broken the inmate code by informing on other prisoners or are known to have committed a crime against women or children. Guards are charged with protecting these inmates from harm.

The skills required to maintain order in social relations include observation and monitoring. As well, a high degree of communications skills and skill at mediating disputes is the preferable way of dealing with the tensions that arise. Words and tone of voice are tools which can influence the climate and degree of cooperation. Orders given in a manner which belittles the recipient promote resistance and hostility.

A third and last set of tasks relate to what might be called security matters. These include surveillance, transferring inmates from place to place, searching for contraband including drugs, weapons, or items that might assist in an escape. The
tasks required to fulfil the security role may include the application of physical force to restrain an inmate from escape or from harming himself or others. This also includes responding to relatively dramatic episodes such as hostage takings, riots, escapes, or assaults. These episodes are not only dramatic, but relate to the primary function of incarceration—confining inmates in captivity in a secure manner. These episodes are relatively rare events. A correctional officer remarked:

You sit there for maybe six weeks at a time. Its like "Hey, boss, what time is it?", "Hey, boss, do I have to go to court?" Its like a vegetable job and then all of a sudden, bang. Emergency. Your adrenaline goes, you don’t know if you’re going to have a riot or not...

Again it can be argued that the skills required to perform these tasks are not sex-typed. They can be performed by members of either sex. Searching for contraband is highly dependent upon experience and knowledge, not gender. The most important task is acquiring information and observing. For example in the case of contraband, one needs to know who is likely to have contraband and where they are likely to hide it. An inmate might well conceal contraband outside a cell rather than risk being caught with it on his person or in his cell. The history of the individual inmate may be of primary importance in determining whether he is likely to be an escape risk or if he is dependent upon drugs.

The use of force in a jail is the exception. Sykes noted that the use of force is a "grossly inefficient" means of channelling conduct and that the ability of officials to "physically coerce inmates into compliance" is "something of an illusion" in normal daily affairs and "doubtful" in emergency situations (Sykes, 1966:49).
The job of prison guard can be dangerous. Prison disturbances, riots, hostage takings and fights between inmates happen. Even though the use of force is the exception rather than the rule, it is paramount that officers respond adequately. Death or injury may result to staff or inmates. For example, an incident might escalate from a confrontation between two people to a full-scale riot. Correctional officers report that most emergencies turn out to be false alarms. An electronic beeper may have been accidentally activated or a fight between inmates has resolved itself by the time the officers get there, a fire alarm was accidentally set off, and so on.

In any event, officers do not respond alone. The hours of practice for an emergency ideally result in a unified response. In a disturbance, the sight of a well-rehearsed group of guards working in unison resembles an intimidating, powerful machine. Inmates respond by quietly complying to commands. In crisis situations, the individual size and strength of the officer is not as important as the discipline and co-ordination of the group. When an emergency situation involves a single officer, respondents pointed out that a man would not be able to defend himself any better than a woman could defend herself should he be attacked by a large group of inmates. A correctional officer noted: "The reality of the situation is the men themselves are there on a unit with 15 or 17 or 13 prisoners. I mean what are they going to do either?"

The day to day activities of correctional officers are far more stereotypically female than one might suppose. In my own experience, I was struck by the ease with which I could put my skills of parenting teenaged boys to use in the prison: up in the morning; make your bed; share the television; don’t fight
over the telephone; meal time; bedtime; laundry. Hassles are over seemingly petty issues which take on importance in the context of confinement and speak loudly about the child-like role that inmates are forced to assume in prison. I can recall inmates responding to a request by replying "O.K., mom".

One of the features which makes this jail different from other prisons which have been the subject of research is its status as a remand centre. The inmates are innocent until proven guilty and cannot be compelled to work. There are few programs of any sort. In the words of one of the directors:

We started from the premise that the function of the remand facility was to hold people in safe and secure custody. That was the only mandate that we received from the courts. We don't have a mandate to punish people and we don't have a mandate to rehabilitate people. We don't have a mandate to treat people. All the courts have said is we want you to hold this person in secure custody and provide them at the time and place that they're required for their trial.

This translates into boredom for both inmates and guards. Most inmates are held for a few days, some for years. It is not surprising that almost without exception the correctional officers I interviewed describe the role of the living-unit officer as "babysitting". Officers assigned to the living units may spend the entire shift locked in with prisoners who may be uncommunicative or hostile, and who have little to do. Inmates almost certainly do not want to be locked up. Newly incarcerated inmates face an uncertain future. They are separated from family support. They are forced into communal living with up to sixteen other men.
Officers are alone and unarmed. They communicate with the central control area of the jail by telephone. Each has an electronic beeper in case of an emergency. Except for coffee, lunch breaks and occasional telephone calls from other parts of the jail, they have little interaction with other prison workers. Some female guards contrasted their working style to the style of male guards. Correctional officers, nurses and librarians all reported that women have a different way of dealing with inmates and inmates respond to them in a different way. Other studies have found women officers are better than men in "cooling down" angry inmates, although male officers were seen as better by both inmates and other officers in breaking up fights and in other violent confrontations (Zimmer, 1986; Szockyl, 1989; Pollock, 1986).

The idea of a "male" and "female" approach to guard work is a generalization. Not all men can be clustered together. Neither can all women. There are significant differences between individuals of both sexes. Many of my respondents pointed out that not all women are sensitive and compassionate and not all male correctional officers are aggressive.

Most women perform the job with a less aggressive style not necessarily out of preference, but because of different life experiences and physical limitations. Most women are smaller than most men. They simply respond to differences resulting from their smaller stature. Female correctional officers are, therefore, at a physical disadvantage to men. As children they likely had less experience in contact sports than their male colleagues. Women are socialized to fulfill a more helping rather than aggressive roles. Women are expected to be care givers and nurturers.
The female correctional officers I interviewed object to the stereotypical "nurturing" image of their approach to the job. They see themselves as being able to carry out their duties in an objective, professional manner. Rather than bringing something additional to the job in the form of nurturing, they describe an absence, that is a lack of aggression. They strive to perform the legitimate tasks of the job without bullying or being bullied. They strive to influence others (inmates) in a manner that does not elicit an angry response and maintains a degree of respect. They do not seek to injure, but to solve interpersonal problems. This manner of acting might therefore be described as assertive rather than either passive or aggressive.

Women use different skills than men. They are able to secure inmate compliance with rules and regulations but use a different set of skills than men do. They rely more heavily on verbal skills and intuition. They are more likely to talk out problems, and perhaps, diffuse potential violence:

Just because a man has been doing it longer, doesn’t mean he’s been doing it better, you just have a different way of doing it. I think they rely more on their macho muscular strength, where women don’t have that and they don’t need it to get along. (Correctional Officer)

Usually the guys that say there is no room for women in corrections are the knuckledragging type. A few of the male staff are like that, I don’t think the majority are. They still (perform) in the knuckledragging and almost Hitlerish dictatorship they think they have over these inmates and that’s how they act. So my way, my methods of getting my work done are different, they’re a softer method because if I went up to some guy and
said "If you don't smarten up, I'm going to smack your head off" or something, they're not going to listen to me, right? So obviously I have to do it a different way.

(Correctional Officer)

A librarian described her interaction with inmates in this way:

Being a female helped to keep the aggression levels much lower. Even though the prisoners are very chauvinistic, most of them are kind of protective of the female staff. There wasn't a lot of ego to deal with because I was a woman. I didn't feel a strong sense of danger from most of the prisoners, I didn't feel that at all.

Another indication that women perform the job of jail guard in a different manner is that they rely more heavily on the internal "charge" procedure. Inmates alleged to have breached a jail rule face a disciplinary hearing. Punishment for a rule infraction might include a reprimand, a loss of privileges, or a period of confinement in a segregated cell. A director notes that women are more likely to charge an inmate with an infraction of the rules and regulations, suggesting that this indicates that they also may receive more challenging behaviours from inmates than men do. The idea that female officers are more likely to charge an inmate may, however, suggest that female officers are more likely to rely on established, legitimatized means of discipline rather than some other means.

There are benefits to women's style of doing the job. The skills employed by men and women complement one another. Women humanize the workplace in small ways by establishing less aggressive relationships with inmates. There are other benefits to a less aggressive style of doing the job. If issues are dealt with by
negotiation rather than by the use of force, there is less risk of physical harm to inmates and officers alike and less likelihood of allegations of undue force being brought forward.

Female guards may have a more proactive approach. Women may be better able to predict and contain a confrontation. A situation may not escalate to a point at which physical restraint is required. A potential crisis may be resolved or minimized, and therefore be largely unrecognized and unrecorded. It becomes a non-event. A physical confrontation is quite clearly a more noticeable, identifiable event than a situation that has been diffused. Women are also more likely to be willing to listen. By listening, they are able to determine the concern and subsequently act upon it, forestalling frustration. Women generally have greater verbal ability than men. They may be more willing to enter into discussions with inmates. This may mean that inmates feel their complaints are heard. With women, as they point out, there is not a clash of ego, or a need to prove who is bigger or stronger.

Some male guards accept female guards as competent in performing the day to day tasks of the job. My respondents reported that many men express concerns that women will not be able to back men up should a crisis arise. These men express the opinion that women should step aside during an emergency. At this point the job becomes real "men’s work". Yet female correctional officers reported that once a situation progresses to the point of needing to take physical risks, they are willing to do so. Although only one of the correctional officers I interviewed
expressed reservations about becoming involved in a physical confrontation, they reported that some men simply do not believe that women can or will protect them:

(One of the major obstacles was) having to prove myself and having to show people that just because I'm a woman didn't mean that I couldn't do my job. I could do it just as effectively as anybody else. The other major obstacle was that a lot of my co-workers would say "I think you're competent and you could do your job, but if we ever had an emergency situation, I would be really concerned because I don't think you would be able to back me up". And it was always "Well, why can't I back you up?" "Well, you know, because you're a woman, you're more vulnerable, you're more weak". (Correctional officer)

Furthermore, it is the larger men that are sent to any physical confrontation in preference over both women and smaller men. A correctional officer noted that when the OIC (Officer in Charge) receives the signal that a disturbance is taking place, he or she quickly looks at the list of who is on duty and sends in "the tallest guys, the strongest guys, the fastest guys" to handle the problem.

Female correctional officers reported that in an emergency situation some men adopt a protective, chivalrous attitude towards women. When a crisis arises, women are sometimes not called upon to assist. Female correctional officers resent this treatment. When female correctional officers receive unwelcome protection, they feel they are seen as a liability and resented for not pulling their share of risks. They feel that they appear favoured. In some situations, male officers protect women rather than dealing with the situation at hand. In such circumstances, female officers
do not have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and their assistance is underutilized. One correctional officer illustrated:

There's a fight going on in the unit, an officer is being attacked. Jump on the elevator. I leap out the door. I'm the second person out the door and a PO grabs me. I mean physically grabs hold of me. Says "Get back, don't go in there". Well, there's two people taken out of action right there. Me and my immediate authority figure. I was just barely controlling myself. He obviously didn't control himself. "Just get the hell out of the way. Don't hold me back. Don't try and shield me. It's O.K. You're going to endanger yourself trying to protect me."

Peer pressure is exerted on women to conform to male norms in job performance. Female correctional officers reported that they had difficulties with some male correctional officers about the way they perform the job. Those correctional officers who perform the job in an aggressive manner were highly critical of the way women perform the job:

You get a lot of stuff were they (male officers) tease you about being a social worker and all this kind of stuff. Being a "social worker", it's taboo to be a social worker but, you know, that's the kind of thing they call you. "Prisoner activist" and all this kind of stuff just because you don't do the dictatorship over the inmates and treat (an inmate) like a person you're looked down on. (Correctional officer)

If someone was confronting me, I'd just try and calm the situation down, even though inside I was feeling anxious. A lot of times if you were too nice, people would pick up on it, and they would want to abuse you, and that would be prisoners. And a lot of times if you were too nice, a male co-worker would say "Well, you
shouldn't do that because if you give him (an inmate) extra socks, that means I'll have to give him an extra pair of socks, and I don't want to do that". It's that kind of thing, that kind of pettiness. I wasn't even sure how management felt about it. I don't know if we were encouraged to be like that. And I'm not saying going out of your way to be nice, just responding nicely. "Could you please make your bed?" Other staff members would say "You're telling a prisoner 'Please?'" (Correctional Officer)

Peer pressure is an important means of social control in the jail in another way. Physical prowess, and a willingness to enter into physical confrontations, bring esteem and peer acceptance. The male culture of the jail admires prowess. Unusual incidents break the monotony of the job. Such incidents are bragged about and become the stuff of work place legends. Participants in a crisis have a place in jail history and culture. Boisterous storytelling reinforces comradeship and has a cathartic effect. Guards undergo intensive practice which emphasizes "what if" scenarios. Guards all likely have had private thoughts about the potential risks of the job and fears about what might happen to them should they be taken hostage or involved in a riot. An actual crisis event is an opportunity to demonstrate skills and abilities. Performance during a crisis is, therefore, a significant way of gaining respect and peer acceptance. When women are kept out of such situations, they are kept out of one means of gaining acceptance. Peer pressure is an important means of social control in a jail. Peer pressure is also significant in determining whether or not women participate in a given incident. When several guards respond to an emergency, they take cues from the behaviour of colleagues, especially supervisors:
(If there is an emergency) a woman usually has to make herself available in a sense when the going gets rough. Say "Lookit, I'm here, I'm available and I just want to help my team, my partner as much as you do. So don't disqualify me because of your opinion". They respond with reluctance, hesitance, anger, concern, and then a lot of them they'll say "Go for it". If you get one member, particularly if he's senior and he shows that type of response, then the others will follow suit. (Correctional officer)

In practice, male guards often assume a paternalistic stance towards female officers. They act in a fatherly or brotherly manner. They provide protection, but not respect and responsibility, reinforcing their inferior role and difference:

(With some male officers), it was almost like "my baby sister" kind of thing where, God forbid if anyone else said anything bad about you. Or if a con even raised an eyebrow, that's it, big brother's there, and look out. Or you'd have the other side where there were men that just strictly felt women do not belong in prisons, women shouldn't be here and you'd be constantly criticized. You'd get your partner saying "Well, I hope nothing happens, because I sure as hell wouldn't want you to be there to protect me". (Correctional officer)

In summary, men and women bring different skills to the job. Women report that they generally perform the job with less aggression than some men. The less aggressive supervision style that the women generally assume is not valued or recognized as highly as the more physical male approach. Men devalue the way women perform the job and attempt to exclude women's participation in a significant part of the job. Men offer paternalistic protection and tend to treat women as tokens. Conflicts arise over differing supervision styles and a feeling that women are not
competent in the physical aspects of the job. Women are judged by male standards. Their skills, as a result, are under-utilized and depreciated.

Some men see women as unsuited to work as correctional officers, yet most of the tasks guards perform do not require a great deal of physical strength. The skills and experience women bring to the job, primarily interpersonal communication skills, are effective in the day to day tasks of a correctional officer. Furthermore, women are effective in a crisis, largely because emergencies are dealt with by a group, rather than individual, response.
CHAPTER 8: PERSONAL AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This chapter addresses the problems of harassment in the jail. The questions I attempt to answer include: Do women face harassment in the jail? What forms does the harassment take? If they are harassed, do female guards complain about it, and if not, why not? In what ways does the fact that the work place is a jail complicate the problem of harassment?

Recent policy developments in other large institutions and precedence in academic research about female guards include both personal and sexual harassment. For example, the University of Victoria and Douglas College (University of Victoria, 1991; Douglas College, 1992; 7 July 1992) have recently revised their policy to include both personal and sexual harassment. Policy makers at Douglas College describe "Personal Harassment" as conduct which causes a person "substantial distress" and includes assault, intimidation and discriminatory behaviour (Douglas College, 7 July, 1992:4). Correctional Services Canada (Canada: March, 1991:4) defines harassment as:

Any improper behaviour directed at you that you find offensive and that the other person knew or ought reasonably to have known would be unwelcome. Harassment can be a remark or gesture, made once or many times, that demeans, belittles or causes personal humiliation or embarrassment. It can be from anyone, including a colleague, supervisor or subordinate.
In the most exhaustive study of female guards working in "men’s" prisons, Zimmer (1986: 90-91) writes:

...the negative attitude and behaviour of male guards and supervisors serve as the primary obstacles to a successful and easy adjustment to the job. No woman failed to mention opposition and harassment by male colleagues when discussing the difficulties she encountered upon first entering a men’s prison and for many women, negative male behaviour has continued throughout their period of employment.

Zimmer goes on to say:


Like personal harassment, sexual harassment has a negative impact on the victim. It can be blatant or subtle. Sexual harassment may include propositions, touching, pinching, sexual assaults, or rape. Unwelcome advances or invitations may be accompanied by threats or suggestions that there will be negative consequences for non-compliance. Equally important, sexual harassment includes unwelcome remarks, crude jokes that cause embarrassment, sexist remarks or insults, displays of pornographic or derogatory pictures or jokes, sexual teasing, references to male prowess and suggestive comments (Aggarwal, 1987:7). These may not be directed specifically at an individual but produce a "poisoned environment" which is both hostile and intimidating to women (Aggarwal: 81),

Both personal and sexual harassment will be discussed in this chapter. The inclusion of both personal and sexual harassment reflects the nature of much demeaning treatment female guards are subjected to. When the issue is clearly sexual harassment, I will use that term. When the respondent described an event that more closely resembles personal harassment, the term "harassment" or "personal harassment" will be used.

I found a lack of consensus among my respondents about the issue of sexual harassment. During the interviews, almost every female correctional officer described some form of discrimination including sexual harassment. They were usually aware of it as an on-going fact of working in a prison, although many did not define their experiences as "sexual harassment". Some of my respondents, including managers, appear to restrict their definition of sexual harassment to unwanted touching or sexual suggestions, particularly when associated with threats or in exchange for some advancement opportunity. Others include a broader list of
behaviours, including demeaning or belittling remarks, often, but not necessarily, of a sexual nature.

Most women I interviewed reported that they did not personally receive unwanted touching or suggestions, sexual harassment in the narrowest sense of the word, but other forms of harassment were common. When asked if sexual harassment is a problem in the jail, many replied "Not for me". The same women often went on to describe what they call "other harassment". This "other harassment" included physical assaults, threats, unfounded graphic sexual rumours about individual women and daily doses of demeaning remarks. Women who speak of sexual harassment in ways which include demeaning or belittling remarks, were prone to describe it as "all day, everyday".

Although women described dramatic episodes of harassment, it was most often an undercurrent of sexism and inequality. Much of the harassing behaviour appears to be of the subtle variety. It includes sexist remarks, insults, teasing and put downs. The subtle type of comment may be more difficult for a supervisor to take seriously and for a woman to prove. As well, the consequences to the harasser may be less severe. The incident in itself may be seemingly minute. The comment can be "excused" as a joke. A correctional officer described some male peers by saying:

"They just love to bug you, constantly pick at you".

Another described the social interaction between female and male correctional officers in this way:
(The attitude of some men is) "If you want to work in a man's job, you're going to have to take whatever we give out". It's not you're going to take whatever we take, it's whatever we give out. "Plus the dirtiest, rottenest, stinkiest, horribilest thing I could think up and my friend is going to add to it, too".

Correctional officers face a more generalized form of harassment which is gender-based, but that has little or nothing to do with sex or sexuality and which might more accurately be called personal harassment. It is gender based in that it refers to socially defined maleness and femaleness; for example, sexist comments which suggest women should not work as guards. The intangible nature of these put-downs make them difficult to confront. It may be so subtle that the victim is not really sure what is happening. This form of harassment appears to be designed to force women from the job. A correctional officer explained:

Women are not wanted in male institutions. That's it. That's the bottom line. Any woman working in a male institution is going into enemy territory.

Most female correctional officers do not consider profanity to be necessarily sexual harassment. The use of profanity, however, is perceived to be sexually harassing when it is directed at an individual woman. Correctional officers described incidents in which inappropriate and profane language was directed at them in front of inmates. Such incidents have the effect of seriously undermining the authority of the correctional officer. If an officer does not have the respect of her colleagues, it is difficult to understand how she would be able to maintain the respect of inmates.
One woman reported that an inmate asked her "Why do you let them treat you that way?"

Most correctional officers reported ignoring harassing comments. This sometimes worked, but often did not. Inappropriate comments are especially problematic when they are directed at an individual and do not stop as a result of a verbal challenge. Eleven of the correctional officers, just over fifty percent of the group interviewed, reported such episodes.

One form of sexual harassment involves rumours about female correctional officers. These include speculation about their sexual orientation and sex lives. Several reported being the victims of slanderous allegations. For example, a surprisingly large number of correctional officers reported that they are assumed to be lesbians by people both inside and outside the criminal justice system. A correctional officer explained:

Some women get stereotyped. We have our butch, we have our gay stereotypes. We have our butch, we have our gay guards. I think its just that, a stereotype. It's a stereotype you have on the streets. The images that women have to be tough, very masculine, very big, you know, very bullish and although we do have a couple of women like that, and we do have a couple of gay women, I don't think they differ very much from gay women that are like that on the street. I mean, they could be working in a bakery and they could be that way. I think it's more a perception of what women are supposed to be. When people look at me they go "You're a guard? How could you be a guard?" Its just that people kind of grab onto that image and they use it. Its the same as saying women shouldn't be in jail and women can't do the job. The only women who can are strong and big and all that crap.
A correctional officer, assumed to be a lesbian by her co-workers, claimed that there can be benefits to this stereotype. She was protected from some other forms of sexual harassment by it. The very suggestion that this woman is a lesbian is in itself, however, a form of sexual harassment. Her private life is speculated about and gossiped about. She is different and deviant. She is not a "real woman":

The old boy network had already decided that I was a lesbian, but at least that stereotype had its sanctuary. There are times I could just sit down and howl, because it was so stupid. Apart from being butch, and a feminist, and having penis envy, which I think is really quite strange, I wasn't harassed in that way.

Women are also rumoured to be sexually involved with both supervisors and inmates. Slanderous stories are hard to rebut. Gossip often takes place behind the back and out of hearing of the victim. Any attempt to defend oneself against such stories only gives validity to rumour and gossip. I heard numerous rumours about women working in the jail while conducting this research. Some were reported by the officers themselves. Typically stories describe the same set of circumstances but differed wildly in content, from relatively harmless to extremely serious allegations. Stories and gossip are fuelled and complicated by the practice of drinking after shifts. Alcohol is a problem in a highly stressful job. Correctional officers work shifts in a stressful environment. After finishing their shifts, they want to relax and relieve the stress of the day. Drinking with one's buddies is an attempt to do this. The cure is often worse than the disease, however. Like police, correctional officers are prone to alcoholism. Some women engage in drinking with the men after shifts, at least
occasionally. If they drink with the men, they are assumed to be promiscuous. A favourite myth among men is that loose women get what they deserve, be it rape or harassment. There is a widely held idea that "nice" women who do not "drink with the boys" are not harassed and that those that do probably are those who receive, and deserve, sexual harassment. Drinking after work in the local bar is widely practised by men, but frowned on for women. A correctional officer explained:

It was a strange environment to work in because going for a drink with the guys after work was OK, but if you were a female, it was not what you should be doing. You shouldn't associate with people from work. And that's not right. I mean it wouldn't be (that way) in any other profession. If I was working at a private agency downtown as an investment broker, I'd go out. It (would be) no big deal and the whole office wouldn't be saying "Oh God, she's going out for a drink with the guys." It wouldn't be a big deal.

Some women are personally and sexually harassed more than others, but harassment does not appear to be related to drinking after work. Women who reported that they have at least on occasion gone "drinking with the boys" did not report more sexual harassment or personal harassment than those who do not. These correctional officers often reported that they did not receive a great deal of harassment and some women who do not associate at all often report it. Women who do participate in drinking after work were surprised that others are critical of their behaviour. Ironically, women who engage in drinking after work with fellow officers tended to report a higher degree of acceptance from their peers.
Unfortunately, sexual harassment from peers is not the only serious problem correctional officers face. Harassment, be it personal or sexual, is even more difficult to deal with if the harasser is a supervisor. In the paramilitary hierarchy of the jail one is expected to follow orders without question. A superior’s word carries more weight. He has more access to directors and, therefore, more power. The problems of dealing with harassment are intensified. Four women reported serious attacks directed at them from supervisors. One correctional officer reported being taken into the office by a supervisor:

I was dragged into the Po’s office. (He) proceeded to scream at me because he felt I was emasculating the men. His exact words were: "Why don’t you concentrate on being half a woman instead of trying to be a man? You’re no damn good as a woman either". He had this incredible amount of resentment. He assured me that I would fail, they’d beat me out of there, that I would get raped, I’d be beaten up, I wouldn’t stand a chance. He was shouting and holding his finger in my face and being extremely aggressive.

Another described persistently negative incidents with a supervisor and the difficulties it presented:

He made some comments which were really, really blatant malice. He said he was “just joking” but in my opinion, it was not a joke, there was definitely some hate there. Maybe he’s also a chauvinist, he doesn’t like women, he’s not happy with his job, people are getting ahead, doing things he might like to do and you know, no matter what he thought of the system years ago, he has become everything that he hated about it. It was escalating, getting worse every time I saw this individual to the point where I was starting to break down, I thought “What the hell have I done to deserve this?” I’m
busting my ass off and I'm being treated like I don't deserve to be here and I shouldn't be doing this job and that was really difficult.

As well as personal and sexual harassment from colleagues and supervisors, women also reported sexual harassment from prisoners. Women reported less sexual harassment, however, from inmates than from staff. When asked to describe the worst things about the job, some women included the inmates. Issues related to inmates, however, were often not gender based. It is a "barrage of inmates passing on their resentments in life to you". Inmates challenge the authority of women because they are guards rather than because they are female guards. Correctional officers are symbols of the authority which is depriving inmates of their liberty.

Research indicates inmates generally strongly favour or are neutral about women's employment in prisons (Zimmer, 1986:10, 61-65; Pollock, 1986:91-93; Szockyj, 1989:320). Inmates report that women treat them better than men by being less confronting and more willing to carry out duties such as handling requests without complaint. The prisoners, therefore, have much to gain by ensuring that the women remain. A correctional officer explained:

I don't have problems with inmates, being female. I get a better response from them than male officers do. I get them to do things that I want them to do without being that knuckledragging, domineering type of person. The only trouble I see myself (having) is with other officers.

Women correctional officers also have more direct and effective options in dealing with harassing behaviour of inmates. Correctional officers are in a position...
of power over inmates. They are able to charge the inmate with a disciplinary infraction by way of the correctional centre rules and regulations. A correctional officer illustrated this:

I had an inmate once, young guy, 19 or 20. (He started speaking to me) in front of the other inmates in the TV area: "Hey, do you have a boyfriend? Do you make out with your boyfriend? Do you want to make out with me?" He spent ten days in the hole (segregation). I haven't really had a problem since with the inmates because if they ever start with me I just basically tell them "I've sent a guy to the hole for 10 days for stuff like that, so if I was you..."

I will now turn to the complex issue of complaining about harassment. Understanding why women do not complain about personal and sexual harassment illustrates the very difficult position of female correctional officers in a jail.

If a woman is harassed, either personally or sexually, a man might believe the logical and rational thing to do is to complain about it. To a woman, it may be more rational and realistic not to complain. A woman does not complain for practical and economic reasons. These reasons can be divided into three general parts. First, harassment is normalized in the male culture of the jail. That is, it becomes customary, expected behaviour, so it is viewed as having little importance. Second, it is assumed to be inevitable, just a price women have to pay for working in a jail. Third, the benefits of complaining about harassment often are outweighed by the costs. Harassment is a no-win situation for women. The burden for dealing with harassment is placed squarely on the victim. They either tolerate it or face even greater problems: isolation, a lack of peer support, perhaps even the loss of their job.
It might be argued that while sexual harassment takes place, it is not a serious problem. Granted, when asked to describe the worst things about the job, correctional officers invariably described issues like "negativity", boredom, and management. Some harassing behaviour is indeed trivial, even silly at times. Female guards, however, get peer support for complaints about management or the boredom of the job. They do not get support for complaints about issues like sexual harassment which are primarily seen as women's issues. Men understand complaints about management, but they do not understand, and therefore are less likely to validate, issues like sexual harassment.

Women can lodge complaints either through the chain of command or through the union, formally or informally, but few complain. A complaint initiates the disciplinary action against the harasser. Only one woman described making a written complaint. Several described having had informal discussions with supervisors about specific incidents. Sometimes the problem is rectified by informal processes, without any form of complaint:

We were going through a doorway or something and he (a SCO) made a motion like he was going to grab my rear end. At that exact time (a director) saw him and I must have given him (the SCO) a look to kill. (The director) saw all this and I guess he spoke to him about it, too, and afterwards this officer came and spoke to me about it "I'm sorry. I'll never do it again. I was only kidding. I didn't know you'd take it that way". (Correctional Officer)

Only a small percentage of male correctional officers are vocally opposed to women's presence. Unfortunately, many men are silent about sexual harassment,
signalling that it will be tolerated. This silence condones sexual harassment of women and thus challenges women's legitimate right to work in the jail. Men who are silent do not model appropriate behaviour for their peers, reinforcing the likelihood that the culture will not change. Men reinforce the normalcy of sexual harassment by their silence. A correctional officer illustrated this theme:

(The biggest obstacle) was not being accepted by your colleagues. The idea that women don't belong in a prison is held by a few, but supported quietly by the majority. One person will make a (derogatory) comment and the others won't say anything, it's subtle, but it's there. (Correctional Officer)

There is doubtless considerable pressure on men when witnessing harassment. Many men are supportive of women in whatever career they might choose but they can easily become confused and angered over what they, too, see as a "no win" situation. When men do attempt to speak up about sexual or personal harassment, they, too, are isolated. A senior male officer explained:

One of the reasons women are reluctant to come in (to the service and why they leave is the treatment they receive. It makes me angry. When it occurs frequently a supervisor, I try to be supportive. However, no matter what I did, I would be wrong. As human beings, we have set up roles for men that have no place anywhere. It can be an isolating phenomenon for men who try to be supportive without being patronizing.

Women believe that they will be blamed for the sexual harassment. It is generally, but not always, men who harass. However, both men and some women are silent do not model appropriate behaviour for their peers, reinforcing the normalcy of sexual harassment by their silence. A correctional officer illustrated this theme:

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believe that if a woman is harassed she is to blame for it. They are seen to have caused the harassment either by action or by omission, by failing to "handle" the harasser or by provoking harassment. They should have taken some action to prevent or stop the harassment. They may have given some signal that they are sexually available or promiscuous. They are perceived as "deserving" what they get.

In some ways, all women are seen as "deserving" both personal and sexual harassment, by virtue of the fact that they have chosen to work in a male-dominated field. Harassment is seen as a normal and expected consequence of working in a jail. It is also assumed to be unstoppable. It is, therefore, dismissed as a condition of work. Harassment becomes an excepted part of the job. It is normalized. The onus is on women to adapt to it. A correctional officer explained it this way:

It (sexual harassment) happened on a day to day basis, but I think its one of the things that women have to accept in working in that type of environment. For example, an inmate came up to several staff recently and threatened them with bodily harm, death threats once he's released from prison. And the choice was do they take it outside to court? And the response from upper management was "Don't bother, that's expected in your job". It's the same thing. It's expected. It's also expected that the female staff would have to put up with sexual harassment on the job.

As well, women are harassed in all manner of jobs. It is not unique to the jail. A clerk explained that the work site was irrelevant: (As a secretary) "You're just a dumb, blond bimbo. It's par for the course". A correctional officer explained "I have witnessed sexual harassment but, personally, I think it's normal. Whatever
there is at work, it's normal". The values of the dominant male culture become part of the belief system of both men and women.

In some sense everyone is harassed in a prison, reinforcing it's normalcy. Humour is a stress reliever. A work environment characterized by long hours of boredom and shift work seems a natural site for pranks and practical jokes. Both men and women become the butt of these. Joking and teasing are also used as a form of social control. New staff are tested. Once the test is passed, they are teased less or left alone. Correctional officers explain that new recruits are teased initially until they prove themselves. If officers make mistakes, they are perceived as a threat to all and they are quickly, and sometimes mercilessly, dealt with by isolation or by teasing.

Teasing is often heavily laden with sexual overtones. A female correctional officer provided the following example:

Like we went through training and on my first day on by myself, I basically stood around with my back to the wall, as close to the door as possible. I mean I was visibly nervous, I'm sure they had a great time: "Well, it's the big boss", that kind of thing. Or you get a phone call "Yea, Miss Wilbur, Mr. Meoff there? Got him on your unit?" "No, I don't think so." "Well, you want to check? First name's Jack" "Is there a Jack Meoff here?" Stuff like that, that's what other people do to you. The inmates have a laugh. Everyone plays along with it.

Furthermore, the strongly individualistic values of the women I interviewed encourage, and reinforce, the belief that they should shoulder blame. This belief system reinforces the notion that people are responsible for their own fate.
Furthermore, they should be able to deal with problems on their own, so correctional officers may blame themselves for not dealing with the situation. A correctional officer explained:

The first thing I do, as a rule, because I'm a female is think "Oh, I must have done something wrong" or you take on that guilt role or I think that's what most women do anyway. You know you automatically assume you've done something wrong and you should be responsible for this. So without naming names or anything...It was very difficult for me to discern until I had someone else come up to me in one instance, another officer, and say "Hey, I've noticed this is happening. Why is this happening?" and "This doesn't happen to me, why is it happening to you? Why are you being treated differently and in a negative way?" and I had to stop and say "Yeah, I guess I've sort of just been putting up with it", thinking this is the way that things should be. (Correctional officer)

Similarly, correctional officers assume harassing male behaviour will be seen by supervisors and other officers as individual idiosyncrasies of the harasser rather than anti-woman bias. Harassment will be dismissed as an individual problem. Harassment might be viewed as an extreme form of normal behaviour, a personal style that cannot or should not be interfered with. As well, harassing behaviour is only one behaviour in a range of behaviours that the individual displays. A harasser might otherwise be a valued staff member, with skills and experience, almost certainly with more seniority than a woman would have. A harasser may be an otherwise "nice guy". An officer described such an individual. She explained:

I believe that he has been around a lot longer, would probably have the support of the upper management
people, people who never have had that experience with them, would never understand.

Another explained:

There's always an underlying, macabre black humour. If you make any attempt to complain it's instantly "Oh well, it's just a joke. He would do that to anybody".

A man has a more legitimate, less marginal role in the organization. He is with friends and allies. As a part of the "old boys network" his beliefs are reinforced by the group. On the other hand, the victim may be relatively new to the organization, and part of the numerically rare group of women. She is different, peripheral. It is assumed that men are more likely to be long-term employees, while women are there for the short term. There is greater benefit in supporting the male who is more likely to be a long-term employee. If one can assume that new employees are targeted more for abuse until they "prove" themselves, then they are harassed at the most vulnerable point of time. A correctional officer explained her situation:

Because (I was) young and new, I mean that is a major problem. So forget about a career in corrections, because nobody would want to work with me, really. And even the ones that did, it would always be in the back of their minds. They would always think about it.

Prisons have a strong subculture. This subculture makes complaining about harassment especially difficult. There is a great deal of pressure to remain loyal to other officers. Both inmates and guards have a code of behaviour which strongly
prohibits informing or "ratting" on one's peer group. A "rat" is despised for his or her disloyalty to the group. This prohibition functions to silence women even more. Women fear that they will be perceived as "rats" if they complain about harassment.

A correctional officer described the culture. She also explained why the culture is primarily a male one:

I mean you've got people that are known in the institution as rats, like every time you do something wrong, they run to the director's office and they're ready to tell "Oh, this guy screwed up" because they think that's to their advantage, that it's going to make them look good. Women are as a rule more talkative, we gossip more. We might say "Oh, did you see that dress she had on". Women are more catty, but I don't know too many women that are back stabbers, who want to climb, to get ahead of you. When I first came to the jail I could not believe how bad the men were, I mean bad, not catty, I mean bad. It just really blew me away that in a place where it's already stressful and negative and you have all that stuff going on. (Correctional officer)

Women do not complain about harassment because it is a "no win" situation. Correctional officers do not complain for practical, economic reasons. The costs of complaining simply outweigh the benefits.

Despite the fact that case law places the burden of ensuring a harassment-free workplace on the employer, the entire burden, in reality, falls on the victim. Women must somehow "solve" the problem: by verbal rebuke; initiating complaint and taking the consequences (including isolation) for her action; or by leaving the job and facing the financial consequences of doing so. A young woman with perhaps two years of post-secondary education may not have many job options. By complaining about
either personal or sexual harassment, she is putting herself in a position of choosing
to either speak up or look for another job, perhaps at near-poverty wages. If they
complain, women fear retaliation in the form of verbal abuse, poor references or
evaluations. The job may become so uncomfortable that they might choose to leave.
Correctional officers illustrated:

Just because of the way I am, (if I complained), I would
probably would have been forced into a position where
I would have been very uncomfortable and would have
wanted to leave. (Correctional Officer)

You’d be history, one way or another. Set up to take a
fall. I’m not sure how far up this would extend, but POs
would not be supportive. (Correctional officer)

One respondent described being threatened that if she made problems for a
male officer by charging him with sexual harassment, she would be blacklisted from
government employment. Women have reason to believe that such threats could be
carried out, particularly if the officer involved is of a higher rank or lengthy service.
She went on to say:

The women are really afraid to say anything. I was
threatened twice by men that I could lose my job if I
made trouble for them. One guy told me that I could be
fired and that I could be blackballed from any
government job.

By complaining, victims give up whatever control they have in the situation.
Ignoring the comments or verbal retorts may have been somewhat helpful. They
may have been able to avoid the harasser. Complaining makes the matter public.
The victim may now have to deal with both the harasser and unfavourable public opinion. There are few secrets in a jail. The prison environment is prone to gossip. A correctional officer noted that before any written complaint reaches the directors, the whole jail would know about it, although the matter is between the employer and employee (harasser). There may be general knowledge about an allegation, perhaps embellished by rumour and speculation. When the union or management becomes involved the matter becomes public knowledge and the actions of the victim as well as the alleged harasser will be scrutinized.

Correctional officers do not have faith in the channels for complaint. Complaining involves trusting that your complaint will be taken seriously. Most correctional officers expressed a lack of trust in management and a feeling that management is not supportive of women in the workplace. They would, therefore, be unlikely to feel that a matter of sexual harassment or any other matter would be taken seriously. As one woman explained: "I was physically assaulted by a male staff. Complaining would have got me absolutely nowhere". Another correctional officer explained:

I think women put up with a lot because of the environment we’re in. But I also think that it’s probably hidden in the jail. You know, there was one (case) at the jail and it was covered up by management, so I don’t think that the jail is taking it seriously, so that has left me sort of disrespecting management in that particular area. They obviously don’t feel it’s important or that that person mattered. (Correctional Officer)
More than anything, women expressed a fear of isolation if they were to complain about any form of harassment. They would be ostracized, blamed, accused of overreacting. Several women mentioned the great courage and strength a woman would need to complain about harassment. A sense of isolation increases the sense of powerlessness the women feel:

A lot of guys would say "You're right, but you know what you're putting yourself in for." And a lot of them would say "You're making a mountain out of a molehill". (Correctional officer)

People would be reluctant because of all the heat you would get from the male officers. I think people would, you know, isolate you and I think there'd be a lot of talk and comments and whispering when you walk into the room and things like that. (Correctional officer)

I don't know what would happen, I think people would say "She can't handle it, what's she doing working here? She can't take it, this is a jail, you know". I think the woman, I'm almost 90% sure would be shunned. "Don't get too close to her cause you'll wind up on paper" (facing discipline). (Correctional officer)

These fears are realistic. They describe the situation that women face if they do, in fact, complain. One woman who put in an informal, unwritten complaint explained:

I was blamed. I was told I overreacted. They don't pay me enough to go through that crap. In the institution there's a whole "we'll stick together" mentality and there's this male bonding that goes on. I had to defend myself constantly, my actions. (Correctional officer)
While it is not surprising that personal and sexual harassment takes place in a prison, as it does in other male-dominated environments, the consequences of harassment for women are potentially higher. Guards work in a job which has a potential for violence. Guards must rely on one another for backup and support in emergencies. If an individual is seen as peripheral in any way, they may be vulnerable to inadequate back-up. Most women I interviewed did not fear that they would not receive back-up in an emergency and some pointed out that the physical design of the building would probably preclude inadequate support. This feeling was not universal, however. One woman reported an incident with an inmate in which she was left to fend for herself. She did not receive back-up, although there were two male officers present. "I’m wrestling with this guy and they both turned and walked away." Another reported:

I think you’d have cause to worry and I think that is a concern, a very big one if you piss off enough people. They’re not going to want to come running as hard. I mean, it was like that anyway if you were working on a unit with some asshole that didn’t like working with females. You’d call him over to do something and he’d just take his time. You know, like: "What are you squawking about now?"

As well as being ostracized and blamed, correctional officers fear that a complaint about harassment would reflect on how competent they are perceived to be in their job. The primary duties of a correctional officer are, after all, supervising and controlling the inmates, many of whom are hostile to guards. Women are
already suspected of not being competent to do the job. A male officer told me "Any woman who gets harassed is a weak link". A female officer explained it this way:

You don’t complain. If you complain about sexual harassment then they’re going to say, "What, you can’t handle yourself with the inmates?" and if you complain about the staff "Well, what do the inmates do around you?" The staff are supposed to be your friends. (Correctional officer)

Another significant concern expressed by the women is the question of the ultimate outcome of a complaint. Correctional officers report that the most significant consequence to a harasser may be merely a transfer to another institution where he will be free to harass again. Every woman who described complaining felt that "not enough" happened to the harasser in question. The likely outcome of any complaint is a reprimand, a short suspension and a transfer to another jail:

Making any kind of complaint would be a complete and utter waste of time. Being a woman in a male institution, you walk a very fine line. You’re not one of the boys and you’re not really one of the girls. If you complain, obviously it’s because you’re female and you can’t take it. You can’t work in a male environment and you can’t take the kidding and stuff that the other guys take. And they manipulate that really successfully. You complain. And for what? To see him get shuffled off to another jail, which is where he wants to be anyway? (Correctional Officer)

While the courts have placed the onus on the employer to provide a discrimination-free workplace, in reality women bear the cost of personal and sexual harassment. Women do not feel that they can complain about it. The onus is on the
women to deal with the harassment, to ignore harassment, to take the consequences
for complaint, to avoid situations in which it is likely to occur.

Sexual harassment is a common problem for women. Harassment can also
take the form of non-sexual demeaning and hostile words and behaviour. The male
environment of the prison complicates an already complex problem. Harassment
takes place in the context of a subculture which values group loyalty, that is
characterized by sometimes crude behaviour and in which women are both
newcomers and a minority. Harassment is often subtle, sometimes insidious. It is
normalized in the male culture of the jail. The costs of complaining are so high that
few complain. It is a no-win situation which increases the burden on women who
are left to find ways to cope in a sometimes hostile environment.
CHAPTER 9: COPING IN THE MEN'S WORLD OF THE JAIL

This chapter discusses how women cope with the challenges and frustrations of working as a guard in a jail for men. Working in a jail means that women must adapt to a predominately male culture which sees them as different and inferior. Their relationships with other officers are characterized by contradictions. Many of their fellow workers are supportive, many are extremely unsupportive. Women have to adapt to hostile colleagues, a "negative" work environment, and a paramilitary hierarchy with few female role models. Three things emerged which describe how female correctional officers cope with the conflicts and contradictions inherent in their social situation. First, women have much in common with male peers. Second, they accept what might otherwise be intolerable behaviour, and third, they decide to withdraw from peers and/or the job in one way or another. These are not clearly separate classifications. Any or all of these factors might come into play.

First, women are, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted in the workplace and have much in common with co-workers. They have positive relations with at least some of their colleagues, and a great deal in common with all of them. Women are a part of the workplace. They develop relationships based on common concerns and mutual assistance. They face the same challenges, risks and frustrations.

Despite the hardships and frustrations of the job, the greatest rewards of the job for correctional officers are often phrased in terms of individual empowerment or growth and the friendships they form with peers. Correctional officers gain a
Having to look at myself. Having to really look. Not at the job, but at myself. And not kidding myself anymore. Not saying, "I'm a tough individual, I can take this." Saying "What are my traits?" I have to accept some of these female traits because they're me. Not downplay them. Say "Yeah, that's me and so is that". Not good or bad. Just me. Some of the traits I have are kind of harsh. That's what my husband gets after me about. And yet I don't want to get rid of some of those traits I've picked up from the building here. Harshness in a way. Bluntness. Those are things I'm glad I've picked up. Because I used to think "Oh, I don't want to hurt someone's feelings". Now I think that is just the way it is. If you don't like it, too bad. A little bit more assertive I call it. My husband calls it being a bitch. I'm able to stand up for myself more. I'm quite content with that. But there are other things I have to face up to reality with. I don't want to be in a negative environment. Some people are quite happy with that. I'm not.

Correctional officers described a sense of isolation from the rest of society. Jacobs and Retsky (1980: 188-189) note that "even close friends do not know what to make of the prevailing belief that prison guards are sadistic, corrupt, stupid, and incompetent". In the introduction to a collection of articles about prisons, Ross notes that guards are typically viewed by both the prison literature and the press as "harsh (if not sadistic), power-hungry illiterates – an ignorant, rigid, authoritarian individual who is vigorous only when demanding inmate compliance, when opposing inmate's
rights, when criticizing management policies or when scuttling rehabilitation programs" (1981:3).

In anticipation of a negative response, correctional officers are often reluctant to disclose their occupation to acquaintances. Experience teaches guards that they should be wary of outsiders. An unmarried correctional officer illustrated the isolation and rejection that can take place:

Women who work in prisons are like other women no matter what the job is. But it's funny what the public image of the women who work in jails is. Myself, if I meet a man, being single, I don't tell them what I do, or I try not to. And usually what happens is you get to this stage:

"What do you do?"
"I work for the government"
"Well, what do you do?"
"I work for the Solicitor General"
"Well, what do you do?"
"Well, I work for corrections"
"Well, what do you do?"
And it gets down to:
"Okay, I'm a guard."

I mean, finally, you get down to the last thing and its like:

"Oh, really, see you later"

Another correctional officer described the adverse reactions of people to the fact that she worked in a jail:

(From) almost everyone I met. A lot of morbid curiosity, a lot of negative reactions. They had assumptions that I was "obviously" a lesbian, or sort of sadistic in some way. "How could you do something so horrendous?", "How could you keep those poor people locked up?". That sort of thing.
For better or worse, this isolation draws prison workers together. Only other correctional officers could really understand what the job is like. They will not be judged hastily or unfairly, or be seen as "different":

When I was single, of course, it was horrendous. Meeting men? Impossible, impossible, impossible. I think that is why we tend to socialize together, which is unhealthy in my opinion. And why we tend to marry each other, and why the marriages don’t work. Why there is alcoholism and so on. Because the rest of society tends to treat you as if you have bubonic plague. (Correctional officer)

I tend to shy away from groups of women who haven’t worked in the prison system. Because sometimes I feel that I don’t talk the way other women do. That maybe my language is a little coarser or I might say something that offends people because we’ve developed a sense of humour that other people outside prisons don’t have. (Nurse)

The women find a set of what Goffman (1963:20) calls "sympathetic others" in the workplace. Others of their kind, provide "moral support", acceptance and feelings of being a person "who is really like any other normal person". They share both the experiences of the job and a sense of social isolation with others at work.

The job is such that there is a constant potential for violence in the workplace. Guards rely on one another for physical support and protection. A sense of solidarity is reinforced by facing dangerous or difficult situations. The common bond helps to diffuse differences between men and women. For example, correctional officers learn the informal rules of the job from more experienced, and often male, officers:
When I first went there they said "You know, you’re going to lose your friends". I remember having a lot of guys tell me that "Try to do some social functions with the staff here because you’re going to find you’re not going to have any friends from your outside sources in about six months". They all went through it and I ended up telling trainees that came through after me the same thing. Because you do. You just tend to gear towards the jail "family" because in a sense you’ve been divided from the outside society that you were with prior to working there. (Correctional Officer)

When asked to describe the greatest rewards of the job, women often pointed to their fellow guards, both male and female. Many have sought an environment in which they would work almost exclusively with men. They speak of the male guards in positive, sometimes even affectionate, terms and are willing to forgive or ignore a great deal. Some guards marry one another. Others date or become friends. Although many female officers describe a small percentage of the staff as particularly offensive or opposed to women’s employment in a jail, most correctional officers carry out their duties in a responsible and professional manner. Their behaviour towards fellow workers, male or female, reflects this. One correctional officer explained:

The greatest rewards of my job? I would say the greatest rewards of my job are the staff that I work with. If it wasn’t for the staff, and I stress staff, not management, and the way they are and the support I get, I wouldn’t be working there.

Several women volunteered that they have what might be termed significant social encounters with male peers that were the basis of nurturing, personal
relationships. They described friendly, informal conversations in casual situations away from the workplace. Ironically, many of these significant encounters take place when women go "drinking with the boys". The irony lies in the fact that bosses and many women feel that women who engage in such activities are harassed more and accepted less. Drinking in the bar, however, is the most easily accessible forum for casual, off-the-job, social contact.

Several female guards described intimate, but non-sexual, encounters when male colleagues told them that they respected them as workers. These appear to be extremely significant events and relationships for the individual women. They are told they were competent correctional officers.

Off-the-job encounters break down barriers so that female officers become people with problems, concerns, needs and goals just like anyone else. Many of their most immediate problems such as shift work, bosses, inmates, and isolation, are both familiar and shared. These encounters highlight the importance of peer relationships in reducing isolation and in providing female correctional officers with a sense of being a legitimate member of the team. These encounters are significant because they can have the function of neutralizing other negative relations with male peers. If a woman feels accepted and esteemed by at least some of her colleagues, it makes the negative reactions of others easier to handle.

Some men accept individual women guards who excel at the job, but not women in general. There is a contradiction in their reasoning. If they are supportive of a woman in the job, they are, of course, recognizing that a woman is capable of doing the job. The following illustrates this typical sentiment:
I would say a minority of men voiced that opinion (that women should not work there). They treated you with that opinion and did not care who knew about it. But a minority. There were others that highly respected you, that voiced how much they respected me as an officer and how I handle my job, yet when we go drinking or whatever, they'd sit there and say "but I don't think women should work in a prison". (Correctional Officer)

Some women are more esteemed, and accepted, by both male and female correctional officers than others and for a variety of reasons. Women who reported being married to a correctional officer or involved in a romantic relationship with a male officer described this as defusing some hostility, while being an "ex" girlfriend or wife greatly increased it. Women who have some friend or relative in employment at the jail reported that this is helpful in reducing feelings of marginality and isolation, making the prison a more comfortable place to be. Some women are highly esteemed because they have "proven themselves" or bring valued job-related experience. Some women have a friendly and pleasing personality, or a sense of humour, which diffuse hostility. No doubt, some possess more skills and abilities than others and are therefore more readily accepted.

The second, and most frequent way women cope with the job is by accepting what they feel they cannot change. They seek male approval and endure the difficulties of the job without comment or overt protest. Most female correctional officers try to maintain harmonious relationships with their male peers and do not want to draw attention to themselves, hoping to be left alone to do their jobs.

The culture of the jail is such that women are forced to adapt and deal with problems on their own. They do not have faith in channels for complaint. The cost
of complaining is high. Female correctional officers fear isolation and retaliation. The strongly individualistic character of many of the female guards reinforces the feeling that they should be able to cope.

One correctional officer noted that she knew sexism would exist in the job before she accepted it, but the financial benefits outweighed the costs. She explained:

I knew it was going to be there, but for the money difference, I was willing to put up with it. There is a big difference between eight bucks an hour and thirteen.

Again, sexual harassment and discrimination are normalized in the male culture of a jail. Men greatly outnumber women, thus have more power to establish the cultural norms of the workplace. Sexual harassment is taken for granted. Men deny that it has any importance. In fact, it is accepted by men and many women, and assumed to be both an unavoidable and an unalterable part of workplace culture. Because sexual harassment is seen as normal, complaining about it is viewed as making "a big deal out of nothing".

Jail culture obfuscates harassment. For example, a prison environment is characterized by profanity and crude behaviour and the differences between boorishness and harassment are blurred. The language in a prison is rough and many male officers point out that this existed before the introduction of women. The language is said to be better, improved, since women moved into the system. Rough language is, therefore, not in itself intended to exclude women.
Discrimination and harassment may be somewhat easier to accept, in some ironic way, in a work site in which it is open and blatant. Many male officers do not hide their feelings about women in general and women working in a prison in particular. Women claim they get used to particularly blatant behaviour, especially when they sense it is not motivated by hatred. Some harassment is so blatant as to be ridiculous, trivial, even silly. A respondent described incidents of touching and sexual attention which she described as "not real" sexual harassment:

I see very blatant stuff which I tend to think isn't real because if it was real, it would be much more slyly done. It's just a bull in a china shop routine. It's very, very blatant.

Ironically, one of the reasons why it is easy to accept harassment and sexist attitudes is the sheer volume of it:

Well I mean, man! If I complained every time someone made a comment to me about whatever "Well you don't know any better. You're just a female", I mean, I'd be a basket case by now. (Correctional Officer)

Women adopt and accept the male culture and are very tolerant of male behaviour and culture. A correctional officer noted: "You get some hard-line feminist, and she’d go right up the wall in the first night". Women fight back by ignoring the comments or by verbal aggression, found to be sometimes, but not always, an effective means of handling unwanted comments. Many women mentioned ignoring or verbally rebuking negative or blatantly sexist comments. A correctional officer explained:
The women at the jail have probably all experienced it at some level. Comments or jokes or razing. When I first started there I was absolutely horrified at some of the crap I was hearing from these guys and I just thought "Oh my God" and its well, don't be a prude. You have to become one of the guys kind of thing. So you have to kind of make a decision really early on, are you going to say, "I'm not putting up with this crap" and then you get kind of ostracized and labelled "Oh well, she can't take jokes" or do you sort of go with the punches and learn how to do rebuttals to shut them up?

One extreme form of acceptance is to become like the men. Some women take on an exaggerated "male" way of doing the job. They both accept and assume the most extreme forms of jail culture. They try to outdo males at being male. Several women point to, and are extremely critical of, individual women who "do the job like a man". Such women do a disservice to all women by breeding a great deal of resentment from both men and women. They attempt to "out-macho the boys" by choosing a "fictitious male role model" that as a respondent notes "even the men don't follow". A correctional officer explained:

I see some of them, there's one or two that really want to be like the guys, I mean the whole macho image, just a few. But most, I think, maintain their femininity. We know we're women and are quite proud of it.

Some women feel pressure to conform by accepting and assuming the language and culture of the jail:

Well, when I went in there, I learnt from my family that you do not swear. I was never allowed to swear in my family. When I worked in the prison every second word almost (was swearing). They'd laugh at me if I didn't
swear. So after a while, I couldn’t say anything and the second word was f this and f that. (Correctional officer)

The risk associated with the job means that correctional officers must rely on the strength of the group in times of danger. Guards identify with other guards. There is tremendous pressure for members to be loyal to their respective groups. Guards are a group opposed to another group, the inmates. In a crunch, this overshadows all other considerations. Both inmates and guards protect themselves by not alienating their group, by emphasizing similarities and by disregarding dissimilarities. A respondent explained:

Because feminist or not, I’m also a pragmatic feminist. Basically it came down to, I didn’t always like them; I certainly didn’t agree with a lot of their opinions, but the bottom line was I knew that if I was in danger, those guys would come rolling through the door. I knew they would do it because that’s their job. And I respected them for that. And so what I did was I found what I could like in them, and let the rest go.

Lastly, women deal with the environment through some form of withdrawal. This may mean taking stress leave. It may mean becoming apathetic or emotionally detached. It may mean refraining from unnecessary social contact with colleagues. It may mean trying to work graveyard shifts when fewer guards and bosses are around. It may mean quitting and thereby totally abandoning the stressful circumstances of the job.

Prisons have a notoriously high absenteeism rate. Boredom, the potential for violence, and conflicts with supervisors contribute to the stress. Several correctional
officers mentioned difficulties with stress and stress leave problems. There is a feeling among some women that management "hates stress leave and that’s it. You’re blackballed." Correctional officers do not feel that stress is seen by management as a legitimate reason for absenteeism. The needs of the correctional officer conflict with the bureaucratic need to cover shifts. Stress leave is expensive. It also indicates a lack of stability. An admission of being "stressed" conflicts with the macho image of being able to "handle" anything. Female correctional officers are perceived to be emotionally weak by male officers and if they are suffering from stress it confirms that they "can't take" the stress of the job. Part of the "male" stereotype is that one does not express emotion, suppresses worry or insecurities. Men may be loathe to suggest they are having work related difficulties. However, if problems are not resolved through a leave, counselling, or some other means, the stress finds other outlets. A correctional officer explained her own story:

Those are the ones that go out after work and get drunk and then go home and thump the hell out of their wives. That is how my relationship broke up, because that is exactly how my boyfriend (a guard in the jail) dealt with stress.

A woman reported an incident that she described as having gender overtones: she was treated in a heavy handed manner in part because she was a woman. She ultimately was so stressed by the situation that she took rather drastic measures which might be understood as an extreme form of withdrawal:

I thought "Forget it, I'm just going to quit, I've had enough of this bullshit." And I wasn’t thinking clearly.
I was just stressed out. I was very naive in the politics of the job. Aside from the original stress, there's this added stress and then my own personal self esteem and worrying "Oh, my God, they're not going to think I'm a good worker anymore." And those insecurities started popping up and everything blew out of proportion. I became suicidal to the point where I attempted to take my life three times. I went into the hospital and it just went on and on and it was all because I was stressed out. (Correctional Officer)

There is, additionally, another means of withdrawal. Guards are able to withdraw through apathy. The officer gradually loses interest and motivation and puts in minimal effort. Security becomes lax. The officer becomes more cynical and increasingly tardy in handling the tasks of the job, just putting in time to collect a paycheck. Apathy adds to the already negative and de-moralized atmosphere of the jail. Absenteeism increases and if the job becomes too unbearable, the guard may quit. Several of the correctional officers I interviewed described frequent thoughts of leaving the job. Prisons have a high turnover rate.

Lastly, fully a third of the women correctional officers I interviewed reported that they have little superfluous interaction with anyone, neither male or female, from the workplace. Some correctional officers even avoid the coffee room. They become socially detached from the group. This self-isolation is often a conscious attempt to avoid harassment and other hostile social encounters:

I don't get into a lot of chit chat with the staff. (Correctional officer)

I don't really get involved. I don't really talk to very many people. I don't get involved at all and sometimes
I don’t even go downstairs anymore. I just don’t bother, I don’t need the hassle. (Correctional Officer)

There are some that you don’t sit in the office with at all. You stay on your unit with the inmates. It’s probably safer there (with the inmates), too. I guess when I say I felt safer with the inmates than the guards, it’s that you knew the hassles you’d get. With the guards you didn’t know which way they were going to come on. Like some of them would come on like they’re talking all this romantic stuff, I wouldn’t call it romantic, but pretty gross things. They’d always come out with their nice little comments about what they would like to do with you if they ever got the chance. And you know, in two seconds they’ll be bad mouthing you. (Correctional officer)

In this chapter I have discussed some of the ways in which women cope with the contradictions of being a woman working as a guard in men’s prisons. Women establish supportive relationships with at least some of their male peers. They accept what seems inevitable and normal—sexual harassment, discrimination and "negativity". They accept the culture of the jail. Lastly, female guards withdraw in some form. They may take stress leave or refrain from social contact. They may become apathetic. They may quit.
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

The questions I attempted to answer in this thesis include: How and why have women come to work in such a highly male-dominated job? Did they consider the male-dominated nature of the job before accepting it? Are female guards different in any identifiable way from other women who work in the jail, for instance do they have differing life and work experiences? Do female guards encounter difficulties that male guards do not? What are the sources of solidarity and differences women perceive between themselves and their male peers? Do female guards face the same problems as other women such as sexual harassment? What form does harassment take? If female guards are indeed harassed, do they complain about it, and if not, why not? In what ways does the fact that the work place is a jail complicate problems like sexual harassment? How do women cope with a hostile male environment?

The introduction of women as guards in "men's" jails took place at a time when jails were under external pressure for reform. The time period coincided with pressure from the women's movement for equal opportunities for women in all fields of employment. This answers the broad question of how and why women became guards in "men's" jails.

In order to understand why and how individual women come to the job of correctional officers, I compared female correctional officers to clerks, nurses, and librarians who work in the same jail. Women become correctional officers for the same reasons that men do. They are attracted by wages, job security and benefits.
They did not actively seek the job but often discovered it by chance. This finding is opposite to the view of local managers in the jail, but consistent with other research about male correctional officers (Jacobs, 1981; Webb and Morris, 1978; Ross, 1981; Crouch and Marquart, 1980; Jacobs and Retsky, 1980, Lombardo, 1981), female guards (Zimmer, 1986) and female police officers (Martin, 1980). This finding suggests the differences between the perceptions of management and female guards in the jail.

I found female correctional officers to be younger and better educated than clerks. Correctional officers were more likely than clerks, nurses and librarians to have previous experience working in "men's" jobs. Zimmer's respondents tended to have previous prison experience (1986:41). The guards I interviewed did not. Indeed, they were less likely to have even been inside a prison for any reason than nurses, clerks and librarians. The female guards I interviewed considered neither the male-dominated nature of the job nor popular images of jails in consideration of the job.

One striking difference between the female correctional officers and other women working in the jail was that correctional officers tended to present themselves as more introspective in interviews than clerks, nurses and librarians. They were much more likely to give unsolicited reports of past life experiences which were unfavourable in some way. These backgrounds included child sexual abuse, alcoholic parents and various teenage rebellions. This finding supports Bass and Davis' (1988) suggestion that survivors of abuse and dysfunctional families are drawn to, and survive in, exceptionally crisis-prone jobs.
Women working as guards in men's prisons find themselves in a confusing position. They are treated as both different and inferior, yet they are sympathetic to their male peers. Female correctional officers have much in common with their male peers. They accept the job for the same reasons as men. Like male guards, female guards experience an occupational culture characterized by conflict. They describe an atmosphere characterized by boredom, a sense of isolation, a potential for violence, and a huge impersonal bureaucracy. Management is distant, preoccupied with paper work and policy. These rather negative aspects of the work environment increase solidarity among guards.

My study confirms the results of other studies (Jacobs and Retsky, 1980; Ekstedt and Griffiths, 1988; Crouch and Marquart, 1980; Lombardo, 1981; Webb and Morris, 1978; Ross, 1981) about guards: they are frustrated with management and the "politics" of the job. My study is different in that these other studies, with the exception of Jurik and Halemba (1984) and Zimmer (1986) which were primarily about male guards, while mine was about female guards.

My study supports Kanter's view (1976:416) that women at the bottom of organizational hierarchies share the frustrations of men in similar situations and develop sympathetic relationships with their peers.

Despite the comradeship and common problems with co-workers, female guards face additional and complex difficulties not faced by male officers. Like other women in male-dominated jobs, they experience paternalism, tokenism and harassment (Kanter, 1977; Zimmer, 1986; Jamieson, Beals, Lalonde and Associates, 1990; Martin, 1980; Lunneborg, 1990; Williams, 1989). Personal and sexual
harassment are persistent and become normalized and accepted by both men and women. As in other studies (Peterson, 1982; Zimmer, 1986; Fry and Glaser, 1987; Jurik and Halemba, 1984), my respondents reported that inmates tend to be more supportive of female guards than some male peers. From the onset, female guards are assumed to be different than male guards. Colleagues doubt they can handle all aspects of the work. While the cost of being a guard are high, the costs of being a female guard are higher.

Some female guards adapt to their circumstances by gaining respect and acceptance. I found that many women experience supportive personal encounters with male peers which establish their legitimacy and acceptance. Most women, however, also adapt to the job by simply accepting what might otherwise be unacceptable. They tolerate boorish language, harassment, and tokenism in part because they do not feel they have a choice. Sexual harassment happens so often and provokes so little response that it becomes normalized, a natural and inevitable cost of working in the jail.

Lastly, some female guards cope with the job by withdrawing or disengaging in some way. This might be by avoiding co-workers, by becoming apathetic or ultimately by quitting, and thereby reinforcing the notion that women cannot perform the job.

Whatever the means of adapting to the job, it is clear that the onus is on women to adapt. Female guards pay a high price for working in a jail. They must adapt to the environment without complaint, or leave, tolerating inequality and opposition.
The primary aim of this research has been to advance our understanding of why women choose to become correctional officers and the consequences of that choice. The following recommendations emerge from that understanding:

1) There is a need for training in the jail system. Managers and guards need to be sensitized to the problems of women working as guards. Those in positions of power, usually men, do not share the experiences and perspectives of women. They are, perhaps, not even aware of the burdens on women working in the jail. If they can come to understand the reasons why women do not complain about their circumstances this could be an important first step in taking the burdens off of individual women.

2) The jail should be diligent in screening for, and eliminating, job candidates who are unable or unwilling to develop relationships built upon mutual respect with female colleagues.

3) Policy should prohibit both personal and sexual harassment. This recommendation is in line with recent policy changes at other major institutions (Douglas College, University of Victoria) and more accurately reflects the reality of workers in the jail.

4) Mechanisms for complaint about personal and sexual harassment should exist outside the paramilitary chain of command. There is an over-all lack of trust in the established management.

5) Victims of harassment should be given confidential, empathetic, and practical support.
6) A harasser should face real, significant consequences, up to and including, dismissal.

7) Managers should develop mechanisms for listening to, and responding to, workers concerns. The frustrations and anger expressed by my respondents suggest a high degree of dissatisfaction with the job. The jail might be advised to adopt a more participatory form of management with increased worker input and decision making power.

8) Managers should seek ways of recognizing individual contributions of employees. Many of the women I interviewed expressed concerns about not receiving recognition for their contribution to the jail.

If these recommendations were acted upon, female correctional officers would encounter a more positive and less stressful work environment. Trends in women's employment suggest that women will continue to work as prison guards. Putting the burden solely on women to adapt to the jail environment is unfair, unlawful and counterproductive. A negative, conflict-ridden work environment results in a high turn-over rate and absenteeism. In a jail, it increases the potential for guards to pass on frustrations to inmates and for lax security as a result of apathy.


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