

Introduction: Gender and Prison History

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Perhaps uniquely among social institutions, modern debates over the meanings, effects and purposes of the prison are fundamentally shaped by our understandings of its history. It is the rare essay or monograph that does not begin its discussion of the modern prison by placing it in the historical context of its predecessors. Indeed, arguably the most important treatment of social control written during the last half of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, explains the emergence of our contemporary 'carceral society' entirely in terms of the development of modes of surveillance and institutional control in eighteenth century workhouses, military barracks, schools and prisons. Foucault's perspective has become so integral to debates among scholars of the prison that, as Adrian Howe notes with only slight exaggeration, critics "do not step out today to discuss the penal question without being able to cite *Discipline and Punish* at will" (1994: 2). In addition to Foucault's work, the last thirty years have seen the growth of an impressive volume of scholarship on the prison (which Howe and others have labeled the "new penology"), almost all of which has drawn to some degree on a critical historical perspective (see, for example, Garland 1990; Hirsch 1992; Ignatieff 1978; Melossi and Pavarini 1981; Rothman 1990). However, while issues of power and control have been very much on the agenda of critics, gender has only rarely captured their interest.

It is accurate to observe, as Howe does, that "the new critical perspectives on punishment are . . . profoundly masculinist" (2), but doing so may hide a curious omission. While much of this scholarship does treat the imprisonment of men, to the exclusion of women, scholars have rarely considered men (or women) as gendered. In most areas of academic scholarship – as in life - women possess gender, men do not. Yet there is ample evidence that the founders of modern prisons had in mind the custody, and later, the rehabilitation, of a particular, and masculine, subject in mind (Britton 2003a). The architect of the men's reformatory movement in the United States, Zebulon Brockway, explicitly claimed that the aim of his disciplinary regime was to turn inmates into "Christian gentlemen" (quoted in Piscotta 1994: 18). Certainly the reliance of early (and modern) prisons on paramilitary command and hierarchy and the emphasis on large scale factory labor imagine the control of a sizable population of masculine subjects.

Mark Kann (chapter one) is one of the very few authors to consider the influence of notions about masculinity on the early architects of the modern prison. Kann notes that the very rationale for the building of the new “penitentiaries” lay in the republican idea of men as free, rational subjects. The ideal penitentiary inmate was one whose reason could be shaped by enforced solitude and reflection, and whose love of unfettered liberty would make the denial of freedom a punishment to be feared above all others. The grand hope of the penitentiary was to return such men, now reformed sinners, to their communities as equal and law-abiding citizens. As Kann notes, this construction of the penitentiary subject made such a punishment irrelevant for slaves, who had no freedom to lose, and for free Black men, whose masculinity reformers never envisioned encompassing rationality and sober self-control. In a similar fashion, as Anne Butler aptly questions, since during the dawning of the penitentiary era women were denied the rights of citizenship, “what rights would women inmates prepare to resume?” (1997: 135). The result, according to Kann, was a two tiered criminal justice system, in which white men enjoyed the relative beneficence of the penitentiary regime, and Black men continued to suffer the harsher physical punishments that had preceded it. Angela Davis’s piece (chapter two) extends this line of analysis from the historical treatment of black male bodies into the present, arguing that prison conditions have become even more punitive in the modern era because the presumed subject of punishment is always, symbolically, the Black male body.

Considerably more recent scholarship has focused on the historical role of women in masculinized institutions of incarceration (e.g., Butler 1997; Dodge 2002; Rafter 1990). One of the best examples is Mara Dodge’s work (chapter three, see also Dodge 2002) on women in Illinois prisons during the nineteenth century. Dodge’s piece is a particularly good example of moving beyond the “add women and stir” approach to feminist scholarship. In addition to documenting the experiences of the few women in the system, Dodge demonstrates the deeply gendered nature of punishment regimes themselves, evidenced by administrators’ plaintive protest that one woman inmate was “more trouble than twenty males.” Dodge details the disruptions supposedly caused by women’s mere presence in men’s prisons, which a prison physician held to be the chief precursor of masculine masturbatory insanity. Her work also underlines the gendering of women’s labor – which was confined largely to sewing and mending, and exposes the racialization of women’s incarceration by documenting the harsher sentencing and discipline meted out to newly freed Black women in the aftermath of the Civil War.

As other observers have noted (e.g., Freedman 1981, 1996), the women’s reformatory movement transformed prevailing notions about women offenders. Previously viewed by prison officials and the public as much worse than men, reformatory advocates, who were primarily white women of the privileged classes, began to argue during the mid

nineteenth century that women were, in fact, more capable of reform and hence required a different, more “feminine” kind of treatment. Women’s reformatories sought to return their charges to acceptable domesticity through training in household chores and “mothercraft.” Hunt et al. (chapter four) document the paradoxical result. Though their analysis focuses on a particular historical case, their point is generalizable to the period. Women’s perceived greater malleability made them particularly vulnerable targets for institutional regimes of “care” and “reformation.” The upshot was a discipline that aimed for a much deeper transformation of its charges – targeting the soul, rather than the body, in Foucault’s terms. Whether it succeeded or not, the appearance of these ideas mark the beginning of an era in which “rational” men were to be deterred through the use of rigid, determinate sentencing schemes and women convicted of the same offenses held for longer periods in more “feminine” reformatory surroundings so that they might be retrained as respectable wives, mothers, and servants. In this case, as is so often true in the modern context, the appearance of leniency in the institutional treatment of women hides deeper and more punitive gendered processes (Carlen 1983).

Critical scholarship on the prison has often taken a top-down approach, emphasizing the imperatives and techniques of control. Yet Foucault in particular and other critical scholars also clearly aim to encourage resistance to the prison and its regimes. Prison disturbances and uprisings are, in this context, often framed by scholars as heroic attempts to resist control and injustice, to break the grip of discipline. Almost without exception, however, these are struggles among men. This is true of cultural mythologies as well. One need only think, for example, of the dozens of cinematic representations of the noble and ill-treated male prisoner and his struggles against sadistic prison guards and wardens. The historical record tells us – as do the stories our cultures spin – that women in prison have rarely engaged in this kind of collective resistance. This raises the fundamental question of agency, which is at the center of Bronwyn Dalley’s (chapter five) historical account of women’s experiences in New Zealand prisons. Dalley traces women’s compliance both to the structural conditions of their incarceration and to gendered norms that mitigated women’s collective resistance. Dalley argues for a view of women as agentic subjects, as actors who used both compliance and the prison itself for their own ends. In doing so, her piece provides an important corrective to the masculinist narrative of the compliant woman prisoner and the heroic male prison resister.

As with most sex-segregated total institutions, prisons are in the paradoxical position of both prohibiting and facilitating same-sex sexual activity. Though not often read as such, the flourishing of sexual subcultures in men’s and women’s prisons may in fact exemplify one of the most enduring forms of resistance to prison discipline. Regina Kunzel’s essay (chapter six) takes on the treatment of prison sexuality by twentieth

century popular and academic writers. Her implicit focus on gender demonstrates the ways that gender and identity have been conflated in our understandings of prison sexuality. In men's prisons, now as during the early part of this century, feminized "punks" are those who serve the needs of real, masculine men, and in women's prisons the predatory, masculinized "butch" still lies in wait for unsuspecting, and otherwise heterosexual, femmes. The strength of this piece is that Kunzel succeeds in doing what few others have done in building a bridge between prison studies and critical theorizing on sexuality and gender. In fact, Kunzel argues that the very existence of the prison "situational homosexual" could teach us much that would undermine rigid and essentialist notions of sexual identity.

Penal philosophies in the United States have come full circle during the last two hundred years. The punishment and profit orientation of early prisons, though eclipsed for a time by the rehabilitative philosophies, if not results, of penitentiaries and reformatories, have returned with a vengeance. Davis' discussion (chapter two) of the new, "supermax" prisons clearly underlines this shift in approach. Prisoners are once more rational actors to be warehoused, exploited for their labor, and deterred by punishment. This is now the standard historical arc in scholarship on prison history, and again, these studies have focused almost exclusively on men's institutions. The work of Rosemary Gartner and Candace Kruttschnitt (chapter seven) is an important exception, as they pose the question of whether the conditions of women's incarceration follow this trajectory. While they find some evidence of change, on balance, they show that gendered assumptions about women continue to mark them as irrational actors, and that they shape the conditions of women's incarceration regardless of the period. The notion that women are "disabled and deficient" means that they still require special handling.

Gender, the state and regimes of control

The study of prisons is necessarily the study of the state. As the legitimate arm of internal coercion, the disciplines and strategies employed in prisons can tell us much about the officially mandated construction of the ideal citizen (as in Mark Kann's piece in this volume, see also Pisciotta 1994) and also reveal much about the gender regimes that inform state control. Kelly Hannah-Moffat's article (chapter eight) begins where Gartner and Kruttschnitt leave off, with the enactment of state policies intended to address women's "special needs" in Canadian prisons. Beginning from a potentially progressive moment, the establishment of a task force directed to assess issues particular to women's criminality and incarceration, Hannah-Moffat traces the cooptation of purportedly feminist ideals of collective empowerment by state control and gender imperatives. Hannah-Moffat extends David Garland's (1996) notion of a "criminology of the self" by demonstrating how, in the confines of the women's prison, such a notion is distilled into

individual empowerment, and ultimately, the psychological and feminized discourse of “low self esteem.” She also demonstrates how tactics aimed at satisfying the needs of “women as a group” will inevitably fail to serve women in their diversity. Her more general point is perhaps obvious but bears repeating in a neo-liberal age; structural empowerment – and perhaps even individual empowerment – can never be more than oxymorons in a system dedicated to creating a controllable population.

As Hannah-Moffat’s analysis demonstrates, the concept of “empowerment” (and its ever present shadow, the notion of “self esteem”) is currently very much in vogue among government officials and social service agencies in North America. Its polysemic nature has made it useful for public relations - it seems to denote a positive, rather than a punitive strategy – but its connotation of individual responsibility means that it is well suited to strategies of control. In the United States, for example, under the banner of “personal responsibility,” poor single mothers who once received government assistance are now to be “empowered” by strict time limits on assistance and mandatory employment (Hays 2003). Indeed, as Hannah-Moffat also notes, the velvet glove of empowerment policies are always accompanied by an iron fist, a process through which those deemed refractory and ultimately “unempowerable” by authorities can be warehoused and punished. Again, we see the two-tiered system described by Kann (chapter one) and our reading of the history of prisons should allow us to predict with some certainty those who will find their way to such institutions (see, for example, Davis in chapter two), those about whom, as David Garland (1996) puts it, a “criminology of the other” will be written.

One of the problems with analyses like the above, however, is that they tend to envision a unitary state, with a specific and one-dimensional goal of control. Even to the extent that state theorists have allowed that the state may be gendered, they have also often tended to view state actors simply as instruments of the goal of enforcing an idealized gender regime. This is the point of departure for Lynn Haney’s (chapter nine) ethnography of a probation department and a minimum security institution for young girls in California. Haney finds that women officials in both institutions see themselves as standing against a patriarchal state, whether in the private context of attempting to disrupt young girls’ heterosexual relationships or in ending their dependence upon public assistance. Yet another sort of empowerment discourse is in place, one in which officials believe themselves to be consciously working against structural oppression. Her ethnographic approach allows Haney to show, however, that far from cooperating, the girls in both situations ultimately use the system for their own ends, reasserting the primacy and desirability of their relationships and vowing to “stay on welfare forever.” As Hannah-Moffat predicts, officials invariably respond to the girls’ seemingly paradoxical failure to

become empowered by threatening, and in some cases imposing, stricter punishments in more restrictive institutions.

The increasingly punitive processes employed in such institutions are the subject of Jill McCorkel's (chapter ten) ethnography of a "therapeutic community" at "East State," a prison in the United States. McCorkel documents a sort of Foucauldian nightmare prison within a prison, in which women are perpetually reminded that their most insignificant behaviors and even innermost thoughts are subject to the gaze of the unblinking blue eyes posted on every wall. As addicts, these women are beyond the pale of reform, subjects of Garland's "criminology of the other." The great strength of McCorkel's piece, however, lies in her assessment of the relevance of the "new penology" in understanding the kinds of surveillance practiced on women. Mirroring the findings of Gartner and Kruttschnitt (chapter seven), this paper demonstrates that, rather than the anonymous gaze of the panopticon, women continue to be subject to an "embodied surveillance" by counselors and other prisoners themselves, a verifiable and intimately personal form of social control. McCorkel links this to gendered notions that have long framed criminal women as less rational than men and hence more in need of the guidance reserved for children rather than free adult subjects. In fact, as I have noted elsewhere (Britton 1996), the conditions of women's incarceration suggest that the Foucauldian "madman" may actually be a woman.

Though the study of men in prisons has a very long history, the field of prison masculinities is still in its infancy. The sophisticated analyses of gender and the state control of women exemplified by chapters seven, eight, and nine in this volume are simply not yet matched by any corollary treatment of men's incarceration. Carolyn Newton's piece (chapter eleven) is a call for such empirical and theoretical work and a tentative beginning of this project. As with the Kunzel article (chapter six), Newton's work is important in building bridges from what many still see as the relatively exotic world of prison studies to more mainstream theorizing, in this instance, in the sociology of masculinities. Newton takes classic prison ethnographies, e.g., Gresham Sykes' *Society of Captives* (1958) and demonstrates how prisoner hierarchies and cultures reflect those of men in more conventional settings. Conversely, she also applies the general case of masculinity to that of the prison and in the process illuminates many of the extreme forms of dominance and submission we find there there. In a fashion similar to Lynn Haney's work (chapter nine), Newton links gendered control to gendered resistance, arguing that the masculinized regimes of control in men's prisons may in fact be productive of the hypermasculine subcultures and modes of resistance employed by their prisoners.

Carrabine and Longhurst's contribution (chapter twelve) is written in answer to Newton's call. Taking two empirical examples, they detail the multiple masculinities that come into everyday conflict within prison walls. In some instances, the rational, bureaucratic masculinity of prison managers is asserted over the sheer physicality expressed by the sculpted bodies of male prisoners. In others, however, these masculinities may find common ground in the exclusion or diminution of women. This piece is valuable because it opens a window on a dynamic sociology of masculinities, one in which men are not framed as an undifferentiated group with a single set of interests. As the earlier chapters in this section demonstrate, such a focus has already become the norm in the best of the studies of the state control of women. The prison, with its multiple oppositional cultures, directly evokes such a multivocal perspective and perhaps can be accurately understood in no other way.

Gender and work in prison

I have spoken repeatedly in this essay of the necessity of building connections between prison studies and the mainstream of theorizing in gender, race and sexuality, and have already discussed promising efforts in this direction. Studies of gender and work in prison are perhaps at some advantage in this regard, as they constitute a sort of hybrid at the intersection of the sociologies of work, gender, and prison. The theory of gendered organizations, which is just now beginning to inform our more general understandings of gender and social control (see for example chapters nine and ten in this volume) was first introduced in the sociology of occupations and organizations, in the United States primarily by Joan Acker (1990, 1992) and in the UK and Australia by scholars such as Cynthia Cockburn (1983, 1985) and Rosemary Pringle (1989). In simple terms, the idea at the core of the perspective is that organizations themselves presume and reproduce gender through such mechanisms as policies, practices, cultures and assumptions (Britton 2000; Martin and Collinson 2002).

In my piece on the gendered organizational logic of the prison (chapter thirteen), I draw on a case study of work in men's and women's prisons to assess whether Acker's version of the paradigm can help us understand the resistance faced by women officers in men's prisons and the relative success of their male counterparts in women's prisons. In general, I conclude that modern prisons, whether populated by men or women, are masculinized work environments: through policy, they presume male workers in control of exaggeratedly violent male prisoners, marginalize female officers and generally ignore any other kind of institutional environment. Through practices like assignments and promotions, prison officials prioritize skills associated with men, such as their presumed greater ability to deal with physical violence. This is true even in the female-dominated environments of the women's prisons I studied, a fact that perhaps tells us how far we

have traveled from the treatment imperatives of the women's reformatory model. Occupational masculinity in both environments is built on the assertion of a hegemonic model based on physical strength, and it is a masculinity to which all men may then lay claim, regardless of their actual physical abilities.

Much of the research on gender and prison work has been done in the United States, with notable early efforts by Owen (1988), Jurik (1985, 1988), Zimmer (1986) and Pollock-Byrne (1986). Women were not legally allowed to work in men's prisons in the States until the late 1970's, and as of 1995 (the date of the last published U.S. prison census), made up only 19% of all officers in such institutions. As Louise Farnsworth (chapter fourteen) documents, the legal situation is similar in Australia, though at the time of her study women were quite rarely employed in men's institutions. Her work hence provides a detailed account of the resistance women faced during the early stages of their integration into men's facilities, as well as a comparative example from the Australian context. Her findings are remarkably similar, indeed, almost identical to those on American prisons. For these pioneer women officers, the primary obstacles come not from prisoners but from male officers, who resent women's invasion of their occupational space and apparent threat to the notion that masculinity is a job requisite for running a men's prison. Her work also tentatively suggests that policy changes requiring a focus on communication and conflict diffusion may in fact ultimately favor women. In this, she provides an important corrective to some iterations of the gendered organizations perspective that have tended to see organizations as inherently and unalterably masculinized (Britton 2000).

Malcolm Cowburn (chapter fifteen) approaches this issue from a somewhat different perspective, taking on the case of work with sex offenders in men's prisons in England. In many ways the issues he presents, e.g., resistance and harassment of woman officers from male coworkers, extend to the more general case of women's work in prisons. What is unique about this paper is his connection of these issues to work with sex offenders. As feminist scholars have amply documented, violence against women is connected to cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality, among them the notions that women are weak and inferior, that they are little more than objects who should serve men's needs, and that there are some places that "good girls" simply do not belong. The nearly two decades of research on work in men's prisons has documented striking similarities in the core beliefs of the male officer subculture (and a similar case can be made for culture as a whole). Cowburn's point is that any sort of therapeutic effort aimed at changing sex offender behavior in prisons is likely to be undermined by the hypermasculine officer and prisoner subcultures in which these men live. Even privileged men, in this case, the psychologists Cowburn interviews, collude with and benefit from the assertion of this particular form of masculinity, illustrating just the kind

of convergence that Carrabine and Longhurst's work (chapter 12) would lead us to expect.

It is not particularly surprising, I suspect, to learn that men's prisons are gendered organizations, hypermasculine environments in which women workers have found it difficult to find a foothold. The gendered organizations perspective leads us to expect, however, that men *and* women workers benefit in some ways from their participation in masculinized organizations. We know, for example, that pay and benefits are higher in male-dominated, masculine gender-typed occupations, a finding that holds both in North American and European labor markets. Such occupations and the organizations in which they are performed generally offer higher levels of social status and other intangible benefits to their incumbents as well. Thus, we might also predict that workers would prefer them regardless of pay. This is the question that I take on in chapter sixteen. I find that both men and women overwhelmingly prefer work in men's prisons. Their reasons lie in time-honored gender stereotypes about women inmates, e.g. women are irrational, intractable, and simply "messier." As I discuss in more detail elsewhere (Britton 2003) and as other chapters in this volume also underline, women prisoners are symbolically both less and more than men – they fail to measure up in their presumed physical and emotional weakness, but their purported emotionality and embodiment mean that they are more difficult to control. Though officers themselves do not place as much emphasis on them, gendered structural elements of men's and women's prisons also help to explain their preference. The architecture of men's prisons is what officers (and perhaps those in society as a whole) recognize as the shape of a "real prison;" it facilitates control in ways that the reformatory-influenced structures of women's prisons simply do not. Officers also express a strong preference for male supervisors, whom they see as more able to exert control and support the decisions of line staff. In this, they are not much different from workers in the "free world," who express similar preferences for male coworkers and supervisors. The somewhat paradoxical upshot is that, though women have faced significant obstacles in their efforts to integrate men's prisons, they – and their coworkers - prefer them and the benefits that accrue to work in these undeniably masculinized occupational spaces.

Gender and the experience of incarceration

In the final section of this volume I include a number of pieces that look at incarceration from the side of those who experience it most intimately, the women and men serving time in prison. By definition the prison fosters an inherently oppositional culture, an "us against them" climate in which interactions between prisoners and prison staff are severely circumscribed and in which instances of cooperation and alliance, while possible, are always suspect. The previous chapter in this volume suggests that officers

prefer this sort of atmosphere, one in which clear lines – both literal and symbolic – facilitate control. Historically, men’s prisons have been much more likely than women’s prisons to foster such an environment, a fact that certainly figures in officers’ preferences for the latter. Contrary to their assertions that the problems of women’s prisons are due to the nature of women prisoners themselves, however, Kruttschnitt, Gartner, and Miller (chapter seventeen) convincingly demonstrate that the recent trend toward the equalization, and hence masculinization, of women’s prisons may well have produced a women’s prison culture that strikingly emulates its male counterpart. Kruttschnitt, et al. compare the situations of women at the California Institution for Women (CIW), which exhibits many of the features of the women’s reformatory model, with those of the recently opened Valley State Prison (VSP), a facility explicitly designed and run on a male model. They find that inmate relations at the latter are characterized by much higher levels of distrust and that inmate-staff interactions are more distant and hostile than those at CIW. While some differences remain, e.g., women at both prisons rarely segregate themselves by race, on balance they show that masculinized regimes of control produce many of the same results regardless of whether they are enacted on the bodies of men or women.

As chapter eleven (Newton) in this volume suggests, these regimes of control shape a resistance characterized by aggressive masculinity, one in which free world norms that valorize violence and control are enormously amplified. Joe Sim’s (chapter eighteen) article in this volume is yet another call for the integration of the study of masculinities into the realm of prison research, but also sounds a cautionary note for those who would use the tools it provides. Deconstructing unitary notions of men’s prison culture, Sim is careful to underline the variety of masculinities that exist and are fostered across prison contexts. Further, he argues that the discourse around extreme, hypermasculine violence and the “pathological” individuals who perpetuate it hides the “normal,” everyday culture of men’s prisons – and the norms of free world masculinity - that condemn some extreme acts but condone the everyday violence that perpetuates male domination. While extremely violent prison cultures certainly exist, understanding the contexts that foster them may well be one step in decentering the vision that has stood at the heart of research on men’s prisons from their inception.

In the American context, the burden of the incarceration “binge” of the last quarter century has fallen most heavily upon communities of color, and particularly upon African-American men, who now make up about 50 percent of the prison population, a representation four times greater than their share of the American male population. As Davis notes in chapter two of this volume, for most middle class Americans the face of disorder, of the amoral, aggressive, violent criminal, has become that of a young Black man. And indeed in the popular imagination it is these men whose behavior most closely

fits the stereotype of extreme violence and hypermasculinity believed to be at the center of prison culture. M. Nandi (chapter nineteen) asks these most objectified of subjects to speak for themselves about masculinity and incarceration. She finds a conscious construction of an oppositional subjectivity, one in which men associate violence and aggression with “boys,” and responsibility and accountability with manhood. She suggests, in fact, that the deeply oppositional culture of the prison may foster such assessments, as men resist the constructions of masculinity that those in control expect they will display. She argues that such a reconstruction is not without problems, however, particularly in its overemphasis on the controlling image (Collins 2000) of the roles of “strong Black women” in poor communities of color. Even so, these men’s attempts to create an oppositional masculine subjectivity bear closer scrutiny, and reinforce a conception of the prison as a site of conflict for both hegemonic and oppositional masculinities.

As I noted in my discussion of chapter five (Dalley), resistance has often been conceptualized at the level of grand battles or great ruptures in the fabric of social control – in the prison context, observers have often seen resistance only in the form of riots or more minor forms of collective prisoner violence against authorities. As Mary Bosworth (chapter twenty) argues and as earlier selections in this volume confirm, women’s behavior in prison rarely – either historically or today – meets this criterion. As Sim’s and Nandi’s pieces suggest as well, such moments are neither the most common, nor even perhaps the most important, forms of men’s resistance to prison. Bosworth (chapter twenty) and Bosworth and Eamonn Carrabine (chapter twenty-one) build on this theme, arguing for a broader understanding of resistance. They argue that the most important moments for prisoners may lie not in “getting things done” but rather, in “getting things said.” Prisoners resist by questioning the system, by choosing how and when to conform, and by engaging in the give and take upon which order in any total institution is based. Foucault in particular argued that in a modern system in which power is literally all around us, resistance is also necessarily local and often individual. Indeed, if we view them through the lens of this model, women may well be prison resisters *nonpareil*, a fact that could explain why so few officers want to work with them and why prison administrators throughout the history of the prison have found them to be more troublesome than men.

The final piece in this volume looks at the experiences of those who visit prisons rather than those who are held in them. Megan Comfort (chapter twenty-two) focuses on the neglected topic of “secondary prisonization,” the process through which family members are affected by the incarceration of a loved one. This is quite clearly a gendered phenomenon, as it is also racialized and “classed;” the US incarceration binge has hit poor Black and Hispanic families particularly hard, and many women in these

communities face a monumental struggle to keep family ties together. Those who are able do so through visits. In the process of admitting them to the prison, however, Comfort finds that prison policies and staff treat women little better than prisoners themselves, keeping them waiting for long periods without providing any information about why (indeed, officers are behind a locked door, shielded from the long queue of visitors). The humiliation is also gendered, as institutional dress codes for visitors give officers the right to assess and comment on women's "overly revealing" clothing, and hence presumably on their moral character. Visitors may resist but there is little latitude for doing so effectively; rules change frequently and arbitrarily, and visitors can be identified as "security risks" for any reason and barred from entering. Though understanding women's experiences of incarceration tells us quite a lot about gender and prison, an even larger population of women leaves the free world every day and must submit to its gendered regimes of power if they are to maintain contact with their husbands, fathers, sons, and friends. This is an aspect of the intersection of gender and incarceration that we have only begun to explore.

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