

Parallels in the Prison Experiences of Women and Men

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A central argument in the recent social science literature on prisons has been that women's prison experiences must be understood as distinctive and fundamentally different from those of men who are serving time. Scholars supporting this argument have cited differing societal justifications for the incarceration of women and men, differing procedures and programs within correctional institutions, differing forms of inmate social organization, and the differing nature of relationships that female and male inmates maintain with the outside world (Bosworth, 1999b; Owen, 1998; Pollock-Byrne, 1990). While acknowledging the importance of these differences, we disagree with the conclusion that they necessitate separate theories or models of imprisonment for men and women. Our disagreement rests on our analysis of the parallels that exist between the prison experiences of women and those of the first-time, short-term male inmates we have studied.

We are not proposing that research on women's prisons should return to a reliance on the established models of men's imprisonment. Our specific argument here is that the prison experiences of both women and first-time men differ from those depicted in the literature on men's prisons, and that they appear to differ in many of the same ways. The traditional models derive primarily from research that has been conducted at men's institutions and guided by a handful of analytic issues, including deprivations faced by inmates, the nature of the inmate social organization and culture, prison socialization, external factors that affect inmates' adaptations, and the effects of imprisonment on inmates' lives. Like any analytic framework, this set of issues has limited as well as advanced sociological understanding. In particular,

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Research on these issues has tended to depict inmates as the passive recipients of external forces generated in both the outside and the prison worlds. This depiction has increasingly been challenged by researchers working in alternative analytic frameworks, such as those examining the issue of legitimacy (Sparks, Bottoms, and Hay, 1996). In this chapter, we first present a phenomenological model of prison experience developed through our men's study. Then, after describing our research methods for both our women's and our men's studies, we examine three parallels between women's prison experiences and those of first-time male inmates.

A Phenomenological Model of Prison Experience

Our study of first-time male inmates addressed the fundamental question: How do new inmates *experience* prison? It soon became apparent that existing models of prison culture and socialization would be inadequate for our analysis. For example, the traditional concept of "prisonization" (Clemmer, 1958), and the deprivation and importation models that derive from it, begin with the premise that there is a monolithic "prison culture" into which inmates are gradually but inevitably socialized as they progress through their prison careers. Our analysis, however, sought to view inmates' lives experientially rather than as a matter of inevitable organizational stages. We did so by looking at how inmates conceptualized the prison, how they defined the problems presented by their imprisonment, how they responded to these problems, and how they viewed themselves within the prison world. We believe that a similar experiential focus, with emphases on problem solving and identity, has considerable value for the understanding of women's imprisonment.

Our model is based on the processes through which inmates who have no prior direct knowledge of prison come to know the prison world. Because the men we studied were first-time inmates who had been given relatively minor sentences (of two years or less), they were socially marginal vis-à-vis both the outside and the prison worlds. That is, when these men were sentenced to prison, they lost their status as free adults but had not yet achieved any meaningful status in prison. Although they do eventually participate in prison culture, their participation is inhibited by their continuing ties to, and identification with, the outside world. In this respect, their cultural situation is parallel to that of immigrants who expect to return to their country of origin within

a few years' time (see Morawska, 1987; Shokeid, 1988) or who otherwise maintain a "sojourner orientation" (Gibson, 1988). Immigrant sojourners, however, can typically draw on shared symbols or institutions to fortify their transient adaptations to a new culture. New inmates, in contrast, have little in common with one another, and consequently have fewer collective resources to draw upon as they confront problems presented by their sudden immersion into a foreign culture (Schmid and Jones, 1999).

Building on this border-crossing analogy, our analysis centered on how inmates orient themselves to prison and how their orientations change as they progress through their sentences. New inmates, like recent immigrants, think about and try to prepare themselves for the world toward which they are heading. Our first question, therefore, involved an examination of the conceptualizations, or prison images, that inmates bring with them and the subsequent changes in imagery that take place as they acquire prison experience. We expect that their imagery will influence their actions, so we then asked: How do inmates adapt to the prison world, and how do their adaptation strategies change during their prison careers? Finally, because imprisonment constitutes an assault on inmates' identities, we asked: How does the prison experience induce changes in inmates' self-definitions? In contrast to the focus on internal and external determinants of prison adaptation found in much of the contemporary literature, our analysis examined inmates' experiential realities and their orientations to the practical problems of everyday prison life.

Our analysis led to a model of inmates who are actively engaged in social life and social action as interpretive processes. New inmates begin their interpretative work well before their arrival at the prison, by formulating an image of prison life and a rudimentary survival plan based on this imagery. As they enter prison, serve their time, and eventually exit the prison world, their imagery and the corresponding problems presented by their sentences (i.e., their prison orientations) change. And as their prison orientations change, so do their adaptation strategies and the "identity work" they perform in conjunction with these strategies. The key to understanding all of these changes is an appreciation of the continuous and simultaneous influence of both the outside world and the prison world throughout the inmates' prison experiences.

Table 8.1 presents an overview of the model. In this table we characterize inmates' experiences in terms of three broad interpretive phas-

Table 8.1 Orientation and Prison Imagery

Orientation	Preprison	Prison	Postprison
Inmate perspective	Outside looking in	Inside looking in	Inside looking out
Central concerns	Violence/ uncertainty	Boredom	Uncertainty
Specific problems	Survival	Endurance	Reintegration
Orientation to space	Prison as separate world	Prison as familiar territory	Prison as separate world
Orientation to time	Sentence as lost time	Killing time/time as measure of success	Sentence as lost time/using time
Supportive others	Family and friends	Partners	"Real" family and friends
Perception of sentence	Justified and unfortunate	Arbitrary and unjust	Arbitrary and unjust (intensified)
Predominant emotion	Fear	Detachment	Apprehension (about outside)

es, representing their orientations vis-à-vis the prison and the outside worlds. Thus the *preprison orientation*, which inmates initiate before their arrival and modify based on early prison experiences, is essentially a perspective of an outsider looking into the prison. The subsequent *prison orientation* emerges after inmates have acquired months of actual prison experiences and insider understandings. It is an "insider looking in" orientation that focuses on inmates' day-to-day reality in the institution. As we discuss elsewhere (Schmid and Jones, 1990, 1993), inmates' outside orientations are held in abeyance during this interpretive phase, but nonetheless continue to affect their prison adaptations. The *postprison orientation* offers an "insider looking out" perspective. As they prepare for their exit from the prison and anticipate their return to the outside world, inmates gradually move away from their prison orientation toward a "postprison" orientation, in which their outsider perspective is again incorporated more directly into their views of the prison.

So how is this model relevant for the sociological analysis of women's imprisonment? The central theme of our model is that inmates' adaptations and ultimately their identities are simultaneously grounded in, and therefore shaped by, both the outside and the prison

social worlds. Data from our men's study demonstrate that the concurrent influence of these social worlds involves something more than the "importation" of outside values or customs into the prison. Instead, these men experience prison as sojourners, in that they cross a cultural border between the outside world and the prison and then actively interpret and adapt to prison culture, but with the belief that their adaptations are temporary and that they will be returning to their lives in the outside world. The literature on women's prisons has established that correctional policies and programs clearly differ for women and men, and that "prison culture" is demonstrably different in women's and men's institutions. But the idea that the outside world has a continuing influence on inmates' prison experiences is also a prominent theme in this literature (Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Owen, 1998; Bosworth, 1999b), and we believe that this similitude warrants empirical examination and theoretical development.

Methods

We examined parallels in women's and men's prison experiences using data from two of our studies on imprisonment. Our women's study, which employed a variety of research methods, began when one of us participated as a group leader in a parenting-skills course at Midwestern Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW). This class, which was attended by eighteen inmates, met two evenings a week for three months. Following this, permission was granted to conduct a formal study of the prison. Data collected include interviews with thirty-one inmates, and two-hour follow-up interviews with five key informants. Other sources of information include inmates' responses to the Twenty Statements Test (TST) (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975) and observations and informal conversations in various programs and locations within the prison over an eighteen-month period (Jones, 1993).

For the men's study, data were derived principally from ten months of participant observation at a maximum-security prison, also located in the upper midwestern United States. One of us was an inmate serving a felony sentence of one year and a day, while the other participated in the study as an outside researcher. Relying on traditional ethnographic methods, this approach offered us general observations of hundreds of prisoners, extensive fieldnotes based on repeated, often daily, contacts with about fifty inmates, and personal relationships established with a smaller number of inmates. We subsequently returned to the prison to

conduct focused interviews with twenty additional prisoners, identified by prison officials as first-time inmates serving sentences of two years or less (Jones and Schmid, 2000: 183–197).

Experiential Parallels

We focus here on evidence that demonstrates an interplay of outside and prison worlds in three aspects of inmates' experiences: their prison imagery and problem definition, their adaptations to prison culture, and their identity work in prison.

Parallels in Imagery and Problem Definition

For first-time inmates, women or men, the interplay of outside and inside orientations begins before imprisonment, in the interpretive work they perform to prepare themselves for incarceration. Inmates construct an image of prison based on available cultural resources, most notably the often-stereotypical conceptions presented in fictional and journalistic accounts:

Oh, you can watch it on TV . . . the news. They'll come out on the news and say there's a stabbing or a drug-related mishap in [the state] prison. . . . That's the only thing a person's got to go by, is what they watch on TV or what they hear.

The gay women, and these great big, burly women. I got this from TV. You know how TV plays everything up and exaggerates.

The first of these interview excerpts is from our men's study; the second is from our women's study. Our data from both projects include numerous examples of inmates pointing to media bases for their early views of prison. At MCIW, in fact, we found that women often arrive with imagery based on stereotypes of men's prisons:

I thought it was going to be like men's prisons, with bars and things like that. I was really scared of violence, of being confined, and what I would be up against with the other residents.

I was scared because I didn't know what I was walking into—guns, bars, and violence.

These data illustrate how men's prison imagery dominates media depictions but also suggest how this imagery can serve as an interpretive frame for women.

In both studies, we found that inmates supplement media with various secondary sources, including stories from more experienced prisoners in county jails, information from others, and inmates' own prior experiences with the criminal justice system. In the following excerpt, a new male inmate describes his impression of maximum-security inmates, based on conversations with jail cellmates while he was awaiting transfer to prison:

It made me fearful because of the type of people I was talking to. I felt, oh my god, is this the type of person, with this intellectual level, I am going to be dealing with for I don't know how long? I knew I was capable of probably handling it, mentally, but I know it's a great big mental adjustment because you don't know to what extent that people are going to fly off the lid, that they are mentally stable or how much importance that male ego or machoism or whatever—that's a real big thing to them.

A comparable "outsider looking in" orientation is evident in the expectations of women anticipating their sentences at MCIW:

I was scared to death. I was told to watch out for the women, that I was going to get attacked in the showers, and to watch out for the rapes, cockroaches, and stuff like that. It kind of made me sick. You hear so much about gays that I was afraid that they would get you in the corner and rape you.

Similar expectations, crafted from similar cultural resources, are reported by Owen (1998) in her ethnography of the Central California Women's Facility. For men and women, the process of preparing for an initial prison sentence begins with the "cognitive work" of building a mental image of the prison they are about to enter.

As inmates assemble a picture of prison life and imaginatively project themselves into it, their imagery incorporates a mixture of public stereotypes and their own fears. The preprison imagery of male inmates is dominated by the themes of uncertainty and violence, including sexual violence, and the specific problems they focus on are those of physical survival. For women, initial images are also dominated by an "institutional uncertainty" (Galtung, 1961) about what will happen to them,

including concerns about prison sexuality. Although fear of violence is not universally present in women's imagery, it is a theme that nonetheless appears regularly in our data:

I was scared at first. I didn't know what to think about this place. You know . . . what kind of people were here or how they were going to act toward somebody. You know, because there was a riot up at [a maximum-security prison for men]. I thought, "God, what if that happens here and somebody ends up getting killed."

Whether or not women fear violence, they do express concern over the "kind of people" who are in prison and the problem of not being able to trust other inmates:

Realizing the people that I was going to be in here with, you know, murderers and people like that—I've never been around violent people before. Being around people you can't trust—you know, they're young and temperamental; you never know what's going to happen. They are like a live fuse waiting to go off.

Women are just different. For instance, men will fight at the drop of a hat, whereas a woman will try to turn and get others involved in it and say stuff behind people's back. They will not come out with it to your face. You know, women like to gossip a lot, and in doing so, they're out to see people hurt.

Distrust of other inmates, which is commonly noted in research on women's imprisonment (see Bosworth, 1999b; Owen, 1998; Greer, 2002), is equally prominent in the data from our men's study:

I thought the inmates would be—like you wouldn't be able to talk to them. It was hard time they were doing here—and I thought you wouldn't be able to talk to them. If you said something to them, I thought they would try to hurt you.

I thought they'd be more or less like, you know, the animals that you run into on the street—and ghetto types and that type of thing—rather rough, trying to beat you out of something continually.

For both women and first-time male inmates, then, surviving prison is fundamentally viewed as a problem of dealing with an untrustworthy inmate population.

As with the men we studied, women's earliest prison experiences tend, on balance, to reinforce their fears. All MCIW inmates begin their sentences at a separate reception center, which, with its bars, cells, and isolation procedures, approximates outsiders' imagery of what a prison should look like. And even though MCIW's campuslike architecture contrasts with this image, the majority of inmates (54 percent) report being very frightened at the time of their arrival. An even greater majority (72 percent) find institutional reception activities to be humiliating, as illustrated by the following statements:

To have someone tell you to bend over and spread your cheeks is the most degrading thing that you could ever be asked to do. I mean, I've never been raped, but in my mind it is the same thing as rape. I'll never get used to it. You just come to accept it. For some women, they've been invaded all of their lives.

It's horrible, degrading; it makes you feel like you are nothing, just trash. You're treated like garbage. I really hated it. It strips you of all your dignity.

I felt bummed by being numbered. I don't like people considering me like a number instead of a human being. You're this certain number, and it makes me feel like nobody.

Compare these statements with those of first-time male inmates:

They took me to the security center—took me downstairs. . . . Before they took me into there, the goon squad undressed me. They were nasty. . . . They told me to take my clothes off, and they looked up my ass with a proctoscope, thinking that I had drugs on me. They were a little bit disappointed; they didn't find anything. Went through me quite thoroughly, as a matter of fact.

They brought me into a room and strip-searched me. One guard commented on how pretty I was, and suggested I grow a beard, while the other guard said I didn't have to worry because of my size. Needless to say, I didn't really need to hear that conversation.

In both prisons, in-processing procedures mark inmates' passage into the "other world" of the prison. And in both institutions, the emotional effect is the same: these activities dramatically heighten inmates' feelings of vulnerability and challenge their outside identities.

Our data suggest that men and women respond to their vulnerability in similar ways. All of the men and a majority of the women we talked with believe that they had to present themselves differently in prison, by "appearing tough" and by becoming more reserved in their interactions with others:

When people see weakness they take advantage of that. I have to protect myself. I can't let anyone think I'm weak. I can't cry. Anger is violence and tears is fears.

Kindness is a considerable weakness in here. As far as being friendly to any one person—it's a lot, lot harder to do in here than it is outside. You'll get taken advantage of. You have to work with what you have. . . . I kinda tried to present that I'm not to be led around by the nose. . . . I like to watch people. I'll watch people's eyes when they ain't watching me—but I don't look into people's eyes very much.

I had to be more assertive, follow rules and keep calm. You don't have to be tough, but you get respect for standing up for yourself.

Well, I learned that you can't act like—you can't get the attitude where you are better than they are. Even where you might be better than them, you can't strut around like you are. Basically, you can't stick out. You don't stare at people and things like that. I knew a lot of these things from talking to people, and I figured them out by myself. I sat down and figured out just what kind of attitude I'm going to have to take.

You can't mouth them back [i.e., other inmates]. You don't dare say anything back to them.

In this sampling of interview excerpts, men's and women's statements are indistinguishable. (The first, third, and fifth quotes are from women, the second and fourth from men.) Although women ultimately adapt to prison in different ways, their initial responses to imprisonment—grounded in an outsider's experiential orientation and based on similar prison imagery constructed from similar cultural resources—are directly parallel to those of the male inmates we studied.

As the women at MCIW get further into their sentences, their prison images and adaptive responses become increasingly dissimilar

from those of men. Even so, the process through which their imagery changes is fundamentally the same: they receive conflicting accounts from official and unofficial sources; they remain distrustful of fellow inmates generally but find ways of interacting with some of them; with the help of these inmates they actively interpret the conflicting information presented to them, refashioning their understanding of prison and their responses to it. As part of this interpretive process, inmates learn about and take into account the social organization and culture of the prison (or, more accurately, representations of this social organization and culture as presented to them by others). The outcomes of this interpretive process differ for women and men because, as is well established in the literature (see, for example, Owen, 1998; Pollock-Byrne, 1990; Mawby, 1982; Heffernan, 1972), the social organizations of men's and women's prisons are in fact quite dissimilar.

As inmates come to accept an "insider's" orientation toward prison, the problems presented by their imprisonment become more clearly defined. For men, problems of physical survival remain the primary focus for several months and then gradually become secondary to problems of enduring an unchanging daily routine. For women, the fear of violence recedes rapidly, as do many aspects of their institutional uncertainty, but not their distrust of other inmates. In general, women come to see the problems of imprisonment as isolation from their family and friends, a dispossession of outside family roles (see Ward and Kassebaum, 1965; McGowan and Blumenthal, 1976; Owen, 1998), and frustration with rules and procedures that treat them like children:

For instance, the petty rules. I thought prison was going to be that you're locked up and it's enough to be locked up, and they put you in your cell and you do what you want in there. But they can put you in your cell here, and you still can't do what you want. They've got control of every little personal thing that you do, which is really hard to accept.

Parallels in Adaptation

All inmates, regardless of sex, length of sentence, or prior prison experience, must somehow accommodate themselves to the social organization and culture of the prison. This is true even for short-term inmates, particularly during the middle of their sentences, when they are temporally furthest from the outside world. Meisenhelder (1985) has argued that (long-term) imprisonment affects the experience of temporality by

removing inmates from any meaningful connection with outside events, thereby promoting a "present time" orientation. But even short-term inmates are encouraged to adopt a present time orientation, by the "do your own time" norms that have been documented in both men's and women's prisons (see Owen, 1998; Jones and Schmid, 2000) and by a reciprocal control of information that evolves between inmates and their visitors or correspondents. That is, after emotion-provoking contacts in the early weeks of their sentences, communication between inmates and outsiders becomes constricted over time, as inmates seek to reassure outsiders by withholding their fears or negative experiences and outsiders try to shield inmates from news that might upset them. We documented this process in our men's study (Jones and Schmid, 2000: 95-97) and we found it to be equally present in our data from the women at MCIW. In concert with their "present time" focus, inmates also find it necessary to situate themselves in, and accommodate themselves to, the social organization of the prison.

When we examine the interplay of outside and prison world orientations on inmates' overall adaptations to prison culture, then, the principal question of interest is: How do inmates manage an orientation toward the outside world during the middle of their sentences, when they are also likely to adopt an insider's perspective on prison life? Our data suggest that men and women establish different strategies as they accommodate themselves to differing forms of prison social organization, but that they do so in ways that are nonetheless experientially parallel, and in keeping with a sojourner's approach to prison culture.

The men we studied were able to retain some level of outside orientation because of the sociological ambivalence that remained present throughout their sentences (Schmid and Jones, 1993). Their ambivalence allowed them to negotiate a minimal level of participation in the prison world while at the same time inhibiting full participation. Specifically, these men were able to create a strategy that let them move about the prison, interacting with a variety of other inmates and participating in a variety of activities, while nonetheless maintaining existential distance from the prison world. This strategy reduced their institutional uncertainty because it enabled them to learn the social organization of the prison, including racial and other subdivisions, the distinction between inmates and more experienced "convicts," and the central ideas of the "inmate code." Elements of their strategy included consciously developed impression management skills, normative guidelines for exploring prison territory and selectively interacting with others, a tentative acceptance of experienced inmates' "do your own time"

practices (including cognitive minimization of the importance of outside contacts and efforts to suppress thoughts about the outside), and participation in legal and illegal diversionary activities to combat boredom. Their most important adaptive tactic, however, because it was directly connected to all of their other tactics, was participation in a prison "partnership."

A partnership is a friendship with one other inmate, usually another first-time inmate. The relationship typically begins as one of a small number of tentative acquaintanceships, based on common backgrounds or interests, that develop during the initial weeks of an inmate's sentence. This relationship is strengthened through the inmates' mutual exploration of a prison world viewed as hostile, and is further reinforced by its acknowledgment by other inmates and staff.

The most important function of a partnership is to help both inmates "make sense" out of prison life. Partners explore institutional territory together, compare their prior expectations about prison, and exchange information and advice about prison norms, inmate groups, the prison economy and other aspects of the prison world. This mutual interpretation of prison culture directly addresses new inmates' overriding concerns during the early months of their sentences, in that it reduces their uncertainty about the prison and provides them with some protection from the inmate population they fear.

As inmates progress through their sentences, their partnerships contribute to their prison adaptations in additional ways. Above all else, an inmate's partner is someone with whom he can share his prison experience, on both a material level (e.g., by sharing food and other canteen items) and an emotional level (e.g., exchanging news from home, advice, and personal thoughts). Partnerships frequently take on an advocacy function, so that one partner will intercede with officials or other inmates when necessary. As partnerships strengthen over time, they also affect inmates' identity work, a point we return to below.

Previous studies on the culture of women's prisons have established that women experience many of the same deprivations of incarceration as do men, but that they develop substantially different social structures. In particular, women tend to organize into relatively enduring primary relationships, often involving both dyadic homosexual attachments and extensive "fictive families." The specific forms of these relationships vary considerably from study to study—and presumably from institution to institution (see Heffernan, 1972; LeShanna, 1969; Leger, 1987; MacKenzie, Robinson, and Campbell, 1989; Mawby, 1982; Moyer, 1980; Van Wormer, 1987). Similarly, the kinship terms

used to describe familylike relationships also vary by institution and study (Selling, 1931; Foster, 1975; Ball, 1972; Brown, 1977). At MCIW, most women participate in one of three types of relationships: the "quasi-family," the "couple," or the "rap partner."

"Quasi-family" is a term we have used to describe a common form of primary relationship between an experienced inmate (a "mom") and anywhere from one to fifteen other inmates ("kids"). While many inmates believe these groupings are essentially like outside families, others believe the term is somewhat misleading, and that the "mom" role is really that of a counselor or adviser. There are usually two mothers in each housing unit; when one leaves, another woman typically takes on the position. There is little competition between the "moms," and "kids" will sometimes seek advice from more than one mom. The most frequently cited reasons for inmates performing the role of "mom" are the respect they receive from other inmates and the opportunity to express their nurturing feelings. Inmates who adopt the "kid" role are generally younger, are less secure at the institution, and often report that they do not have a strong relationship with outside family members. According to inmate estimates, approximately 50 percent of inmates participate in quasi-family relationships.

Both the prison literature and the popular media have emphasized the role of homosexuality in women's prison. Physical and romantic "couple" relationships do exist at MCIW, although inmate estimates of how many women participate in these relationships vary greatly. When the question was asked in terms of a sexual affair during incarceration, estimates ranged from 5 to 100 percent, with an average estimate of approximately 45 percent. The most revealing aspect of these data, however, is that inmates who had served less than three months gave the highest estimates (75 to 100 percent), suggesting that their estimates reflected their outsiders' acceptance of stereotypes, their lack of direct knowledge about the prison, and their own concerns about homosexuality in prison. When the question was phrased in terms of an enduring "couple" relationship, estimates were considerably lower, with 41 percent of the inmates estimating that 5 to 15 percent of the women at MCIW were involved in such relationships.

Inmates who acknowledged participation in couple relationships reported that they were open about their situation and emphasized that their relationships developed out of a voluntary courtship process rather than coercive pressure. Although some women had a difficult time understanding why anyone would become involved in a couple relation-

ship, the majority saw these relationships as fulfilling the same basic needs as quasi-families: emotional involvement, sharing, and providing a sense of belonging and trust. Unlike quasi-families, couple relationships also provide some combination of love, sex, or "romance."

One reason for the widely varying estimates of the number of women involved in couple relationships is that it is difficult to distinguish between couples and another common form of relationship, "rap partners," who are most often defined simply as good friends. The two dyadic relationships are thought to address essentially the same needs, except that rap partners provide "companionship" rather than sexual gratification. As expressed by one inmate:

I think there is a lot less sex going on around here than people think, because if you're in a friendship, some people think you are lovers. It's just having a good buddy. We have a lot of that and there is no sexual business going on. It's just straight up friends. This is the most common type of situation.

Rap partners at MCIW are thus participating in essentially the same kind of relationship as the partnerships of male inmates.

If we focus on the specific behaviors of the men and women we studied, we would conclude that they have adapted to prison in very different ways. If we examine their adaptations in experiential terms, however, it becomes apparent that their differing strategies have accomplished similar results. In both institutions, inmates enter prison with outsiders' stereotypical understandings of the prison world, with the view that their sentences are forcibly removing them from their outside network of family and friends, and with a fearful distrust of the inmate population. In both prisons, inmates form affective relationships that approximate the kind of relationships available to them on the outside and enable them to keep the "general inmate population" at arm's length. All of these relationship forms, moreover, are recognized within the larger prison social organization. Women's relationships are more centrally located, in that quasi-families, couples, and rap partners essentially constitute the prison organization at MCIW and, especially in quasi-families, involve a mixture of new and more experienced inmates. (Although partnership is an acknowledged component of the men's prison organization, the men we studied virtually always formed partnerships with other first-time inmates, an arrangement that reinforced their marginal position within the prison culture.) In both the women's

and men's prisons, then, affective relationships help inmates to learn about prison organization and culture and to reach a limited accommodation with this social system, but also to see themselves as something other than full participants in it. Their affective relationships, in other words, allow them to act as cultural sojourners. Their affective relationships also support forms of identity work that help inmates to remain at least partially oriented toward the outside world throughout their sentences.

Parallels in Identity Work

At the same time that inmates are struggling to adapt to their changing conceptions of the prison, they are also grappling with questions of who they are, in relation to both the prison world and the outside world. Following Schutz's argument (1962) that a person's sense of self while working toward a goal is experienced as his or her total self, inmates' adaptive work and identity work can be seen as different components of a single interpretive process. In the prior section we examined how male and female inmates develop different adaptive strategies to accomplish similar experiential goals—negotiation of the prison world while maintaining some existential distance from it. In this section we examine how their differing forms of identity work accomplish similar results.

The primary difference between the identity work observed in our men's and women's studies follows the differences observed in their adaptations. First-time male inmates are more likely to remain at the fringes of the prison social organization, participating in it only minimally and primarily through their partnerships. Their identity work, consequently, is largely conducted apart from prison culture. Although it is certainly influenced by their partnerships, much of it takes place through private cognitive activity. Women inmates are able to form adaptive relationships that are more centrally connected to the prison social organization, and their identity work is conducted through these relationships.

First-time male inmates are generally aware that their identities are being challenged by their imprisonment, and this awareness affords them some protection against radical identity change. Their identity work begins in self-dialogues they initiate before their arrival at the institution and continue through the early weeks of their imprisonment. In addition to formulating their initial imagery and adaptive tactics,

inmates use self-dialogues to contemplate what their prison sentences mean for their lives. With few exceptions, they report strong feelings of vulnerability, discontinuity, and differentiation from other inmates, emotions that reflect both the degradations of their early institutional experiences and their outsiders' perspective on the prison world. These emotions, in turn, constitute the essential motivation for initial adaptive strategies that emphasize self-insulation.

Inmates soon discover that they cannot remain socially insulated. Beyond their need for firsthand information about prison, their behavior is also influenced by the ambivalence that emanates from their marginality in the prison and outside worlds. Our analysis suggests that inmates are able to express both directions of their ambivalence—and thus remain existentially grounded in both worlds—by drawing a distinction between their "true" identities (i.e., their outside, preprison identities) and the "false" identities they create for the prison world. For most of a new inmate's sentence, his preprison identity remains a "subjective" or "personal" identity while his prison identity serves as his "objective" or "social" basis for interaction in prison (see Weigert, 1986; Goffman, 1963).

As we discuss elsewhere (see Schmid and Jones, 1991; Jones and Schmid, 2000), this conceptual bifurcation of an inmate's self is based on two conscious and interdependent identity-preservation tactics. First, after coming to believe that he cannot "be himself" in prison because he would be too vulnerable, he decides to "suspend" his preprison identity for the duration of his sentence. That is, he resolves not to be changed by his prison experience, protecting himself by choosing not to reveal himself to others. Implicit in this tactic is the belief that he will again "be his old self" after his release. Because this tactic leaves him with little basis for interaction within the prison, his second tactic is the creation of an identity that facilitates cautious interaction with others. This tactic consists of his increasingly sophisticated impression management skills, which are initially designed to hide his vulnerability, but which gradually evolve into an alternative identity felt to be more suitable to the prison world.

A consequence of these tactics is that much of the inmate's identity work is conducted through solitary introspection. There are some exceptions: his limited interactions with family and friends, especially at the beginning of his sentence, are likely to be based on his preprison identity. More significantly, he interacts with his partner in terms of his preprison identity as well as his prison identity. He views most of

his daily contacts with inmates and staff as inauthentic, however, because they are grounded in the false front he has created for the prison world.

Like other cultural sojourners, these men seek to define themselves through their relationship to the world they have recently left behind, and to which they expect to return. Their efforts at self-definition follow a distinctive pattern. In self-dialogues before and just after their arrival at prison, inmates try to assess how they will be affected by their imprisonment and resolve not to be changed by the experience. In the middle of their sentences, they consciously attempt to suppress self-dialogues, in keeping with their present time orientation. During those infrequent times of introspective dialogues that nonetheless occur, inmates continue to think of themselves in terms of their outside identities, but may also experience doubts about their ability to revive their suspended identities. In the final months of their sentences, as inmates shift back to an outsider's perspective, their reemerging self-dialogues include efforts to reconcile their preprison and prison identities. As with their self-dialogues at the beginning of their sentences, their identity work at the end of their imprisonment is a private activity, disconnected from their daily prison activities.

Identity work by women, as documented in our study and as reported in the literature, differs considerably from the men's identity work we have just described. In experiential terms, however, there are two ways in which it is comparable. First, women inmates, particularly at the beginning of their sentences, perform many of the same identity-work activities. Second, women's identity work, like that of first-time male inmates, is simultaneously grounded in both the outside world and the prison world.

We established, in our earlier discussion of inmates' prison images, that women and men often begin their prison sentences in a phenomenological orientation characterized by intense emotions and feelings of vulnerability, a distrust of other inmates, and a belief that it is impossible to "be yourself" in prison. For women as well as men, this orientation is associated with self-reflection and impression management.

As part of our research at MCIW, we asked inmates to complete the Twenty Statements Test, which calls for respondents to give multiple written answers to the self-defining question "Who am I?" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975). We found that few women were able to provide more than four or five responses, an inhibition that is undoubtedly related to their isolation from the social contexts of their outside

identities. The responses they did provide, however, are revealing. The most frequent category of responses, using Zurcher's coding scheme (1977), is the "reflective" mode. Within this category inmates defined themselves in ways that counter public stereotypes of prisoners or criminals—that is, as loving, caring, sensitive, loyal, strong, and intelligent. These responses suggest that inmates are actively engaged in identity work to resist the definitions of their selves implicit in their imprisonment. Our interview data and those of other researchers (see Greer, 2002; Bosworth, 1999b; Owen, 1998; McCorkel, 1998) further document self-reflective activities that are generally parallel to those of first-time inmates in our men's study.

Earlier, we cited data that both men and women respond to their intense emotions at the beginning of their sentences with conscious efforts to hide their vulnerability, by acting reserved or "tough." Similar evidence of impression management is reported by Bosworth (1999b), who notes that women make use of such "masking" for a variety of reasons, including both self-protection and a consideration for others. Greer (2002) has examined the emotional management strategies used by women to project the impression that they are in control of their emotions. In these studies, as in our men's study, inmates' impression management activities are grounded directly in their distrust of other inmates and their beliefs that they cannot "be themselves" in prison.

The women at MCIW also engage in identity work that is quite different from that of inmates in our men's project. One of the most consistent themes in the literature is that women's self-definitions are anchored primarily in their outside, conventional identities rather than in identities associated with their participation in the prison world or in criminal social worlds (Ward and Kassebaum, 1965; Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Owen, 1998; Bosworth, 1999b). Our MCIW data support the finding that women's identities remain embedded in the outside world but further suggest that their outside identities become conjoined with their prison identities.

When we look closer at the TST data, the single most frequent response given by inmates is the self-definition of "mother." As noted earlier, 80 percent of the women we interviewed were mothers. For these women, the conventional identity of "mother" tends to structure the entire prison experience, including the problems presented by imprisonment. The problem most frequently cited by inmates in general is separation from family and friends. The primary problem confronting the inmate-mother is more specific: it is determining what to do with

her children during her incarceration. Most of the inmate-mothers at MCIW reported that they could not count on the father to take care of their children; instead, they relied on parents, siblings, in-laws, cousins, or friends. One-third of these women further reported that their children had to be separated, because they were unable to find someone who could accommodate all of their children.

Our data show that inmates' concerns about their relationship with their children are justified. For example, over 50 percent of these women received no visits from their children during their incarceration. One mother, who had been in prison for over four years, had only one visit from her children during this time. Most mothers, especially those with infants, worried that their children might become too attached to their temporary caretakers. As described by one of the women we interviewed:

I'm real concerned about my daughter, because she was only four months old when I was arrested. And, I found out from my son that she calls my sister Mom and my sister's kids her brother and sister. I'm not really worried about my son, because he was five when I was arrested and he is ready for me to come home right now. So, I told him, you have pictures of me and you show them to her and you tell her that this is her Mom and that I love her very much, and give her a kiss and a hug. He really liked that idea, so I am hoping that he can kind of teach her who I am. But I don't know.

Those who are fortunate to have visits or telephone calls with their children find these contacts to be highly emotional and sometimes painful experiences.

After a visit is the saddest time in prison, very sad. Anticipating the visit is the highest time, and after the visit is the lowest.

It makes you feel good, very close and accepting. But after we hang up, I get an attitude, and that shows me that I miss them and my freedom.

I talked with her on the phone. I wanted to cry, it really hurt, but it felt so good to hear her little voice. She cried as soon as she heard my voice, so I won't call her anymore because of what it puts her through.

Although such contacts may reassure inmate-mothers about their children's welfare, they also emphasize the separation of mothers from their children.

Both the centrality of the mother identity and the problems that imprisonment presents to inmate-mothers are well documented (see Sobel, 1982; Lundberg, Sheekley, and Voelker, 1975; Owen, 1998). An accompanying theme in much of this research, however, is a disjunction that exists between inmates' self-definitions or self-presentations and their actual parenting behaviors. There are indications of this among the women at MCIW, in that only 68 percent of the inmate-mothers were living with their children prior to their incarceration. What accounts for this disparity between expressed identity and behavior? Bosworth (1999b) provides an intriguing answer to this question in her analysis of identity—including idealized identities of femininity and motherhood—as a form of resistance to the restrictions of imprisonment. Our research supports this hypothesis, and further suggests that inmates' identity work relies heavily on the idea of "motherhood" not only in terms of its outside meanings but in terms of its meaning within the prison world as well.

Inmates at MCIW make frequent use of mother-and-child concepts as part of their prison imagery and adaptation strategies. The most notable are found in the quasi-family relationships that we have already described. Our data suggest that the mother identity in these quasi-families, as viewed by both "moms" and "kids," constitutes an idealized version of the motherhood role. The following descriptions of the "mom" role are all from "kids" in a quasi-family:

They are usually older and have longer sentences, and they have more of the real-life experiences. They kind of keep you in line and out of trouble. And if you don't stay out of trouble, then you have them breathing down your neck.

They are active in things around here. They help the younger girls adjust, they give advice, and they are someone that you can be open with since there is such a lack of trust around here. They are the most respected of inmates.

She shows concern for me, gives me time, and if it's my birthday, she remembers it. I go to her for advice when I need it. And she sticks by me. Sometimes, though, they will just out and out tell you you're messing up. Like I was floating down the hallway one day and she told me she wanted [me] to meet her in the shower so we

can talk. When I got there, she told me to sober up and turned on the shower, and then she told me how that wasn't good for me and stuff.

The "moms" see their role in much the same way:

It's being patient with them. Offering advice and constructive criticism. We help them sort through their problems. It's a thing called trust, a feeling that you have found someone in here that you can really trust.

[An inmate "kid"] tells me her problems and I give her good, sound advice. I listen to what she has to say, even when things bother her, upset and hurt her. And if she is doing something that is not right, then I tell her so.

Throughout our interviews, inmates consistently used the same words to describe the "moms": they are women who are kind, patient, wise, and concerned; they are women who provide both advice and comfort; they are women who will work to keep their "kids" out of trouble.

Holstein and Gubrium (1994) have analyzed the concept of family as a "descriptive practice" rather than as an objective social institution. From their perspective, family rhetoric is viewed as a discursive process through which domestic social relationships are interpreted, represented, and organized. The concept of family is invoked, in a wide variety of organizational and social settings, to declare interpersonal attachments that are based on nurturing and concern, whether or not they are also grounded in biological kinship. Clearly, the quasi-families at MCIW exemplify this rhetorical usage, organizing relationships in a manner that helps women adapt to the uncertainty and mistrust they experience as part of their imprisonment. But inmates' rhetorical use of mother-and-child concepts has another important outcome—it continuously reinforces an idealized exemplification of what it means to have a mother or to be a mother:

There are some people in here who are really into motherhood. . . . When I first came in, there were several who wanted to mother me. Some people can take it and some can't. You can walk around these grounds on any given day and here somebody say, "Mom, mom, look what I did today." It's something you can understand. . . . The people that are portraying the mother need to be able to give that nurturing feeling.

She is open and patient. She is the kind of mom that every girl would like their mom to be like.

They give you that motherly touch, that motherly feeling. They give you a lot of advice. They voice their opinion and they try to comfort you. It's the way that they like to do their time. They are some of the most respected [women] in here.

Both inmates and staff acknowledge the respect that is granted to "moms" in prison; it is a natural extension of the respect that should be given to any mother, inside or outside prison.

If we look at the specific women who perform the mother role at MCIW, a number of patterns emerge. As suggested by the inmates we have quoted, mothers tend to be older and therefore have more "life experience." They also have more experience in the particular social organization at MCIW: in our sample, the "moms" were more likely to be serving sentences of ten to twenty-five years while nearly all of the "kids" were serving sentences of five years or less. At the same time, none of the "moms" had served prior prison sentences while 25 percent of the "kids" had been previously incarcerated. The "moms" also have an experiential basis for their advice: they were far less likely to receive prison disciplines (two or less per year) than were inmate "kids" (four or more per year, with most receiving one or two per month). Significantly, all of the "moms" had retained custody of their natural children, while this was true for only 36 percent of the "kids."

Imprisonment severely challenges inmates' outside identities. Bosworth's analysis (1999b) begins with the recognition that these challenges typically include both the disruption of women's outside roles as wives, girlfriends, or mothers and an array of institutional expectations for inmates to engage in traditional and passive feminine behaviors. Her analysis illustrates how inmates resist these expectations, not by rejecting them outright but rather by redefining or reshaping them in ways that assert positive, active identities. The idealized mother role that inmates reinforce through their participation in the quasi-families at MCIW can be viewed in these terms. "Motherhood" in these families is a kind and nurturing identity but also a strong and assertive one that commands great respect from others. Motherhood in the outside world is also a core identity for the majority of inmates at MCIW. Giving respect to motherhood within the prison world ennobles the idea of motherhood generally, regardless of how individual inmates have performed this role in their own lives.

Women inmates engage in various forms of identity work throughout their sentences, including several forms that are also practiced by men: self-dialogues, impression management, and management of emotional experience and displays. Women also engage in distinctive forms of identity work. It is theoretically important that much of their identity work in prison takes place through the affective relationships in which they participate, as part of their adaptation to prison culture. (Although we have focused here specifically on the mother role within quasi-families, our data suggest that similar identity work is conducted through the component roles of the couple and rap partner relationships.) These relationships permit a more integrative form of identity work than is practiced by first-time male inmates. It is of equal theoretical importance, however, that both groups of inmates remain oriented to the outside throughout their sentences, and that they consequently address issues of their outside identities as well as their prison identities.

Discussion

The analytic issues that guided research into men's prisons, and the resulting deprivation and importation models of imprisonment, also influenced early research on women's prisons. This work has led to the understanding that women face many of the same deprivations as men, but that they develop a substantially different form of social organization and culture, characterized by a lower allegiance to the idea of an "inmate code" and a tendency to organize into relatively enduring primary relationships. As researchers have sought to examine other aspects of women's imprisonment, however, conceptual reliance on the men's prison literature has been increasingly criticized, and researchers have argued that women's prison experiences must be understood as fundamentally different from those of men. We believe that the limitations of the men's prison literature lie more in the underlying issues that have been addressed than in the selection of men's prisons as research sites. Foremost among these limitations is a representation of prison experience in terms of competing (i.e., deprivation versus importation) deterministic models of behavior.

It is the determinism of these traditional models that is being challenged by research on both men's and women's prisons. Our study of first-time male inmates, conducted within a phenomenological perspective, presents a model of prison experiences in which inmates are

actively constructing and modifying their imagery of the prison world, defining the problems presented by their imprisonment, developing adaptive strategies to address these problems, and engaging in identity work to mitigate the effects of their imprisonment on their self-definitions. Because the inmates we studied remained at least partially oriented to the outside world throughout these activities, the underlying metaphor we used is that of cultural sojourners, who cross a cultural border when they enter the prison, actively interpret and adapt to a new culture while they are inside, but view these adaptations as temporary adjustments until they can return to the outside world.

Differences between women's and men's prison experiences should continue to receive close empirical examination. Imprisonment will be best understood, however, by investigating similarities as well as differences in inmate experiences, from a variety of conceptual frameworks. In the analysis presented here, we have identified several parallels—and noted specific differences—in the ways that women and first-time male inmates deal with their imprisonment. Whether pursuing similar or dissimilar lines of action, however, the women and men we studied were unquestionably involved in active interpretations of their worlds rather than passive responses to their prison environments.

Parallels in the prison experiences of the women and men we studied are especially pronounced at the beginning of inmates' sentences, when they are constructing their initial cognitive images of the prison, defining the problems presented to them, and devising initial means of confronting these problems. We found women's and men's images to be strikingly similar, and crafted from the same (outsider's) cultural resources, including media depictions of men's prisons. Both groups begin their sentences with a high degree of uncertainty about the prison world, a generalized mistrust of other inmates, a fear of violence or sexual predation, and feelings of personal vulnerability. Women and men modify their prison images and problem definitions at different rates and in different forms, but the process by which they make these changes remains parallel: despite their distrust of the inmate population they nonetheless find ways to interact with specific other inmates and to make use of these interactions to interpret the prison world. In this manner they gradually acquire a more realistic (insider's) understanding of prison organization and culture, and reduce their institutional uncertainty.

Two reasons often given for the argument that women's and men's prison experiences must be understood separately are that women

remain more closely connected to their outside roles and that the social organization and culture of men's and women's prisons are dissimilar. Both of these assertions are well supported by empirical evidence. Despite these differences, however, our research reveals two fundamental parallels. First, both groups remain at least partially oriented to the outside world throughout their imprisonment, even during the middle of their sentences, when they also tentatively adopt present time, "do your own time" norms. This is a point of considerable theoretical and practical importance. Delineating how inmates manage the conflicting demands of outside and prison worlds is essential to understanding the processes and effects of imprisonment. Second, both women and men accommodate themselves to prison culture by establishing affective relationships within the prison world. These relationships (partnerships for men; quasi-families, couples, or rap partners for women) approximate the kind of relationships available to them on the outside, enable them to negotiate their way through prison culture, and allow them to see themselves as less than full participants in the prison world.

We found additional parallels, and differences, when we examined inmates' identity work. At the beginning of their sentences, when they view the prison as outsiders, women and men engage in similar identity management activities. In particular, in response to their emotional and physical vulnerability and their sense that they cannot "be themselves" in prison, both men and women attempt to present themselves differently to others. Over time, as they define the problems of their imprisonment differently, and as they accommodate themselves to very different inmate social systems, their identity work, like their adaptive behaviors, becomes less similar. First-time male inmates distinguish between their authentic outside identities and their artificial prison identities and eventually seek to resolve the differences between these identities through a renewed self-dialogue at the end of their sentences. The women at MCIW, in contrast, are able to make use of their affective relationships in prison to reinforce central outside identities, such as motherhood. While behaviorally different, however, this identity work is experientially parallel in its simultaneous orientation to both the outside world and the prison world.

Our men's study resulted in a model of the prison experience in which first-time inmates approach their sentences as a border crossing into a separate and terrifying world and cautiously negotiate their way through this world as cultural sojourners. Our women's study has identified a number of ways in which women similarly work to connect

their outside and prison world orientations. This analytic framework does not apply equally to all women or men in prison and it clearly requires further empirical investigation. Nonetheless, we believe that the experiential parallels we have identified begin to establish a conceptual bridge between the research literatures on women's and men's prisons, and consequently extend sociological understanding of imprisonment.