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Gendered Rehabilitation:
Targeting Treatment or Reproducing Inequality?

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Abstract

Gender theorists have argued that gender neutral policy and bureaucratic practices disadvantage women because neutrality masks a male bias. In response, some have suggested that policy and practice should be tailored to meet gender-specific needs. Yet others have argued that targeting treatment to gender categories simply reifies these categories and reinforces existing gender inequality. This study investigates these tensions by examining gender specific treatment implemented within a community correctional system. Based on analysis of officers’ case notes and fieldwork with community corrections agents, I find that gendered treatment shapes both the rehabilitative project and the nature of social control experienced by women and men. I suggest that officers conceptualize men and women’s criminality and rehabilitation in ways that reinforce gendered beliefs or symbolic associations of masculinity with greater status, competence and power and femininity with dependency, powerlessness and psychological disorder. However, because greater responsibility or agency for one’s criminal offending may lead to more punitive treatment, men are in some ways materially disadvantaged by this association. Thus I suggest that gender specific treatment in the correctional context may have positive material but negative symbolic consequences for women, with the situation reversed for men.
Gender theorists have argued that gender neutral policy, practices and organizational dynamics disadvantage women. This occurs because policies and practices that claim to be universally applicable actually reflect the perspective and assumptions of the dominant social group (Acker 1990; Bem 1993; Britton 2003; MacKinnon 1990; Young 1990). Following upon this claim, some have suggested that policy and bureaucratic practices should be tailored to respond to men and women’s gender-specific needs. As Young (1990) explains, “Where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression” (p. 3).

Yet others have argued that acting responsively to gender categories in this way has the effect of reifying these categories, reinforcing gender stereotypes and perceived sex difference (Jaggar 1994; Rhode 1992; Wharton 2005). This is problematic because these categories are unequal and stratified, signaling and articulating unequal relationships of power (Jaggar 1994; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 1997; Ridgeway and Correl 2004; Risman 1998; Risman 2004; Scott 1986). Gender is “an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people into two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social inequality based upon this difference” (Ridgeway and Correl 2004). Thus, gender targeted or differentiated treatment may then reinforce inequality, rather than rectifying disadvantage resulting from gender neutral treatment.

Despite these critiques, so-called gender specific treatment has been widely advocated and, increasingly, implemented across a range of human service organizations and agencies of social control. Gender specific treatment in these settings involves tailoring work practices to fit
the perceived gendered and culturally specific needs of the clients served.\textsuperscript{1} As programming, trainings, and even legislation advocates for a gender-specific approach, sociological research addressing this phenomenon remains lacking. We know little about how institutions and actors charged with, “acknowledging and attending to” difference do so, the strategies actors rely upon to meet gendered needs, nor the effect these attempts have on those targeted.

This study applies these questions to gender-specific treatment occurring within the community correctional system. The community corrections system, or probation and parole, is vast, supervising one of every 45 American adults (Pew Center on the States 2009). Women represent a substantial share of this population, comprising 23 percent of probation caseloads and 13 percent of those on parole. Of criminally sanctioned women, 85 percent are supervised in the community (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). Women’s representation within this system is also growing: nearly one percent of all adult women were under correctional supervision in 1998, representing a 48 percent per capita increase since 1990.\textsuperscript{2}

Community corrections is an interesting case from which to examine targeted treatment for several reasons. First, community corrections officers have substantial discretion to tailor their response to individual clients, and may alternate between a law enforcement and a social work orientation, depending upon their understanding of client needs. Second, the interventions available to officers can be both deeply personal and highly significant, ranging from rights limitations to possible reincarceration (National Research Council 2007). And third, unique among correctional institutions, community corrections officers supervise men and women within the same organizational context, allowing for direct comparison of the treatment provided to male and female offenders.

\textsuperscript{1} Gender specific treatment is generally not directed via policy or law, rather it emerges as a discourse or organizational goal that individuals are charged with defining and putting in to practice.

\textsuperscript{2} Men’s per capita involvement grew 27\% across this same period (Greenfeld and Snell 1999).
The data for this study were drawn from a community corrections system in a Western State. Western State is an innovator in correctional practices, actively pursuing gender and culturally sensitive treatment. The institutional commitment to targeted treatment ranges from hiring practices and team organization to management-initiated diversity committees. In Western State, community corrections is operated semi-autonomously at the county level. Probationers and parolees are managed together within the same organizational context, with relatively little distinction made between the two populations. The state ranks in the middle quintile of states in terms of percent of the population in the criminal justice system, either incarcerated or serving sentences in the community, approximating the national average (Pew 2009).

Utilizing multiple methodologies, I explore the tensions of targeted treatment by examining the work practices community corrections officers enact in the service of rehabilitation. First I ask whether statistically significant gender differences exist in the frequency with which key topic areas are noted in the formal record of offenders’ supervision. Results of this case note analysis suggest that officers working with men are more likely to record notes about male offenders’ employment status, criminality and adherence to the formal rules of supervision, while officers working with women are more likely to record notes about female offenders’ romantic relationships.

Then, drawing upon observations of meetings between officers and offenders and in-depth interviews with community corrections officers, I identify patterns in the ways gender specific treatment was put in to practice and reveal how officers conceptualized offenders’ gender-specific needs. I find that gendered treatment within the community corrections setting shapes both the rehabilitative project and the nature of social control experienced by women and men. In these gendered projects, officers assign criminal men greater responsibility and agency
in their criminality than they do women. As criminality is seen as a choice for men, so too is the decision to “go straight.” Rehabilitation is then conceptualized as a process of encouraging men to choose conventional over criminal goals. In contrast, criminality is not understood to result from women’s agentic choices, rather officers assume that women are led into criminality by problematic romantic partners, or become criminally engaged as a result of victimization, trauma and/or psychological problems. Thus women’s criminality is not an outcome of agentic choices, but flawed selves. Rehabilitation for women is then conceptualized largely as a process of psychological transformation, and necessitates intervening deeply in women’s lives.

I suggest that conceptualizing men and women’s criminality and rehabilitative goals as distinct in this way reinforces gendered beliefs about men’s greater status, competence and power relative to women, or the symbolic association of masculinity with valued traits. And yet, because men are assumed to bear greater responsibility for their crimes, they are in some ways disadvantaged by this association. Because men are considered “real” criminals in a way that women are not, they are subject to more punitive treatment rigidly focused on adherence to formal rules and sanctioning. Thus, I suggest that within the context of a criminal justice system committed to gender-specific treatment, women’s placement in the gender hierarchy may have positive material but negative symbolic consequences for women, with the situation reversed for men.

**Gender Targeted and Women-Focused Treatment**

The movement to provide women involved in the criminal justice system with gender-specific treatment is not a new one. Such efforts first emerged in the early nineteenth century (Pitman 1884; Women's Prison Association 2004). While advocates’ goal was for women to
receive services and facilities equal to those offered to men, they also called for differential
treatment, defined as treatment responsive to women’s believed more passive and child-like
nature (Rafter 1985). These early efforts at justice reform were guided by essentialist notions of
differences between men and women, differences which presumably drove men and women’s
pathways into offending and determined the appropriate form of rehabilitation. For instance,
women were believed to be drawn into crime by material need or desperation, while men were
believed to offend because of a propensity for criminality or the desire for a criminal lifestyle
(Freedman 1984). In this and each penal reform movement that followed, defining what women
were (in opposition to men) and what caused them to commit crimes (differently than men)
would be central to determining the nature of gendered reform. Contemporary targeted or gender
specific treatment is similarly premised upon understandings of who criminal women and men
are, and what they require for reform.

The contemporary gender-specific treatment movement presumes that women differ from
men in their psychological development, psychological profiles and life experiences. It is based
on a theory of relational psychology (Gilligan 1982; Miller 1986) which holds that psychological
development differs between boys and girls: while boys’ developmental goal is to achieve
autonomy and independence, girls seek to develop a sense of connection with others. Through
this connection, girls develop self-worth and a sense of self. Proponents of gender specific
treatment for women assert that because female offenders have frequently experienced
victimization and trauma, often in the context of relationships, their developmental goals have
been compromised. Substance abuse, criminality and dependence upon unhealthy partners are all
seen as outgrowths of this developmental deficit. According to this literature, effective
rehabilitative practices for women must then address women’s distinct psychologies and victimization histories (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003; Sydney 2005; Van Wormer 2010).

Targeting treatment to female offenders was formalized with the 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice Prevention Act. The Act required that states assess the adequacy of their services for girls as a condition of receiving federal funds. It also established a challenge grant that provided funding for programs targeted to girls (Kempf-Leonard and Sample 2000). As a result of this legislative expansion, a variety of community programs and service agencies began experimenting with gender-specific programming (Foley 2008). Calls to provide treatment targeted to female offenders have since become relatively common in practice literature directed at social work and criminal justice professionals (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003; Greene 1998; Van Wormer 2010). Advocates assume that treatment tailored to meet women’s needs will lessen the disadvantage experienced by women within the justice system, ultimately promoting more equitable outcomes.

Despite the prevalence of advocacy efforts encouraging gender specific treatment for women, I have identified only a handful of studies addressing how such treatment is implemented in the justice system. Goodkind and Miller (2006) conduct a qualitative investigation of an art therapy program for institutionalized, delinquent girls and find that, following gender specific practices, corrections officers: police girl’s sexuality, essentialize gender differences between boys and girls and focus on girl’s victimization as a primary identity, practices which ultimately reinforce gender stereotypes. Further, they suggest that these practices may have “widened the net of social control” in a Foccauldian sense, as staff took on non-criminal aspects of girls’ lives, encouraging such gender “appropriate” behavior as acting demure, non-sexual and “nice” (Goodkind and Miller 2006). In another study, Goodkind (2009)
examines staff goals at a residential program for delinquent and at-risk girls. She argues that the gender specific programming she observed is best characterized as promoting a program of “commercialized feminism,” a fusion of neo-liberal and traditional feminist values. Goodkind argues that the empowerment goals advocated by program leaders placed primary emphasis on building personal independence and self-esteem, while paying little attention to the structural realities constraining girls’ lives. In one of the few studies examining gender-specific treatment aimed at an adult offending population Hannah-Moffat (1995; 2001) investigates two women-centered prisons in Canada and finds that the program goals of empowerment and therapeutic care, what she calls feminized technologies of penal governance, were ultimately incompatible with the coercive and oppressive realities of the prison environment. All three studies suggest limitations to what gender specific treatment may be able to achieve in the corrections setting.

While there are relatively few studies that examine how gender specific treatment that is founded on a relational or empowerment model is put into practice, there is a body of work that speaks to how women’s treatment within the penal system and associated agencies is gendered. In an historical investigation of the prison in Britain and the US, Dobash, Dobash and Gutteridge (1986) explore how conceptions of criminal women transformed from evil to mad, and punishments altered correspondingly. McCorkel (2003) investigates a prison for women implementing a drug treatment program. She finds that, despite goals of gender neutrality, the staff recognized women as different from criminal men, and thus employed gendered strategies in supervision. Specifically, these gendered strategies fused embodied surveillance techniques, wherein female offenders were constantly watched by both staff and other inmates, with a therapeutic discourse locating the source of women’s criminality in deviant, non-“habiliated” selves. In work addressing a mandated, community-based drug treatment program for female
offenders, McKim (2008) likewise finds that staff conceive of criminal women as lacking an adequate self; this belief then defines rehabilitation for women as a project of therapeutic governance, which she explains as monitoring self and others, therapeutic and emotional disclosure, and working through disordered emotions. In recent work Haney (2010) uncovers the gendered nature of state regulation. She describes how correctional workers in one alternative-to-incarceration facility for women relied upon a therapeutic discourse focused on righting women’s cognitive distortions and regulating appropriate desire. Building upon Foucault, these works contribute to our understanding of how contemporary punishment regimes are gendered. While Foucault (1977) suggests that the project of modern punitive systems is to produce a “willing subject” who internalizes the surveillance technologies to which he is exposed, this literature implies that, for women, punishment is not just about imposing self-regulation, but also reaching into women’s minds and “habilitating” the disorder which lies therein.

This study builds upon the literature on gender in corrections in important ways. First, much of the research discussed above looks specifically at correctional practices within women’s prisons and alternative-to-incarceration facilities, rather than supervision in the community: it is thus unclear to what extent the findings apply outside of the “total institution” context. Second, none of this work takes as an explicit goal the comparison of treatment received by women and men. This is to be expected as the vast majority of prisons, jails and treatment facilities are gender segregated. However, this research must then assume differential treatment between women and men is occurring without actually documenting it. Finally, none of this work focuses principally on how correctional agents explain, understand and make sense of the treatment they provide to male and female offenders. This is an important omission because the correctional
interventions officers impose are motivated by particular philosophies of punishment; philosophies that help to explain the motivation underlying gendered rehabilitation regimes.

This paper addresses these gaps, analyzing how community corrections officers tailor treatment to men and women based upon their beliefs about gender-specific rehabilitative needs. Because these needs are conceived of as distinct for men and women, the nature of social control becomes a gendered project. I first present details of the methodology used to sample and analyze officers’ case notes. I then present the results of this analysis. Turning from the quantitative to the qualitative data, I next present the fieldwork methodology. I then identify how differences in the content, structure, quality and tone of the meetings between officers and male and female offenders contribute to gendered experiences of social control. Next I discuss the logic underlying officers’ reliance upon the gendered treatment strategies I have presented. In conclusion, I discuss how reliance upon gender categories to define treatment needs cannot be understood simply as either ameliorating or reinforcing gender inequality; rather I suggest that such treatment has distinct material and symbolic consequences for male and female offenders.

**Gender Differences in the Formal Record**

Before presenting the content of and reasoning underlying gender-specific treatment, I first present gender differences found in the official record of supervision, that is, officers’ case notes. In case notes, officers record information about offenders that they believe to be important descriptions of their progress on supervision. Specifically, I ask whether there is a statistically significant gender difference in the count of comments recorded in case notes regarding: employment, crime/criminality, fee payment, sanctioning, timeliness to meetings and offenders’ romantic relationships.
From this data set, I then sampled the offenders whose case notes I would analyze. Because of the sensitive nature of the case note data, I was able to access these notes only on a WDOC computer over the course of a single week. While I was able to take hand-written notes, I was not allowed to print any of the case note information or take any data with me to analyze later. These conditions meant that I was only able to access 101 case notes.

I followed two strategies to select the sample. In the first sampling strategy, I sampled within officer. I selected two officers, one male and one female, who supervised both men and women. For each officer, I then drew a sample of ten male and ten female offenders. I also selected one female officer who supervised only women and sampled twenty offenders from her case load. I obtained twenty offenders from each of the three officers, for a total of sixty offenders. In each case I sampled offenders who had low risk scores, no criminal history, no recorded mental health concerns and a sentence of either Drug I or Theft I. I chose those with low risk scores and sentences of Drug I and Theft I because these are frequent offense categories among both men and women. I chose those without a criminal history or recorded mental health issue because I wanted to minimize the extraneous information that officers might draw upon when recording their case notes. Sampling only offenders in these categories controls for gender differences in type of crime, criminal history, and mental health. The purpose of sampling by

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3 Drug I and Theft I are low-level sentences. The majority (94%) of the offenders I selected for the case note analysis were convicted of Drug I. I had initially intended to sample only drug offenders; however I had to extend the conviction to Theft I in order to find a sufficient number of offenders matched on the characteristics of interest, and in some cases, supervised by the same officer.
officer in this way was to assure that I captured variation in the type of caseload offenders were supervised on, whether all women or mixed gender. I also was interested in collecting data for men and women paired with an opposite gender officer. Once I had obtained a sufficient sample that met these criteria, I utilized a second sampling strategy to select additional offenders. The second strategy samples offenders directly. I drew a random sample of 41 offenders with the above crime, criminal history and mental health characteristics stratified by gender such that half of this additional sample was men (20) and half women (21). The combined sample includes a total of 101 offenders supervised by 40 officers. This hybrid sampling strategy was necessary because the offender’s case notes were to be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. For the qualitative analysis, it was important to have male and female offenders clustered within both male and female officers. For the quantitative analysis, it was important to have a sufficient number of officers and sufficient variation in officer gender to control for this variable.

For each offender, I began the case note review at the beginning of offender’s supervision and continued reviewing the notes for the offender’s first full year on supervision. I then tallied the number of notes recorded on key topics over the course of this first year as well as the total number of entries. The time periods covered by these notes are not identical, as offenders’ periods of supervision began on different dates. However, for most offenders, the initial office visit occurred within the past five years. I use these records to analyze how offender gender net

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4In order to assess whether the results were sensitive to the 60 case notes selected first, I ran the analyses on just the forty-one records I obtained through the second sampling strategy (with no repeated observations of officers). I found similar coefficient estimates, but these were, in several cases, no longer statistically significant due to the smaller sample size. The results I report in the text and tables are those drawn from the full sample. I control for correlated reporting by officer using clustered standard errors by officer. However, due to the complex nature of my sampling design, standard errors may still be somewhat underestimated. Fortunately in the analyses below, almost all significant results are highly statistically significant, so slightly larger standard errors would be unlikely to change the substantive conclusions.
of officer gender is associated with the number of notes recorded over the course of a year in topic areas of substantive interest.

In my regression models, both male officer and male offender are dummy variables equal to one for male and zero for female. As dependent variables, I use the number of times the topic of interest occurs in the offender’s case notes over the course of the offender’s first year on supervision. Because each dependent variable is a count of the number of times a specific topic is mentioned, I use negative binomial models.  

I use clustered standard errors to correct for the fact that multiple offenders have the same community corrections officer, and there may be similarities across the case notes recorded by a single officer. Because the total number of entries officers record over the course of the year varies between offenders, dependent upon the number of meetings or phone calls the officer and offender exchange, I adjust for this variability by specifying individual offender’s differential “exposure” to text entries in the model. In each model, independent variables are the gender of the officer and the gender of the agent. For ease of interpretation, I have reported the exponentiated results in each table.

The purpose of these analyses is to document differences by offender gender net of officer gender in the types of topics that are recorded in case notes. Results below show that

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5 The basic count data regression is the Poisson model. However, the Poisson model forces the mean and variance of the dependent variable (conditional on the regressors) to be the same. I tested for over-dispersion and rejected the null hypothesis that the variance and mean are equal to the alternative that the variance exceeds the mean. Over dispersion is not surprising, as the sample contains some records with a high number of counts. Therefore, I utilize a negative binomial regression model, which allows for the mean and the variance to differ.

6 Because the effect of offender gender might vary dependent upon the gender of the officer with whom the offender is paired, I ran interactional models testing for differences. As the sample size for cross-gender pairings in these models was too small to make a valid comparison, I was able to compare only male officers paired with male offenders to female officers paired with female offenders. These models revealed significant differences across gender pairs for only one outcome, employment. The expected count of mentions of employment was significantly higher for male officers working with male offenders when compared with female officers working with female offenders. Because only one interaction was found to be significant, I have not included these results in the paper. Tables are available upon request.
there are statistically significant differences in the number of comments recorded in officers’
case notes by the gender of the offender. Differences in the number of comments about the
offender’s crime/criminality, employment, drug and alcohol use/abuse, fee payment and
romantic relationships suggest that officers view these topic areas as more and less relevant
markers of progress towards the successful completion of supervision for women and men.
Below I will use my qualitative data to explain how each of these topic areas is linked with
gendered processes of social control and rehabilitation.

Results

Model 1 of Table 1 shows results for mentions of crime in the case notes. Although both
male and female offenders have no criminal history and I matched offenders across gender on
crime-type, I nonetheless find that men’s case notes more frequently discussed crime than did
those of female offenders. Male offenders have 1.8 times as many notes that reference crime as
female offenders. This greater focus on public safety likely reflects the fact that across the state
as a whole, male offenders are substantially more likely to be convicted of violent crime.7 This
fact about the population of male offenders in the state may have affected the way officers
supervised the male offenders whose case notes I examined, even though they had no prior
criminal history and were not convicted of violent offenses.

Turning to drug and alcohol use/abuse, Model 2 in Table 1 shows that being a male
offender significantly increases the number of case notes mentioning offenders’ use of drugs and
alcohol. Included in this category are comments about the offender’s drug of choice, history of
substance use, and current use, including both positive and negative results of urinalysis tests.

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7 During this time period in Western State, 32 percent of male offenders were convicted of violent crimes while 16
percent of female offenders were convicted of violent crimes.
Specifically, being male increases the number of comments recorded in the case notes by a factor of 1.48, controlling for the gender of the officer and total text entries.

Next I turn to employment. Model 4 of Table 1 shows that being a male offender increases the number of comments about employment by a factor of 1.3, controlling for the gender of the officer and total text entries. This difference is significant at the .05 level.

The first three models in Table 2 show topics related to the formal conditions of supervision: fee payment, timeliness of arrival at supervision appointments, and sanctions imposed. Being male significantly increases the number of mentions of fee payment in the case notes by a factor of 1.37, controlling for officer gender and total text entries. This difference is significant at the .05 level. Offender gender does not predict frequency of mention of timeliness or sanctions. Case note analysis thus suggests that officers treat only some aspects of the formal conditions of supervision as more important to male offenders’ rehabilitation than they do female offenders.

Only one topic area was found to be more common in the case notes of female offenders, offenders’ romantic relationships. In the model of romantic relationships, Model 4 in Table 2, being male decreases the number of mentions of romantic relationships by a factor of .66, controlling for officer gender and total entries. This difference is significant at the .10 level.

One limitation of these data is that they cannot reveal the source of these differences. For instance, it is plausible that male offenders mention their own employment status or job seeking more frequently than do female offenders. This would then be reflected in a greater number of comments about employment in male offenders’ records. While this remains a limitation, this concern is mitigated for two reasons. First, as the majority of these topics relate to important components of supervision, we would expect officers to bring them up in meetings and comment
on them in the formal record, even if offenders did not bring up the topic on their own. Second, officers are unlikely to record topics in the case notes that they do not feel are importantly linked with offenders’ progress on supervision. Thus, case notes do not represent simply a record of what is discussed in meetings, but officers’ distillation of important themes.

These descriptive analyses suggest that officers assign priority to different topic areas in their supervision of male and female offenders. The case note analysis shows that the gender specific treatment evident in the interviews and observations I discuss below also characterized offenders’ formal record. However, this quantitative analysis can not reveal why the topic areas that officers consider important differ for male and female offenders, nor how officers explain and understand their differential treatment of men and women on supervision. For this, we turn to the qualitative data.

**Fieldwork Methodology**

The interview and observational data were drawn from two county community corrections systems within Western State. I refer to the counties as Greendale and Riverside. Riverside includes the state’s largest city and is the most populous county in the state with over 700,000 residents. Greendale borders Riverside and is the second-highest population county in the state with a population of over 500,000. Both counties are growing rapidly and have a non-white population between 25 and 30 percent, with Latinos composing the largest minority group in both counties (US Census Bureau 2008).

Both counties manage offenders in a manner deserving mention. Officers’ caseloads are divided into categories of offenders sharing a particular identity (women, Spanish-speaking) or category of crime (drug offender, domestic violence, sex offender, mentally ill). These caseload
categories are neither exclusive nor firm, and women are represented across teams. Such management allows the officers to become familiar with the resources available to and laws regulating their specific populations. However, because nearly all officers cycle through diverse caseloads during their tenure, they are able to speak to differences across populations. It is also important to note that most officers “matched” the identity of their caseload, that is, women were more likely to supervise women, Latinos to supervise Latinos, etc.

I interviewed 26 officers and staff in a single county office in Greendale and 24 officers and staff across five free-standing offices in urban Riverside County. Interviews averaged between 45 minutes and one hour. Interviews addressed a variety of topic, from beliefs about the causes of crime, to the personal mission of the job, to what culturally competent and gender-specific treatment meant in practice. Questions aimed to gain an understanding of how officers conceptualized the work, their role and their relationship with offenders.

In Greendale, I also observed over 50 routine meetings between community corrections officers and their clients. These meetings averaged between 15 and 45 minutes. In each case, I approached offenders in the lobby as they waited for their appointment, and sought their consent to observe the meeting. Consent had previously been obtained from the officers. No offender declined my request to observe their meeting. Offenders generally seemed indifferent to my presence, although some offenders inquired about the project or what I was studying in school. These data were collected between April 2009 and January 2010.

My experience varied somewhat between the two counties. In the first, officers were accustomed to the presence of student volunteers and interns, and treated me as just another

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8 In Greendale I conducted interviews with nineteen officers, four managers who did not currently carry a caseload, and four correctional staff, who worked with clients. In Riverside, I interviewed twenty-one officers and two correctional staff, who also worked with clients.

9 Offenders are likely to have little expectation of privacy in this setting.
student learning about the job. In the second county, some officers seemed wary of my presence, at least initially. Through the interviews I learned that substantial tension existed between managers and officers. Because management had sanctioned my research, some officers seemed to believe that I was working either with or for management. For most officers, as the interview began and it became clear that I was not serving at the behest of management, they relaxed considerably and were able to answer thoughtfully and honestly.

In presenting the quotations in text, I have included a subscript below the quotation which identifies the gender and race of the officer. The subscripts are defined as the following: F=female, M=male, W=White, B=Black and L=Latino. I also number the interviews, but to protect the identity of the speaker, the numbers are randomly assigned and do not represent the order in which the interviews were conducted.

While I report officer race and gender in the quotes, I do not discuss race differences in the nature of gendered treatment for two reasons. First, although the racial profile of the offenders I observed matched the racial demographics of Greendale County, mostly white with some Latinos and Asians, the observational sample was simply too small to draw conclusions about race-gender interactions. From the interviews, I concluded that race and ethnicity did not seem to determine how officers conceived of gender-appropriate rehabilitation, as Black, white and Latino officers working with racially and ethnically diverse offenders voiced similar beliefs about gender-specific needs. Thus, while it is possible that gendered rehabilitation varies across racial and ethnic categories of offenders, I did not find evidence of this and therefore do not discuss it.

**Meeting Content and Structure**
Meetings between community corrections officers and offenders occur at regularly scheduled intervals, largely dependent upon the offender’s assessed risk category. These meetings are intended to serve a supervisory function: officers check in with offenders’ compliance on key conditions of supervision: employment and job search, police contact, drug and alcohol use and attendance at drug treatment and other mandated programs. Offenders may also be required to submit a urine sample to prove that they are substance free. The meetings are largely designed as a means of “keeping tabs” on those sentenced to probation or recently released from prison onto parole. Within these meetings officers have substantial freedom to shape the form, content and tone of the encounter.

Some aspects of the meetings were similar for male and female offenders. Specifically, in meetings with both men and women, officers frequently discussed alcohol and drug treatment, offenders’ compliance with that treatment and the importance of treatment to rehabilitative goals. Because of the high rates of substance abuse among the supervised population, this topic was viewed as central. Other topics frequently addressed with both men and women were housing and access to transportation. Finally, officers I observed actively encouraged both male and female offenders’ efforts towards conventional goal attainment, whether in reference to offenders’ job search, community service hours completed, or a negative urinalysis (UA).

Despite these similarities, gender differences in treatment were substantial, reflecting differences in the primary goals officers’ held for male and female clients. For instance, while officers working with both men and women were supportive and encouraging of their clients, the content areas officers highlighted for encouragement differed. Officers working with men tended to see public safety and assuring that men fulfilled the formal rules of supervision as the primary goals of their meetings. This focus reflects both officers’ greater concerns about men’s potential
for violence, as well as the belief that imposition of formal structure, routine and assumption of conventional responsibilities were the appropriate steps towards criminal desistance and rehabilitation for men. In contrast, officers working with women more often took a holistic approach, not just addressing the crime or adherence to formal conditions, but also social networks (particularly romantic relationships) and clients’ emotional lives. This focus reflects both officers’ beliefs that women’s criminality was influenced and affected by those they were closest to – members of their social networks – as well as the idea that women’s criminality was internally located, reflecting emotional and psychological disorder.

Choosing Productive Citizenship

Officers working with men focused more upon the agentic choices offenders made that led them to their present circumstance; in meetings they worked to create a dynamic in which the offender would choose to abstain from criminal behaviors. Officers believed that they could assist male offenders to make better choices by helping them to identify their long-term goals and encouraging them to take the initial steps necessary to advance along a non-criminal path. This was frequently accomplished by utilizing motivational interviewing (MI) techniques.

In motivational interviewing, the client’s own desire for change is elicited through supportive counseling and reinforced through the clients own “change talk.” The goal of this treatment is to lower client resistance and strengthen commitment to personal change (Hettema, Steele, and Miller 2005; Miller and Rollnick 2002).10 Once officers have identified areas of

10 In motivational interviewing (MI), the client’s autonomy is central, that is, the client determines whether change is desired, or not, and sets the pace of change. This approach may be more fitting to the drug and alcohol treatment field where it is often employed: in the correctional field, behaviors like criminality and drug use are no longer legitimate options, thus the client’s choice is substantially circumscribed. Motivational interviewing employed in the correctional context may present greater ethical complexity than MI in other settings (See Miller and Rollnick 2002: 161-175 for a discussion of ethical considerations in the use of motivational interviewing).
behavioral change (that are compatible with the law) that the offender values, the officer can then work with the client on the small (and legal) steps that will help them to accomplish these change goals.

One officer explains how he uses motivational interviewing techniques with his generic drug caseload:

I’ll use different techniques but one I like to use is try and find out what they like, what they want out of life and from that ask them how they expect to get it, ask them if they know what it takes to get the things that they really want in life, whether it’s just having a good job or having a car or having a house or having a family, those are called common threads, things that everybody seems to want. So I work with them to figure out how they can attain those things in a legal way so they don’t have to worry about losing it and then set up steps for them to be able to attain those things. If it’s one thing at a time, whether it’s the shirt on their back we start with the basics, the needs, and work up from there. (WM, #8)

The quote reveals how officers conceive of criminal men as agentic; men can choose to refrain from criminality and learn the skills necessary to achieve goals in non-criminal ways. It also reveals that rehabilitation for men is linked with conventional goal attainment, “having a good job or having a car or having a house or having a family. . .” By framing the conversation in this way, the officer positions himself as a resource and guide for the offender. While these techniques were by no means exclusive to officers working with men, in interviews these techniques were brought up more frequently by these officers.

Officers also spent substantial time reviewing and enforcing the formal conditions of supervision with men. These conditions are set by statute, as implemented by administrative rules, and, if violated, may lead to sanction or even revocation for the offender. Two conditions frequently stressed were those of employment and fee payment.11 Officers often began the

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11 All offenders on supervision are required to pay monthly supervision fees, those who do not pay fees may be subject to revocation or sanction, or have their period of supervision extended. However, officers may petition the
conversation by asking whether the client was up-to-date on fee payment, and stressed the importance of paying these fees. Officers most frequently next turned to discussion of men’s job search, whether the offender had applied for any jobs, and if so where. Discussion of the job search did not seem rancorous or punitive, rather officers tended to be encouraging and supportive, trouble-shooting ways to present the criminal record in the best light, mentioning job openings they knew of in the community and building up clients’ confidence about their employment prospects. By focusing on these formal conditions, officers reinforced the notion that employment and the accompanying ability to pay fees defined the rehabilitative project for men.

While officers encouraged and supported men in their attempts to meet conditions regarding fees and employment, structural impediments to attaining these goals were not seen as sufficient reason why the conditions could not be met. For instance, officers often stressed the importance of fee payment whether the client was employed or not. One officer I observed counseled an undocumented worker who was having trouble finding a job in the recessionary economy to pick up cans by the side of the road in order to pay his supervision fees.

That officers tended to focus more upon the conditions of supervision for men than women may have significant consequences for male offenders. This is because officers agree that it is quite difficult for offenders to successfully complete all of the conditions of supervision. That is, if officers chose to enforce these conditions to the letter, offenders are much more likely to face sanction or revocation. Thus, although men and women may be subject to the same set of conditions, if officers hew more closely to the rules when working with men, male offenders might face a higher bar to the successful completion of their supervision.
Finally, officers working with men saw public safety and crime prevention as an important part of their work as well. While focus on safety was more characteristic of officers working with domestic violence and sex offenders, it was also true of officers working with caseloads of largely non-violent men. Recall the results of the case note analysis that found that officers discussed male offenders’ crimes and criminality more frequently with low-level, first-time drug offenders than they did with the matched sample of female offenders.

This dual focus on encouraging rule-following and assuring public safety reflected what officers working primarily with men voiced as the mission of their job:

The mission of our job I would think is a) we have a charge to make sure that the client completes the conditions as ordered by the court, b) we should try to get clients to a point to where they are productive members of society and are not committing crimes and returning into the criminal justice system. So those are my primary goals and what I do is to make sure that they do what they’re supposed to do because in the end that is my charge is to ensure that they comply with the orders of the court. (WM, #49)

I'm thinking the focus is they're kind of living this unconventional lifestyle where their rules are set up differently than what I think the rules are to be successful, my usual mission is to try to get them to understand that a more pro-social lifestyle is to have a job and to have these kind of parameters and follow rules and be successful in that way. (WF, #39)

These particular constructions of the mission of supervision were similar to those voiced by officers working with Latinos, sex offenders, and generic case loads, but all officers working primarily with men. The mission for these officers was both public safety and encouraging men to conform to a conventionally “productive” lifestyle, defined as being part of the formal economy and paying fees regularly. Men on supervision are thus seen as capable of fulfilling the rules of supervision and making non-criminal choices; their criminal status doesn’t threaten officers’ conception of men’s agency and responsibility, two indicators of adult status. Yet this
very responsibility means that men may have more difficulty successfully completing supervision.

_Holistic Treatment: Building (Emotionally) Independent Women_

While there was substantial commonality in the topics discussed with male and female offenders, meetings with women were less rule-focused and more holistic in orientation. The officers addressed diverse aspects of female offenders’ lives, rather than focusing on particular goals, such as employment. At the beginning of meetings with female offenders, officers frequently began by checking in regarding how the client was doing generally. This open format allowed the client to bring up issues of concern or recent accomplishments: topics could range from job search to children’s well-being to drug treatment. Officers also spent more time putting women at ease and engaging in casual conversation as a part of the meeting. In interviews, officers explained that successfully working with women required building rapport, and forming a trusting relationship.

Women are much more into sharing, and they wanna know they can trust you, and they want to, they love a lotta feedback. They love to talk, so it's a lot of listening and relationship building. They wanna know that you know their kids’ names; they need that connection. Men, not so much. (WF, #35)

While officers working primarily with men worked to defuse tension and build connection with the offender through motivational interviewing techniques, officers working primarily with women used conversation and learning personal information about the offender as a way to establish trust.

Following these relationship-building conversations, officers often next turned to discussion of women’s participation in substance abuse treatment programs. Officers were very
attentive as to whether clients were complying with their treatment programs and whether women were attending drug and alcohol support groups such as AA or NA. In some cases attendance at support groups could even replace a jail sanction. One officer explained how she had used a drug and alcohol support group as a sanction for a female client who had stopped reporting and going to treatment, and subsequently tested positive for methamphetamine use:

And I said well, based on what's going on, I can take you to jail or we can talk about a sanction. I said I think an appropriate sanction would be a hundred and twenty meetings in a hundred and twenty days. And she said I think that's great. She accepted the sanction, we did our little paperwork, and she's still doing it today. (WF, #35)

Thus, while AA and NA were an important part of the discussion for both men and women, officers working with women seemed to rely upon meetings to structure and supervise women between office visits and to keep them away from criminal associates; whereas with men, officers viewed employment as filling this role.

Despite these differences, when female clients were not doing well, the focus of interviews was more structured, and targeted towards areas of concern, such as a positive UA or a missed appointment, as well as whether the client was paying fees and attending treatment groups as demanded by the conditions of supervision. Thus, what seemed to be normal treatment for male offenders seemed to be considered more punitive treatment for female offenders.

Female offenders’ perceived emotional needs and self-esteem deficits were also key areas of concern for officers. Officers working with women mentioned that they saw the meeting as an opportunity to address and begin to work through women’s emotional needs.

And I have to tell my clients every day, you have to work on your self-esteem. Every day you have to work on your self-worth, and when you start feeling that low self-esteem and

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12 While the case note analysis suggested that notes regarding drug and alcohol treatment were recorded at a similar rate for male and female offenders, the qualitative analysis allows us to see how the nature of the discussion differs by gender.
low self-worth, go in the backyard, dig it outta the dumpster, put it back on, and keep pushing. (BF, #36)

One way this officer explained that she helped women build self-esteem was by discouraging her clients from using language like “babymomma” to describe themselves. Another way was to encourage her clients to wear less revealing clothing. Regardless of the technique officers used, defining criminal women’s problems in this manner implies that rehabilitation will largely be defined psychologically rather than behaviorally.

Though officers working with both women and men believed that low self-esteem partially explained offender’s criminal behaviors, officers working with women were more likely to see self-esteem building as an important part of their work. In contrast, officers working with men worried that criminal men’s self-esteem was already too high, that their criminality resulted from a narcissistic personality. Because narcissism is one feature of “criminal thinking,” these officers believed that building men’s self-esteem could then prove counter-productive.

Officers working with women also seemed more attuned to the structural constraints women faced in completing the conditions of supervision, such as attaining employment and paying fees. Officers were particularly attuned to barriers posed by women’s single parenthood and care-giving obligations. While women’s economic barriers were acknowledged, officers’ goals for women’s rehabilitation were not economic but emotional. Perhaps because officers see employment as such a daunting goal for women, in meetings, officers often focused on women’s emotional independence, rather than economic self-sufficiency. In response to my request to give an example of how he might tailor his approach to women, this officer responds:

M: Well you know first of all I think I would work really hard to help a female to learn how to be self-sufficient in that you don’t want to be depending on some man to help you make it. And so I would probably emphasize that more, spend more time doing that.
I: In terms of like finding a job or?
M: Getting training or you know experiencing being on their own. I think, yeah. Because see guys you just kind of expect them to do that, but women, I think they would like to do that but it just seems like it’s almost impossible. Especially if you have kids that you have to take care of. That’s a huge, huge stumbling block you know. (WM, #9)

As this quote suggests, romantic relationships were a big part of the discussion with female offenders, and inquiring about boyfriends and partners, routine. Officers tried to discover whether women were romantically involved with male friends or associates they mentioned in passing, and commonly asked whether men they were in relationships with were also on supervision or had a substance abuse problem. One officer explained that officers generally assumed that the men criminal women were involved with were problematic, “I mean what we call it here is that their picker is broken . . . that part of the brain that picks the man you’re attracted to, that picker is broken and you only pick bad men, either abusive or addicted or all of the above.” Officers focused on the men in women’s lives because of the widely held belief that criminal men had led women into criminality initially, and were likely to do so again. Thus, involvement in romantic relationships posed a threat to women’s rehabilitation. I found this greater attention to women’s relationships present in my observations, the interviews and the case note analysis.

In addition to the more frequent mention of relationships, the tone of comments about relationships differed between the case notes of male and female offenders as well. Writing about male offenders, officers noted how girlfriends encouraged male offenders’ in their attainment of conventional goals, “O [offender] moved in with his GF, working at McDonalds, wants to go to college! Overall I am very impressed w/ O’s progress, by all appearances doing very well.” Case notes also frequently mentioned the resources girlfriends could offer male

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13 This criminal pathways argument, central to both academic and practice literature addressing women’s criminality, leaves little space for women’s agency.
offenders, particularly housing. Officers generally assumed that partnership for men was 
positive, a sign of progress and conventional development, so long as girlfriends were not on 
supervision or co-defendants in a case. Cases in which the girlfriend was not on supervision, but 
nonetheless likely to be involved in or accepting of a criminal lifestyle were not assessed 
cautiously. For instance, in one set of case notes, an officer reported that he had allowed a male 
client with a ten year history of methamphetamine use to move back in with his girlfriend with 
whom he had had lived for six years prior to his sentence. Presumably the girlfriend was aware 
of, and possibly involved in drug use herself, but the officer makes no mention of having 
concerns with this living arrangement.

In contrast, the notes about women’s romantic relationships were largely negative. While 
the resources boyfriends offered were mentioned, “O moved in with BF and BF’s parents after 
release from jail,” “BF will pay supervision fees,” they also frequently mentioned the 
boyfriends’ drug use, criminal involvement, supervision history and role in encouraging the 
female offender’s own criminality, “Told O that she could not live with a male who is also on 
supervision due her relapses in the past. I reviewed O’s past relapses with her, how she gets lost 
in relationships w/males who have criminal history and then she relapses.” “PO told O that any 
contact with husband [who continues to sell marijuana] would result in loss of custody of child.” 
“Admits she is still with Jake, states he drinks but no law enforcement involvement.” In these 
quotes, it is not imminent danger posed by the male partner that the officer seems to be 
concerned about; rather involvement in a relationship itself seems to run counter to officers’ 
conceptions of proper female rehabilitation.

What was remarkable about officers’ interest in this topic was the extent to which 
women’s involvement with romantic partners was considered a sign of low self-esteem or
personal failure. One officer observes, “I think it’s harder, harder for women to stay out of relationships. So I really admire the women that I know who are working hard on themselves and aren’t getting you know tempted into “I just need a man.” And actually are learning how to take care of themselves, that really helps their self-esteem long term.” Another concurs:

They drift around and women look for guys to take care of them. So they often will do a lot of things just to get that, you know that false sense of security I guess. And guys are very eager to pretend to give that to them just for you know the ability to be with them and use them. And so that gets perpetuated I think. (WM, #9)

In these quotes, women’s relationships with men are viewed as suspect, a sign of weakness or personal failure and evidence of female offenders’ inability to be independent. Both the men and women involved are seen as “using” one another.14

In contrast, men’s relationships with women were not seen as problematic to the same extent. Indeed, some relationships were seen as a mark of male offenders’ progress. Even when men were in relationships officers viewed as unhealthy, officers did not attempt to intervene to the same extent as with female offenders. After one officer explained how he counseled women to stay out of relationships and focus on their kids, I asked him if he similarly counseled men to stay out of relationships. He replied that he did but, “Of course it’s like telling somebody to not breathe, you know. Well, they’re just, men are you know (pause), they think about sex 80% of the time. You know, I mean they just do. Let’s be real.” Embedded within this quote is both the idea that relationships are more about sex for male offenders than they are for female offenders, and that, perhaps because of this, men cannot be influenced or discouraged from involvement in relationships by their officers, as women may be.

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14 It is important to note that there may well be truth in officers’ understanding of how relationships affect women. However in evaluating such treatment, it remains important to consider whether regulating these relationships should be a central goal of criminal justice supervision, or whether attention might more usefully be focused elsewhere. It is also important to consider whether the benefits of this type of treatment outweigh the costs.
The differences in the content of interviews I outlined above were reflected in differences in how the mission of the job was framed between officers working primarily with men and those working primarily with women. While officers working with men put public safety and the formal conditions of the job first, officers working with women defined a broader mission. In response to the question “what do you see as the mission of your job?” officers working with women described a diversity of missions, from reuniting women with their children to “dig[ing] deep” into to traumatic pasts to linking women up with resources and treatment programs to deal with addictions. One officer explains her mission, “With just the general woman population a lot of the women have trauma issues, abuse, lots of psychological issues, and helping the women learn how to deal with that without having to use the drug to ease the pain.” Another concurs:

I think to help the clients, I think it’s to help the clients access the treatment that will address their addictions and the crime that falls from that. And then to encourage them because going through addiction treatment or any kind of treatment is difficult for the people that have supportive families and all of that, and these people don’t usually have any of that. (WF, #7)

Public safety and the formal rules of supervision are not the priority here, rather, for these officers, treating women meant addressing the broad contexts of their lives, from substance abuse treatment to trauma recovery.¹⁵

As I have discussed, officers were more attuned to the structural challenges that marked women’s lives, including barriers to the attainment of the rules of supervision, and thus more forgiving when female offenders couldn’t meet goals like employment. Yet this very awareness

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¹⁵ Women were not the only clients who received holistic treatment from their officer. In one meeting I observed a male offender who had just been released from the hospital for a suicide attempt. This interview was not focused on the conditions of supervision, but rather on housing, medication and the offender’s mental health. I also found that discussion in meetings with young offenders was less structured and rule-focused. One officer I observed in meetings with several young adult men (perhaps 18 or 19) took a mentoring or school counseling approach, asking primarily about family, school and general life-issues. In one case the officer reminded his young charge that, were he to get involved in criminality again, “[h]e would break his mother’s heart.” As evidenced here, offenders conceived of as particularly vulnerable (the mentally ill, juveniles) were also treated holistically, similarly to women.
seemed to lead officers’ to focus instead on women’s emotional and psychological problems, thus reinforcing women’s symbolic status disadvantage.

Quality and Style of Interaction

Gender differences I observed in the content and structure of meetings were also present in the quality and tone of officers’ interactions with men and women. Officers’ interactional style similarly reflected the belief that male offenders were competent decision-makers who had chosen the wrong path, while female offenders were psychologically disordered individuals, not wholly responsible for their actions. Specifically, officers working primarily with men focused on forging a respectful rapport and maintaining a judgment-free encounter. In contrast, officers working with female offenders focused on empathizing with offenders, listening and engaging in a therapeutic style of interaction, and cultivating a friendship or mentor-like relationship. Thus for men, officers’ interactional style encouraged men to drop a combative stance and opened up the possibility for discussion about the offender’s criminal thinking patterns and behaviors. While for women, officers’ style aimed to forge an emotional connection, model a healthy and supportive relationship, and even work towards women’s emotional healing.

Rehabilitating Masculinity: Respect and Rapport

As discussed above, officers focused on men’s agentic choices that had led to criminal involvement, and presumably would also lead them out. Rehabilitating men was thus primarily concerned with setting men up to make the “right” choices. While part of this process was encouraging (or insisting upon) employment and fee payment, thereby positioning men as productive citizens, the process also unfolded in the quality and style of officers’ interaction with
men. Officers felt that establishing trust and rapport opened up the possibility for offenders to undergo cognitive shifts. Such rapport was established through breaking down barriers to engagement between the officer and the offender. Officers explained that offenders often came into the office filled with anxiety and distrust, seeming to expect the worst:

So I figure this is a very uncomfortable place. It’s stressful place, a place where people come unwillingly, figuring that the worst is probably going to be assumed of them and that they’re going to have this horrible PO that makes them feel small and ugly and horrible and I try to combat that a little bit with a little humor once in a while, and trying to calm their fears. . . (WM, #28)

The first office visit is a chance to put the client at ease, using humor to alleviate tension and begin to normalize the interaction. Through these initial interactions, officers attempted to show offenders that their role was to help the offender move forward, not to judge or humiliate them. One officer who had worked with sex offenders in the past explains that she learned how to defuse the fear sex offenders brought with them into initial meetings, “I began to take an approach with new clients telling them you know “that this isn’t about judgment, I’m not judging you.” And when I could get them to feel safe, to admit that they had committed their crime, I felt like I could start making some progress with them.”

Officers also felt that treating clients with evident respect was an important part of rapport and trust building. One officer explains, “To me the most successful element you can work is if you can build a rapport with somebody. And the rapport is based on just a basic level of trust and respect, that I'm gonna treat you as a human being, and I expect to be treated the same. And as long as we don't violate that, then we have somewhere to work from.” If the offender trusted the officer, the officer could then “start to hold up the mirror a little bit and maybe create a little cognitive dissonance” as one officer put it, utilizing motivational interviewing techniques to break down offenders’ criminal thinking patterns. This quote also
hints at another difference in style between officers working primarily with men and women, that is, officers working with men tended to verbally acknowledge the power dynamics present in the supervisory relationship in a way that officers working with women did not.  

While both sets of officers worked to develop rapport, the extent to which officers working with men described listening, working through traumatic history or engaging in therapeutic discourse was quite different. Men would generally be allowed to unload feelings of anger and frustration at their circumstance for a short time, but quickly encouraged to move on to other things. One female officer working with domestic violence offenders explains:  

I kind of, I let them process that, I let them kind of talk about how frustrated they are or why they shouldn’t be here and “I’ve seen worse things, I mean there’s other guys that do worse than I do.” You know let them get that all out and I kind of let them be heard because I know if I don’t we’re never going to go anywhere. So I let them do it for a certain amount of time, but if it continues to be really useless and unhelpful over time I can say that “I’m going to have to stop you there, let’s move forward. Ok, you’re here now, let’s focus on what you need to do here. Can’t change that.” (WF, #31)  

In other words, listening was intended as a starting point to forge a positive working relationship with men, but was not generally used as a mini-therapy session or chance for the male offender to heal. One female officer working primarily with men noted that she was careful not to delve too deeply into clients’ personal lives:  

I want to make sure that we address the problems that are important to them, but I also want to try to manage the situation because you always have to, whatever can of worms you open in a session you have to be able to close, you can’t let them walk out this door raw. So if I don’t have time to close them back up before they walk out then I can’t let them continue with it. I try to keep it a little more superficial because um (pause), our job is not as counselors. I don’t have 55 minutes to deal with his situation and put him back together and send him out the door; I don’t have that. (WF, # 6)  

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16 I found that the power dynamic between officer and offender was less frequently explicitly acknowledged by officers working with women, perhaps because such recognition threatened their definition of the relationship as therapeutic or empowering for the offender.
I was able to observe several meetings between this officer and her male clients and confirmed that some men seemed to be seeking a connection with her, or attempting to engage her more deeply in their lives, however, this officer largely stuck to the script, focusing on topics centrally relevant to supervision. She maintained a business-like interactional style. The quality and tone of officers’ work with men was respectful but officious; men’s internal lives were largely seen as beyond the scope of the supervisory relationship.

*Empathizing, Engaging, Empowering Women*

In contrast, many officers felt that female offenders required empathetic, emotionally responsive treatment in order to be able to engage in personal change. Expressing empathy and making women feel welcome were important aspects of these officers’ style. As one officer explains, “you need empathy for both [men and women], but (pause) I think yeah, I mean women are just by nature more emotional and for a woman to come in and not feel welcome um, it’s much harder for them to open up and really make the changes. Without such a reception, these psychologically troubled women would continue to “self-medicate” with drugs or unhealthy, “addictive” relationships.

Officers also forged emotional connection by interacting less formally and more like friends than did officers working with men. Officers working with women engaged in a chatty style that minimized the social distance between client and offender, complimented clients on successes at work or school as well as changes to appearance like a new haircut or color. “I’ll compliment them that they look nice. I’ll talk to them about what it is that they like about themselves.” In these ways the supervisory relationship took on aspects of a friendship or mentor relationship. One particularly engaged female officer on the drug court team spent time on the
weekends and evenings with her clients, texting, taking them out to dinner, even overseeing a
DHS/family visit at the zoo. Another officer on a women’s team led a knitting class for her
clients once weekly.

In part, officers felt that this was an important part of working with women because their
clients had so few positive role models or relationships in their lives. Officers took on this role
often recognizing that women had few non-criminal friends that they could turn to for advice and
support. The criminal activity that led to community supervision thus availed women of one
person (their corrections officer) who could act as a caseworker or friend to them.

A number of them are grateful that, that I’m here and they want to get out of their
addiction. They want me to do UAs to hold them accountable. They are desperate for
something to get in their life and help them get out of the addiction. I’ve had people use
me as a reference on jobs as the emergency contact number on applications and things.
So sometimes there’s no one else left, so I’m like this authoritative, responsible person
they actually have a relationship with that they can refer other people to. (WF, #2)

Another officer from the women’s team concurs:

I have a desire to help them. And not that I wouldn’t have a desire to help men also, but I
don’t mind them talking. I don’t mind them needing a hug at the end. I don’t mind being
the one person they call if I’m the one person they have right now. That doesn’t bother
me. And I think some POs, that would be too much or too close or too involved. So I
think I enjoy the women for that. (WF, #7)

This officer explains that she is well-suited to working with women because she is not just
comfortable with, but happy to provide the emotionally-engaged, close relationship she has
found that women require on supervision.

Some officers even felt that meetings could be an opportunity for a mini-therapy session,
or a chance to address women’s trauma:

Well here’s a good example, yesterday I had a client come in, um she’s lost custody of all
of her children. And she’s appealed and she goes for her appeal hearing this morning.
You know, and somebody who might not want to get into that deep emotion type conversation with her would just be you know, “good luck,…” da, da, da, da. (pause) but I kind of delved into it a little bit further and we talked about her needing to learn how to forgive herself and that she’s a different person now than the person when she lost her children. (WF, #3)

This officer saw the supervisory meeting as an opportunity for the offender to begin to heal psychologically. In the context of explaining why she enjoys working with female clients, another officer explains that she can take on the role of a psychoanalyst:

Finally, I built a relationship with her enough that it’s like come on, I mean I know your pattern. You’re dating these men because of your father. You know, her father abandoned her when she was a young child, and so she’s always had this wanting to find a man. (LF, # 16)

Presumably, the officer views the chance to discuss women’s troubled histories and problematic personal patterns as a benefit of court-ordered supervision.

Far from a “nail ‘em and jail ‘em” operation, officers conceptualized effective supervision for women as listening and being responsive to female offenders, and being a resource for women who had no one to count on or talk to. The quality and tone of officers’ work with women was emotionally engaged and personal; women’s internal lives were seen as central to the supervisory relationship.

**The Logic of Gendered Rehabilitation**

Community corrections officers enact the gendered treatment regimes I have described because of their beliefs that criminal men and women differ fundamentally in their pathways into crime and the root cause of their deviance, that is, officers’ understandings of the psychological underpinning of offenders’ criminality. These beliefs then generated the distinctly gendered processes of social control I have described.
Most officers agreed that nearly all offenders came from disadvantaged backgrounds and family situations, but that relative to men, female offenders were less agentically positioned in their descent into criminal offending. In response to the question, “Do you believe that women should be held less responsible for their crimes due to their pathways into crime?” one officer responded, “Personally, we all have choices to make, but yes, I think women probably are put in situations where the choices for them are less, so when they make these bad choices it’s outta desperation . . .” This officer voiced a sentiment expressed by many officers I interviewed, that women’s more marginalized circumstances, in terms of economic power, dependent roles within relationships, caregiving responsibilities and victimization histories, made women less responsible for their crimes, and their decision to offend less blameworthy.\(^\text{17}\) As one officer explains, “I mean their stories are heartbreaking. It’s phenomenal to me that they get through each day with some of the horrendous things that they’ve been through.”\(^\text{18}\) Officers’ conceptions of offenders’ blameworthiness reflected their understandings of how offenders had initially become criminally engaged.

From officers’ narratives, I identified two basic types of criminal men that entered the justice system along distinct pathways: those I term Misfit Masculinity and those I term Oppressive Masculinity.\(^\text{19}\) Misfit Masculinity was described by officers as immature or poorly socialized individuals who had neither the will power nor the skills to meet their (frequently)

\(^{17}\) Of course, the fact that women’s offending tends to be less violent and serious than men’s on average likely also contributed to this belief (Daly 1996). In fact, one female officer working with serious, repeat offenders, including women, commented the following, “We underestimate women. [Other officers] They’re just kinda doing one of these to you . . . ‘oh, she's a woman, you know. Oh, she was raped, oh, she was this, oh, she was that.’ Oh yeah? Not all women that are with us did robbery, armed robbery, assault, stabbing.” Because of this officer’s exposure to more criminal women, she viewed women less as victims and more as blameworthy offenders.

\(^{18}\) This belief was not universal among officers, several officers denied that they saw any difference between the life circumstances of men and women, and believed that treatment should not differentiate by gender category alone. Most officers, however, believed that, though men and women shared many characteristics, women faced additional barriers, hardships and circumstances that needed to be taken into consideration. Women’s single parent status was an important consideration, for instance.

\(^{19}\) These are not officers own words, but rather categories I impose upon patterns in how officers talk about men’s criminality.
conventional goals. Asked why he believes offenders become criminally involved, one officer responds:

    Well some of it is immaturity. I think people sort of, they get stuck emotionally where they’re at when they’re fourteen, fifteen. . . I think it’s easier to be a failure for a lot of these guys too, that it’s easier to just kind of couch surf and not have responsibility and not have people relying on you because when they start feeling that sense of responsibility, that’s uncomfortable for them. They’re not used to that and so it’s easier just to sort of self sabotage. (WM, #46)

This officer explains men’s criminality as a kind of extended adolescence and a way to shirk real life responsibility. Other officers working primarily with men exhibiting Oppressive Masculinity explained that they believed violent criminality emerged out of a need for “power and control” and the “criminal thinking” belief that the rules did not apply to them. “They do it because they think they can [domestic violence offending]. . . You have to be a bully and you have to the type of bully that thinks he’s not going to get caught.”

    While explanations for men’s offending differed in some ways by the “type” of man the officers discussed, officers did not seem to similarly differentiate women’s pathways into crime; women were believed to be drawn into crime for reasons of psychological deficiency, traumatic personal histories or relationships with problematic men.20

    Based upon these gendered types, rehabilitation for men then meant engaging in a cognitive intervention wherein offenders learned how to meet their goals legally, learn and accept the rules of society, and adhere to them in the context of employment. To be a rehabilitated man was to be a productive worker, and a contributor to society. Eventually this

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20 Although officers did not distinguish diverse pathways into crime for women as they did for men, they did identify criminal types of women. I identified two types of criminal femininities: Desperate Femininities, those women identified as excessively needy and lacking in resources (both emotional and financial), and those identified as mentally imbalanced and psychologically manipulative, what I term Disordered Femininities. While these two types exhibited different behaviors in interaction with their officers, both were understood to be emergent from similar life circumstances.
would mean attaining the material markers of success: a house and car and eventually, supporting a family. For women, rehabilitation meant in large part psychological transformation; becoming strong enough in oneself without the help of drugs or a romantic partner to deal with the pain and trauma that had marked their lives. It could also mean being a good mother to her children.

**Conclusion**

While some feminist theorists have argued that gender neutral policy and bureaucratic practice will disadvantage women because neutrality masks a male bias, others argue that policy and practice that targets treatment to women simply reifies gender categories and reinforces existing inequality. While gender theory has reached something of a stand-still on this issue, practitioners are actively implementing targeted treatment across a variety of organizational contexts. Based on analysis of officers’ case notes and fieldwork with community corrections agents, this research suggests that gender-specific treatment cannot be said to simply advantage or disadvantage women, but rather, has complex material and symbolic implications for the men and women targeted.

As this work has implications for gender theory, so too does it contribute to criminological literature on formal social control. While probation and parole are the most common forms of criminal justice supervision, we know relatively little about how community corrections officers conceptualize their work, and less about how and why officers’ work practices are gendered. Evidence presented here suggests that officers understand the root cause of deviance and criminality differently for the men and women they supervise. Because officers believe that men and women have distinct needs, they tailor their interactions and interventions
along gendered lines. In fleshing out the content of these gendered strategies, this study illuminates the gendered nature of formal social control.

In this paper I have documented ways in which the experience of supervision differs for male and female offenders in an institution committed to providing gender-targeted treatment. I have suggested that these differences reflect distinctly gendered rehabilitative practices and experiences of formal social control. These differences emerge from officers’ beliefs regarding what men and women require to reform and rehabilitate into non-criminal, “normal” men and women. I have described these differences as the following: greater focus on men’s agency in choosing to criminally offend or abstain from offending and greater focus on men’s adherence to the formal rules of supervision. For women, I found supervision to be more holistic in orientation, more personally engaged with the officer, with greater attention paid to women’s emotional needs, deficits of self-esteem and problematic relationships with men.

The gender-specific rehabilitative regimes I have described suggest that targeting treatment by gender categories reinforces gendered beliefs or symbolic associations of masculinity with greater status, competence and power, and femininity with dependency, powerlessness and psychological disorder. Specifically, officers believe men to be more responsible and agentic in their criminality than are women and that women are coerced or led into crime, rather than offending by their own volition or agency. Further, consistent with past research, I find that officers locate women’s criminality in emotional and psychological deficits, and thus seek to rehabilitate women through interventions in these domains. For this reason, gender-targeted treatment for women infringes on women’s privacy, personal freedom, and freedom of association in a way not true of gender-specific treatment for men. In addition, by locating women’s criminality in disordered selves rather than poor or irresponsible choices,
officers further reinforce notions of women’s inferiority, even relative to criminal men. In these ways, I suggest that the gendered treatment I have described advantages men symbolically.

However, because greater responsibility or agency for one’s criminal offending may lead to more punitive treatment, men are in some ways materially disadvantaged by this association. For instance, officers may be more willing to extend a second chance to women who have violated a rule of supervision than they would to men, who are deemed both more responsible and blameworthy for their actions. Of course, I can only speculate on this matter as I do not have longitudinal data on sanctioning or revocation. However, this claim does align with past research on gender differences in judicial sentencing, which has found that women receive more lenient treatment than criminal men (Spohn and Beichner 2000; Spohn and Spears 1997). Further, because men are held to be more competent, they are also believed to be more capable of fulfilling the formal rules of supervision, including obtaining employment and paying supervision fees. Women may be less pressured to fulfill these obligations, as officers believe they are less capable of doing so. In these ways male offenders may face real material consequences resultant from their masculine status. Thus, within the context of a correctional system committed to gender-appropriate treatment, women may experience positive material, but negative symbolic consequences, with the situation reversed for men.

Finally, while I have suggested that women may be advantaged in the short term by officers’ looser commitment to assuring that women fulfill the formal rules of supervision, this may prove disadvantageous for women in the long-term. This is because gender specific treatment for women tends to take as its primary task empowering women through encouraging emotional, psychological and relational independence, rather than encouraging the steps necessary for women to attain economic independence through job training and skill building.
Vocational education and job training are two interventions the “what works” literature has shown to be successful in curbing recidivism (MacKenzie 2000; Petersilia 1998; Seiter and Kadela 2003). Though it may be the case that women are indeed lacking in self-esteem and reliant upon problematic romantic partners, if women have no source of income and no place to stay (other than with this partner) self-esteem building or emotional empowerment alone will not translate into real independence for women. In contrast, officers working with men are more likely to target employment, and the structured and cognitive behavioral therapeutic interventions that have been found successful in protecting against recidivism in the context of reentry programs (Andrews and Bonta 2003; MacKenzie 2000; Seiter and Kadela 2003).\(^{21}\) Uncovering the long-term consequences of these gender-specific regimes remains an important topic for future research. Future work may also usefully apply the distinction I have drawn between material and symbolic advantage to other institutional settings, such as welfare offices, where the material benefits offered to women (and not men) have frequently been glossed over in favor of a focus on stigma and surveillance, aspects of symbolic experience.

\(^{21}\) Mackenzie (2000) and Seiter and Kadela (2003) are meta-analyses, and did not consistently report the gender of the sample from studies they drew upon. It is not possible to say definitively that these findings apply equally to men and women. Andrews and Bonta (2003) report that their findings are equally applicable to women and men.
Table 1. Negative Binomial Regressions of Counts of Case Notes: Crime, Drugs & Alcohol, Treatment, Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crime (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Offender</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Officer</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Offenders 101 101 101 101

Notes:

Dependent Variables: Crime-mentions of offender's crime in case notes; Drugs-mentions of drugs & alcohol in offenders' case notes; Treatment-mentions of drug and alcohol treatment in offenders' case notes; Employment-mention of employment in offenders' case notes.

Standard errors clustered by officer. Results reported in exponentiated format. Exposure is total number of text entries recorded during the year.

Offenders matched by gender on risk score, crime, criminal history and mental health. For sample selection see text.

+ : P-value of < .10 , * : p-value of <.05, ** : P-value of <.01, *** : P-value of <.001
Table 2: Negative Binomial Regressions of Counts of Case Notes: Payment, Timeliness, Sanction, Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Fee Payment (1)</th>
<th>Timeliness (2)</th>
<th>Sanction (3)</th>
<th>Romantic Relationships (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Offender</td>
<td>1.37 (.18)</td>
<td>1.06 (.32)</td>
<td>0.84 (.24)</td>
<td>0.65 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Officer</td>
<td>1.64 (.60)</td>
<td>1.32 (.41)</td>
<td>0.81 (.4)</td>
<td>1.48 (.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Offenders</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

Dependent Variables: Payment-mentions of supervision payment and fees in offenders' case notes; Timeliness-mentions of offenders showing up on time or missing appointments recorded in the case notes; Sanction-mentions of sanction in offenders' case notes; Romantic Relationships-mention of romantic relationship or partner in offenders' case notes.

Standard errors clustered by officer. Results reported in exponentiated format. Exposure is total number of text entries recorded during the year.

Offenders matched by gender on risk score, crime, criminal history and mental health. For sample selection see text.

+: P-value of < .10 , * : p-value of < .05 , ** : P-value of < .01 , *** : P-value of < .001
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