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Imprisoned Men: Masculinity Variability and Implications for Correctional Programming

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ABSTRACT

Prison is a place with an accumulation of men who espouse toughness and aggression, where those who deviate are punished and forced to renegotiate their thoughts on what it means to be a man. Behaviors not considered overtly masculine, such as receiving support in the form of correctional programming, may be off limits to men serving time. Guided by the larger masculinities and crime framework, we examine the perceptions of masculinity and its consequences through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five incarcerated men in the state of Arizona. We focus on three questions: what does it mean to be a man? Does the prison experience alter this conceptualization? Does this conceptualization affect participation in correctional programming? Our results reveal that there is variation in how incarcerated men define what it means to be man, the incarceration experience matters for how incarcerated men define and express their masculinity, and what it means to be a man in prison indirectly impacts engagement in correctional programs.

What does it mean to be a *real man* in prison? Self-reliance, loyalty, emotional balance, courage, assertiveness, and confidence are characteristics associated with men (on the outside). Work, family, and recreational life provide a number of opportunities to express and display these traits in healthy ways. Prison has a limited if nonexistent work, family, and recreational life, meaning incarcerated men have to express and display their masculinity in other ways. Prison is a place with an accumulation of men who espouse toughness and aggression (Mears, Stewart, Siennick, & Simons, 2013). Prison is a place in which those who do not conform to these ideals are punished and forced to renegotiate their thoughts on how to be a real man (Messerschmidt, 2001). What this means is that behaviors not considered overtly masculine, such as receiving support in the form of correctional programming, may be off limits to men serving time. Real men in prison do not show weakness by acknowledging the need for help.

Not all men, however, subscribe to the expectations of a "hegemonic masculinity" that idealizes a uniform set of exaggerated masculine behaviors across all settings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) advocate for a more holistic understanding of masculinity "recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups." Clinicians in the field of counseling psychology

have advocated for a "positive masculinity" that embraces and promotes prosocial masculine qualities (Englar-Carlson & Kiselica, 2013; see also Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). European correctional scholars have long acknowledged the complexities of prison masculinities (Jewkes, 2005; Maycock & Hunt, 2018). There seems to be variability in the degree to which men on the outside embrace exaggerated or harmful masculine behaviors associated with aggression and violence. Could the same be true of men on the inside in US prisons? And if so, could this lead to insight in how to make correctional programming more accessible and effective?

We examine the perceptions of masculinity and its consequences among incarcerated men in a medium security prison in the state of Arizona. Three broad research questions guide our work. First, what does it mean to be a man? Second, does the prison experience alter this conceptualization? Third, does this conceptualization affect participation in correctional programming? With every reason to expect that the prison is an environment that promotes an antisocial and exaggerated form of masculinity conducive to aggression and violence, our broader purpose is to determine the *consequences* of the multiple perceptions of what it means to be a *real man* in prison.

Men in prison

Exaggerated masculinities in prison

Hegemonic masculinity is considered to be the presiding notion of masculinity, or what it means to be a man in a given social context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Karp, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity is fluid and can change as social contexts change; however, it has certain characteristics that have remained rather consistent across time and space. Central features include valuing power, control, competition, and emotional suppression (Evans & Wallace, 2008). Authority, heterosexuality, independence, aggressiveness, and a tolerance of violence are additional pillars (Connell, 2014; Karp, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity also emphasizes the importance of material wealth and respect, and the use of intimidation to display strength (Connell, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity is fluid, but flexing manliness often means subscribing to a more rigid foundation of attitudes and behaviors.

Hegemonic masculinity could be considered maladaptive and destructive – alongside being valued and accepted (Kupers, 2005). A desire for respect, autonomy, and independence, for example, is not inherently problematic; these attributes can be prosocial, but the way that they are pursued can be cause for concern. The pursuit of hegemonic masculinity is often associated with homophobia, misogyny, and a high tolerance for the use of violence (Carlsson, 2013; Kupers, 2005). Messerschmidt (1993) wrote that crime is the result of "doing masculinity," where males attempt to establish their masculine identities by using the most readily available resources to do so. He argued that middle-class, white men, for example, are able to establish masculine identities and provide for themselves through educational attainment and good careers; lower-class, minority men have less legitimate opportunities and may use crime and violence to establish masculinity. In more recent work he has elaborated to account for the role of structure and its influence on masculinity performance (Messerschmidt, 2009, 2013, 2018, 2019). Power, aggression, and violence are valued and enhance the exaggerated masculine identity; however, displays of weakness can quickly undermine that ideal, making the concealment of vulnerability and

weakness an integral part of hegemonic masculinity (Karp, 2010; Spencer, Fegley, Harpalani, & Seaton, 2004).

Prison is understood to contain a culture that has multiple masculinities including harmful or exaggerated masculinities (Haney, 2011; Toch, 1998). In addition, it is recognized that there is a prison code, largely influenced by an exaggerated masculine culture, that structures behavior during incarceration (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Sykes & Messinger, 1960; Trammell, 2012). Respect is prized by the prison code and is associated with violence, with physical domination as one way to gain respect within the prison environment (Kupers, 2005). Reflective of hegemonic masculinity, as much as the prison code is about displaying toughness, it is equally concerned with concealing weakness. Displays of weakness can be a source of vulnerability that provoke exploitation from other prisoners (Seymour, 2003; Trammell, 2012); thus, the prison code dictates that incarcerated men avoid appearing weak in front of others and minimize displays of weakness overall. Showing kindness, gentleness, care, sadness, and love are all considered indicators of weakness within the prison code. The informal structure of prison means that masculinity is pursued in ways that reward violence and punish pacificity (Ricciardelli & Sit, 2016).

The force of hegemonic masculinity is intensified on the inside. A rich history of correctional thought details how prisoners import attitudes and characteristics from the outside-in (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). But the setting changes – the audience becomes all men, and displays of masculinity, for example, become exaggerated when legitimate displays done on the outside are unavailable on the inside (Newton, 1994; Sloan, 2016a). Importation therefore comingles with deprivation: no autonomy, no meaningful work, no family, and no women means masculinity swells and takes the form of aggression toward other men (Messerschmidt, 2001; Sykes, 1958). Exaggerated forms of masculinity serve as a coping mechanism in response to these environmental stressors, relieve short-term needs and fears, and allow those who are incarcerated to adapt to the prison environment (Dolovich, 2018). To be a real man in prison means to orient your life around a carousel of violence, with real consequences that embolden antisocial attitudes and behaviors.

Consequences of the masculine prison

Violence – and especially the threat of violence – can structure the consequences of behaviors and nonbehaviors behind the walls (Dolovich, 2018). The use of violence is the ultimate display of a harmful masculinity in prison and takes the form of fights with other prisoners, assaults on correctional officers, and sexual assault (Kupers, 2005; Michalski, 2015). Punishments for violating code are much more drastic on the inside as compared to that on the outside. Whereas most men on the outside mature and expand their behavioral response repertoire beyond the schoolyard fight option, men on the inside fight, and they fight when attempts are made at avoiding fighting (Sabo, Kupers, & London, 2001). Some men in prison concoct a volatile brew where violence becomes tolerated, normalized, valued, and expected. Ultimately, it is the culture within the prison and its emphasis on violence that makes for a prison characterized by exaggerated displays of masculinity. The main consequence of this culture is that violence, often times, trumps all else, leading to an emphasis on security and safety rather than on growth and rehabilitation.[1]

The presence of violence, and the absence of social support, contributes to an environment where rehabilitation is neither welcomed nor feasible (Lutze & Murphy, 1999; Seymour, 2003). Expectations of the prison code create an added level of difficulty to conducting therapy in prison, as the emotional suppression that is demanded by the prison code makes it more difficult to reach incarcerated men therapeutically (Kupers, 2005). Lutze and Bell's (2005) evaluation of boot camp prisons found that even though these particular boot camp prisons were treatment-focused and oriented toward rehabilitation, they reinforced exaggerated displays of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity stereotypes that countered the benefits to completing the program. Failure to recognize and address the influence of masculinity can undermine rehabilitative efforts – even when rehabilitation is at the forefront of programming.

Many incarcerated men are still developing their male identities, making the information they receive from the prison about masculinity that much more influential (Haney, 2011). The influence of the prison environment brings the influence of hypermasculinity in prison full-circle: men who endorse exaggerated masculinities produce masculine environments that are exaggerated, which then structure the attitudes and behaviors of men – whether they subscribed to a hegemonic masculinity or not. Exaggerated masculinity in prison is neither an accumulation of masculine men nor a structured patriarchal institution that exerts influence on men; it is both (see Rubin, 2017). Curtis (2014) noted that the prison serves as an environment that can construct, reconstruct, affirm, or reaffirm ideas surrounding what it means to be a man and how behaviors and attitudes should reflect that definition. Achieving a healthy masculine identity requires chipping away at environments in which exaggerated or harmful masculinities flourish.

Alternative masculinities within the prison

A dominant, hegemonic masculinity can only exist if there are alternative masculinities for comparison (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Many incarcerated men perceive that it is necessary to project a masculine front that is exaggerated to the larger prison population and these exaggerated displays of macsulinity are most often done publicly to show conformity within the dominant prison culture (De Viggiani, 2012). And yet displays of emotion, prison culture norms, and masculinity vary across different spaces within the prison environment (Crewe, Warr, Bennett, & Smith, 2014). De Viggiani (2012) found that in private or with trusted others, sometimes the hypermasculine front is dropped or reduced; the prison code is relaxed in the prison visitation setting, for example (Tasca, Wright, Turanovic, White, & Rodriguez, 2016). Sim (1994, p. 112) wrote, "Pursuing education classes, attaining an intimate knowledge of prison rules, regulations and standing orders, becoming a 'jailhouse lawyer' and categorically refusing to engage in violent or coercive behavior are all examples of strategies developed by prisoners which do not necessarily derive from the culture of masculinity inside." Not all in prison are governed by violence.

Correctional scholars in the European context have found that fatherhood (Ugelvik, 2014), media consumption (Jewkes, 2002), and employment during incarceration (Sloan, 2016b) can all be related to gender performance and achieving masculinity goals. They also know that part of understanding expressions of masculinity in prison means understanding the emotional worlds of incarcerated men (Crewe, 2014), and that expressions of

masculinity as a part of prison social life can have lasting impacts on health (De Viggiani, 2003). Within the US context, however, scholars are just beginning to acknowledge the importance of gender dynamics for understanding incarceration and post-incarceration experiences more generally. Trammell et al. (2018), for example, found that incarcerated men and women differ in how they interpret the help and advice they receive from correctional staff.

Nandi (2002) examined what it means to be a real man in US prisons in her survey research of 37 incarcerated African American men. The men described feelings of help-lessness and compassion for others as marks of a real man, as one man wrote, "A real man isn't afraid to cry … A real man has compassion for those who have none for themselves" (Nandi, 2002, p. 97). The participants also identified the prison experience – and especially in serving lengthy sentences – as causing them to reevaluate their masculinity. Lastly, responsibility was redefined through introspection, and not one man linked real manhood with sex, aggression, pride, or violence. Importantly, Nandi's (2002) sample was generated from a website that posts prisoners' profiles to link them with social contacts in the free world and from prisoners who contributed to an anthology on the phenomena of Black incarceration. Possible selection effects aside, her work puts words to the idea that multiple masculinities exist within prisons alongside hegemonic masculinity. This idea has been further supported by international work in India, Taiwan, and Canada assessing how masculinity is comprised in prison settings (Bandyopadhyay, 2006; Hua-Fu, 2005; Ricciardelli, 2015).

Current focus

Masculinity is context specific. Recognizing this variability, Addis and Mahalik (2003, p. 8) wrote, "Thus, men who endorse traditional masculine ideologies may cry, men who endorse nontraditional ideologies may make homophobic remarks, and men who sub-scribe to masculinity norms of self-reliance may ask for help under certain conditions. It is precisely this sort of within-person and across-situation variability that needs to be understood if [we] are to adequately understand and facilitate adaptive help seeking." Is this also true of men in prison? If so, how can a better understanding increase the likelihood that prison will be a place of rehabilitation rather than a place of violence? We answer three research questions to determine the variability of masculinity and its implications for correctional programming. We first establish a foundation for what the men perceive it means to be a man and whether the prison experience impacts that perception. We then turn our attention to an in-depth analysis of our most critical question: Do masculinity meanings affect participation in correctional programming? Our broader purpose is to determine the *consequences* of the multiple perceptions of what it means to be a *real man* in prison.

Methods

The Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) housed around 42,000 people at the time of data collection, comprising an ethnically and racially diverse population – roughly 40% Hispanic, 39% Caucasian, 14% African-American, and 5% Native American (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2017). People in prison are housed

across 10 different facilities, varying in custody level, in addition to 6 private prison facilities across the state. At the time of data collection, ADC reported 36,262 total program enrollments (not accounting for individuals enrolled in more than one program simultaneously), across a variety of program types: education (5,538 enrollments), addiction treatment (807 enrollments), sex offense treatment (263 enrollments), self-improvement programs (4,568 enrollments), and work programs (25,086 enrollments) (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2017). The incarcerated men in this study were all living in a medium security unit, which housed 671 men at the time of data collection.

The purposive sample (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006) is made up of five incarcerated men who had recently participated or were actively participating in programming during incarceration. The men were recruited from the first Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program class offered in Arizona that took place in the Spring of 2016 (see Pompa, 2013; Wright & Jonson, 2018). Selection for participation in Inside-Out involved a rigorous process that ensured each of the students had been free of any recent disciplinary infractions and were appropriate for the course, as determined by ADC officials and the Inside-Out course instructors. Following successful completion of the class, the five men in this study were identified as exceptional students within the Inside-Out course and chosen to be a part of an Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program think tank referred to as the Arizona Transformation Project (ATP). Within the ATP, the men in this study work to create transformative learning opportunities within prison and the community (Haverkate, Meyers, Telep, & Wright, 2019; Thrasher et al., 2019). One of the authors approached each of the five men and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study and all five agreed.[2] Thus, this sample is uniquely comprised of five men with exceptional performance in a correctional program, who were viewed positively by ADC officials, and who continue to engage in positive behavior. We return to the impact of the potential bias in our sample below in our discussion section.

The sample is middle-aged, with ages ranging from 36 to 49 years old. Of the five men, none were married, although one described being in a committed relationship, and three of the five men had children. Educational attainment ranged from GED/high school to Masters. Four of the five men indicated that this was their first time serving an adult sentence, and the number of years spent incarcerated on their current sentences ranged from 4 years to 22 years. At the time of data collection 50% of the entire prison population was between the ages of 25 and 39, 30% was between 40 and 54 years old, 10% was between 18 and 24 years old, and 10% was 55 years old or older (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2017). Additionally, 50% of the larger prison population were serving their first sentence with ADC at the time of data collection (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2017). Compared to the larger prison population, the sample interviewed in this study is slightly older and is over-representative of those who are serving their first adult sentence with ADC.[3]

Data were obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews comprised of open-ended questions that were conducted in April of 2017. This approach was chosen for two reasons. First, given the limited research and knowledge about barriers to programming during incarceration, the study is exploratory in nature and is largely reliant on the experiences and perceptions of people incarcerated to inform the research questions. Second, the use of in-depth interviews allows for the men to shed light on

the meanings they assign to masculinity and programming, and it allows us as researchers to learn these dynamics through their perspectives (Lofland et al., 2006).

One author conducted all the interviews one-on-one and each lasted approximately two hours, giving roughly ten hours of interview data for the analysis. Although the sample is small in number, we counter this with in-depth interviews that elicited deep and meaningful descriptions (Maruna & Matravers, 2007; Presser, 2010). To allow for free expression, the interviewer conducted the interviews privately in a programming office. Given the sensitive nature of the questions, it was important to have the interviews conducted away from other incarcerated men and correctional staff to allow for free expression of perceptions, attitudes, and experiences – and to maintain the privacy of the men. The interviews were semi-structured, with the interview tool outlining basic demographic information, masculinity attitudes, and experiences with and attitudes toward programming and incarceration. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain the original statements of the men.[4] Additionally, pseudonyms were provided to protect their identity and preserve their confidentiality.

Two-cycled thematic coding was used to analyze the interview data (Saldaña, 2013). First-cycle coding focused on the descriptive analysis (Saldaña, 2013, p. 87) and structural analysis (Saldaña, 2013, p. 84) of the participants' responses. More specifically, descriptive coding was used to uncover the basic topics within participants interview responses, while structural coding was used to identify the broad themes that made up the interviews. While the interview tool provided some structure and assumptions for analysis based on a priori interests in masculinity and programming, we also used the first-cycle coding process to account for and uncover emerging themes from the interviews (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Second-cycle coding then focused on pattern analysis (Saldaña, 2013, p. 209) in which similarly coded data were identified, organized, and coupled with the themes identified during the first-cycle coding process.

Results

Results of the study are organized around the three research questions of interest. The first question (what does it mean to be a man?) yielded three key themes: personal definitions of masculinity, perceptions of others' definitions of masculinity, and shifting masculinities. The second question (does the prison experience impact what it means to be a man?) produced two key themes: imported masculinities and masculinity as a prison tool. Lastly, the third question (how do masculinity meanings affect participation in correctional programming?) resulted in three key themes: direct effects of masculinity on programming, indirect effects of masculinity on programming, and the context-specific nature of impact of masculinity on programming.

What does it mean to be a man?

Personal definitions of masculinity
Masculinities are complex, fluid, and malleable, they do not take one particular form. In their personal definitions of what it means to be a man, the men in this study provided descriptions of being a provider and leader within the family, serving as a protector, and being strong. Their definitions, however, did not reflect harmful or exaggerated masculine

attitudes or behaviors. Most believed that being a man meant being loving, compassionate, selfless, and responsible. Adam highlighted this duality specifically by noting common societal expectations of what it means to be a man: "I think some of what I believe is a man is the way society feel, like you have to provide, you have to protect, you have to be responsible." Adam also added that being a man is to "have compassion, love, consider others around you, sometimes even over yourself," further illustrating the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity goals in non-harmful ways.

Most of the men thought that being a man meant having the ability to put others' needs ahead of their own. Sean spoke to this idea by saying:

> A man steps from his boyhood life to say, "Look. This world is no longer all about me. There's other people involved in my life that I need to care about, that I need to set aside my wants and desires to make sure their needs are met first."

Lawrence also emphasized the importance of prioritizing the needs of family in defining what it means to be a man. He spoke to the idea that masculinity is developmental and a progression of becoming more active in trying to better others:

> A real man, to me, steps up to the plate, looks in the mirror and sees what he can better about himself, and how he can better those around him, and be a provider, and this is kind of movin' on to step two – be a provider for his family … And if you're not providin' for your family, bein' an example for your kids, treatin' your wife like a queen, and bein' responsible, you're really not a man.

Jeremy's definition of masculinity, on the other hand, challenged previous expectations he understood around displaying emotions as a man while also acknowledging that he agreed with some more common expectations of hegemonic masculinity, such as being a leader:

> Growin' up, you start to see, "Look man, you don't have to be a tough guy to be a man." That men can actually show their emotions, and I think that a man is just bein' responsible. A man is not having to be who other people are or expect you to be. Being yourself, you know? I do believe that a man should be strong, a man should be the leader of a household, but I don't believe that a man should be dominant.

Perceptions of others' definitions of masculinity

The men believed that their conceptualizations of masculinity and what it meant to be a man to them *differed from* other incarcerated men's definitions. The men thought that other incarcerated men displayed their masculinity in more harmful or exaggerated ways and, as Jeremy put it, "just think bein' a man is bein' a tough guy." Martin thought that most other men thought of masculinity as being tough, willing to use violence, and disrespecting women:

> In here the man is bein' the tough guy, ready to fight at any limits, lookin' for trouble, gettin' tattoos, usin' vulgar language, not carin'. For many, it's okay to hit a female, fights, and thinks that's cool, and doin' drugs. Havin' a lot of kids and not supportin' 'em.

Jeremy showed the complexities of self and others' perceptions of masculinity, "Not that I'm above them but I'm on the outside lookin' in and to me it looks like they're a bunch of clowns. But from the inside, they sound cool as hell." Collectively these sentiments may reflect the tendency for men to underreport their own enactment of problematic forms of masculinity, while overreporting that of their peers. However, these observations spoke to

a larger theme of shifting masculinities, whereby the men described evolutions or changes in how they have thought of what it means to be a man across time.

Shifting masculinities

While the men conceptualized masculinity in ways that were not exaggerated or harmful, most acknowledged they had experienced shifts in how they defined manhood and that their previous definitions and conceptualizations were more exaggerated and reflective of the other incarcerated men's current definitions. Lawrence spoke to this shift by saying, "I've changed my view and I've walked it, a different path, it hasn't always been easy and I've had times where I've been susceptible to the peer pressure." In fact, Lawrence goes on to describe what he previously believed it meant to be a man:

> Be tough, to hit somebody in the mouth if they disrespected you. I wanted to be a gangster. I used to think that if you wasn't a gangster or you wasn't tough like that, then you just wasn't a real man … That's what it was, just bein' macho.

Jeremy described what he thought it meant to be a man as a child and attributed his changed perspective on masculinity to age and growing up, describing that he was exposed to more exaggerated masculine behaviors and attitudes as child but had different realizations as an adult:

> As a kid I only saw the negative of what a man should be. The man should protect his family. The man should die for his loved ones … if anybody disrespects my family then I'm gonna get at 'em, you know? But then as an adult, you start to see that you have to be there for them, to love them, to be able to offer guidance, advice, not just the monetary aspect but emotionally you have to be there for 'em.

Does the prison experience impact what it means to be a man?

Imported masculinities

All of the men acknowledged that incarceration played a significant role in shaping masculinity attitudes and that there were multiple ways that incarceration experiences could influence these attitudes. First, it was noted that many of those who were incarcerated brought violent attitudes and behaviors into the prison with them from the outside, but that the prison environment heightened and intensified those attitudes and behaviors. Sean spoke to this by describing the ways in which men tried to gain respect in prison through the same ways they tried to gain respect outside of prison:

> You live your life like that and then you come in here, then you try to gain respect here by doing the same kind of behavior, so prisons can add to it though because instead of tryin' to build a person's self-respect up and self-dignity up, the environment itself can tear down a person's dignity and if they're not strong willed, it could easily destroy it and it just takes 'em deeper down.

Consistent with this line of thought, Jeremy described feeling that there were expectations of being tough, suppressing emotion, and not showing weakness both inside and outside of prison. He said that when they were in prison, however, the tough behavior became exacerbated because most of them shared in these beliefs *before* they were incarcerated:

> Each man has to show how macho he is outside of prison and in prison. Now when you come to prison, you already have guys who grew up in gangs or in the hood these places all it is it's everyone tryin' to show everyone how tough that they are, even though inside they're really not tough, they're really emotional individuals, who have to suppress that emotion and so as not to show weakness. So we learn the more emotional a person is, the more tougher he has to portray himself, and so we learn to just try to impress each other with our toughness, and when you grow up in that and then you come to prison because of that, it's worse in prison because now you have a whole bunch of guys who have to show each other how tough that they are.

While there was a general agreeance that incarceration intensified previous attitudes and behaviors held by incarcerated men before being incarcerated, the men also acknowledged that there were unique rules and expectations about how to behave in prison, consistent with the prison code. Each of them thought that the expectations of the prison code were not reflective of their behavior on the street, yet these expectations called for exaggerated responses when they were violated. Jeremy illustrated this observation by discussing what it means to be a called a "punk" on the street versus in prison:

> It's exponentially worse in here. So when you have a bunch of guys acting like their tough then you have stupid things, like if a guy calls you a punk, you have to fight. And if you don't fight then people from your hood or your race will send three guys to beat you up because you didn't fight this guy for callin' you a name. And it doesn't happen like that on the streets, even though we grew up with the same mentality in the neighborhoods, if someone calls you a punk out there, you can walk away or you can just laugh it off, but you put these fences around and all of a sudden the dynamic changes and it's ridiculous.

In addition to acknowledging imported attitudes surrounding violence, two men spoke to imported beliefs surrounding emotional expression and how incarceration experiences have interacted with those beliefs. Sean acknowledged his experiences outside of prison informed how he believed he was expected to show emotion as a man. He described being told that it was feminine to not only display emotional reactions, but to have emotional reactions at all:

> Women have feelings, they have emotions – men don't, right? And that's a whole like generational thing. And, so to be in touch with your feelings and emotions, not necessarily weak, but they'll be like, "Man, what are you a girl or what?"

Sean further connected this to his incarceration experience by describing his emotional reaction to the death of his mother while he was incarcerated. He reflected on his beliefs of what it means to be a man, through experiencing this loss during incarceration coupled with previously held expectations of how men should display emotion:

> You know, you grow up with the old attitude of, well, "Real men don't cry. Big boys don't cry," … it's so untrue … and that's damaging to a child, 'cause I'll tell ya, I've gone through some things in here where I wanted to cry. I lost my mother … and we were like best friends. And, I mean, I shed a few tears but I wanted to like cry-cry, but it's like this mental thing and I don't believe it's wrong. I never raised my children that way. But it's like this really weird subconscious like block that I have.

While Sean acknowledged how an experience during his incarceration incited meaningful self-reflection about what it means to be a man, Lawrence described how the larger prison population perceives the display of emotion. Lawrence said that weeping or crying in

public is consistent with his notion of what it means to be a man, but something that is perceived as weakness by other incarcerated men:

> The shortest verse in the entire bible is the most powerful, it says, "Jesus wept." And he was the epitome of masculinity, wasn't no punk in him at all. And you see him weep several times. And that right there is a picture of true masculinity because he was weeping because of the misfortunes of other people and how other people weren't able to help themselves and this bothered him and hurt him. But in here, that would be seen as bein' soft.

Sean's experience illustrates that positive self-reflection and reassessment of masculinity attitudes can occur during incarceration. Lawrence's quote demonstrates, however, that just because this behavior is occurring individually does not mean that the larger population is tolerant of it. Taken together, this suggests that navigating emotions as a man is a difficult endeavor long before incarceration due to how men are socialized, but that being incarcerated adds another level of disapproval to these imported beliefs.

Masculinity as a prison tool

Sean's struggle to reconcile the expectations of how he should behave as a man in prison and how he personally feels that he should behave as a man was reflective of the other men in the sample. The men thought that the expectations surrounding what it meant to be a man in prison did not align with their personal views, but that it was necessary to embrace those expectations in order to stay safe. Martin highlighted this incongruence by acknowledging that while he did not care what other people thought of him, he had to maintain an image of not being vulnerable or weak because of how quickly situations can escalate into violence in prison:

> People get so mad so quick and the next thing you know, they're in a fight in the shower. Everyone's so worried about this image in prison. You gotta be this real tough guy and it's somethin' so different than it would be out there and in here, I really don't care what people think but, also, people need to know that I'm not a weak individual, I'll stand up for myself and no one's gonna bully me or extort me or anything like that. So there's that fine line between.

The men also believed that masculinity and the prison code were a tool to build up a respected reputation while incarcerated. Adam remarked that because the use of violence was respected by the prison code, other incarcerated men often used it to bolster their own reputations:

> I don't see these color barriers, and there's a lot of guys like me that don't see the color barrier, but it's either play by the rules or get your brains kicked out your head. It's just that simple in prison because it's gonna be a lot more people trying to get their bones or get their reputation that will do somethin' to a man based on his beliefs.

Jeremy spoke to the intersection of reputation and safety during incarceration by noting that incarcerated people, ironically, often use violence to earn a reputation of respect that consequently allows them to be less violent in the future and less likely to be victimized:

> So to protect yourself, you have to build up a reputation and you have to be aggressive, and the more aggressive person gains the most respect, and the more respect a person gets, the least violence that they have to endure, you know? Or inflict.

Do masculinity meanings affect participation in correctional programming?

Direct effects of masculinity on programming

Even though all of the men in the sample identified the presence of the prison code and related exaggerated masculine behaviors during their incarceration experience, they had mixed beliefs as to whether these exaggerated masculine attitudes and behaviors directly impacted participation in correctional programming. Three of the participants spoke directly to these direct impacts. Some claimed that the prison code did not overtly punish incarcerated men for participating in correctional programs. Adam said:

> Handle your business, man. That's a big deal, you know what I mean? The convict code would never hinder a man from doin' somethin' that's beneficial to himself, his community, his family.

While Adam felt that the prison code would never directly discourage participation in correctional programs, Martin acknowledged that there was potential for participation to be viewed negatively. However, Martin stated that even though participation in correctional programs could be viewed poorly, he had never experienced backlash for it:

> If there's somebody like me constantly up in here volunteerin' to do work or goin' to help out on programs, it could be viewed negatively. But in my time, almost seven years, no one's come at me and said, "Hey, you're tryin', you're doin' too much. You're makin' us look bad." I haven't seen that.

Lawrence, on the other hand, felt differently about the direct relationship between masculinity and participation in correctional programs. He specifically noted that engagement and participation in correctional programming was openly perceived as weak and discouraged by the greater incarcerated population. He thought that this disapproval was *directly related to masculinity expectations* from other incarcerated men:

> See, one of the things about masculinity, too, in here, is there's this thing that programming is not cool … Like people that program are a bunch of squares, they're soft, they're probably snitches because they're frickin' wantin' to be around the cops or somethin', they're wantin' to do the right things so they're probably snitches. It's just a stigma that it gets. So people that program, they're kind of looked at as 'I wouldn't trust that guy,' that's how the population sees us.

Indirect effects of masculinity on programming

Although there were mixed opinions regarding the direct influence of masculinity expectations and the prison code on engagement in correctional programs, some of the men discussed ways that masculinity expectations indirectly influenced participation and engagement in correctional programs. Adam acknowledged that a lack of autonomy during incarceration may prevent incarcerated men from participating in correctional programs:

> In prison we're told everything. We're told when we could go outside. We're told what time to eat lunch, breakfast, dinner … We're told what time we can see the counselors, what time we could have church. Everything is dictated to us. So a lot of guys in here feel like, "Well hell, I'm not gonna sign up for that. I don't need them tellin' somethin' else I have to do."

In addition, Adam also suggested that there may also be resistance to correctional programs and rehabilitative efforts because they are perceived as "handouts":

> The prison environment influences a lot because a lot of prison environment is negative, a lot of people in here just don't have the will to come out from under the shit they cause. They're comfortable, they think rehabilitation or help is a handout, and until you know that the power's in your hands, what are you gonna do?

While Adam highlighted how masculinity expectations can indirectly influence the choice to participate in correctional programs, Sean explained that the indirect influence of masculinity extends past that intial choice. He noted that irrespective of whether or not masculinity expectations directly hindered the choice to participate in correctional programs, if participants do not enter the programs with the intention of wanting to become a different man, the programs will not work:

> You could sign up for every volunteer program there is. You could get put in every mandatory program there is. If your motive isn't pure, if it isn't about "I want to change, I'm sick and tired of bein' the man that I was and I want to become a man, and understand what it means to become a man, and a productive member of society" … Until a person totally gets to that point … they're not gonna change. I don't care, you can give 'em shock therapy, they're not gonna change.

Moreover, Sean explained that expectations surrounding how men are supposed to deal with emotions may undermine their ability to deal with past traumas once they begin participating in programs:

> If a person is a drug addict, or a person's an alcoholic, and that person maybe was abused as a child, whether sexually, emotionally, or physically. For them to deal with those emotions, it's traumatizing 'cause you have to go back to that point and deal with it. But if you've been told all along you don't deal with emotions, you don't have feelings, feelings are for girls and things like that, you got to break that barrier, you got to, 'cause you have to go back there and say, "Hey, this wasn't my fault, the person that hurt me was a bad person. It didn't have to define me though and, this is what it did to me." And then I can start moving forward and building upon that.

While Adam noted the ways in which masculinity expectations indirectly influence participation in correctional programs, Sean's observations suggest that masculinity expectations may indirectly impact *how* men participate in programs. Lawrence echoed a similar sentiment. Specifically, he shared that being open is discouraged during incarceration:

> Being really forthcoming for some reason is a sign of weakness and it's frowned upon. Like me, I've always been an open book – I don't care what people know about me. They can know anything. I could share anything. I could share my weaknesses, all of that, and that gets frowned upon by people. "Oh, you shouldn't be tellin' them this about you, you shouldn't be doin' that, you need to be like this and that."

When asked why being forthcoming and open is perceived as weak, Lawrence claimed that vulnerability was the primary concern:

> 'Cause they're like insecure in my opinion, with people knowing everything about them because it makes them feel vulnerable and I think that they just feel you should be the same way too. Everybody's so guarded in here, when somebody's not, it's easy to speak evil of somethin' that you don't understand.

The men often said that openness and vulnerability were discouraged and served as a barrier to addressing past traumas. Adam described how this process prevented incarcerated men from recognizing that they have a lot of shared experiences:

> What people don't know is that we all been through the same thing one way or another. It's all abuse, it's all negative. People just don't want to expose that much of their life, especially when it's somethin' that's hurtful, it's better to keep to yourself.

Adam recounted his own experiences with becoming more open and discussing his past. He described being resistant to sharing specific details of his life, but found doing so to be a helpful and powerful process:

> It's hard because even myself, I didn't care to mention my past of talk about my past until I had that feelin' of "Wow, I feel better." You couldn't have told me talkin' about my past would make me feel better. I'll tell you you're full of shit. But I had that experience, not expecting it. I just involved myself in somethin' and I let the pieces fall where they may and it happened, and I was like, "Wow, that felt good, man. That's powerful." So then I started bein' more open and more honest and ways of seekin' that relief again and it helps.

Lawrence went as far to say that the inability to open up prevents incarcerated men from getting help and addressing the root of their problems:

> If you're not gonna be able to open up, you're never gonna get help. If you have a bunch of idiots tellin' you that you shouldn't open up, you're never gonna get to the root of the problem. Talking about things helps 'cause not everybody's able to have that self talk within themselves.

The men's experiences and observations suggest that masculinity indirectly interferes with correctional programs. Most of the interference occurs while incarcerated men *are already participating in these programs*. Expectations that they should not express their emotions, discuss their past, or show vulnerability all appear to prevent meaningful engagement in correctional programs.

The context-specific nature of impact of masculinity on programming

While the men noted several ways that the expectations surrounding what it means to be a man can negatively impact engagement with correctional programs, three of the men discussed the positive impact of a particular program that appeared to overcome some of these barriers. The Impact of Crime on Victims Class (ICVC) is centered around victimization and allows for victims of crime to voluntarily share their experiences with a class of incarcerated men. Martin, Lawrence, and Jeremy all described the powerful experience of being brought face-to-face with the consequences of victimization. Martin emphasized how hearing stories of victimization encouraged and allowed incarcerated men to empathize and experience emotional vulnerability in a way that was distinct from other programs:

> You can say and hear it but sometimes it just doesn't sink in. I mean, you have victims and they're passin' these pictures around, or tellin' their story, and they're cryin' and they're feelin', you can actually feel their hurt and see it. That's a whole different ballgame. You can sit and take classes and get these certificates but if you're not graspin' and understandin' it, or usin' it and applyin' it, in real world situations, you might not learn from it … In ICVC, it's stuff that's actually happened and people hurt and real stuff to where it's like how could you not feel and hurt. I'll never forget that class.

Lawrence believed that the program was indirectly related to masculinity and being a man. He argued that the class forced participants to self-reflect and take responsibility for their actions, which he believed is a man's primary obligation:

> ICVC is the most effective because … real victims actually come in and speak with us and you have to see it face to face. When I say man's number one duty is [responsibility], it forces that personal responsibility where you get punched in the mouth with the reality of what you've done in the past and you have to see it, and it makes you look at yourself.

Jeremy emphasized how ICVC allowed participants to talk about their pasts and reflect on instances in which they victimized others, as well as instances in which they were victimized themselves:

> The class brings you face-to-face with things that people might have done on the streets, you know? Even though it might not be their victims the story can trigger memories from what they've either gone through or inflicted upon other people. And I think that's necessary.

Jeremy also discussed how ICVC allowed him to hear other incarcerated men's experiences with victimization and the importance of understanding the relationship between victimization and offending:

> Some of these guys were abused, some of 'em were sexually abused, neglected, you know, the physical, emotional, mental traumas that we've been through. One of the things that ICVC showed me, that I didn't expect, was that everybody in here, were victims before they started to victimize, screwed the hell up way before they came to prison. Prison is a result of their traumas. And, so I think it's ironic as hell that I learned that.

While the men did not describe the ICVC program as confronting masculinity, they seemed to think that it indirectly addressed some of the barriers masculinity poses to meaningful engagement in correctional programs. Jeremy's discussion of being able to listen to and understand other incarcerated men's past experiences with victimization speaks directly to Adam's and Lawrence's prior comments that discussing one's past is frowned upon and avoided. While vulnerability, openness, and displays of emotion are often disapproved of and discouraged while programming, it seems as though this variability in masculinity is context-specific and dependent on variability in type of programming.

Discussion

Cullen, Jonson, and Stohr (2014) solicited essays that envisioned a different future for the US prison as thought up by established correctional scholars. There was the therapeutic prison, the faith-based prison, the safe prison, the healthy prison, and so on. Many of these ideal type prisons were characterized by a prison culture that was unfettered by harmful or exaggerated masculinity values. The virtuous prison surrounds people who are incarcerated with positive moral influences that exhibit prosocial attitudes and behavior (Cullen, Sundt, & Wozniak, 2014). The restorative prison depicts a prison-based culture of care that replaces violence with dialogue (Presser, 2014). And the feminist prison, though written with incarcerated women in mind, describes a prison that addresses trauma, substance use, and mental health while maintaining the bonds between the incarcerated and their families and communities (Holsinger, 2014). Given the entrenched prison

culture steeped in exaggerated masculine ideals, are these visions destined to be make-believe? Or are there fissures in the prison code that can be leveraged to build a healthier prison culture? Our purpose was to determine if variation exists in the masculine ideals held by incarcerated men and to identify if this impacted programming. Based on our results, three conclusions can be reached.

First, consistent with prior research, there is variability and complexity in how these incarcerated men define what it means to be man (Morey & Crewe, 2018). Variability exists between the men in our sample – different men have different notions of masculinity. The men we interviewed expressed views and definitions of masculinity that were not harmful or exaggerated, but recognized that their understanding of masculinity was different from that of other incarcerated men who they believe see what it means to be a man through an exaggerated lens. Just as importantly, this variability exists *within* the men in our sample as well. Men change, develop, and reassess their beliefs surrounding what it means to be a man over time, even while incarcerated. Most of the men in this study identified shifts in their conceptions of masculinity, acknowledging that they previously held more exaggerated attitudes and endorsed harmful behaviors, but over time developed definitions of manhood that included being compassionate, selfless, emotionally supportive, and loving.

Perceptions and definitions of masculinity change across time: masculinity is developmental (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Future work could consider how interactions with the criminal justice system influence the development of masculine identities for adult men, and continued research on the developmental timing of incarceration and its implication for masculine identity development could help to move this literature forward (see also Dmitrieva, Monahan, Cauffman, & Steinberg, 2012). From a practice and policy perspective, people working within correctional settings could acknowledge that incarcerated men do not enter the prison environment as blank slates. People who are incarcerated bring in attitudes, beliefs, and experiences from their lives outside of prison that inform their behavior during incarceration (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Evidenced by our five participants, the same is likely true of attitudes and beliefs surrounding masculinity. Gaining a better understanding of what men bring into prison with them from the outside provides an opportunity to assess and address individual differences and needs that may be impactful for their incarceration experiences. These attitudes and beliefs surrounding masculinity are likely to change and develop during incarceration and, as suggested by our work, hold the possibility to develop and change positively.

Second, the incarceration experience matters for how the men in our sample define and express their masculinity. The presence of the prison code can exacerbate previously held notions of masculinity for incarcerated men. The prison code often calls for exaggerated and harmful masculine behaviors such as violence, emotional suppression, and minimizing displays of weakness. When the rules of the code are violated, the consequence is perceived by this sample to be almost exclusively violence. Consistent with Trammell's (2012) investigation of prison violence and the prison code, however, violence within this setting appears to be instrumental and used to procure power and preserve values and norms. Masculinity then becomes a tool used to navigate this code of behavior, but our findings suggest that there are different objectives in doing so and these differences are important. Some incarcerated men suppress their emotions, project a tough image, and use physical aggression as an attempt to ensure individual safety in an environment that

can quickly turn violent; the use of these behaviors is not necessarily a personal endorsement of harmful masculinity attitudes or behaviors. Some incarcerated men do, however, endorse these attitudes and engage in the same behaviors to instill fear and establish a respected reputation among the larger incarcerated population. People engage in the same behavior for a variety of reasons, and to neglect the variation in these motivations could come at the cost of addressing or correcting the behavior. Harmful and exaggerated displays of masculinity in prison have received a significant amount of scholarly attention. Less discussed, however, are the other forms and expressions of masculinity during incarceration. There have been recent research efforts to understand how masculinity is used to navigate the prison environment (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019; Novek, 2014; Ricciardelli, Maier, & Hannah-Moffat, 2015) – an area of research that could continue to be developed and pursued. Additionally, future research could also begin to consider the ways that masculinity can positively shape men's incarceration experiences. The identities incarcerated men shape for themselves as people appear to revolve around how they define themselves as men. Within the cognitive transformation framework, identity change is important for desistance from crime (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). Taken together, this suggests that future research interested in understanding rehabilitation and desistance from crime could consider the influence and power of masculinity as a tool that informs personal identity (Carlsson, 2013; see also Glynn, 2018). Exaggerated masculinity is powerful; masculinity that is healthy – and perhaps supportive – could be powerful, too.

Third, what it means to be a man in prison indirectly impacts engagement in correctional programs. The choice to avoid correctional programs potentially represents an opportunity to establish and assert control in an environment that gives few opportunities to do so – evidenced by Adam's explanation of incarcerated men not signing up for programs because they do not want someone else telling them what to do. Participation in correctional programs may be considered emasculating if the programs are perceived to be handouts, and choosing to receive help or participate in rehabilitative efforts can even be re-negotiated to be seen as masculine. Adam's use of the words "will" and "power" above to describe the process of resisting rehabilitation suggests that even when people do decide to embrace rehabilitative efforts, it is less about taking help from others, and more about having the individual strength to change. Prior work has also suggested that masculinities may impact correctional program participation with Ricciardelli (2014) finding that many men considered correctional programs to be unhelpful and disconnected from the realities of the prison environment. And yet the impact of masculinity on programming also seems to extend past the initial decision to participate and may influence *how* incarcerated men participate once already in programs. The men in this study acknowledged that to fully engage in programming requires a certain degree of openness, vulnerability, and willingness to revisit past traumatic events. But these requirements can stand in stark contrast to what it means to be a man in prison.

Our findings indicate that the decision to participate in programming may not necessarily be the most important issue (see, for example, Batchelder & Pippert, 2002). Instead of placing concern on whether incarcerated people participate in programs, we could be interested in *how* they participate in programs. Empirically this suggests scholars could place their attention on understanding what impacts meaningful engagement in correctional programs and even in defining "meaningful engagement." In terms of the influence

of masculinity, future work could seek to better understand how expectations surrounding what it means to be a man – both inside of prison and outside of prison – impacts the quality of engagement in correctional programs once participation has already begun and how this varies both between and within incarcerated men. The issue of program participation versus program engagement is salient from a policy standpoint for debates on mandatory versus voluntary programming, where program enrollment assumes a greater importance than program success. Part of this debate could include identifying existing correctional programs that may already allow for meaningful engagement and the expression of multiple masculinities. Our work suggests that the ICVC program may serve as an opportunity for incarcerated men to be more empathetic, emotionally expressive, and vulnerable. Similarly, work from Buston (2018) highlighted a "softer side" of masculinity among Scottish prisoners in a parenting program, while research from Gueta, Gamliel, and Ronel (2019) found that NA meetings in Israeli prisons challenged hypermasculine values and allowed men to negotiate their masculinities. Taken together, the findings from our work and these previous works suggest that there may be existing correctional programs that can be used as models for future efforts.

We are unable to say *why* our work shows variation in the degree to which incarcerated men embrace exaggerated forms of masculinity. The presence of alternative masculinities that welcome self-improvement through correctional programming could be due to selection effects, whereby we have found men whose appetite for programming is non-random. Equally plausible is that the men are responding in ways that they believe are socially desirable toward a female interviewer (Sloan, 2016a). Perhaps these alternative masculinities are actually the hegemonic masculinity – that is, these are the beliefs of the majority of men in prison – and the prison code is birthed only by the pluralistic ignorance of men who privately believe one way and publicly behave in another (Prentice & Miller, 1996). We have good reason to believe that maturation effects contribute to our findings: the men in our sample were older than the average incarcerated man and all of them identified an earlier time in their lives when they approved of harmful behaviors. *For our purposes*, we simply sought to establish whether there was variation in what it meant to be a man in prison (yes), whether this was impacted by the incarceration experience (yes), and whether this impacted correctional programming (yes, albeit largely indirectly). Future research that identifies the mechanisms behind this variation can better translate findings into specific policy recommendations that leverage the existence of alternative masculinities.

Our findings represent the perceptions of five men. Five men within a prison unit of 700 people, within a prison complex of 4,000 people, within a state prison system of 42,000 people, and within a nation of over 1,500,000 incarcerated people. What can be learned from just five men? Large sample sizes seem to be an expectation if one is to make a contribution in criminology (Wright & Bouffard, 2016). Interview one person in-depth and it may be an award-winning life-history analysis book, but interview more than one but less than some arbitrary number and the sample size is too small to be meaningful. Although a sample of 12 is recommended as an ideal minimum number of participants to achieve theme saturation, as few as 6 may be sufficient to develop "high-level, overarching themes" (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006: 78; see also Morse, 1994; Nielsen & Landauer, 1993). So, what can be learned from these five men? Sabo et al. (2001, p. 4) identified prison as "an ultramasculine world where nobody talks about masculinity." These men

talked, and the incarcerated men around them can learn from their attitudes and beha-viors (Kreager et al., 2017). We believe, then, that these five men can impact that prison unit, the unit can impact the complex, and so on. Five men is a start, and we hope that the courage of these five men means that the next study is less exploratory.

Prisons can be supportive environments, prisoners can be supportive people. End-of-life care requires the compassion to put others first, the concern to provide comfort in the uncomfortable, and the courage to face the unknown (Gawande, 2015). Thousands of people die in US prisons each year, but notice is usually only offered for the people who die at the hands of others. In 2014, over four thousand people died in state and federal prisons in the United States, and the overwhelming majority (87%) died from illnesses like cancer (30%), heart disease (26%), and liver disease (9%) (Noonan, 2016). Who is there to provide end-of-life care for these people? Who is there to provide the compassion, the concern, and the courage? Prisoners. Prison hospice programs rely on the humanity of fellow prisoners to attend to the dignity and care of those who will die in prison. Volunteer prison hospice workers, often numbering twenty to thirty people per program, describe their experience as transformative and one that enhances their self-worth and compassion for others (Wright & Bronstein, 2007). Less-intensive supportive prison programs include animal training pro-grams (Cook & Farrington, 2016), fatherhood programs (Hansen, 2017), wildfire fighting programs (Feldman, 2018), and youth crime prevention programs (Helfgott, Gunnison, Collins, & Rice, 2017). These programs are missing in the narratives of masculine prisons, masculinity, and the prison code. We believe a lot of good can come from focusing on variability in masculinities within the prison setting. If we choose to believe instead that men will be men, then we risk that these alternative masculinities will succumb to an exaggerated form of masculinity that is neither authentic nor welcomed.

Notes

1. A reviewer pointed out that not all prisons are violent. We acknowledge and agree that differences in the racial composition of prisoners and staff and the way that prisons are managed, for examples, can influence the level of violence within prisons (Steiner, 2009).
2. Prior to consenting the men, the Institutional Review Board of the authors' home institution reviewed and approved the study to ensure integrity and ethicality.
3. Data available for the entire prison population did not include marital status, educational attainment, or number of years served on current sentence. As such, demographic comparisons between the sample and larger prison population can only be made for age and prior incarceration.
4. Quotes were edited for non-word utterances, speech fillers, and grammar to allow for ease of interpretation. Member checks were used to ensure accurate representation of the quotes.

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