



Correctional Officer Training Programs: How Do They Impact the Body?

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Abstract

How the body is used within strenuous pre-work or training conditions and regimen is physically, mentally and socially challenging. In this study, we analyse interview data to examine how Canada's federal correctional officer recruits (CORs, n = 31) and correctional officers (COs, n = 25) with at least one year of occupational tenure embodied their experiences of the Correctional Training Program (CTP). First, recognizing the lacuna in knowledge around impacts on the body from correctional officer training, we interpret the dominant body discourses and effects on COR and CO stress and wellness. Second, understanding how bodies uniquely experience the program, we discuss how training programs influence how CORs interpret, discipline and/or alter their body to mold into the "proper" CO. Findings suggest training enlists the body, creates expectations and prepares the body for on-the-job training and their future role as a CO. We conclude with recommendations for training and applied practice.

Keywords: Body studies; Foucault; docile bodies; correctional officers; training.

Introduction

In countless realms of contemporary society, we use our bodies in various ways; one such way is to communicate, both socially and physically, in spaces (Shilling, 2012). Correctional officer recruits (CORs) and correctional officers (COs) do or will work within the socially complex, dangerous, risky, hierarchical, routinized and highly gendered environments that tend to characterize prison spaces (Crewe et al., 2011; Foucault, 1977a; Garland, 1985, Jewkes, 2005; Ricciardelli et al., 2015). COs' bodies tend to be controlled, manipulated and shaped in carceral spaces to create a "good" CO (Cassiano et al., 2022), maintain institutional control and security and facilitate required hierarchal relations, but it is necessary to see how the body itself is impacted and how COs "feel" their bodies in the space. Thus, they will experience some form of embodiment as they learn and negotiate carceral space.

In this article, we explore what is required within the Correctional Training Program (CTP) as offered by the federal correctional service of Canada (Correctional Service of Canada; CSC), focusing on elements of CTP (e.g., decision-based training scenarios, strikes [or failed tests]) and gender-based underpinnings within training. Given the lack of extant empirical evidence unpacking the relationship between CTP and the stress the program imposes on recruit and officer bodies, our analyses contribute to the correctional literature by investigating the training experience on CORs' physical bodies and describing the impacts on CORs'



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bodies during training and how such impacts follow them into the federal correctional field. This study expands on body scholarship by answering two primary research questions: (1) How do CORs actively use their bodies in CTP? and (2) How do COs reflect on how they use their bodies during training, and how does this shape the working body throughout their career of service? To answer these questions, we analyse semi-structured interviews (n = 56) with COs and CORs who participated in a mixed-methods longitudinal study designed to explore their mental health, wellness and other occupational experiences and perspectives.

We structure the current article by first reviewing the existing literature on the “body”, specifically work belonging to Foucault (1977a, 1978, 1980) as well as other applied literature pertaining to “docile bodies” in prisons, illustrating how this process of examination, hierarchical observation and normalization pertains to the way COs’ bodies are then turned into the modified, amplified, “improved” versions of themselves through the discipline and work of the training program. Docile bodies allow for the analysis of the individual body (COs and CORs) and how efficiently the body learns and moves in the space (the prison), seeing the process of the organization of bodies and how they discipline themselves and others around them to create a homogenized, unified space to exercise control, where the goal is to monitor the process of discipline (Foucault 1977a). As Foucault (1977a) further states regarding discipline and individualism in disciplinary spaces, “the aim is to derive the maximum advantages and to neutralize the inconveniences ... as the forces of production become more concentrated; to protect materials and tools and to master the labour force” (p. 142). Next, we explain our qualitative research design before unpacking the emergent themes in our analysis, which include perceptions of the training received; how decision-based scenarios work to influence COs in the workplace; how the body is conditioned in training through a disciplinary ‘strike’ system; and the ways gender impacts how CORs and COs perceive CTP. We conclude with concomitant suggestions for future applied practice and theoretical growth, particularly in terms of how bodies seem to remain docile through examination, hierarchical observation and normalization, even for those with legislative and discursive authority, during training.

Theoretical Framework

Foucault and Docile Bodies

Prison work, like incarceration, occurs in the prison space; however, scholarly attention is most often directed towards the surveillance of those incarcerated rather than those working within such spaces (Cohen, 1985; Haggerty et al., 2011; Rose, 1999). Training, then, is the starting point for hierarchical observation—it is the space in which CORs become socialized into being observed and eventually, observing others (Ricciardelli et al., 2021) – techniques that may become justified as necessary to ensure each other’s safety and security, as well as that of the people who are incarcerated. Here, we consider the formation of the correctional officer body through the administration of training regimes within CTP prior to engaging in correctional services work. This provides valuable insights into the administration and discipline of not only prisoners, but also correctional officers. Before such analysis, we turn to the work of poststructural theorist Michel Foucault and his theorizations regarding modern disciplinary societies and institutions. Foucault’s (1977a, 1978) early and late work focus on how micro-level practices and broader (bio) political regimes inscribe and organize bodies towards prescribed ends in Western societies. Within such “disciplinary” societies, bodies are molded and normalized towards conformity within institutions such as schools, prisons and the workplace (Deleuze, 1992). For example, his reflections help explain how correctional officers’ bodies are trained to become the most effective and “good” officers. Foucault (1977a) argues that “the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces” (p. 136.), meaning that correctional officers’ bodies go into the training program, expecting their bodies to be molded and formed into the “good” officer. Specifically, the body is disciplined through the production of “docile bodies” where subjects are observed and assessed against norms of conduct and performance and are subjected to modes of correction (Foucault, 1977a). There are three key points to understanding the docile body, which are hierarchical observation, normalization and examination. All of this relates to the CO body and the training program for officers and how they interact with each other.

Oriented to the “conduct of conduct”, bodies are subject to various institutional training regimens (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136) and are subject to manifold forms of training, which reflect power relations, such as correctional officers having to control the prison population. Such disciplinary regimes operate across institutions and form the capillaries of broader governmentalized and biopolitical interventions aimed at governing at a distance within late neoliberal societies (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). In relation to the latter, at the population level biopolitical interventions aim to foster certain forms of life and allow others to die (Foucault, 1978). It is important to note that Foucault (1977a) describes discipline as an individualizing process, which is important for distinguishing oneself from other recruits. However, it is also important to note that the process of biopower is necessary to understand how power dynamics work within the prison between recruits and supervisors, as this is how the prison functions (Foucault 1977a).

The outcome of discipline is often to produce and govern obedient bodies by diminishing the forces within the body that may otherwise become recalcitrant to modern forms of power, since for Foucault (1977b), resistance is the antecedent of power; thus, it is always present, contestable and antagonistic to power relations. These characteristics of the disciplined body parallel the “good” prisoner and correctional officer created through offender programs and correctional training programs, respectively. By creating this dynamic where the body is being punished in order to reform and shape bodies, there is also the power relation in which “one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (Foucault 1977a, p. 138). In this sense, relating back to CTP, training can provide overt, subtle and socially constituted directives on how to perform and conduct corrections in certain ways, yet also formally and informally punish the body if it does not perform properly (e.g., earning strikes or failing tests; subordination by peers).

Disciplinary spaces, like prisons, are structured to ensure that bodies or other objects properly occupy the space and are distributed into sections or parts that necessarily influence others (Foucault, 1977a). The materialization of disciplinary space tends to create and enforce disciplinary tactics on bodies, in which the act of watching is central to discipline – put another way, the body is under surveillance. The CO’s body is not exempt from being put under surveillance; rather, it is expected to be surveilled. Here, hierarchical observation occurs, referring to the exercise of discipline as presupposing a mechanism that coerces by observation. Hierarchical observation can be understood as the techniques that make it possible to “induce effects of power through the means of coercion to those that they apply these techniques on are clearly visible” (Foucault 1977a, p. 171), meaning that there are mechanisms put in place to enforce power relations built between COs and their superiors. The goal is for the power relationship to create a space where the CO can self-surveil their body and their duties, conforming to the “proper” or “good” officer, who will then move up in the ranks to then govern and help discipline other bodies who come into the training program.

The disciplinary power of the mind should also be noted, as it is the individual who must “want” to have this discipline done to their body. Essentially, with hierarchical and (neo)panoptical observation enacted in carceral spaces (Haggerty, 2006), the empowered person would be able to observe the entirety of the population all at once (or create the perception of total surveillance) – something often considered necessary to the “healthy” function of prison infrastructure (Foucault, 1977a; see also Bentham, 2010). The correctional body is taught that constant perceived surveillance is the norm and necessary to develop a “good” officer who will administer and protect the prison space and its prisoners. The process of conducting this discipline of the body happened by normalization. Though normalization:

operates not by differentiating individuals, but by specifying acts according to a number of general categories; not by hierarchizing, but ... by bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden; not by homogenizing, but by operating the division, acquired once and for all, of condemnation.” (Foucault 1977a, p. 183)

Normalization in the prison means the typical and usual treatment of the body is met with discipline, including physical and mental punishments and consequences, to create this docile body. The body going through the stress of constantly worrying about strikes or failing a test is expected among CORs when entering the program, as further elaborated in the results and discussion sections.

The final key component of creating the docile body is the process of examination. Examination “combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze ... it establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (Foucault 1977a, p. 184). Examination, therefore, is showing and proving to those who are conducting this examination that they are physically changing and adapting their bodies to the expectations put in place by supervisors in their respective disciplinary spaces. CORs are taking everything that they learned in the training program and proving to the examiners, through a ceremony process (Foucault 1977a) that they are now to be differentiated and judged on their skills and how they learned those skills and applied them to their bodies.

Previous scholarly contributions on prison work and the docile body are limited in terms of how the docile body connects criminalised people to prison labour or impacts how COs experience workplace stress. There is a plethora of work on the prisoners’ bodies in the prison, with limited work on the bodies of the CORs and COs, the people in charge of disciplining incarcerated bodies. Theoretically, in prison, the total institution itself affects embodiment, rendering individuals as subjects, creating hierarchies, informing culture and determining agents of control – all of which inform the practices, actions and discourses of people within the institution (Schlosser, 2013). More specifically, the docile body is used and manipulated within the context of incarcerated people or COs’ potential for action (Schlosser, 2013).

The Body as a Project in the Context of Carceral Spaces

The shift from penal welfare to reforming incarcerated people created the intense supervision and surveillance programs found within most prisons, particularly in Western societies (McCahill & Finn, 2013). Applied studies show how new surveillance technologies were introduced in select prisons internationally, including compulsory drug testing, criminal profiling, electronic monitoring and police databases (McCahill & Finn, 2013). These surveillance apparatuses intrude on the body and demand compliance and order among those being observed (McCahill, 2013).

Correctional services remain a predominantly male-dominated field where masculinity is a desired trait (Compton & Brandhorst, 2021). Women taking this career path often face challenges from prisoners, coworkers and supervisors (Smith, 2011). Examples of these difficulties include sexual jokes, remarks regarding their female status and rumours about their sexual involvement with coworkers and prisoners (Smith, 2011, Hermary 2024). Smith (2011) argues:

Mass imprisonment in the current era has meant that more men are being imprisoned. Often, these men bring with them negative stereotypes of women in general and negative stereotypes of female correctional officers in particular. These negative perceptions have caused men to challenge their supervision by women and to target female correctional workers with particularly hostile conduct, including assaults, masturbation in view of female staff, and disrespectful and demeaning language. (p. 1709)

Smith's words further exemplify how women correctional officers are often viewed in the prison setting.

Finally, conformity is not always achieved through coercion or force, but rather through desire: "self-monitoring is achieved on two interacting levels: practice and discourse. Individuals feel compelled to regulate their bodies to conform to norms, but also to talk about what they "should" and "should not" do and to "confess" any deviation from these norms" (Pylypa, 1998, p. 24). We will argue that self-monitoring is part of how CTP creates conforming officers – the "docile" body. It is through the individual officer's desire to self-monitor that they are then able to become a "proper", "docile" body. Through interactions with other members of staff in the prison and the training they receive, CORs can manipulate their actions and behaviours into favourable traits that are attributed to the "good" CO (see Cassiano et al., 2022). Through examination, a COR can shift to the position of a CO, showing superiors the levels of self-monitoring, discipline and conformity they have conducted on their bodies.

Current Study

Connecting aspects of Foucault's concepts requires a focus on the visibility of the body and how power dynamics influence the body. Thus, in the current study, we use Foucault as the conceptual starting point for analysis as we investigate how self-governance works with shaping the body into the "good" CO. More specifically, we investigate how CORs and COs embody and self-regulate their training for the correctional field. Our goal is to build on previous findings by Foucault (1977a) to investigate how CORs and COs experience similar pains on the body or talk about the impacts of CTP on their bodies as routed in power dynamics.

Methods

We draw on semi-structured interviews with 31 CORs (baseline) and 25 COs (follow-up) to unpack how the body is shaped by and within CTP. The data for the current study are drawn from a longitudinal study (2018–2028) that tracked changes in COs' mental health and well-being while they were employed by the federal correctional service of Canada (which houses people sentenced to two or more years in prison). The study, referred to as A Longitudinal Study of Canadian Correctional Workers' Well-being, Organizations, Roles and Knowledge, or "CCWORK", (see the study protocol), includes semi-structured interviews with recruits during the in-person component of CTP (i.e. baseline interviews) and each year following. The current study relies on baseline and year one follow-up interviews, conducted between October 2019 and October 2021. Our research ethics protocols received approval from Research Ethics Board of the Memorial University of Newfoundland (File No. 20190481).

To shed light on CORs and COs' experiences and interpretations of correctional training, we inquired into their experiences of training, specifically asking participants whether they had any "advice for CSC" about training, as well as explicit questions about their experience in CTP since arriving at the National Training Academy or a satellite site. Recruitment is facilitated by CSC, which advertises CCWORK to CORs and COs and provides a private space for the project team members to conduct interviews in person or by phone (which has been the interview medium since the COVID-19 pandemic due to public health measures). Study participation is voluntary, and CSC has no access to research data, which is anonymized (e.g., participants'

names are replaced with a unique identification number rather than a pseudonym to avoid the inexplicit suggestions of race, ethnicity or gender/sex associated with names as labels).

Baseline interviews were between 45 and 90 minutes' duration, voice recorded and transcribed verbatim. We engaged our findings using an emergent thematic analysis, meaning we read the transcripts to code the data, but within this process we created a codebook. From the codes around CTP experiences as related to the body, we axial-coded (Michael & Tami, 2019) using QSR NVivo software. The parent node, "Correctional Training Program" included excerpts from CORs, with contributions from 26 correctional officers at baseline or who had completed a year on the job (i.e. follow-up wave). To develop our analysis of how the body is affected for CORs and COs, we applied open coding (Cascio et al., 2019) and classified different excerpts into the following four themes: how CTP is embodied by recruits; how decision-based training scenarios work and influence the body; conditioning of the COs body through the strike system; and how gendered bodies experience CTP.

These themes were designed from open coding (Cascio et al., 2019) excerpts first coded under the parent node "body". We then identified emergent themes across the excerpts (e.g., coding repetition in details expressed across participant words and narratives). For instance, when coding for how CTP was shaping the body, we would look at mentions of CTP and the training and how participants felt the process was embodied, coding data into mutually exclusive and comprehensive categories such as if discussion prevailed around physical exertion, positioning or controlling the body as well as around the mind-body connection as experienced when doing diverse CTP modules (e.g., firearms, decision-based training scenarios).

Results

The results are structured so we first examine the embodiment of CTP training and the expectations it sets. Next, we examine themes surrounding COR and CO feelings on decision-based training, how the body is conditioned and the effects of gender on the CTP experience.

Theme 1: Embodiment of CTP

Through training, officers are pressured to be "good" and "conforming" with the embodiment requirements – the need to mould and shape their bodies into that of the desired CO – in CTP. To progress in the prison environment, there are certain practices in which CORs must engage, which put strain – even strenuous strain – on their bodies, yet help shape the body into the correctional officer's body as it is required to oversee the prison. However, P7 noted that the specific body requirements for training were somewhat ambiguous and fell outside the purview of the CTP, given the diversity of demands placed on the body across institutions with varying security classifications:

The academy [CTP] teaches you like the basic skills but doesn't teach you the routine of the institution ... and that's more important than knowing those skills, like knowing when you got to be where, who you got to report to and when you relieve so and so. (P7)

P7's words speak to how participants learn "basic skills" in CTP, but do not teach institutional specifics. Thus, a challenge emerges tied to how to meet the specific demands of the occupational role because role expectations are understood differently across institutions of diverse security classification. For instance, P6 further explained how in CTP, "they try to get you ready with those scenarios [decision-based training scenarios] but then they also show you instances where you go do a range walk, talk to inmates, or go through the yard". The diversity in the training seeks to prepare CORs for the complexity and variety of situations they will face, as well as comprehensive role demands that arise across diverse prisons. The body is being taught what actions are required and "correct" for the correctional body's job and actions in the prison, evidencing another way examination and hierarchical observation (Foucault 1977a) operate in the prison by creating a docile body. Each action, however diverse, requires a unique presentation or expression of the body, whether it be stoicism, composure or the expression of sympathy, findings we now explore in further depth.

The "Good" CO

There is no single, unifying characteristic defining a good officer (Cassiano et al., 2022) but, as our data show, the pressure to be a "good CO" stems, at least in part, from CTP, which teaches the mandates of CSC for its employees; this is how bio-power comes into effect – the self-disciplining action of training encourages the CO body to be formed. The body can be manipulated in many ways (i.e. physically, mentally, through policy). P51 explained how policy education helps to create an idea of what constitutes a "good" CO:

They give you like the policy, they give you like what is expected and they're trying to mould you into what they want but they're not telling you how it actually is when you get in there – some instructors are good.

The participant's words reveal the mobilization of the term "mould" to suggest CTP serves to shape CO bodies and perceptions of bodies through truth artefacts (i.e. policy documents) that prescribe ways of doing and being – even though, as the participant indicates, they remain somewhat divorced from the instruction of each respective institution.

Other perceptions from participants of what entails a "good" CO include the capacity to think quickly and respond to stressful situations efficiently. For example, P104 argued that actions and the body are tied to the institution similar to the expectations of armed forces members:

Don't try to like give a negative ... don't try to be negative about CSC ... it's very similar to the military kind of way of like ... you can never do ... don't be saying negative comments about the military when you're in the military.

P149 continued this theme of officer presentation: "It's a little bit paramilitary, of course you need to have your uniforms looking straight and your boots looking good and, and things of that matter." Both excerpts reveal how bodies and verbal expressions in correctional work become obligated to mirror, at least to some extent, those belonging to their public safety counterparts, such as armed forces members, suggesting an overlap of bodily discourses throughout "paramilitary" institutions.

Building on this theme, P107 explained some of the physical expectations of a CO:

To me what it represented is 'okay this is what the job can entail ... this is what could happen at a moment's notice, you could go from just standing still to having to book it pulling up like heavy doors, sometimes you might have to wrestle with somebody, it's not like it's just a job where you show up and then it's over. I mean there's other aspects to it and that's the one thing I wish CSC would maybe implement a bit more [of] a physical requirement for the position 'cause although you might not always be doing it, you got to be ready for it and that's kind of how I look at that.

P107 emphasized the physical and combative realities of correctional work, lamenting that their organization did not prioritize physicality expectations more thoroughly in training. The body is being trained to distinguish between favourable and unfavourable actions and decisions in CTP, thereby creating a docile, obedient body. Through hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1977a), the COR is analysed and monitored to ensure their training of the body is being effectively taught and applied to the prison space. Their words also point to the gendered realities of correctional culture, a position that has been explored in other literature (Burdett et al., 2018; Mennicke et al., 2018; Ricciardelli, 2017); it necessitates gendered inequalities and subordination over body status and interpretations.

P24 continued with the idea of becoming more independent during training, which is another value often tied to the social constructions of gender:

You need to be independent. You need to learn how to ask questions and stuff when you need help, but I feel like a lot of other officers have said yeah it would just make more sense if they did CTP, like a CTP jail like at specific jails it would just make more.

These statements from CORs and COs comprise just some of the responsibilities CTP tries to teach recruits regarding how to best embody a "good" CO, which in these excerpts point to masculinities driven by capacities to resolve problems on their own and, when not possible, require careful and calculated strategies of engagement to access "help", lest CORs are seen as "weak", which is dangerous in the prison.

Embodying a good officer also involves being good at de-escalating situations and crises without resorting to the use of force (see Liebling, 2011). P118 explained how decision-based training helps with learning how to properly de-escalate incarcerated people:

Yeah, more DBTs [decision-based training scenarios], more things like that, because if you practice those, hopefully like once you come into the jail those [are] what you'll remember. "Oh, I know this guy's slashing up in his cell". This is what we were taught in training, there's not necessarily steps you need to take but like at least you kinda have a general idea of how to respond to it, how to call for assistance, how to basically do non-control intervention, like helping them.

This participant recognized that the goal of a "good" CO is not to resort to bodily force, but to examine the situation and evaluate the necessary steps for responding appropriately to incarcerated people. This does not mean that evading force in every

situation is desirable or achievable, but it points to how CORs are trained to self-discipline their instincts and bodies so when force is used, it happens with precise calculation and a thorough (though sometimes quick) consideration of alternative responses (and which become necessary to record and report during subsequent investigations of the officers' actions). P61 further explained:

For me personally watching the role playing was super helpful and of course being in the scenario is very helpful ... tell me what was I supposed to learn from that maybe do a role-play afterwards of best-case and worst-case scenario because what I've learned now is an inmate could be yelling and screaming at you and not every conversation is going to end up win-win; sometimes you just have to just walk away.

These quotes demonstrate how COs 'properly' prepare themselves for their various responsibilities in the prison through the training they receive and examinations (which then lead to self-governance and the docile body, which parallels the "ideal" CO body). Their training "generally" directs their movements, gestures and conversations during critical incidents or difficult encounters at work to help prevent physical altercations. However, somewhat paradoxically, P61 admits not every situation is "winnable" for COs, and "walking away" from a scenario may be best practice in certain contexts. These findings (1) point to how COs are expected to independently analyse scenarios for a variety of potential responses and (2) recognize how CORs are disciplined through physical role-plays that then trigger a self-regulatory mode of body conformity and governance. In other words, CORs and COs believe they have autonomy to make decisions on the job, yet these very decisions seem to simultaneously be a product of CTP conditioning.

In the next sections, we explain embodiment as learned across three sub-themes of training – instructor inconsistencies, decision-based training scenarios and physical skills – then look at the role of the gendered body.

Instructor Inconsistencies

CORs explained how instructors test and teach differently. While instructors will approach education uniquely based on their personal work experiences and histories, perceived conflict between instructors and recruits nonetheless emerged as a theme, as some participants sought to avoid being tested by certain instructors. The consequence is how to best position the body to meet the requirements not just put forth by the CTP (i.e. CSC) but also as they vary across instructors. Said simply, CORs seek to understand how they are going to be tested but also how to perform testing differently for every instructor. Participant 150 explained:

The trainers are not consistent. You get instruction from one instructor and then you hear something totally different that totally does not jive with the other one said. So you get in shit for something the other instructor is like "yeah, do that" or whatever. That's very frustrating. It's something that we're all dealing with right now (P150).

P150's description of their experience widely resonates with that of other CORs – this reality was ethnographically experienced by Rosemary Ricciardelli, second author, who completed CTP, where trying to position the body (e.g., hands on firearms) as instructed changed between instructors so performing the skill became overly complex, sometimes worsening rather than improving due to the confusion created and the desire to try to adhere to the many diverse ways learned for handling firearms. P32 continued with this notion:

Just about consistency across the board, I mean there was for instance somebody who I now work with and I'm glad that I work with him, but on one of his tests, he would have failed that test, but then when you start talking about the answers in class there was an answer that they marked wrong.

P33 also explained the stress felt with various instructors:

If I had gotten for instance on my shot gun that I had an instructor who I feel had it in for me from day one, he was trying to rattle me, he did things to rattle me until he got to fail me in shot gun where I did exactly the same thing in my practice with a different instructor the day before who told me don't change a thing.

The frustrations felt by CORs and the inconsistencies among instructors affect how CORs can conduct themselves and express themselves in the prison. If recruits are being taught different strategies or instructions, this conundrum creates disunity and confusion, which can be dangerous to staff and especially those in their custody. This inconsistency also makes the body more difficult to self-govern as the expectations are not consistent. CORs also described, at times, "having a target on their back" when speaking during CTP, where participants felt singled out by instructors who may have seen them as occupationally unfit (and which may be tied to CORs' presentation of self, gender and/or body); thus, participants construct instructors as *mobilizing*

inconsistent pedagogical practices, even if not intentionally, to “weed out” some CORs. The absence of examination makes the production of docile bodies more difficult, thereby limiting officers’ capacity for self-governance.

Decision-Based Training Scenarios

Participants discussed how decision-based training scenarios were very generic and very predictable to figure out as they often comprise “perfect scenarios”. “In training, it’s always the perfect scenarios sort of thing and they don’t really prepare you for the actual problems the inmates are going to come to you with” (P17). The “absence of realism” challenges attempts to become “good” COs who have “shaped” their body adequately, as participants problematize preparing for imagined realities over lived occupational realities – scenarios that are understandably difficult to recreate in a classroom setting but nonetheless may lead participants to feel misled and under-prepared. This becomes dangerous when the COR is trying to self-govern their body and perform their duties in the prison due to inadequate training.

Other participants discussed the problems associated with a perceived lack of preparation for the complex and varying realities posed by correctional work across different levels of institutional security and demographics, as P78 stated:

In the training, they gave you scenarios where it was the worst-case scenario of all times so at least it prepared you for what could happen, but it wasn’t tailored to the institution ... especially with women there’s a lot more underlying mental health issues.

These concerns were commonly reported by COs when discussing scenario-based training from CTP, a theme we will revisit as we explore how CTP prepares COs for minimum- and maximum-security prisons.

While the concern for scenario-based training is how it is not institution-specific, which leads to many officers not being properly prepared when arriving to prison, many still argue CTP was beneficial. As P18 illustrated:

Dealing with things like decision-based training that’s probably hands down the best class that we can have here ... the instructors treat you as if an inmate were to treat you. They put you in controlled situations that you’re going to be dealing with at the institution.

P55 continued by stating: “Having just those scenarios and just putting yourself in that situation helps you prepare for those situations or other situations because you ... [dealt] with it mentally and physically.” Having more practical, daily scenarios that do not go to the extreme would be beneficial too, as P33 argued: “There’s a lot that you don’t use day-to-day, but I think it’s important for people to know. Like you know self-defence, but come on, you don’t use that day-to-day.” Of course, there are practical scenarios during CTP, as experienced by the second author; these are not the scenarios that COs recall when reflecting on CTP. Finally, P61 claimed CTP is:

useful in terms of using communication skills that trainers and the scenario-based training, well the role playing was not my favourite. It was very useful in terms of – I’ve never had exposure to how inmates act or when they’re yelling and screaming at you and I had no exposure to that before, so it was really useful in terms of then you do the role-playing. You learn the skill, you do the role-playing and then you go back and you debrief with the whole class and the trainers.

Empirically, these excerpts from participants show that CTP is a necessary training program that prepares trainees for work in the prison, aiding them with physical safety measures such as self-defence and providing various decision- and scenario-based training. Perhaps a more subjugated theme is how participants praising aspects of CTP already seem to embrace the self-regulatory component of governance; namely “accepting” the realities of the training regimen and reproducing the training’s purported efficacy during interviews with researchers and beyond. Regardless of how beneficial training is, findings emphasize that CTP aims to be universal in its approach and provides training that is not institution- or security classification-specific, which many CORs and COs consider a drawback. This suggests CTP is training a generic body rather than a structured body for working in a specific institution or security classification. Either way, the CORs are learning to conform their bodies to the “ideal” CO, as portrayed by the instructors, to varying and inconsistent degrees.

Physical Training

Self-defence is essential for correctional training because self-defence teaches CORs how to protect their bodies in adverse events. Self-defence is a means to use the body as required by the occupation to ensure safety for both the COs and incarcerated people. With CTP being only a 14-week program, sessions to practise self-defence (or any skills) are limited in their allocation and the information provided may not always feel applicable to the job. For instance, P2 explained:

The self-defence portion of it is pretty much completely useless. Cause, I don't know any guys that are swinging guys around by their arms and taking guys down and doing these locks and all this crap that we learned. I just felt the self-defence part of it seemed kind of irrelevant, arrest, and control obviously is a completely different story, but I can tell you there's not a lot of arm locks and stuff going on at work so and that was a pretty important portion.

While self-defence is arguably necessary for security, it should be centralized in correctional training. Participants felt the self-defence learned was at times impractical for officers, as the techniques they are taught do not necessarily translate to the practices adopted, particularly during critical incidents. Sometimes these incidents can require quick-thinking, adaptiveness and muscle memory, which can be beneficial when learned through self-defence. The value of muscle memory was explained by P2, when speaking about arrest and control training and the use of handcuffs:

For all the practical teaching, it's not that wasn't worth it because some of it I did use. When we handcuff or put on the handcuffs or take them off, but for all the other stuff mostly it's different than at every penitentiary. So, since it's different, we've learned one way and it was like the manual way.

Here, P2 speaks to the impracticability of physical training, suggesting that the body is shaped to act in CTP, but describes a disconnect between the body trained for CTP and the body experienced when performing the CO role. This theme was more pronounced when participants explained the training's perceived focus on physical training components versus the classroom components:

We do not regularly use handcuffs in the jail. We do not regularly tackle people; we do not regularly do those things. I regularly deal with severe mental health issues. I regularly deal with queer inmates. I regularly deal with people with uh, historical trauma. All that stuff would have been much more beneficial ... we focused on heavy violence. (P157)

Basically your police and general knowledge and I think you need to almost maybe 'cause you can read policy off of the internet ... then I almost think that your on-the-job needs to be longer – like, to me, me going away to CORE should have been like firearms and arrest and control, self-defence and then you should come back and do actual posts ... like at your jail not like the worst-case scenario. (P113)

P157 explained that they spend more time navigating prisoner psychological and social needs than using physical skills when on duty, leading to the suggestion that more time should be spent learning about the needs of people who have suffered trauma, identity struggles, mental health challenges and so forth. This would provide more support for COs when performing their occupational responsibilities – rather than them having to rely on security-oriented physical skills. Physical skills are still necessary to protect the body; however, such skills are not the only form of protection required. The mind also requires protection and perhaps requires more interconnection in training. This theme was echoed by P113, who felt the training did not apply proportionately to the actual job and desired more onboarding at the institution to rectify discrepancies in acquired knowledge. In redirecting knowledge to communication skills, CORs displayed their agency to change and adapt to all reconstituted as truth in terms of who equates to the “good” CO – which, unsurprisingly, is subject to change, contestation and reversal.

Conditioning the Body

Often, physical skills are tested through “strikes”, a system of assessment in CTP that places the CORs' body under stress. Put simply, three strikes (i.e. a score of less than 70 per cent on three tests) results in academic release from CTP for a COR. There are over 50 strike-earning tests during CTP. Avoiding strikes (or receiving strikes) pressures the body to perform standardized skills correctly. Failing to do so warrants a strike – a warning to the individual that their body is not performing adequately or meeting organizational standards. Strikes can be psychologically challenging to navigate, if received, anticipated or avoided. P97 explains the strike system:

You can get two strikes on one component like firearms or something and now you have invested so much time into coming you've ... maybe quit your job or you have a family whatever have you and now your livelihood sits on you.

P97's words reveal how their future (and present) livelihood rests upon completing CTP, which hinges on not receiving strikes – a source of embodied stress that is only avoidable through their own performance. P119 further explained that:

the three-strike thing, that's all that it is cause it's just like looming there and you're like 'I can only fuck up three times' ... I understand it because realistically should you be continuing if everything is a struggle for you? Absolutely not.

P119's words demonstrate the interpretation of how the finality of striking out shapes the CTP experience because the system "weans" (P106) out people who are struggling with skill acquisition, which also means the structure places a lot of pressure onto CORs to perform when undergoing testing (that is, under pressure). P152 further explained the sentiment:

Instead of 'Oh, here's your weakness, let's fix it, let's build you up, let's get you there' ... it seemed like in corrections, 'Oh, you failed. Okay, we're gonna write you up, oh, two strikes, oh, you only got two left. There's three strikes ... no we'll fail you for anything even unsuitability on the last day' ... [instead it should be] 'Get us through it, build us up, teach us what we need to do to be a correctional officer,' stop threatening us cause, there was always this ever-present threat that, we'd send you home for anything.

P152, echoing others, felt the strike system hindered success and, instead of "building up" recruits, was experienced as rather punitive. Some participants desired more positive reinforcement and teaching instead of strikes, which were described as negatively affecting self-esteem and confidence in the body to perform as training or desired. These desires for different types of training show how CTP is not currently a universally accomplishable training, a view echoed by multiple participants. The strike system is a fairly strict form of shaping the correctional body into a docile, obedient, conforming body. Failing out of CTP, through strikes and decreased self-esteem, created stress – even sadness or frustration – leaving the COR to feel their body had failed them or they had failed with their body, unable to confirm and overcome challenges presented. Such feelings were accompanied by worry about and fear of being expelled from the program. Not surprisingly, recruits suggested that the three strikes prior to expulsion should instead be raised to five.

Firearms training is a physical skill example of how the strike system connects to physical training to create complacent or docile bodies. As P108 mentioned, most CORs collect strikes during firearms training. Increasing the strike system from three to five was thought to provide more practice time – more time for the body to develop muscle memory – for CORs who struggle with firearms, which would provide more opportunities for learning prior to sending CORs home. CORs desired opportunities to learn firearm manipulations and to improve accuracy when shooting, thus reducing the number of CORs sent home automatically:

I've seen a lot of good recruits go home because of firearms and I get that it's a huge part of our job but for someone who's never shot or is struggling like a week for a firearm and then two and a half days for shotgun and one day for 40 mil like it's not a lot of time – like we shot five practice rounds, like five, and then we did our qualifying ... You don't actually have a lot of time for the actual shooting part. I think the written part you have enough time for. Even like the safety you have enough time for, it would just be more like on the range like shooting accuracy that could have more. (P108)

P108 felt insufficient time was allocated to shooting accuracy and target practice; however, others saw manipulations as a greater point of struggle. Either way, they desired more time for firearms training. Even recruits with firearms experience felt pressured by the speed required for skill acquisition:

I've handled firearms before so I went in there thinking that I wouldn't struggle with it and then I did ... Firearms definitely needs like more time, so you have more time to like get your trigger pull under control, get your stance under control, be able to be like okay with the rifle doing these shots in ten seconds that a lot of time. (P113)

Thus, the firearm training regimes were deemed insufficient, which coincides with the strikes, both disciplining the body to varying degrees – the former not enough and the latter to the extreme.

Gendered Bodies in CTP

Training differs when recruits are trained for the role of a CX, a CO deployed to work in a men's institution, versus a primary worker (PW), a CO deployed to work in a women's institution. The difference is that CXs are trained on firearms, while a PW is not trained on firearms and instead is trained on women-centred programming. P51 comments on elements of the gender differentiation in training:

I think it's crazy that they have the women-centred training split up. I think it's beneficial for everyone no matter where you're going ... and it seems very archaic to me that they have it segregated it into 'I know what it is more applicable to women offenders and in women's institution.'

P51's words suggest that the differentiation by the gender of the incarcerated person in how the CO is trained was considered "archaic" – an outdated exercise that no longer served the incarcerated community. CORs and COs mentioned how not having firearms in women's institutions seemed counter-intuitive to contemporary discourses around equality and equity, as did not

having the women-centred training topics extended to include programming processes for incarcerated men. This was echoed by P148:

I don't feel that there's a divide at all and it's unfortunate too because at times it's us male staff as CXs could probably benefit from some of stuff they're going through and these chicks are interested in the firearms too. It's like they're like 'Ah, we had a talk about feelings today.' It would've been cool to go out to the range right and I think both experiences would be good.

Programming prepares CORs differently, depending on the gender housed in the institution, appearing to position CORs as having to meet different gender-specific needs – specifically, reducing equality under the guise of ensuring equity without evidence of achieving equity. P78 explained the notion of different expectations presented for women-centred training versus that for institutions housing men:

In the training, they gave you scenarios where it was the worst-case scenario of all times. So at least it prepared you for what could happen, but it wasn't tailored to the institution you were going to, so I found it was more ... because especially with women there's a lot of more underlying mental health issues, I believe. They didn't really go to that, they went just more to the men's institutions where everyone's gonna be violent all at once ... (P78)

In this excerpt, P78 suggests that the curriculum ensures CORs are trained in accordance with gender interpretations tied to the institutions in which they will work. In response, certain topics are included or excluded based on the gender of the incarcerated people. Regarding programming extended to incarcerated men, P157 mentioned how COs going to work with incarcerated men at the time largely “didn't get any Indigenous training, they didn't get any cultural training. That all happened during the women's side of things. And I know that there are trans inmates in male jails. I know that there are Indigenous inmates in male jails”. P157 illustrated how the content difference among COs attending to incarcerated men versus incarcerated women was jarring; information beneficial for both parties may be limited to informing only one. The idea here is not that training should be the same; instead, training is omitted for incarcerated men or women, which is potentially problematic, given the diversity of needs of the prison residents that may extend beyond gender differentiations.

Gender and the body in training were connected when participants spoke of differences in training expectations – including in discussion of physical skill competencies. P99 said:

Females can do modified push-ups which I think is kinda stupid because if we're doing the same job, I expect that they should be able to do the same style of physical training that I am because at the end of the day if they're not as strong or maybe if I'm not as strong as a stronger female, she might have to save my life at some point.

Here, P99 demonstrates how some female COs are frustrated because of modified physical training practices for women. P100 added:

Not everything's equal, which I find if you're going to be doing like policing or you're going to be doing corrections there has to be an even level because you have to be able to ... if you're gonna say that I need to [pause] be able to manoeuvre 180 pounds around because that's the average weight of an inmate and that's the average power of an inmate and if you can't be able to do that you're gonna get slammed down on the ground and you're gonna put that place at risk.

The words of P100 suggest CORs should receive the same type of training, regardless of the gender of the incarcerated person to be in their custody. This, as voiced by P100, may also prevent safety concerns from arising because of shared physical competencies, without which officers, prisoners and institutional security could be compromised. There are set expectations from COs for CORs that they need to be a unified force to oversee the prison. Having disunity among officers can cause potential risk and harm to everyone in the prison. Thus, gender differentiation in training requires further analysis to determine whether it is either necessary or effective.

Discussion

The current study reveals how CORs and COs reflect on the role of the body in the correctional training regimen, particularly how the body is manipulated and formed through efforts to create the most effective officer. We found that CTP influences how CORs and COs conduct themselves in their roles as officers and that it intends to conform the body into a “good officer” or, as Foucault (1977a) describes it, a docile body – a body that authorities ensure is discursively conforming and obedient. Data reveal that CTP is also embodied through physical and mental expectations placed upon CORs, exemplified through scenario and decision-based training exercises that demonstrate to CORs how the body ought to perform. Decision-based

training was much more affective according to COs due to the body being put in physical situations where they must make the “right” decision in the moment, adding pressure to recruits. Participants reported that this occurred through hierarchical observation and examination, where the recruits doing these scenarios were placed alongside other members of their cohort, encouraging self-governance as well as collegial and authoritative governance. The body is also conditioned by the (fear of) strikes, training the body in the behaviours/actions deemed acceptable (a pass) versus unacceptable (a fail). Putting this anxiety into the COR’s body can influence bodies that are obedient and conform to the prison’s expectations. Correctional scholarship (Compton and Brandhorst, 2021; Hermary 2024; Smith 2011), along with quotes from participants, shows a discrepancy in how women are treated in prison settings. The training structure further genders bodies – whether appropriate or not, this finding is beyond the scope of the current study to elaborate further and requires much research into the diverse needs of male, female and gender-diverse incarcerated people and officers, particularly in ways that discuss how COs can most effectively meet these needs.

Recognizing that we did not ask participants explicit questions about the body and correctional training (given that this emerged from a broader mental health and well-being study), we suggest that a future structured independent study is warranted in this area – one that focuses on how the body is understood, manipulated and controlled through CO and the impacts on wellness and self. Thus, while our study is relevant to expanding body and prison literature, this project was not intended to study the body; direct and focused research is required. Moreover, given the localized and smaller sample, we acknowledge a lack of generalizability of study findings, in accordance with much qualitative research.

Conclusion

The body is a tool for COs to shape and manipulate into a conforming and disciplined vessel intended to carry out the occupational responsibilities inherent to the CO role – care, custody and control. The intersection of body studies and correctional facilities provides insight into how training programs create the CO. CTP is embodied through training, even when instructors’ interpretations are inconsistent; there is a general understanding of the COR’s embodied expectations – as evidenced, for example, by performance during decision-based training. Although the strike system can be polarizing for some, strikes tied to testing discipline the body by punishing improper behaviours, and rewarding correct actions, creating a benchmark to achieve. Here, self-disciplining tactics are utilized. Further, gendered differences in training are believed to require re-envisioning by participants to ensure equity and reduce gendered differences in actions and responses, thereby further supporting the wellness of prison residents. Moreover, by allowing modified physical training objectives for female officers, a divide appears to be emerging, undermining security and creating new vulnerabilities for those who truly value physicality to ensure the safety of residents, colleagues, the institution and the public. Overall, the body enacts authority for COs, and body studies are further warranted to understand the body project underpinning training fully. By examining how a CO’s body works within the prison, we can begin to understand the impacts and inner workings of CTP and how it prepares its officers.

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