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Authors

Sexton, Lori
Jenness, Valerie

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“We’re like community”: Collective identity and collective efficacy among transgender women in prisons for men

Lori Sexton

University of Missouri, USA

Valerie Jenness

University of California, USA

Punishment & Society

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Abstract

Recognizing that prisons house diverse populations in equally diverse types of environments, we utilize a unique data set and employ two well-known sociological concepts—collective identity and collective efficacy—to examine overlapping communities in which transgender women in prisons for men are situated and experience prison life. Findings from our mixed-methods analysis reveal that despite their considerable diversity, transgender prisoners embrace a collective identity and perceive collective efficacy *as transgender prisoners* more so than *as prisoners per se*; their collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy are predicated on social-interactional factors rather than demographic characteristics and physical features of the carceral environment; and the more time a transgender inmate spends in prison, the more likely she is to identify with a community of transgender prisoners, but the less likely she is to feel an affective commitment to the transgender prisoner community or to expect other transgender prisoners to act on her behalf in prison. This novel application of dynamics generally understood to operate in social movements and residential neighborhoods—collective identity and collective efficacy, respectively—to the transgender community in California’s prisons sheds insight into the ways in which transgender women in prisons for men experience prison life, the loyalties around which prison life is organized, and the complexities around which communities in prison are structured.

Corresponding author:

Lori Sexton, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of Missouri, Kansas City, 5215 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, MO 64110, USA.

Email: sextonl@umkc.edu

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A considerable body of research paints a complex picture of prison life by focusing empirical attention on the diversity of prison populations, the subjective experience of prisoners, the multifaceted nature of prison communities, and the myriad ways prisons are structured. Produced over the past half a century, this literature reveals considerable variation within and across carceral environments, both in terms of the types of people they house and the structure and culture of the carceral institutions in which they are confined. Although prisons and other carceral institutions vary by penal philosophy (Kruttschnitt and Gartner, 2004), features of the physical plant (Jewkes and Johnston, 2014; Morris and Worrall, 2014), organizational purpose and security level (Goodman, 2014; Inderbitzin, 2007), and inmate supervision style (Sexton, 2014), there are nonetheless fundamental core processes that structure carceral life. At the heart of prison as a total institution lies a fundamentally coercive and controlling environment that results in the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958).¹

The robust literature on prisoner life yields a paradoxical picture of prisons. On the one hand, prisons are generally understood to be harsh environments, full of potential problems and conflicts born of the deprivations inherent to such confinement. Scholars point to the state-sanctioned loss of freedom and deprivation in environments that are replete with intergroup conflict, abuses of authority, violence, and other threats to health and well-being (Calavita and Jenness, 2013, 2015; Carrabine, 2005; Crewe, 2009, 2011; Kruttschnitt and Gartner, 2004; Rhodes, 2004; Sexton, 2014; Simon, 2000; Sparks, 1994; Sparks and Bottoms, 1995). As Carrabine (2005: 897–898) describes, the prison “generates intrinsic and fundamental conflicts, not least since prisoners are confined against their will, with people they would normally not choose to be with, in circumstances they can do little to change and are governed by custodians who police practically every aspect of their daily lives.”

Coincident with this picture of prisons as uniformly harsh, the prison literature also reveals the myriad ways carceral environments are organized around cooperation and collaboration based on institutionally recognized shared identities and subjectivities. Despite—or perhaps as a result of—being confined in institutions characterized by harshness and laden with conflict and coercion, inmates operate in a highly structured social environment with mutual expectations of loyalty and allegiance born of community-level expectations. Whether inmate culture is understood to be the product of the carceral environment itself or a variant of a more general criminal subculture, it is commonly accepted that, within prison walls, there is a cohesive inmate culture characterized by group-shared (and enforced) norms (Clemmer, 1940; Hayner and Ash, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Sykes and Messinger, 1960), including norms that define a stratification order particular to prison life.

Historically, these norms have taken the form of an inmate code that demands strict loyalty to other inmates—epitomized by Hayner and Ash's (1940) classic work on "right guys"—and opposition to prison staff.

More recent research on race and gang affiliation in contemporary prison life complicates this picture further. For instance, Trammell's (2009) work on "How Men Describe Order in the Inmate Code in California Prisons" reveals the importance of gang affiliation as a source of tribal affiliation and attendant loyalty. Likewise, Goodman's (2008, 2014) ethnographic work in California prisons interrogates race as a central organizing principle of prison life. These recent findings reaffirm the existence of an abundance of race-based affiliations, allegiances, and loyalties—phenomena that have been consistently documented in the literature on prisons (Hunt et al., 1993; Jacobs, 1979).

Donaldson's (1993) classic work, as well as Dolovich's (2011), Robinson's (2011) and Jenness and Fenstermaker's (2014, 2015) more recent work, reveal how markers of gender and sexuality organize prisoners' lives in carceral environments designed for men. Prisons are, in the first instance, sex segregated institutions (Britton, 2003) organized around heteronormative understandings that produce a consequential stratification order among inmates (Fleisher and Krienert, 2009; Kunzel, 2008). This stratification order positions sex offenders and those with non-normative gender identities and sexualities near the bottom of that order and consequently renders them fair game as prey for other prisoners (Clemmer, 1940; Ireland, 2002; Knopp, 1984; Leddy and O'Connell, 2002; Schwaebe, 2005; Vaughn and Sapp, 1989). This is especially true for transgender women in prisons for men (Jenness, 2010a; Jenness and Fenstermaker, 2015, 2016; Jenness et al., 2011; Sexton et al., 2010).

The expectation of loyalty to fellow inmates stands in stark contrast to, and exists despite, another well-established truism of prison life: trust no one. In the words of Sykes (1956: 131) over 50 years ago, social interactions among prisoners are characterized by "force, fraud, and chicanery... exploitative tactics that are supported or reinforced by the social structure of the prison." More recently, Dolovich (2011: 10) described this milieu as one in which "the strong prey on the weak and gain status and power through the domination and abuse of fellow human beings."

Given the complex structure of inmate communities in prisons in the United States, the tension between solidarity and affiliation, on the one hand, and self-interest and disaffiliation on the other, merits empirical interrogation. This tension is complicated precisely because prison environments are simultaneously characterized by harshness, deprivation, and distrust as well as inter- and intragroup loyalties and commitments that organize prison life and undergird prisoner communities. Modern day prisons provide a unique setting in which to examine the intricacies of allegiance to one's own kind in a closed social system with finite resources for managing a particularly harsh, degrading, and disempowering social environment. Likewise, transgender women in prisons for men—a group of prisoners who are uniquely situated as "the girls among men" and

therefore face unique challenges in men's prisons (Jenness 2010a, 2010b; Jenness and Fenstermaker, 2014, 2015; Sexton et al., 2010)—constitute a distinctive population of prisoners who provide an empirical window through which to examine prisoners' perceptions of collective allegiance and its corollary, perceptions of collective efficacy, against a well-established backdrop of self-interest and competition.

This article also responds to Panfil and Miller's (2014) recent call for research that moves "beyond the straight and narrow" by focusing empirical and theoretical attention on LGBTQ populations. As they persuasively argued in a recent issue of *The Criminologist*, "Despite notable exceptions, the extent to which scholars in criminology and criminal justice have explicitly included LGBTQ populations or themes in research is underwhelming" (Panfil and Miller, 2014: 1). Conducting empirical research on LGBTQ populations, they rightly argue, simultaneously brings much needed attention to marginalized populations, and enriches—by either affirming or problematizing—our understanding of broadly applicable criminological constructs and theories through a focus on uniquely situated groups.

The remainder of this article unfolds in four sections. In the next section, we provide an overview of key empirical and theoretical work that informs our analysis of collective identity and collective efficacy among transgender women in California prisons for men. Thereafter, we describe the unique data used for our empirical analysis. In the analysis section, we present findings that reveal that, despite their considerable diversity, transgender prisoners embrace a collective identity and sense of collective efficacy as transgender prisoners more so than as prisoners per se; their collective identity and perception of collective efficacy are predicated on social-interactive factors, such as exposure to and trust in other transgender prisoners, rather than demographic characteristics and physical features of the carceral environment in which they reside; and the more time a transgender inmate spends in prison, the more likely she is to feel a sense of affective commitment to a community (i.e., collective identity), but the less likely she is to express perceptions of collective efficacy (i.e., to expect other group members to act on her behalf). Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings for our understanding of prison life, the relationship between perceptions of collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy more generally, and how the findings presented in this article relate to larger discussions about the social organization of prison communities.

Theoretical and empirical considerations

In this article, we focus analytic attention on specific measures of perceived collective identity and collective efficacy among transgender women incarcerated in prisons for men. Consistent with a larger literature on collective identity and collective efficacy, our empirical focus is on prisoners' subjective perceptions of who they are and their ability to impact their environment rather than a reality separate from their assessments of their lives in prison. In the sections that follow, we provide an

empirical and theoretical overview of these core concepts and thereafter a summary of the scant literature that can be found on transgender prisoners.

Collective identity

Across numerous literatures, social movement scholars, organizational and social psychologists, and anthropologists have grappled with how to define, delimit, and measure collective identity. As a result, the term “collective identity” is seldom used in the same way across studies; this, in turn, produces multifaceted and often amorphous understandings of the concept. Despite this lack of consensus, the literature suggests that the essence of collective identity “resides in a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences” (Snow, 2001: 2213). Seen this way, collective identity is rooted in a subjective sense of one’s location in a social world. Moving beyond the mere essence of the concept, Polletta and Jasper (2001: 285) note the importance of employing a definition that is both comprehensive and parsimonious. In this spirit, they define collective identity as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution”—a straightforward definition that is reflected to varying degrees in the literature.

Recognizing the myriad forms that collective identity has taken in the empirical literature, Ashmore et al. (2004: 80) created a general conceptual framework for collective identity, a “strategy by which individual theorists might better articulate the assumptions and the components of their theoretical formulations.” To do so, they surveyed a broad range of examinations of collective identity and related concepts in order to disaggregate the concept of collective identity into key conceptual domains. Ashmore et al.’s (2004) framework presents the most comprehensive treatment of collective identity to date, and serves as an important organizing framework for future studies of collective identity. Consequently, we employ elements of their framework in the analyses presented here and discuss the framework in further detail in the data and method section of this article.

Collective efficacy

Collective efficacy refers to the capacity of a group to achieve common goals (Sampson et al., 1997). Originally developed under the rubric of social disorganization theory, recent scholarship on collective efficacy has examined the concept across a wide variety of institutional arenas and numerous scholarly literatures. Across these literatures, collective efficacy has been conceptualized and measured in many different ways, more often than not relying on individuals as units of analyses and their subjective sense of their relationship to their environment as the focal concern. Borrowing from the criminological literature in particular, collective efficacy is commonly conceptualized as having two components: (a) social cohesion and trust (SCT) and (b) informal social control (ISC). SCT measures commitment to a group and its members, while ISC measures expectations that one can depend

on group members to intervene for the good of the group. Although collective efficacy is an emergent quality of groups (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, workplaces), many studies—the present study included—have examined this concept via individual perceptions.

Conceptually, collective efficacy has much in common with collective identity. Both concepts reference social processes and products that reside squarely in the realm of subjective assessment of one's own position relative to a group. For instance, like collective identity, SCT measures individual perceptions of group affiliation. While collective identity measures a commitment to a group in an abstract sense—with commitment based on commonality with the group as a whole—SCT measures commitment to the people who constitute the group. ISC, on the other hand, represents individual perceptions that other group members are willing to act on the groups' behalf under certain circumstances. In this sense, ISC captures individual expectations of hypothetical action stemming from the affiliation inherent in perceived identity and perceived SCT. In other words, ISC makes explicit the individual, subjective expectation that SCT among group members will translate into intervention on behalf of a similarly situated other (quite apart from whether action is, in reality, forthcoming).

Transgender women prisoners

Until very recently, very little social science research had been published on transgender prisoners—prisoners whose gender identity and/or presentation are different from their sex as assigned by the institution. In 2005, Tewksbury and Potter (2005) deemed transgender prisoners a “forgotten group.” Four years later, Sexton et al. (2009: 860), published the first demographic profile of transgender women in prison and concluded that they are exceptionally marginalized both inside and outside of prison.

Prior to this landmark publication, previous studies portrayed transgender inmates as minor characters in the cast of the early literature on prison culture—as “punks” or “queens” among the more normative “Men.” In one of the most illuminating articles on the topic, Donaldson (1993) vividly describes distinctions between a jockey, a punk, a queen, a booty-bandit, a Daddy, and a Man. However, he does not address the social status, identity, behavioral repertoire, or efficacy of this particular group of prisoners. Likewise, the most recent and most comprehensive research on prison sexual culture does not provide clear direction along these lines (Fleisher and Krienert, 2009; Kunzel, 2008). What we do know is that transgender women prisoners have much in common with other prisoners in prisons for men. Most notably, they experience many of the same pains of imprisonment as other prisoners (Crewe, 2009; Jenness et al., 2013; Kruttschnitt and Gartner, 2004; Sexton, 2014; Sumner, 2009; Sumner et al., 2015; Sykes, 1958).

Transgender women in prison for men are also distinct from other prisoners in consequential ways. They embrace non-normative gender identities and/or display non-normative gender presentations in a rigidly gendered carceral setting that

assumes males—and only males—as inhabitants. In this sense, they occupy a minority status in prison that renders them vulnerable and marginalized. With regard to vulnerability, for example, transgender prisoners are *13 times* more likely than their nontransgender counterparts to be sexually assaulted in prison (Jenness et al., 2007; Jenness, 2010a, 2014; see also Jenness and Fenstermaker, 2015). When examined along the lines of previous employment, marital status, mental health, substance abuse, HIV status, homelessness, sex work, and victimization, transgender women prisoners in men's prisons are comparatively disadvantaged and marginalized (Sexton et al., 2009).

As a uniquely situated group within the larger prison culture in prisons for men, transgender women in prisons for men are bound by a common social location within prison and commonality of experience that flows from it. At the same time, however, as a population of prisoners they are distinct and display considerable diversity among themselves. For example, they report a range of sexual and gender identities, attractions, sexual orientations, and presentation of self modalities. These and sources of diversity such as race/ethnicity, educational attainment and other sources of social capital, mark transgender prisoners as a heterogeneous group of inmates (Jenness et al., 2011, 2013). Transgender women prisoners in prisons for men simultaneously share with their nontransgender counterparts the fact that they are, in the first instance, prisoners—even as they are situated as a distinct subpopulation of prisoners with a unique relationship to life in prisons for men and display considerable diversity among themselves as a distinct subpopulation that routinely violates the gender order. These social facts lead to competing hypotheses about their collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy.

Hypotheses

A key question for this work is whether transgender women in prisons for men report perceptions of collective identity and collective efficacy as a distinct subpopulation of prisoners, as prisoners in a generic sense, or as both. It is reasonable to hypothesize the presence of collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy based on commonalities among transgender women in men's prisons, especially given that transgender prisoners embody individual (non-normative) identities and culture set apart from—but nested within—the larger prisoner culture (Sumner, 2009). As Sumner (2009: xviii) explains, “As the ‘ladies’ among ‘men’, transgender inmates are situated within a correctional policy context that regulates gender and an inmate culture in which masculinity is revered and femininity is reviled.”

At the same time, recent qualitative analyses of transgender women in men's prisons reveal a friendly yet fierce competition among transgender women prisoners for the attention and affection of “real men” in prison. As Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014: 29) explain:

Transgender prisoners in men's prisons express a desire to secure standing as a “real girl” or “the best girl” possible in a men's prison. This desire translates into

expressions of situated gendered practices that embrace male dominance, heteronormativity, classed and raced gender ideals, and a daily acceptance of inequality. To succeed in being “close enough” to “the real deal” requires a particular type of participation in a male-dominated system that can dole out a modicum of privilege and respect.

Transgender prisoners accomplish these goals to varying degrees through the enactment of hyper-femininity in a demonstrably hyper-masculine environment. The result is a culture of competition among transgender prisoners—a competition with a clear prize at the end (“real men”) and strategies to achieve this prize (the accomplishment of femininity)—that could mitigate the development of a collective identity and the perception of collective efficacy associated with being a transgender woman prisoner in an alpha male environment. In short, extant work suggests that transgender women in prisons for men can be seen as both a subculture and as strategic competitors within the prison arena. Their similarity as transgender women is a possible anchoring point for a subculture (Sumner, 2009; Sumner and Sexton, 2014), while their competition for the attention of men and other valuable resources can render them adversaries (Jenness and Fenstermaker, 2014).

In this context, we examine the social allocation of allegiance among the transgender prisoner population and the dynamics of cooperation amidst an established backdrop of known and understood competition among transgender women in men’s prisons. We focus on whether and to what extent transgender inmates express a sense of collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy with two prison communities to which they belong: the transgender inmate community and the larger inmate community. Further, we examine the predictors of transgender inmates’ collective identity and collective efficacy in order to understand what predicts a subjective sense of belonging to each of these communities, and what helps to translate this sense of belonging into a subjective sense of collective efficacy.

We hypothesize that transgender inmates will express a stronger sense of collective identity and perceived collective efficacy with other transgender inmates than with the larger inmate population. Specifically, we expect that demographic factors, features of the carceral environment in which transgender prisoners reside, and social-interactional factors will be associated with collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy. With regard to demographic factors, we anticipate that commonalities across numerous characteristics related to personal and social identity will increase identification and affiliation with the larger group—as has been demonstrated in the literature on the social organization of the prison described above—thus corresponding to higher levels of collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy. Physical features of the environment—which structure and constrain exposure to and social interaction with others, particularly in a prison setting—are expected to exert an influence on group affiliation and perceptions of efficacy as well. In the social interactional realm, we hypothesize that stronger friendships with individual group members will be associated with a stronger

affective commitment towards the group (perceived SCT). In this case, prediction hinges on the strength of relationships with—rather than mere exposure to—other group members. We also hypothesize that this affective commitment will be associated with greater expectations of intervention for the good of the group (perceived ISC). Lastly, we hypothesize that transgender inmates' sense of collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy with both reference groups increases over time, as they have greater exposure to other group members and increased opportunity to develop affective ties. To empirically address these hypotheses, we turn to the original data and mixed method analyses described below.

Data and method of analysis

A focus on transgender women in prisons for men

When data collection began in April 2008, California was home to over 300 transgender inmates in prisons for men (Jenness et al., 2011, 2013). The 315 transgender women we interviewed and collected official data on were housed in 27 of California's 30 prisons for men. Recognizing that distinct types of gender variant people may or may not identify as transgender (Valentine, 2007), for the purposes of this work transgender prisoners were delineated by deploying four specific criteria. A transgender inmate is a prisoner in a men's prison who: (a) self-identifies as transgender (or something analogous); (b) presents as female, transgender, or feminine in prison or outside of prison; (c) receives any kind of medical treatment (physical or psychological) for something related to how she presents herself or thinks about herself in terms of gender, including taking hormones to initiate and sustain the development of secondary sex characteristics to enhance femininity; or (d) participates in groups for transgender inmates. Meeting any one of these criteria qualified an inmate for inclusion in the larger study from which this article derives (Jenness et al., 2011).

Inmates in California prisons who met the eligibility criteria described above were invited to participate in the study, and almost all of them agreed to be interviewed. A team of eight interviewers traveled to 27 prisons for adult men in California, met face-to-face with over 500 inmates identified by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) as potentially transgender, and completed interviews with 315 transgender inmates. The shortest interview was less than a half an hour (19 minutes), while the longest extended to just under three hours (two hours and 55 minutes). The mean duration for interviews was slightly less than one hour (56 minutes). The total amount of live interview time approached 300 hours (294 hours and six minutes). The overall response rate was 95 percent, which leads us to conclude that the findings reported below are not biased by refusals to participate in the study. The final step in data collection involved concatenating official data retrieved from the CDCR's database on inmates to the self-report data described above.

Measuring collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy

The interview schedule employed to collect original data for the larger project from which this article derives was designed to capture a wealth of information on inmates' lives both inside and outside prison, including: the housing environments in which transgender inmates live, the social networks in which they are embedded, their personal relationships in prison, and their identities and conduct as transgender inmates. A summary of the key independent variables used in analysis presented in this article can be found in Table 1.

The instrument also included a series of closed-ended questions that captured measures of collective identity and measures of perceived collective efficacy. A summary of our dependent variables, along with basic measures of central tendency, can be found in Table 2. We drew from Ashmore et al.'s (2004) organizing framework to inform our conceptualization and operationalization of collective identity, as well as its articulation within a prison setting. According to this framework, collective identity can be measured at the individual level as a multidimensional concept rooted in an individual's subjective identification with a larger group. Of the various components identified by Ashmore et al. (2004) that comprise collective identity, three were chosen for this study: 1) Self-categorization/goodness-of-fit, 2) explicit importance, and 3) affective commitment/attachment.²

Each of these three subjective dimensions of collective identity was measured by the respondent's level of agreement (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) with a declarative statement related to a component of collective identity for a given social group. Each statement was provided to transgender prisoner respondents twice—first with transgender inmates as a reference group, and again with the general inmate population as a reference group—and respondents were asked for their level of agreement with each iteration of the statement. For instance, to assess transgender inmates' collective identity with the inmate community as a whole, self-categorization/goodness-of-fit was measured using the statement "I am a typical inmate"; explicit importance was measured with the statement "Being an inmate is important to me"; and affective commitment/attachment was measured with the statement "I have a strong sense of belonging to the inmate community." To measure transgender inmates' collective identity with the *transgender* inmate community, the word "transgender" was inserted before "inmate" in each of the statements (e.g., "I am a typical transgender inmate").

We operationalized collective efficacy such that we could remain consistent with the original use of the concept and, at the same time, adapt our measurement to attend to the particulars of the prison environment.³ As originally operationalized by Sampson et al. (1997), collective efficacy consists of two interrelated components: SCT⁴ and ISC. Each component has five separate indicators; SCT indicators are measured using a five-point scale of agreement, while ISC indicators are measured using a five-point scale indicating the likelihood of an event occurring.⁵ However, the translation of neighborhood-based measures of collective efficacy

Table 1. Summary of independent variables.

Variable	Description	Measurement
Demographics		
Age	Age of respondent at time of interview	Age in months at time of interview
Race	Race of respondent	Racial category according to official CDCR records
Gender identity, gender presentation, and sexual orientation		
Female gender identity	Respondent's subjective identification as female	Dichotomous variable reflecting whether inmate identifies as female
Consistent female presentation	Consistency of respondent's female presentation, prior to incarceration and expected upon release from prison	Dichotomous variable reflecting whether inmate reports consistent female presentation prior to and after incarceration
Sexual orientation	Sexual orientation label chosen by respondent	Nominal variable consisting of: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, other
Physical environment		
Level IV prison	Whether respondent's current prison is designated Level IV custody	Dichotomous variable reflecting the presence of a Level IV designation by the CDCR
Reception center	Whether respondent's current prison is a reception center	Dichotomous variable reflecting the designation of reception center by the CDCR
Group housing unit	Whether respondent's current housing unit is called or group housing	Dichotomous variable consisting of: group unit (dormitory or gym), celled unit
Social environment		
Concentrated TG prison	Whether respondent's current prison houses a concentrated population of transgender inmates	Dichotomous variable reflecting the presence or absence of at least 50 transgender inmates
Portion other inmates TG	Portion of other inmates in respondent's current housing that she identifies as transgender	Ordinal variable consisting of: a few, some, about half, most, all
Portion friends TG	Portion of respondent's friends that she identifies as transgender	Ordinal variable consisting of: a few, some, about half, most, all

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Variable	Description	Measurement
Trust TG friends	Degree to which respondent trusts her transgender friends	Agreement with the statement "In general, I can trust my transgender friends" using a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree
TG friends care	Degree to which respondent feels her transgender friends care about her	Agreement with the statement "My transgender friends care about me" using a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree
Trust non-TG friends	Degree to which respondent trusts her non-transgender friends	Agreement with the statement "In general, I can trust my non-transgender friends" using a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree
Non-TG friends care	Degree to which respondent feels her non-transgender friends care about her	Agreement with the statement "My non-transgender friends care about me" using a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree
Intimate environment Sexual relationship	Whether respondent has been in a sexual relationship with another inmate while living in her current housing unit	Dichotomous variable reflecting the presence or absence of a sexual relationship
Marriage like relationship	Whether respondent has been in a marriage-like relationship with another inmate while living in her current housing unit	Dichotomous variable reflecting the presence or absence of a marriage-like relationship
Exposure Time incarcerated	Time respondent has spent incarcerated on current term	Number of months incarcerated on current term as of interview date

Table 2. Summary of dependent variables with descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean and SD for transgender inmate reference group	Mean and SD for inmate reference group
Collective identity (CI)		
I am a typical (transgender) inmate	3.33 (1.292)	2.89 (1.393)
Being a (transgender) inmate is important to me	3.80 (1.208)	2.04 (1.171)
I have a strong sense of belonging to the (transgender) inmate community	3.58 (1.214)	2.36 (1.251)
CI scale	3.57 (0.968)	2.44 (0.968)
Collective efficacy (CE)		
Social cohesion and trust (SCT)		
In general, (transgender) inmates are willing to help each other	3.69 (1.045)	2.98 (1.231)
(Transgender) inmates as a group are close	3.45 (1.074)	2.95 (1.206)
(Transgender) inmates can trust each other	2.85 (1.146)	2.14 (1.081)
(Transgender) inmates generally get along with each other	3.38 (1.051)	2.99 (1.095)
(Transgender) inmates as a whole share the same beliefs	3.12 (1.203)	2.14 (1.134)
SCT scale	3.30 (0.843)	2.63 (0.835)
Informal social control (ISC)		
Another (transgender) inmate would intervene if a (transgender) inmate was being disrespected	3.84 (0.975)	3.14 (1.180)
Another (transgender) inmate would intervene if a (transgender) inmate's property was being taken	3.82 (1.013)	3.23 (1.266)
Another (transgender) inmate would intervene if a (transgender) inmate was being verbally insulted	3.68 (1.061)	2.82 (1.143)
Another (transgender) inmate would intervene if a (transgender) inmate was being physically assaulted	3.86 (1.072)	2.99 (1.185)
Another (transgender) inmate would intervene if a (transgender) inmate was being sexually assaulted	3.90 (1.133)	2.89 (1.274)
ISC scale	3.81 (0.880)	3.02 (0.957)

to a carceral setting required adjustment to the measurement of ISC: the substance of each indicator was changed to reflect a scenario that was fitting for a prison setting. For example, rather than asking respondents about the likelihood of a neighbor intervening when children were being disrespectful of an adult—a situation with no applicability to an adult correctional facility—we asked for their level of agreement with the statement: “An inmate would intervene if another inmate was being disrespected.”⁶ To measure transgender inmates’ ISC with regard to the general inmate reference group, respondents were read a series of ten statements using the word “inmate”; the same series of statements was then repeated, inserting the word “transgender” before the word “inmate” in each statement to measure ISC for the transgender inmate reference group.

Analytic strategy

To address our hypotheses, we utilized a mixed methods analytic strategy. For the quantitative analysis, we conducted standard descriptive analyses as well as bivariate and multivariate analyses designed to assess the relationship between collective identity, perceived collective efficacy and various predictors of both. Our predictor variables include demographic and individual characteristics as well as factors related to the physical environment, social environment, and intimate relationships, as described in Table 1. We began by regressing the composite scales for CI, SCT, and ISC on each predictor variable individually using ordinary least squares regression, in order to identify significant bivariate relationships. We then estimated full models predicting CI, and perceived SCT and ISC using only those variables that were significantly predictive in the bivariate analyses.⁷

Throughout the presentation of findings in this article, we also draw on three sources of qualitative data. First, we draw on responses to the open-ended questions asked during the interview that speak to how transgender prisoners think about themselves, other prisoners, and their relationships with both transgender and nontransgender prisoners. Second, when asking closed-ended questions during the interview, respondents often provided unsolicited comments that shed insight into these dynamics. And, third, we draw on ethnographic data collected in the field to provide illustrative examples of key dynamics that occupy center stage in the quantitative analysis (for more along these lines, see Jenness, 2010b). In the next section, we present our findings in a way that maintains a thematic focus on the key concerns and attendant findings by drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data to address each issue in turn.

Findings

Transgender prisoners in California’s prisons for men are, demographically speaking, distinct from the larger prison population as well as diverse among themselves. Table 3 reveals that transgender inmates are distinguishable from the larger population of inmates in prisons for adult men in terms of age, with

Table 3. Characteristics of study sample

	Total adult transgender population in CDCR prisons for men		Total adult population in CDCR prisons for men ^a	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Total	332		146,360	
Age				
<i>M</i>		38.05		37.39
Median		38.50		37.00
<i>SD</i>		9.61		11.18
Range		19–63		18–92
18–25	33	9.9	21,383	14.6
26–35	90	27.1	46,933	32.1
36–45	135	40.7	40,971	28.0
46+	74	22.3	37,073	25.3
Race/ethnicity				
Hispanic	94	28.3	56,880	38.9
White	93	28.0	37,954	25.9
Black	115	34.6	43,451	29.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	0.9	1,337	0.9
Other	27	8.1	6,738	4.6
Offense				
Crimes against persons	162	49.8	80,202	54.8
Property	98	30.2	26,892	18.4
Drug	53	16.3	26,418	18.1
Other	12	3.7	12,841	8.8

^aThe total adult male prison population figures include the study population and exclude those residing in camps and on death row.

transgender inmates more represented in the middle ages (36–45) ($p < 0.001$); race/ethnicity, with transgender inmates disproportionately white and black ($p < 0.001$); commitment offense, with transgender inmates disproportionately admitted to prison for crimes against property ($p < 0.001$). Significant differences also emerged with regard to custody level, with transgender inmates disproportionately classified as Level 3 and Level 4 ($p < 0.001$); sex offender status, with transgender inmates more frequently classified as sex offenders ($p < 0.01$); gang status, with transgender inmates less frequently identified as gang members ($p < 0.001$); and mental health status, with transgender inmates more often classified as CCCMS⁸ and EOP⁹ ($p < 0.001$). Although these are statistically significant differences, the magnitude of the difference (i.e., the effect size) for all of these dimensions is not large.

Transgender inmates and the larger population of inmates in prisons for men are roughly equivalent on only one dimension reported in Table 3. Namely, approximately the same percent of transgender inmates and inmates in prisons for adult men are serving life sentences.

Transgender women inmates are not only diverse in terms of the profile presented in Table 3, they are also diverse in terms of how they think about their gender, sexual orientation, and attractions. For example, the vast majority (76.1%) identify as female when asked about their gender identity, with considerably fewer identifying as “both male and female” (14%). About a third (33.3%) identify as “homosexual,” while 19.4% identify their sexual orientation as “transgender,” 18.1% identify as heterosexual, 11.3% identify as bisexual, and the remaining 17.8% identify as something else. The vast majority report that they are sexually attracted to men while in prison (81.9%). A small minority indicated being attracted to both men and women in prison (15.6%); and a majority (75.8%) report being attracted to men both outside of prison and inside prison. Transgender prisoners also vary in terms of continuity of gender presentation, with over three-fourths (76.7%) of transgender inmates reporting presenting themselves as female outside of prison and anticipating presenting as female if/when they are released from prison. They display consistency between their gender presentation and their status as transgender both inside and outside of prison. This finding challenges the commonly held notion that prisoners adopt transgender identities as an adaptation to being in a sex segregated environment organized around masculinity and its many displays; in fact, transgender women in prisons for men report perceiving themselves as more feminine after being incarcerated than before being incarcerated, despite the fact that “man up” is a commonly heard refrain in prison (Jenness, 2015).

Despite considerable diversity in the transgender inmate population and the fact that, at the time of data collection, they were dispersed across 27 prisons in California, transgender inmates report relatively high levels of both collective identity and perceived collective efficacy. Their levels of collective identity and collective efficacy were significantly higher with regard to the transgender inmate reference group than the general inmate reference group—a difference that holds for each measure of collective identity and collective efficacy, as well as the composite scales for collective identity and the two components of perceived collective efficacy (SCT and ISC) (Table 2). These differences indicate that transgender inmates affiliate more strongly with other transgender inmates than they do with the larger inmate population, in both a generalized and a targeted sense: they are committed to the notion of a transgender community and report a stronger affective commitment to their fellow transgender inmates who comprise this community. In other words, neither their diversity as a subgroup of prisoners nor their geographical dispersion across 27 different prisons prevents them from embracing a “shared sense of ‘oneness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences” (Snow, 2001: 2213). Rather, they perceive themselves as part of a larger group of transgender prisoners, regardless of other individual characteristics or physical location.

Transgender women in prisons for men identify primarily, but not exclusively, with other transgender women in prisons for men. They frequently refer to other transgender prisoners not just as “community,” but also as “family.” With regard to the former, a transgender prisoner described it this way: “The transgenders are all in one group. We get along. We’re like community. We have to stick together in here.” Going further, a young Hispanic transgender prisoner who identified as Catholic and reported being raped in prison while drunk explained that she would like to be placed in a particular housing unit “because there are so many family—so many transgenders there.” When asked why she wanted to live with other “transgenders,” she elaborated: “I consider them family. I don’t have much family on the streets. With lots of transgenders in here, it feels like one big family” (ID#10). Commensurate with a broader discourse on “families we choose” (Weston, 1997), the transgender women in this study embrace this kind of meaning and easily deploy it when asked about their location and community in prison.

Our interviewees distinguished themselves from other transgender prisoners in another way, too. They often expressed pride in being who they are and, above all else, being “true to oneself” rather than being what they call a “fabricator.” For example, an HIV-positive African American transgender prisoner serving time for fraud described how she grew breasts with hormones, wears wigs and weaves, applies make-up on most days, and “does a bunch of other things to look like a lady” (ID#5). Later in the interview, she said, simply and with pride, “I’m not much of a fabricator” and described how efforts to look feminine reveal her true self and a willingness to be public about who she is, what she is, and how she is in the world, both inside and outside of prison. Another transgender prisoner corroborated this view when she said “people respect people for being who they are, not who they pretend to be. No one respects a fabricator” (#ID10). This respect is hard-earned insofar as being who you are is not an easy task for some transgender prisoners. As a final comment at the end of her interview, one transgender prisoner explained it this way:

It’s very hard to be transgender in prison because you don’t identify with the gender of the people you’re incarcerated with. You’re sexually vulnerable all the time. It’s exhausting. Because you feel like you can’t be yourself. Like most people, we just want to be ourselves and express ourselves (ID#10).

For many transgender prisoners, being true to oneself as a woman is a source of identity pride, often expressed in defiance of acknowledged stigma and despite the many hassles and harms that they recognize accompany doing so in a prison for men. Designed to advance a decidedly authentic self, these kinds of expressions implicate other transgender prisoners as less than authentic, thus a distinction between transgender women in prison is rendered legible.

Many transgender prisoners reported a keen awareness of how nontransgender prisoners perceived them in derogatory ways. A middle-aged, white transgender

prisoner explained the following when asked about getting respect from other prisoners: “Most transgenders on this yard, well, they get called ‘cum buckets’. The guys here have no respect for them and they have no respect for themselves. Do you know what I mean by cum bucket? I hope it’s obvious” (ID #8). An African American transgender prisoner from another state who described herself as a “crack whore” outside of prison explained it this way: “They think I’m a slut because I have breasts. We’re prison whores. That’s how we’re seen, especially if we have breasts” (ID #3). These and other comments reveal that transgender prisoners, while often having pride in their distinct identity, are nonetheless aware of a stratification order in prison that does not serve them well insofar as they are situated near the bottom of the ladder (Sumner, 2009)—a “reject among rejects,” to quote one transgender prisoner. Interestingly, these kinds of reports are often coupled with a preemptive articulation of how the transgender woman being interviewed is not at all like the image of transgender women in prison, even as other transgender women fit the bill.

Transgender women in prisons for men clearly see themselves as different from other prisoners and identify with that difference, albeit not always on the same grounds and in the same ways. This does not preclude them from also seeing their humanity and status as a prisoner as sources of commonality with non-transgender prisoners. For example, a transgender prisoner who reported that she “just broke up with my cellmate [who was also her institutional husband]” and felt the need for less drama and a “calmer existence” proclaimed the following when asked what she thought people on the outside should know about transgender prisoners: “It’s all about humanity. All of us—races and genders—civil rights, women’s rights, all rights. We’re human. Live and let live. Can we all get along?” (ID#5). From this point of view, there is no more powerful common denominator among prisoners than being human; the rest is secondary.

Likewise, many transgender prisoners noted that everyone in prison is a criminal and that being a criminal constitutes the overarching commonality among all prisoners. As an African American transgender prisoner who distinguished herself from other transgender prisoners and nontransgender prisoners alike said: “We’re all criminals and convicts of one type or another—rapists, thieves, murders. I did fraud. If we were trustworthy, we wouldn’t be here. We’re convicts” (ID#5). Less dramatically, a white transgender prisoner who reported being raped in prison, attempting suicide in prison, and struggling with mental health issues in prison concluded in her final comment during the interview: “We’re no different than any other person, except we’re criminals” (ID#17). A similar sentiment was expressed by a young, Hispanic transgender inmate in her closing remarks. She opted for the term “inmate” over “criminal,” but nonetheless emphasized the common humanity of those who share her identity: “Consider us a human. Don’t discriminate. Treat us as every other inmate” (ID#44). Perhaps the most vivid example of “sameness” came in the form of a transgender prisoner who very much identified as a woman and was living as a woman in prison while serving on the Men’s Advisory Council,

which is charged with bringing concerns from inmates to the attention of the prison administration. After the interview, she took great pride in explaining how she was on the *men's* advisory council while commenting on how she was helping “us” (referencing all prisoners) in so many important ways.¹⁰

The quantitative and qualitative data described above triangulate to reveal that transgender inmates express a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy with both the transgender community and the general inmate community, but they affiliate more strongly with the transgender community in prison. Given these findings, the question becomes: What predicts varying levels of collective identity and collective efficacy, as perceived by transgender women in prison? Further, are the same factors predictive of perceptions of collective identity and collective efficacy across reference groups? To address these questions, we focus first on individual characteristics related to personal identity, and in subsequent sections we examine factors related to the physical environments in which transgender prisoners serve time and transgender prisoners' social-interactional experiences in prison.

Individual characteristics

As revealed in Table 4, individual characteristics such as age, race, gender identity, gender presentation, and sexual orientation had no consistent effect on reported collective identity or of collective efficacy across reference groups. Although no individual-level variable emerged as a consistent predictor of collective identity or collective efficacy across reference groups, age was positively related to collective identity with the transgender inmate reference group. This is consistent with a key finding in the literature on “coming out” as transgender, namely that transgender individuals tend to come out—both to themselves and others—later in life (Beemyn and Rankin, 2011). Other, more surprising, findings emerged with regard to sexual orientation and race. Specifically, transgender inmates who identified as heterosexual reported significantly lower collective identity with the general inmate reference group. Black transgender inmates reported significantly lower SCT with the transgender inmate reference group, while Hispanic transgender inmates reported significantly higher SCT with the general inmate reference group.

In general, however, despite considerable heterogeneity in the transgender inmate population along these lines, similarity along one key dimension—some form of transgender identity or presentation—proved powerful enough to overcome many other sources of dissimilarity. With regard to the inmate reference group, collective identity and perceived collective efficacy overcame an additional hurdle: transgender inmates' significant dissimilarity from the larger inmate population. Despite the many differences that set transgender inmates apart from the larger inmate population, transgender prisoners expressed a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy with inmates in general, although this affiliation with the larger inmate population was significantly weaker than their affiliation with other transgender inmates.

Table 4. Results from OLS regression models predicting collective identity, social cohesion and trust, and informal social control

	Collective Identity			Social Cohesion and Trust			Informal Social Control			
	TG inmates		General inmate	TG inmates		General inmate	TG inmates		General inmate	
	Bivariate	Multivariate	Bivariate	Multivariate	Bivariate	Multivariate	Bivariate	Multivariate		
Demographics										
Age	0.197*	0.212*	0.128*	0.055	-0.092	-0.141*	-0.090	-0.152*	-0.119	-0.093
Black	-0.010		0.086		-0.147*	-0.168*		-0.083		0.032
Hispanic	0.040		0.112		0.015		0.200*	0.058		0.108
Gender identity and presentation										
Female gender identity	-0.010		0.002		-0.101		-0.010	0.085		0.003
Consistent female presentation	0.132		0.131		0.114		0.130	0.118		0.130
Sexual orientation										
Homosexual	1.536		1.275		0.106		1.029	0.176		0.296
Heterosexual	-2.674		-3.012*		-1.669		-1.342	0.535		-1.040
Bisexual	1.089		1.689		1.579		0.278	-0.765		0.689
Physical environment										
Level IV prison	0.055		-0.054		0.012		-0.048	-0.086		-0.067
Reception center	-0.036		0.102		0.095		0.116*	0.105		0.064
Group housing unit	-0.054		-0.106		0.043		0.021	0.061		0.018
Social environment										
Concentrated TG prison	0.049		0.030		-0.055		-0.023	-0.115*		-0.063
Portion other inmates TG	-0.100		-0.124*		0.016		0.041	-0.092		0.029
Portion friends TG	0.169*	0.172*	0.047		0.145*	0.086	-0.065	-0.015		-0.009
Trust TG friends	-0.010		-0.002		0.393*	0.201*	0.151*	0.032	0.259*	0.142
TG friends care	0.089		0.057		0.425*	0.271*	0.242*	0.240*	0.288*	0.224*
Trust non-TG friends	0.100		0.006		0.066		0.237*	0.156	-0.077	0.091
Non-TG friends care	0.104		0.064		0.089		0.192*	0.054	-0.004	0.091
Intimate environment										
Sexual relationship	0.106		-0.051		-0.110		-0.170*	-0.086		-0.149*
Marriage-like relationship	0.100		-0.038		-0.092		-0.088	-0.004		-0.053
Exposure										
Time incarcerated	0.145*	0.049	0.146*	0.109	-0.150*	-0.091	-0.183*	-0.016	-0.158*	-0.091
										-0.127*
										-0.080

*p < 0.05.

Physical characteristics of the prison environment

There is a long line of research that suggests that prison and housing environment exert a powerful effect on myriad aspects of prisoners' lives while incarcerated.¹¹ Informed by this literature, we ran a series of models that revealed that physical characteristics of the prison environment do not produce significant effects on collective identity and collective efficacy among transgender prisoners. Features of the physical environment at both the institution- and housing unit-levels, including custody level of the institution, whether it was a reception center, and whether the inmate was housed in a celled or dormitory environment, are not significantly associated with collective identity or collective efficacy for either reference group (Table 4). This indicates that transgender inmates' affiliation and anticipated willingness to intervene with similarly situated others is bounded by commonality of identity and experience, rather than physical location. Regardless of their local environment, transgender inmates retained a sense of collective identity and perceptions of collective efficacy with two broader communities: the transgender inmate community and the larger inmate community.

Social-interactive characteristics

The types of predictors that are significantly associated with collective identity and perceived collective efficacy are social-interactive characteristics (Table 4). We found support for the hypothesis that social interaction with members of a reference group—rather than mere physical proximity—is associated with a stronger collective identity with that group. For example, whether or not respondents were housed among a concentrated population of transgender inmates consistently failed to significantly predict any of our outcomes of interest.¹² Contrary to our expectations informed by subcultural theories, being part of a large, physically proximate transgender community in prison had no statistically significant effect on a sense of community or perceptions of collective efficacy among the transgender prisoner community writ large. We found a significant, positive effect of the social environment on transgender inmates' collective identity with the transgender inmate community, however. Specifically, the higher the proportion of one's friends in prison that were transgender, the higher her collective identity with this reference group (Table 4). This effect held for perceptions of SCT but not ISC, which indicates that the mere presence of transgender friends in prison is sufficient to facilitate an affiliation with the group and an affective commitment to its members, but does not necessarily produce explicit expectations of intervention on one's behalf (Table 4). Considered in tandem, these findings on physical and social location stand in contrast to the extant literature, in which "variability [in collective efficacy] is not necessarily associated with closeness in the relationships among people in a collectivity. . . . The realization of collective efficacy merely requires a reasonable expectation that contact among these people will continue in the future" (Williams and Guerra, 2011: 129). Our innovative conceptualization of

community allows us to examine whether “closeness of relationships” can indeed impact *perceptions* of collective efficacy, rather than its realization, even in the absence of physical proximity.

When friendships in prison were examined not just in terms of their presence or absence, but with regard to their strength and meaning, the picture changes. Measures of trust in transgender friends and assessments of the degree to which transgender friends care were not significantly associated with collective identity, but were significantly positively related to both measures of perceived collective efficacy (Table 4). In other words, the presence of transgender prisoner friends who are perceived to be trustable and who genuinely care makes the difference between commitment to a group and a belief that members of the group will act in one’s own best interest.

These statistical findings are corroborated by qualitative data that reveal transgender prisoners’ complicated view of friendship. On the one hand, when asked about their preferences for living environments, they often report wanting to be around other transgender women prisoners for support, “girl talk,” and protection. A white transgender prisoner from a middle class family in an affluent part of California explained, simply, “I’m a girl, so I’d rather be around other girls. For sociability” (ID#10). Likewise, a Hispanic transgender prisoner who was in a holding cage awaiting placement in administrative segregation during the interview explained that having other transgender friends in prison is important because “we could talk about girl stuff. . . We can talk about feelings together and get a break from the madness” (ID#4). A transgender prisoner who spent over twenty years working as a prostitute in Los Angeles, during which time she churned in and out of prison routinely, explained in response to a question about whether she wants to be housed with other transgender prisoners: “I never thought about it. It’s hard. I want the company of men, but I feel safe around transgenders. I like women friends” (ID#1). Our data reveal that transgender women in prisons for men desire the presence of other transgender women in their living environment; however, that desire is mitigated by other concerns.

Transgender women in prison for men also commented on the problematic nature of friendships with other transgender prisoners by referencing drama, competition, and distrust in ways that can effectively preclude meaningful friendships between transgender prisoners. A transgender prisoner with a BA in a social science discipline who is serving her ninth term and has been in the system for over 20 years explained that she would welcome more transgender prisoners in her dorm, “but not too many because a lot of transgenders cause too much drama. They like to compete. I’m more passive. I’d like friends, but not drama” (ID #13). A middle aged transgender prisoner who identifies as Mexican was more emphatic in her response to a question about friendships with other transgender prisoners when she said “everything is cutthroat over here” and “a lot of transgenders are filled with hatred toward other transgenders because they compete. It’s ugly” (ID#12). As Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014) have described in detail, transgender inmates in prisons for men engage in a competitive pursuit of a femininity that does

not constitute “passing,” but does involve accountability to a normative standard and a “ladylike” ideal. Such practices require an intense preoccupation with bodily adornment and appearance as well as deference, demeanor, and a studied comportment. They argue, “When successful, the result is the achievement of a *recognition* that one is close enough to a ‘real girl’ to be deserving of a kind of privilege within the alpha male environment of prison” (Jeness and Fenstermaker, 2014: 4). The pursuit of this kind of prison privilege leads to conflict, often anchored in “jealousies,” to borrow from the quote presented at the beginning of this article.

In this context, it is telling that some transgender prisoners found our questions about friendships with other transgender prisoners naive at best and laughable at worst; in fact, they sometimes responded to questions about friendships by equivocating about what is meant by “friend” and concluding that no one has real friends in prison; they have “associates” (i.e., people you engage with in a friendly way and might even rely upon, but do not necessarily trust).¹³ A transgender prisoner explained it this way: “My mother said a friend is someone who will take a bullet for you. Well, I don’t have those kind of friends, but I have friends. Just regular friends” (ID#3). Our data reveal that, in the main, “regular friends” for transgender prisoners are not necessarily friends who will intervene on their behalf in prison precisely because the prison environment encourages “trusting no one,” even those with whom they identify. As an African American transgender prisoner who has been presenting as female since she was 17, was close to 30 at the time of the interview, and enjoys attending transgender support groups in prison explained: “There’s a lot of backstabbing, drama, and gossip [among transgender prisoners]. You can’t trust people like that” (ID#25). A long-term resident of a prison that houses a substantial cluster of transgender prisoners described the dilemma this way when asked about wanting to live with more transgender prisoners: “It’s a double-edged sword. Yes, because there is strength in numbers. In another sense, they are always looking for a garage to park their Dodge in” (ID#14). She went on to say “we are all respectful to each other to a point, unless you’re known as a ‘ho’ or a ‘bitch’. But, there’s lots of hos and bitches in here.” Another transgender prisoner summed the situation up quite persuasively when she said: “Girl, you want them other girls and need them other girls and they are the last thing you really want or need. Drama. Gossip. Shit. It never ends well, and you need to stop it before it gets too far. You try to stay out of it, but you can’t really” (ID#105).

Interestingly, while the presence of transgender friends in prison is significantly associated with higher levels of perceived collective identity with the transgender inmate community, no such relationship is found among transgender inmates with regard to the general inmate community (Table 4). Exposure to other transgender inmates—regardless of whether they were considered friends—did emerge as significant, however. The proportion of inmates in one’s housing unit that were transgender was inversely related to perceptions of collective identity with the larger inmate population. In other words, the greater transgender inmates’ exposure to other transgender inmates, the less they identify with the larger inmate

population. Thus, it appears that exposure to transgender friends in prison strengthens affiliation with the transgender inmate community, while exposure to transgender inmates—quite apart from friendship—diminishes affiliation with the inmate community writ large. This provides strong evidence of the presence of a subculture among transgender prisoners, at least at the level of self-reported identity and affiliation.

The relationship between quality of friendships and SCT found for the transgender inmate reference group held for the general inmate reference group as well (Table 4). This is consistent with the hypothesis that, regardless of the degree of exposure one has to other members of a group, the strength of friendships that one forms with members of that group is associated with higher levels of affective commitment (in this case, SCT). The difference between reference groups was visible once again when examining ISC (Table 4). The relationship evident for the transgender inmate reference group—that stronger friendships were associated with an expectation of intervention for the good of the group—is not evident for the general inmate reference group. Thus, although strength of friendships with other transgender inmates increases expectations of cooperative efforts for the transgender inmate reference group, strength of friendships with nontransgender inmates has no significant effect on anticipated intervention on the part of the larger inmate community.

Time incarcerated

One additional predictor of perceptions of collective identity and collective efficacy is noteworthy: time incarcerated. The average time incarcerated in a California state prison for our sample was just under 11 years, with a great deal of variation around the mean ($M = 10.91$, $SD = 8.61$); incarceration stays for transgender prisoners at the time of interview ranged from two months to 45 years. As a measure of exposure to the prison environment in the most literal sense, it is logical that time incarcerated would impact perceptions of collective identity and collective efficacy. This is the case for all three dependent variables as well as for both reference groups. In bivariate analyses, longer prison stays are associated with significantly higher levels of CI, but significantly lower levels of collective efficacy, for both reference groups. In other words, the longer a transgender inmate spends in prison, the more she will come to identify with both the transgender inmate community and the inmate community more generally. This finding is not surprising; if exposure to other group members is predictive of higher levels of CI, the window of time during which this exposure can occur seems a logical proxy.

Despite increasing levels of CI, however, transgender inmates tend to perceive *lower* levels of collective efficacy over time. That is, the more time a transgender inmate spends in prison, the more likely she is to identify with a community, but the less likely she is to feel a sense of affective commitment to that community or to expect other group members to act on her behalf. We attribute this outcome to the dynamics born of the complicated nature of friendship among transgender

prisoners, as described by the qualitative data above as well as the findings reported by Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014). In short order, the transgender women prisoners in this study report friendships with other transgender women punctuated by betrayal in predictable ways; over time they come to learn not to count on their sisters in prison for actual assistance in the form of real intervention on their behalf.

Discussion and conclusion

In an era that has witnessed a discernable decline in “in prison” research that focuses on life behind prison walls (Simon, 2000), this article draws on original data to break new ground in the study of prisoners, prison life, and prison communities. By focusing on transgender women prisoners, it interrogates the tension between allegiance and loyalty, on the one hand, and stratification and conflict, on the other hand, in prisons in California. It does so by returning to a reliance on in-prison research with an eye toward addressing larger questions about the structure of prison communities in the modern era.

Transgender women in prisons for men present the opportunity for us to explore both diversity and commonality among prisoners. They are exemplary of the myriad ways in which a unique subset of inmates both fits within the confines of the overall prisoner community and is distinct as a smaller subset of prisoners identifiable by their common identity(ies) and shared experience as “girls among men” in an alpha male environment (Jenness and Fenstermaker, 2014). Framed in this way, our focus on transgender inmates provides a unique opportunity to empirically examine the contours of two common sociological concepts—collective identity and collective efficacy—as a means of capturing the tension between cooperation and competition inherent in prisoner communities. This is a crucial step toward addressing questions about prison communities more generally.

Our empirical findings reveal that transgender inmates affiliate more strongly with the transgender inmate community, but that this identification does not preclude affiliation with the inmate community writ large. Transgender inmates’ sense of collective identity with the larger inmate population is evidence that they “buy in” to the institutional imputation and affiliate with others who are similarly marked and socially situated. The label “transgender inmate,” in contrast, is seldom ascribed by the institution to prisoners who identify or present as female—not because their often noticeable differences from the larger inmate population are ignored by institutional personnel, but rather because they are frequently (and often erroneously) categorized as homosexual (Jenness, 2010a, 2010b, 2014; Robinson, 2011). This conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation is continually reproduced by both prison staff and the larger inmate population (Jenness, 2010a, 2010b; Robinson, 2011). Consequently, the adoption of a transgender inmate identity, and the attendant affiliation with this group, finds its source within the community more so than being imposed from without.

The extent to which transgender women inmates in prisons for men feel a sense of belonging with the transgender community is predicted by the presence of transgender friends more so than shared personal characteristics or characteristics of the physical environments in which they find themselves in prisons. Transgender inmates who are friends with similarly situated others affiliate more strongly (i.e., express a stronger sense of collective identity) with the transgender inmate community. Moving beyond identification with the transgender inmate community and into the realm of affective commitment to *members* of the community takes us from collective identity to perceptions of collective efficacy among transgender women in diverse types of prisons. The extent to which transgender inmates express a sense of perceived social cohesion and trust with the transgender inmate community, and an expectation of protective action on their behalf, is predicted not by the presence of friends within this community, but by the nature of these friendships. Specifically, a sense of belonging to the transgender inmate community is translated into affective commitment to community members and an expectation of intervention when the relationships among community members are stronger and marked by trust and mutual caring—qualities often in short supply in prison.

The findings presented in this article throw into stark relief the tension between competition and cooperation in carceral contexts. The social allocation of allegiance among transgender inmates is quite telling in this regard. Two specific findings—that transgender inmates' sense of collective identity and perceived collective efficacy is higher with the transgender inmate community than with the larger prison community, and that their affiliation and allegiance are predicted by the presence and strength of friendships that transgender inmates have with others in their community—reveal that significant competition among this group does not preclude demonstrable allegiance and presumed cooperation. The “friendly competition among ladies” that Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014) report is aptly described: despite being engaged in a very real competition for a host of desirable winnings—the achievement of femininity, the attention and affection of men, increased social status—our findings reveal that transgender inmates engage in these contests in ways that acknowledge commonality of experience and identity and ultimately reaffirm their place in the transgender community.

This sense of belonging to the transgender inmate community grows over time. Our findings reveal that transgender inmates' collective identity gains strength over time, while collective efficacy with these same communities wanes. Thus, transgender inmates' affiliation with the transgender inmate community becomes stronger even as they come to understand that this affiliation will do little for them in terms of improving their plight in prison (for more along these lines, see Jenness and Fenstermaker, 2016). This acknowledgement of common identity and embrace of a community rooted in this identity, coupled with an apparent disregard for the practical or instrumental benefits of allegiance to such a community, speaks to the powerful appeal of a sense of belonging to something larger than oneself while enduring the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958). In an environment

rife with conflict and coercion and in the company of similarly situated others who will compete with others for the few desirable resources available, transgender inmates continue to embrace commonality, identity, and community even in the absence of perceived collective efficacy.

More than half a century ago, Sykes ([1958] 2007: 82) described the fundamental tension of the prisoner community as a choice between “bind[ing] himself to his fellow captives with ties of mutual aid, loyalty, affection, and respect, firmly standing in opposition to the officials. . . . [or] enter[ing] into a war of all against all in which he seeks his own advantage without reference to the claims or needs of other prisoners.” Despite this pervasive and persistent tension—one that is only heightened for transgender inmates—these choices are not mutually exclusive for transgender prisoners. Cooperation exists alongside competition, and amidst difference and division, communities manifest in patterned ways.

This article provides evidence for the existence of multiple, overlapping communities in a carceral context. These communities are shaped by common characteristics, experiences, and identities rather than bounded by spatial location. In the case of transgender women in prisons for men located in 27 prisons across the state of California, they express a subjective sense of both collective identity and collective efficacy with other transgender inmates as well as with the larger inmate population, regardless of physical location within the prison environment. Their orientation to each other and the prisoner population writ large, as well as the perceived potential to impact their carceral environment reveals that (at least some) inmate communities are rooted in commonality of experience and identity that exists despite many barriers—physical, demographic, and social.

More theoretically, this article uses the case of transgender women in prisons for men to invite more research on how prison communities of all sorts might be tied together by a common identity or other mutually-shared characteristics rather than—or in addition to—geographic proximity. Hipp and Boesson (2013) made a similar theoretical move in their introduction of “egohoods” to the study of routine activities and crime, effectively incorporating residents’ subjective sense of neighborhood into the study of what was previously typically oriented to as a purely objective, geographical concept. In a prison setting, where the decisiveness of the physical location is undeniable, the identity- and commonality-based conceptualization of community that we advance here prompts us to move beyond exclusively spatially-defined communities in a similar way. Instead, this conceptualization offers the “prisoner community” as a whole, as well as distinct and discrete subcommunities such as the transgender prisoner community, as the unit of analysis for patterned perceptions of collective identity and collective efficacy. Doing so moves us closer to understanding prison communities as both similar to and dissimilar from other types of communities, effectively connecting the study of punishment and society to the study of the free communities from which our prisons draw their residence.

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Notes

1. For Sykes (1958) and decades of prison researchers following him, the pains of imprisonment are born of the deprivation of liberty, the deprivation of goods and services of choice, the imposition of a rule-bound regime, and other universal characteristics of carceral environments. Of course, the particularities of prevailing penal philosophies, idiosyncrasies in institutional management and correctional practices, and individualization of carceral experiences influence how these pains are experienced (Sexton, 2012). Goodman (2014: 388) reminds us of this as one of his "lessons for punishment and policy": "scholars ought not overgeneralize the nature of prison life. They should embrace the variegated nature of prisons and punishment, which vary across time and place, and according to the many nested and overlapping fields in which people and institutions are embedded." In this article, we do so by attending to the particularities of transgender prisoner culture and identity as well as the fundamentally constrained environment in which they are situated.
2. These three dimensions were chosen for their applicability to the prison environment and the ease with which they could be captured empirically among the target population during interviews.
3. Most empirical work on collective efficacy has utilized the original scales with little or no adjustment (see, for example, Maimon and Browning's (2010) examination of collective efficacy in urban neighborhoods). When collective efficacy is measured outside of a neighborhood setting, as in Williams and Guerra's (2011) examination of school bullying, more modification is necessary.

4. When adapting the measures for SCT to a prison context, we thought critically about the paradox of including “trust” as part and parcel of perceived collective efficacy. Although social cohesion is undoubtedly present in carceral settings—as described above, it has been documented by numerous scholars of the prison community—it has also been demonstrated that a guiding principle of prison life is “trust no one.” Thus, it stands to reason that there is ample evidence of social cohesion without trust in a prison setting. The lack of emphasis on trust, relative to other measures of social cohesion, is evident in our analysis as well: as Table 2 demonstrates, the mean value for our “trust” indicator was significantly lower than for most other SCT indicators, a relationship that held for both reference groups (with the exception of the “shared beliefs” indicator for the inmate reference group). Despite this difference, we opted to adhere as closely as possible to the original conceptualization of SCT, thus keeping “trust” as a component of SCT. We do so recognizing that how trust is understood and experienced is context-specific and, in this case, relative to the contours of prison life.
5. For uniformity of measurement, we rephrased ISC indicators as declarative statements to be rated on a five-point scale of agreement (similar to measures of SCT and collective identity).
6. This particular example has the most similarity between the original and adapted indicators; other indicators were more substantively distinct. Situations in which inmates could conceivably intervene ranged in severity from simple verbal insults to sexual assault. See Table 2 for other examples.
7. With only 315 cases in our sample, we were limited in the number of variables that could be included in any given model. This constraint informed our decision to include in the full model only the variables that were statistically significant in bivariate OLS models.
8. Correctional Clinical Case Management System.
9. Enhanced Outpatient Program.
10. The irony of serving on a men’s advisory council as a woman was not lost on us, but it seemed to be uneventful to those who reported this phenomenon to us.
11. For instance, physical characteristics of carceral environments have been found to predict prison violence (Farrington and Nuttall 1980; Perez et al. 2010) and other behavioral outcomes and adaptations to confinement (Van Tongeren and Klebe 2009).
12. The 315 transgender inmates we interviewed were housed in 27 of California’s 30 prisons for men. Three prisons in particular housed concentrated populations of transgender prisoners (defined as more than 50 transgender prisoners in a single institution). A total of 103 transgender prisoners were housed in concentrated populations, and the remaining 212 transgender prisoners were dispersed across 24 different institutions—some in prisons with only a handful of other transgender prisoners, and a few as the sole transgender prisoner in their institutions.
13. Thus, just as “trust” is a fraught concept in prison, the term “friendship” is similarly weighted—and carefully chosen—by prisoners. Many respondents went out of

their way to qualify or caveat the use of the term “friend,” or took care to explain that “friends” in prison are quite different from “associates.”

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Lori Sexton is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. She has a Ph.D. in Criminology, Law and Society from the University of California, Irvine, and an M.A. in Criminology from the University of Pennsylvania. Lori's interests lie at the intersection of criminology and sociolegal studies, with a specific focus on prisons, punishment and the lived experience of transgender prisoners. Her work has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Justice, and the Fletcher Jones Foundation, and has been published in *Law & Social Inquiry*, *Punishment & Society*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Critical Criminology*, and *Criminology & Public Policy*.

Valerie Jenness is a Professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society and in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine. She is the author of four books, including, most recently, *Appealing to Justice: Prisoners,*

Grievances, and the Carceral Logic in the Post-Civil Rights Era (with Kitty Calavita, University of California Press, 2015) and many articles published in sociology, law, and criminology journals. Her studies of sexual assault in prisons, the management of prisoners with mental health concerns, transgender prisoners, and the inmate appeals system in prison have informed public policy. Most recently, she has worked with the Los Angeles Police Department and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to develop and implement innovative policy related to the care of transgender prisoners.