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'You're Walking into Situations Where You Just Really Don't Know How It's Going to Go Down': The Production of Carceral Space and Risk in Parole Work

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Following interviews with 150 Canadian federal parole officers employed in prisons or community spaces, we 'spatialize' parole work by analysing how participants perceive and navigate risk and use emotional labour in relation to their carceral workspaces. Employing Henri Lefebvre's theorization of the social production of space, we analyse how parole officers' feelings of vulnerability arise from the interaction of the built environment with people's use of space (including both criminalized persons and other correctional workers). We also unpack the strategies employed by parole officers to mitigate the spatial risks experienced in their occupational routines; and examine how these spatial experiences connect to the emotional labour performed by parole officers in their supportive and disciplinary job functions.

KEY WORDS: carceral space, emotional labour, parole, probation, production of space, risk

INTRODUCTION

In an era of 'mass supervision' (McNeil 2018), many people convicted of a crime serve all or part of their sentences under forms of community supervision, such as on parole or probation. In recent years, scholars have developed nuanced theoretical critiques about an inherent tension in community supervision, namely that it is simultaneously characterized by care/support and control/punishment (e.g. Werth 2013; McNeill 2018; Martin 2021; Phelps and Rhuland 2022; Maier *et al.*, 2024). Further, researchers have increasingly sought to 'spatialize' the experience of carceral conditions in community supervision contexts, recognizing how parole and probation are inherently linked to the lived experiences of, and within, diverse spaces (e.g. Phillips 2014; Carr *et al.* 2015; Reeves 2016; Worrall *et al.* 2017; Shah 2020; Maier 2021; Dagan 2023). Many of these studies can be situated within the emergent field of carceral geography, which argues

that punishment, whether in institutional or community spaces, is enacted and experienced in inherently spatial ways (Moran 2015; Moran et al. 2018). We contribute to these scholarly discussions through an analysis of interviews with 150 Canadian federal parole officers (POs), who work in either prisons or community spaces. We find POs in both spaces experience and perceive risks and vulnerabilities arising from their carceral workspaces; and we unpack how POs implement safekeeping practices (Stanko 1997) to reduce unpredictability and, hence, feelings of vulnerability, with a particular focus on how these dynamic processes are inherently spatial. Further, we reflect on how POs' immersion in their carceral workspaces entails considerable emotional labour and affects their ability to provide support to those under their supervision (i.e. prisoner or parolees). Through these analyses, we argue the spatial realities of correctional work, broadly, and parole/probation work, specifically, must be understood to fully comprehend, and potentially redress, the occupational stresses experienced in this line of work.

CONTEXT AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), the federal agency responsible for the confinement and community supervision of people sentenced to at least two years in prison, employs over 1,300 POs. Of these POs, 43 per cent work as Institutional Parole Officers (IPOs) in federal penitentiaries and 57 per cent work in community settings as Community Parole Officers (CPOs). The job duties and workspaces of IPOs and CPOs are different. As part of a prisoners' case management team, IPOs meet regularly with their caseload of clients (typically between 24 and 32 individuals) to assist with accessing programs or other forms of support and, ultimately, provide the Parole Board of Canada with recommendations about clients' suitability for parole. Meanwhile, CPOs supervise parolees who are serving the remainder of their sentence in the community, ensuring they do not breach their release conditions, assessing their risk of reoffence, and providing them assistance and support as they reintegrate into the community. Their duties entail regular meetings with parolees and 'collateral contacts' (i.e. close contacts of the parolee, such as partners, family members, friends, or employers) in a variety of spaces, including parole offices, halfway houses, homes, community locations, and workplaces.

Although their duties, caseloads, and workspaces differ, IPOs and CPOs share the joint focus on care/support of criminalized individuals as they move through their sentence and reintegrate into the community; and control/punishment, through assessing clients' risk of reoffending and reporting on their behaviour. POs' risk assessments and recommendations have considerable influence over an individual's experience within the Canadian federal correctional system. Further, the occupational duties of both IPOs and CPOs entail regular movement into, out of, and through the diverse carceral spaces prisoners and parolees live, work, and take leisure—spaces POs perceive to carry varying levels of risk, and in which, therefore, they employ various tactics to minimize feelings of vulnerability. By 'spatializing' these daily routines, we demonstrate how correctional workers experience and are affected by carceral space, albeit very differently than criminalized people, as part of their daily routines.

Carceral space

The interdisciplinary field of carceral geography has advanced nuanced understandings of carceral spaces—both within and beyond the prison—and the relationship between such spaces and the lived experience of those confined (e.g. Moran 2015; Moran *et al.* 2018). Moran *et al.* (2018) differentiate between 'compact' carceral spaces, which are physical sites such as prisons; and 'diffuse' carceral spaces, which are diverse spaces, while not physically confining people, characterized by carceral elements (e.g. surveillance, electronic monitoring, stigmatization, etc.). Carceral spaces, whether compact or diffuse, share three characteristics: they create

lived experiences of harm, they are intentionally created (e.g. by a correctional service), and the harm and intentionality are tied to particular spaces (Moran *et al.* 2018). Studies unpack how prison spaces diversely shape the lived experiences of incarcerated people (e.g. Medlicott 1999; Baer 2005; Crewe *et al.* 2014; Moran, 2015; Norman, 2019; Norman and Andrews 2019), or how the interrelationship between dominant ideologies of, and approaches to, punishment and the spatial design of prisons (e.g. Drake 2016; Jewkes and Moran 2017). Other scholars examine lived experiences of diffuse carcerality, such as electronic monitoring (Gacek 2022) or diversionary programs for young people (Fishwick and Wearing 2017).

Less common, however, is the analysis of how space affects the occupational experiences of frontline staff working within these carceral environments—a fact highlighted by Turner *et al.* (2023: 612), who note scholarly 'work that interrogates the potential link between [correctional staff] experiences and the carceral space itself is limited'. These authors address this gap by showing how the carceral workspace of Canadian correctional officers creates sensory experiences relating to sound and smell, which affect how these staff understand their health and well-being, negatively shape their views of incarcerated people and, thus, potentially affect how they perform their occupational responsibilities (Turner *et al.* 2023). In community parole/probation work, meanwhile, Phillips (2014) offers a rich analysis of how policy directives focused specifically on managerialism, risk mitigation, and health and safety shape the architecture of probation offices in England and Wales and, in turn, affect interactions between probation officers and criminalized persons. Phillips (2014: 123) highlights how an increased emphasis on spatial safety has emphasized the carceral nature of probation offices through, for example, 'widespread use of CCTV, panic alarms and escape doors'—a development that, while well-intentioned and in place to protect probation officers, may 'other' probationers as potential threats and reinforce the difference between probationers and staff. In the current study, through analyzing the experiences POs who work in both penitentiary and community settings, we contribute to these scholarly understandings of carceral space and correctional work by exploring how correctional workers perceive and experience occupational risk and undertake emotional labour arising from the interplay of the design and use of carceral space.

Risk and space in parole/probation work

Many scholarly discussions of risk in probation and parole work centre on how officers engage with processes of risk assessment or management and/or the effects of risk models on the lives of criminalized persons (e.g. Bullock 2011; Robinson 2002; Hannah-Moffat *et al.* 2009). Less frequently examined are the experiences of these correctional workers when perceiving and navigating risks in their occupational routines and workspaces (Ireland and Berg 2007; Norman *et al.* 2023; Sabbe *et al.* 2021; Maier *et al.* 2024). Furthermore, few scholars have grappled with the spatial implications of parole and probation work. Notable exceptions include studies on the effects of architecture and design of parole/probation offices (Phillips 2014; Carr *et al.* 2015; Worrall *et al.* 2017; Shah 2020), the experiences of POs who shifted their work into new spaces during the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Norman *et al.*, 2021; Phillips *et al.*, 2021; Norman and Ricciardelli, 2022), and phenomenological experiences of risk management (Taylor 2023). Although all these studies 'spatialize' parole/probation work, we adopt a different approach by seeking to understand how POs' occupational experiences of risk and emotional labour are shaped through the production of carceral space.

There is a connection between the current study and a small body of literature emerging from the United States in the 1990s, in response to rising fears among probation officers about their workplace safety in the context of broader changes to criminal justice policy (Lindner and Koehler 1992). Studies focused on probation officers' safety concerns when engaging with clients with a history of violent offences, particularly when conducting field visits to clients' homes (Lindner and

Koehler 1992; Lindner and Bonn 1996), and debates followed about whether probation officers should be armed (e.g. Cohn 1997; Small and Torres 2000). Linder and Bonn (1996: 16–17), for example, detailed some risks felt by probation officers who visit client homes:

> Safety concerns are also related to fieldwork activities including visiting the probationer's home.… An officer might be victimized should a confrontation develop during the course of a visit to the home. Field visits are often made to high crime areas where violence is commonplace. Many probationers reside in multi-dwelling buildings where the officer must climb several flights of stairs in dark or poorly lit hallways. Public housing projects are especially dangerous with elevators sometimes stopped between floors, so that a mugger can enter through the emergency escape hatch in the ceiling. As a result, probation officers engaged in fieldwork are at some risk of being victimized.

Their findings, while arguably stereotyping both probationers and their neighbourhoods as inherently violent, do highlight the role of *space* in how officers perceive *occupational risk*. Home visits to clients have long been considered vital for parole and probation officers, given home visits facilitate both the building of supportive relationships and more effective supervision and risk assessment (Ahlin *et al.* 2013). Yet, few studies of officers engage deeply with theories of space to interpret how these correctional workers navigate perceived risk and vulnerabilities when completing their occupational duties. Further, virtually absent in the literature is a recognition of POs working in institutional spaces, despite this being a key feature of parole work in the Canadian federal correctional system. Our study, in response, considers the spatial realities of parole work, and contributes to broader literature on risk in carceral space—specifically, adding to empirical knowledge exploring how both criminalized people and correctional staff in carceral environments employ safekeeping strategies to navigate perceived risks (e.g. Ricciardelli 2017, 2019; Norman *et al.*, 2023).

Emotional labour and space in parole/probation work

The concept of emotional labour, which emerged from the pioneering work of Hochschild (2012), refers broadly to how workers manage their feelings and intentionally display certain emotions as a central part of their work. As Phillips *et al.* (2020) explain, emotional labour serves a double purpose for workers, who 'perform emotional labour in order to manage their emotions as well as the emotions of the recipient of their emotional display' (p. 5). In parole/probation work, for example, supporting a client in achieving their rehabilitation goals may require a PO to outwardly demonstrate empathy while simultaneously suppressing their emotional reactions to the case (Phillips *et al.*, 2020).

Among a broader body of literature on emotional labour in criminal justice work, studies focusing specifically on parole/probation work have explored topics such as relationships with clients (Nandi, 2014; Fowler *et al.*, 2017; Tidmarsh, 2020), professional identities (Tidmarsh, 2020), and the connection between emotional labour and organizational values (Westaby *et al.*, 2020). Contemporary developments in some jurisdictions' parole or probation policies have shifted the desired duties of the PO away from interpersonal relationship-building toward client management, part of a broader rise of managerialism and risk management in many contemporary correctional systems (Westaby *et al.* 2020); Ricciardelli *et al.* 2023). In such a context, the emotions felt and enacted in parole/probation work may be minimized or undervalued, even as they remain central to the work performed by practitioners (Phillips *et al.* 2020; Maier *et al.* 2024). In the current article, we contribute to such discussions by exploring how POs' active participation in the production of carceral space entails emotional labour that, in turn, affects their well-being and occupational abilities.

The production of space

To address these lacunae in knowledge, we 'spatialize' perceptions of risk in parole work by drawing from Henri Lefebvre's theory of space as socially produced. In his foundational work, Lefebvre (1991) argues space is socially produced through three interrelated processes, which together constitute a *spatial triad*. The first process is *spatial practice*, or 'perceived space', which refers to the material or physical creation of space (e.g. the built environment and physical layout of a prison). Second, *representations of space* (or 'conceived space') are how spaces are abstractly conceptualized through signs, codes, or other discursive constructions to reflect ideological values (e.g. how the architecture of prisons may reflect dominant ideas about punishment at particular historical moments). Third, *representational spaces*, or 'lived space', refers to how space is 'directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users"' (Lefebvre 1991: 39). That is, lived space is how spaces are used and experienced by those within them.

Lefebvre's work, while not widespread in criminological studies, has been used by several scholars to unpack the nuances of carceral spaces (e.g. Mitchelson 2014; Norman and Andrews 2019; Schwarze 2021). In the current study, we draw from Lefebvre's spatial triad—particularly focusing on the interaction of spatial practice and lived space—to unpack POs' understandings of risks and vulnerabilities. We focus our analysis on how the interaction of spatial practice (i.e. the physical environments in which POs work) and lived space (i.e. the uses of those spaces by correctional staff and criminalized persons) affect POs' understandings of risk and vulnerability within carceral workplaces.

METHODS

Data for the current study is derived from semi-structured interviews with 150 participants currently or recently employed as POs by CSC: 96 IPOs and 54 CPOs. We conducted interviews as part of a larger study, investigating the occupational realities and impacts of parole work, funded by the Union of Safety and Justice Employees (USJE) and supported by CSC. Both organizations assisted with recruitment via internal email listservs. Prior to recruitment, approval for the study was received from the Research Ethics Board at [university redacted]. We employed a semi-structured approach to interviewing to empower participants to guide discussions and identify relevant topics, while ensuring we could address key questions in our interview guide and probe responses for elaboration or clarification (Brinkmann 2020). Because USJE had a particular interest in understanding how POs' occupational duties and workplace environment affected their mental health, many of our questions focused on participants' perceptions of occupational stress and well-being; however, many other lines of discussion opened-up during interviews, permitting us to probe how POs experience and produce space in relation to their perceptions of risk and how their immersion in a carceral workspace affects their well-being.

Each participant completed a short demographic and occupational experience survey prior to the interview, enabling us to ascertain some basic characteristics of the entire sample of participants. One hundred and fourteen participants (76.0%) identified as female, 33 (22.0%) as male, and three (*n* = 2.0%) did not provide their gender. The majority (*n* = 106; 70.7%) were between 35 and 54 years of age. Most participants listed their race as white (*n* = 128; 85.3%), with racialized groups (Afro-Caribbean, Black, Chinese, or South Asian) being the next most frequent identification (*n* = 15; 10%). 50% (*n* = 75) of participants had between 10 and 19 years work experience with CSC, while nearly a quarter (*n* = 36; 24.0%) had less than a decade of CSC experience and the same number (*n* = 36; 24.0%) had more than 20 years work experience in the organization. Participants worked across Canada, with all but two (Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador) of the 13 provinces/territories represented. We are

not aware of any publicly available data on the occupational information or demographics of federal POs in Canada, so we are unable to know if the sample is representative. That said, the sample of 150 represents over 10% of the 1,388 POs and parole supervisors employed by CSC according to CSC's most recent statistics (Public Safety Canada, 2023), providing a significant sample of this occupational group.

Interviews, which typically lasted between 75 and 120 minutes, were conducted between July–October, 2020. In this period, Canada's 'first wave' of COVID-19 infections had passed and the much larger 'second wave' (which peaked in January of 2021) was just beginning. POs, like other public safety personnel, were deemed 'essential workers' and thus continued to perform their job duties while adjusting to new routines, workspaces, and occupational stresses (Norman *et al.* 2021; Norman and Ricciardelli 2022). All interviews took place entirely over the telephone, due to the geographic spread of participants and ongoing COVID-19 public health measures. While we were forced to avoid face-to-face interviews, this may have benefitted the study given that telephone interviews may make participants more comfortable when discussing sensitive topics (Novick 2008). Given the challenges of parole work, including routine exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events, telephone interviews may have helped participants feel more at ease discussing sensitive matters or personal experiences. As Canada's federal government is bilingual, interviews were offered in English and French. Most participants ($n = 145$) participated in one-on-one interviews English, while the remainder ($n = 5$) took part in group interviews in French that were translated in real-time by professional translators.

We adopted a semi-grounded constructed approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Ricciardelli *et al.* 2010; Charmaz 2014) to data analysis. That is, while we sought to enable thematic findings to emerge from the interview data without imposing theoretical interpretations pre-emptively, we recognized that our scholarly backgrounds and personal biographies nonetheless shape the ways in which we interpret data. After interviews were transcribed verbatim, we undertook open coding of the transcripts to identify emergent themes. We began by developing a preliminary list of codes by independently and sequentially coding five identical transcripts. As the remaining transcripts were individually coded, we refined or added new codes as they emerged. We analysed data using NVivo software, assisting us with coding into primary, secondary, and tertiary themes.

FINDINGS

Although the primary workspaces of IPOs (prisons) and CPOs (parole offices, client homes and other public spaces) differ considerably, both groups expressed concerns and awareness of how certain spaces carried risk—or even were perceived as inherently risky. POs perceive risk in specific workspaces as arising from the interaction between the physical environment (i.e. the perceived space) and human (inter)action in the spaces (i.e. the lived space). Further, particularly for IPOs, there is a potential temporal element to how certain spaces were produced in ways that encourage feelings of vulnerability. In examining the occupational experiences of these two populations, we find IPOs experience greater feelings of unpredictability (and, thus, risk) as a result of the prison environment within which they work, yet have a greater ability to mitigate these concerns through controlling how their workspace is produced. In comparison, CPOs express less concern about unpredictability, yet are limited in their ability to minimize spatial risk due to their diverse and vast workspaces. We unpack the spatial experiences of both populations, before examining how each seeks to minimize risk through their production of (work)space. We build on these discussions to consider emergent implications concerning the relationship of carceral space to POs emotional labour and the inherent tensions of care/support and control/punishment in the provision of 'carceral care' (Martin 2021).

Space and perceptions of risk in institutional workspaces

IPOs interpreted prisons as a violent and unpredictable lived spaces shaped through interaction with the spatial practice and arrangement of the institutions. Many, such as P15, expressed a keen awareness of how the built environment of the prison impacted safety in particular areas of their workplace: '[it is] a very old institution with a lot of blind angles … so [there is] a lot of looking over your shoulder'. Her words evidence how feelings of vulnerability in particular spaces at work are produced in interaction with how specific people, including prisoners and staff members, used spaces across time (i.e. how they contributed to the production of lived space). The specific spaces IPOs identified as risk-laden at certain moments were either spaces through which they had to travel or where they met with clients. The prison yard and breeze-ways (i.e. open corridors linking spaces) were highlighted by participants as particularly risky, due to a convergence of spatial and temporal factors: they are open spaces that, at certain times, have large numbers of prisoners moving through them; they are harder for security personnel to closely monitor and, if necessary, intervene within; and, in the design of some prisons, staff cannot avoid passing through these spaces during their daily routines. P25, for example, described feeling unsafe walking through the prison yard:

> There's never enough correctional officer presence in the yard …. I walk through the yard daily. You're surrounded by, it could be 100 or more, inmates doing whatever. And not a correctional officer in sight.

P25's words demonstrate how aspects of the spatial practice of her workplace (a large yard in which many people can congregate and, due to the design of the prison, she must move through as part of her daily routine) became seen as risky due to the production of lived space (by male prisoners who congregate in the yard and correctional officers who, in the participant's view, do not provide enough security presence in the area). P104 expressed a similar view: 'I walk through a yard where there's potentially 400 offenders out at any given time.... It's a little bit unnerving'. As the words of these participants make clear, the production of prison space shapes the IPOs' perceptions of safety and risk.

Participants also discussed meeting spaces as potentially risky under certain conditions, providing further insights into how the spatial production of IPOs' workplaces affects their interpretations of risk—creating what a participant called 'precarious moments' (P21), referring to instances where they feared for their personal safety. Often, IPOs meet their clients in their office or a shared meeting room, where the spatial practice can affect IPOs' risk interpretations. P53, for instance, described how office layouts hampered her ability to minimize vulnerabilities:

> All the offices, you're farthest away from the door and the inmate is closest to the door, so if there were trouble, you're not getting out that door. But that's just the way the whole place is built.

P53 described how the design of her workplace offices create feelings of risk, and how these feelings were produced through the interaction of this spatial practice (which made sitting closest to the door impossible for the IPO) and the lived space in instances where there might be 'trouble' due to a client's behaviour. P120, similarly explained how there are 'instances where you're trapped in your office with inmates that have a lengthy history of violence [who] don't get along well with authority figures'. As such statements show, meeting rooms can be risk-laden spaces due to their design and the potential behaviour of clients within these designs.

Demonstrating how other staff members, as well as prisoners, produce the lived space of IPOs' work environment, participants noted how the vigilance (or lack thereof) of correctional

officers influenced their interpretations of risk and vulnerability. In some cases, participants referred to how security staff routinely checked on the rooms when IPOs were meeting prisoners, either as a matter of routine or when asked specifically by an IPO, realities we return to below. Conversely, some participants described correctional officers' actions as producing a risky lived space. P52, for example, described situations where IPOs have been locked in offices with prisoners because some correctional officers responsible for monitoring the room 'tend to be pretty lax, and don't really follow rules, and are not really watching you when they're supposed to'. This caused concern and impeded the ability of IPOs to feel safe. Here, P139 outlined an 'absolutely traumatizing' incident where she was meeting a prisoner on the unit outside his cell door at a time when all prisoners were confined to their cells:

> I was scared as it was… I was talking to this inmate and [a correctional officer] ended up closing the barrier… and I'm locked behind it with all the cell doors. And then to top it off, he opened up all the cells. It just so happened that the inmate who I was having a conversation with was a highly prolific sex offender who… didn't like me. We were in a very heated conversation and his door opened and… then a whole bunch of inmates' [doors also opened]…. Then officers saw that I was in there and started screaming, and they pulled me out of there. They said after the officer couldn't see me the camera view so he didn't see me, he didn't think anybody was on the range anymore, so they let the inmates out.

P139 added, as a result of this incident, she no longer fully trusts security staff and her spatial understandings of occupational risks have been altered: 'I put so much trust in these guys… so I'm constantly thinking of that now. Where are they? Can they see me? Do they even know I'm here?' As this narrative reveals, actions of security staff shape IPOs' experiences of risk and space, as well as prisoners, who contribute to the production of lived space in ways that can increase or decrease IPOs' feelings of vulnerability.

Perceptions of risk in community workspaces

Whereas IPOs' work occurs within a single site of confinement and restricted movement, CPOs' occupational responsibilities involve working in and travelling through a variety of spaces. As P131, a CPO, stated: 'we're out in the community seeing [parolees] … in their homes, business, wherever out in the community, coffee shops, whatever we can do'. As P131 alludes, CPOs are expected to maintain regular contact with their clients and build an understanding of their living, occupational, and social circumstances as they reintegrate into the community—a task entailing visiting parolees in diverse spaces, many unique to the individual client. CPOs described three primary workspaces within which they perceived and navigated risk: parole offices, the homes of parolees' or their close contacts, and the geographic area those homes are located within. Each of these can be considered 'diffuse' carceral or quasi-carceral spaces, where parolees are subject to regulation, surveillance, stigma, and embodied effects of incarceration (Moran *et al.* 2018). Thus, though qualitatively different than a prison workspace, those of CPOs bear similarities to those of their IPO colleagues.

Participants described parole offices as the safest places for meeting with clients, because they are familiar secure spaces where CPOs can control, to some degree, the production of lived space. As a result, CPOs explained they typically conduct their initial meetings with parolees at the office, to minimize risk as they gather information about a new client. Here, P022 says: 'Generally, we try to do the first appointment in the office. Because, obviously, for the safety standpoint you don't know what you're getting into, and you kind of need to access the situation'. As per P022, parole offices were described as familiar and controlled spaces where CPOs feel comfortable, factors that reduce feelings of vulnerability. Likewise, P54 said:

If I was ever unsafe, I could just honestly start yelling, or press my [personal protection alarm], or open my door, and there would be another staff member within 20 feet who can come to my assistance. Certainly, if I have been engaged in an argument with an offender, I have had staff members just come and look through my window and make sure that I'm okay…. And we're taught to position ourselves so that we're the ones closest to the doors.

P054's matter-of-fact assessment of safety within parole offices highlights how CPOs' feelings of safety or vulnerability in such spaces are produced through the interaction of perceived space (through security measures, such as windowed rooms arranged to maintain distance between CPOs and their clients) and the lived space (through the presence and actions of colleagues or security staff). However, while participants typically described parole offices as controlled and safe spaces, a handful, such as P24, identified these workspaces as risk-laden environments in which they could not take the spatial safety precautions they felt necessary:

None of the offices in our [parole] office are safe…. Set up is supposed to be where [CPOs] have access to the door, in the event something happens, [but] our offices are so small that… we both have access to the door…. There's also been a few instances in which police officers have inadvertently stood in the doorway while I'm having somebody arrested and blocked me into the room with them.

P024's demonstrates how not all parole offices are built to allow CPOs to take precautions to minimize vulnerabilities, such as being unable to lay out the room to ensure parolees sit furthest from the doorway, thus reducing PO risk by supporting the actions of others if necessary. For some CPOs, then, the perceived and lived space of the parole office can increase or decrease their feelings of occupational vulnerability.

While the parole office is, for most participants, perceived as a relatively safe workspace, the homes of parolees or close contacts were described as riskier spaces. P24 explained 'we go and do these visits by ourselves, and it's 100 per cent dangerous'. Discussing visiting clients at their places of residence, P132 stated 'we're dealing with unpredictable situations, we're dealing with people [who] are violent, people who are sex offenders, people who are gang members, people who have mental health needs and that provides unpredictability because we're going to their homes'. P132's words describe how the space of the parolee's home is interpreted as unpredictable and, therefore, risk-laden. The perceived risk from these spaces could be heightened if parolees live in residential facilities—a common occurrence for recently-released parolees: 'rooming houses are always questionable, not because the guy [parolee] is questionable, but because of everybody else that lives there. I have [the parolee's] file, but I don't have anybody else's file. I don't know who those people are' (P49). As per P49, and echoed by others, the presence of unknown individuals could make specific workspaces unpredictable lived spaces for CPOs.

The vulnerabilities felt by CPOs when visiting these spaces may be exacerbated by policy decisions shaping the lived space when CPOs conducted home visits. P24, for example, lamented how '[CSC] don't train you on going out to do site visits with offenders', leaving CPOs to determine how best to maintain their safety without guidance. And P132 further noted they felt unsafe on such visits because 'we don't have any protection: we don't have any armoury, we don't have vests, we don't have guns, we don't have pepper spray, we don't have anything that would protect us if a situation were to go awry'. As these statements demonstrate, policy and training can influence the extent a CPO perceives risk and experiences vulnerabilities in particular workspaces. Nonetheless, most CPOs expressed commitment to meeting clients in spaces where they felt comfortable to facilitate meaningful interactions. P124 explained 'the vast majority of contacts [meetings] are outside of the

office…because [clients] don't like coming into anything that resembles CSC environment'. Thus, although parolees experience the 'pains of supervision' (McNeill 2018) in a variety of diffuse carceral spaces (Moran *et al.* 2018), many CPOs demonstrated a commitment to minimizing parolees' spatial experience of carcerality by choosing comfortable meeting places for their clients.

A further requirement of CPOs is they visit parolees' collateral contacts—people in the community (e.g. family, friends, co-workers) who are considered as key influences in the parolee's life. Whereas CPOs have a relationship with and considerable knowledge about the lifestyle of their clients, and thus can make reasonably well-informed predictions about parolees' behaviours, interactions with collateral contacts carry a higher degree of unpredictability and thus risk. P5 explained 'I know what to expect of the offenders, and I'm prepped that way, but the piece about going to their family support, that's when things can get a little dodgy…. You're kind of walking into situations where you just really don't know how it's going to go down or what it's going to be like'. Various CPOs discussed unexpected situations during these visits, such as finding weapons, aggressive dogs, or people using drugs or alcohol. Participants also explained how, despite efforts to determine who would be present for a meeting, they could arrive to find unexpected individuals present again exacerbating potential risk:

> Sometimes you got a group of guys sitting there, and you're like "oh my gosh!" It's very awkward. I just remembered one [contact] that was in organized crime, and there would be like a couple of people sitting there you know while I was interviewing…and they would try intimidation. (P130)

The spatial unpredictability, and subsequent heightened perceived risk, experienced by P130 speaks to the importance of lived space in CPOs' feelings of vulnerabilities in home visits to collateral contacts. P130's concern about meetings collateral contact was shared by P5, who explained how uncertainties were exacerbated when the physical (i.e. perceived) space was also unknown to the CPO:

> I'm walking into a really nice home and the couple seems well to do, very polite, and I sat down. And they were aware of the interview process as well, because I explained things over the phone…. But soon as I asked about having them fill out a criminal record check, the guy just went off, he just lost it and he stood up, he blocked me, I couldn't…access the stairs to get out.

Here, P5 describes a situation she felt her safety was threatened within despite taking reasonable precautions (explaining the interview process in advance) and using her intuition to determine if the space was safe. Ultimately, however, the lived space produced by an aggressive collateral contact and the perceived space of the home (specifically, an exit that could be easily blocked, preventing the CPO from leaving) combined to create a threatening and potentially unsafe experience for the participant. In response to such perceptions of risk, both CPOs and IPOs adopt a variety of safekeeping practices to produce workspaces in a way that minimizes their feelings of vulnerability.

Navigating risk in carceral workspaces: spatial safekeeping strategies

Just as prisoners and parolees both inhabit punitive carceral spaces, POs working in institutional and community spaces navigate carceral workspaces that, while qualitatively different, are perceived by both IPOs and CPOs to be risky and characterized by vulnerabilities. In response, both groups devised spatial safekeeping strategies designed to produce spaces where unpredictability and vulnerabilities decreases, thus increasing feelings of occupational safety. We discuss

three primary strategies POs describe to navigate spatial risk in their workspaces: hypervigilance, anticipating spatial risk, and redesigning space, noting that each risk is experienced and navigated in gendered ways.

Both IPOs and CPOs report adopting hypervigilance in specific workspaces and situations where they anticipated elevated risk to their safety. P105 (IPO) explained how, when working in a prison, 'you make sure that you just keep your head on a swivel … . Just being aware of where you're working at'. P9, an IPO, similarly compared walking around an institution with 'being in the bush while you're hunting' because 'you have to have eyes in the back of your head'. Participants also described intuition, or 'listening to your gut', as a safekeeping practice. For example, P5 CPO described a home visit where 'I ended it before it even started' because he/she felt uncomfortable, explaining how in such settings 'you really do have to listen to your gut'. For both IPOs and CPOs, then, awareness of their surroundings, anticipation of risks, and intuition are needed key characteristics to maintain safety in their workspaces.

A second strategy used by POs was to anticipate the risk of specific spaces, thus reducing the unpredictability of certain encounters. This was particularly salient for CPOs when meeting parolees or collateral contacts in homes. A CPO, P5, who echoed others, for example, explained 'I know the questions to ask [in advance of a meeting]. I always ask "do you have a large dog?" [or] "is there a gate that I need to access?" I'm asking all the questions before I show up for interviews'. As P5 explains, through advance preparation POs can learn about potential spatial risks and proactively design safekeeping strategies. IPOs, meanwhile, anticipated how specific clients might react to certain discussions—such as delivering bad news about the prospect of achieving early release—and took steps to mitigate the riskiness of the space these encounters occur within. For example, some IPOs described requesting security staff to check on them, or even sit in the room, for certain meetings—a tactic which changes the lived space through regular surveillance by a correctional officer: 'I usually know if it's gonna be a hard conversation [with a prisoner], and I'll alert a correctional officer to either come with him or do a walk by of my office' (P25). In some instances, IPOs even moved the location of meetings from offices to more open and populated areas of the institution as a safeguard: 'if I'm very uncomfortable I'll meet with [a prisoner] at the panel in front of guards' (P26).

Finally, recognizing how perceived and lived space interact to produce feelings of vulnerability, participants described various strategies to construct their workspaces to maximize their safety. For some IPOs, processes entailed rearranging their physical workspaces to ensure they had an 'exit strategy' in case they felt their safety was threatened. P36 stated he arranged his office 'where I'm closest to the exit of the door, so that if [clients] are getting angry or whatever or upset, I can walk out and just close the door and get out'. P50 similarly explained:

> I always have an exit strategy. I always keep a pair of scissors in my desk…. I always keep my back to the wall. I have a general awareness of my surroundings…. You want to keep your phone right next to you so you have an ability to seek help, and I try to keep an exit between me and the offender and that sort of stuff. Just general safety.

In these statements, P36 and P50 demonstrate how IPOs alter the physical layout of their office furniture within the space to produce a lived space where their feelings of vulnerability are minimized, such as rearranging furniture to be closer to the door than a prisoner or ensuring they can call for help or, if necessary, fight against an attacker.

CPOs, who regularly work in unfamiliar community spaces, described a smaller range of possibilities for rearranging workspaces. The primary strategy described was to hold meetings in the CSC parole office or a CSC-operated residential facility, despite the space being less conducive

to building positive relationships with parolees: 'if I know that I'm going to suspend a guy, or if I know I'm going to even just confront a guy about something, I'm never going to do it in his home, I'm always going do it at the office' (P107). Here, P107 describes how anticipating risk leads her to altering the spatial terrain of specific meetings with a particular parolee they perceive as risky, like when confronting or delivering bad news to a parolee. In meetings perceived as especially risky, some CPOs described bringing a co-worker along with them for extra security.

While their carceral workspace produces feelings of vulnerability, POs' narratives reveal they, at times, lean on these carceral characteristics to decrease feelings of risk. P15 (IPO), for example, explained she will 'find out where every camera is in the institution, so that you know which sections in the institution you're more vulnerable and which ones you're more, I guess, under the eye'. Similarly, the production of space through ensuring the presence of security staff, described by both participants in institutions and the community, demonstrates how aspects of the carceral workspace are strategically used by POs to minimize vulnerabilities. In the community, some arrange meetings at or near police stations to decrease their perceived risks. As demonstrated by these participants' words, the surveillance pervading many carceral spaces is appreciated by some POs as a risk mitigator should a dangerous situation arise.

Emotional labour and 'carceral care': spatial implications for parole work

We tie together our analysis by considering how POs' experiences of carceral space affect their work in term of emotional labour and their ability to provide support to criminalized persons within an inherently depriving and punitive setting. Scholars have analysed how tension in parole/probation work runs between providing care or support on the one hand and enacting control or punishment on the other (e.g. Werth 2013; McNeill 2018; (Martin 2021); Phelps and Rhuland 2022; Maier *et al.* 2024). Many of these tensions are encapsulated in Martin (2021) conceptualization of 'carceral care', which recognizes that carceral institutions (e.g., prisons, halfway houses, etc.) are simultaneously punitive and have the potential to 'be crucial sites of care and support' (p. 6). The tolls of navigating these tensions in a carceral workspace are arguably underappreciated within both academic research and correctional policy.

As demonstrated, POs are acutely aware of the spaces in which they work and expend considerable effort to produce lived space (Lefebvre, 1991) in ways that maximize their comfort. These experiences of carceral workspaces entailed significant emotional labour on the part of some workers, such as P3:

> It is such an institutionalized environment. I just never could [have] imagined that … I would be in a place where I wouldn't say how I felt about something, like not being able to show compassion when we feel it. But it's such a total environment that we work in, and I think if we were all to go around having feelings we probably couldn't be here or we'd just cry every day.

P3 describes a carceral work environment where staff are expected to suppress displays of empathy or compassion, but directly links this emotional labour to the (in)ability to provide emotional support to clients. Conversely, P31 described her work persona as 'a cranky old woman' and, giving an example of a client she confronted about risky sexual behaviour, explained how she performs emotional labour to fulfil her supervisory duties:

> [The client] was like 'how could you possibly ask this?' … I'm a parole officer. I'm dealing with sex offenders. I've asked more guys what their sexual fantasies are and whether they masturbate to ejaculation than I can count. This is my job. I'm not saying it's the best part of my job, but it's my job. And yet you will have [other parole officers taking an approach to clients of] 'oh you poor thing.'

Here, P31 provides a vivid example of performing emotional labour to display characteristics typically associated with masculinities, namely being stoic and confrontational, as part of her supervision duties. Such repertoires of masculine gender performance, which can leave minimal room with the supportive or helping roles they are expected to perform for criminalized persons, are often employed by POs working in institutional spaces (Norman *et al.* 2023).

The words of P3 and P31 provide insight into the emotional labour required in *both* the caring and punitive aspects of parole/probation work. POs both work in and, through their supervisory duties, contribute to the production of carceral spaces, whether in the community or prisons. Being part of the carceral systems that undertake surveillance and punishment, while maintaining empathy toward their clients, takes an emotional toll on many POs. P64, for example, described an emotionally charged incident in which he reported a client for breaching his parole conditions:

> You have a guy on your caseload for year. You get to know them, you get to know their spouse, you get to know their kids. And then you send them back to jail…. Meeting a guy and saying 'I've got to send you back.' And he's been out for over ten years…. At the police station, he's there with his wife, and they're both crying because he's a lifer and he doesn't know when he's getting out again, right? And I show up and he apologizes to me, but it still sucks.

POs, as vividly illustrated by P64, are tasked with carrying out punitive actions against criminalized persons in diverse spaces, despite the interpersonal connections they may have developed with their clients. Working in, and contributing to the active production of, carceral spaces, POs undertake emotional labour that adds an invisible layer of stress to their already challenging occupational realities. Research on parole/probation will benefit from deeper attention to the interplay of carceral space, occupational stress, and punishment versus support.

DISCUSSION

This article makes novel contributions to theoretical understandings of risk, space and emotion in parole—a line of work characterized by tensions between providing care and enacting punishment. While recognizing POs and other correctional staff do not experience the same degree of harm and control as criminalized persons (Turner *et al.* 2023), we argue these workers are still profoundly affected by the carceral spaces in which they work. Specifically, POs' carceral workspaces, whether institutional or community-based, are perceived as risk-laden due to the interaction of the lived and perceived spaces (Lefebvre 1991); that is, the interplay between the diverse physical space POs work within and the use of these spaces by people—including criminalized persons, correctional staffs and/or collateral contacts of parolees. POs navigate perceived risks through a variety of spatial safekeeping practices intended to produce carceral spaces evoking fewer vulnerabilities. These experiences of space and risk in turn require emotional labour on the part of POs, affecting their abilities to provide support and care to their clients.

IPOs expressed a keen awareness of how the built environment (perceived space) of their prison workplaces created risk yet expressed that such spaces become risky only because of how they are used by prisoners and correctional staff (lived space). Regarding lived space, IPOs described prisoners' presence in specific areas of the prison as a source of risk—echoing, perhaps, concerns some correctional officers express, particularly those who see prisoners as a threatening 'dangerous other' (Drake 2011; see also Norman *et al.* 2023). Yet, IPOs also pointed to the role of other staff, particularly security personnel, as producing risky lived spaces. The interaction between perceived prison space and the lived space produced by both prisoners and staff, then, contributes to IPOs' experiences of 'precarious moments' (P21) in

their workplace. CPOs working in the community, meanwhile, must navigate a variety of spaces, including parole offices and the residences of clients or collateral contacts, each carrying risk as lived spaces of unpredictability. Whereas parole offices were interpreted by CPOs as relatively safe places to meet clients, albeit with the need for some precautions, home visits (as well as visits to the homes of collateral contacts) were viewed as highly risky due to unknown aspects of the physical setting (perceived space) and the people in the residence (lived space).

Perceptions of spatial risk in the carceral workspaces led POs to adopt safekeeping strategies. Stanko (1997) developed the concept of safekeeping to explain how women perform self-regulation in response to gendered experiences of risk and danger. The concept has since been applied, including in criminological research, to understand how both women and men navigate risks arising from confinement or employment in carceral spaces (e.g. Ricciardelli 2017, 2019; Norman *et al.* 2023). Our findings add to the literature, demonstrating POs perceive and react to a variety of risks in their carceral workspaces. Through safekeeping tactics, like hypervigilance, anticipating risk in specific spaces, and redesigning space, POs actively contribute to the *production of carceral space* by mitigating, to the extent possible, risks they interpret in their workspaces.

We also suggest bringing a spatial lens to bear on research about tensions in parole/probation work between care/support and control/punishment (e.g. Werth 2013; McNeill 2018; Martin 2021; Phelps and Rhuland 2022; Maier *et al.* 2024). Carceral space, as a socially produced feature of correctional institutions and sites of community supervision, is vital to the occupational experiences of the people who work in those spaces—which, for a relational and 'caring' profession such as parole, may create barriers to building relationships or providing support to criminalized clients. We have elsewhere analysed how Canadian IPOs shared feelings of genuine concern for their criminalized clients, understanding them 'as human beings, with complex biographies that may involve histories of victimization, whom IPOs seek to support through a process of relationship building and rehabilitation' (Norman *et al.* 2023: 2092). CPOs also expressed similar orientations toward the care/support goals of parole work. Yet, as evidenced in the current study, for both occupational groups these feelings were constrained by the production of the carceral spaces they worked within, and the resultant perceptions of risk they experienced. Further attention to the social production of parole and probation spaces, therefore, will enhance insights into how these carceral spaces affect parole/probation officers' performance of, and attitude toward, their competing care/support and control punishment duties.

PO's experiences of risk and emotional labour arise directly from the carceral characteristics of the spaces they work. POs experience fear, threats to safety, unpredictability, and ongoing anxiety about potential vulnerabilities arising from their carceral workspaces. Space, as a socially produced phenomenon (Lefebvre 1991), is arguably underappreciated in examinations of occupational safety and well-being in correctional work, broadly, and parole/probation work, specifically. Like Turner *et al.* (2023), we suggest greater scholarly attention be directed to how carceral geographies affect correctional workers to develop a more wholesome understanding of their occupational experiences. Such research will enrich the existing literature by providing nuanced connections between correctional spaces and parole/probation practices (e.g. Phillips 2014; Carr *et al.* 2015; Worrall *et al.* 2017; Shah 2020; Maier 2021; Phillips *et al.* 2021; Taylor 2023) and complement growing knowledge about carceral space and the experiences of criminalized persons either inhabiting prisons or living in community settings (e.g. Medlicott 1999; Baer 2005; Crewe *et al.* 2014; Moran, 2015; Fishwick and Wearing 2017; Norman 2019; Norman and Andrews 2019).

The Canadian government has given increased attention to the mental health and well-being of public safety workers, including those who work in correctional services (Oliphant, 2016). The concern has been matched by the union representing federal parole officers, and funding our study, which is lobbying for increased awareness of and action to mitigate the occupational

harm experienced by parole officers (USJE, 2019). Thus far, in Canada, questions of space or emotional labour have largely been absent in these discussions. As such, we hope the current article represents a foundation upon which increased attention to these issues can be incorporated into policy discussions, with the goal of making carceral workspaces healthier and safer.

Finally, we recognize how parole/probation practices have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the spaces of supervision and resultant impacts on both workers and clients. We have elsewhere detailed how, within the first six months of the pandemic (i.e. the time period when our interviews were conducted), POs were forced to adjust to new spatial realities, including navigating carceral spaces which were not conducive to social distancing, while attempting to provide adequate support to the criminalized persons on their caseload (Norman et al. 2021; Norman and Ricciardelli 2022). POs demonstrated a keen awareness of the interplay between risk, emotional labour and the production of carceral spaces while attempting to provide care and support to their clients during an exceptionally challenging period. In the subsequent years, while Canada and most other correctional jurisdictions have supposedly returned to 'normal' operations, the impacts of the pandemic have continued to affect parole and probation practice, including the spatial realities of workers and those under supervision. Across various jurisdictions, researchers have shown how technological adoptions forced by pandemic have altered the spatial realities of supervision, with greater use of video or telephone meetings (e.g. Norman et al. 2021; Phillips et al., 2021; Schwalbe and Koetzle, 2021; Martin and Zettler, 2022). Such spatial changes not only inevitably affect occupational experiences of risk and emotional labour, but also raise questions about unequal technological access and competence for both parole/probation officers and their clients (e.g. Carr, 2021) and the quality of mediated relationships between these two groups (e.g. Phillips, 2017). As the post-pandemic years unfold, it behooves scholars to consider the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on community supervision, broadly, and the spatial realities of parole/probation work, specifically.

CONCLUSION

In the current study, we interrogated how space is produced in institutional and community parole work, with a focus on how Canadian POs perceive and navigate risks and occupational challenges. From changing physical layouts of office furniture, to asking pertinent questions prior to arriving at homes of parolees, POs take precautions as safekeeping strategies. At times, the production of space may affect, often in challenging ways, both the support and supervision of clients—suggesting a need for great attention into carceral space within debates about the tensions inherent to parole/probation work. Through 'spatializing' the experiences of parole work in both institutional and community spaces, we hope to stimulate further scholarly interest in this important, if understudied, aspect of correctional labour.

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