In 2009, the Naval Consolidated Brig Miramar in San Diego approached the design of its new Women’s Correction Facility (WCF) from the perspective of a well-known design phrase, “Whatever you do, do not build a men’s prison and then paint it pink.” This statement originated in 1999 and was not just about construction materials. The Miramar brig opened in 1989 and confined women in a facility where men were also confined. While women always had their own separate housing unit, the housing unit was surrounded by male units, with the women participating in programs on a co-educational basis. In 1999, Miramar assumed responsibility for defining and implementing all women’s programs for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), and in 2000, opened the DOD level III (long-term) housing unit for women. Little did the facility know what lay ahead with the decision to become the sole DOD facility for confining women.

Initial plans were simple — female inmates would be provided opportunities equivalent to those provided to males, with additional considerations to ensure adequate care, treatment and security. It quickly became apparent that a much more radical approach would be required to evolve the traditional military male-focused approach to corrections. In 1992, Ellyn Kashak wrote, “Despite claims to the contrary, masculinist epistemologies are built upon values that promote masculinist needs and desires, making all others invisible.” To establish a new body of knowledge, Miramar developed a long-range implementation plan and embarked on a path toward a new culture that has evolved during the past 14 years.

Meeting the Needs of a Female Population

There are many issues to be resolved when developing a gender-responsive program for women in an environment that traditionally serves the needs of men. Preliminary studies indicated that the needs of the brig’s female population were vastly different when compared to the brig’s male population, and that the women’s issues would require different programs and case management than the men’s. The brig has striven to create an environment that fosters a sense of physical and emotional safety while also capitalizing on women’s interpersonal and emotional strengths. Special consideration has been focused in the following areas:

- Attention to clinical issues such as a history of past trauma, mental illness or substance abuse;
- Parenting skill development;
- Educational/vocational training and retraining;
- Adult living skill development, including: community aid, support and resources, and resource management; and
- Personal financial management, including: requirements in a single-parent family, independent living and business skill development.

Other unique management challenges include:

- Clinical interventions and curriculums need to identify and reinforce gender differences from a strength-based perspective;
- Current classification schemes may not be appropriate for program placement, or cell and work assignments;
- A typical history of abuse may influence women’s self-image, the environment and social conduct; and
- Female inmates may also present additional health care concerns, such as pregnancy or menopause.

Upon development and implementation, the gender-responsive clinical and programmatic offerings were unparalleled anywhere else in DOD corrections. When compared to the civilian female offender population, military female
offenders offered an ideal population for treatment. They already had minimum educational requirements; were generally drug-free upon entry and during their confinement period; were relatively free of severe emotional or psychological disturbances; and had an absence of criminal conviction histories.

Program planning and implementation during the past 14 years has been comprehensive and included experts from throughout the military and civilian communities, as well as the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Stephanie Covington, Ph.D., co-director of the Institute for Relational Development/Center for Gender and Justice in La Jolla, Calif., provided extensive on-site consultation and mentorship from 2000 to 2010. Kate DeCou, Ph.D., assistant director of field education at Springfield College in Massachusetts, conducted an NIC technical assist visit to discuss the WCF design requirements in 2007. Warden Teena Farman conducted an on-site visit in 2004. While the brig provides programs and services that are comparable for both men and women, extensive research by then Technical Director Deborah Bell, LCSW, and Lois Lausch, WCF director, enabled the brig to focus on meeting the distinct needs of women in a gender-specific facility with consideration to program design and implementation strategies.

WCF and the Military Model

The women’s program transformation did not take place in a vacuum, nor did it blindly accept all the recommendations of the civilian consultants. At the most basic level, the brig is always a military institution. William E. Peck, director of U.S. Navy Corrections and Programs Division, stated in the May/June 2013 issue of Corrections Today, “There are differences between military prisoners and civilian prisoners … the heart of military corrections is to provide support for the military ‘good order and discipline’ that is required to win wars.”
offenders in the military are serving sentences that range from a few days to life. The average age upon confinement is 24, with a range between 19 and 43 years old. Women have disproportionately low visitation with family and friends when compared to males. One-third are serving time for violence, one-third for drugs and one-third for larceny. Eighty percent have a common denominator of a history of trauma — significantly impacting their programming needs and how they do time. Female offenders are largely first-time offenders, with an absence of criminal history.

Another unique consideration of these women is that they have both thrived in job performance, operations and military culture, and have committed crimes. Functioning in the routine and discipline of the armed forces structure, these women have developed coping styles to suit their participation in the military and seem to suppress some of the natural cultural tendencies generally ascribed to women. Female military offenders function at a higher level than most other correctional female populations in terms of education, physical strength, self-discipline and the ability to compete. They are managed by a multidisciplinary unit team in a direct supervision environment, under the military model concept, which includes: the wearing of the service camouflage uniform, observation of military courtesies and following the chain of command. These offenders are not only women, but women warriors — a unique group of offenders. For these women, camouflage is the "new pink.”

Guiding Principles of Gender-Responsiveness

To meet the needs of its female offenders, the brig has adopted the definition and guiding principles of gender-responsiveness for female offenders in the criminal justice system of Covington and Bloom. Gender-responsiveness involves creating an environment through site and staff selection, as well as program development, content and material that responds to the realities of women’s lives and addresses participants’ issues. Gender-responsive approaches are multidimensional and based on theoretical perspectives that acknowledge women’s pathways into the criminal justice system. These approaches address social and cultural factors (e.g., poverty, race, class and gender) and therapeutic interventions involving issues such as abuse, violence, family relationships, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. These interventions provide a strength-based approach to treatment and skill-building, with an emphasis on self-efficacy. Guiding principles for implementing gender-responsive strategies for female offenders include the following:

- Gender: Acknowledge that gender makes a difference;
- Environment: Create an environment based on safety, respect and dignity;
- Relationships: Develop policies, practices and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others and the community;
- Services and supervision: Address substance abuse, trauma and mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated and culturally-relevant services and appropriate supervision;

Female Military Offenders

Two questions arose when considering the development of the Navy’s female offender program: Why do women join the military, and why do women offend? Generally, many women join for the same reasons as men: opportunity, desire to serve, pride, patriotism and education. According to the DOD Advisory Committee on Women in the Services’ 2008 Annual Report, the primary reason women continued military service was their sense of job satisfaction and job performance. Women also remained in the military because of access to health care, education, a sense of purpose and being part of a team. So then, what caused these dedicated women to offend? They left home with a purpose. They were successful in basic training and military schools. In many cases, offenses occur when bad relationships are created or continued; drugs, larceny and violence ensue; and childhood trauma rears its ugly head.

Characteristics of female military offenders. Female offenders in the military are serving sentences that range from a few days to life. The average age upon confinement is 24, with a range between 19 and 43 years old. The average woman’s education exceeds a high school diploma, and 25 percent have some college education. Forty percent have psychotropic medication needs, and 40 percent are parents. Forty-seven percent are single, 38 percent are married and 15 percent are separated/divorced/widowed. Women have disproportionately low visitation with family
• Socioeconomic status: Provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions; and
• Community: Establish a system of community supervision and reentry with comprehensive, collaborative services.

**WCF purpose and mission statements.** Using these well-known fundamental definitions and principles, Miramar’s WCF developed purpose and mission statements that paved the way for today’s state-of-the-art program. The resulting purpose statement was: “WCF, an innovative leader of women’s corrections, empowers women to transform their lives through creative programs and opportunities.” The mission of WCF is to provide a safe and supportive community for staff and inmates that:

• Gives women a voice and the courage to change;
• Fosters connections to family, friends and community;
• Exceeds professional standards;
• Provides opportunities and resources for growth and transformation;
• Honors military and legal requirements; and
• Promotes personal and professional development.

**Training, Programming and Facility Enhancements for Women**

Meeting these goals required an integration of specialized staff training; gender-responsive, offense-related programming (clinical, educational, vocational, life skills and health); and facility enhancements. WCF, training, programs, clinical, facilities management, operations and executive staff collaborated in all aspects of facility and program design and implementation.

**Training.** A gender-responsive training curriculum for staff was developed with the assistance of criminal justice Consultants Phyllis Modley, Marcia Morgan and Joan Gillece, Ph.D. The trainings included modules that focused specifically on female offenders; psycho-social development of women; relationships; trauma-informed services; substance abuse; health issues; boundaries and communication; practicing management styles; helping women transition back to the community; and self-care for staff.16

**Programming.** “Most inmates are released from prison. If they leave angry, unable to resolve their problems, without skills and without hope, they are more likely to end up back in prison, doing much damage along the way.”17 At Miramar, programs were developed and implemented that focused on women’s typical pathways to crime — connectedness and relationships (crimes to or with significant others, drugs in social environments); domestic violence (against children, spouses, etc.); behavior change; and recognized life trauma, addictions and abuse issues (sexual abuse, physical abuse, drugs and alcohol). Clinical programs included: psychosocial screening and assessment; individual counseling; Prison Rape Elimination Act victimization and abuse risk assessments; psychiatric consultations as needed; substance abuse education and treatment; case conferences; Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups; domestic and general violence groups; dialectical behavior therapy skills groups; trauma and recovery groups; and stress and anger management. Other programs included: community transition; parenting; empowerment; reentry seminars; financial management; pregnancy management and family health care; peer orientation; book club; a mentorship program with community leaders; communal activities such as town hall meetings, or a weekly mindfulness practice; and Leap to Success. Leap to Success is a collaborative program between WCF and San Diego Gas and Electric that helps incarcerated female services members gain confidence and skills for reentry.

**Facility enhancements.** When planning began, unit operations, design features and furnishings were driven by recognized design recommendations to meet female offender population needs. The design was relationship-focused through the use of small groupings and sub-units. This reduces tension, enhances relational groupings and promotes socialization and community within the unit. A women-only unit management style that is community-focused and uses moveable furniture to facilitate “town hall meetings,” social encounters/games and offense-related programming was also utilized. The design also provided a sense of family/home through the use of color, light and soft materials to positively impact socialization and the level of anxiety.

The design is environmentally sensitive to diminish sound and provide soothing and protective natural light. Carpeting provides improved acoustics to promote conversation. Small “pits” help define areas; break up the space for smaller groupings of inmates; and promote positive behavior by providing a goal to “move up” to another subsection of the unit, with the conversation areas as an incentive. Unit glass dividers enhance defined areas, subdayrooms and groupings. A colored concrete floor gives a less institutionalized appearance by softening the normally harsh look of concrete. Drop ceilings provide sound buffers and quieter areas that are conducive to conversations. Increased light, window glazing, skylights and window walls contribute to improving inmates’ moods, helping normalize sleep cycles and counteracting depression symptoms. Additional features include two laundry rooms in the unit, which allow women to wash their own undergarments — a less expensive washing method that allows for individual responsibility, privacy and fewer replacements of garments. An interior atrium courtyard is accessible, an outdoor area is included for relaxation and private spaces are provided to reinforce the women’s sense of control over their environment.

In the brig’s historical experience, women present lower violence or destruction risks. This allowed the use of wood doors, cloth, porcelain toilet fixtures and carpeting — features that are more typical of a safe home environment. However, safety and security were not ignored. Modern digital electronic control systems are used throughout the facility. The unit is located as far away from male inmate housing and movement as possible. Cell door windows were lowered to improve sight lines for shorter female staff.

Small enhancements were included, such as privacy screens for toilets to acknowledge a higher need for privacy while unclothed or using feminine products. To promote
the women’s positive self-image through personal grooming, hygiene accommodations included electrical outlets in nonsegregation cells for hair dryers and curling irons. There is a provision for hair products (e.g., straighteners) and extended services for the women to maintain a sense of adequate personal appearance. An additional $5 per month for personal hygiene products is provided to indigent inmates. There are foot steps in the showers to assist women in shaving their legs, and a bathtub provides a possible relaxation/self-care incentive. Diverse exercise equipment is also provided, such as yoga mats, aerobic machines, a large exercise area for volleyball and an area for walking.

Basic medical and mental health support are met with on-site resources. WCF is located close to medical offices due to heavy use of medical services by female inmates. There is an on-unit kitchenette for pregnancy accommodations. Healthy snacks are available between meals in the unit, as medically prescribed. This also allows for freezing/storage of breast milk for babies during visitation. A psychologist or social worker assigned to the women’s program is located within the unit as part of the unit management team, and is accessible to staff and female inmates, without the need to enter the male compound for treatment. Program spaces and staff on the unit minimize transit through commingled common areas to access group treatment and/or work assignments. As the program continues to evolve, greater access to safe and appropriate gender-responsive and trauma-informed work and vocational training will become more available, while maintaining equal access.

**Conclusion**

The implementation of the women’s program was challenging, but continues to evolve in a positive manner. Parity was the key — not creating identical programs and services, but rather programs and services that were relevant and equitable for men and women. They are equivalent in their purpose and effort rather than being the same in content. “Administrators are concerned that managing incarcerated men and women differently may lead to complaints that services are unequal. However, a difference exists between equality and parity.” In the words of one jail administrator, “Once we acknowledge that gender makes a difference, it is empowering … [it] frees you from having to worry about treating people the same … [and] it is more logical.”

**ENDNOTES**


19. Ibid.

**Brewster Schenck, MSEd, CCE, is administrative director, and Lori Turley, MA, MS, is technical director of the Naval Consolidated Brig Miramar, U.S. Navy. Lois Lausch, BA, CCM, is director, and Jeffrey Thompson, LCSW, CCM, is clinical director of the DOD Women’s Correctional Facility at the Naval Consolidated Brig Miramar.**