

A close-up photograph of a person's open palm, facing upwards. The palm is painted with the colors of the transgender flag: blue, white, and purple. The paint is applied in thick, horizontal strokes, creating a textured effect. The background is a solid, light pink color.

# Trans+ Prison Project: Experiences of Incarcerated Gender-Diverse People in BC

A project of The Chair in Transgender Studies

Presentation by Dr. Sarah M. Steele  
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## Territorial Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect the ləkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.



# Current Correctional Service of Canada Policies and Procedures

- Prisons are based on sex segregation.
- Bill C-16, 2017 - Canadian Human Rights Act now prohibits “discriminatory practices based on ... sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression,” among other grounds.
- CSC policies and practices have been introduced that attempt to accommodate gender-diverse prisoners.

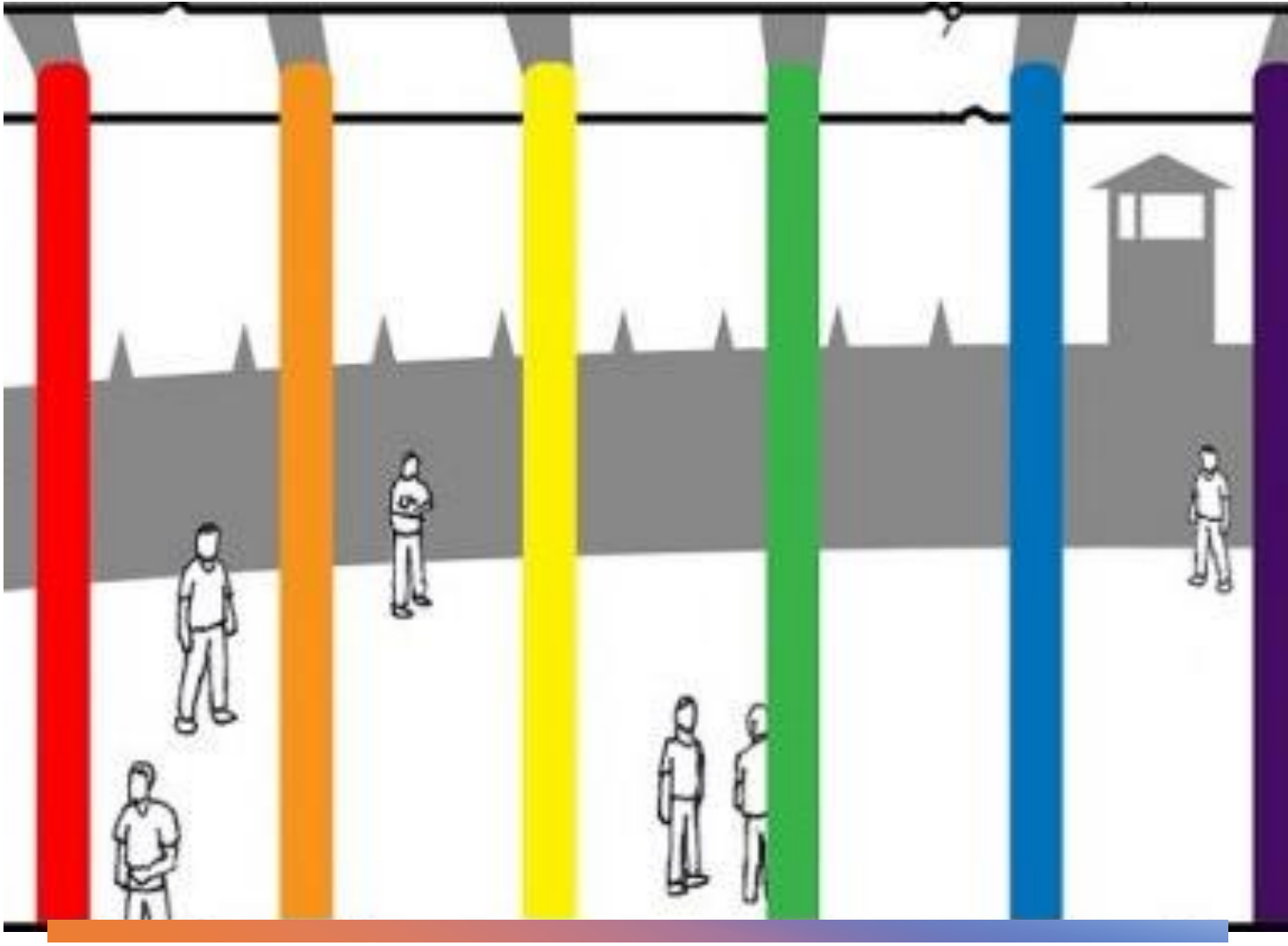


# Individualized Protocols

- Gender identity
- Chosen name
- Chosen pronouns
- Strip search protocol
- Frisk search protocol
- Urinalysis protocol
- Observation protocol
- Medical escort protocol
- Showers and toilet access
- Decontamination shower protocol
- Voluntary nudity protocol
- Type of facility requested



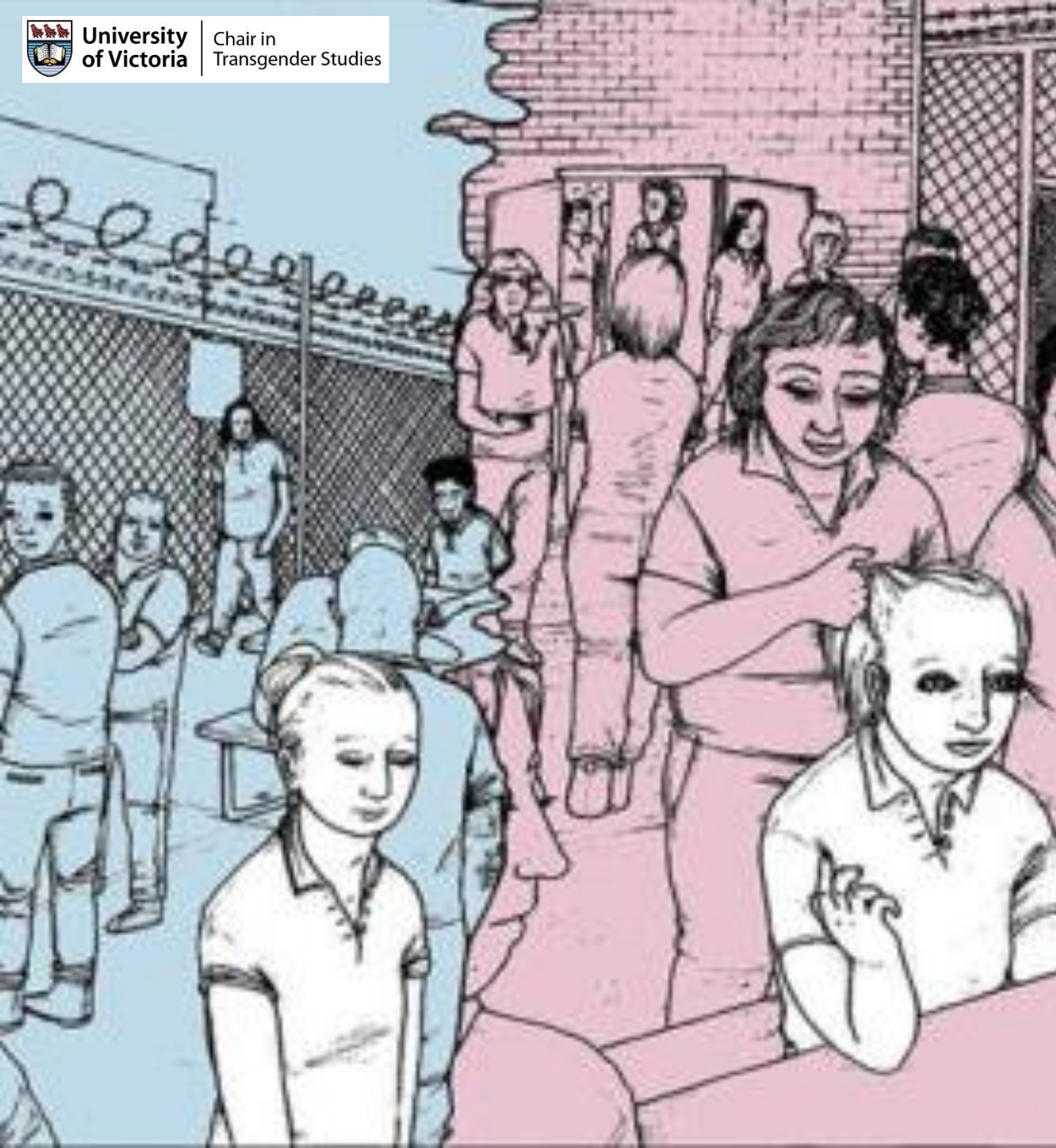




# Commissioners Directive 100

“Offenders will be placed according to their gender identity or expression in a men’s or a women’s institution, if that is their preference, regardless of their sex (i.e., anatomy) or the gender/sex marker on their identification documents.

In the event there are overriding health or safety concerns that cannot be resolved, the offender will be placed in a site that better aligns with their current sex (i.e., anatomy).”



# Differences between men's and women's prisons

## Men's Institutions

- Hard perimeters
- Large populations
- Cell blocks /ranges
- Armed guards
- Culture of aggression & violence

## Women's Institutions

- Less secure perimeters
- Smaller populations
- Cottages
- Workers not armed
- Culture of emotionality
- Children may be present
- Trauma informed

# Trans+ Prison Project Overview

- Lived experiences of Trans+ individuals within Canadian Federal Prisons.
- Five field trips to collect data within BC prisons (January - August 2024) + online collection
- 27 prisoner interviews
- Six staff focus groups, with a total of 23 participants



# What prisoners said about names and pronouns

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Staff were inconsistent in using names and pronouns on IPs

Even though I'm living full-time female, and I had my surgery ... I still get misgendered....I've had a couple staff where they'll 'forget', but I don't think they forgot.

Everything is easier in CSC institutions if there is a legal name change, but it is very hard to do.

Yes, I get it's a men's prison, but it's not that hard to properly identify someone. Yes. Mistakes happens, I get that. But when it's a consistent person making the same mistake over and over and over, I shouldn't have to keep telling the person, can you please not use this? Can you please do this?



# What Trans+ prisoners said about searches



- Gender-diverse prisoners are discouraged from asking to have female officers participate in their individual search protocol.
- Female staff sometimes refuse to search gender-diverse prisoners even when individualized protocols require it.
- This can result in delayed movements for prisoners

“I get adverse treatment if I want ... to visit my family. I get placed in holding tanks because the female staff refuse to search me, and they don't understand how that makes me feel. I'm not a freak. I'm not a creep.”



# What prisoners said about requests for transfers

- Most trans women and female-identified gender-diverse prisoners wanted to transfer to a women's institution.
- Having convictions or *accusations* of violence or sexual assault against women or children were the main reason for denied transfers.
- Most nonbinary and Two-Spirit people were not interested in transfers to women's institutions.





# What trans women prisoners said about transfers

“I came from 24 years in the men's prison system into the women's prison system, and it was a culture shock to me. I had to relearn how to do time again.”








What trans women  
prisoners said  
about  
treatment by other  
prisoners in men's  
prisons

“Even though it's 2024, there's still a lot of stigma within the offenders. Automatically they assume I'm gay and I want to hook up with 'em and ... that's not the case.”

“I get asked for blow jobs right in front of staff members and staff just laugh. It's like they think I deserve this treatment, just because I'm transgender it's my fault. And it's not. It's sexual harassment.”



A black and white photograph showing a close-up of a hand gripping a vertical metal bar. The hand is positioned in the center-left of the frame. In the background, a window with horizontal bars is visible, and the interior of a prison cell is dimly lit. The right side of the image is torn, revealing a white background where the text is located.

## What trans women prisoners said about treatment by other prisoners in men's prisons

"I've been beat up here, I've had to sit in segregation for most of my time ... because... it's very unsafe for me here, because for some reason inmates don't like transgenders here. They want to stab me, they want to kill [me]. I have a target on my back everywhere I go! ...there are so many violent issues that cause me harm here, and... [staff] don't care."



# What trans women prisoners said about treatment by staff

“My parole officer... really helped me fill out the paperwork for my name change and the gender marker change. And then I came [to a women’s institution]. And when I got here, I was very fortunate that, again, I would say an individual...she kind of went out of her way to help me navigate this big part of my life”





## What other prisoners said about how staff treat trans women in men's prisons

“The way [staff] talks to them, the things they say behind their backs... they do get treated differently by certain guards. I will admit that. And it's not right.”

“I feel that they've been treating a lot of the transgender kindly not because they want to, but because they sort of have to. And I think they should be treating all people nicely, not just one set or a group or anything like that, because they're fearful of being sued or anything like that.”



