

SCIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION IN PRISONS: EXAMINING THE
EXPERIENCES OF SUSTAINABILITY IN PRISONS PROJECT COORDINATORS

by

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ABSTRACT

Science and Sustainability Education in Prisons: Examining the Experiences of Sustainability in Prisons Project Coordinators

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Incarcerated participants of environmental education programs have described experiences that match identity development theories, demonstrated patterns of overcoming fear, shifts in self-esteem, empathy, and feelings of empowerment (Passarelli, 2017; Morita, 2021). Yet, little research has focused on the experiences of program coordinators. This study used a survey and semi-structured interviews with former graduate student Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) coordinators to determine if and how individuals experienced a change in schema while working with environmental education and conservation programs in prisons. Schemas are structures of knowledge that help us understand the world, interpret geographical features, understand mathematical formulas, and perceive acceptable behaviors. By identifying patterns in the survey responses and themes from semi-structured interviews, I evaluated changes in schema related to environmentalism, incarceration, and career paths. Coordinator responses indicated that many individuals experienced a change of perspective related to environmentalism, incarceration, and career path. Out of the three categories, participants were most likely to have experienced a change in schema on incarceration.

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Introduction

“It changed how I saw prisons and our incarcerated population. Where I used to think prisons were just metal bars and concrete, now I saw communities engaging in education, gardening, jobs, and self-growth”

- Former Sustainability in Prisons Project Coordinator

Individuals working in prison environments start their days with security checks, multiple gates, COVID-19 tests, and a dive into a hierarchical and exploitive environment, rather than coffee. As a result, the average national turnover rate among correction officers was sixteen percent in 2010, and that rate has grown with the COVID-19 pandemic (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022). Prison staff can be considered ‘violence workers’ or individuals responsible for applying the state’s power through violence and enforcement (Seigel, 2018). While this power most directly and significantly impacts incarcerated individuals, staff perspectives and values are also shaped by their experiences and positions.

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) student coordinators hold unique positions as contract staff with the Washington Department of Corrections (WA DOC). Unlike corrections officers who have a security role, SPP coordinators focus on bringing science and sustainability education to incarcerated students and technicians. Coordinators generally enter the prison environment once a week, and provide guidance and education for program participants. Unlike corrections officers, coordinators do not have a disciplinary role and they receive fewer trainings from WA DOC. However, they participate in additional or supplemental trainings offered by SPP.

While there has been increasing research on previously incarcerated individuals' experiences in sustainability and science education programs (Passarelli, 2017; Morita, 2021; Gallagher, 2013), prison gardening programs (Timler et. al, 2019; Jauk et al., 2022) and a growing connection between the prison industrial complex and environmental justice (Webb,

2016), little research has focused on the experiences of individuals delivering and coordinating science and sustainability programs in prisons. My thesis research fills that gap in the literature and further examines how working in a prison influences individuals' schema, perspectives, and career choices. In this research I asked: How does coordinating environmental education programs in Washington State prisons affect individuals' schemas as they relate to career paths and perspectives on environmentalism, and incarceration?

At its foundation, this research can inform future training, practices, and procedures for coordinators with SPP. A greater understanding of coordinator experiences and lasting perspectives developed from working in the prison environment also has the potential to make education programs more effective and continue to improve incarcerated individuals' experiences in science and sustainability programs.

I divided the following literature review into two chapters. In chapter one, I provide a brief description of the history of incarceration, SPP, and past research with SPP. In chapter two, I outline schemas as a theoretical framework and highlight past research on corrections staff experiences. Following these chapters, I describe study methods and the results of the survey and semi-structured interviews with former SPP coordinators.

Positionality Statement

I worked with the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) coordinating beekeeping, gardening, and Roots of Success programs in Washington State Prisons. As a student coordinator, I shared experiences with participants and have worked or collaborated with some participants. My experiences and relationships may have introduced some biases into this type of qualitative research. Yet, my thesis research remains independent from my position with SPP. While serving as a coordinator, I understood my own experience but did not have the reflective perspective to understand lasting impacts on my schemas.

Additionally, as a white woman, I must acknowledge that I hold significant privilege and have not had the same experience working in a system that disproportionately impacts marginalized individuals and communities and individuals with different identities. Through this research, I have come to a better understanding of the experiences of diverse individuals working with environmental education programs in a prison setting by letting individuals' experiences speak for themselves.

This research focuses on the experiences of individuals who are not currently incarcerated. While understanding experiences of individuals who work in the prison environment may improve future dynamics and educational programs, this research is not intended to de-center the voices and experiences of incarcerated individuals. Rather, I hope that this research can inform new practices and training methods for individuals working in the prison environment and further work to center incarcerated voices in education, programming, and carceral system reform initiatives.

Chapter 1. Prison Systems and the Sustainability in Prisons Project

1.1 Introduction to Literature Review

The following literature review explores a variety of topics to better understand the environments and programs in which graduate student coordinators with the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) work. First, I outline a brief history of incarceration. Then, I describe the demographics and conditions of incarceration in the United States and Washington State. Next, I outline the connections between environmental justice and incarceration. Finally, to conclude chapter one, I discuss the impacts of COVID-19 in prisons, describe SPP, and highlight previous research by graduate student coordinators. In chapter two, I define schemas and outline the theoretical framework for this study. I conclude by highlighting common perspectives and ideas for careers, incarceration, and environmental schemas.

1.2 History of Mass Incarceration

The history of incarceration in what is now known as the United States of America demonstrates patterns of exploitation, profit-centered action, and hierarchical power structures. Connections between past systems of incarceration, political and social events, and philosophies can provide context for the current prison environments in which SPP graduate student coordinators work.

Incarceration in the United States is an extension of colonization, as both colonization and incarceration are rooted in systemic state violence. Colonization, in which European immigrants claimed Native land, was maintained through a series of strategic and brutal military and cultural tactics or an *imaginary of righteous violence* (Stone-Mediatore, 2019, p. 3). Modern-day incarceration demonstrates similar imaginaries of righteous violence and reinforces hierarchies of power established through colonization. Incarceration also controls individuals and

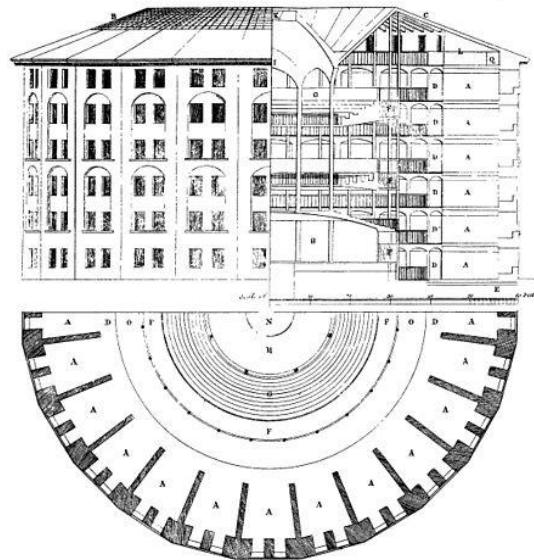
uses physical and mental violence to bend individuals to the will of the state. Yet, jails in 18th century America were structured very differently from modern-day prisons and the environments where SPP coordinators currently work.

In the 18th century and prior to the American revolution, incarceration was a rare form of punishment. Public and corporal punishment were more common, and jails served primarily as a space for individuals awaiting sentencing (Anno, 2004). Yet, prison philosophies began to change as colonies gained independence from Great Britain. Quaker ideals heavily influenced the new philosophies, signaling a shift away from the death penalty and towards prolonged incarceration. As a result, Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia became one of the first institutions to operate based on a principle of penology and to incorporate a penitentiary in the courtyard (Depuy, 1951). Penitentiaries, like Walnut Street Jail, promoted solitary confinement as a more humane form of incarceration; a model referred to as the “Pennsylvania System.” In the Pennsylvania System, prison planners expected penitent incarcerated individuals to spend time in solitude feeling regret for having done wrong (Depuy, 1951). However, overcrowding became an issue, and the penitentiary closed in 1828. New facilities built under a similar model, including Eastern State Penitentiary, emphasized social confinement but were also built based on Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon (Anno, 2004).

Bentham constructed the panopticon as an architectural device promoting isolation and surveillance based on his brother’s design for a mill as seen in the figure below (Steadman, 2007, p.8)

Figure 1.

Drawing of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon by Wiley Reveley, 1791.



The design structure places a guard in a central tower surrounded by incarcerated individuals, creating a sense of constant surveillance. Eastern State Penitentiary follows a similar radial plan with one central location for prison staff that looks down ten hallways. The panopticon and design of Eastern State Penitentiary represent hierarchies of power that influence what those working in prisons experience, including SPP coordinators in present-day Washington State facilities.

An alternative model for expanding the scale of incarceration arose in Auburn, New York. Under the Auburn model, individuals lived separately with no communication allowed, but they worked together in a factory setting (Anno, 2004). Incarcerated individuals marched in lockstep with their heads turned to one side, as they were not allowed to make eye contact with one another or prison staff. Strict conditions and restrictions on communication and contact contributed to a hierarchy of power in the prison environment and further division between

incarcerated individuals and prison staff. Over time, the Auburn System became a more common model, as it was less expensive and less space-intensive than the “Pennsylvania System.”

Prisons continued to operate under the Auburn model, using exploitive labor to produce materials for the military and public during the World Wars and to care for farms, especially in the south (Anno, 2004). The use of prison labor in factory and agricultural settings is a legacy of slavery in the United States. While the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery, it made a notable exception for punishment and resulted in a new form of forced labor known as the Black Codes. The Black Codes regulated labor and prohibited Black individuals from gaining employment, housing, and performing every day activities. Black codes transformed non-criminal activities like marrying or owning property into crimes punishable by incarceration therefore contributing to disproportionately high rates of incarceration of Black individuals (Hinton, 2016).

Following the Black Codes, a convict leasing system was developed to “lease” incarcerated individuals to plantation owners for a fee to the state. While the convict leasing system was eventually phased out, it was replaced by chain gangs. In chain gangs, incarcerated individuals were chained together at the ankle and forced to work all day at unsustainable rates and in inhumane conditions (Lichtenstein, 1993). Chain gangs were not abolished until the 1950s, sustaining slavery in the United States for an additional hundred years. The factory model, convict leasing system, and chain gangs degraded incarcerated individuals and treated them as expendable property. The historic systems of labor exploitation established dynamics that influence current systems of incarceration and perpetuate the notion that incarcerated individuals can be treated as less than their non-incarcerated counterparts.

While exploitive labor continues in the modern carceral system, emphasis shifted toward the policing and regulating of poverty, crime, and drugs in the 1930s. The focus on policing continued for many decades. Then, the “law and order” ideal gained prominence through Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign (Hinton, 2016). As the “law and order” ideal gained prominence, President Johnson launched a War on Crime, passing the 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Act and encouraging police officers to occupy spaces previously filled by social programs under the war on poverty (Hinton, 2016). Suddenly, people in the streets became the enemy and law enforcement was considered a solution. Under the Safe Streets Act of 1968, the federal government invested \$400 million in the War on Crime and created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to distribute funding. The organization funded 80,000 crime control projects and contributed to the need to expand prisons and large scale structures of mass incarceration in the present day.

1.3 Mass Incarceration in the Present Day

Incarceration’s historical ties to colonialism, slavery, and the wars on crime and drugs inform the current carceral practices and systems in which SPP coordinators work. The United States has the largest carceral system and incarceration rate of any country, with over one million people currently incarcerated, an annual bill of approximately \$182 billion, and immeasurable social costs (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.). After President Nixon deemed drug abuse public enemy number one and President Reagan expanded drug war efforts, prison populations increased until 2010 (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.). Then, in 2012 the Obama Administration’s National Drug Strategy defined a new approach to drug control that emphasized treatment, prevention, and recovery (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022).

Yet, incarceration for drug-related crimes continues to disproportionately target people of color. Black people are 2.7 times more likely to be arrested for drug-related crimes and 6.5 times more likely to be incarcerated for drug-related offenses (Schanzenbach et al., 2016). Black individuals also receive 50 percent longer sentences than their white counterparts. In 2022, drug related offenses still accounted for the incarceration of almost 400,000 individuals.

The scale and conditions of incarceration in the United States, created in part by the wars on crime and drugs, have been labeled the prison industrial complex (PIC). The PIC describes systems of special government and industry interests that embrace a profit-oriented mindset that encourages policing and imprisonment as solutions to social issues in which incarcerated individuals are the raw material (Schlosser, 1998). The term is inspired by the “military-industrial complex” which describes the relationship between the United States military, profit, and public policy. The PIC is also built on the school to prison pipeline in which children of color are pushed out of schools and into prisons. Inadequate public-school resources, reliance on police in schools, school-based arrests, disciplinary alternative schools, and court involvement and juvenile detention lead students directly from schools to prisons (American Civil Liberties Union & Global Human Rights Clinic, 2022). The PIC’s history of exploitive labor and racism continue to shape the carceral system in which SPP Coordinators work.

1.4 Incarceration in Washington State

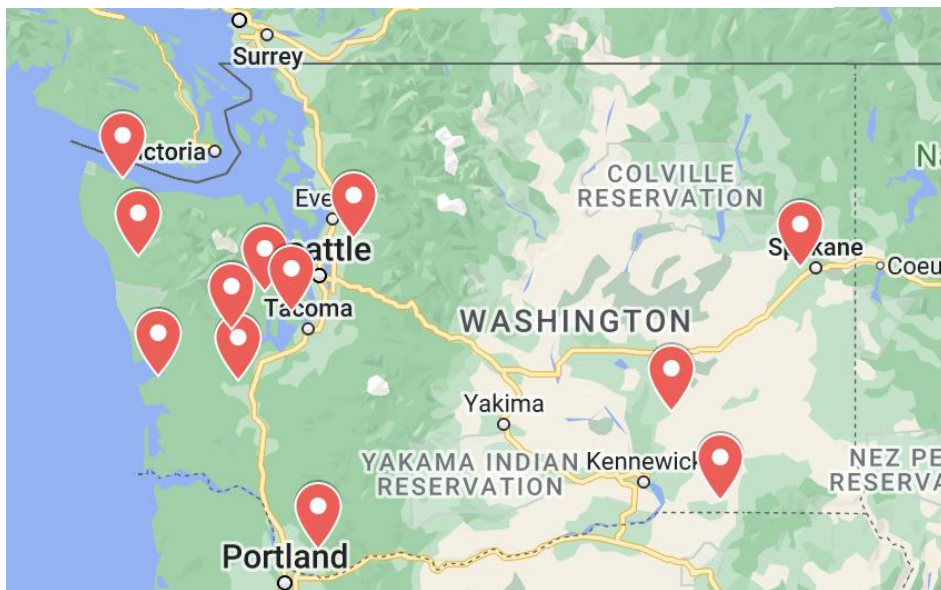
Demographics in Washington State prisons parallel national and historic trends. In September 2022, Washington Department of Corrections had an average of 13,373 individuals incarcerated in prisons, reentry centers, community parenting alternatives, graduated reentry programs, and in-state rented beds (Department of Corrections, 2022). Of this population, 92.4

percent of individuals are incarcerated in the twelve Washington State prisons, and 94.3 percent are male while only 5.7 percent are female (Department of Corrections, 2022).

There are ten men’s prisons and two women’s prisons spread across the state. Figure 2 depicts the location of each of the twelve prisons in Washington State. As of 2021 and per Revised Code of Washington 70.395.030, there are no private prisons or detention facilities in Washington State.

Figure 2.

Map of prison facilities in Washington State.



The prisons in Washington State are primarily located outside of cities in more remote environments. While the twelve prisons are spread across the state and every county has some individuals incarcerated, some counties have greater portions of their population incarcerated. Smaller counties including Grays Harbor, Cowlitz, Lewis, Yakima, and Asotin have the highest incarceration rates in the state (The Prison Policy Initiative, 2022).

The location, size, administration, and custody level of each prison influences the community and work environment. Five of the Washington State prisons, Mission Creek Correction Center for Women, Larch Corrections Center, Olympic Corrections Center, Coyote Ridge Corrections, and Cedar Creek Corrections Center, are work camps and only host incarcerated individuals with six years or less prior to release. Other facilities host a range of minimum, medium, and close-custody individuals. Coordinators with SPP primarily work and visit the facilities closest to the Evergreen State College: Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women, Cedar Creek Corrections Center, Washington Corrections Center, Stafford Creek Corrections Center, and Washington Corrections Center for Women.

Following national trends, people of color are disproportionately incarcerated in Washington State. Of those incarcerated, 55.7 percent are classified as white, 17.3 percent as Black, 5.4 percent as American Indian/Alaska Native, 4.2 percent as Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4 percent as other, and 0.7 percent as unknown (Department of Corrections, 2022); 16.4 percent of individuals also identify as Hispanic. Comparatively, the 2020 U.S Census indicated that approximately 77.5 percent of residents identified as white and only 4.5 percent identified as Black or African American (United States Census Bureau, 2022).

In addition to the disproportionate rates of incarceration among races, the legacy of slavery and colonialism continues in Washington State as incarcerated individuals are paid far below minimum wage for work they do. Most incarcerated workers, including technicians in SPP programs, are paid 42 cents an hour before deductions, with max earnings of \$50 a month. Approximately 80 percent of prison work is facility maintenance including kitchen or laundry work (American Civil Liberties Union & Global Human Rights Clinic, 2022). Yet, some individuals work for Correctional Industries, Department of Natural Resources, or private

companies and are paid slightly higher wages. Washington State Representative Tara Simmons introduced House Bill 1025 the “Real Labor, Real Wages Act” in 2023 to raise incarcerated worker’s wages to the state minimum wage (Cabahug, 2023). However, this bill died in session. Colorado remains the only state to pay incarcerated individuals minimum wage.

In October 2020, WA DOC launched a partnership with Amend at the University of California San Francisco. The partnership aimed to change correctional culture and bring a health-focused approach to training correctional staff and preparing incarcerated residents for reentry. The approach emphasized staff wellness and rethinking the purpose of prisons while building relationships between incarcerated individuals and staff, and bringing technical assistance to create a healthier environment. Several staff from WA DOC traveled to Norway to learn more about Amend and the Norwegian Correctional Services. As a result, WA DOC aims to implement Amend practices to reduce staff use of force, reduce staff assaults, reduce use of sick leave, reduce use of solitary confinement, improve staff health and satisfaction, and improve resident readiness for reentry (Department of Corrections Strategy and Innovation Team, 2022). One of the primary Amend strategies is dynamic security in which staff frequently observe, interact, and engage with the incarcerated individuals. The program aims to empower staff to develop and implement new ideas to improve incarcerated individual’s lives, which is believed to create more meaning in the staff work. Stafford Creek Corrections Center introduced a five-member Amend team that is currently working to implement the strategy (O’Sullivan, 2023).

Despite WA DOC’s partnership with Amend, programming initiatives continue to face barriers in prison facilities. Staff shortages can prevent buildings from opening and proposed changes to WA DOC Policy 500 will require that a non-incarcerated instructor, sponsor, or facilitator remain in the room for the duration of peer-led classes. Felix Sitthivong, a member of

Empowerment Avenue, advisor for the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Awareness Group, and peer-facilitator at Stafford Creek Corrections Center noted that recent changes to policy and lack of support for peer-led classes “repress prisoner voices and maintain a white supremacist patriarchal status quo” in the name of calls for evidence based rhetoric (Sitthivong, 2023). The Amend program and proposed changes to policy could alter the environment where SPP coordinators work and potentially enhance future opportunities for programming in prison facilities.

1.5 Environmental Justice and Incarceration

Prisons are sites of environmental injustices. Pellow (2019) highlights just a few examples of environmental injustices associated with prisons including: Rikers Island Jail built atop a landfill, Victorville Federal Correctional Complex built on a former nuclear weapons storage area, the Northwest Detention Center in Washington built next to a Superfund site, and Texas prisoners exposed to extreme weather. He suggests that carceral systems and climate, social, and environmental justice are incompatible. As such, addressing environmental justice may require a shift away from mass incarceration to disrupt systems of power.

Similar arguments have called for prisons to be considered locally unwanted land uses (LULUs). Opsal and Malin (2020) examined previous studies of prison placements and noted that research has primarily focused on how prisons create environmental harms rather than how prisons themselves are LULUs. State and federal agencies filed 197 water quality violations against correctional facilities within three years, and 58 facilities had formal enforcement filed over a five-year period, including overcrowded conditions, inadequate waste treatment facilities, and substandard air quality. Other forms of LULUs studied by environmental scholars include power plants, landfills, mines, and factories.

1.5.1 Environmental Justice and Incarceration in Washington State

Despite Washington Department of Corrections' commitment "to operate a safe and humane corrections system and partner with others to transform lives for a better Washington," incarceration in Washington State contributes to environmental and climate injustices (Mission, Strategic Measures & Budgets, 2022). The siting and operation of the twelve Washington State prisons contradicts the seventeen principles of environmental justice adopted in 1991 by the Participants of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. *Appendix A* provides a list of all seventeen principles.

The summer heat waves of 2021 and 2022 created stress for communities and individuals across Washington State. Vulnerable communities, including incarcerated individuals, often were more significantly impacted by the high temperatures and dry conditions. Office of the Corrections Ombuds, an independent office of the governor's office, published a report on how the high temperatures experienced in Washington State from June 26th through June 28th, 2021 impacted incarcerated individuals. The report documented complaints filed with the Department of Corrections and observations from a visit to Monroe Correctional Complex (MCC) on Monday June 28th (Sax, 2022). At the time of the visit to MCC, temperatures peaked at 107 degrees Fahrenheit. Each building and unit at MCC had different temperatures and conditions. The Program Activities Building had air conditioning and had been opened as a cooling center for individuals to use if they became overheated. The intensive management unit was the coolest of all units and the Twin Rivers Unit was the warmest. The Twin Rivers Unit measured 94 F at the time of the visit. However, the frosted windows were not in direct sunlight at the time of measurement. The Twin Rivers Unit ceilings were also partially covered with large glass panels, allowing for constant and direct sunlight that contributed to increased temperatures. The Ombuds

report recommended that WA DOC cover the glass panels, place more fans in common areas, increase the availability of ice, allow individuals to block the air vents, use smoke ejectors, implement window coverings, and lower water temperatures for showers.

The heatwaves in Washington State caused widespread stress and health challenges. However, as a vulnerable population, incarcerated individuals were more severely impacted than the general population. Incarcerated individuals do not have control of their environment or the ability to relocate to access resources which could help mitigate the effects of higher temperatures. The conditions outlined in the Ombuds report, and descriptions shared by incarcerated individuals, violate environmental justice principles two, three, five, seven, and eight as outlined in **Appendix A**.

Water contamination posed an additional environmental justice concern at Airway Heights Corrections Center (AHCC) in 2017. The groundwater that served AHCC and the surrounding area was contaminated by firefighting foam. The contamination affected both water and food supplies as AHCC hosts the food factory for Correctional Industries, from which foods are distributed to other state prison facilities. Correctional industries had to quickly address the issue by asking staff to work overtime, seeking external water sources, and recalling food (Sokol, 2020). As of 2020, Washington Department of Corrections planned to sue the federal government for the runoff from Fairchild Air Force Base that caused the contamination. The Kaspel Tribe also filed a lawsuit against the government and foam makers. However, the lawsuits will not ameliorate the potential adverse health effects to the incarcerated caused by polluted water.

Building emissions programs and greenwashing pose an additional environmental justice concern in the Washington State prisons. Washington Department of Corrections highlights its

initiatives to improve building and operation sustainability on the [website](#) and in promotional materials. WA DOC has made changes to improve energy efficiency and reduce impact on the environment in compliance with Governor Inslee's Executive Order 18-01. For example, Airway Heights Corrections Center purchased 1.2 million kWh of solar electricity from Avista solar farm in 2018 and a number of facilities including Washington State Penitentiary, Monroe Corrections Center, Correctional Industries, and Coyote Ridge Corrections Center now have LEED certified buildings. While the buildings are LEED certified and may produce fewer emissions, they do not address justice issues as described during the heat waves of 2021 and 2022.

Jewkes and Moran (2015) note that forms of 'green' initiatives like transitioning to LEED certified buildings are becoming symbolic and support mass incarceration or sustaining the prison industrial complex instead of the environment. Even prison gardens have been labeled as paternalistic, can contribute to prison greenwashing and perpetuate the psychological harms of a prison environment. Jewkes and Moran extend the argument to address SPP programs as a potential form of greenwashing.

Similarly, Hazelett (2022) notes that prison gardens are passive disciplining tools that pass rehabilitative responsibilities to incarcerated individuals rather than to the state and society. As currently established, garden programs do not recognize incarcerated individuals as implicitly deserving outdoor and garden space. Rather, it reinforces patterns of discrimination and lack of spatial agency. Hazlett proposes that "the prison garden is not only used to cloak the injustice of mass incarceration, but also to ceremonialize rehabilitation and reentry and thereby legitimize prison" (Hazlett, 2022, p. 444). Despite these statements, Hazlett notes that the prison garden can be a space in which resistance and mutual healing for program staff and incarcerated individuals can occur through passive restorative justice. In fact, Gilliom (2017) confirmed that relationship

building and restorative justice occurs in SPP programs. They found that corrections staff described an increase in prosocial behavior and that the prison garden can also humanize and unravel subjectivities by bringing incarcerated individuals and staff together in a new and more open environment.

1.6 Background: The Sustainability in Prisons Project

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP), a partnership between Washington Department of Corrections and The Evergreen State College, works to empower sustainable change by bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons. The program began at Cedar Creek Corrections Center (CCCC) in 2003 when Evergreen's Dr. Nalini Nadkarni collaborated with CCCC's superintendent Dan Pacholke to ask incarcerated individuals to participate in a study on native mosses (SPP, n.d.). It has since grown to offer multiple programs, each coordinated by Evergreen graduate students, including peer led gardening classes, conservation nurseries, Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly rearing, Western Pond Turtle rehabilitation, beekeeping, and more (Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Incarcerated individuals working in the Conservation Nursery at Washington Corrections Center for Women and Beekeeping program at Washington Corrections Center. Photos from SPP 2021 Annual Report.



Most SPP programs involve a partnership with organizations like the Washington State Beekeepers Association, community colleges, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and more. As of 2022, incarcerated students and technicians in many of the SPP programs can earn college credit during incarceration by completing coursework through SPP's Prior Learning Experience Program. In this program, students complete course work and SPP submits their educational portfolios and covers administrative expenses for registering students with the Evergreen State College.

Each SPP program is coordinated by a graduate student from The Evergreen State College. The coordinator positions are unique, with most coordinators working both in prisons and in offices at The Evergreen State College or remotely from home. Most graduate student coordinators work directly with one or two environmental education programs at one or two Washington State prisons. Coordinators develop and deliver educational materials for the program, communicate with facility liaisons and program partners, guide care for program organisms, and facilitate small group seminars and educational sessions. Coordinators generally work part-time for twenty hours a week and work with technicians in prisons one day a week. For example, the SPP Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly coordinator works with a small group of incarcerated technicians at Mission Creek Corrections Center once or twice a week. Coordinators may visit prisons more or less frequently based on program needs, seasonal changes, and availability of technicians. Other coordinators work with peer-led education programs, program evaluation, organization administration, or curriculum development and visit prisons less often on a case-by-case basis.

1.7 Incarceration and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the prison industrial complex, school to prison pipeline, carceral system, and incarcerated individuals. In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people in prisons decreased by 20 percent (ACLU, n.d). The population decline was largely due to pandemic-related slowdowns in the legal system; prison populations have since started to increase again. From March 2020 to February 2021 the infection rate in all state prisons was 219 cases per 1,000 incarcerated individuals at risk of exposure. Nationally, almost 2,500 individuals incarcerated in state and federal prisons died of COVID-19 (Carson & Nadel, 2022).

In Washington State, 16,192 incarcerated individuals and 6,009 Department of Corrections (WA DOC) staff tested positive for COVID-19 from March 2020 to November 2022. Of the positive cases, eighteen incarcerated individuals and four WA DOC staff passed away (Department of Corrections, 2022). Visitations and programming were largely suspended in all twelve prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, SPP suspended most programs and prioritized health and safety. However, some programs, including the prairie conservation nursery, Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly program, beekeeping, and some peer-led education classes, continued operating with approved COVID plans (SPP, 2021). While some programming returned in 2021 and 2022, prisons are still experiencing outbreaks, quarantines are imposed, and programming is frequently paused.

1.8 Past Sustainability in Prisons Project research

Many former graduate student coordinators have completed thesis projects with SPP. Previous thesis projects provide context to SPP programs and how coordinators interact with incarcerated students, technicians, and the organization. Previous research with SPP falls into

four broad categories: participant experiences, organism programs, environmental justice, and Department of Corrections staff experiences. Some thesis projects have also worked with incarcerated thesis advisors to guide the research pathway (Shepler, 2019).

1.8.1 Participant experiences

Several past coordinators and Master of Environmental Studies (MES) students at The Evergreen State College completed thesis projects evaluating past participant experiences. Gallagher (2013) assessed environmental attitudes and beliefs of past participants. She concluded that individuals who participated in education programs, worked with living things, and interacted with the outside community demonstrated more pro-environmental attitudes. Similarly, Passarelli (2017) examined how participating in SPP programs shaped past participant's attitudes and identities. She found that past participants generally engaged in pro-environmental behaviors but were hesitant to label themselves as environmentalists. She concluded that SPP programs have a transformative effect on individuals and can lead to participants overcoming fear and experiencing positive shifts in empathy and self-esteem. Morita (2021) studied the recalled experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals. He examined how participating in SPP programs may result in empowerment and found that past SPP program participants experienced individual, organizational, and community empowerment, but that themes of disempowerment were also present. From these three research projects, it is evident that participating in SPP programs can increase environmental attitudes while individuals are incarcerated and post-release while also providing opportunities for empowerment.

Additional graduate student research evaluated the effectiveness of SPP programs. Clarke (2011) examined participant experiences to determine the significance of science and sustainability programs in rehabilitative and education outcomes. She found that SPP programs

share characteristics with successful rehabilitation programs including fostering an environmental stewardship ethic, influencing emotional health, and improving quality of life during incarceration. Weber (2012) took a different approach and compared lecture and workshop style educational classes. They concluded that participants experienced a significant improvement in attitudes towards environmental issues after an educational session and that lecture style presentations might be more effective than workshop presentations in improving incarcerated individual's attitudes on environmental topics.

1.8.2 Organism programs

Some graduate students used data from SPP programs or collaborated with incarcerated individuals to care for organisms for use in their research. For example, Aubrey (2013) worked with incarcerated technicians in the Taylors Checkerspot butterfly program at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women (MCCCW) to determine which hosts were preferred by *E. e taylori* among *P. lanceolata*, *C. levisecta*, and harsh paintbrush (*Castilleja hispida*), a known native host. Technicians and Aubrey found that the butterflies preferred *Castilleja pp.* over *P. lanceolata*. Klag (2020) also collected data based on work he did with SPP programs. Klag worked to determine if out-planted vegetative mats made from coconut coir and *Alnus rubra* chips promote *Viola adunca* ability to maintain spacing with the mat more effective than traditional techniques. He collaborated with SPP to grow 36 control mats at Stafford Creek Corrections Center in Aberdeen, Washington. Collaborative research growing plants and caring for organisms with incarcerated technicians shapes coordinator experiences working for SPP. Mintz (2019) explored the use of compost tea as a nutrient supplement and Mann (2014) cultivated *Lomatium utriculatum* at Shotwell's Landing with incarcerated individuals from Cedar Creek Corrections Center to research the affects of large-scale prescribed fire burn on prarie

communities. Mann found that plant communities had different responses and *Lomatium utriculatum* seeds collected from burn plots demonstrated increased germination. These studies highlight the work that incarcerated technicians do and their deep knowledge and contribution to scientific work and knowledge.

1.8.3 Environmental justice

While several Master of Environmental Studies thesis projects that relate to SPP highlight the relationship between environmental justice and incarceration in the literature review, two coordinators completed studies directly addressing the relationship. Webb (2016) analyzed results from five years of environmental lecture series participant surveys and evaluated the relationship between incarceration rates by race and distributional justice or how resources and opportunities are dispersed across society and to individuals. They found that some components of SPP programs offer space for environmental justice by addressing distributional justice, procedural justice, and rights-based justice. However, they also found that not all SPP programs support each realm of justice and that SPP is not necessarily a justice-centered organization.

Benoit (2020) took a different approach and applied a food justice lens to explore a connection between food deserts and prisons. She found that incarcerated individuals reported a lack of access to healthy options, inability to seek other options, and abundance of unhealthy foods. The relationship between environmental justice, food justice, and incarceration shapes coordinator experiences as they maintain a status of privilege and power in the prison environment (Webb, 2016).

1.8.4 WA Corrections staff experience

Most graduate student research involving SPP evaluated program participant's experiences. However, Gilliom (2017) examined the impacts of Western Pond Turtle

rehabilitation programs on correctional *staff's* work environment at Larch Corrections Center and Cedar Creek Corrections Center. The turtle programs had an overall positive impact on the prison work environment. Corrections staff expressed increased job satisfaction, decreased stress, and increased prosocial behavior. Gilliom also identified room for improvement based on corrections staff experiences. Potential improvements included reducing program operation workload, improving communication, and evaluating the scale of the program. Gilliom's research outlined corrections staff experiences, but graduate student coordinators have a unique position working both in the prison environment less regularly than full time staff. Overall, previous research by graduate student's informed the design and theoretical framework of this study as outlined in the next section.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction to areas of research

In this research I focus on the impact of working in SPP on three areas: career path, environmentalism, and incarceration. I selected these areas of focus based on previous research, personal interest, and potential future implications. Each area of focus is evaluated for a change in schema as defined below. This chapter of the literature review provides a brief introduction to schema theory and description of parameters for each focus area.

2.2 Schemas

In schema theory, a cognitive development theory, a schema is a structure of knowledge that helps us understand the world and interpret geographical features, understand mathematical formulas, and perceive acceptable behaviors. Piaget (1976) first formally introduced schemas as mental structures able to be altered by new information, but the principle can be traced back to Aristotle, Plato, and Immanuel Kant.

As we grow, schemas can be changed and reconstructed. Children most easily and frequently alter schemas, but adults also experience changes (Axelrod, 1973). There are two ways in which schemas can change: assimilation and accommodation. When an individual experiences a new environment or receives new information, they assimilate the new information into an existing schema. The new information does not change the overall schema, rather, it adds to the pre-existing schema. For example, if a child knows what a dog is, they have an existing schema to understand the dog. If the child sees a dog do something new, like bark or catch a frisbee, they enter a state of disequilibrium, seek reinforcement, and assimilate the new information into an existing schema. However, through accommodation, existing schemas are changed or new schemas are formed (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). If the same child sees a cat for

the first time, they must form a new schema and accommodate a novel problem. While cats share many characteristics with dogs, they cannot fit into the same schema. A schema can be something specific like recognizing a dog or cat or an elaborate category like recognizing types of dogs. In this study, I address elaborate schemas: incarceration, career path, and environmentalism.

There are different types of schemas: person or self-schemas, role schemas, and event schemas (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Person schemas refer to impressions and characteristics of oneself. Role schemas refer to one's occupation or social role and event schemas include gatherings, meetings, and routines. This thesis will focus on participant's self-schemas and role schemas.

Schema theory focuses on individuals and how each person understands and cognitively processes the world (Axelrod, 1973). As such, this study will focus on each participant's individual schemas while also identifying patterns related to changes in schema. Bullough and Knowles (1991) used a similar model to examine individual schemas. They evaluated how a new teacher's understanding of herself and her teaching changed over her first-year teaching. They interviewed and collected journals from one teacher throughout her first year of teaching to observe changes in thoughts and ideas on her professional identity. They found that her self-schema of teaching remained largely the same but had to assimilate or reframe based on conditions. While I plan to interview past coordinators rather than follow one coordinator through their first year in the position, the same principle of observing how schemas change applies to this thesis.

2.3 Working in a prison environment

As outlined in chapter one, prisons are a unique and closed work environment with a variety of tensions, power dynamics, and stressors. Correctional staff are responsible for maintaining safety and security for themselves, coworkers, and incarcerated individuals in their care. Long term exposure to stress from maintaining safety, encountering manipulation, coworker conflict, negative media portrayals of corrections, low pay, overtime work, and sexual harassment often leads to burnout, decreased work performance, depression or suicide, family challenges, or early retirement (Finn, 2000). Correctional officers also often experience negative attitudes and pessimistic feelings after working in prisons (Dollars & Sinefield, 1998). Many prison staff experience a conflict between their role as a security officer and a rehabilitation agent. Split between roles, officers have high job demands, limited decision-making opportunities, and minimal colleague support (Bourbaonnais et al., 2007). As a result, many correctional officers experience an increase in levels of neuroticism, adverse health effects, and additional stress (Suliman & Einat, 2018).

Some prison officers also experience a decline in conscientiousness, or how they perform and approach work and agreeableness (Einat & Suliman, 2021). A decline in conscientiousness may represent a transition among prison officers who enter the job with energy and motivation and gradually become more pessimistic, less dedicated, and more disorganized. Prison officer's split role may contribute to the loss of conscientiousness as officers are forced to adjust and abandon previous worldviews. Einat and Suliman note that "prison service encourages its officers, both officially and unofficially, to be flexible in their attitudes and traits" (Suliman & Einat, 2018, p. 12). Maintaining more flexible attitudes and worldviews may make schema accommodation more likely among prison staff or graduate student coordinators.

After recognizing the challenging dual role that corrections officers hold, Hazlett (2022) applied Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to the relationship between correctional officers and incarcerated individuals. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire works to design an education system with oppressed people and for oppressed people to become more free. He notes that oppressors often treat people as objects and view freedom as a threat while oppressed individuals become more alienated and as a result begin to see the oppressors as good. In prison, corrections officers can be equated to the oppressors. However, Hazlett notes that corrections officers are often also oppressed by "internalized carceral ideology, socioeconomic marginalization, and dehumanization". In choosing to partner with Amend, WA DOC may have recognized some of the characteristics discussed by Freire and pursued building relationships between incarcerated individuals and DOC staff in accordance with Freire's idea that one group cannot liberate an oppressed group without the involvement of the oppressed group.

2.4 Areas of research

This research focused on three categories: career path, environmentalism, and incarceration. The subsections below provide a brief description of what a schema for each area of focus may include.

2.4.1 Career Path

Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) Coordinators are graduate students enrolled in either the Masters of Public Administration or Masters of Environmental Studies programs at Evergreen State College. Some coordinators enter the program with a clear career path vision for post-graduation. However, many coordinators enter the program without a clear planned career path. In this study, career path schemas could include skill development, areas of research interest, future professional goals, and current jobs.

2.4.2 Environmentalism

Most SPP coordinators are students in the Masters of Environmental Studies program at Evergreen. As such, in this study environmentalism was defined by each participant and varied in scope. Environmentalism schemas could be narrow and limited to conservation work or carbon emissions and climate change. However, schemas for environmentalism can also be broad and include the built environment, social justice issues, and incarceration.

2.4.3 Incarceration

In this study, schemas for incarceration included thoughts on the carceral system, mass incarceration, incarcerated individuals, policies, and the prison environment. Common perspectives on incarceration may include abolition, pro-incarceration or rehabilitation advocacy. Schemas on incarceration also include characteristics of the environment, personal relationships, or emotional reactions to the prison environment.

2.5 Conclusion

Through the literature, I explored the history and conditions of incarceration, science and sustainability programs in prisons, and schemas surrounding careers, incarceration, and environmentalism. From this information, I return to my research question: *How does coordinating environmental education programs in Washington State prisons affect individuals' schemas as they relate to careers, environmentalism, and incarceration?* Power dynamics and context in the prison environment influence SPP graduate student coordinator's experience. However, a lasting change in schema would require SPP coordinators to accommodate and change existing knowledge based on their experiences in prisons.

3. Methods

In this thesis, I aimed to determine if and how former graduate student coordinators experienced a change in schema while working for the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP). I used both a survey and semi-structured interviews to accommodate different communication preferences and styles. Due to the nature of the research and potential professional conflicts, I designed the survey to provide space for anonymous written answers with the opportunity for elaboration and additional conversations in semi-structured interviews. In the survey, I collected quantitative, qualitative, and demographic data. In interviews, I collected qualitative experiential information. Prior to conducting any interviews or distributing the survey, I obtained approval from The Evergreen State College Internal Review Board.

3.1 Participants

To be eligible to participate in this research, an individual must have previously worked as a graduate student coordinator with SPP and not be currently working in that role. SPP maintains a contact list of previous student coordinators that currently includes 53 individuals. I sent invitation emails to all previous graduate student coordinators on the existing contact list. Eight of the 53 individuals did not have active emails on the contact sheet, and two of the available emails were no longer active. As a result, I sent participation requests to 43 individuals.

3.2 Survey Data

I invited all participants to complete a voluntary ten-question survey estimated to take ten to twenty minutes. Most participants completed the survey before sharing their experiences in an interview. However, a few individuals completed the survey after their interview and five individuals chose to participate in only the interview portion. Because the survey was

anonymous, the proportion of students who completed the survey before or after the interview is unknown.

I designed the survey to collect demographic information and quantitative measurements through a Likert-item model with a five-point scale per question. The demographic questions collected aggregate data without revealing any identifying information. After closing the survey, I analyzed each question separately to find the central tendency and distribution. To see the questions asked, please see **Appendix B**.

3.3 Interviews

In addition to distributing a survey, I invited former graduate student SPP coordinators to participate in semi-structured interviews about their experience working with environmental education programs in prisons and lasting perspectives. I shared the research goals and interview questions with participants before the interviews, via email, to ensure participants felt comfortable, prepared, and able to withdraw from the study if necessary. I held interviews either in person or via Zoom.

I developed four interview questions, with one or two clarifying questions to explore former coordinators' experiences working with SPP and its lasting impact on their perspectives and schemas. I designed the interview questions based on previous studies on SPP programs completed by Masters of Environmental Studies students, historical context, and preexisting literature. See **Appendix C** for all interview questions. Although the questions served as the foundation of each interview, I omitted some questions and added supplemental questions throughout each interview. For example, if a previous coordinator described a specific interaction with Department of Corrections (WA DOC) staff, I added a question asking them to

elaborate on their relationships with WA DOC staff. Most interviews lasted thirty to forty-five minutes, with the shortest interview taking only fifteen minutes and the longest just over an hour.

I chose to manually transcribe each interview rather than using a text-to-speech application to remind myself of the conversations and listen for changes in tone or vocal cues throughout the interview. While I recorded most interviews, at least one participant requested not to be recorded. Instead of recording, I took notes during the interview and coded the notes.

3.4 Codes and Analysis

I analyzed responses to each interview question and survey short-answer question for general themes. I aimed to extract themes that described participant experiences under three categories: career path, environmentalism, and incarceration. Then, each theme was assigned a code that described participant experiences. Participants shared many personal stories and experiences from their time with the Sustainability in Prisons Project. I aimed to represent experiences under each code without including any personal information. The examples associated with each code in the following section have been carefully selected to avoid including any potentially identifying information. I also used R to find the central tendency and distribution for survey question responses.

3.5 Participant Identities

Twenty-one individuals completed the demographic survey portion of this study. Participant ages fell between 26 and 49, with a median age of 33. Of those participants, 61.9 percent identified as female while 38.1 percent identified as male, non-binary, or other. Notably, participant identities differed greatly from the identities of incarcerated individuals described in the Literature Review **Section 1.4: Incarceration in Washington State**. While People of Color are disproportionately incarcerated, 86 percent of participants in this study identified as white.

Participants worked in a variety of roles during their time with SPP. Some coordinator roles included: Conservation Nursery Coordinator, Workshop/Lecture Series Coordinator, Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly Coordinator, Green Track Coordinator. Some coordinators worked with SPP as recently as 2021 while other coordinators were ten years removed from their roles. Coordinators generally held their position for one to three years while completing their degree at the Evergreen State College.

4. Experiences and Perspectives

4.1 Overview

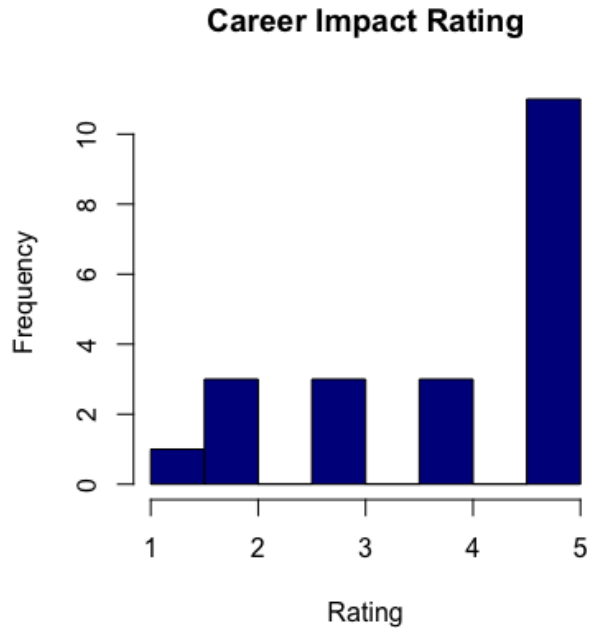
The following section outlines common themes and potential changes in schema for each of the three focus areas: career path, environmentalism, and incarceration. My coding of the interview transcripts resulted in three themes under the environmentalism category, 14 under career path, and 19 under incarceration. In the following sections I will briefly explain each code and provide examples using quotes from the survey and interviews. Then I will describe how the codes fit into schema theory in which schemas are structures of knowledge that help us understand the world and if or how they demonstrate patterns of schema assimilation (adding new information to existing schemas) or accommodation (building a new schema in response to new information or experiences). Each area of research also has a bar chart highlighting how significantly participants indicated that their experiences shaped their perspectives for that category.

4.2 Career Path

Within the topic of careers, I divided codes into three groups: previous work, continued work, and influence. Participants indicated that their time with SPP impacted their perspectives on career paths slightly significantly, moderately significantly, very significantly, or extremely significantly. Figure four below shows the distribution of responses ranging from 1.0 (not at all significantly) to 5.0 (extremely significantly). Career path had the most individuals rate the impact on their perspectives as extremely significantly and second highest average rating. Therefore, a handful of individuals experienced a very strong change in schema for career path during their time with SPP. The following sections begin by examining coordinator perspectives prior to their time at SPP then examine individual's perspectives post-coordinator position and the overall influence of the position on their perspectives.

Figure 4.

Distribution of significance ratings for career path.



4.2.1 Category 1: Previous Work

Participants entered their coordinator role from a wide variety of backgrounds and with diverse interests. Some coordinators expressed that they considered SPP their first office job and experience working with sustainability, conservation, and the carceral system. These coordinators often entered the position right after completing an undergraduate degree or from a position in another field. One coordinator noted that “Working at SPP was my first ecology, restoration, environmental job that I’d ever done.” Many of the coordinators who expressed that SPP was their first job did not have a clear vision for their future career path but viewed SPP as an opportunity to explore a variety of jobs. Several participants expressed that the SPP’s blend of education, conservation, and environmental work made the coordinator role feel like a natural way to explore different career options and enter a professional role for the first time.

On the other hand, some participants stated that their role at SPP matched their academic interests and planned career path. Several participants had prior experience in conservation or environmental education work that they hoped to continue after their time with SPP. One coordinator noted that SPP “felt like it would be the perfect job to bridge careers. It involved things I was already good at and then the direction I wanted to go.” This coordinator did not experience a change in perspective or career path during their time at SPP. Rather, they continued to develop their current career path and expand skills. Therefore, this quote and coordinator experience is an example of schema assimilation in which the coordinator continued expand their existing career path schema with new information but did not encounter any contradicting information.

While many participants expressed that their role at SPP broadly matched their interests and desired future career paths in social justice or conservation work, other coordinators did not have a background related to the specific conservation program they worked with. For example, few butterfly program coordinators had prior experience working with the Taylor’s Checkerspot Butterfly.

A handful of coordinators expressed that they chose to pursue a graduate degree at The Evergreen State College because they were interested in furthering their career path and working with SPP. One participant expressed that

I just remember that I had a couple choices where I could have gone for graduate school. But, getting the job offer from SPP was what solidified me going to Evergreen. Like, I would not have gone to Evergreen if SPP had not offered me the job.

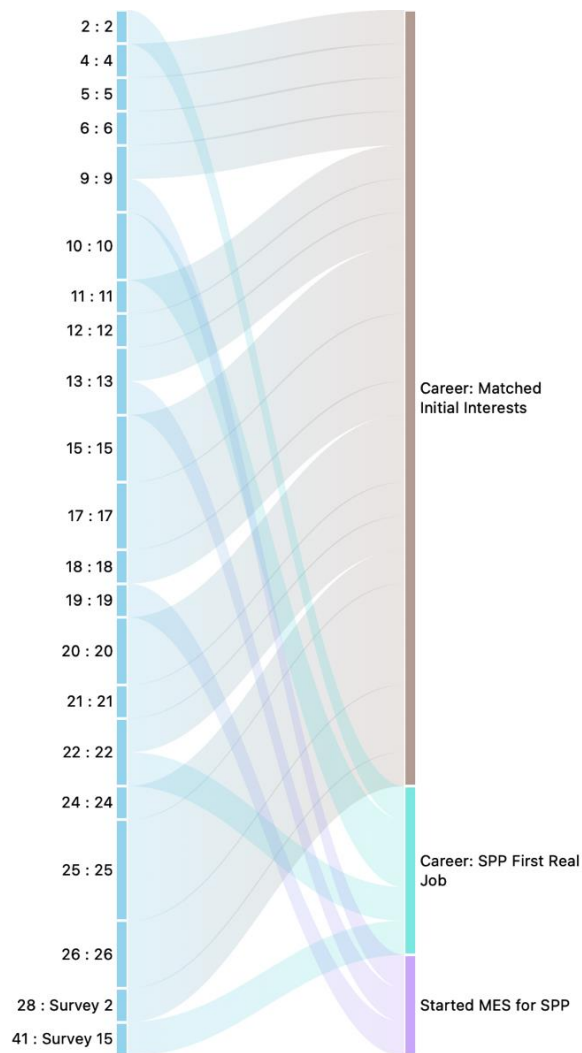
This quote and participant does not necessarily represent a clear example of schema assimilation or accommodation. However, knowing that some coordinators come to Evergreen masters programs at least in part because of the opportunity to work with SPP further

demonstrates that many coordinators came into the positions with an existing interest in environmental, social justice, and work with the carceral system. This context could also inform future outreach initiatives to recruit SPP coordinators or Evergreen students.

The Sankey diagram below in Figure five displays the frequencies of codes associated with the previous work category for career paths. The numbers on the left of the diagram represent one interview or survey. I assigned a number to each interview and survey to identify each response while maintaining participant anonymity. For example, 2:2 is the second interview that I completed. The right side of the diagram highlights the codes that I identified under *previous interests* in the numbered interviews and surveys. The Sankey Diagram below displays frequency of each numbered interview, not correlation, and the width of the various bars reflects the frequency. Wider bars indicate that the code appeared more often while thinner bars indicate that the code appeared less frequently. This figure highlights that most participants entered their role interested in working in a similar field in the future.

Figure 5.

Sankey diagram for previous interests.



Participant’s previous work and planned career path influenced what they may have perceived as an option for future work and their career schema. Individuals who had more prior work experience likely had a more expansive pre-existing schema for careers while individuals who expressed that working as an SPP coordinator was their first job may have had a narrower view of possibilities of schema. The following table highlights one example of schema accommodation and schema assimilation based on their previous experience.

Table 1.

Career Path: Previous Experience Assimilation and Accommodation

Schema	Quote	Explanation
Assimilation	“So, I think it did help shape my interests in wanting to go into adult education more, but I was already interested in a lot of the work we were doing. So, in that sense it just kind of added to it I suppose.”	This individual learned information that did not challenge their pre-existing interests and vision career path. They were already interested in education and their experience with SPP added new information and experiences to that schema.
Accommodation	“Before I worked with SPP, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. When I started there, I knew fairly early on that the career I would choose would be within our very messed up criminal justice system.”	This individual came into their position with SPP without a clear career path. They accommodated new information and experiences from working with the carceral system to build a new schema for career path that involved working in corrections. More examples of this experience are outlined in Category 2: Continued Work .

4.2.2 Category 2: Continued Work

After leaving SPP, participants embraced different career paths. Most coordinators continued on to work in conservation or corrections. One coordinator noted that

Working for SPP introduced me to the world of plant propagation for the purposes of habitat restoration. This influenced my future career within the conservation field by providing a baseline understanding of habitat restoration and native plants in Washington State.

Many coordinators who continued to work in conservation expressed that they developed conservation skills during their time with SPP. These coordinators developed new skills working alongside technicians and partner organizations that they continued to use in future positions. For example, one coordinator shared that

Really, I think it was more the nursery part of the work that probably impacted my future career desires or goals more than the prison part because I didn’t end up going into a social justice field or anything like that. So I would say that’s really

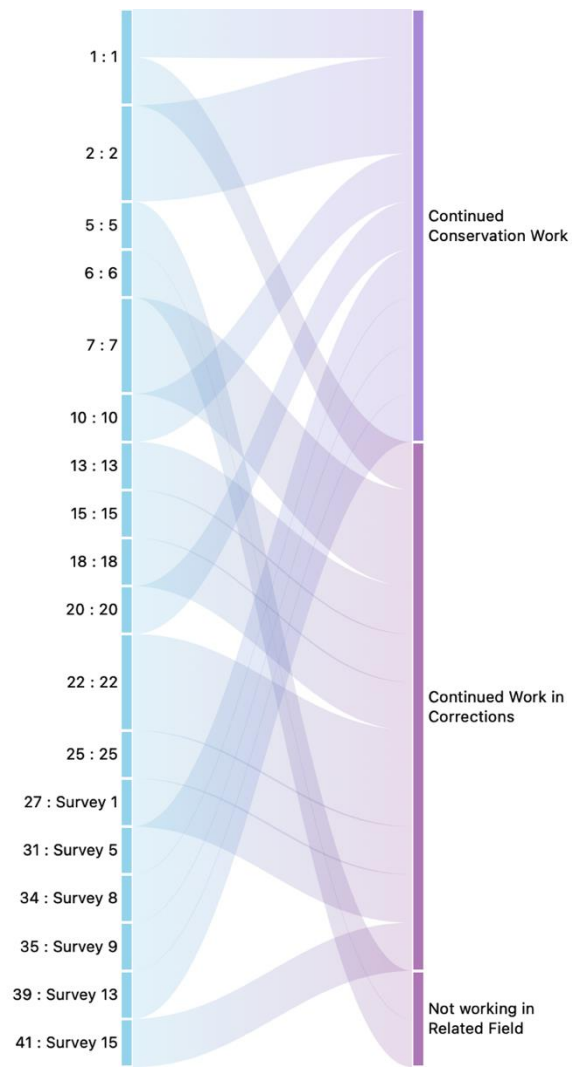
the main way it influenced me—it gave me a good sense of what working at an organization like...would look like.

Other coordinators continued on to work in the carceral system. For example, one coordinator who continued work in corrections noted that “I decided I would continue working in prisons. So, it changed, like, my whole career path. I didn’t have a career path and then all the sudden I was like; I want to do this.”

A handful of coordinators shared that they do not work in conservation, sustainability, environmental education, or a field related to their work at SPP. The Sankey diagram below provides insight into the split between how many participants continued work in environmental fields or corrections.

Figure 6.

Sankey diagram for continued work.



The following table highlights one example of schema accommodation and schema assimilation based on where coordinators continued in a professional capacity after leaving SPP.

Table 2.

Career Path: Continued Work Assimilation and Accomodation

Schema	Quote	Explanation
Assimilation	“The prison-related part of SPP didn't really affect my career path much that I can see. The conservation nursery part though did help push me towards working in natural resources -- since then I worked at a native plant garden, (briefly) at an organic farm, and then began work in forestry and related jobs.”	This individual came into their position with SPP with an interest in conservation nursery work. They developed new skills that matched their pre-existing vision for their career path and assimilated that information into the existing schema.
Accommodation	“Corrections education was new to me at the time. When I first came to Evergreen and I worked for SPP and learned a little bit more. So in that sense it was like the perfect stepping stone if you will.”	Corrections education did not previously fit into this individual’s schema for career path. However, during their time with SPP they built a new schema for career path that included corrections education and eventually continued down that career path. Corrections education did not necessarily fit into what this coordinator previously viewed as possible in a career, so they had to build an entirely new schema.

4.2.3 Category 3: Influence

Participants expressed that their time with SPP influenced their career path in different ways. Some coordinators shifted their academic studies and thesis research based on their experience working with SPP programs. Other coordinators described transitioning to focus on human-centered work. One coordinator was surprised to find a new interest in social justice work noting that “I had mostly wanted to do, like, hard environmental science things but that social

justice component was really fulfilling and eye-opening. I was like, I could potentially do that in the future!” Similarly, several participants expressed that their time at SPP expanded their career interests and possibilities for future jobs. Some participants expressed that SPP offered a view of what environmental related careers might look like because the work involved both hands-on and office work. One coordinator stated that

I always felt like to be working in an environmental field, you have to be, like, really hands on- the one providing the knowledge or collecting the data. But, in the background there are people coordinating it, there’s people who are managing grants and relationships and things like that. So, it kinda broadened my perspective on what careers can look like.

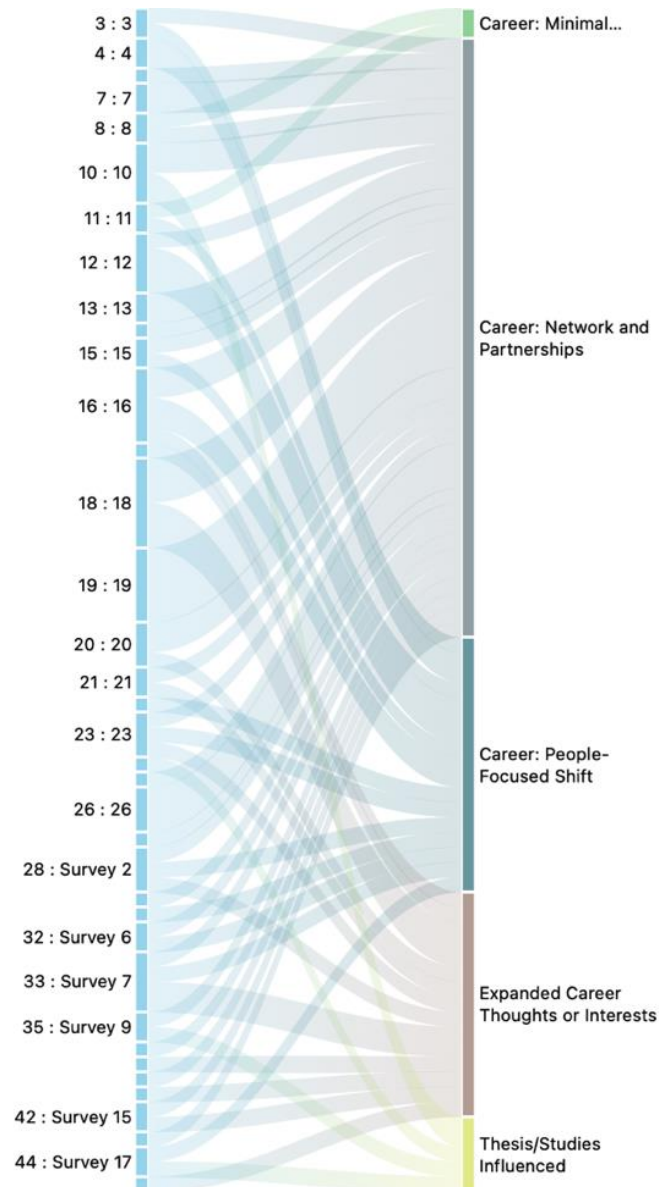
While most participants indicated their role at SPP had some influence of their perspectives on career path, other coordinators entered their role and Masters program with specific interests and a desired career path. Participants also noted that it is difficult to separate their experience working with SPP from their academic studies to identify where their career interests shifted.

The most common code in the career category was network and partnerships. Participants most frequently expressed that their new relationships and the SPP network influenced their perspective on careers. They noted that SPP offered opportunities to interact with Washington Department of Corrections (WA DOC) staff, incarcerated individuals, conservation groups, state agencies, nonprofits, Evergreen faculty, and colleagues in their academic program. Several participants continued to work with a partner organization or state agency after their time with SPP. One coordinator shared that “I think one of the most valuable things for me and my career that came out of SPP were the relationships that I built with folks working with different state agencies on conservation initiatives.” Participants also noted that the skills they developed in managing partnerships with SPP and engaging with stakeholders proved useful in their career

paths. Below is a Sankey diagram that highlights the frequency of each code related to influence on careers.

Figure 7.

Sankey diagram for influence on career path.



Participant's described a variety of changes to their career path schema. As noted in **Category 1: Previous Work**, changes to schema for career path largely depended on each participant's prior experiences and how established their career path vision was when they started working as a coordinator. Coordinators who learned that working in the environmental field does not always have to be hands on or who established a new human-centered careers are examples of schema accommodation. These individuals learned new information during their time with SPP that did not match what they previously envisioned for a career path. As a result, they had to build a new schema for career path. On the contrary, coordinators who continued pursuing their previous interests and planned career path are examples of schema assimilation or no change in schema. Some coordinators who continued to pursue pre-existing interests and careers experienced schema assimilation, however some individuals indicated that they did not add any new information or expand their schema for career path. See the chart below for specific examples of schema assimilation and accommodation.

Table 3.

Career Path: Influence Assimilation and Accommodation

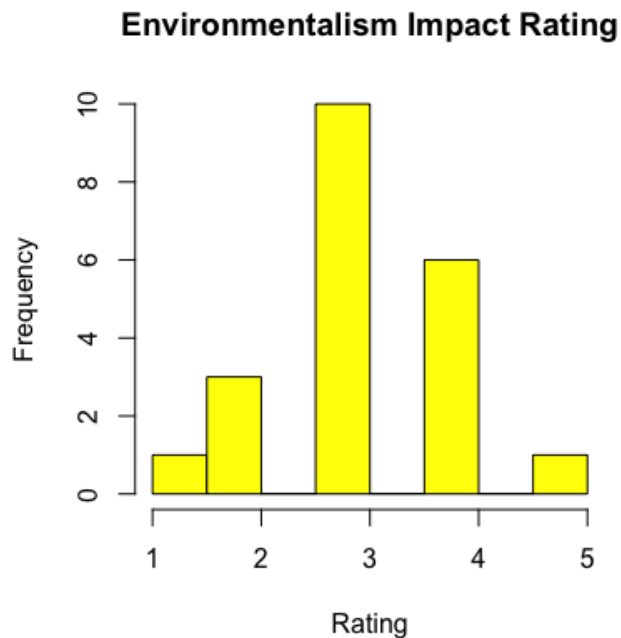
Schema	Quote	Explanation
No Change	“But, I don’t think for example-working for SPP didn’t make me want to change anything and become like a plant expert or go work for a nursery, as much as I love plants.”	This individual learned new information about plants and working in a conservation nursery during their time with SPP. However, they did not learn anything that changed what they already imagined for their career path. This individual did not necessarily have to assimilate or accommodate any information for their career path schema. While they learned new skills, they did not relate to what they envisioned for a future career path.
Assimilation	“My career path changed significantly because of my work with SPP. I realized that my passion for environmental education was based more in my passion for facilitating connection with the natural world (humans included). I shifted from environmental education to community-based work with environmental education incorporated into it and a focus on working to break down the school to prison pipeline through facilitating community connection and support for youth experiencing barriers to success.”	This individual was previously interested in working in environmental education and assimilated what they learned during their time at SPP to incorporate a focus on community-based work. They expressed that their interest in community-based work did not necessarily challenge or contradict their interest in environmental education work. Rather, they continued to grow that schema by adding an emphasis on community-based work.
Accommodation	“Applying to SPP was already an intentionally big change in my career path, and I have many personal reasons while my career path diverged so significantly. However my time with SPP showed me the diversity of work within the environmental field and allowed me to find contentment and even enjoyment doing work I thought I never wanted to do.”	This individual opened their career path schema by choosing to apply for a coordinator position. They gained experience working in an unfamiliar field and created a new schema for that type of work.

4.3 Environmentalism

Within the topic of environmentalism, participants demonstrated the most consensus on how their time with SPP impacted their perspectives on environmentalism. Participants were allowed to choose whether their time at SPP impacted their sense of environmentalism not at all significantly, slightly significantly, moderately significantly, very significantly, or extremely significantly. Figure 8 below shows the distribution of responses ranging from 1.0 (not at all significantly) to 5.0 (extremely significantly). Environmentalism had the lowest average significance ranking out of the three categories of research.

Figure 8

Significance rating for environmentalism.



Most interview participants were students in the Master of Environmental Studies at Evergreen program while they worked with SPP. As such, they expressed that their perspectives on environmentalism were well established when they entered their role with SPP. A few coordinators noted that their perspectives on environmentalism did not change but that they

developed some new conservation knowledge or skills. However, most participants expressed that their perspective on environmentalism expanded to encompass how different people and populations can engage in environmentalism. Participants described a shift in perspective that centered on making nature and sustainability, or environmental education, accessible for everyone. Participants also shared that their perspectives shifted to emphasize storytelling and communication rather than just management or conservation work. One coordinator noted that their time at SPP “illuminated how environmentalism is intersectional and that access to and participating stewardship is diverse” while another coordinator stated that “SPP influenced me by showing me that environmentalism can be and should be inclusive, that everyone belongs.”

Participants whose perspectives on environmentalism expanded or became more broad experienced schema assimilation. Their environmental schema was already established, and for most participants, the new information did not mismatch or challenge their existing thoughts. Rather, it added to their existing schema and collected new information on environmentalism. Most participants did not need to build a new schema like the child who had only seen a dog but never a cat. Instead, they added new information to their existing schema for environmentalism much like the child would do if they learned that dogs could bark for the first time.

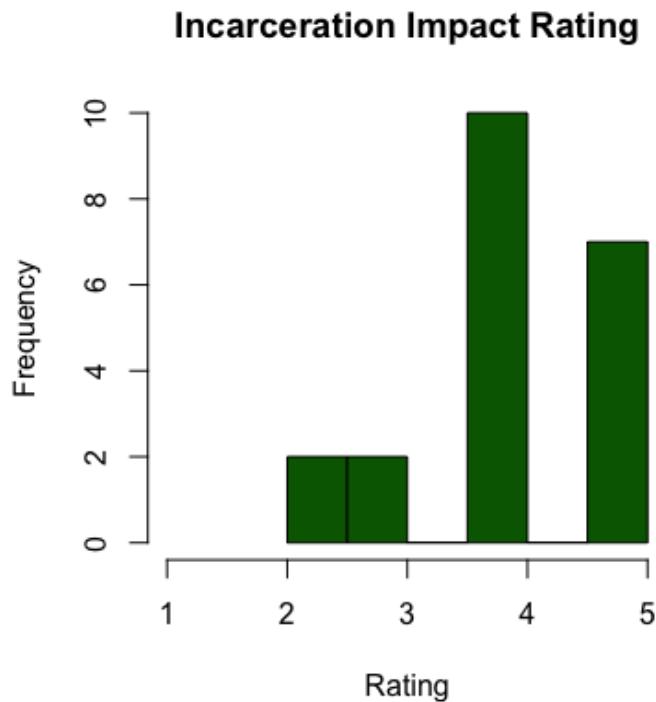
4.4 Incarceration

Within the topic of incarceration, I coded comments into four groups: Experiences and Emotions, Overall Experience, Previous Connections with Incarceration, and Relationships. Each code group contains several themes and individual codes. Overall, individuals indicated that their time at SPP impacted their perspectives on incarceration slightly significantly, moderately significantly, very significantly, or extremely significantly. Notably, no individuals rated the impact on their perspectives on incarceration as not at all significantly. Figure 9 below

shows the distribution of responses ranging from 2.0 (slightly significantly) to 5.0 (extremely significantly).

Figure 9.

Distribution of significance ratings for incarceration.



The median impact rating score for incarceration impact was 4.00 or very significantly. The mean impact rating was slightly higher at 4.048 or just above very significantly. Out of all three areas of research (incarceration, environmentalism, career path), incarceration had the highest mean rating. It is likely that incarceration had the highest mean rating because participants had the least previous experience and knowledge on this focus area and through their work with SPP gained much in that area.

4.4.1 Category 1: Previous Experience with Incarceration

Individuals came into their roles with SPP with different experiences and relationships with incarceration. Participants' previous experience with incarceration influenced their experience during prison visits, reshaped their pre-existing views on incarceration, and contributed to how established their schema on incarceration was prior to working at SPP. Participants described three primary types of previous experience with incarceration: First Prison Experience, Personal Experience with Incarceration, and Previous Work with Incarceration.

Most individuals shared that they were introduced to the prison environment for the first time while working for SPP; their previous experience was limited to media representations of incarceration. Some coordinators who entered the prison environment for the first time noted that the experience was overwhelming, intimidating, and emotionally charged. Further, several individuals were particularly stressed by the protocols, restrictions, and hierarchies within the prison environment when they first entered. One individual shared that

Walking into it, of course, the first time is really overwhelming. You have to go through all the doors and checks and like make sure you didn't leave your cell phone in your pocket or your keys or any of that. So it was definitely very interesting and something I had never experienced before.

However, some individuals found entering the prison environment easier, sharing that

My first day was in prison at SPP, which I don't think is always the case. That was kind of a fun experience to just jump right in and not maybe build up ideas in my head or something or get scared.

Category 2: Relationships, below, highlights how some coordinators came to feel more or less comfortable in the prison environment with time by building relationships with both incarcerated individuals and staff.

While most individuals entered the prison environment for the first time as a graduate-student coordinator, some individuals came into their roles as coordinators with personal or professional connections to incarceration. Participants with a personal connection with incarceration were either previously incarcerated or had a close friend or family member incarcerated prior to their time working with SPP. Although these individuals had a greater familiarity with the prison environment and more knowledge on what to expect during a visit, they shared many of the feelings of being overwhelmed, fear, and anxiety in the prison environment that individuals with no prior experience felt. One participant shared that

I have family who have been incarcerated. So I have like, a personal experience with it. It wasn't something new to me and didn't really--like I knew some things about the way all of that worked. I think that some things that were new to me in that experience were just like actually experiencing it. So even though I had heard from people who I know who had been incarcerated, seeing some of it was difficult at times.

Another participant shared that

I grew up with friends and family members who were incarcerated so I've been going to prisons since I was an infant and I've been doing education work since I was eighteen, so I already had a pretty strong foundation. And, I would never say I am comfortable in a prison system. It's not a comfortable place. But, it's an environment I was already familiar with when I started.

For some individuals, entering the prison environment felt traumatizing or re-traumatizing, showing more of what they or loved ones experienced while incarcerated. SPP provides training materials to support staff on what to expect during their first facility visit, annual workshops or trainings with previously incarcerated individuals, and bi-weekly space in staff meetings for sharing and working through safety or security concerns. However, there are not resources specifically designed to support individuals with previous experience with

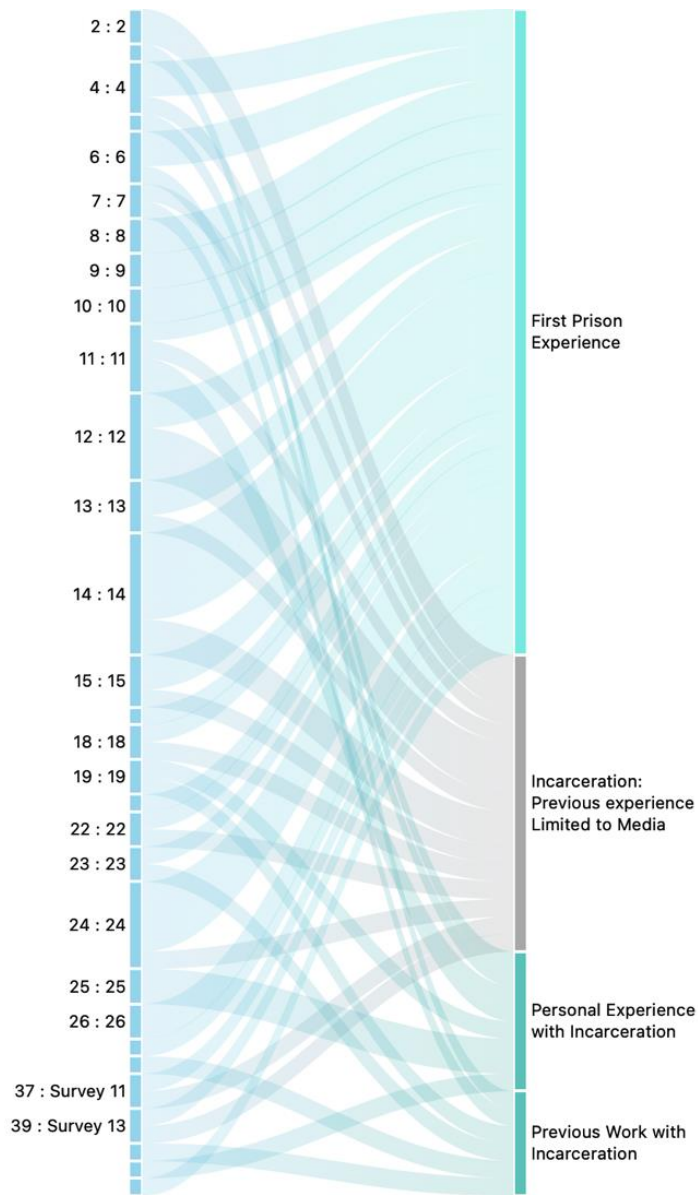
incarceration. See **Additional Findings** (Section 4.5) for more information on what participant's shared about their experiences working in the SPP offices and as a member of the staff team.

A handful of individuals also worked in the prison environment or with incarcerated individuals prior to their time with SPP. Most individuals supervised and guided work crews in forestry programs outside the prison. A few worked or volunteered with various programs within the prison. Participants who had previously worked in the prison environment did not express discomfort entering the prison environment in the same way that individuals with a personal connection did. However, some individuals who continued to work in corrections after their time at SPP noted that their experience in the prison environment shifted to become more challenging as they entered the facilities more regularly, often on a daily basis. While some individuals who continued working in corrections found the experience of entering daily challenging, they shared that they liked that they could work more regularly with incarcerated individuals and have a more direct impact in their role.

The Sankey diagram below in Figure 10 displays the frequencies of codes associated with **Incarceration Category 1: Previous Experience with Incarceration**. On the left is all the interviews and surveys in which the identified codes appear and codes identified are on the right. The chart provides a visual verification that most participants entered the prison environment for the first time as SPP graduate student coordinators.

Figure 10.

Sankey diagram for previous experience with incarceration.



Many of the individuals who entered the prison environment for the first time as SPP coordinators shared experiences that indicate a change in schema. Some coordinators had to create an entirely new schema or accommodate the information. For example, for individuals who expressed that their prior experience with incarceration was limited to portrayals in the

media, their schema for incarceration were broad and expanded upon their first visit. The first time they walked through the gates and had to scan their badge, wait for a door to unlock, or entered the large courtyard gardens, participants gained new information that may not have matched what they previously thought of the prison environment. Rather, participants who stated that their previous views of the carceral system were limited to media often described that their previous schemas included images of a very dangerous environment in which individuals wear matching jumpsuits and are completely isolated. Several participants referenced shows and movies like *Orange is the New Black* or *Prison Break* when describing their views of prison prior to working as an SPP coordinator. Just like the child who saw a cat for the first time had to adapt their understanding of pets, many of the participant student coordinators had to adapt their understanding of incarceration and accommodate a new schema. Students with personal or professional experience with incarceration likely did not have to build an entirely new schema. However, they may have encountered factors that did not meet their previous experience and also had to accommodate if they could not assimilate or fit the information into their existing schema.

4.4.2 Category 2: Relationships

Most graduate student SPP coordinators entered the prison environment approximately once a week for one to three years. As a result, coordinators spent a significant amount of time with incarcerated students or technicians and WA DOC staff. Some coordinators, particularly those who worked with living plants and animals, worked closely with a small crew of incarcerated technicians during their time with SPP. Many of these participant coordinators shared that they built relationships with the technicians based on the conservation work. They described experiences building relationships with incarcerated technicians while also

establishing professional boundaries. Some coordinators even maintained lasting relationships with incarcerated technicians, sharing that “I’m still in touch with a couple of those technicians that are now out in the world and doing really amazing things” or “As I continued working in the programs, I developed friendships with the people I was working with and met through the programs that still continue today”. Many of the participants also described a sense of pride in their relationship with incarcerated technicians. They expressed a sense of fulfillment in discussing environmental and conservation topics with technicians and their growing relationship.

Participant’s relationship with incarcerated individuals often humanized their perspectives of the prison environment. One coordinator described their experience building relationships with incarcerated technicians and noted that “something really shifted there where the incarcerated students suddenly shifted from being a number to being a human being.” Another coordinator shared that “Overall, the experiences I had with the incarcerated women, forming relationships with them and talking about like future career goals, I think that was really transformative.”

Many coordinators were surprised to find an active community within the confines of the prison environment. Coordinators described feeling connected to the incarcerated community as they built relationships with students and technicians and embraced a front-row view of incarceration. Upon reflection, several coordinators expressed that their relationships with incarcerated individuals shifted their perspectives on the prison system. One coordinator stated that

Walking into a prison and meeting somebody and shaking somebody's hand who has been through the system--the broken system--and talking to people, getting to know them, and having shared interests, it really shifted my perspective and really focused my attention on working with that population.

While participants described their relationship with incarcerated individuals as having a positive impact, they also noted that it was emotionally challenging. One participant noted that

The doors are closed and there's like all these processes you have to go through to connect with somebody and get to know the system behind the scenes. It really reinforces the dehumanizing nature that the system is built to be. And, yeah. It's hard to go inside a prison and meet people and realize they're people.

However, although most participant coordinators described a close relationship with incarcerated technicians, coordinators with less direct interaction with incarcerated students and technicians shared fewer experiences building relationships. Coordinators who worked in the office or with larger groups of students in lectures or classrooms spent less time interacting directly with incarcerated students. As a result, some coordinators described feeling overwhelmed by interacting with so many students, program demands, and not being able to build relationships and meet the needs of every student.

Participants also described mixed relationships with WA DOC staff. WA DOC Staff support SPP programs on a daily basis when SPP coordinators are not there. Several coordinators expressed their appreciation and respect for facility liaisons and the work they did to support SPP programs outside of their typically assigned responsibilities. While many coordinators were critical of the carceral system and idea of DOC staff when starting their position, several found that DOC staff were supportive and essential to SPP programs. One coordinator recognized the dual responsibilities DOC staff have in promoting security and programming, stating "I respect the fact that they have a really difficult job to do and it's hard to be the bad guy all the time." Other coordinators observed a perspective shift in the staff who work most closely with SPP

programs. Much like SPP coordinators relationships with incarcerated technicians influenced their perspectives on incarceration and humanized the prison environment, coordinators saw relationship dynamics change between DOC staff and incarcerated technicians in the program. A coordinator shared their experience in which they saw “a correctional staff member learning together and working with incarcerated students to care for turtles and noticed a shift in their relationship from human and number to human and human.”

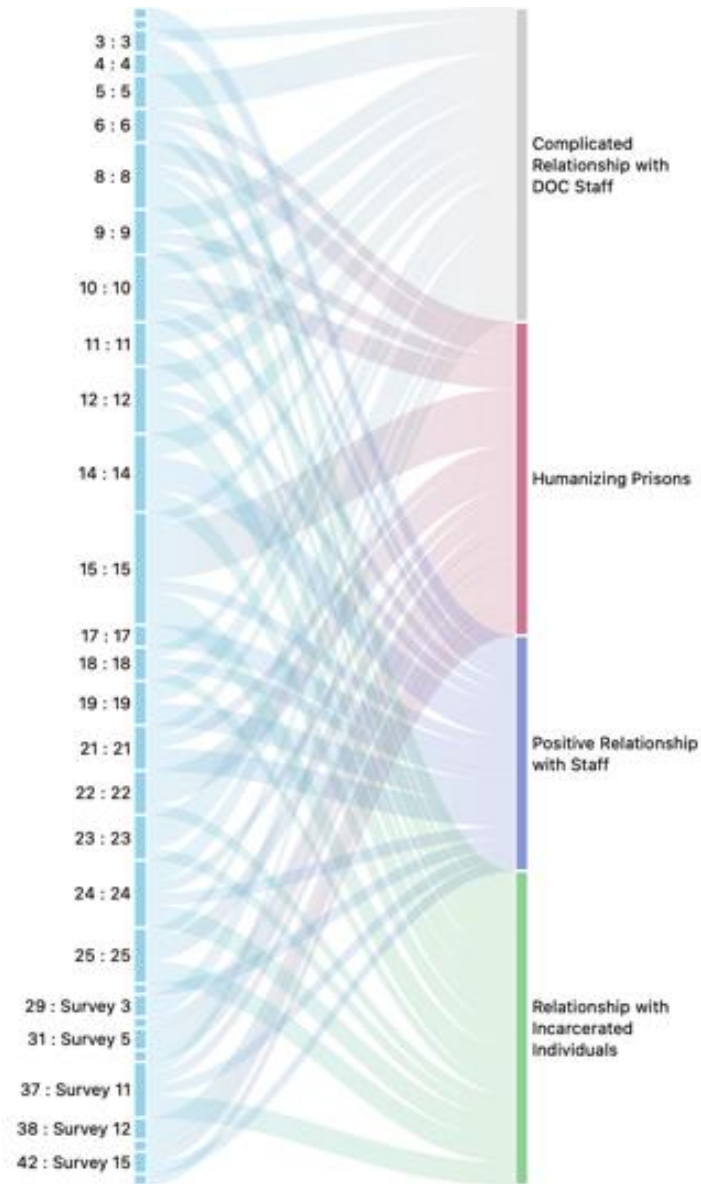
Although many participants had a positive relationship and appreciation for DOC staff, several participants felt uncomfortable around staff or experienced a lack of support from staff. They felt less comfortable or safe around staff members and overwhelmed by the power hierarchy in the prison environment. One coordinator stated

As I spent more and more time in prisons, I actually found that I was more uncomfortable working with correctional staff than I was working with incarcerated people. The military culture they work in and encourage in the US prison system as a whole is extremely unsettling, and broken.

Other coordinators felt discomfort witnessing the interactions between corrections officers and incarcerated individuals, noting that some staff were not interested in rehabilitation and showed hostility towards incarcerated individuals. Several participants cited lack of staff support for programs as a primary challenge and expressed frustration with what they viewed as a “façade to cover up, dismiss or explain away human mistreatment” rather than engage in positive programming.

Figure 11.

Sankey diagram for Incarceration: relationships.



The Sankey diagram above in Figure 11 displays the frequencies of codes associated with Incarceration **Category 2: Relationships**. The chart shows the split between positive and complicated relationships with DOC staff in which complicated relationships were slightly more

common. It also highlights how many different participants touched on themes of humanizing the prison environment or building relationships with incarcerated individuals.

Overall, participants' relationships with incarcerated individuals and DOC staff shaped their experience working in the prison environment. Most coordinators who had positive interactions and built relationships with incarcerated individuals experienced a shift in perspectives related to who is incarcerated. Coordinators expressed that the shift did not represent a transition to a more positive view of the carceral system but to a more nuanced perspective and appreciation and humanization of incarcerated individuals and WA DOC Staff. As noted in **Category 1: Previous Experience with Incarceration**, many participants had little to no previous experience interacting with incarcerated individuals and their previous schema on who is incarcerated was limited to media representations. These individuals described a change in schema to include a more humanized view of incarcerated individuals and the carceral system. Rather than viewing incarceration as a concept or system, participants began to think of their incarcerated colleagues.

While most participants described a positive relationship with incarcerated individuals, they described a mixed relationship with DOC staff. Some individuals described experiences with DOC staff that matched their existing schemas and ideas surrounding the carceral system including the hierarchical structure and lack of focus on restorative justice. These individuals added to existing schemas or experienced schema assimilation as they put names and faces to the people upholding their perspectives. Other individuals experienced a growth in their schema or even had to accommodate with a new schema as positive interactions with DOC staff challenged pre-existing perspectives.

4.4.3 Category 3: Experiences and Emotions

Participants experienced a variety of emotions and conflicts when they entered the prison environment. One of the most common emotions participants described was a sense of anxiety or feeling overwhelmed due to the tense environment, procedures, lack of familiarity with the setting, and pre-existing assumptions. They carried an emotional burden from building relationships with incarcerated individuals and empathizing with the community. Further, many participants described that they felt that they had a lack of capacity to make meaningful change for incarcerated individuals and stressed by their limited capacity for action. Several participants also noted that many incarcerated individuals are survivors of trauma and continue to experience trauma in the prison environment. Regularly interacting with individuals who have experienced trauma and hearing their stories and experiences creates anxiety and tension. Participants also described particularly strong emotional burdens and anxiety entering and leaving the prison environment, sometimes due to not knowing what to expect. One coordinator noted that entering “made me anxious. I never got over that. I would get like sweaty and hyper-alert the whole time and then I would be exhausted when I left.”

In fact, many coordinators felt strong emotions when leaving the prison environment and noted that they experienced exhaustion once they left the facility. One coordinator described the experience as

really bizarre because you know on the one hand you go into the facility and you are there for like a graduation ceremony and it's like fun times and there's like cake and punch and then you leave and you expect to be kind of pumped up on all of that. But, I would go home and cry and take a nap.

On the other hand, some coordinators felt privileged to enter the restricted environment and work with education programs. These participants appreciated the opportunity to witness the prison environment, provide education, and expand their knowledge of the practices in the

carceral system. Similarly, some participants found the environment to be a calm space. These individuals were grounded by the regular schedules or expectations and opportunities for programming and education. However, other participants described the prison environment as gloomy and challenging. Participants noted that “working in a prison was not somewhere that is the most comfortable place to work, you know getting the concept of being searched and locked in behind you.” Another participant noted that

Fun is never the right word when you’re inside a prison, and it shouldn’t be. But it’s hard to find the right word to explain what I felt. It certainly wasn’t a negative feeling overall. There are always negative feelings when you’re in prison, and I think that’s just part of the job.

In addition to strong emotions in relation to prison environments, many participants experienced an internal conflict and identified working within the dynamics of the prison system as their least favorite part of their time as a coordinator. They felt conflicted about working within the carceral system and shared concerns about the nature of their work, similar to those Jewkes and Dominique outlined (2015) regarding sustainability initiatives in prison as a form of green washing. Several participants worried that their work helped make the carceral system more palatable, and sustained its initiatives. However, most coordinators also felt that their work positively impacted the experience of a small portion of the incarcerated population in Washington. Conflict was strongest among participants when they learned about the wages SPP technicians and all incarcerated individuals are paid, living conditions, sentencing, and reasons individuals were incarcerated. For some individuals the conflict remained internal and something they debated individually or with colleagues. However, some participants faced the conflict in a broader sense with the Evergreen community and in their interactions with DOC staff, fellow SPP staff, and incarcerated technicians. Internal conflict was one of the most common themes.

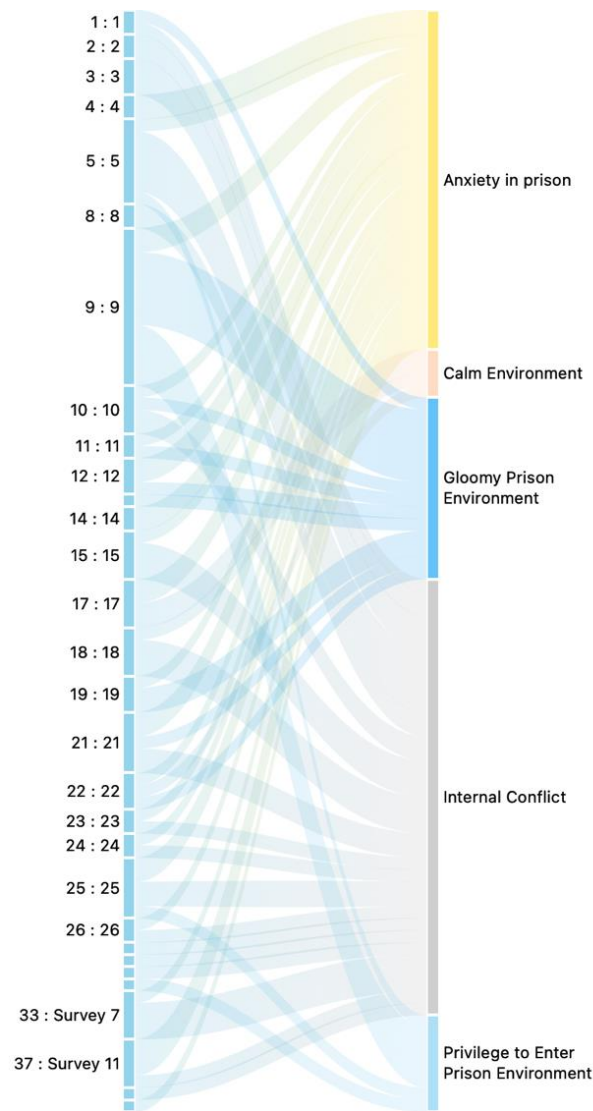
Appendix D highlights several quotes describing participant’s internal conflict. The following chart demonstrates that some coordinators experienced assimilation while others experienced accommodation when encountering an internal conflict.

Table 4. Incarceration: Experiences and Emotions

Schema	Quote	Explanation
Assimilation	“I guess it kind of strengthened ideas I already had. I like definitely believe in restorative justice and that is not the model that most prison systems operate within so it’s hard to see how things are and how people are treated. It’s like to see the reality of it, it kind of strengthened my view that this isn’t- this system isn’t helping and that changes need to be made.”	This individual had a strong belief in restorative justice when they started their position at SPP. They experienced an internal conflict working within a system that did not match their pre-existing beliefs. However, because the conflict did not challenge their pre-existing beliefs, they did not have to build a new schema. Rather, they assimilated their new experiences and deeper knowledge of the prison system to strengthen their existing beliefs and schema about corrections.
Accommodation	“It was also just kind of mind expanding to be, like, this really innovative environmental work is happening and most of the people involved have no intention of abolishing prisons, or really even changing prisons. They’re just, like, seeing this as another opportunity to provide within this structure that they don’t see a problem with. And so that was a weird dichotomy for me to wrestle with. Right, like they are not mutually exclusive. You can be an environmentalist and pro-prison it turns out.”	This individual experienced an internal conflict in which they had to redefine the relationship between environmentalism and incarceration. They had to accommodate new information that challenged their previous view that environmentalism and incarceration are mutually exclusive.

Figure 12.

Sankey diagram for Experiences and Emotions.



The Sankey diagram above in Figure 12 displays the frequencies of codes associated with Incarceration **Category 3: Experiences and Emotions**. The chart shows the split between perceiving the prison environment as calm or gloomy: gloominess was over twice as common. It also highlights how often participant's described feeling a sense of anxiety or overwhelm in prison and experienced an internal conflict.

Participants emotional response to the prison environment shaped their interactions and how they experienced the prison environment. For some coordinators, the anxiety, overwhelm, disappointment, and exhaustion they experienced in the prison environment contributed to schema assimilation where they incorporated new feelings and knowledge into an existing schema. For other coordinators, seeing a calm prison environment may have required them to accommodate and build a new schema. However, each individuals' prior knowledge and experience is unique and each code does not indicate clear accommodation or assimilation. Participant's internal conflict is a representation of their schemas for incarceration expanding, developing, or establishing for the first time. The conflict represents a challenge to existing schemas with new knowledge, positionally, and relationships.

4.4.4 Category 4: Overall Experience

The final category for incarceration is Overall Experience. This category includes the following codes: Incarceration: Location Impacts Experience, Rose Colored Glasses, Security Concerns, Incarceration: Expanded Perspective, and Incarceration: No Change.

Participant's experience in the prison environment may have impacted how their perspectives on incarceration developed. Coordinators worked in a variety of different prisons as described in ***Section 1.6 Background: The Sustainability in Prisons Project***. Some coordinators had the opportunity to work at and visit multiple facilities and see the different communities. Those coordinators found it "surprising how different the culture is from prison to prison. You know there is a general culture in corrections but really I think that's based on like the population that is there and then also the outside community that influences in different ways." Participants also noted differences in men's and women's facilities and in different security levels. Some

participants worked primarily outside of the fenced prison environment in conservation programs while others worked within the fenced area.

Participants also noted that their experience of the prison environment and perspectives were limited to SPP areas. Most coordinators go directly to their work site at a greenhouse, classroom, or field and do not spend time in living units or with individuals in intensive management units. Some coordinators felt like they “had a skewed and unrealistic image of the inhumane conditions in prison, perpetuated by the information that DOC chose to provide and not provide.” One coordinator specifically noted that their perspective did not change while working as a coordinator because “In SPP it’s a more kind rose-colored glasses, kind of at arms-length, you aren’t really immersed in that. So, I would say my perspective did not change.”

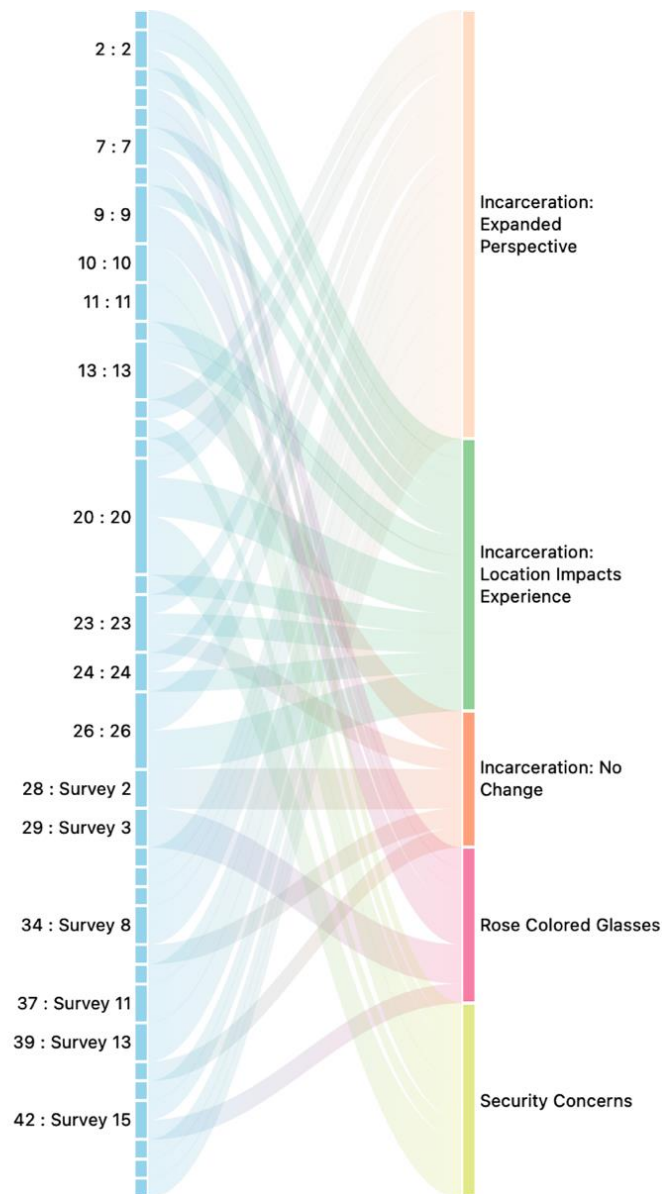
Security concerns and issues also impacted participant experiences and perspectives on incarceration. Some coordinators experienced very few or no major security concerns during their time at SPP while others experienced significant security issues. One coordinator noted that “I had a couple interactions with some of the inmates that were less than comfortable and at that time they didn’t have very good security in place for me.” Generally, coordinators were not surprised by security concerns but some were surprised by the DOC response noting that “working with DOC on that took a long time to get stuff approved.” Participant experiences with feeling safe in the prison environment or facing security concerns could have impacted how their schemas for incarceration developed. Security concerns also changed with how recently coordinators worked with SPP as programs have shifted and developed.

The final two codes for overall experience evaluated whether coordinators experienced a change in perspective during their time with SPP. The Sankey diagram below shows that the

code for expanded perspectives occurred more frequently in the survey and interviews than no change in perspective.

Figure 13.

Sankey diagram for Overall Experience.



Coordinators largely attributed their change in perspectives to exposure, interaction, and gaining knowledge. Many participants expressed that their perspectives became more nuanced because of their interactions as an SPP coordinator. One participant noted that

It didn't make me like go from being anti-prison to pro-prison, it didn't make me go from liking prisons to hating prisons. It wasn't something so simple. It was just kind of like an expansion of my awareness of all the different aspects of it and all the different directions that we could go policy wise, morally, and ethically.

Individuals who expressed that they did not experience a change in perspective after working with SPP generally stated that they started the experience with a significant foundation of knowledge or strong beliefs. Some participants started with abolitionist ideals or with a strong belief in restorative justice, and expressed that their time with SPP further solidified their perspectives. One coordinator also noted that their perspective did not change but that their knowledge increased stating: "What I knew about my perspectives did not change. But what did happen is that the box grew bigger because I'm gaining all this new knowledge and new perspectives and ideas. So, I know a lot more and my box is still growing to this day". The box the coordinator described can be considered a schema that continues to assimilate as the information they learn fits into their pre-existing perspectives on incarceration.

4.5 Additional Findings

While this study focused on if and how coordinators experienced a change in schema on careers, environmentalism, and incarceration, participants also shared information and experiences outside the scope of the research question. This section highlights additional patterns in coordinator experiences.

Coordinators' experiences varied greatly based on when they worked with SPP. Coordinators who worked with SPP more recently described a greater focus on education. They spent more time talking about creating educational materials and sharing educational

opportunities than about the physical conservation work. On the other hand, coordinators who worked with SPP further in the past often spent more time talking about the conservation aspect of their work. This pattern could represent a shift in the organization's focus to center education or a shift in coordinator roles over time.

I also observed a shift over time in the language participant's used. Coordinators who worked for SPP in the early years often used terms like 'offender', 'inmate', or 'guard' whereas more recent coordinators generally referred to individuals as 'incarcerated individuals', 'residents', or 'correctional officers'. The change in language parallels changes in language within DOC and a change in perspective over time in the larger community. The newer terms reflect a newer focus on humanizing those in the carceral system. As a result, SPP now asks onboarding coordinators to review and use language as outlined in the Underground Scholars Language Guide (Cerdeja-Jara et al).

While this thesis research focused on coordinator's experience working in the prison environment, most coordinators also described their experience working in the SPP offices. The majority of coordinators expressed an appreciation for the workplace environment and staff team at SPP. Many coordinators described the SPP work environment as positive and supportive. One coordinator noted that "I really liked the environment of SPP. I'd say for the most part it leans towards being very healthy, very communicative." Another coordinator noted that "We had a great cohort of student coordinators and I really was inspired and admired the senior leadership there. And I thought they did a really good job creating a safe environment for us." Some coordinators also expressed an appreciation for the flexibility in working with SPP, consistent encouragement to grow, and opportunities to pursue specific interests.

While most coordinators had positive experiences working in the SPP office environment and as part of the SPP team, some coordinators shared that there were challenges working in that environment. A handful of coordinators expressed a need for more managerial support. As a small organization, SPP is limited in capacity and split between several programs. One coordinator expressed that

You're not always sure what the expectations are, what your priorities are. Sometimes it feels like you don't have enough on your plate, sometimes it feels like you have way too much on your plate. And, it's really hard to spread those priorities out sometimes, especially among a limited staff that all have their own priorities.

Similarly, some coordinators noted that they encountered difficulties identifying priorities and seeking support with a limited full-time staff team. One coordinator noted that

I was already playing a whole bunch of different roles and then I was kind of forced to take on what felt like managerial responsibilities. Um, and didn't feel like at these times that I had the support I needed or someone I could communicate to because I didn't want to burden them.

Other challenges that coordinators identified included limited classroom management training, living in a different world from their incarcerated counterparts, balancing different SPP priorities, losing sight of the mission, and serving as a liaison between WA DOC staff and SPP managers. Several coordinators also expressed that they wished they could have supported initiatives and programs led by incarcerated individuals more in the role and made participation in SPP programs more consensual. Overall, many coordinators found both beauty or opportunity and limitation or frustration in the SPP partnership model between Evergreen and WA DOC.

Overall, many coordinators fondly reflected on their time with SPP, as one coordinator noted that "SPP changed my life for the better and I wouldn't take it back for anything" and another coordinator stated that "by far it is still one of my favorite positions I've ever held." Like

all positions, the coordinator role came with challenges, highlights, and opportunities for growth.

One coordinator summarized the balance noting that

I would say that it was an incredibly powerful job and one that stuck with me for a long time. And, what I've said about that job when I've talked to other people about it, is that it's one that I'm really glad I got to do and it's also one that I'm really happy that I'm not currently doing cause it was a really challenging job, emotionally. And, there's a lot of ethics that come into play everyday. You're really faced with some of the like big questions with our society and whether, you know, just all the ethical or unethical nature of incarceration and the disproportionate number of people of color that are in prison. You're staring it right in the face everyday.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Limitations

This study was subject to substantial limitations. This section recognizes limitations imposed by biases, sample size, methods, and gaps. First, the findings are limited to only a portion of former SPP coordinators. While approximately half of the 53 invited individuals (49 percent) participated in the study, ideally, the number would have been even higher. It is possible that participants with strong views were more likely to participate in the study. I opened the survey and interview for approximately two months from February 2023 to the end of March 2023. A longer timeframe for conducting interviews and distributing the survey may have increased the response rate. Additionally, participants were both graduate students and SPP coordinators simultaneously. As a result, many participants shared experiences from both their graduate studies and work as a coordinator. The parameters I established for this study do not provide space to differentiate between perspective changes from graduate studies and work as a student coordinator.

This study also relied on participant's recalling their perspectives prior to their experience working as a coordinator and self-reporting experiences. Some participants expressed difficulty remembering their perspectives on the three areas of research prior to working as a coordinator or a lack of clarity on exactly when a shift in perspective occurred.

The coding method I used in this study was also limited. I coded the interviews and survey responses for common themes alone. As a result, the codes could be biased to my knowledge, perspective and experiences. While I worked to include all perspectives and shared experiences, another individual might code the experiences differently.

Finally, changes in schema are limited to each individual's experience working as a coordinator and their prior experience. While this study demonstrates patterns of schema accommodation for incarceration, career path, and environmentalism, each individual's changes in schema are unique. I identified patterns such as individuals who entered the prison environment for the first time often experienced schema accommodation. However, each individual's experience and perspective shift is unique and depends on prior experience, education, and interactions.

5.2 Future Research

Further research can contribute to continued improvement of SPP programs, prison education initiatives, and schema theory understanding. This study focused on a very narrow population and program. Further research could examine if and how education coordinators for different programs experience a change in schema. That research could share information, best practices, and challenges and experiences from coordinators across programs.

As noted in the previous section, this study is limited by asking participants to retroactively self-report their experiences. Further research could follow incoming SPP coordinators throughout their time working with SPP to evaluate how their perspectives change in real time. Additionally, SPP could use evaluation surveys similar to those used in environmental education and workshop programs to evaluate coordinator perspectives and experiences and collect data. While SPP does not currently have structured coordinator evaluation surveys, they do initiate exit interviews and regular coordinator check-ins.

Further research could also evaluate perspective shifts in environmental education coordinators who work in non-prison environments. It would be valuable to compare the impact

and limitations of working in a prison environment and the scale of perception impact in the environmentalism and career categories.

5.3 Closing

Individuals who work in the prison environment are surrounded by barbed wire, pressing expectations, hierarchical structures, and trauma. As violence workers, staff in the carceral system uphold the current systems, shape practices, and influence incarcerated resident's experience. While SPP coordinators are contract staff and do not enter the prison environment on a daily basis, many coordinators described experiences and perspectives that represent a change in schema related to incarceration, environmentalism, and career path through both assimilation and accommodation. Much like the incarcerated SPP program participants who experienced shifts in views on environmentalism and empowerment, SPP coordinators experienced shifts in their perspectives on career path, environmentalism, and incarceration. Often, coordinators expressed that it was their interaction with incarcerated individuals and flow of knowledge that inspired schema accommodation or assimilation.

Out of the three areas of research, coordinators indicated that their perspectives on incarceration were most greatly impacted by their time with SPP. Coordinators experience working in the prison environment was often new and their experiences interacting with technicians and emotional response to the prison environment did not match what they previously expected. On the other hand, most coordinators started with a strong belief in conservation and climate communication or environmental education. As a result, most coordinators shared evidence of schema assimilation for environmentalism in which they broadened their perspective of who could participate and lead environmental work to increase accessibility.

While most coordinators experienced some change in schema for incarceration, environmentalism, and career path during their time with SPP, some coordinators expressed that they experienced no change in perspective for one or all three categories. Additionally, many coordinators experienced both schema accommodation and schema assimilation. Coordinators who expressed that they had no change in perspective may have experienced schema assimilation, encountering new sights or circumstances that matched their pre-existing beliefs. Within the scope of this study, it is not possible to determine what percentage of coordinators experienced schema assimilation versus accommodation. However, coordinators experiences did indicate that most coordinators experienced schema accommodation for incarceration and the fewest experienced schema accommodation for environmentalism. Still, each coordinator's experience is unique and influenced by their prior experiences, location of work, personal identity, and when they worked with SPP as program goals, structure, and logistics have changed in the ten year span that participants worked for SPP.

Overall, most coordinators described positive experiences working as a part of the SPP team and coordinating nature, science and environmental education programs in prisons. Connecting students and incarcerated residents through conservation and education programs can increase awareness on the carceral system and facilitate perspective changes on incarceration, environmentalism, and career path. Further, it is possible that the SPP network can contribute to a series of individual perspective shifts and eventually a broader paradigm shift on the dual crises of climate change/environmentalism and incarceration.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Environmental Justice Principles adopted by Participants of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit as presented in Mohai et al. 2009:

1. Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced, and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
8. Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental Justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
11. Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
12. Environmental Justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the

testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14. Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
15. Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations, which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

Appendix B. Survey Questions

Thank you for participating in this research study! The goal of this survey and associated optional interview is to collect information regarding how and if your thoughts on environmentalism, incarceration, and career paths changed from working at SPP. Completing the survey is optional and you may choose to skip any questions. The survey is divided into two parts: perspective questions and demographic questions. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns— I'm happy to provide more information via email, Zoom, or phone. (jennifer.bass@evergreen.edu)

By checking this box, I understand that all of my responses in this study are completely confidential, and will be used only for research purposes. If I have any questions about this study or want more information, I am free to contact: Jennifer.bass@evergreen.edu.

What was your coordinator position with the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP)?

How significantly did working for SPP influence your perspectives on incarceration?

- Not at all significant*
- Slightly significant*
- Moderately significant*
- Very Significant*
- Extremely Significant*

If applicable, please describe how working as a coordinator with SPP influenced your perspectives on incarceration.

How significantly did working for SPP influence your perspectives on environmentalism?

- Not at all significant*
- Slightly significant*
- Moderately significant*
- Very Significant*
- Extremely Significant*

If applicable, please describe how working as a coordinator with SPP influenced your perspectives on environmentalism.

How significantly did working for SPP influence your career path?

- Not at all significant*
- Slightly significant*
- Moderately significant*
- Very Significant*
- Extremely Significant*

If applicable, please describe how working as a coordinator with SPP influenced your career path

Demographic Information

All questions on this survey are optional. Demographic data will be used to make cumulative statements but will not be tied to individual responses or questions.

What is your age?

With which racial group (s) do you identify? Check all that apply. If you identify as another race or ethnicity not listed below, please specify.

Asian

Black or African American

Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin

Middle Eastern or North African

Native American or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

Other

What gender best describes you?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to answer

Other

Appendix C. Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your path to getting involved with SPP.
 - a. Which career paths were most intriguing to you when you applied to the program and where do you currently work?
 - b. Prior to working with SPP, had you worked in environmental education or related fields? Can you describe that experience?
2. Describe your experience working with the Sustainability in Prisons Project.
 - a. What was surprising to you about working with SPP?
 - b. What was your most and least favorite part of working with SPP?
3. Tell me about how working with SPP impacted your sense of environmentalism?
 - a. Do you consider incarceration an environmental issue?
 - b. How would you define environmentalism?
4. Did your work with SPP change your perceptions of the prison system and incarceration? How?
 - a. Prior to coming to Evergreen and working with SPP, what were your perceptions of the prison system in the United States?

Appendix D. Internal Conflict Quotes

Internal conflict was one of the most frequent codes. These quotes further describe the conflict coordinators experienced and expand on **Category 3: Experiences and Emotions**. Several quotes and survey responses that represent internal are not included in this table because they include potentially identifiable information.

<p>“I felt like I was working against my own morals while also feeling guilt for my bitterness because there were now names and faces to people upholding this system. People I liked and appreciated.”</p>
<p>“ I realized how complicated it is to actually make a difference, how much money and coordination and passion it takes just to work on one listed species in one habitat, and how much resistance there can be from establishments like the military and corrections. Conversely, the military and corrections did great things for conservation when they had the right leaders in the right positions. So, it’s complicated.”</p>
<p>“These experiences made me grateful for the opportunities SPP gives incarcerated participants, while also frustrated by the political blockages and limited leverage the organization has to implement more meaningful change.”</p>
<p>“I think the prison system is quite flawed, but I realized how many positive things happen in prison. There are beautiful things that happen there. I believe incarceration’s sole focus (after safety) should be rehabilitation and healing”</p>
<p>“ Do we want to participate in a system that is corrupt and inextricably linked to the racist criminal justice system? I mean no, we don’t but it exists. And that was something that we as graduate students were constantly trying to figure out how to articulate. It was like we don’t like this system, this system sucks, but it exists so we’re trying to make it less bad. And that’s just kind of where we landed- for better or worse this exists and we’re going to work within it as it exists.”</p>
<p>“There can be great intentions and really motivated sweet people making change but there is a disconnect between people doing the work and people living in prisons and what they would want change to look like. There is a complexity of well-intentioned prison programs.”</p>
<p>“The more time went on, I realized I could never be set up with the resources necessary to help the incarcerated technical I worked closely with in any meaningful capacity. Since there are minimal safeguards to ensure a smooth and successful release and prevent recidivism within the carceral system, I took on the emotional burden in trying to make up for these shortcomings, which I could never accomplish.”</p>
<p>“And I think SPP has a similar feeling in that we know that this is a necessary evil at the moment but that we know that if we can move away from the prison system to different forms of helping people and not just hurting them, that would be ideal. So that’s a lot of where I’m at now in terms of prisons and incarceration. I just think there are a lot better ways to do it. I think the vast majority of people in prison are just repeating cycles of abuse they experienced when they were younger.”</p>
<p>“ I don’t know. It’s just a huge mess and I really like working at SPP but I know folks didn’t agree with it so that was something I struggled with for a little bit. I’m glad there are those people who are going to bang on the window and fight for abolition but I’m also glad that SPP exists and there are people who will go in and take an interest in these people that are pretty much hidden away from the rest of society that people forget about or don’t care about”</p>

“And so it’s just more than anything this is complicated stuff and innovative projects and solutions. And it is sort of like you can’t be an absolute. There are no absolutes or you can’t rely on absolutes to make progress a lot of the time and that doesn’t mean you’re giving up your values. But, it’s certainly like you have to have this sort of come to Jesus with yourself, like is this okay? What’s my values? It’s complicated for sure.”

“It’s not changing the system as a whole, it’s making the system, it’s making the experience of individuals in the programs better and can change their lives for the better and it is a teaching moment and can shift the thinking of the staff members and maybe that could chip away at the system over time. But, it’s not making any big wide sweeping changes to stopping people from being mass incarcerated in the first place and the racism and the systems that get people into prison. SPP isn’t having a major impact on that- and that’s frustrating. And at the same time, something like SPP is of huge value and needed in our current system cause the reality is that our current system exists and without SPP in Washington it would be much worse.”

“My least favorite part is that prison systems exist in the way that they do and that an organization like SPP has to exist.”

“And having all these conflicting emotions the first time I went in and as like case managers would show stories of crimes or incarcerated people would sometimes share what they did- and sometimes I’d have reactions to that- like emotional reactions and at the same time have empathy. Like all these layered emotions and it really brought home that teaching of both and thinking or dialectic thinking. There can be so many truths that are real and I didn’t come to that understanding immediately.”

“But then there is that whole conundrum of like I think the system is broken, I don’t think the punishment system that we have is functional at all. But, I also have no idea what an alternative would be. It’s like- I just try not to get into it personally because I have no answer and I would just end up spinning.”

“...I feel that sort of covering up and pretending is so insidious and it was done by DOC and I felt like SPP participated in it- I don’t know if I would say they are responsible for it though. They didn’t create it- the system, but I do think they participate in a way and they participate in the greenwashing of it where they make it look better, but it’s not better. Again, it’s better for a select minority of people. I think that’s good- I don’t think SPP should like rip out their programs and just be like not giving people the opportunities that they do get through SPP.”

“SPP is part of the prison system. It makes conditions better for a small population of people. But in no way does it challenge the prison system itself... I guess I was surprised. I thought that there would be some sort of radical aspect of it- that it would be more um, at odds with the DOC system.”

“I liked the whole mission of SPP and how they gave a lot of respect to the inmates. It was interesting. It was kind of an internal struggle a lot of the time because I didn’t really- I don’t really have a high opinion of our whole prison system.”