THE CORRECTIONS EXPERIENCE FOR OFFENDERS

Introduction

It has become axiomatic to say that correctional programs and institutions are overcrowded, underfunded, and unfocused these days. As the drug war rages on and mandatory sentencing has its effect, probation and parole caseloads and incarceration rates spiral past any semblance of control (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997, 2006b; Glaze & Bonczar, 2006; Pollock, 2004; Ruddell, 2004). As a consequence, though spending on corrections has steadily, and steeply, climbed over the last few years, it is nearly impossible for most states and localities to meet the needs for programs, staff, and institutions. So they do not. Thus, the corrections experience for offenders is shaped by shortages.

But, as has been discussed already in this text, this has always been somewhat true. If it is built, or in the case of probation and parole, offered, then they will come—because, as with all corrections sentences, they are forced to. A case in point: almost immediately after the first American prisons were built, the Walnut Street Jail (1790), the Auburn Prison (1819), the Western Pennsylvania Prison (1826), and the Eastern Pennsylvania Prison (1829), they were full, and, within a few years, they were expanded or new prisons were under construction (Augustus, 1852/1972; Conover, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 1922; Pollock, 2004).

To say that crowding and corrections have always been linked, of course, is not to dismiss the negative effects of overfilling or to argue that it might not be worse than ever now. Certainly, the U.S. incarceration rate has never been so high, nor can we easily

In this section, we discuss the nature of the correctional experience for incarcerated individuals, an experience that, as of 2004, 1 in 138 U.S. residents have (Harrison & Beck, 2005). Of course, the odds of incarceration increase if you are male and a minority, though the number of incarcerated women has increased faster proportionately than it has for males in recent years. Certainly, as illustrated by the research presented in this section, how people experience corrections is influenced to some extent by the reality of crowding and the concomitant lack of resources.

**Jails and Prisons**

Jails were the first type of correctional institution created. The form they took varied by the sophistication and size of the community and its relative remoteness. When some sort of legal representative holds the persons, either a sheriff or a designee, so that they will appear at trial, then wherever they are placed is by definition a form of a jail. When need be, accused offenders or political opponents were held in caves, shacks, barns, pits, castles, dungeons, the sheriff’s own house, or they were just tied to a tree or rock (Hirsh, 1992; Irwin, 1985; Kerle, 1998; Zupan, 1991).

The history of adult and juvenile American jails, per se, has been intertwined with that of prisons. In fact, the two modes of confinement were virtually indistinguishable both in design and theory before the nineteenth century when separate structures called “penitentiaries” were created in Pennsylvania and New York. More than 80 years ago, Joseph Fishman articulated the differences between jails and prisons in his book *Crucibles of Crime: The Shocking Story of the American Jail* (1923/1969) and these distinctions remain somewhat true today:

In the pure sense, there is a difference, and a vast difference, between these two types of institutions [prisons and jails]. Men and women are confined in prison strictly speaking, after they have been convicted of an offense of a grave character which involves moral turpitude. They are confined in jails after they have been convicted of misdemeanors, such as being drunk and disorderly, petit larceny, working on Sunday, etc. Also (and here is the great difference) jails are used for the confinement of men and women who have been arrested, charged with committing crimes or misdemeanors, but who have not yet been tried. As a general rule, persons are sentenced to jail for comparatively short periods of time from thirty days to a year. They are sentenced to prison for periods of from one year to life. (pp. 15–16)

These differences that Fishman delineated in 1923 became clearer once the penitentiaries were developed for the convicted and sentenced “long term” offenders and the correctional purposes of jails and prisons diverged (Hirsh, 1992). Prisons were and are used for long-term and convicted offenders who were to be simultaneously punished, deterred, and reformed while being isolated (incapacitated) from the community. Conversely, jails were and are used to hold pretrial detainees and short-term, sentenced offenders with diverse justifications for incarceration (Goldfarb, 1975). Despite these distinctions, however, the common history shared by jails and prisons ensures that there are parallels between the two types of correctional institutions in both the managerial,
architectural, and theoretical spheres. Juvenile facilities, work releases, halfway houses, and probation and parole developed in reaction to the problems inherent in jails and prisons; they were a form of reform. Ironically, jails, and then prisons, themselves were developed when the reformist spirit prevailed and before it inevitably ebbed in populist politics (Hirsh, 1992; Lewis, 1922; Sullivan, 1990).

The Promise of Reform

As rehabilitation as a justification for incarceration gained primacy in America’s prisons, jails, and juvenile institutions, correctional facilities with a more open architecture were constructed (Rothman, 1980). Dormitories, cottages, and less institutionalized settings were thought to complement treatment purposes effectively. In time, “reformatories” geared primarily toward juveniles, young adult male offenders, and women were developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth; they tended to reflect a distinctly rehabilitative purpose. Developing in tandem with the reformatory era was the indeterminate sentence, probation parole, and education and vocational training programs (Rotman, 1990; Sullivan, 1990). Such reformatory style facilities eventually came to influence adult male institutions as well, and reformatories remain in widespread use in some form in many states today. Because they tended to be more open architecturally, direct and constant supervision by staff, to prevent abuse, is required in such facilities.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a sense developing that the great American prison experiment had failed. The conditions in some prisons were notoriously unhealthy, brutal, and in some disarray. Prisons were overcrowded, and the Auburn style of formal discipline was shredding. At the inception of their creation, prisons had been meant to punish and reform. The incontrovertible evidence was, however, that punishment did occur but reform rarely did in America’s prisons. Hence, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the National Prison Association, the predecessor of the American Correctional Association, was created, and the idea of the reformatory was born (Roberts, 1997).

This reformatory, as epitomized by the Elmira, New York prison (1877), was conceptualized as operating on the precepts of the developing medical, psychological, and social work fields (Lewis, 1922; Rothman, 1980; Sullivan, 1990). Geared toward younger male inmates, who were believed to be more amenable to treatment, the Elmira reformatory, in theory, was to use a reward system, such as “good time” and early release to parole, as a means of motivating the positive behavior and ultimate reform of inmates. The staff was to be composed of professionals with at least some college training who could mentor these young men and model prosocial behavior. The use of corporeal punishment was prohibited.

The reality of the implementation of these ideals was less than the promise of reform for a number of reasons, as was discussed in Section I (Rothman, 1980). Chief among these was the failure of the state to fund the reform fully, thus resulting in fewer programs and less than professional staff and a descent into the renewed use of the strap to maintain order. Despite these failures in implementation, and perhaps in conceptualization, the medical model of corrections was more concretely represented in Elmira and in other reform initiatives, leading to

- good time,
- parole and probation,
- rehabilitation programming, and
- indeterminate sentencing.
By the early decades of the twentieth century, all states had adopted all or a portion of these programming components of the reformatory model for their correctional systems. Of course, as with the Elmira experiment, formal adoption of a model does not mean that it is implemented perfectly or funded adequately. Moreover, as our discussion of treatment programming in Section V of this book will illustrate, the implementation of effective programming takes more than just full funding.

**Total Institutions, Importation, Prisonization, and the Pains of Imprisonment**

In addition to the evident patterns and trends that appear in corrections historically and that continually crop up in more modern correctional institutions and practices, the operation of corrections, particularly of prisons and jails, shapes the offender’s experience. One central component of that operation is the totality of it.

Erving Goffman (1961) coined the term total institution to describe the situation of inmates of mental hospitals (but also of prisoners) in this country in the 1950s. For one year he served as a staff member (athletic director’s assistant) and did ethnographic research in a federal mental health hospital in Washington, DC. While avoiding sociable contact with staff, he immersed himself in the inmate world, or as much of it as he could without being admitted to the hospital, and what he observed allowed him to learn much. Goffman (1961) defines a total institution as “[a] place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (p. xiii). Another key component of this social world is that there are clear social strata in such institutions dividing the “inmates” and the “staff” (Goffman, 1961, p. 7). There are formal prohibitions against even minor social interactions between these two groups, and all of the formal power resides with one group (the staff) over the other group (the inmates).

This definition is directly applicable to prisons, even today, though it more aptly describes both the prisons and jails of the past (Jacobs, 1977). For jail and prison inmates, the institution is where they live, and often work, with people like themselves in terms of not only their criminal involvement but also, largely, their social class. Though there is some ability to visit with others, the mode and manner of this contact with the outside world is quite limited in prisons and, to some extent, even more so in jails, and it is also dependent on the security status of the institution (e.g., whether it is a work release facility or a maximum security prison). The formal rules of prisons and jails also closely control inmate behavior and movement. Another key formal prohibition of total institutions governs interactions between staff and inmates. Simply put, staff members are to restrict such interactions to business alone and are to parcel out information only as absolutely necessary. As Goffman (1961) put it, “Social mobility between the two strata is grossly restricted; social distance is typically great and often formally prescribed” (p. 7).

How do these aspects of total institutions affect the lives of inmates of jails and prisons today? In the 1950s, Goffman (1961) believed that total institutions had the effect of debilitating their inmates. As he saw it, upon entrance into the institution, the inmate might become mortified or suffer from the loss of the many roles he or she occupied in the wider world (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). Instead, only the role of inmate is available,
and that role is formally powerless and dependent. Additionally, though each person entering a jail or prison imports their own culture from the outside, to some extent they are likely to become prisonized or socialized into the inmate culture of the institution (Clemmer, 2001). Couple this mortification and subsequent role displacement with prisonization into the contingent inmate subculture, and you have the potential for the new inmate to experience a life in turmoil while adjusting to the institution and some difficulty when reentering the community.

Part and parcel of this inmate world are what Gresham Sykes (1958) describes as the pains of imprisonment, such pains include “the deprivation of liberty, the deprivation of goods and services, the deprivation of heterosexual relationships, the deprivation of autonomy, and the deprivation of security” (pp. 63–83). To this list we would add deprivation of contact with family members, particularly their children, a severe pain that many inmates experience when, as an artifact of their incarceration, they are unable to have regular interactions with their own children or to have any control over their children’s environment on the outside (Gray, Mays, & Stohr, 1995; Stohr & Mays, 1993).

Sykes (1958) argued that the first five of these pains, though not physically brutalizing, have the cumulative effect of destroying the psyche of the inmate. In order to avoid this destruction, inmates in prisons (he did research in a maximum security prison) may be motivated to engage in deviance while incarcerated as a means of alleviating their pain. So bullying other inmates, involvement in gangs, buying items through the underground economy, and homosexual acts might all be motivated, in fact, by the need for some autonomy, liberty, security, goods and services, and sexual gratification (Johnson, 2002). Extrapolating from this point, the extent to which female inmates form pseudofamilial relationships may be a means of alleviating the pain experienced due to the separation from children and other close family members (Owen, 1998).
Subcultures, or environments with their own norms, values, beliefs, and even language, tend to solidify when people are isolated from the larger culture and when members have continual contact with each other for an extended time. In other words, it would appear that total institutions provide the perfect admixture for an inmate subculture to form. Accordingly, the degree to which a correctional environment fits the definition of a total institution will determine the extent to which a client subculture exists. Not surprisingly, then, most correctional research on inmate subcultures has tended to focus on prison inmates and specifically maximum-security prison inmates (see Hemmens & Marquart and Lutze & Murphy in this section; Clemmer, 2001; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Owen, 1998; Sykes, 1958). This is not to say, of course, that those in a jail or a minimum security prison do not have distinguishable “norms, values, beliefs, and language” that set them apart from the wider community, but it is much less likely that they do than is the case for inmates in a maximum security prison. By definition, the longer people are in an institution, associating with others like them, and the more “total” the institution is in its restrictions on liberty and contact with “outsiders,” the more subject inmates are to the pains of imprisonment. This observation would appear to suggest that the more a correctional environment fits the descriptors of a total institution, the more likely that a definable inmate subculture exists and that those correctional clients are “prisonized” or have adopted the subculture.

Indicators of such a subculture, as identified by prison researchers, include defined roles for inmates and prescribed values and behavior patterns (Clemmer, 2001; Owen, 1998). For instance, Clemmer (2001) broadly defines criminal subcultural values as including “the notion that criminals should not betray each other to the police, should be reliable, wily but trustworthy, coolheaded, etc.” (p. 87). Though all criminals might have some exposure to these values, they are more likely to be reinforced and adhered to in a prison setting for the reasons noted above. This criminal subculture becomes a “convict subculture,” according to Clemmer (2001), when such inmates “[s]eek positions of power, influence, and sources of information” so that they might get the goods and services they desire to alleviate those pains of imprisonment. Similarly, Owen (1998) notes that some women would engage in a version of this subculture although it might be tempered by the relationships they had and the goods and services they needed. Notably, both Clemmer and Owen, however, found that a significant portion of inmates in the male and female prisons they studied were not at all interested in being involved in the convict subculture or the “mix” of behavior that can lead to trouble in prisons. Rather, these inmates either chose not to connect to the inmate subculture or they held on to more traditional and legitimate values from the larger culture.

In his research on corrections, Johnson (2002) noticed that, despite the mortification, prisonization, and pains experienced to different degrees by incarcerated individuals, some were able to adjust prosocially, even to grow, in a prison setting. Though the exception rather than the rule, these inmates, he noted, developed another means of adjusting. This alternative means of handling incarceration, or supervision in the case of probationers and parolees, is mature coping. As identified and defined by Johnson (2002), “Mature coping means, in essence, dealing with life’s problems like a responsive and
responsible human being, one who seeks autonomy without violating the rights of others, security without resort to deception or violence, and relatedness to others as the finest and fullest expression of human identity” (p. 83). As indicated by this definition, offenders need to learn how to be adults with some autonomy in an environment where, formally, they have little power (although the informal reality may be different—more about this in Section III of this book) and their status is almost subhuman by wider community standards. Moreover, they must accomplish this feat without doing violence to others—though Johnson (2002) allows that violence in self-defense may be necessary—and they need to exercise consideration of others in their environment.

Johnson (2002) notes that mature coping is relatively rare among the inmate population for a number of reasons. He argues that inmates are typically immature in their social relations to begin with, which, of course, is one of the reasons they are in prison in the first place (Conover, 2001). Because of impoverishment, poor or absent or abusive parenting, mental illness, schools that fail them or that they fail, offenders enter the criminal justice system with a number of social, psychological, and economic deficits. They are often not used to voluntarily taking responsibility for their actions as one would expect of “mature” individuals. Nor are they typically expected to “[e]mpathize with and assist others in need,” especially in a prison or jail environment (Johnson, 2002, p. 93).

Second, Johnson (2002) argues that, for inmates to maturely cope it is helpful if they are incarcerated in what he terms a **decent prison**. Such a facility does not necessarily have more programming, staffing, or amenities than the norm, though he thinks it might be helpful if they did; rather, such institutions or programs are relatively free of violence and include some opportunities so that inmates might find a **niche** for involvement. In order for inmates to find this niche, however, decent prisons need to include some opportunities for inmates to act autonomously.

Being secure from violence, like autonomy, is basic to human development. In fact, if the security need is not fulfilled, it will preoccupy offenders and motivate them to engage in behaviors (e.g., bullying or gang activity) that they normally might avoid if they were not feeling continually threatened (Johnson, 2002; Maslow, 1998). Then, assuming that the offender perceives that he or she is relatively safe, there need to be prosocial activities, including work, school, athletic, church, treatment, or art programs that provide some sort of means for positive self-value reinforcement. Such places are termed **niches** by Johnson (2002), and the opportunities they afford provide redress for the mortification and pains that offenders, particularly those who are incarcerated, experience.

### How Corrections Is Experienced Depends

#### Offender Demographics

In the readings that follow, the authors either directly or indirectly discuss the correctional topics mentioned earlier. Their research gives these facts and concepts real and current application. In their research, they more fully illustrate the point that all offender adjustment and types of institutions are not monolithic. The research by Hemmens and Marquart and Lutze and Murphy makes plain that demographics such as gender, race or ethnicity, social class, and age can all affect how offenders perceive their experience with corrections. Furthermore, the research by Pizarro and Stenius and Richards and Ross
indicates that a powerless status and the type of institution or correctional program offenders are exposed to also shape their reality and how they adjust.

In terms of gender, the history and practice of incarcerating women and girls provides a context for current practice. Initially, women and girls were not incarcerated separately from men and boys. As their numbers grew and a sense of moral propriety developed, however, women and girls were allotted their own separate institutions (see the Rafter article in Section I). To some extent, their separate treatment was a boon as their institutions tended to be softer structurally (e.g., fewer fences, a more cottage-like atmosphere). Separate institutions, particularly when staffed by women, also provided female prisoners protection from sexual abuse by male staff (Pollock 2002). However, cultural pressures to create “ladies” and “conformity” with stereotypical female roles were fierce in such institutions (see the Rafter article in Section I). As a consequence, historically, women and girls have tended to be incarcerated and supervised in the community for lesser offenses than those for which men and boys are “punished” (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992) because females, by definition, are double deviants; they have been deviant criminally (like men), but they also have deviated from societal expectations for their gender. Moreover, the drug war of the last 20-plus years has tended to capture and incarcerate low-level female offenders, resulting in what some researchers regard as an over-incarceration of women (Chesney-Lind, 2002).

The correctional experience for women and girls has also been defined by their separation from family and friends. Perhaps because of this separation, some of them have tended to form pseudo family units as a means of adjustment to the pain they experience (Owen, 1998; Pollock, 2002).

Lutze and Murphy note that the gendered nature of some correctional institutions—in male institutions this means there are more “masculinized” values placed on behavior—may reward or promote aggression and impede the ability of inmates to transition effectively out of prison. In contrast, in female institutions where “feminized” values are placed on behavior, the inmate may be rewarded for more submissive and nurturance-related behaviors (Britton, 2003). Although Britton (2003) in her book At Work in the Iron Cage: The Prison as Gendered Organization is primarily focused on how gender affects work in prisons, she does note that organization and culture tend to shape inmate behavior so that it conforms to sex role stereotypes about what it means to be a woman.

As regards age and race, and as discussed in Section I, scholars note that inmates have historically been incarcerated in different types of institutions because of their race or their age and treated differently by criminal justice and correctional authorities (see Hemmens & Marquart in this section; Carroll, 1974; MacKenzie, 1987; Maitland & Sluder, 1996; Oshinsky, 1996; Wright, 1989; Young, 1994). Moreover, the research indicates that different racial and age groups might adjust in dissimilar ways, though there is some dispute in the literature on racial differences at least (see Hemmens & Marquart in this section; Wright, 1989). We do know that younger inmates will tend to engage in more deviant behavior while incarcerated, perhaps because of their inability or unwillingness to “maturely cope.”

**Powerlessness and Inmate Status**

Power, as defined by the political scientist Dahl (1957), is essentially the ability to get others to do what they otherwise wouldn’t. Formally, at least, and to differing degrees
depending on their role, the status of their subjects, and the type of institution or program, probation and parole officers and correctional officers in jails and prisons have the power to get their clients to do what they otherwise would not in terms of behavior or work or programming. As Richards and Ross note in their article, this power to control and classify in corrections is somewhat absolute and can be debilitating. Welch (2005) notes that such control is “ironic” in that, although a lack of social control in the larger community is usually believed to be a cause of crime, this control might also create crime or greater violence or deviance in a correctional environment.

Sykes (1958) also noted about 50 years ago that the formal roles of staff and inmates do not always reflect the informal reality. In the maximum security institution he studied, Sykes (1958) found that this formal power was in fact tempered by the fact that staff members were grossly outnumbered by inmates and needed inmate compliance to get work done (e.g., guards could not easily or efficiently or safely use force to get inmates to make their beds, attend programs, leave other inmates alone, etc.). Also, the regular human contact between staff and inmates led them to form friend-like relationships that moderated the formal power of staff. For these reasons, Sykes (1958) claimed that inmate and staff relationships would naturally incline toward degrees of corruption, some more serious than others.

Johnson (2002) also recognizes that these informal relationships between staff and inmates do exist (as will be discussed more fully in another section of this book), albeit not as a “corrupted” relationship per se but as a real world representation of prisons and prison work. For Johnson (2002), such relationships mean that some staff members will engage in human service work to facilitate the adjustment of offenders or inmates.

Whether corrections employees are inclined to be human service workers or not is likely shaped by their own proclivities, the professional culture of their institution or program, the type of institution they work in, and the sort of offender or inmate they work with. In a number of sections in this book, we will touch more on how the type of facility shapes staff behavior. It is sufficient to say here that probationers likely have a different experience with corrections, because of their status and the degree of liberty, than do jail or prison inmates, or even parolees. But we should also note here that between jurisdictions (even in the same state), between the adult and the juvenile system, between large and small and medium jails, and between different prison security levels, the experience of offenders and inmates is likely to vary greatly. Less restrictive environments are possibly more preferred by offenders, though there is some evidence that intensive community supervision is not necessarily prized over prison, particularly among those who have already “done time” (Crouch, 1993).
Summary

- Though individual experiences, or individual perceptions and adjustment, might vary, the issues identified by philosophers and correctional researchers of yesteryear are still pertinent to our understanding of corrections today. To varying degrees, offenders and inmates experience pains related to their status, and, as humans, we can be sure that they will behave in either prosocial or antisocial ways to ameliorate that pain.
- Despite the formal roles of staff and correctional clients in “total institutions,” it is likely that such roles are “corrupted” or at least operate differently than one would think. In other words, staff power is not truly absolute, though it can be used for good or ill.
- Mature coping is one way that correctional clients can fruitfully “adjust” and perhaps reform in the corrections environment.
- Extralegal factors such as gender, race, age, and class likely color the view and experience of correctional clients. Correctional institutions and programs are likely still engaged in the social control of their clients and can serve to facilitate their reform or disable it.
- The good news is that we can direct offender adjustment in ways that are likely to yield a calmer and more secure environment for all offenders and inmates and that might actually lead to their reform (and ours?).

KEY TERMS

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<tr>
<th>Decent prison</th>
<th>Mortification</th>
<th>Reformatories</th>
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INTERNET SITES

American Correctional Association: www.aca.org
American Friends Service Committee (a Quaker organization interested in correctional reform): www.afsc.org
American Jail Association: www.aja.org
American Probation and Parole Association: www.appa-net.org
Bureau of Justice Statistics (information available on all manner of criminal justice topics): www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs
National Criminal Justice Reference Service: www.ncjrs.gov
Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (periodic statistical reports on all manner of criminal justice topics, e.g., HIV in prisons and jails, probation and parole, and profiles of prisoners): www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/periodic.htm
Vera Institute (information available on a number of corrections and other justice related topics): www.vera.org
As you travel through your criminal justice or criminology studies, you will soon learn that some of the best-known and emerging explanations of crime and criminal behavior come from research articles in academic journals. This book has research articles throughout, but you may be asking yourself, “How do I read a research article?” It is my hope to answer this question with a quick summary of the key elements of any research article, followed by the questions you should be answering as you read through the assigned sections.

Every research article published in a social science journal will have the following elements: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) methodology, (4) results, and (5) discussion or conclusion.

In the introduction, you will find an overview of the purpose of the research. Within the introduction, you will also find the hypothesis or hypotheses. A hypothesis is most easily defined as an educated statement or guess. In most hypotheses, you will find that the format usually followed is this: If X, Y will occur. For example, a simple hypothesis might be “If the price of gas increases, more people will ride bikes.” This is a testable statement that the researcher wants to address in his or her study. Usually, authors will state the hypothesis directly, but not always. Therefore, you must be aware of what the author is actually testing in the research project. If you are unable to find the hypothesis, ask yourself two questions: what is being tested and/or manipulated, and what are the expected results?

The next section of the research article is the literature review. At times, the literature review will be separated from the text in its own section, and, at other times, it will be found within the introduction. In any case, the literature review is an examination of what other researchers have already produced in terms of the research question or hypothesis. For example, returning to my hypothesis on the relationship between gas prices and bike riding, we may find that five researchers have previously conducted studies on the effects of increasing gas prices. In the literature review, I will discuss their findings, and then discuss what my study will add to the existing research. The literature review may also be used as a platform of support for my hypothesis. For example, one researcher might have already determined that an increase in gas causes more people to roller-blade to work. I can use this study as evidence to support my hypothesis that increased gas prices will lead to more bike riding.

The methods used in the research design are found in the next section of the research article. In the methodology section, you will discover who and what was studied, how many subjects were studied, the research tool (e.g., interview, survey, observation), how long the subjects were studied, and how the data that was collected was processed. The methods section is usually very concise, with every step of the research project recorded. Concise but complete recording of steps is important because a major goal of the researcher is “reliability,” or being able to do the research over again in the same way and achieving the same the results.

The results section is an analysis of the researcher’s findings. If the researcher conducted a quantitative study (using numbers or statistics to explain the research), you will
find statistical tables and analyses that explain whether or not the researcher’s hypothesis is supported. If the researcher conducted a qualitative study (nonnumerical research for the purpose of theory construction), the results will usually be displayed as a theoretical analysis or interpretation of the research question.

Finally, the research article will conclude with a discussion and summary of the study. In the discussion, you will usually find the hypothesis restated and perhaps a small explanation of why this is the hypothesis. You will also find a brief overview of the methodology and results. Finally, the section will end with a discussion of the implications of the research and of what future research is still needed.

Now that you know the key elements of a research article, let us examine a sample article from your text.

⚠️ Ultramasculine Prison Environments and Inmates’ Adjustment

It’s Time to Move Beyond the “Boys Will Be Boys” Paradigm

Faith E. Lutze and David W. Murphy

1. What is the thesis or main idea from this article?

   The thesis or main idea is found in the introduction of this article. Lutze and Murphy first state that “few studies have considered the influence of gender-stereotyped environments on all-male correctional populations” (p. 82). This statement is then followed with the explanation of this study in the conclusion of the introduction: “In this study we explore the influence of ultramasculine prison environments on inmates’ adjustment to prison” (p. 82). Thus, from the introduction, we learn that the main idea of this article is to fill in the space where prior research has failed to completely address the effect of ultramasculine prisons on male inmates and the process of rehabilitation.

2. What are the hypotheses?

   The hypotheses are found in the middle of the article on page 85. In a section titled “Hypotheses,” Lutze and Murphy state and explain their two hypotheses. Hypothesis 1: “The gendered or ultramasculine nature of the prison environment influences inmates’ adjustment and perceptions of the environment” (p. 85). Hypothesis 2: “Shock incarceration programs are more gendered or more ultramasculine than traditional prisons and influence inmates’ adjustment and perceptions of the institutional environment differently than traditional prisons” (p. 86).

3. Is there any prior literature related to the hypotheses?

   Lutze and Murphy state in the section “Hypotheses,” “This study builds on prior research by exploring the relationship between inmates’ adjustment and the gendered nature of the prison environment in a male boot camp prison” (p. 85). The previous section, “Gender and Environmental Effects on Behavior,” presents the prior literature to which the authors are referring.
Throughout this section, the authors cite numerous studies that analyze the gendered nature of ultramasculine prisons. The authors then provide their own hypotheses to add to the already existing research.

4. What methods are used to support the hypotheses?
   ♦ Lutze and Murphy outline their methods in the section titled “Methodology.” Here, the authors state, “on the basis of survey evaluations of two all-male groups of inmates, we compare the differences in the perception of the prison environment present in a shock incarceration program and in a traditional minimum-security prison” (p. 86). We know that the authors are utilizing surveys and that this is a comparative study conducted on male inmates. The authors continue the “Methodology” section by describing in detail the setting, the subjects, the procedure, the sample, and the measures.

5. Is this a qualitative study or quantitative study?
   ♦ To determine whether or not a study is qualitative or quantitative, you must look at the results. Are Lutze and Murphy using numbers to support their hypotheses (quantitative) or are they developing a non-numerical theoretical argument (qualitative)? Because Lutze and Murphy utilize statistics in this study, we can safely conclude that this is a quantitative study.

6. What are the results, and how does the author present the results?
   ♦ The results are presented in both the “Findings” and the “Discussion” sections. The “Findings” section discusses the statistical results, whereas the “Discussion” section analyzes the statistical results. If the reader has no prior statistical knowledge, it is best to uncover the results in the “Discussion” section. In this section of the Lutze and Murphy article, the authors state that “these findings indicate that perceptions of gender are important for inmates’ adjustment to the institution. In addition, they show that perceived differences in the gendered nature of the prison environment do not influence inmates’ patterns of adjustment differently in the two prison populations” (p. 91). The authors then provide a detailed discussion of the findings, as well as the implications of the findings.

7. Do you believe that the authors provided a persuasive argument? Why or why not?
   ♦ This answer is ultimately up to the reader, but, looking at this article, I believe that it is safe to assume that the readers will agree that Lutze and Murphy present a persuasive argument. Let us return to the first major premise: The gendered or ultramasculine nature of the prison environment influences inmates’ adjustment and perceptions of the environment. This proposition is supported with a statistical analysis based on a comparative study of inmates’ attitudes and perceptions.
   ♦ The second premise is this: Shock incarceration programs are more gendered or more ultramasculine than traditional prisons and influence inmates’ adjustment and perceptions of the institutional environment differently than traditional prisons. Although the findings showed a mixed statistical support...
for this proposition, the authors discuss the limitations of the study that may have led to the statistical conclusion. Lutze and Murphy argue that the “failure to find dramatic or consistent differences between prisons may be related to the general concept that prison environments are designed by men for men, and thus tend to be gendered in similar ways regardless of their design or pragmatic intent” (p. 92). In other words, the authors realize that other variables are at work and future research is necessary. This limitation does not take away from the persuasiveness of the argument but rather acknowledges the many variables that affect inmates’ attitudes and perceptions.

8. Who is the intended audience of this article?
   ♦ As you read any article, ask yourself, to whom is the author wanting to speak? After you read this article, you will see that Lutze and Murphy are writing for not only students but also professors, criminologists, psychologists, and criminal justice personnel. The target audience may most easily be identified if you ask yourself, who will benefit from reading this article?

9. What does the article add to your knowledge of the subject?
   ♦ Again, this answer is for the reader to answer independently, but it is safe to assume that the reader will find that this article adds an analysis of the gendered effect of ultramasculine prisons on the male prisoner. As Lutze and Murphy argue, most literature regarding ultramasculine or gendered prisons focuses on the effect on female inmates. The authors of this article add to the existing literature the effect of gendered prisons on male inmates and how this effect will ultimately affect the rehabilitation of male inmates.

10. What are the implications for criminal justice policy that can be derived from this article?
   ♦ Many policy implications can be derived from this article, but the most important implication is a reevaluation of gendered and ultramasculine prisons. Does this type of prison environment assist or inhibit the rehabilitation of male inmates? After reading this article, you will see that the effect of ultramasculine prisons on male inmates’ attitudes and perceptions requires further research and evaluation so that the criminal justice system can better fulfill its function of changing behavior and preventing future criminality.

Now that we have gone through the elements of a research article, it is your turn to continue through your text, reading the various articles and answering the same questions. You may find that some articles are easier to follow than others, but do not be dissuaded. Remember that each article will follow the same format: introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. If you have any problems, refer to this introduction for guidance.
Faith Lutze and David Murphy examine the concept of shock incarceration in this article. Shock incarceration is supposed to function by “shocking” people sent to them, by sending home the message that, yes, there are prisons and that they are not nice places. Shock programs have become increasingly popular as an alternative to traditional prisons because short stays are obviously cheaper than long stays. Critics of such programs state that they are characterized by ultramasculine environments, which may lead to a number of negative outcomes for inmates. Lutze and Murphy’s study compares inmates in a shock incarceration program with inmates in a traditional minimum-security prison on the degree to which they perceive their environments as masculine and on how these perceptions relate to institutional adjustment. The authors find that inmates who describe their environment as possessing ultramasculine attributes were more likely to report negative patterns of adjustment.

Ultrasculine Prison Environments and Inmates’ Adjustment

It’s Time to Move Beyond the “Boys Will Be Boys” Paradigm

Faith E. Lutze and David W. Murphy

Gender is universally recognized as one of the most fundamental determinants of human behavior. Criminologists consistently propose that it is one of the strongest predictors of criminal involvement (Messerschmidt 1993:1). Decades of evidence indicate that men are far more likely than women to engage in nearly all types of illegal behavior, especially violent crime (Belknap 1996; Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1998; Cullen, Golden, and Cullen 1979). Although gender has been acknowledged as an important influence on behavior and is commonly used in criminological studies about female offenders and their treatment by the criminal justice system (Belknap 1996; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988), the influence of gender on behavior is often ignored in criminal justice research on or about men (Collier 1998; Newburn and Stanko 1994).

Understanding how behaviors are influenced is a prerequisite to creating appropriate correctional institutions and effective correctional programs. Although many studies have considered gender differences in criminal offending (see Adler 1975; Belknap 1996; Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1998; Messerschmidt 1993; Simon and Landis 1991; Steffensmeier 1995) and the influences of gender-biased
sex-role stereotypes on women in prison (Pollock-Byrne 1990; Rafter 1995), few studies have considered the influence of gender-stereotyped environments on all-male correctional populations (Morash and Rucker 1990; Sim 1994; Wright 1991b). With the relatively recent advent of boot camp prisons, also known as shock incarceration programs, concerns have been raised about subjecting women to a military model of corrections designed for men (MacKenzie and Donaldson 1996; Marcus-Mendoza, Klein-Saffran, and Lutze 1998; also see Hannah-Moffat 1995). Yet few observers have voiced concerns about the wisdom of subjecting men to an ultramasculine model of corrections that emphasizes aggressive interactions and male sex-role stereotypes (Morash and Rucker 1990).

In this study we explore the influence of ultramasculine prison environments on inmates’ adjustment to prison. We begin by examining the meanings and significance of gender and the influence of social environments on gender formation. We further explore this influence by comparing inmates of a shock incarceration environment with those of a traditional minimum-security prison.

Definitions of Masculinity and Femininity

Despite the lack of general agreement on the specific definition of masculinity, certain elements of the concept appear in virtually all related discussions. First, it is assumed that a general relationship exists between sex (i.e., being male or female) and gender (i.e., being masculine or feminine) (Vetterling-Braggin 1982). Second, specific behavioral characteristics and personality traits tend to be associated with masculinity, specifically in contrast to femininity (Deaux 1987). These terms largely have emerged from traditional stereotypes linking femininity to “weakness and passion” and masculinity to “power and rationality” (Money 1987:13). Although the definitions of these terms continue to evolve, they still reflect similar stereotypes today.

The words associated with masculine characteristics carry a sense of superiority, which is unmistakable in contrast with the terms used to describe feminine characteristics. For instance, sissified carries profoundly derogatory implications; being powerful, however, is commonly considered desirable. The influence of gender labeling is evident in instances where men and women depart from sex-role stereotypes (see Collier 1998 for a discussion). For instance, men who fail at particular tasks are often labeled with derogatory feminine terms such as being a sissy, while women who demonstrate power are often referred to as bitch. Thus sex-role labeling tends to reinforce behavioral patterns, social networks, and existing institutions of power and rewards.

Subscribing to masculine sex-role stereotypes (i.e., valuing masculinity and/or devaluing femininity), however, has been associated with a number of negative attitudes and behaviors. Although masculine attributes are not inherently bad, they have the potential of being detrimental when alternative behaviors are ignored because of stereotypical beliefs that “real” men can act only in one way (see Basow 1986; Collier 1998; Thompson, Grisanti, and Pleck 1985; Toch 1998). For instance, independence may be considered a positive attribute in some circumstances, but sometimes help from others is needed to overcome personal problems such as drug and alcohol abuse or financial difficulties. Also, although authoritative action and assertiveness may be necessary at times, they may be counterproductive if they are the only means considered acceptable for men in communicating with others. Such behavior may cause conflict in the home and in public places (Thompson et al. 1985), and may cause crime. Refusal to accept less stereotypical masculine responses inhibits the solving of problems that may be related to criminal behavior.
Consequently an overreliance on masculine sex-role stereotypes may hinder prosocial behavior.

### Gender and Environmental Effects on Behavior

Historically, the apparent difference between males’ and females’ criminal tendencies were attributed to sex (i.e., biological traits). Modern criminological theorists, however, subscribe to the general assumption that masculinity and femininity are gender-linked characteristics which are the function of socialization and the environment (see Belknap 1996). According to accepted theories of masculinity, males engage primarily in certain behaviors because those behaviors represent their masculinity effectively. In other words, masculinity is *learned*, and males use it as a means of establishing their gender identity (Franklin 1984).

Particular forms of masculinity, and the appropriate behaviors used to express them, are established not at the individual level but within a larger social group or network. Masculinities therefore are constructed, maintained, and restructured according to the relationships that exist within various social networks in a given environment (Franklin 1984). Consequently, “different types of masculinity exist in the school, the youth group, the street, the family, and the workplace,” but each is subject to the influences of the patriarchal culture in which they exist (Chatterbaugh 1990; Messerschmidt 1993:84) Moreover, these types of masculinity exist in relatively specific and identifiable contexts; yet they develop systematically and are ever-changing, always unfinished products (Chatterbaugh 1990; Messerschmidt 1993). Therefore the behaviors in which men engage depend on what type of masculinity that exists in their particular environment or social setting. These settings serve as the venues in which males find support for their self-identity and in which they ultimately contribute to the identification of others (Franklin 1984).

### The Gendered Nature of Prison

Understanding how support for masculine behavior is influenced by social networks and given environments is important to the study of correctional environments. Whether prisons are meant to punish or to rehabilitate, their purpose is to change behavior and prevent future criminality. Correctional environments that support overreliance on male sex-role stereotypes may inadvertently support behaviors and attitudes that inhibit prosocial behavior by rewarding aggression and hindering the transition from prison to a law-abiding lifestyle (see Abbott 1981; Bernard and McCleary 1996; Sim 1994).

### Traditional Prison Environments

Research on traditional prison environments tends to show that the institutional environment, or prison climate, influences inmate behavior and adjustment. Gender, however, is rarely considered as an environmental attribute. When the prison is considered as gendered or as reinforcing sex-role stereotypes, it usually is in regard to women inmates rather than men. Concern about the reinforcement of gender-biased policy and environments in women’s prisons has long been considered detrimental to women and their success after prison. Even when issues of equality are discussed, especially when programs designed for men are provided to women, the appropriateness of subjecting women to such environments is questioned because women’s needs are different from men’s and because of the gendered nature of programs designed to fit men’s needs. Yet in spite of this history of concern about the gendered nature of women’s prisons, and the long-standing gender disparity in the commission of violent crime, sex-role stereotyped prison environments for men have been called into question only recently.
Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on how masculine environments affect inmates in traditional male prisons. The literature largely provides graphic accounts of survival in maximum-security institutions permeated with personal and institutional violence and aggression (see Abbott 1981; Bernard and McCleary 1996; Sykes 1958). It appears that masculinity, along with violence and aggression, are valued in the traditional prison culture (Lockwood 1982; Toch 1998). Wright (1991b) argues that the establishment and reinforcement of a masculine identity legitimizes an inmate’s use of violence and aggression. Moreover, violence appears to be most common among those inmates who have negative perceptions of (and difficulty in adjusting to) the prison environment and the effects of incarceration (Wright 1991b). Furthermore, Wilson (1986) concludes that male and female inmates differ in their adherence to the inmate code: Male inmates are less trusting of the staff than are female inmates. Wilson attributes this difference to the prison setting, not to gender differences.

Most discussions of masculine prison environments have been linked to violence in maximum-security institutions, where serious, often violent offenders are incarcerated. Few studies have considered how masculine sex-role stereotypes may be replicated or perpetuated in minimum-security institutions, where violent exchanges between inmates are less common and where the institutional environment may be considered safer and more predictable than in maximum-security institutions.

**Shock Incarceration Environments**

Shock incarceration programs appeared in the early 1980s as an alternative to traditional prisons and as a means of getting tough with young male offenders. Boot camp prisons mirror military boot camps in their common use of “strict discipline, physical training, drill and ceremony, military bearing and courtesy, physical labor, and summary punishment for minor misconduct” (Morash and Rucker 1990:205). The purpose of a strict, disciplined correctional environment is to scare offenders away from future criminality and to transfer prosocial behavior to the street. Soon after boot camp prisons developed, however, the severity of such an environment was strongly criticized, and its impact on inmates was questioned (Morash and Rucker 1990; Sechrest 1989).

Because of concern about the principles of military boot camps, which include the promotion of aggression, toughness, and intimidation, Morash and Rucker (1990:206) asked perhaps the most pertinent question: “Why would a method that has been developed to prepare people to go to war, and as a tool to manage legal violence, be considered as having such potential in deterring or rehabilitating offenders?” Specifically, Morash and Rucker (1990) argue that ultramasculine sex-role stereotyped environments may promote aggression and competitiveness as well as leading to isolation and helplessness; each of these outcomes may inhibit prosocial adjustment in some males. Thus an important aspect of the boot camp environment may be the extent to which it is gendered. A gendered boot camp environment generally values what is known as *ultramasculinity* (Morash and Rucker 1990). Such a setting supports notions of male forcefulness and strength of will and informally rewards bravado, aggression, and toughness (see Karner 1998). Morash and Rucker state that these beliefs “rest on the assumption that forceful control is to be valued” and that to succeed is to have masculine characteristics—characteristics that may be a cause of crime (1990:215).

For instance, many boot camp programs emphasize the complete dominance of staff members over inmates, confrontational modes of expression, physical fitness, and repeated verbal insults that degrade minorities, women, and homosexuals (Lutze and Brody 1999). Examples of confrontation often are displayed proudly to the media by shock administrators. Numerous newspapers have depicted staff members at boot camp prisons “in the face” of offenders, yelling commands or insults and...
administering discipline through demanding physical exercise (see Bohlen 1989; Brodus 1991; McDermad 1993; Stobbe 1993). Confrontation, dominance, and control are displayed without much consideration of the idea that other forms of communication (e.g., personal or group sessions, private discussions/counseling) may be more effective in initiating positive responses. Considering a less gender-stereotyped response to men in prison is important in view of recent research on male victimization. According to research (Newburn and Stanko 1994), and personal accounts (Abbott 1981; Bernard and McClearay 1996), some men victimize others to regain their “manhood” and a sense of control in their lives.

In spite of early concerns about the abusive nature of boot camp prisons, most of the work on shock incarceration programs suggests that such prison environments have a positive effect on inmates' attitudes and adjustment (Burton et al, 1993; MacKenzie and Shaw 1990; MacKenzie and Souryal 1995; McCorkle 1995) and do not tend to increase aggression (Lutze 1996a, 1996b). More recent research on the nuances of inmates’ attitudinal change and adjustment has yielded mixed results, however (see Lutze 1996b, 1998; Lutze and Marenin 1997). Although researchers have not yet considered empirically whether the environment in boot camp prisons is any more ultramasculine than in traditional prisons, emerging evidence suggests that the environments of boot camp prisons in fact are gendered and may influence inmates' adjustment accordingly. For instance, MacKenzie and Shaw (1990) report that inmates were well-adjusted overall and remained so over time, except for an increase in conflict. This outcome may indicate the confrontational nature of boot camp prisons and the gender-limited means of dealing with stress among inmates and between inmates and staff. Lutze (1996a, 1996b) also reports that although shock incarceration inmates were better-adjusted and held more positive attitudes toward the program and staff than inmates in a traditional prison, inmates in the shock incarceration program reported greater feelings of isolation and helplessness over time than did the comparison group. These findings tend to support Morash and Rucker's (1990) argument that inmates in boot camp prison may be forced to deal with stress in predominately masculine ways (i.e., conflict) or by withdrawing (i.e., isolation and helplessness).

As further evidence that shock incarceration programs may be ultramasculine, Lutze (1998) discovered that such programs supported rehabilitation by providing a safe, controlled environment for inmates’ participation in programs, but did not offer any greater emotional feedback and support than a traditional prison. Lutze (1998:561) concludes that there is a need to explore how fully “shock incarceration programs, or other correctional settings, can be developed to increase both the external controls that inhibit negative inmate behaviors and the support and emotional feedback that promote psychological and emotional change.” Psychological and emotional support may be associated with modes of coping not fostered in an ultramasculine environment.

Hypotheses

This study builds on prior research by exploring the relationship between inmates’ adjustment and the gendered nature of the environment in a male boot camp prison. We test the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** The gendered or ultramasculine nature of the prison environment influences inmates’ adjustment and perceptions of the environment.

We expect that all prison environments are gendered, and that the extent of gendering will influence how inmates adjust to prison and how they perceive their correctional environment. We expect that the more inmates define their environment as possessing strongly masculine attributes, the more they will experience feelings of isolation, helplessness, anxiety, assertive interactions, and conflict with staff members and other inmates. We
also expect that inmates will perceive their
environment as being less safe, and as providing less support and emotional feedback. In addition, we believe that they will report higher levels of coercion.

**Hypothesis 2.** Shock incarceration programs are more gendered or more ultramasculine than traditional prisons, and influence inmates’ adjustment and perceptions of the institutional environment differently than traditional prisons.

On the basis of Morash and Rucker’s (1990) analysis of boot camp prisons, we expect that shock incarceration programs will emphasize ultramasculine attributes. Given these observations, we expect that shock incarceration inmates will experience more feelings of isolation, helplessness, anxiety, assertive interactions, and conflict with staff members and other inmates. They will also be likely to report less safety, support, and emotional feedback and to report being subjected to more coercion.

In spite of the heavily military environment prevailing in most of these programs, a few also include types of rehabilitation not typically geared toward males. The presence of these features may help to neutralize the otherwise ultramasculine environment at these institutions. Some shock programs emphasize family relationships, family planning, antidrug and alcohol consumption, and personal freedom. Many of these programs are not given as much attention or credibility in traditional male institutions. Because of the dual existence of an ultramasculine environment and “feminine-like” programs in some shock incarceration facilities, it may be difficult to determine how inmates define the gendered nature of their environment.

**Methodology**

On the basis of survey evaluations of two all-male groups of inmates, we compare differences in the perception of the prison environment present in a shock incarceration program and in a traditional minimum-security prison. We use these comparisons to examine the influence of the prison environment on variables measuring inmates’ adjustment.

**Research Setting**

The subjects compared in this study are a group of inmates housed at the Intensive Confinement Center (ICC) in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania and a group of inmates in the Federal Prison Camp (FPC) at Allenwood, Pennsylvania. ICC inmates typically spend up to 17 hours a day for six months in the program, which emphasizes physical activity, work, and treatment programs such as education and drug counseling. The ICC also closely regulates inmates’ appearance, demeanor, and activity, in accordance with strict militaristic guidelines. All staff members are male except for one teacher, one drug and alcohol specialist, and two secretaries, who have limited contact with inmates.

The public areas of the ICC may be characterized as a loud, tightly structured, highly disciplined environment. Officers commonly yell orders and inmates yell responses in acknowledgment or in request for further instruction. The staff totally dominates the inmates. Inmates must request permission to proceed past each staff member they encounter, to enter the cafeteria, and to speak with staff members. Their physical appearance is under constant scrutiny, including presentation of uniforms, length of hair, amount of facial hair, posture, and body weight. Inmates who fail to conform to the rigid expectations of the program are quickly subjected to verbal reprimands and discipline in the form of physical exercise. Inmates who show weakness or who do not measure up in their athletic ability are often called sissies, girls, or mama’s boys. In the private areas of the institution (classrooms and work areas), staff members still maintain a strictly disciplined environment, though communication is somewhat more relaxed. Inmates are allowed to speak with staff members more openly and without formality. Strict
rules still apply to appearance and posture, however. Treatment staff members (teachers, counselors, case managers) still may discipline inmates for their behavior, and they share their progress reports with the custody staff.

FPC Allenwood, on the other hand, is a traditional minimum-security institution in which inmates develop their own programs. These programs typically include work; they also may include treatment and recreation. The characteristics of offenders sentenced to institutions such as FPC Allenwood are generally similar to those sentenced to the ICC. For example, inmates in both institutions tend to be less violent, to have less serious records, and to be serving shorter sentences than inmates in more secure traditional prisons. Although most of the staff at FPC Allenwood are males, women serve as correctional officers, teachers, hospital staff members, secretaries, and work supervisors.

The public areas of FPC Allenwood are less disciplined and less structured than in the ICC. Although FPC inmates are required to observe general rules and regulations governing inmate behavior, their movement through the institution is less restricted and much more relaxed than in the ICC. Although staff members maintain control of inmates, the general staff-inmate interaction is not confrontational.

Research Procedure

In this study we use data originally generated from a larger study in which self-report questionnaires were administered to the subjects. The first of two questionnaires was given within two weeks of an inmate’s arrival at his institution (Time 1); inmates completed the second questionnaire approximately six months later (Time 2). All demographic data were gathered during the first phase; inmates’ evaluations of their environment as well as their attitudes and personal adjustment to confinement were collected during the second phase. The first author administered confidential surveys to inmates in small groups, away from direct observation by the staff.

Sample

Intensive Confinement Center. All inmates arriving at the ICC between December 1993 and October 1994 were surveyed for this study. Of the 334 ICC inmates completing the Time 1 questionnaire, 271 (81%) also completed the Time 2 questionnaire. Of the 63 inmates (19%) who were not included in the second phase, 23 (7%) withdrew voluntarily from the ICC program, 19 (6%) were removed formally by the prison staff for misconduct, 10 (3%) were released prior to graduating from the program, 9 (3%) were unable to participate because of medical conditions, and 2 (1%) inmates’ sentences were commuted by the court. This study includes only those ICC inmates who completed the program by participating at both Time 1 and Time 2.

FPC Allenwood. The comparison group used in this study consists of inmates arriving at FPC Allenwood between March 1994 and January 1995. A total of 170 of these inmates were selected to participate in the study. Comparison group selections were made according to age (less than 45 years) and sentence length (less than 60 months). Of the original 170 inmates, 106 (62%) participated fully in the study by completing questionnaires at Time 2. Of the 64 (38%) inmates who did not complete the study, 54 (32%) were released from the institution before Time 2, and 10 (6%) declined to participate at Time 2. This study includes only those FPC inmates for whom Time 1 and Time 2 measures were collected.

Measures

The measures used here relate to three specific areas: demographic information, institutional environment, and adjustment to prison.

Demographics. Subjects were asked to provide information on a variety of background characteristics including age, race, marital status, occupation, education, prior arrests, and offense leading to current confinement.
Environment. The environment of each institution is measured with the Gendered Environment Scale, Wright’s (1985) Prison Environment Inventory (PEI) and the Coercion Scale. We developed the Gendered Environment Scale to explore the extent to which the environment is gendered; it measures the extent to which the prison environment supports male sex-role stereotypes (see Appendix Table Al). Composed of 11 Likert-type questions, it is based on components of the male sex role specified by Brannon and Juni (1984; also see Thompson et al. 1985). Gender stereotyping in this study relates to the overgeneralization of feminine attributes, definition of feminine attributes as negative, the use of feminine descriptors as derogatory labels for men, the portrayal of men as better than women, and support for assertive interactions between men.9

The PEI is used to measure how inmates define their environment (Wright 1985). The PEI consists of 80 Likert-type questions that address Toch’s (1977) eight situational variables: privacy, safety, structure, support, emotional feedback, social stimulation, activity, and freedom. Only the scales for safety, support, and emotional feedback are used in this study. The PEI safety scale measures the extent to which the institutional environment allows inmates to feel safe from being attacked by others, or from being robbed. The support scale measures the extent to which the environment provides inmates with reliable assistance from people with programs that advocate opportunities for self-improvement. The emotional feedback scale measures the extent to which the environment allows inmates to develop intimate relationships with people who care about them and the extent to which inmates are allowed to show their emotions without being ridiculed. This scale includes interactions with staff members and with other inmates.

Adjustment. We use six measures to assess inmates’ adjustment. Isolation is measured with the Isolation Scale. Isolation, as measured by this scale, relates to the inmates’ feelings that few, if any, people can be trusted and that it is better to stay away from others if one is to complete his sentence successfully. The Isolation Scale consists of six items such as “There are no real friends in prison” and “In the institution I keep pretty much to myself.”

The state version of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Speilberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene 1970) is used to measure stress. This 20-item Likert-type scale, which has been used in prior prison research (see MacKenzie, et al. 1987), consists of items such as “I feel calm” and “I am presently worrying over possible misfortunes.”

An inmate’s feeling of helplessness is measured by the Victim Scale, taken from MacKenzie and Shaw’s (1990) 37-item Attitude Toward IMPACT Scale. (For the remainder of this study, we refer to this scale as inmates’ “helplessness.”) Items consist of statements such as “I do not think I can take this anymore” and “This place is unfair.”

Conflict is measured by two Guttman scales indicating how many times an inmate has been involved in a conflict either with another inmate or with the staff (Shoemaker and Hillery 1980). The two scales each consist of seven items that measure conflict on a continuum ranging from verbal conflict to physical violence; inmates are asked if they have been in a variety of situations involving other inmates or staff members. For example, they are asked whether they have ever been in “[a] discussion in which some disagreement occurred” and “[a] situation in which some physical force was used on someone.”

Assertiveness is measured by the Assertive Interactions Scale (Goodstein and Hepburn 1985). This scale consists of nine questions relating to the likelihood that an inmate will assert himself in a difficult situation: for example, “I try to stay out of trouble but nobody is going to push me around and get away with it.”
### Findings

#### Demographic Characteristics

We compared inmates at the ICC and the FPC to see whether the groups differed on demographic characteristics at Time 1 of the study (see Table 1). The groups were statistically similar in most characteristics, except that ICC inmates tended to be younger, serving shorter sentences, younger at the age of first arrest, and single. These characteristics are related primarily to age and sentence; therefore we introduce these variables as controls in all multilevel analyses.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>ICC (N = 271)</th>
<th>Allenwood (N = 106)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>33.2</td>
<td>109.1</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>12.7</td>
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<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Length (Months)</td>
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<td>30.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
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<td>28.8</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juvenile Time</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>61.3</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>6.6</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>24.6</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence of Perceptions of a Gendered Environment on Inmate Adjustment

We use an independent-sample t-test to test for the difference between the two prisons regarding the presence of gendered environments. ICC inmates \((M = 35.1)\) reported the environment to be significantly more gendered than did FPC inmates \((M = 31.7)\).\(^{12}\)

We use linear regression (OLS) to test the relationship between the inmates’ assessment of the gendered nature of the environment and how they adjust to prison. Each of the adjustment measures (assertive interactions, isolation, helplessness, stress, conflict) is regressed on the nature of the gendered environment, age, sentence, and prison setting. We pool the two prison populations for these analyses.

The gendered nature of the environment relates significantly to each of the adjustment measures (see Table 2). As inmates defined the environment as possessing more masculine

Table 2  Relationship Between Gendered Environment and Inmates’ Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Assertive Interaction</th>
<th>Isolation</th>
<th>Helplessness</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>28.042</td>
<td>12.81</td>
<td>13.869</td>
<td>7.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>4.75***</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>3.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>−3.652</td>
<td>−5.62***</td>
<td>1.021</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−.118</td>
<td>−2.74**</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>−.217</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td></td>
<td>.048</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F (df))</td>
<td>11.320(4,346)**</td>
<td>4.375(4,348)**</td>
<td>15.147(4,346)**</td>
<td>7.588(4,340)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>347</td>
<td></td>
<td>349</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inmate-Staff Conflict</th>
<th>Inmate-Inmate Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.307</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>2.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>1.95*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−.030</td>
<td>−2.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>2.70**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F (df))</td>
<td>7.070(4,342)**</td>
<td>5.486(4,348)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(p < .05\); ** \(p < .01\); *** \(p < .001\)
attributes, they were more likely to report greater levels of assertive interactions, isolation, feelings of helplessness, stress, and conflict with staff members and other inmates. These relationships between adjustment and the gendered nature of the environment did not differ significantly by prison setting.13

Perceptions of Gendered Environment on Safety, Emotional Feedback, Support, and Coercion

We use linear regression to test the relationship between the inmates’ assessment of the gendered nature of the environment and their perception of safety, emotional feedback, support, and coercion. Each of the environmental measures is regressed on the gendered nature of the environment, age, sentence, and prison setting.

The gendered nature of the environment significantly influences inmates’ perceptions of other environmental attributes (see Table 3). Inmates defining their environment as more masculine were more likely to report lower levels of safety, lower levels of emotional feedback and support, and greater levels of coercion. The relationship between the gendered nature of the environment and environmental attributes did not differ significantly by prison setting.14

Discussion

These findings indicate that perceptions of gender are important for inmates’ adjustment to the institution. In addition, they show that perceived differences in the gendered nature of the prison environment do not influence inmates’ patterns of adjustment differently in the two prison populations.

Gender Matters: The Influence of Environment on Inmates’ Adjustment

Regardless of institutional setting, inmates who defined the environment as possessing ultramasculine attributes were more likely to report greater levels of assertiveness, isolation, helplessness, stress, and conflict with other inmates and with the staff. They were also more likely to perceive the environment as

| Table 3 | Relationship Between Gendered Environment and Inmates’ Perceptions of the Environment |
|---------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|         | Emotional Feedback |                      | Support |                      | Safety |                      | Coercion |
|         | Constant | 38.219 | 18.53 | 47.497 | 19.86 | 40.979 | 16.925 | 3.722 | 3.27 |
|         | Gender | −.211 | −5.08*** | −.233 | −4.85*** | −.191 | −3.95** | .224 | 9.76*** |
|         | Prison | .640 | 1.04 | −.868 | −1.21 | 6.714 | 9.342*** | 1.712 | 5.01*** |
|         | Age | −.069 | −1.70 | −.167 | −3.55*** | .011 | .230 | .013 | .573 |
|         | Sentence | .005 | .231 | .014 | .590 | −.016 | −.668 | .014 | 1.27 |

**R² | .081 | .102 | .255 | .316 |

N | 341 | 346 | 345 | 350 |

**p < .01; ***p < .001.
providing less safety, support, and emotional feedback, and as more coercive.

These findings support the notion that gendered prison environments may be directly related to adjustment in ways that inhibit rehabilitation. Prior research on inmates’ adjustment shows that safety, support, emotional feedback, and positive interactions with others are important to prosocial change (see Goodstein and Wright 1989; Lutze 1998). Yet it appears that these very attributes are compromised in environments that emphasize male sex-role stereotypes. It is disconcerting that ultramasculine environments may be magnified in boot camp prisons which are designed to create a more positive correctional environment; this fact calls into question new programs that basically do “more of the same” in housing male inmates.

These findings suggest that Morash and Rucker (1990) are justified in their concern about creating an environment in shock incarceration programs which actually may promote behavior related to ultramasculine stereotypes, which in turn are believed to be correlated with criminality (see Karner 1998 for a similar discussion related to the military). In this study we offer a possible explanation why inmates in prior studies of shock incarceration programs reported greater levels of conflict (MacKenzie and Shaw 1990), isolation, and helplessness (Lutze 1996b), and reported similar levels of support and emotional feedback than those in traditional prisons (Lutze 1998).

**Prison as Support for Masculine Social Groups**

We find mixed support for the hypothesis that inmates will perceive boot camp prison to be more masculine than traditional prison, and thus will follow different patterns of adjustment. Although ICC inmates perceived their environment as significantly more masculine than did inmates in traditional prison (in support of Morash and Rucker 1990), inmates at the ICC did not differ overall from traditional inmates in their patterns of adjustment.

A failure to find dramatic or consistent differences between prisons may be related to the general concept that prison environments are designed by men for men, and thus tend to be gendered in similar ways regardless of their design or programmatic intent (Hannah-Moffat 1995; Sim 1994). The ICC may merely reinvent the masculine nature of traditional prisons, thus generating similar outcomes related to adjustment.

The types of behavior in which men engage depend on the type of masculinity that exists in their particular environment or social setting. These environments or social settings serve as the venues in which males find support for their self-identity; ultimately they contribute to the identification of others (Franklin 1984). Therefore, in prison, just as in free society, masculinity is reinforced through social groups and networks. The social setting of prison is an arena in which ultramasculine sex-role stereotypes are promoted and must be confronted, whether or not the individual inmate or staff member subscribes to such beliefs or behavior (see Collier 1998; Toch 1998).

Male inmates and staff members may find it difficult to provide higher levels of support and emotional feedback in programs designed to accomplish rehabilitation because more personal, more caring forms of support are not perceived as acceptable masculine forms of communication. It may be that the prison environment is not “safe” enough to enable an inmate to depart from traditional male paradigms of communication. For instance, because of a lack of trust between all actors in the prison and a fear of being perceived as weak, many men may not transcend the traditional male boundaries, which inhibit the provision of emotional support. Immersion in an ultramasculine setting may hinder the opportunity to incorporate gender-diverse modes of coping; such modes may support personal changes that may enhance success after release.

Patterns of adjustment such as increased isolation, helplessness, and stress also may have
negative consequences. For instance, inmates who do not contend effectively with isolation or helplessness may continue, after release, to separate themselves from others who may be helpful in providing services that support law-abiding behavior. On the other hand, inmates who internalize repeated examples of confrontation and assertive interaction as acceptable behavior for gaining control of others may experience problems after release by overasserting their position and refusing to compromise.

It may be that sex-role stereotypes are replicated when the gendered nature of the prison environment is not considered in the creation of new programs such as shock incarceration. Thus prisons are similar to each other, not only because all total institutions function to control and influence inmates’ behavior in similar ways (see Goffman 1959), but also because their environments are similarly gendered; thus they reinforce behavior related to sex-role stereotypes that create division between inmates and staff. Reinforcement of ultramasculine sex-role stereotypes actually may contribute to behaviors that perpetuate criminal behavior.

Although this study contributes to the literature on gender and on inmates’ adjustment to prison, it also raises many questions that need to be addressed through future research. First, masculinity is not a unidimensional construct. Individuals differ in their adherence to different dimensions of masculinity, depending on demographic characteristics, personality, socialization, and social setting (see Messerschmidt 1993). Consequently, future studies should consider how different types of individuals interact with others (male and female) and with the environment (coercive versus noncoercive settings).

Second, more complex measures should be developed and implemented to assess the gendered nature of the environment and how inmates adjust to different social climates. The environmental and adjustment measures used in this study were derived on the basis of male populations; therefore they also may be gendered so as to influence outcomes.

Finally, it is unknown how individual inmates are affected by ultramasculine prison environments. Are weaker inmates victimized, or do they become the victimizers (see Bernard and McCleary 1996; Newburn and Stanko 1994)? Are aggressive individuals rewarded, and do they become more aggressive as a result (Morash and Rucker 1990)? To more fully understand the existence of ultramasculine environments and how individuals interact with them, researchers must explore these questions more fully.

**Conclusion**

Our findings support the notion that an inmate’s ability to undergo prosocial adjustment (the goal of boot camp prisons) may be inhibited if the environment emphasizes ultramasculine values. Such environments, whether located in new, creative prison programs or in traditional prisons, are limited in their ability to provide the freedom and support that inmates need to pursue rehabilitation wholeheartedly. Ultramasculine environments also may inhibit staff members from providing full support to inmates who wish to seek personal change, because they are similarly inhibited by sex-role stereotypes. It is time for criminal justice scholars and criminologists to stop viewing gender bias as applicable only to the evaluation of women, and to begin exploring how sex-role stereotypes influence men negatively and inhibit treatment attempts to change antisocial male behavior.

**Notes**

1. Theorists in psychology, feminist studies, masculine studies, and education have also analyzed the influence of gender on behavior (see Sapiro 1990 for a review).
2. As with many concepts encountered in the social sciences, a single, agreed upon definition of masculinity does not exist. This is quite evident when we examine the variety of ways in which masculinity
has been operationalized across studies (Baker and Chopik 1982; Norland, Wessell and Shover 1981; Wilkinson 1985) and defined across disciplines (e.g., psychology, feminist studies, etc.). Wilkinson (1985) explains that masculinity exists on multiple dimensions, and leaves conceptualization to the discretion of individual researchers. Consequently the validity of any analysis of masculinity depends on the appropriateness of the definition and the measurement.

3. Common adjectives used to describe masculine and feminine characteristics include the following:

Masculine: virile, manly, mannish, gentlemanly, strong, vigorous, brawny, muscular, broad-shouldered, powerful, forceful, macho, red-blooded, two fisted (Webster’s New World Thesaurus 1997; emphasis added).

Feminine: effeminate, epicene, sissified, sissyish, unmanly, womanish (Roget’s II 1997; emphasis added).

4. Research on aggression and boot camp prisons has focused on behavior within the institution as opposed to behavior after release. Studies on recidivism among boot camp prison graduates do not indicate increases through new violent offenses (see MacKenzie 1991; MacKenzie and Shaw 1993).

5. The female drug and alcohol specialist was hired toward the end of the period of study.

6. This study includes only those who completed questionnaires at both Time 1 and Time 2, because data related to the environment were collected only at Time 2. Although dropouts did not differ significantly from completers for either group on most of the demographic variables, it is not known how dropouts may have defined their environment in terms of being gendered. Thus the results should be interpreted cautiously.

7. On the variables listed in Table 1, ICC inmates who dropped out of the study did not differ statistically from ICC inmates who completed the study.

8. On the demographic variables listed in Table 1, Allenwood inmates who dropped out of the study did not differ statistically from Allenwood inmates who completed the study, except on sentence length. Dropouts (M = 24.7, sd = 17.4) tended to have slightly shorter sentences than those who completed the study (M = 30.7, sd = 19.1, p < .05). These differences should not affect the generalizability of study results.

9. Results of a varimax factor analysis for the Gendered Environment Scale produced five factors (see Brannon and Juni 1985), and they relate conceptually to what we call the gendered environment. Therefore we combine them into a single scale for the purposes of this study. Items remaining in the scale were determined on the basis of their corrected interitem correlations and on how they affect Cronbach’s coefficient alpha for the scale. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” (= 5) to “strongly disagree” (= 1).

10. ICC inmates differed statistically from FPC inmates in the following manner: age (ICC: M = 26.2, sd = 5.2 vs. FPC: M = 33.2, sd = 7.0, p < .01), sentence length, in months (ICC: M = 24.4, sd = 7.8 vs. FPC: M = 30.7, sd = 17.4, p < .01), age at first arrest (ICC: M = 23.5, sd = 5.7 vs. FPC: M = 28.8, sd = 8.3, p < .01), and marital status (chi square = 24.8, p < .01).

11. Statistical correlations showed that age, sentence length, age at first arrest, and marital status are highly correlated. Therefore the use of age as a single control is justified.

12. The results of the t-test are t = 5.11; df = 359; p < .001.

13. The interaction term (prison x gendered environment) was introduced into each of the regression models in Table 2. No interaction was significant. The interaction term for assertive interactions, however, approached significance (p = .067). As the gendered nature of the environment increased, both the ICC and FPC inmates reported that they would be more likely to assert themselves in a difficult situation. The relationship between gendered environment and assertive interactions, however, was stronger for the FPC inmates.

14. The interaction term (prison x gendered environment) was introduced into each of the regression models in Table 3. No interaction was significant. The interaction term for safety (p = .079), however, approached significance. As the gendered nature of the environment increased, both ICC and FPC inmates described the environment as less safe. The relationship between gendered environment and safety, however, was stronger for the FPC inmates.

References


Section 2 ▪ Ultrasubtle Environment and Inmates’ Adjustment


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define what a total institution is and how it might vary by type of correctional arrangement (e.g., probation, parole, jail, prison) and inmate status.

2. Explain why the power of staff in corrections is not absolute? How might this power be used to improve the correctional environment and to destroy it?

3. According to Lutze and Murphy, how do inmates perceive minimum security and shock incarceration facilities and operations?

READING

In this article Craig Hemmens and James Marquart survey the correctional research literature on studies of inmate adjustment patterns to prison life. Early studies assumed inmates were part of a monolithic homogeneous whole, though later research suggested factors such as race, age, and socioeconomic status affect inmate adjustment to prison life. Their own research focuses on the relationship between perceptions of one aspect of the institutional experience, inmate-staff relations, and age and race or ethnicity. A survey of recently released Texas inmates revealed that race and age have a major impact on inmate perceptions of staff.

Friend or Foe?

Race, Age, and Inmate Perceptions of Inmate-Staff Relations

Craig Hemmens and James W. Marquart

Introduction

The prison experience has historically been meant to be unpleasant, and prisoners have been expected to suffer to some degree. There is, however, some dispute in the correctional research literature as to whether prison has any impact whatsoever on today’s inmates. There is


a general consensus in the correctional literature that institutionalization is a dehumanizing and demoralizing experience (Goffman, 1961; Irwin, 1980), but some research suggests that some inmates prefer prison to probation (Crouch, 1993), and that some inmates fare better in prison than others (Goodstein & Wright, 1989; Goodstein & MacKenzie, 1984; Wright, 1991). Some research indicates sociodemographic characteristics such as race and age may affect adjustment to prison, as well as perceptions of the institutional experience.

This article builds upon prior research on inmate adjustment patterns. A total of 775 recently released Texas inmates, or “exmates,” were surveyed about several aspects of the inmate-staff relationship. Their responses were examined and compared with a host of sociodemographic and criminal history variables. This article isolates and examines the effect of race and age on inmate perceptions of inmate-staff relations.

Prior Research

There is a substantial body of literature on inmate adjustment to prison (much of it focusing on race and age) as well as on inmate-staff relations. Each of these is examined in turn.

Inmate Adjustment

Research on inmate adjustment to incarceration dates from the pioneering study by Clemmer (1940) in which he developed the concept of “prisonization” to explain how prisoners become assimilated into the informal social structure of the prison. Some subsequent researchers built upon Clemmer’s work, focusing on the inmate subculture that developed around shared “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958), which unified the inmate population and created a subculture based on a set of norms and values in opposition to those espoused by the prison staff. This portrayal of prison life became known as the “deprivation” model, and received mixed empirical support.

Some researchers decried the focus on the so-called pains of imprisonment and institutional factors as the key to understanding inmate adjustment. They examined, instead, attributes and experiences that inmates brought with them to prison. They also argued that inmates brought into prison values learned on the street, in the inner city (Carroll, 1974; 1982). This was referred to as the “importation model.” Researchers have studied a variety of extra-prison variables, including race, age, socioeconomic status, and criminal history, a number of which have been found to be related to inmate adjustment patterns. Race and age are prominent among these variables. The focus of this article is on the impact of race and age on inmate perceptions of one aspect of the institutional experience, inmate-staff relations.

Race and Inmate Adjustment

Several studies have examined the racial heterogeneity of the inmate population. Earlier studies made passing reference to racial differences and their potential impact on the prisoner subculture (Sykes, 1958), and the picture generally painted was one of inmate heterogeneity. Regardless of whether such a picture was accurate then, indications are that it certainly is not accurate today. Carroll (1974) and Jacobs (1974) both detailed the changing nature of the inmate population, focusing particularly on racial differences.

Jacobs’s description of Stateville prison portrayed Black inmates as much more cohesive and unified than White inmates. He argued that this racially based group unity was a direct consequence of the Black inmates’ shared preprison experiences with racism and discrimination in their lives in general and the criminal justice system in particular (Jacobs, 1976, 1977). Carroll posited that Blacks were successful in

adjusting to prison not only because of their shared history of discrimination on the basis of race, but also because so many of them came to prison from the urban ghetto, where “making it” on the streets required a greater degree of toughness (Carroll, 1982).

Goodstein and MacKenzie (1984) found that White and Black inmates did vary on the degree of prisonization and time spent in the criminal justice system. White inmates with multiple convictions were more highly prisonized than Whites with one conviction, while Black inmates remained at the same level of prisonization regardless of the number of convictions (Goodstein & MacKenzie, 1984). Black inmates were also more “radicalized” than were White inmates, regardless of the length of confinement. These findings suggest there are significant differences between Black and White inmates, possibly because Blacks have suffered discrimination at the hands of criminal justice actors at all levels of the system.

Several studies of racial differences in prison indicated that Black inmates are significantly more likely than White inmates to be involved in conflicts with both staff and other inmates. Fuller and Orsagh (1977) found that Black inmates were more likely than White inmates to be aggressors. Other studies have also found that interracial conflict most often involves a Black aggressor and a White victim (Bowker, 1980; Lockwood, 1980; Wooden & Parker, 1982). The evidence of racial differences on aggressive behavior is mixed, however. A number of other studies have found little or no support for the hypothesis that non-White inmates are in fact more aggressive or violent than are White inmates, when controlling for other factors such as age, number of prior arrests, and drug and alcohol dependency (Ellis et al., 1974; Goodstein & MacKenzie, 1984; Wright, 1988; Zink, 1957). In addition, while a number of studies have found that Blacks are much more likely to be involved in conduct that results in official condemnation by the prison administration (Flanagan, 1983; Ramirez, 1983), it has been suggested that racial discrimination on the part of prison administrators or correctional officers may account for this differential (Flanagan, 1983; Howard et al., 1994; Poole & Regoli, 1980; Wright, 1988).

Other studies of racial differences in adaptation to prison indicated that White inmates may suffer from higher levels of stress and fear than Black inmates. One study found that White inmates are more likely than Black inmates to injure themselves intentionally (Wright, 1988). Other studies showed that White inmates had more psychological problems, including breakdowns (Johnson, 1987) and depression. There may be, however, alternative explanations for the difference in adjustment by race. Goodstein and MacKenzie (1984) found no differences in the level of anxiety or the likelihood of depression between Black and White inmates.

Age and Inmate Adjustment

Age is frequently cited as an important explanatory variable in criminal justice (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1991). A number of studies of violence in prison suggested that age is an important factor in inmate adjustment patterns. Age has been closely linked to the likelihood of aggressive behavior in prison. As inmates become older, there is a linear decline in the number of aggressive acts toward other inmates and/or correctional staff (Ekland-Olson et al., 1983; Porporino & Zamble, 1984), which mirrors the age-crime relationship in the free world (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1991; Nagin & Farrington, 1992).

A study of age and aggressive behavior in prison by MacKenzie (1987) revealed a slightly more complex picture, however. Rather than a linear decline with age, she found that the rate of aggressive behavior rose until the late twenties, then declined. In addition, interpersonal conflicts with other inmates remained high for a longer period of time than did interpersonal conflicts with correctional officers. Recent research suggests that age is related not only to
the likelihood of being involved in violent activity in prison, but also to perceptions of prison as safe or dangerous. Hemmens and Marquart (1999b) found that younger inmates were more likely to perceive prison as a dangerous place than were older inmates.

**Inmate-Staff Relations**

Living in prison means losing control over much of one’s life. Personal autonomy is replaced by the requirement that the individual obey the commands of correctional staff. Inmate-staff relations thus comprise a crucial aspect of the institutional experience, and have been the subject of correctional research since the 1930s. Early researchers assumed that inmates had different norms and values than guards, and that guards and inmates distrusted one another. This research on the prison experience also tended to dichotomize the prison setting, with inmates on one side, guards on the other (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958).

It was taken for granted by these early researchers that inmates would have different norms and values than guards, and that guards and inmates would distrust one another. This research on the prison experience also tended to dichotomize the prison setting, with inmates on one side, guards on the other (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958).

Later research has suggested that such a picture is overly simplistic. The Ramirez (1983) research indicated that staff and inmates share similar attitudes concerning a variety of issues. The Marquart (1986a, 1986b) participant observation research indicated that correctional officers who are involved in daily interaction with inmates can establish a rapport with and an understanding of inmates.

Historically, correctional officers have been White males with relatively low education levels, drawn in large part from rural areas, where many prisons were first located (Clemmer, 1940; Jacobs, 1977; Lombardo, 1982). Only recently has the presence of minorities and females in the correctional officer pool become noticeable. Studies of the impact on corrections of the changing correctional officer work force have produced mixed findings. Some studies indicated that minority officers have more punitive attitudes towards inmates than White officers (Jacobs & Kraft, 1978), while other studies found just the opposite (Jurik, 1985) or no difference (Crouch & Alpert, 1982).

In regards to female correctional officers, several studies indicated that female officers do not hold substantially different attitudes towards inmates than male officers (Cullen et al., 1985; Jurik, 1985, 1988; Jurik & Halemba, 1984). In addition, research suggests that while sexist attitudes still exist among inmates and male officers (Crouch, 1985; Zimmer, 1986), in general both inmates and male officers believe female correctional officers can do their jobs as well as male officers (Kissel & Katsampes, 1980; Walters, 1993).

The focus of the research presented in this article was on inmate attitudes towards and perceptions of correctional officers, a relatively understudied aspect of the inmate-staff equation. Much of the prior research has focused on staff attitudes toward inmates. The composition of the Texas correctional officer force has moved from what was characterized by Marquart (1986b) as a “good old boy” system dominated by White males from rural areas, to one with a substantial number of minority and female correctional officers, many from more urban areas. How have inmates perceived this shift in the demographic makeup of the Texas correctional officer force? This research sought to answer this question by examining inmate perceptions of female correctional officers, inmate-staff relations, and the use of force by correctional staff.

**Methods**

The data for this study were obtained from a survey, administered over a six-week period, to 775 men released from incarceration in the Texas Department of Corrections—Institutional Division (TDCJ-ID). These former inmates, or “exmates,” were interviewed at the bus station in Huntsville, located two blocks...
west of the Walls Unit. There are over one hundred prisons in TDCJ-ID, though virtually all inmates are processed and released through the Walls Unit. According to TDCJ-ID data, 1,900 inmates were released during the interview period, and 775 inmates submitted to interviews. Assuming that virtually all of these 1,900 inmates passed through the bus station on their way home, as required by law, this generated a response rate of 41 percent. No data were collected on precisely why inmates refused to participate. Care was taken to create a research design that would yield accurate responses and generalizable results, though there are areas of concern, which may limit the usefulness of this study and which should be noted. These include the issues of selection and response bias.

**Statistical Procedures**

The data analysis included two steps. First, responses to individual items were examined using analysis of variance (ANOVA). Second, a logistical regression was conducted, incorporating all of the sociodemographic variables collected, to determine which individual variables remained in the equation when controlling for the effects of other variables.

**Analysis of Variance**

Analysis of variance (or ANOVA) is a statistical procedure by which the ratio of variance between group means is examined to determine the likelihood that a difference in mean scores occurred by chance alone. In this research, exmate responses on each of the individual survey items were compared on the basis of sociodemographic and criminal history variables. Sociodemographic variables included race, age, education level; criminal history variables included age at first arrest, number of prior incarcerations, and number of years spent in prison. ANOVA was used to determine whether the difference in the mean scores of the various groups (race/ethnicity and four age categories) occurred through chance variation or whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the sociodemographic/criminal history characteristics and responses to the survey items.

It should be noted that while information concerning a host of sociodemographic and criminal history variables was collected, in this article the focus is exclusively on race and age. This is because, in most instances, the other variables failed to reveal a statistically significant relationship between the variable and perceptions (Hemmens, 1998). These have therefore been excluded from the presentation of results.

The possible range of scores on each item was from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). A lower mean score indicated that an exmate group tended to agree with the statement; a higher mean score indicated that an exmate group tended to disagree with the statement. Items were reverse scored when necessary to achieve consistency of interpretation.

**Logistic Regression**

Logistic regression allows the researcher to perform a regression-like analysis of data when the dependent variable is dichotomous rather than continuous. Logistic regression was chosen for these data because the narrow range of answers (1 to 4 on a modified Likert scale) tended to produce very clear response patterns—exmates either agreed or disagreed with most statements. Exmate responses were recoded into two categories (agree/disagree), and logistic regression was performed.

**Findings**

**Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Exmate Sample**

First, the demographic characteristics of the exmate sample were analyzed and compared with state and national data. Descriptive statistics for the sociodemographic and criminal history characteristics of the 775 male
exmates who comprised the sample are summarized in Table 1. Sample characteristics were similar to national level data regarding sociodemographic characteristics of male inmates in 1994 (Gilliard & Beck, 1996). Blacks made up the largest racial/ethnic group in the exmate sample, comprising almost one-half (48 percent) of all respondents. Whites accounted for approximately one-third (33.7 percent) of all respondents, while Hispanics made up just 17.2 percent of the sample. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample was similar to that of inmates nationally. National statistics indicate 45.6 percent of inmates are White, and 48.2 percent are Black/minority (Gilliard & Beck, 1996).

The average age of the exmate sample was 33 years. White exmates were slightly older, with a mean age of 33.8 years, compared with a mean age of 32.7 years for Black exmates, and 32.2 years for Hispanic exmates. The difference in mean ages was not statistically significant. Precise national statistics on age are not kept, but estimates of the number of inmates by age category compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics suggest the mean age of the exmate sample is in line with national statistics. Approximately 55 percent of all inmates nationally are age 32 or younger, while 45 percent are age 33 or older (Snell, 1995). In addition, the median age of inmates on admission (a figure that is available), was 29 years in 1992 (Perkins, 1994).

The mean years of education completed for the exmate sample was just less than eleven years, or less than a high school degree (twelve years). Over one-half (55.4 percent) of all the exmates had not completed high school. Slightly over one-quarter (28.8 percent) of the exmates had a high school degree or GED, while 15 percent had at least some college experience. National statistics on inmate education levels indicate that roughly 40 percent of all male inmates do not have so much as a high school degree, while slightly less than 47 percent have a high school degree, and slightly more than 13 percent have at least some college experience (Snell, 1995). The median education level nationally of inmates at admission in 1992 was eleven years (Perkins, 1994). This closely mirrors the exmate sample. Comparison of the exmate and national samples revealed exmates as a whole were somewhat less educated than inmates nationally, with a greater percentage of exmates having failed to graduate from high school.

**Perceptions of Inmate-Staff Relations**

Next, the responses to questions dealing with inmate-staff relations were examined. The exmates were divided into three racial groups: White, Black, and Hispanic. Responses by racial/ethnic group were compared to determine whether exmates of different racial/ethnic groups held different perceptions of inmate-staff relations.

Four age-group categories were also created: 19–29 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, and 50 and older. Responses by age category were compared to determine whether exmates of different ages held different perceptions of inmate-staff relations. Age categories were created to highlight age differences. Tracking responses by individual years tended to mask differences as the changes between one year and the next were very slight.

Exmates were asked their level of agreement with eight statements regarding correctional staff. ANOVA was then conducted to determine statistically significant differences based on race and age. The eight statements and the responses to each statement are displayed in Table 2.

Exmates appeared to share similar feelings about correctional officers and inmate-staff relations. Mean scores on the eight questions regarding perceptions of correctional staff did not often vary significantly based on most of the selected sociodemographic and criminal history characteristics,
### Table 1  
Sociodemographic and Criminal History Characteristics of the Exmate Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>32.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–29</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No high school degree</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior incarcerations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in prison</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–9</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at first arrest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 17</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–21</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22–29</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or older</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

such as education level, socioeconomic status, and criminal history. The results for these items were thus excluded for ease of presentation here. Only two variables revealed statistically significant results. These were exmate age and race (discussed following).
Table 2  Perceptions of Inmate-Staff Relations Using Analysis of Variance

I had very few problems with guards in TDC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.408</td>
<td>2.532</td>
<td>2.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>.822</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F \text{ ratio } = 2.055; \ F \text{ probability } = .1288 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>19–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40–49</th>
<th>50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.640</td>
<td>2.498***</td>
<td>2.246**</td>
<td>2.143a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>.891</td>
<td>.703</td>
<td>.524</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F \text{ ratio } = 7.744; \ F \text{ probability } = .000 \]

Female guards do their job as well as male guards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.398</td>
<td>2.320</td>
<td>2.346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td>.723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F \text{ ratio } = .8188; \ F \text{ probability } = .4413 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>19–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40–49</th>
<th>50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.317</td>
<td>2.393</td>
<td>2.387</td>
<td>2.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>.705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F \text{ ratio } = 1.370; \ F \text{ probability } = .2506 \]

There are enough guards to provide safety and security for inmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.568</td>
<td>2.547</td>
<td>2.592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>.773</td>
<td>.723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F \text{ ratio } = .1785; \ F \text{ probability } = .8366 \]
The quality of new guards entering TDC today is as good as it ever was.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.808</td>
<td>2.796</td>
<td>2.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>.690</td>
<td>.631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F ratio</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F probability</td>
<td>.7034</td>
<td>.7034</td>
<td>.7034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TDC staff often act unfairly towards inmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.835</td>
<td>2.894</td>
<td>2.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.696</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F ratio</td>
<td>.917</td>
<td>.917</td>
<td>.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F probability</td>
<td>.4003</td>
<td>.4003</td>
<td>.4003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, they treated me pretty good in TDC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.300</td>
<td>2.386</td>
<td>2.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>.623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F ratio</td>
<td>1.3431</td>
<td>1.3431</td>
<td>1.3431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F probability</td>
<td>.2617</td>
<td>.2617</td>
<td>.2617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>19–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40–49</th>
<th>50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.493</td>
<td>2.318*</td>
<td>2.220**</td>
<td>2.036 a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.703</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*F ratio = 8.483; *F probability = .000

Most guards in TDC treat inmates like they are less than human.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.873</td>
<td>3.008</td>
<td>2.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.737</td>
<td>.700</td>
<td>.627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*F ratio = 2.936; *F probability = .0537

Prison guards often use too much force on inmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.576</td>
<td>2.821*</td>
<td>2.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>.746</td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*F ratio = 8.317; *F probability = .0003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>19–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40–49</th>
<th>50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.853</td>
<td>2.683*</td>
<td>2.612**</td>
<td>2.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td>.695</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*F ratio = 4.437; *F probability = .0042

Note: In this table, the following notations indicate statistical significance at the .05 level between groups: 1,2 (*)& 1,3 (**), 2,3 (**), 1,4 (*), 2,4 (*). TDC = Texas Department of Corrections.
Age and Perceptions

These results indicate that younger exmates tend to have more problems with correctional staff, believe staff treat inmates in an inhumane fashion, feel new guards are less qualified than in the past, and feel that they were not well-treated in prison. They are also more likely to believe there are not enough guards to ensure inmate safety, and that correctional officers use more force than is necessary.

On the item “I had very few problems with guards in TDC” the difference in the mean score for exmates in the 19–29 age category and exmates age 30 or older was statistically significant at the .05 level. In addition, the difference in mean scores for exmates in the 30–39 and 40–49 age category was statistically significant at the .05 level. This indicates that younger inmates had more problems with correctional staff, and that, as exmates age, the likelihood of trouble with staff declines steadily, in a linear fashion. This finding is in accord with research that indicated younger inmates generally have more disciplinary infractions than do older inmates (Ellis, et al., 1974; Howard, et al., 1994; Zink, 1957).

Related to this finding is the observation that younger exmates were more likely to agree with the statement “Prison guards often use too much force on inmates” (this item was reverse coded). The difference in mean scores for exmates in the 19–29 age category and the other three categories was statistically significant at the .05 level. On the item “Overall, they treated me pretty good in TDC,” the difference in the mean score for exmates in the 19–29 age category and the other three categories was statistically significant at the .05 level. Younger exmates were clearly more likely than were older exmates to feel they were not well treated. This may be because correctional staff are harder on younger prisoners, or because younger prisoners are less willing to accept what happens to them in prison as proper, or because younger prisoners are involved in more disciplinary infractions and resent being punished by correctional staff.

The differences in mean scores for the various age categories on the item “TDC staff often act unfairly towards inmates” were not statistically significant, although younger exmates did tend to agree with the statement more than their older counterparts. Taken together, responses to these three items suggest that younger exmates think they are treated poorly, but not inappropriately. It is unclear whether this is a reflection of low self-esteem or simply a statistical artifact. In addition, it is worth noting that age is related to perceptions in the free world as well. Younger citizens have less positive attitudes towards police than do older citizens (Huang & Vaughan, 1996; Walker, 1992).

Given the tendency of younger exmates to feel that they are poorly treated by correctional staff, they were nonetheless more likely to feel that there are not enough correctional officers to ensure safety and security in prisons. The difference in the mean score of the 19–29 age group and each of the older age groups was statistically significant at the .05 level. In addition, as exmate age increased, belief that there were enough guards increased steadily, which suggests, perhaps, that older exmates think there are too many officers getting into their business.

Related to the perception of whether there were enough correctional officers was the perception of the quality of new officers. The mean scores for exmates in the 19–29, 30–39
age categories, and exmates in the 50 and older age category were statistically significant at the .05 level, with the younger exmates tending to disagree with the statement “The quality of new guards entering TDC today is as good as it ever was.” This finding suggests that the oldest exmates think new officers are not as qualified as officers hired in the past, an interesting finding given that TDCJ-ID preservice training has increased rather than decreased in recent years.

Exmates were also asked whether they believed that female correctional staff do their jobs as well as male officers. The mean scores for the four age groups did not reveal any statistically significant differences. In this case, a finding of no difference is perhaps as interesting as a finding of some difference. Exmates were fairly unified in their estimation of the ability of female guards vis-à-vis male guards. The mean scores for the age categories fall around 2.3, indicating a slight tendency towards agreement with the statement “Female guards do their jobs as well as male guards.” This finding is in accord with prior research on inmate attitudes (Kissel & Katsampes, 1980; Walters, 1993). Inmates seem to hold more positive opinions of female correctional officers than do many male staff. Prior research indicated male officers often resent the introduction of female officers into their male world (Owen, 1985; Zimmer, 1986), and frequently denigrate the job performance of female officers (Jurik, 1985; Zupan, 1992).

Race and Perceptions

The relationship between race and perception of inmate-staff relations turned up as statistically significant on only one item: “Prison guards often use too much force on inmates.” On this item (which was reverse coded), the mean score for Black exmates was 2.8, while for White exmates it was 2.6. Black exmates, therefore, were more likely to agree with the statement than White exmates. The Hispanic exmate group had a mean score close to the Black exmates, but this was not statistically significant relative to White exmates. This finding is in accord with research conducted on attitudes of nonincarcerated populations. Black citizens, as compared with White citizens, appear to trust the police less (Cole, 1999; Lasley, 1994) and believe that police use excessive force more often (Huang & Vaughn, 1996).

Black and White exmates had different perceptions of use of force by correctional officers, though they did not have substantially different perceptions of whether correctional officers acted unfairly, or treated inmates as “less than human,” which might be expected.

Logistic Regression Analysis

Logistic regression was conducted, to determine the impact of the various sociodemographic and criminal history variables when controlling for the effect of other variables. Table 3 displays the results of the logistic regression equations for the eight items regarding exmate perceptions of inmate-staff relations. Race and age appeared as significant variables in several items. They were also the only variables to remain in any equation.

These results suggest race/ethnicity is related to perceptions of inmate-staff relations, a fact obscured by the ANOVA procedure. Race/ethnicity and age both play important roles in the logistic regression models for the items regarding perceptions of inmate-staff relations. Differences between White and Black exmates remained in all but two of the eight equations, indicating White and Black exmates have very different perceptions of the inmate-staff relationship. Differences between White and Hispanic exmates remained in several equations as well, suggesting that race is a powerful predictor of perceptions of this aspect of the institutional experience.

White exmates were somewhat more likely than Black exmates to agree with the statement “Overall they treated me pretty good in TDC.” White exmates were almost twice as likely as Black or Hispanic exmates to disagree with the statement “Most guards in TDC treat inmates like they are less than
Table 3  Logistic Regression on Perception of Inmate-Staff Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Σ</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I had very few problems with guards in TDC.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (B/W)</td>
<td>-.3412</td>
<td>11.467</td>
<td>.0007</td>
<td>-.1063</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (H/W)</td>
<td>-.3137</td>
<td>5.320</td>
<td>.0211</td>
<td>-.0799</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (H/B)</td>
<td>-.4962</td>
<td>16.672</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>-.1494</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Female guards do their jobs as well as male guards.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5.879</td>
<td>.0153</td>
<td>.0698</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There are enough guards to provide safety and security for inmates.</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (B/W)</td>
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<td>11.465</td>
<td>.0007</td>
<td>-.1055</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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<td>11.436</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The quality of new guards entering TDC today is as good as it ever was.</em></td>
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<td><em>Overall, they treated me pretty good in TDC.</em></td>
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<td><em>Most guards in TDC treat inmates like they are less than human.</em></td>
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<td><em>Prison guards often use too much force on inmates.</em></td>
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*Note:* TDC = Texas Department of Corrections; B = Black; W = White; H = Hispanic.
human.” White exmates were more than twice as likely as Black or Hispanic exmates to disagree with the statement “Prison guards often use too much force on inmates.” In addition, White exmates were 1.5 times more likely than Black exmates to agree with the statement “Female guards do their jobs as well as male guards,” and 1.5 times more likely than Black exmates to agree with the statement “There are enough guards to provide safety and security for the inmates.” Finally, White exmates were almost twice as likely as Hispanic exmates to disagree with the statement “TDC staff often act unfairly towards inmates.” All of this suggests that White exmates have a higher opinion of correctional staff than minority exmates.

Age also plays an important role in shaping perceptions of inmate-staff relations. As they get older, exmates were more likely to agree with the statement “I had very few problems with the guards in TDC.” For each increase in age category, exmates were approximately 1.5 times more likely to agree with the statement. The same was true in regard to the statement “Overall, they treated me pretty good in TDC.” Older exmates were also more likely to disagree with the statement “Most guards in TDC treat inmates like they are less than human.” Older exmates were also more likely to disagree with the statement “Prison guards often use too much force on inmates.” These findings suggest that older exmates are significantly more likely than younger exmates to have positive opinions of correctional staff, feeling that staff treat inmates decently. This corresponds with the ANOVA findings.

Conclusion

Examination of the exmate responses by race and age revealed some significant relationships between race, age, and perceptions of the institutional experience. Other factors (such as criminal history variables) consistently failed to show up as statistically significant in the ANOVA and do not remain in the logistic regression model, though two factors consistently showed up in both the ANOVA and logit procedures: race/ethnicity and age. Age remained in virtually every equation, while racial differences between White and Black exmates remained in several equations as well.

Regarding age, younger exmates also differed from older exmates in their perceptions of correctional staff and inmate-staff relations. Younger exmates reported having more problems with staff, and were more likely to believe that correctional staff treats them poorly: younger exmates tended to agree that staff often acted unfairly, treated inmates as less than human, and used too much force on inmates. All of this suggests that age is closely related to perceptions of staff behavior and inmate-staff interactions. Whether younger exmates feel this way because they are more often engaged in activity that is likely to be the subject of staff reprisals, or because staff treat older exmates with more care and respect, or because younger exmates come into prison with different beliefs about how they should be treated by staff is unclear. Further research on these differences in perception is clearly warranted.

Regarding race/ethnicity, the logistic regression analysis indicated that both Black and Hispanic exmates are more likely than White exmates to feel correctional staff treat inmates unfairly and/or poorly, and use excessive force. This finding is not altogether surprising, given the long history of poor race relations in Texas prisons (Marquart, 1986a, 1986b). It also mirrors research findings in the free world, which indicate that minority populations have a more negative perception of the criminal justice system in general and the police in particular than do Whites (Cole, 1999; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Walker, 1992).

These findings are in accord with prior research, which found that individual, extra-institutional variables such as race play a major role in inmate adjustment patterns. In addition, this research added to the literature a clearer picture of the impact of age, an understudied variable, on inmate perceptions. Younger and older
inmates differ in their perceptions of prison and this difference is often linear in nature, but particularly pronounced when the youngest and oldest inmate age groups are compared.

References


Inmate subcultures are thought to be related to the concepts of prisonization, importation, and the pains of imprisonment. Note how and why this might be so.

2. The extra legal characteristics of correctional clients are likely to shape how they view and experience corrections. Discuss how race and age might affect how one adjusts in a correctional environment.

3. According to Hemmens and Marquart, what demographic factors most influence inmate perceptions of staff? What is their explanation for this?

In this article, Stephen Richards and Jeffrey Ross examine inmates’ perspectives on prison policy or procedure, particularly their opinions about prison classification schemes. Classification involves decisions about where convicts spend their time in prison based on various risk factors (dangerousness, type of crime, escape risk, etc.), and, of course, inmates themselves have little voice in making these correctional decisions, although how they are classified and in which security level they are confined will have a huge impact on their lives in prison. The authors find little right and much wrong with current classification practices. They do not like classification according to individual characteristics without attention being paid to what they call “bigger structural issues,” such as poverty, discrimination, and the drug war.

A Convict Perspective on the Classification of Prisoners

Stephen C. Richards and Jeffrey Ian Ross

Introduction

Convicts are rarely asked to comment on prison policy or procedure. They have little voice in correctional decisions. This essay attempts to give the men and women who live in cages a voice in how they are classified. This is no small issue for convicts. Although prisoners
may not be considered “stakeholders” (as Berk et al. point out), they may stake their very lives on how they are classified and in which security level they are confined.

Typically, new prisoners enter prison systems through “reception centers” or in what the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) calls “Receiving and Departure.” Although intake procedures differ, they never receive a pleasant welcome. The prisoners arrive scared and worn, wearing handcuffs, belly chains, and dragging leg irons. Standing in line, they are ordered to strip, searched, sprayed or dusted with delousing chemical, issued clothes, and ordered to submit to a battery of token medical and psychological examinations administered by guards pretending to be medical staff. Convicts call this “kicking the tires.” If it’s not flat, don’t fix it. It makes no difference if the prisoner is HIV positive, ready to have another stroke, or near death. The line marches on.

The new prisoners may spend weeks or months at the “reception center,” housed in cells or dormitories. Eventually, they are ordered to a classification meeting where an officer announces what has already been decided: their official security level and prison assignment. Some time later, they are transported to their new home: a penitentiary, correctional institution, or camp.

Prisoner classification is reviewed once or more per year, depending on the system. In the FBOP, this is called “team meeting.” A prisoner with a major disciplinary report may be reclassified in the blink of an eye and transferred to administrative segregation (the hole) or cuffed up and transported to a high security prison. To no surprise, being reclassified to lower security takes more time, is rarely initiated by staff, and may require repeated requests by the prisoner. In the upside down world of prison, you fall up fast and climb back down ever so slow.

Fair warning, beware any research that discusses men and women as “offenders” or “inmates.” This is the official language used by prosecutors, judges, jailers, prison administrators, and the media to degrade and dehumanize. Even persons with better intentions use these words because they are so rarely challenged. Still, the words we use are important.

It is no surprise that most prison research reflects the language and special interests of the prison bureaucracy. After all, the government funds the research and therefore sets the agenda, limits the parameters, and decides if the final report will collect dust on a shelf or be read and used to inform new policy and procedure. Nevertheless, correctional administrators must be reminded that public taxes pay for their prison budgets, their personal salaries, and the research (Ross, 2002). The public would be horrified to know that their tax money is being spent on human warehouses, where little attention is paid to rehabilitation, treatment, or providing prisoners with the opportunity to better prepare themselves for a law-abiding life (Ross and Richards, 2002).

Regardless of whether the research is state-sponsored, statistical analyses typically mean that researchers do not have to get their “hands dirty” by interacting with convicts or ex-convicts to have a better contextual understanding of their findings. Simply analyzing “inmate files” and observing classification hearings does not explore the full dimensions of the problem under study. Ethnographic or qualitative research can be employed to get a better understanding of the real issues involved (Ross and Richards, 2002, 2003).

Social science has used mice, pigeons, and monkeys as experimental subjects. When using human beings, we need to give them a voice. At the very least, it would be interesting to know what the prisoners thought of the alternative classification system. After all, they are the experimental subjects that will reap the benefits or suffer the consequences of the changes proposed by the research. Interviewing the convicts might also raise important questions. For example why do prison systems now house so many prisoners in maximum-security penitentiaries, supermax control units, administrative segregation detention, and protective custody? Is this overuse of high-security incarceration the result of increased rates of prison violence, disciplinary violations, prisoner refusal to program, or the reclassification of prisoners designed to fill new maximum-security penitentiaries? Is this the result of overcrowding, the lack of constructive prison programs, or the failure to “do corrections”? How have mandatory minimum sentencing, the implementation of longer sentences, three strikes legislation (Austin and Irwin, 2001:184–218), and the “rising tide of parole violations” (Austin and Irwin, 2001:143–159) contributed to prisoners doing more time in prison? How has the reclassification of prisoners created the “perpetual incarceration machine” (Richards and Jones, 1997, 2003), where prisoners are recycled from prison to parole and back to prison? The system feeds, getting larger, on its own failure to properly prepare prisoners for reentry and legal citizenship. These are the questions that prisoners might suggest need to be addressed before alternative schemes for classification are created.

There is an implicit belief that better data and statistical analysis will somehow improve things for prisoners and correctional staff alike. The problem is that convicts and guards are different constituencies with competing concerns. The prisoners want less restrictive classification (minimum or medium-security), where they might have better living conditions (more time out of cell, less restrictive family visits, better access to programs, and less violence). In comparison, prison staff may want prisoners to be housed in more restrictive environments (maximum-security, control units, segregation) where they are “locked in” and have little freedom of movement, thus giving the guards more control and less exposure possibly to assault and injury. Statistical analysis does not solve the real puzzle: How does prisoner classification, which decides where individual prisoners will be designated to live, impact the day-to-day routine of prisoners and staff? How is prison classification reflected in the design and construction of new facilities and the remodeling of existing institutions?

A second problem, implied by the discussion above, is that “inmate files” (which usually include presentencing investigation reports, criminal offenses, institutional reports) should not be the sole determinate of classification decisions. Although evaluating prisoners individually is one important criterion, it fails to look at the bigger issues, such as the growing incarceration of minorities and women, conditions of confinement, and problems with reentry (Austin et al., 2001).

For example, using disciplinary reports as the primary criteria for reclassification of prisoners may lead to the construction of more maximum-security prisons. It costs more to house prisoners in high-security institutions. Prisoners that serve time in these institutions suffer more deterioration and are less prepared for release. Do we want correctional departments to spend more tax dollars on concrete and steel or rehabilitation programs?
the FBOP. Notice, that the FBOP had six levels and now five levels, compared to only four levels for the California Department of Corrections. The FBOP uses an “inmate classification system” as a means to segregate, punish, and reward prisoners. This is a “classification ladder” with maximum security at the top and minimum security at the bottom. Ideally, if the FBOP operated to facilitate rehabilitation, prisoners would work their way down the ladder with good conduct and program participation. As they completed their sentences and got “short” (which means a year to release), they would be moved to minimum-security camps or community custody. Unfortunately, most men and women move up the ladder from minimum to medium, or medium to maximum, rather than down. Few medium- and maximum-security prisoners ever make it to the camps.

The classification designations have changed over the years to accommodate the growth in FBOP prisons and population. The old system had six security levels, with 6–5 being maximum, 4–2 being medium, and 1 being minimum. USP Marion (the first super-maximum penitentiary) was the only level 6 institution. U.S. penitentiaries were level 5 (e.g., USP Atlanta, USP Leavenworth, USP Lewisburg, USP Lom Poc); the federal correctional institutions ranged from 4 to 2 (e.g., FCI Talladega, FCI Sandstone, FCI Oxford, etc.), and the federal prison camps were 1. Security levels 6–2 are “in” custody, which means inside the fence or wall. Level 1 is “out” custody, which means federal camps that do not have serious security fences. Level 1 community custody refers to prisoners in camps that were eligible for community programs—work assignments or furloughs.

In the 1990s, the FBOP collapsed these six security designations into five: high, medium high, medium low, minimum, and administrative. The BOP prisoner population is approximately 10% high (USP), 25% high medium (FCI), 35% low medium (FCI), and 25% minimum (FPC), with the rest not assigned a security level; many of these men and women are in administrative facilities (medical or detention), transit, or held in local jails or private prisons. “Administrative” refers to Administrative Detention Max (ADX) Florence (CO) (the highest security prison in the country), FTC Oklahoma City (a medium-security transport prison), and the federal medical centers (which may be maximum, medium, or minimum security).

**The Central Inmate Monitoring System**

There are additional variables that may not appear on official classification forms. Some of these categories are unique to the FBOP. Prisoners complain these labels adversely affect their ability to reach low-level security prisons, despite good conduct records and short time to do on a given sentence. FBOP staff must check the Central Inmate Monitoring System (CIMS) before any prisoner is reassigned to a new cellblock, dormitory, or prison. Convicts may not know they have been singled out for such attention.

CIMS is a computer system that tracks nine special categories of prisoners: (1) “Witness Security” prisoners are government informers that have testified, are testifying, or will testify in court cases; (2) “Special Security” prisoners are prison snitches cooperating in internal investigations; (3) “Sophisticated Criminal Activity” prisoners are those inmates identified as being involved in large-scale criminal conspiracies, for example, organized crime, drugs, or white collar. They may be men or women who were targets of the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) or Continuing Criminal Enterprise (CCE) prosecution, which carry life sentences (Richards, 1998:133). Many of these convicts are suspected of being connected to major drug-smuggling organizations, or they refused to plead guilty, cooperate, and inform on other persons. (4) “Threats to Government Officials” prisoners have been convicted of writing letters, making phone calls, or issuing verbal remarks that convey the intent to do bodily harm to public officials; (5) “Broad Publicity” prisoners are those inmates involved in high-profile cases; (6) “State Prisoners” are
inmates serving state sentences that were transferred into the fed system because they were “difficult”; (7) “Separation” prisoners are those who have been moved to another institution because they are government witnesses, institutional snitches, gang leaders, or persons in danger of being killed or killing someone else; (8) “Special Supervision” prisoners are police, judges, and politicians that are provided protective privilege (Richards and Avey, 2000). These men and women are usually designated to camps (they may not live long in a penitentiary). (9) “Disruptive Groups” prisoners may include members of organizations, such as street or prison gangs and political groups (i.e., Black Panthers, Communists). The point is that classification includes additional variables that may not be amenable to statistical number crunching. Some of these variables may not even be known to the research team or the prisoner.

Classification May Be Used for Unofficial Purposes

Officially, prison systems design classification systems as a means to designate prisoners to different security levels. Typically, the hardcore violent convicts serving long sentences are assigned to maximum security, the incorrigible prisoners serving medium-length sentences, are sentenced to medium-security prisons, and the relative lightweight men serving short sentences are sentenced to minimum-security camps, farms, or community facilities.

Women prisoners are also subject to “classification.” Still, women make up less than 10% of the correctional population. They are usually confined in one or a few institutions in each state. These prisons may hold women prisoners classified for different security levels in various sections of the same institution. Exceptions include the large states and the FBOP where women with different security levels may be imprisoned in separate institutions. In any case, the dramatic increase in the incarceration of women may result in the further differentiation of women’s prisons. We predict there will be future studies of classification systems for women prisoners.

Classification may load up high-security prisons with minorities. African-American, Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano prisoners are more likely to be “young,” gang affiliated, and collect bad conduct “tickets.” This is readily apparent to most observers of prison, including DOC and FBOP administrators. The FBOP and many states have struggled for years with schemes to “racially balance” institutions. Like school busing programs, they bus prisoners from prison to prison trying to somehow racially integrate prisons as dictated by some policy directive addressing the problem. The public does not like to read in the newspaper that maximum-security prisons are mainly occupied by underclass minorities, whereas minimum-security prisons are reserved for middle- and working-class European-Americans.

Depending on the prison system (budget, number of institutions, population counts, level of disorder), prisoners are shuffled from one institution to another. These transfers may or may not reflect official classification schemes. When a given prison is bursting at the seams, with men sleeping in hallways, three to a one-man cell, or on bunk beds arranged in recreational areas of classrooms converted into make-shift dormitories, the “correctional fairy” (Jon Marc Taylor) waves his magic wand, tears up official policy, and transfers bus loads of prisoners to whichever facility has empty beds. “Population Over Ride” is commonly used.

Classification consists of reviewing any “disciplinary actions” and “demonstration of positive participation in an inmate program.” However, convicts will tell you prison guards issue “write-ups,” what are called “shots” in the FBOP, “115s” in the California Department of Corrections, or simply “tickets” in many prison systems (disciplinary reports), every chance they get. Prisoners housed in overcrowded cellblocks or dormitories may collect minor “tickets” for petty infractions or major tickets for defending themselves against predatory or aggressive individuals. Many
prisoners claim disciplinary committees rule against prisoners without due process. There have been a number of studies that suggest prison staff disproportionately find minority prisoners guilty in disciplinary hearings. Write a letter to a newspaper, call a congressional office, or complain about staff or the lack of medical services, and you collect tickets, get dragged to the “hole,” and are reclassified and shipped out to the penitentiary or super-maximum.

Using prisoner participation in prison programs as a second measure has similar problems. Convicts will tell you prison activities (work, vocational training, education) include custodial duties (washing dishes, mopping floors, cleaning bathrooms), duties that masquerade as vocational training (cooking in the kitchen, mowing lawns, painting and repair), and token education programs (ABE, GED). Few of these activities elicit prisoner enthusiasm or are considered real opportunities to learn new skills. “Positive program participation” is usually defined by prison staff as the convict showed up, did not refuse direct orders, and made a good show of pretending to work or study. In many institutions, what programs exist are considered token, as they serve few prisoners, while the rest wait years to participate. Then again, correctional authorities have to have some institutional programs, at least to silence naïve academics and give themselves something to brag about in year-end reports and to the news media. Of course when push comes to shove and the correctional budgets are cut, what programs do exist are the first to get the axe.

A more important problem, briefly alluded to in the article by Berk et al. is that the prison system may no longer expect prisoners to participate in programs, as the programs no longer exist. Most U.S. prison systems do not pretend to provide vocational or educational programming. Prison administrators limit their responsibility to operating orderly institutions, trying to control contraband and violence and prevent escapes. The most efficient way although incredibly expensive and destructive is to build high-security institutions and fill them with reclassified prisoners.

**Conclusion: Placing a Finger in the Dike**

Redesigning classification reminds us of the old “placing a finger in the dike” story. In the United States massive numbers of people are incarcerated on a daily basis. And there is a belief, sometimes unstated, that better classification procedures will to a greater or lesser extent minimize our problems with incarceration; at the very least, it may save the taxpayer the increased costs of housing prisoners in more restrictive settings. Nevertheless, as long as classification of prisoners is based entirely on out-dated measures of individual behavior (criminal offense, institutional conduct, gang affiliation), without references to the bigger structural issues (poverty, racial discrimination, drug war) that have created the boom in prison population, or prison programming that could lower the rate of disciplinary reports and predictable parole failure, very little will change. Meanwhile, the little boy has his finger stuck in the hole, whereas many states are awash in the budgetary debt rushing over the wall from the construction and operation of new prisons.

Perhaps we can expect no more from research sponsored by the government with such limited vision. At best, the research will result in policy review that merely tinkers with how prisoners are classified. And so it goes, across the country, millions of Americans live in cages, academics do studies that appear like they are rearranging the chairs on the Titanic when it is sinking, departments of corrections talk of policy reforms, prison conditions worsen, and the taxpayers drown in red ink. Maybe it is time to close some prisons, send men and women home to their families, and spend the public dollars saved on economic and community development (Clear and Cadora; 2003)? Research on prisons needs to explore these wider contexts and implications.
References


Austin, James and John Irwin. 2001 It’s About Time. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth.


Discussion Questions

1. The authors believe inmates should have a voice in how they are classified. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Why would inmates care about the classification process?
3. What factors most affect the inmate classification process, according to the authors? What other factors do they believe should play a significant role?

Reading

In this article, Jesenia Pizarro and Vanja Stenius take an in-depth look at the history and function of supermax prisons and their effects on inmates. Supermax prisons are a fairly new development in corrections. Pizarro and Stenius explore the roots of these institutions, explain how they operate, and examine their potential effects on inmate populations. They conclude that supermax facilities have the potential to damage inmates’ mental health while failing to meet their purported goals (e.g., deterring inmates in the general prison population from committing criminal acts inside prison), resulting in added problems for correctional administrators and increased economic costs to public budgets without apparent benefits.
Supermax Prisons

Their Rise, Current Practices, and Effect on Inmates

Jesenia Pizarro and Vanja M. K. Stenius

The United States has built the largest prison system in the world (Currie, 1998), and the prison population has skyrocketed in the past decade. Between 1973 and the beginning of the 1990s, the number of prisoners increased by 332%, and the incarceration rate per 100,000 citizens increased by over 200% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1993; Clear, 1994). The growth in the prison population brought with it an increase in young, more violent inmates as well as court rulings affecting the powers of guards and administrators. The combination of these factors pushed many corrections practitioners and scholars to try to develop more effective ways to manage penal institutions and to ensure prison safety. In doing so, a number of new approaches in corrections emerged in recent years, one of which is the super-maximum, or “supermax,” prison. The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) (1997) defined supermax prisons as free-standing facilities, or a distinct unit within a facility, that provides for the management and secure control of inmates who have been officially designated as exhibiting violent or seriously disruptive behavior while incarcerated. Such inmates have been determined to be a threat to safety and security in traditional high security facilities, and their behavior can be controlled only by separation, restricted movement, and limited direct access to staff and other inmates. (p.1)

The advent of supermax institutions has not been without controversy. Opponents argue that supermax institutions violate prisoners’ rights, contribute to inmates’ psychological problems, and are extremely costly (Fellner & Mariner, 1997). Proponents claim that the “toughening” of the inmate population, increased gang activity, and difficulties associated with maintaining order in severely crowded prisons necessitate supermax facilities (Riveland, 1999). This article explores the roots of these controversial institutions, explains how they operate, and examines their potential effects on inmate populations. Although limited, the extant empirical research on supermax facilities demonstrates that these institutions have the potential to damage inmates’ mental health while failing to meet their purported goals (e.g., deterring inmates in the general prison population from committing criminal acts inside prison), resulting in added problems for correctional administrators and increased economic costs to public budgets without apparent benefits.
violent, assaultive, major escape risks, or likely to promote disturbances in the general prison population (National Institute of Corrections, 1997; Riveland, 1999). The rationale behind supermax facilities is to segregate the most dangerous inmates to protect prison staff members and inmate populations. Furthermore, proponents of supermax facilities assert that the threat of the harshness of supermax prisons deters other inmates from committing criminal acts inside the walls (Fellner & Mariner, 1997).

Correctional scholars and practitioners alike consider order and safety to be very important in managing prisons (Dilulio, 1987; Logan, 1992; Reisig, 1998; Riveland, 1999; Useem & Reisig, 1999). This is why prisons have historically had “jails within prisons” to securely house violent and disruptive inmates (Barnes, 1972; Riveland, 1999). Some assert that Alcatraz, which was the home of the most publicized disobedient inmates of the early and mid-1900s, paved the way for modern-day supermax prisons (King, 1999). Alcatraz followed a “concentration model,” which refers to the creation of specific units or facilities to manage specific types of troublesome inmates (King, 1999; Riveland, 1999). In 1963, the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) decided to close Alcatraz and replace it with a new, special, high-security prison in Marion, Illinois; however, the prison was not completed by the time of Alcatraz’s closure. As a result, the BOP dispersed Alcatraz’s inmates to facilities throughout the federal prison system. As time elapsed, practitioners noticed that the new dispersion approach appeared to “work.” As a result, the BOP embraced the dispersion approach. This approach is generally referred to as the “dispersion model” because inmates who are considered troublemakers are spread throughout the system to prevent them from enticing others into collective misconduct (Riveland, 1999).

In the early 1970s, the level of assaults and violence directed toward staff members and other inmates escalated (Bureau of Prisons, 1973b; King, 1999). This increase in violence prompted the BOP to begin sending troublesome prisoners to the high-security prison in Marion, which was originally intended to replace Alcatraz, and to once again embrace the concentration model. In 1972, the BOP built the H unit at Marion, which was designed to separate offenders whose behavior seriously disrupted the orderly operation of the institution from the general prison population. The mission of the H unit ironically fell within the purview of “reform.” It was designed to assist individuals in changing their attitudes and behaviors to facilitate their return to the general prison population (Bureau of Prisons, 1973a; King, 1999).

The escalating violence in BOP institutions continued into the mid-1970s, with an increase of 45.5% in assaults on prison staff members by inmates (Henderson, 1979; King, 1999). As a result, in 1979, the BOP recommended the addition of a new administrative maximum-level unit to the classification system for prisons. Later that year, Marion became the first Level 6 (super-maximum-security) prison (Bureau of Prisons, 1979; King, 1999). Its mission was to provide long-term segregation within a controlled setting for prisoners throughout the federal system who threatened or injured other inmates or staff members, possessed deadly weapons or dangerous drugs, disrupted the orderly operation of a prison, or escaped or attempted to escape (Bureau of Prisons, 1979; King, 1999). Violence at Marion escalated during the early 1980s. From 1980 to 1983, there were 14 escape attempts, 10 group disturbances, 54 serious assaults on inmates, 28 assaults on staff members, and eight prisoners and two corrections officers killed by inmates in its supermax unit (King, 1999). These incidents led to a complete lockdown of Marion during the fall of 1983. The warden and correctional officers at Marion claimed that this act reduced assaults and made the environment safer in the prison (Fellner & Mariner, 1997).

As a result of such claims, many states followed in Marion’s footsteps. The NIC (1997) reported that as of 1997, approximately
34 jurisdictions in the United States operated 1 or more supermax facilities or were in the process of opening one. As of 1997, over 55 supermax facilities or units were operating nationwide (National Institute of Corrections, 1997). At the end of 1998, about 20,000 prisoners, or 1.8% of all those serving sentences of 1 year or more in state and federal prisons, were housed in such facilities (King, 1999).

The Operation of Supermax Facilities

In a survey distributed to correctional institutions nationwide, the NIC (1997) found that jurisdictions vary considerably in the operation and management of supermax facilities. Nevertheless, they found that all supermax prisons share certain defining features. For example, inmates are confined in their cells for 22 to 23 hours a day (Fellner & Mariner, 1997; NIC, 1997; Riveland, 1999). These institutions limit human contact to instances when medical staff members, clergy members, or counselors stop in front of inmates’ cells during routine rounds. Physical contact is limited to being touched through security doors by correctional officers while being put in restraints or having restraints removed. Most verbal communication occurs through intercom systems (Riveland, 1999).

Placement of Inmates in a Supermax Prison.

In most jurisdictions, admission into a supermax facility or unit does not depend on a formal disciplinary hearing but is rather based on the criminal and behavioral history of an inmate while incarcerated (Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 1992; Riveland, 1999). The inmates in these institutions are not those who committed the worst crimes in society but those whom correctional staff members deem as threats to the safety, security, or orderly operation of the facilities in which they are housed (National Institute of Corrections, 1997; Riveland, 1999). Placement in a supermax institution is not a penalty but an administrative decision based on a pattern of dangerousness or unconfirmed but reliable evidence of pending disruption (e.g., a prisoner is a leader of a gang or other radical movement) (Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 1992; Riveland, 1999).

Inmate Programming. Jurisdictions vary in the extent of the programs and activities they offer to their inmates. Some jurisdictions allow inmates to have televisions in their cells and provide education and self-help programs through intra-institutional cable television. Other jurisdictions provide inmates with instructors that assist inmates through cell-front visits. During these visits, instructors stand in front of inmates’ cells and talk to them through openings in the cell doors. Other jurisdictions, however, provide no programs to inmates.

The amount of exercise allowed to inmates in supermax facilities is generally limited to 3 to 7 hours per week in indoor spaces or small, secure, attached outdoor spaces within the facilities (National Institute of Corrections, 1997; Riveland, 1999). Inmates exercise one at a time, and at least two correctional officers escort inmates to and from the exercise spaces. Group exercise occurs only in transition programs (programs designed to reintegrate inmates into the general prison populations or society), which only some facilities provide.

Visitation privileges also vary from facility to facility (National Institute of Corrections, 1997; Riveland, 1999). Some institutions allow only 1 hour of visitation per month, whereas others allow several hours per month. Even so, inmates typically have no direct contact with visitors; their visitation consists of video visiting, which means that inmates and visitors communicate and see each other through a 13-inch, black-and-white television (Chacon, 2000). In other jurisdictions, inmates sit in small cubicles separated by clear partitions from their visitors and communicate through intercoms (National Institute of Corrections, 1997).

Physical Coercion.

Correctional officers in supermax institutions may use proportionate and reasonable force to subdue inmates when dangerous situations erupt. For example, guards
are allowed to conduct cell extractions—the forceful removal of prisoners from their cells—when inmates refuse to come out of their cells or cover the glass windows in their cell doors (Fellner & Mariner, 1997). Correctional administrators justify cell extractions as a procedure for reducing the harm to staff members that could occur with less intrusive means. Quick-response teams carry out this procedure. In most facilities, teams consist of five correctional officers wearing body armor, helmets with visors, neck support, and heavy leather gloves. Each member is responsible for subduing a specific part of an inmate’s body. Other correctional staff members, including a supervising sergeant, an officer with a video camera who records the extraction, and a medical assistant, accompany the extraction team. Guards usually administer chemical sprays (mace and pepper spray) into inmates’ cells through openings in the doors prior to the extraction, rush in when the cell door opens, gain control of inmates, and then place them in restraints (Fellner & Mariner, 1997).

Supermax institutions also use the four-point restraint as a security method (Fellner & Mariner, 1997). This technique uses the leather restraints with which inmates’ beds are equipped to immobilize prisoners by strapping and holding their arms and legs secure. This procedure may be used only if offenders present themselves as imminent threats to themselves or others (Fellner & Mariner, 1997).

Release From Supermax Prisons. In most jurisdictions, the criteria for release from supermax facilities are not published or revealed to prisoners. In fact, only 23 jurisdictions have written criteria under which inmates can earn transfer from supermax prisons (National Institute of Corrections, 1997). Furthermore, the amount of time inmates serve in supermax facilities also varies across jurisdictions (Riveland, 1999). Some jurisdictions have determinate periods to be served, but most have indeterminate placement. The amount of time served may depend on the perceived risk an inmate presents, any behavioral changes that may take place, the amount of time left on his or her sentence, changes in his or her physical and psychological conditions, and his or her willingness to renounce allegiance to gangs (Riveland, 1999). An inmate may be either returned to the general prison population or, if his or her court-ordered sentence is up, released into the community.

The Cost of Running Supermax Institutions

Riveland (1999) noted that “in most jurisdictions, operating costs for extended control facilities are generally among the highest when compared to those of other prisons” (p. 21). For example, in 1999, the average daily cost for inmates at the Colorado State Penitentiary (a supermax facility) was $88.72, whereas the cost at the maximum-security facility (the Colorado Correctional Center) was $50.82. When compared annually, the average cost to house an inmate in the supermax facility in Colorado was $32,383, whereas in the maximum-security facility, it was $18,549 (Rosten, 1999). In addition, the construction of supermax facilities is very costly because of the need for high-security components. These institutions are composed of high-security doors, fortified walls, and sophisticated electronic systems. Although construction costs are high, the cost of staffing these facilities is even higher because correctional officers provide services to inmates and perform maintenance work within the facilities (Riveland, 1999).

Legal and Ethical Issues With Supermax Prisons

The overall constitutionality of supermax prisons remains unclear (Riveland, 1999). The Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment, requires that prisoners be afforded a minimum standard of living (Law Information Institute, 2001). Many argue that the living conditions and treatment provided to inmates in supermax facilities do
not meet the standards of the Eighth Amendment (Fellner & Mariner, 1997). Federal court judges, however, have repeatedly ruled that prolonged segregation is cruel and unusual punishment only for the mentally ill (Rogers, 1993). U.S. district courts maintain that, although the conditions in these institutions are horrible, they are necessary for security reasons and therefore do not violate inmates’ constitutional rights (Henning et al., 1999).

**Consequences of Supermax Confinement**

**Pains of Imprisonment**

In his classic work *The Society of Captives*, Gresham Sykes (1958) asserted that life in a maximum-security prison is a painful experience that influences inmates’ behavior and psychological well-being. In addition to restricting inmates’ behavior and autonomy, incarceration punishes them emotionally and psychologically through what Sykes called the “pains of imprisonment.” These include the feelings of deprivation and frustration caused by the (a) loss of liberty, (b) loss of autonomy, (c) lack of heterosexual relationships, (d) deprivation of goods and services, and (e) lack of personal security and safety. Inmates in supermax facilities suffer these pains in addition to almost complete isolation, although personal security and safety may be greater for inmates in supermax facilities than for those in general populations because they do not have contact with other inmates. The addition of isolation, however, suggests that the pains of imprisonment in supermax facilities are more severe than those in maximum-security prisons. Consequently, any negative emotional or psychological reactions to imprisonment should be greater in supermax facilities than in lower security facilities.

**The Effect of Supermax Incarceration on Inmates’ Health**

A major concern voiced by critics of supermax facilities is their potential effect on inmates’ mental health because of isolation and the lack of activity. Early U.S. experiments with isolation in Pennsylvania and New York in the 1800s demonstrated the severe impact that isolation has on inmates’ psychological and physical health (Toch, 2001). As a result, prison administrators quickly abandoned solitary confinement as a general correctional tool and used isolation as only a temporary form of punishment.

Although the conditions in prisons today are certainly quite different from those in the first penitentiaries, the impact of isolation on inmates’ psyches is likely to be quite similar. Despite the increased use of modern supermax facilities, no research to date has directly examined the effect of supermax confinement on inmates’ psychological and physical health. Inferences about the impact of these facilities on inmates’ mental and physical health are based primarily on research examining the effects of temporary solitary confinement or administrative segregation within regular prisons. Although this research is informative, differences in the scope of restrictions and deprivations, as well as the duration of the isolation, must be considered (see Bonta & Gendreau, 1990). For example, spending a specified number of days in isolation is quite different from serving the remainder of one’s sentence, possibly years, in a supermax facility. Similarly, spending 23 hours a day in isolation with no activities is not comparable to spending 23 hours a day in isolation with meaningful activities.

Isolation research supports the notion that greater levels of deprivation contribute to more psychological and emotional problems (Brodsky & Scogin, 1988; Grassian, 1983; Grassian & Friedman, 1986; Miller, 1994; Scott & Gendreau, 1969). As inmates face greater restrictions and social deprivations, their levels of social withdrawal increase (Miller, 1994; Scott & Gendreau, 1969). Scott and Gendreau (1969) argued that increasing inmates’ restrictions by limiting human contact, autonomy, goods, or services requires more intense activity programming to counteract the adverse effects of these restrictions. Imposing more
restrictions without appropriate activity programming is detrimental to inmates’ health and rehabilitative prognoses. Potentially beneficial programming includes educational, recreational, and psychological services. More recent studies support these contentions in that increasing restrictions, namely through segregation, tends to result in such forms of psychological distress as depression, hostility, severe anger, sleep disturbances, physical symptoms, and anxiety (Brodsky & Scogin, 1988; Miller, 1994). Although the types of restrictions and outcomes measured vary across studies, the general consensus is that increasing the level of restrictions increases the risk for psychological and emotional problems. The extent of the effects of these restrictions depends not only on the nature of the confinement and deprivations but also on inmates’ characteristics (Grassian & Friedman, 1986). Given the high rates of mental health problems within the inmate population, the potential for adverse effects is especially high (Ditton, 1999).

Overall, the research suggests that solitary confinement has potentially serious psychiatric risks (Brodsky & Scogin, 1988; Grassian, 1983; Grassian & Friedman, 1986; Korn, 1988; Kupers, 1999; Miller, 1994). Isolation can produce emotional damage, declines in mental functioning, depersonalization, hallucination, and delusion (Brodsky & Scogin, 1988; Grassian, 1983; Korn, 1988; Kupers, 1999; Miller, 1994; Scott & Gendreau, 1969). Inmates in isolation, whether for the purpose of protective custody or punishment, suffer from numerous psychological and physical symptoms, such as perceptual changes, affective disturbances (notably depression), difficulties in thinking, concentration and memory problems, and problems with impulse control (Brodsky & Scogin, 1988; Grassian, 1983; Grassian & Friedman, 1986; Miller, 1994).

Interviews with inmates in high-security facilities have demonstrated similar findings. In particular, Korn (1988) found that women living in a high-security unit experienced claustrophobia, chronic rage reaction, depression, hallucinatory symptoms, defensive psychological withdrawal, and apathy. Korn attributed these problems to factors such as depersonalization, the denial of individuality, the denial of personal initiative, and humiliation. Similarly, Kupers (1999) argued that inmates placed in an environment as stressful as that in a supermax prison begin to lose touch with reality and exhibit symptoms of psychiatric decomposition. He indicated that the majority of the inmates he had interviewed in administrative segregation units had difficulty concentrating, heightened anxiety, intermittent disorientation, and a tendency to strike out at people.

Since isolation was abandoned as an effective means of reforming offenders, it has primarily been used as a means of punishment within correctional institutions or as an administrative tool to protect individual inmates or others in the general prison population. As such, the goal of using solitary confinement is generally to induce behavioral change within an institution. Although most research does not support the claim that isolation results in desirable behavior modification, a couple of studies have supported this assertion (Suedfeld & Roy, 1975; Suedfeld, Ramirez, Deaton, & Baker-Brown, 1982). Suedfeld and Roy (1975) found that “short-term” segregation is an effective tool for dealing with disruptive inmates because it aids in modifying their behavior and produces beneficial psychological and behavioral effects (e.g., inmates become more pleasant, optimistic, self-confident, and compliant with institution rules). In addition, Suedfeld et al. (1982) found no support for the claim that solitary confinement is adverse, stressful, or damaging. It is important to note, however, that Suedfeld et al. conducted this research on simulated solitary confinement units with inmates who volunteered to take part in the experiment. Accordingly, the implications of this research for supermax facilities are limited given the differences in the duration of the confinement and status of the inmates. Isolation in supermax facilities is not short term, nor are inmates there on a voluntary basis.
In sum, the vast majority of research suggests that inmates placed in restricted environments, such as in solitary confinement, for prolonged periods of time tend to develop psychological problems. Most, if not all, of these studies, however, are weak methodologically. For example, using inmates who volunteer to be placed in solitary confinement could lead to erroneous results because the inmates know that the situation is not real and that they can get out of the situation whenever they want to (Suedfeld et al., 1982). The studies that examined inmates involuntarily placed in segregation failed to administer pretests or to look at the inmates’ past psychological and behavioral records (Brodsky & Scogin, 1988; Korn, 1988; Kupers, 1999; Miller, 1994; Suedfeld & Roy, 1975). In the absence of information on inmates’ presegregation psychological status, it is difficult to make valid assessments of changes in status, because inmates could had been suffering from psychological problems before being placed in isolation. Finally, some of the studies drew inferences on the basis of inmates under special circumstances, such as class-action suits against jurisdictions for the treatment they received in isolation (Grassian, 1983; Grassian & Friedman, 1986), which makes their results difficult to generalize to other populations. Making general inferences from studies using small sample sizes is similarly problematic (Korn, 1988; Grassian, 1983; Grassian & Friedman, 1986; Suedfeld & Roy, 1975).

Despite these problems and limitations, the research suggests that inmates placed in supermax facilities are likely to suffer some form of psychological distress. Although the available research is limited in its applicability to supermax facilities and flawed methodologically, the research suggests that solitary confinement has a detrimental impact on individuals’ mental health, although the extent and specific nature of this impact are unclear. As Robins (1978) noted,

In the long run, the best evidence for the truth of any observation lies in its replicability across studies. The more the populations studied differ, the wider the historical eras they span; the more the details of the methods vary, the more convincing becomes the replication. (p. 611)

Although none of the studies is perfect, taken together, they suggest that solitary confinement negatively influences individuals’ psychological and/or emotional well-being. The implications for supermax facilities are not clear, apart from purporting that confinement within these facilities is likely to contribute to the development of mental health problems and/or exacerbate any existing problems. Given the differences in the lengths and conditions of confinement between research participants, with relatively short periods of confinement, and supermax inmates, one would expect a greater detrimental impact among the latter population than the reviewed studies suggest. Similarly, the effects should be larger for inmates housed in supermax units that have more restrictions and less, or no, programming. The research suggests that inmates housed in supermax facilities for longer periods of time, without programming and with more restrictions on human contact, should be the most adversely affected by supermax confinement; however, this is a function of inmates’ characteristics.

Supermax Prisons as a Deterrent

Prison administrators assert that supermax prisons serve as a general deterrent within the correctional population—that their presence curbs violence and disturbances within penal institutions. General deterrence may occur as individuals observe the imposition of the threatened punishment on others or solely by the knowledge that a given behavior carries a given punishment. This theory asserts that if punishment is distributed with certainty, adequate (and appropriate) severity, and celerity,

For deterrence strategies to be effective, offenders must not only be aware of the sanctions but also believe that they will get caught and punished with the threatened sanctions. What is important in the efficacy of sanctions as deterreents is not their actual certainty or severity but individuals’ perceptions of their certainty and severity (Paternoster, 1987). It is unlikely that supermax facilities serve as a deterrent because of the certainty of punishment; placement in these facilities is relatively rare and often based on administrative decisions using risk factors over which inmates have little control (Riveland, 1999; Toch, 2001). The perceived certainty of placement in supermax facilities is likely to be low and become increasingly so as inmates engage in and observe disruptive or violent behavior that does not result in placement in a supermax institution. “Experiential effects” suggest that threatening inmates with placement in supermax institutions for specified behavior and then failing to follow through may actually increase problematic behavior (Claster, 1967; Jensen, 1969; Paternoster, 1987). Additionally, increasing the severity of punishment has generally been found to be a less effective means of achieving deterrence than increasing its certainty (Zimring & Hawkins, 1973). The argument that the severity of supermax confinement acts as a deterrent does not find support in the deterrence literature, especially if inmates question the certainty of such confinement for violent or disruptive behavior.

Furthermore, Sherman (1993) argued that individuals abstain from offending according to four key concepts in emotional responses to the sanctioning experience: legitimacy, social bond, shame, and pride. Legitimacy is the perceived degree of respectfulness and procedural fairness of an enforcing agent by an individual. Social bond is conceptualized as the relationship an offender has with a sanctioning agent. Shame is whether an offender acknowledges or bypasses a sanction. Finally, pride is how an offender feels in the aftermath of a sanction. If an offender perceives sanctioning as illegitimate or unfair, has social weak bonds with a sanctioning agent and the community that the agent represents, and denies his or her shame, then the sanctioning could cause future involvement in crime. Moreover, Sherman pointed out that the level of deterrence achieved through sanctions varies as a function of the offender. The effects depend on an offender’s personality type, social bonds, and perceptions of legitimacy. As a result, sanctions may deter crime among some groups but increase crime in others.

Arguably, supermax facilities are not a deterrent for institutional misconduct, because inmates generally neither have bonds with sanctioning agents nor believe that they will be treated fairly. Because the deterrence perspective targets only those who would otherwise engage in the proscribed behavior, the threat of placement in supermax facilities is unlikely to serve as a deterrent. Disruptive and violent inmates may be less likely than other inmates to be concerned about the consequences of their actions, to have bonds with sanctioning agents, or to feel shame or pride over their behavior. If supermax facilities are effective in deterring only inmates who would otherwise not engage in misconduct, then they do not add any deterrent value.

In addition, Barak-Glantz (1983) argued that solitary confinement plays a minimal role in deterring inmates’ behaviors. Existing empirical evidence does not suggest that the placement of problematic inmates in supermax prisons decreases prison violence. Research in the area of deterrence indicates that, in most cases, deterrence as a correctional policy does not work (Clear, 1994; Cullen, 1995; Paternoster, 1987; Sherman, 1993). Deterrence research in conjunction with theory and empirical evidence on inmates’ behavior suggests that supermax facilities are unlikely to be effective as a general deterrent for violence and disturbances in prisons.
Since the 1970s, the U.S. correctional system has undergone dramatic changes. Prison populations have skyrocketed in response to changing sentencing policies and crime rates, which has contributed to numerous problems within facilities, such as overcrowding and violence. In the face of inmate violence, lawsuits, federal oversight, and other problems, prison administrators have sought—and continue to seek—means of addressing these issues. Supermax facilities present one solution whose growing popularity has made them “one of the most dramatic features of the great American experiment with mass incarceration during the last quarter of the 20th century” (King, 1999, p. 163). As of 1998, 1.8% of all those serving sentences of 1 year or more in state and federal prisons were housed in such facilities (King, 1999). This number is likely to increase, because many practitioners have classified supermax facilities as an effective tool in the management of problematic prisoners despite the lack of empirical evidence demonstrating such effectiveness (King, 1999).

Research on supermax facilities and solitary confinement within prisons is limited and generally lacking in sound methodology, which makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions regarding what effect these facilities may have on inmates’ behavior and mental health. Given that existing isolation research examines the effects of deprivations that are arguably less restrictive and shorter in duration than supermax confinement, one expects that the risk for psychological harm and other detrimental impacts is greater in supermax facilities than the research suggests. In terms of controlling behavior, the available research does not support the assertion that supermax facilities are effective management tools for controlling violence and disturbances within prisons. Although no research has looked at the deterrent effect of supermax facilities on behavior within prisons, deterrence research suggests that supermax facilities are not effective in reducing violence or disturbances within the general population. In conjunction with the potential for a detrimental impact on the mental health of inmates placed in supermax prisons, the implications of existing deterrence literature suggest that supermax prisons should not be used for their current purpose.

In addition to the lack of apparent benefit from placing inmates in supermax facilities, doing so imposes costs on society. Foremost is the expense of operating supermax facilities. Advocates claim that the cost is worthwhile because these facilities serve as a general deterrent and ensure security in the general prison population, but these assertions are not empirically supported, making it difficult to justify the costs of constructing and operating these facilities. The impact of solitary confinement and the lack of activities or programming on inmates’ psychological well-being presents additional costs to society by necessitating psychiatric care within institutions and potentially leading to more disruptive behavior and violence against staff members.

The costs associated with supermax facilities are not limited to incarceration costs. If these inmates have been abused, treated violently, and confined in dehumanizing conditions that threaten their mental health, then they may leave prison angry, dangerous, and far less capable of leading law-abiding lives than when they entered prison (Fellner & Mariner, 1997). It is probable that inmates who have spent prolonged periods in solitary confinement have a more difficult time adjusting to life outside of prison, especially given the potential for the development or exacerbation of psychological problems. Supermax inmates may be more likely than comparable inmates serving sentences in regular institutions to recidivate (or to escalate their offending). Furthermore, the presence of psychological problems means that the release of these individuals into society poses additional burdens on communities trying to deal effectively with mentally ill offenders.

An additional question arises as to whether it is worthwhile to place someone in a supermax facility for the sake of reducing violence
and disturbances within prisons (which research suggests is not accomplished), only to release that individual into society as less capable of normal social functioning than when he or she was sent to prison. Research in this area is sorely lacking, but given the increasing popularity of supermax facilities, the implications of supermax confinement need careful consideration, because most of the inmates housed in such facilities are returned either to the general prison population or to society. Do the benefits, if any, of placing inmates in supermax facilities outweigh or justify the costs? Available research suggests that they do not; in which case, one must ask why supermax prisons are so popular and whether they are justifiable. Policy makers and prison administrators need to consider why they favor supermax institutions and carefully weigh the consequences of expanding the use of supermax prisons.

Nearly 200 years ago, prison administrators abandoned the first experiments with solitary isolation as a practice, not just a temporary punishment, solely on the basis of its detrimental effects on inmates. Although conditions within institutions are certainly different today, one must ask why this practice, which was once dropped because it was deemed inhumane, is once again justifiable. If it cannot be justified on the basis of current purposes, then the aims of supermax facilities need reconsideration. Current research, which is certainly limited, suggests that it is difficult to justify them for utilitarian purposes (e.g., effective inmate management, deterrence). It is, however, possible to justify them on punitive grounds. Their increasing popularity may mirror the increased punitiveness seen in sentencing across the United States since the 1970s, in which case the arguments surrounding their use are quite different, focusing more on theoretical and moral justifications for their existence, as opposed to their ability to help correctional administrators manage the inmate population.

Regardless of the rationale for using, or not using, supermax facilities, more research is needed to better understand their use, the impact that they have on inmates while in the facilities as well as after release, and ultimately the implications for affected communities. In the absence of more empirical evidence, the conclusions that can be drawn regarding supermax facilities, although informative, are limited. We hope that the conclusions presented here demonstrate just how much is not known about the impact of these increasingly popular facilities as well as point out some areas in need of further exploration, both empirically and philosophically.

References


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did supermax prisons develop?
2. Are supermax prisons doing what they were originally designed to do, or has their purpose changed over time?
3. What are the benefits and detriments (to staff and inmates) of supermax prisons?