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A-BLOCK

TED CONOVER

Ted Conover presents the reader with a window into the life of a brand-new correctional officer in one of the most notorious prisons in the United States—Sing Sing. At the outset, the many risks of holding the position of correctional officer may not appear surprising. How some of these risks originate, however, may indeed be startling. The author presents an additional account that details the complexity of the relationships that exist within the prison environment. This time, though, the nuances of the relationships between “old guards” and “new guards” are highlighted, as are the relationships between guards and inmates. Despite the adversarial and subordinate nature of “the keeper and the kept,” there may indeed be many avenues whereby the inmates have the upper hand within an institution. Literature regarding institutional corrections often centers on the inmate subculture that exists and investigates the sources of that subculture (e.g., importation versus deprivation as the primary pressures shaping subculture). Conover’s piece reminds the reader that there may also be a very active and complex guard subculture that has advantages and disadvantages for pursuing what may be the ultimate goal of institutional corrections—peace within the walls.

Many times during those first months I was assigned to A-block. The mammoth cell-block required more officers to run it than any other building—around thirty-five during the day shift—but the senior officers there seemed particularly unfriendly to new officers, offering little encouragement and lots of criticism. The best way to fend off their comments, I decided, would be to try and enforce the rules as strictly as I could.

But, assigned to one of the vast eighty-eight-cell galleries for the first time, I found it hard to know where to begin. With the sheets hanging from the bars like curtains? The clothes drying on the

handrails? The music blaring from several cells? I decided to start with the annoyance closest at hand: an inmate’s illegal radio antenna.

Inmates were allowed to have music. Each cell had two jacks in the wall for the headphones its occupant was issued upon arrival. Through one jack was transmitted a Spanish-language radio station; through the other, a rhythm-and-blues station, except during sporting events, when the games were transmitted instead. Inmates could have their own radios, too, but the big steel cell-block made reception very difficult. Telescoping antennas were forbidden, because they might be turned into “zip guns.” By inserting a bullet into

the base of an extended antenna and then quickly compressing it, an inmate could fire the inaccurate but still potentially deadly gun. The approved wire dipole antennas were supposed to be placed within a two-by-four-foot area on the wall—where, apparently, they did no good at all.

To improve their chances of tuning in to a good station, inmates draped wires over their bars and across the gallery floor. Some even tied objects to the end of a bare strand of copper wire and flung it toward the outside wall, hoping that it would snag on a window and that they would win the reception jackpot. (When you looked up from the flats on a sunny day, you could sometimes see ten or twenty thin wires spanning the space between the gallery and the exterior wall, like the glimmering work of giant spiders.)

Antennas strewn across the gallery floor could cause someone to trip, and if they seemed likely to do so, I'd have the inmates pull them in. But the inmate in question on my first day as a regular officer in A-block— a short, white-haired man in his sixties—had gotten his off the floor by threading wire through a cardboard tube, the kind you find inside wrapping paper. One end of the tube was wedged between his bars at stomach level, and the other protruded halfway into the narrow gallery space between cell bars and fence, like a miniature bazooka.

"You're gonna have to take this down," I advised him the first time I brushed against it.

"Why's that?"

"Because it's in my space."

"But I can't hear if it's in my cell."

"Sorry. Try stringing it up higher on your bars."

"Sorry? You ain't sorry. Why say you sorry if you ain't sorry? And where'd you get to be an authority on antennas? They teach you that in the Academy?"

"Look, you know the rule. No antenna at all outside the cell. I could just take it if I wanted. I'm not taking it. I'm just telling you to bring it in."

"You didn't tell that guy down there to bring his in, did you? The white guy?"

I looked in the direction he indicated. There were no other antennas in tubes, and I said so.

"You're just picking on the black man, aren't you? Well, have a good time at your Klan meeting tonight," he spat out. "Have a pleasant afternoon. You've ruined mine."

All this over an antenna. Or, rather, all brought into focus by an antenna. In prison, unlike in the outside world, power and authority were at stake in nearly every transaction.

The high stakes behind petty conflict became clear for me on the night during my first month when Colton and I were assigned to work M-Rec, one of the kinds of recreation that Sing Sing relied upon heavily in order to give the prisoners something to do. After dinner, instead of the gym or the yard, inmates could gather at the gray-metal picnic-style tables bolted to the floor along M-gallery, on the flats, to play cards or chess or dominoes, or watch the television sets mounted high on the walls.

"The rule is that they can't be leaning against the bars of the cells," the regular officer said to us, "and the cell gates are supposed to be closed." You could tell from his "supposed" that this rule was not strictly enforced. Still, Colton, a lieutenant's son, seemed strangely zealous. I think he couldn't stand the laxity around us. As we walked along the dimly lit gallery, he challenged one inmate after another. I decided that to keep his respect, I had better do the same. At varying volumes, they objected. "What is this, newjack rec?" asked one older man in a kufi who was sitting right outside his own open cell. I gestured toward the door. He told me that he was *always* allowed to leave the cell door open during M-Rec. Well, not tonight, I said. He yelled and screamed. I closed the gate. He walked right up to me, stood less than a foot from my face, and, radiating fury, said, "You're going to learn, CO, that some things they taught you in the Academy can get you killed."

I would hear inmates utter these exact words several times more in the incoming months at Sing Sing, a threat disguised as advice. (The phrasing had

the advantage of ambiguity, and thus could steer the speaker clear of rule 102.10: "Inmates shall not, under any circumstances, make any threat.") But I hadn't heard those words spoken to me before, and that, in combination with the man's standing so close, set my heart racing. I tried staring back at him as hard as he was staring at me, and didn't move until he had stepped back first.

Some of the conflict we saw, of course, wasn't only a fixed feature of prison life; it had roots in Sing Sing's frequent changes of officers. New officers, as we'd already learned, irritated inmates in much the same way that substitute teachers irritate school children. To try to lessen these effects, the chart office would often "pencil in" a resource officer to the post of a senior officer who was sick or on vacation. That way, there wouldn't be a different substitute every day.

One day in A-block, however, I was assigned to run the gallery temporarily assigned to one of my classmates, Michaels, whom I knew to be particularly lax. It was Michaels's day off, which made me the substitute for a substitute. I knew before I even arrived that things would be chaotic.

My first problem came at count time, 11 A.M. Inmates generally began to return to their cells from programs and rec at around 10:40 or 10:45 A.M. The officers would encourage them to move promptly to their cells. By 11, anyone not in his cell and ready to be counted was technically guilty of delaying the count and could be issued a misbehavior report. Few galleries, therefore, had inmates at large after 11 A.M.

But on this day, Michaels's gallery had a dozen still out. Michaels had grown up in Brooklyn and, more than most officers from the city, considered the inmates to be basically decent guys, his "homies." He wanted them to like him. Once penciled in to this post, he had quickly learned all their names. I had helped him at count time once before, and when I complained about two inmates who were slow to lock in, Michaels replied that they were good guys. Though I had seen sergeants chew

him out for looseness, he had told me privately that the sergeants could "suck my dick in Macy's window" for all he cared.

I liked Michaels for acknowledging the inmates' humanity. He had told me how much he hated A-block's usual OIC, a big, pugnacious slob I'll call Rufino, who told jokes such as "How do you know when an inmate is lying? When you see him open his mouth." But I didn't appreciate Michaels's legacy of chaos that morning.

A group of three or four senior officers strolled by, to my relief—I was sure they'd been sent to help me usher in the stragglers. But they had no such plan. A couple of them glanced disapprovingly at their watches and then at me. They didn't have to help, so they weren't going to. Thanks, guys, I muttered to myself.

About an hour later, a couple of keeplocks returned from disciplinary hearings. The block's keeplock officer, instead of borrowing my keys and ushering the inmates to their cells, called, "They're back," when he came through the gate and then disappeared. One of the keeplocks returned to his cell without trouble, but the second had other plans. It was Tuesday, he told me, and Michaels always let him take a shower on Tuesdays.

"Keeplock showers are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays," I said. "And Michaels isn't here today."

"C'mon, CO, don't play tough. I'll be out in a second."

"No," I said. He acted as though he hadn't heard, grabbed a towel from his cell, and strode quickly down the gallery to the shower stall. I wasn't overly concerned: I always kept the showers locked, just in case something like this came up, and felt confident that once I reminded him he would miss keeplock rec today if he didn't go back, he'd turn around. Then I remembered. On this gallery, the lock mechanism was missing from the shower cell door. The shower was always open. Sing Sing. The inmate was a good foot taller than me and well muscled. I yelled through the bars into the shower that he'd lost his

rec. He said, "Fuck rec." I put the incident into the logbook, then wrote up a Misbehavior Report and had his copy waiting in the cell when he got back. He shrugged it off.

"I don't give a fuck, CO," he explained. "I got thirty years to life, right? And I got two years' keeplock. Plus today, I got another three months. When they see this lame-ass ticket, they're gonna tell you to shove it up your ass."

The frustration was, he was probably right. Of all the inmates on a gallery, keeplocks were the hardest to deal with. There were no carrots left to tempt them with, and few sticks—especially for the long-termers. And now it was time for keeplock rec. I tried to match faces with cells as they headed out to the yard on that hot June day—it could help me when it came time to lock them back in. I was in the middle of letting them out when the keeplock officer reappeared. He gestured in the direction I was walking.

"Forty-three cell?" he said. "Hawkins? No rec today."

"No rec for forty-three? Why's that?"

"He doesn't get it today," he said, and disappeared.

I knew there could be several reasons for the inmate not receiving rec. He might have committed an infraction within the past twenty-four hours. Or he might have a deprivation order pending against him; in cases of outrageous misbehavior, a keeplock who was a "threat to security" could have his rec taken away for a day by a sergeant. Or—what I worried about in this situation—he might have pissed off the officer but *not* had a deprivation order pending. In that case, another officer was asking me to burn the keeplock's rec as an act of solidarity. I hoped it wasn't the last possibility and went on down the gallery, passing up forty-three cell.

The inmate called out to me shortly after I went by.

"Hey, CO! Aren't you going to open my cell?" I ignored him until I was on my way back. He stood up from his bed as I approached.

"Open my cell, CO! I'm going outside."

"Not today," I said.

"What? Why not today?"

"No rec today."

"Why not?"

"That's what they told me."

"Who told you that?"

I didn't answer him, but I immediately felt I'd done something wrong. I returned to the office and tried to get the keeplock officer on the phone. I was going to insist on knowing his reason. What was up with this guy? The phone rang and rang. I called the office of the OIC and asked for him. He was outside now; couldn't be reached, Rufino said. But Rufino was always unhelpful. I called the yard. He'd had to go somewhere, wasn't there now. Shit, I thought.

Meanwhile, three keeplocks on their way out to the yard stopped separately to advise me that "forty-three cell needs to come out, CO." I looked down the gallery. He was waving his arm madly through the bars, trying to get my attention. I walked down to talk to him.

"You're not letting me out?"

I shook my head.

"Who said so?" He was angry now.

"I don't know his name," I lied.

"Well, what did he look like?" I declined to help out. "Then what's your name? I'm writing up a grievance." I told him my name. When I passed by the cell again an hour later, he had a page-long letter written out.

Instead of the classic newjack mistake of enforcing a rule that nobody really cared about, I had just enforced a rule that wasn't a rule, for my "brother in gray." I knew that many police admired that kind of thing. But it made me feel crummy. And with the grievance coming, I was going to have to answer for it.

I thought about how the senior officers hadn't helped me during the count, how the keeplock officer hadn't helped me when the two inmates came back, and how the same keeplock officer hadn't explained to me the deal with forty-three, even

when I asked. More than once at the Academy, I'd heard the abbreviation CYA—cover your ass. I knew how to do it, though I also knew there could be consequences. In the logbook, I made note of the time and wrote, "No rec for K/L Hawkins, per CO X"—the keeplock officer. And then I waited.

The chicken came home to roost about a month later. I knew it when I arrived at work and approached the time clock. Officer X, instead of ignoring me as usual, gave me a cold, hard stare. His partner, Officer Y, stopped me and asked if I was Conover. Yes, I said, and he gave me the same stare and walked away. It was because inmate Hawkins in cell 43 had slugged Officer Y the day before (as I'd since learned) that Officer X had wanted to send him a message that day.

A sergeant who was unaware of all of this approached me with a copy of the inmate's grievance letter in the mess hall at lunch-time that same day. "Do you remember this incident?" he asked. I said yes. "You'll just need to respond with a To/From," he said, using department slang for a memo. "Do you remember why you didn't let him out? Probably forgot, right?"

"Well, no, the keeplock officer told me not to."

The sergeant wrinkled his brow. "Well, probably best just to say you forgot," he said cheerily, and turned away.

"Sarge," I said. "It's in the logbook. I wrote in the logbook that he told me."

"You're kidding," he said. "Why'd you do that?"

I shrugged. "I was new."

"I'll get back to you," he said.

I wrote the memo the sergeant had asked for, told the truth, and felt conflicted. Days went by. Another sergeant called me in and told to me to see a lieutenant in the Administration Building. My memo was on the lieutenant's desk, and he was poring over it. "So you say you logged this part about Officer X, right?" he asked. I nodded, expecting to receive a stern, quiet lecture on how not to fuck my fellow officer. But the lieutenant just nodded, cogitated a bit, and then picked up the phone.

I heard him greet a sergeant in A-block. "So Officer X remembers saying that to Conover now, is that right? And he's going to write a new To/From? And you'll take care of the deprivation order? Okay, fine." And hung up.

He passed my memo to me over the desk. "Just write this up again, but leave out the name of Officer X," he told me.

"And then we're set?"

"All taken care of."

I was relieved. Officer X was off the hook, which meant that maybe he wouldn't hate me more than he already did. Apparently, a deprivation order would be backdated to cover *his* ass. And I had learned an important lesson: If you were going to survive in jail, the goody-goody stuff had to go. Any day in there, I might find myself in a situation where I'd need Officer X to watch my back, to pry a homicidal inmate off of me, at his peril. The logic of the gray wall of silence was instantly clear, as clear as the glare of hate that Officer X had sent my way when he heard what I'd done.

* * *

The single most interesting word, when it came to the bending and ignoring of rules, was *contraband*. To judge by the long list of what constituted contraband, its meaning was clear. In practice, however, contraband was anything but.

The first strange thing about contraband was that its most obvious forms—weapons, drugs, and alcohol—could all be found fairly readily inside prison. Some of the drugs probably slipped in through the Visit Room, but most, it seemed, were helped into prison by officers who were paid off. The Department had a special unit, the Inspector General's Office, which followed up on snitches' tips and tried to catch officers in the act; the union rep had even warned us about the "IG" at the Academy. A couple of times a year, I would come to find, a Sing Sing officer was hauled off in handcuffs by the state police.

But even in its lesser forms, contraband had many interesting subtleties. As officers, we were

not allowed to bring through the front gate glass containers, chewing gum, pocket knives with blades longer than two inches, newspapers, magazines, beepers, cell phones, or, obviously, our own pistols or other weapons. A glass container, such as a bottle of juice, might be salvaged from the trash by an inmate and turned into shards for weapons. The chewing gum could be stuffed into a lock hole to jam the mechanism. The beepers, newspapers, and magazines were distractions—we weren't supposed to be occupied with any of that while on the job. Nor could we make or receive phone calls, for the same reason. Apart from inmates smoking in their cells, smoking was generally forbidden indoors.

And yet plenty of officers smoked indoors. Many chewed gum. The trash cans of wall towers were stuffed with newspapers and magazines.

A much longer list of contraband items applied to inmates. As at Coxsackie, they couldn't possess clothing in any of the colors reserved for officers: gray, black, blue, and orange. They couldn't possess cash, cassette players with a record function, toiletries containing alcohol, sneakers worth more than fifty dollars, or more than fourteen newspapers. The list was very long—so long, in fact, that the authors of *Standards of Inmate Behavior* found it easier to define what *was* permitted than what *wasn't*. Contraband was simply "any article that is not authorized by the Superintendent or [his] designee."

You looked for contraband during pat-frisks of inmates and during random cell searches. One day in A-block, I found my first example: an electric heating element, maybe eight inches wide, such as you'd find on the surface of a kitchen range. Wires were connected to the ends of the coil, and a plug was connected to the wires. The inmate, I knew, could plug it into the outlet in his cell, place a pan on it, and do some home cooking. I supposed it was contraband because of the ease with which it could start a fire, trip the cell's circuit breaker, burn the inmate, or burn someone the inmate didn't like.

And it must have been stolen from a stove somewhere inside the prison.

I was proud of my discovery and asked a senior officer on the gallery how to dispose of it and what infraction number to place on the Misbehavior Report.

"Where'd you find this?" he asked.

"Cell K-twelve, in a box behind the locker," I said.

"K-twelve—yeah, he's a cooker," the officer said. "Cooks every night. Can't stand mess-hall food. I don't blame him."

"Yeah? So what's the rule number?"

The other officer said he didn't know, so I made some phone calls, figured it out, and did the paperwork during lunch. While I was at it, an inmate porter stopped by and pleaded on behalf of the cooker. "He's a good guy, CO. He needs it." A few minutes later, to my amazement, a mess-hall officer called.

"You the guy who found that heating element?" he asked.

"Yeah. Why?"

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Turn it in."

"Oh really?"

"Yeah. Why?"

There was a long pause. "Oh, nothing." He hung up.

I finished my Misbehavior Report and stepped out of the office to let inmates back into their cells from chow. When I returned to the office, the coil, which I had placed on the desk, was gone.

"Where'd it go?" I asked the senior officer. "Did you move it?"

"What—oh, that heating thing?" he said off-handedly. "I gave it back to him."

"Gave it back? Why'd you do that? I just wrote up a report."

"Look, he's a good guy. Never gives any trouble. I think he's vegetarian. He really can't eat that stuff they serve down there. Why don't you go talk to him?" He made for the door.

I stared at him skeptically. He shrugged and was gone.

Unsure exactly why I did so, I went to talk to the inmate. He did seem like a nice guy, and thanked me profusely for not turning him in. Oh what the hell, I thought.

Not long afterward, I found another heating coil during a cell search in B-block. This time my sergeant, Murphy, saw it in my hands and insisted I turn it in. The paperwork that Murphy told me to fill out was even more elaborate than what I had imagined. Specifically, he said, I'd need to make an entry in the B-block cell-search logbook; to write a contraband receipt for the inmate, with copy stapled to a misbehavior report, to be signed by a supervisor in the Watch Commander's Office, where I would submit all the paperwork and get the key to the contraband locker in the hospital basement, where I would also sign the logbook. Oh, and on the way to the Watch Commander's Office, I should stop and pick up an evidence bag from the disciplinary office, in which to place the burner.

It was the end of my day. I knew that many officers, rather than plow through all this when their shift was over, would just drop the contraband in a trash can by the front gate and be done with it. Sergeant Murphy would never follow up. But some contrarian impulse drove me on. I finally made it to the Watch Commander's Office and waited twenty minutes for my turn with the lieutenant. He looked at the heating element, then at my paperwork.

"Do you think this is a good use of the Adjustment Committee's time?" he asked.

I shrugged and said I supposed it was. My sergeant must have thought so when he told me to write all this up, I added. The lieutenant blathered on about major versus minor offenses, the need to make judgments, and so on, apparently expecting me to say, "Oh, I get it!" and withdraw from his office. But it had been a lot of work. I had stayed late. I was pissed off about this and other things. I didn't move.

"Okay," the lieutenant finally said. "Leave it with me." I stood to leave, wondering how to take this. The lieutenant hadn't signed a thing. A CO at a desk near the lieutenant's translated for me as I walked out. "If in doubt, throw it out!" he said with a big smile. And that was that. . . .

* * *

In July, I was penciled in for two weeks as officer in charge of the A-block gym. This huge room was filled morning, afternoon, and evening with inmates, and my day shift spanned two of those times. It was regarded as a fairly good post in that you generally didn't have to spend a lot of time telling people what to do. The regular officer, presently on vacation, had had it for years. Its main downside was risk. On a cold or rainy day, the gym could fill with upward of four hundred inmates, and there were moments when I would be the only officer there with them.

Depending on the time of day, eight to twelve porters were assigned to the gym. I had to put through their payroll, I was told, and therefore to keep porter attendance. (The twelve to fifteen cents an hour they earned was credited to their commissary accounts.) Because I knew the B-block porters to be a tight and surly bunch, I thought I'd better let the crew know right away who was in charge.

They arrived before rec was called, supposedly to get a jump on the cleaning. There was a lot to do, because an inspection of the block was scheduled for the next day. The gym had a full-size basketball court with a spectator area around it, a weights area the size of a half court, a table-and-benches zone for cards, chess, dominoes, and similar games, and two television areas. There was also a locked equipment room in front of which sat my desk, on an elevated platform, with a microphone on top. Instead of hopping to work, the porters turned on the TVs and sat down. I turned off the one most of them were watching.

"Gentlemen, I'm going to be here for the next two weeks and I want to talk with you about when the cleaning gets done and who does what."

They sat silently.

"For example, who normally cleans today?"

At first, nobody said anything. There were stares of indifference and defiance. A pudgy inmate whose nickname, I would later learn, was Rerun finally spoke. "Don't nobody normally clean today," he said. "Tuesday's the day off."

"The day off. So when do you clean?"

"Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. We know what to do."

I tried wresting more details out of them, but they wouldn't say more. Firing porters, I knew, was a bureaucratic procedure that took weeks; I'd be working elsewhere in the prison before the wheels had even begun to turn. And evidently the regular officer was satisfied with these men. Wishing I'd never started down this path, I finally had to settle for a plea dressed up as an order. "Those ledges up there? They're covered with dust, and the inspectors will be looking. So tomorrow, make sure somebody takes care of that along with all the rest."

"They don't never check those ledges," came the quick reply as I walked to my desk. And the TVs went back on.

The next day, somewhat to my surprise, six or seven of the porters set to work in earnest upon their arrival. For half an hour, they swept and mopped and picked up trash. As promised, they skipped the ledges. The place looked pretty good, and the inspectors never came.

I began to relax, and as I did, I began to understand the complex culture of the gym. There was, naturally, a big basketball scene—a league, in fact, with prison-paid inmate referees and a scoreboard and games that took place about every other day. The games were often exciting to watch—sometimes even a few officers would attend—but also nervous-making, as the crowds that gathered for matches between popular teams were partisan and players would sometimes get into fights.

Weight lifting was also popular, and when I was new at Sing Sing, it was intimidating to be faced with the huge, muscle-bound inmates who took it

seriously. But soon I noticed that these purposeful, self-disciplined inmates were almost never the ones who gave us problems, and I came to agree with the opinion, generally held among officers, that the weights and machines were valuable. The only complaint I ever heard from officers was that inmates' weight equipment was much better than what was provided to officers in the small weight room in the Administration Building.

Beyond these activities, the gym held many surprises. On a busy day, it seemed almost like a bazaar. A dozen fans of *Days of Our Lives* gathered religiously every day for the latest installment of their favorite soap. Behind them, regular games of Scrabble, chess, checkers, and bridge were conducted with great seriousness. (One of the bridge players, known as Drywall—a white-bearded man with dreadlocks—came from 5-Building; more than once when he was late, his partners asked me to call the officers over there and make sure he'd left so they could start their game.) At the table next to the games, an older man sold hand-painted greeting cards for all occasions to raise money for the Jaycees, one of Sing Sing's "approved inmate organizations." In a far corner behind the weight area, at the bottom of a small flight of stairs, a regular group of inmates practiced some kind of martial art. Martial arts were forbidden by the rules, but these guys were so pointedly low-key, and the rule seemed to me so ill conceived, that I didn't break it up. In the men's bathroom, inmates smoked—also against the rules but, from what I could tell, tacitly accepted.

A floor-to-ceiling net separated these areas from the basketball court. At court's edge, a transvestite known as Miss Jackson would braid men's hair as they watched the game or press their clothing with one of the electric irons inmates were allowed to use in the gym. She received packs of Newport cigarettes—the commissary's most popular brand—as payment. Miss Jackson seemed a sweet man who was at pains to be noticed: She stretched the collar of her sweatshirt so that it exposed one shoulder, and

cut scallop-shaped holes in the body so that it held some aesthetic interest. She often wore Walkman headphones, disconnected, just for the look. She must have been rich in cigarettes, and I wondered how she spent them.

Out on the court one day, just a few yards from Miss Jackson's enterprise, four short-haired, long-sleeved, bow-tied members of the Nation of Islam stood in a close circle, sternly chastising another member of the group, who must have somehow strayed. One of them was also a gym porter, among those most courteous to me. The juxtaposition of such opposites—the ideologues of the Nation and the would-be sexpot—reminded me of street life in New York City.

I walked the floor every fifteen or twenty minutes, making sure no one was smoking too openly, telling those inmates who had put on do-rags to take them off (it violated the rule against wearing hats inside), and making announcements when there was room at the bank of inmate phones that were lined up on the flats near the front gate. (Inmates who had signed up on a list could be excused from

the gym to make a call.) It wasn't a bad job overall, and I suppose I should have been sad to see it go. But, as usual, I was simply relieved that nothing awful had happened under my watch....

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What similarities might there be between the author's experiences as a brand-new correctional officer and those of a brand-new inmate?
2. In what ways might inmates in some prisons have the upper hand regarding prison management?
3. Most organizations depend on (and even demand) very clear, precise, and detailed communication at all levels. In this piece by Conover, the prison guards seemed to benefit from a *lack* of this type of communication. For what reasons might this dynamic exist within the prison guard culture?
4. Why did the author state that the resolution of very small conflicts is as important as or even more important than resolving the bigger issues within a prison environment?

PRISON GUARD PREDATORS

AN ANALYSIS OF INMATES WHO ESTABLISHED
INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH
PRISON STAFF, 1995–1998

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Despite many images in the popular media, correctional officers working within a prison environment rarely if ever carry weapons. This fact may be surprising considering the very high inmate-to-guard ratio that is typically maintained in state prison systems. Nonetheless, correctional security officers are charged with maintaining a peaceful environment and with ensuring that the prison runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. As a result, many correctional officers rely on their relational skills when interacting with prison inmates. Because of the conditions of confinement and the proximity in which inmates and guards find themselves, it is not uncommon for real (and often inappropriate) relationships to develop between the “keeper” and the “kept.” The news media often carry stories about inappropriate relationships that develop between guards and inmates; most commonly these relationships appear to be initiated by the staff, who are perceived to have the majority of the power. A new perspective on the inmate-guard dynamic is offered in this unique piece of qualitative research by Worley, Marquart, and Mullings. The authors build on research initiated by Allen and Bosta (1981) that explored the extent to which inmates actually target correctional workers and their numerous reasons for doing so. Worley and colleagues present the reader with a rich and detailed exploration into the complicated dynamics that exist between inmates and guards and offer a new framework for considering inmates who initiate inappropriate relationships and their motivations for doing so.

Recently, media accounts have shed light on a number of correctional employees who were terminated for engaging in “inappropriate relationships” with prisoners. This study employed face-to-face interviews of 32 inmate “turners” who were investigated for engaging in inappropriate relationships with security officers. We found that many inmate manipulators share similar attitudes

Excerpts from “Prison Guard Predators: An Analysis of Inmates Who Established Inappropriate Relationships with Prison Staff, 1995–1998,” by Robert Worley, James W. Marquart, and Janet L. Mullings. *Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 24:175–194, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by Taylor & Francis. Reprinted by permission of Routledge.

and beliefs regarding inappropriate relationships. Our findings indicate that there are three distinct types of inmate "turners," each exhibiting an entirely different set of motivations and behavior from one another. We conclude that inmates are very persistent in attempting to initiate an inappropriate relationship with prison employees.

Despite formal policies prohibiting familiarity between offenders and prison staff members, infractions occur that range from "serious (e.g., love affairs)" to "unserious (e.g., giving or receiving a candy bar or soda to/from an inmate)" (Marquart, Barnhill, and Balshaw-Biddle 2001). In the past, scholars have attributed this rule-breaking behavior to the nature of the prison environment. Sykes (1958), for example, contends that the "deal-making" that occurs between guards and inmates is due to prolonged periods of interaction, which may often be quite intense. Prison administrators argue that any type of familiarity between officers and offenders constitutes a major breach of professional work values and ethics (Strom-Gottfried 1999). News reports also suggest that inappropriate relationships occur when employees work closely with incarcerated individuals (Hanson 1999). Finally, the literature suggests that security officers who work with inmates of the opposite gender may be susceptible to engaging in unprofessional sexual relationships and risk losing their jobs (Strom-Gottfried 1999).

Sexual misconduct, primarily by male staff against female prisoners, has prompted lawsuits against 23 prison systems and jails (Siegal 1999; National News Brief 1999; Hanson 1999; National Institute of Corrections 1996). Recently the child killer Susan Smith admitted to having four sexual encounters with a high ranking male security officer (Geier 2000). Staff caught having sex with an inmate in South Carolina are charged with a felony. To deter this problem, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government have enacted laws to prohibit staff sexual misconduct with inmates (National Institute of Corrections 2000).

Contemporary prisons are no longer sex segregated and female security officers work in male penitentiaries. This situation also allows for different types of inappropriate relationships to occur. In 1998, women comprised 22 percent of the American correctional officer work force. Eight in ten female prison officers now work in male prisons. Male officers comprised 78 percent of the correctional officer work force in 1998, however; only 4 percent were assigned to female institutions (Camp and Camp 1998). According to Marquart and colleagues (2001), for example, in addition to inappropriate relationships that occur between male staff and female inmates, "three other combinations are possible (male staff-male prisoner, female staff-male prisoner, and female staff-female prisoner" (p. 5).

Currently it is unknown whether or not staff members initiate relationships with offenders. Indeed, the literature in most instances portrays male guards as sexual predators and victimizers that abuse female inmates (Siegal 1999). The news media also tend to focus exclusively on only those relationships in which the officer is at fault or is responsible for initiating an inappropriate encounter (*New York Times* 1999). Scholars, such as Bowker (1980:126), also attribute considerable blame to prison staff members who "act in sexually suggestive ways" and entice offenders. Moreover, little systematic research has examined the process by which incarcerated individuals solicit correctional staff to break the rules and make attempts to develop relationships, which could only be deemed as improper.

Correctional employees hold a high degree of control over offenders and are guided by norms and regulations as to how they should use their power in a manner that is safe, just, and professional (Dilulio 1987). As mentioned before, a prison staff member can act inappropriately in many ways when dealing with offenders. For example, employees can mistreat offenders, provide inmates with contraband, or exploit inmates for sexual favors. In all of these instances, staff members fail to respect

the level of power that they are entrusted with and abandon their role as professionals. Marquart and colleagues (2001) developed Goffman's (1974) study of "social frames" to advance the notion that particular roles require distinct patterns of behavior if they are to truly remain professional. Rather than being model employees, staff members who behave inappropriately with offenders become deviant and engage in what Goffman (1974) refers to as "breaking frame."

Although there are explicit rules and policies designed to prohibit personal interactions between staff members and inmates, there are nevertheless offenders who persist in attempting to minimize the social boundary between themselves and prison employees. Allen and Bosta (1981) suggest five varieties of offenders that attempt to form inappropriate relationships with correctional staff members: "observers," "contacts," "runners," "point-men," and "turners." Observers were inmates who watched (e.g., personal mannerisms, body language, facial expressions) and listened to staff members to determine which employees might be susceptible to manipulation. These offenders in turn provided crucial information to other inmates who actually initiated the manipulation. "Contacts" were prisoners that ascertained personal details about an employee's life and passed on this "intelligence" to other inmates. "Runners" tested staff members by purposely violating the rules (e.g., asking the officer for a candy bar) to gauge the employee's reaction and willingness to enforce the rules or use discretion. "Point-men" functioned as lookouts to alert other inmates who were attempting to manipulate staff. Finally, these researchers stated that some offenders acted as "turners," or inmates who befriended employees and used that friendship to ultimately coerce employees into rule infractions. "Runners" also went to great lengths to gain an employee's trust, which was used later to corrupt the staff member. This typology illustrates that inmates can be the aggressor or the initiator of an inappropriate relationship with a staff member.

This typology has, however, not been subjected to testing.

The present analysis focuses exclusively on inmate "turners"—offenders identified by Allen and Bosta (1981) as the most likely to develop inappropriate relationships with staff members. Although Allen and Bosta (1981) have identified this inmate "type," they did not examine fully the process by which "turners" manipulate staff. Which staff members are targeted for manipulation? Who initiated the relationship? What does the inmate hope to gain from the relationship? Answers to these questions will fill a gap in our present knowledge about inappropriate relationships and deviant behavior in prison settings. At a larger level, findings from our analyses will clearly illustrate that inmates are not docile or pliant actors. Rather, prisoners can, through staff manipulation, actively exert control over their personal situation to mediate or lessen the pains of imprisonment (Sykes 1958).

METHODOLOGY

The data for the present paper were collected as part of a larger project on staff-inmate boundary violations within the Texas prison system, which is the second largest prison system in the world, houses over 150,000 offenders, and employs over 41,000 people (Texas Department of Criminal Justice [TDCJ-ID], 2000). In addition, there are presently 105 different custodial units within the Texas prison system, which includes seven private prisons; 13 transfer facilities, and 12 state jails (TDCJ-ID, 2000). The primary data sources for the analysis of inmate "turners" were personal observations and inmate interviews.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

In January 1999, the first author began working as a correctional officer in the Texas prison system and saw first hand the unusually high degree of sociability, over-familiarization, and friendliness between offenders and prison staff. It was

not uncommon to observe employees and inmates laughing together, shaking hands, and conversing for long periods of time. Some offenders also were found to be especially successful at compromising staff members. This author personally knew seven staff members who were terminated within 12 months of employment for engaging in inappropriate relationships with prisoners. He wanted to know from an inmate's perspective how and why some staff members were targeted for manipulation and others were not.

TARGET POPULATION

Inappropriate relationships are defined by Texas prison officials as personal relationships between employees and inmates/clients or with family members of inmates/clients. This is behavior that is usually sexual or economic in nature and has the potential to jeopardize the security of a prison institution or compromise the integrity of a correctional employee (Marquart et al. 2001). Texas prison employees are required by policy to report to agency officials any inmate that actively engages in or attempts to engage in an inappropriate relationship.

In October 2000, prison personnel provided the authors with a list of 508 correctional employees disciplined (between 1995 and 1998) for engaging in inappropriate relationships with prisoners. The database also contained the names of 508 prisoners who partook in these relationships. Further analysis revealed that of 508 prisoners, 225 were still incarcerated in October of 2000. Upon approval from prison officials, we sent a letter to each of the 225 prisoners and asked them to voluntarily participate in a research project on deviant relationships between inmates and staff. Each letter detailed the research objectives (as well as a commitment from the prison system not to further investigate their cases) and also contained a stamped postcard with our address that indicated whether or not they wished to be interviewed about their particular incident.

We received positive responses from 82 (36 percent) prisoners and three offenders who heard of the study by "word of mouth." These respondents indicated that they had initiated the inappropriate relationship. Though only 36 percent of the inmates consented to an interview, scholars such as Miller (1991) have found this to be an acceptable rate for sensitive topics. Statistically, the average age of the respondents we interviewed was 36. Forty-one percent were African-American, 38 percent were Caucasian, and 21 percent Hispanic. We selected these 32 inmates for interviewing based on their unit location, which was within a 100 miles radius of Huntsville, Texas. All of the inmates that were interviewed resided in state, rather than private correctional facilities.

INTERVIEWS

Each inmate was contacted and arrangements were made for an interview. Based on our prior research on staff disciplined for engaging in inappropriate relationships with inmates, we developed 11 general questions for the inmates. Table 11.1 shows the 11 questions and each of the four related research topics.

We pre-tested the interview guide with several inmates at a local Texas prison. Between December 2000 and March 2001, we interviewed the inmates who were housed at 17 different prison units. The interviews were "unstructured," which provided the respondents with ample opportunity to elaborate on the questions. All responses were handwritten and the interviews averaged 90 minutes. The interviews took place in the inmate visitation room. We typed the inmate responses and then content analyzed their responses looking for themes related to staff manipulation.

FINDINGS

We uncovered three types of "turners": (1) heart-breakers, (2) exploiters, and (3) hell-raisers. There were no statistically significant differences in either

the age or race among these three types of "turners." These types represent a contribution to the literature on inappropriate relationships between prison staff and prisoners. Table 11.2 illustrates the three types of "turners" and their characteristics.

HEART-BREAKERS

Of the 32 "turners," we identified eight as "heart-breakers," or inmates who initiated a relationship with a security officer to establish a long-term romantic relationship. Five heart-breakers claimed to be

married to former correctional employees, though this was never verified. Of the eight respondents that were heart-breakers, two were White, two were Hispanic, and four were African-American. Also, seven were male and one was female. The female interviewee was the only heart-breaker who had a relationship with a staff member of the same sex. Heart-breakers typically formed strong emotional bonds with prison employees, and it was not uncommon for a lengthy courtship to unfold prior to any romantic involvement. It was also not usual for ex-staff members to

TABLE 11.1 RESEARCH TOPICS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Area	Interview Questions
Attitudes toward prison employees and inappropriate relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of employees engage in inappropriate relationships? • How common is it for guards to engage in these types of relationships? • What does an inmate gain by engaging in an inappropriate relationship?
Inappropriate relationships and changes in the work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are officers different today, than 15–20 years ago? • How have changes in the work environment affected staff–inmate relations? • Has there been an increase or decrease in staff relationships?
How do inappropriate relationships begin?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who initiated the relationship? • Are there different forms of entrapment?
What are the consequences of inappropriate relationships?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact does this behavior have on staff? Other inmates? • How can inappropriate relationships be stopped? • How did your inappropriate relationship become detected?

TABLE 11.2 TYPOLOGY OF INMATE "TURNERS"

Type of Inmate Turner	Characteristics
Heart-breakers (n = 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to form emotional bond with staff member, which can lead to marriage • May spend several months courting an employee • Act alone, without the help of a "look-out" or "pointman"
Exploiters (n = 16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an employee as a means for contraband or fun and excitement • Perceptive, initiate a relationship very quickly • Usually act with the help of other offenders • Most manipulative, likely to use a "lever" on prison employees
Hell-raisers (n = 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have relationships as a way to create problems and disruptions • Most likely to be severely disciplined, employee will help Internal Affairs Division • Most likely to target non-security staff members

reside with the family or close friends of heart breakers. As one male inmate explained:

After we got busted, she went and lived with my family for a little while. But then she left, and now my mom is mad at her. I guess my mom just figured she was freeloading, but I really loved that girl.

In a related example, another informant made the following statement:

Right now my old lady is shacking up with my parents and her two kids. But as soon as I get out we're gonna get our own place.

These "turners" stated that they pursued the relationship because of a romantic interest in a particular employee. They initiated the contact, typically through casual conversation that progressed to the exchange of details about one's self, and attempted to "date" the employees. Many heart-breakers held important jobs, such as a clerk or hall porter, which provided them with mobility and a limited amount of supervision. They could therefore search out their romantic interest under the cover of their institutional job.

It also was not unusual for heart-breakers to wait several months before becoming physically intimate with a staff member. One offender described his sexual encounter with a female kitchen sergeant in the following manner:

We met through the "word of God." Every day, we would share scriptures with one another and we bonded as Christians. It took six to eight months before things became romantic and then sexual, if ya know what I'm talking 'bout. We kept things very quiet from everyone.

It was noteworthy that the above speaker mentioned that efforts were made to keep the relationship private. All of these offenders stated that they told no one, including their cellmate or closest friends about their personal involvement with a correctional employee. The heart-breakers did not utilize "point men," which according to Allen and Bosta (1981), were other offenders that

helped "turners" conceal their inappropriate relationships with security, rather than non-security employees. We do not know how many of the heart-breakers engaged in sexual relations with staff members.

When these offenders were asked why they formed relationships mainly with guards, they gave a variety of different reasons. One respondent expressed his opinion in the following way:

We mainly have relationships with C.O.s because they have less education and much poorer people skills than other employees. Guards relate better with inmates because they come from a lower-middle class background, the same way the convicts do. People in non-security jobs are better educated and don't socialize and mingle with prisoners the way guards do.

Another offender stated:

If I was dating a nurse, I'd have to get a lay-in to see her. And if I kept getting lay-ins, sooner or later this would begin to look suspicious and some snitching inmate might find out about this and tell the rank.

Heart-breakers also engaged in an activity that Allen and Bosta (1981) referred to as the "touch game," which consisted of "innocent" touches (e.g., patting the staff member on the back, touching a staffing member on the hand) initiated by the inmate that seemed accidental. Simple touching breaks down the social distance between the keepers and kept. Touching humanizes an otherwise harsh and inhuman environment. One respondent explained his actions in the following way:

When a boss is opening a door, we might grab for it too and touch hands for a moment. After a while we might be touching something else.

The interviewee claimed that inmates use "touching" to assess a staff member's vulnerabilities, as well as how open he or she would be in forming an unauthorized relationship. Heart-breakers also use such techniques "note-swapping"

(e.g., sending love letters) and "holding jiggers," or acting as a lookout to establish contacts with staff members. When one respondent was asked how he held "jiggers," he gave a detailed account of the following scenario:

At the time this boss lady was going through a lot with her family and didn't have any time to sleep. I told her that she could take a nap and I would just "watch her back." Pretty soon we become good friends and we would just stay up all night talking, even though I was supposed to be cleaning the wing and she was supposed to be guarding the other inmates.

In both the cases of the note-swapping and holding-jiggers, the respondents articulated that this was intended to develop a sense of trust between the inmate and employee. Although some of these offenders admitted that this trust was ultimately for manipulative purposes, there were also heart-breakers who insisted that they were truly in love and never intended to take advantage of their relationship. One interviewee argued that the agency should not be surprised that inmates desperately seek to establish romantic relationships with prison staff members, given the offender's lack of legitimate alternatives. The following quote from a prisoner illustrates that in some cases prisoner-staff contact was initiated to overcome institutional deprivation in the form of a lack of heterosexual relationships:

TDCJ tries hard to keep inmates from society. Instead it needs to make an effort to let an inmate cultivate and maintain the relationships that he has out in the free world. If this was properly done, then, inmates would stop worrying about starting relationships with female officers because they'd have more contact with their wives and girlfriends on the outside.

EXPLOITERS

We uncovered 16 turners who were "exploiters" or inmates who aggressively forged inappropriate relationship with staff members to make illicit profits in the underground prison economy. We found

16 exploiters (14 male and 2 female inmates) of which there were seven Whites, three Hispanics, and seven African-Americans. Exploiters initiated the relationship and befriended staff for economic reasons. Male inmates exploited female staff and the two females exploited male staff. One African-American male prisoner explained it this way:

When I first got here in '89 all I wanted was to do my time and be left alone. But when this place [TDCJ] did away with smoking, I said bullshit on this I'm gonna make me some money. So I hooked up with some ole ugly ass boss lady and I told her how great she looked and how she needed a strong dude like me to be her partner. Shit, she fell for that real fast. Next thing you know I got her bringing in cigarettes by the carton. I was making good money and living good. Hell you give 'em a line a B.S. and you got 'em hooked. We eventually got busted. Ha, she told me how much she loved me. I told her you a fool who was a mule.

A White female prisoner had this to say,

I started talking real nice to the officer where I worked, in the laundry. He was married but I told him how his old lady didn't pay him enough attention. You know that if he was my man how I would treat him. He started writing me notes and cards. Pretty soon I got him to bring in eyeliner, perfume, and some cigarettes. I sold the stuff. Oh it was fun to talk to him and stuff but I never let it get any further. I mean I never let him touch me or anything. I used him to make my life easier in here. Why not? You'd do the same thing.

To obtain contraband, "exploiters" develop a "lever" or "hold" over security officers. Levers, according to Allen and Bosta (1981), were ploys that offenders use to manipulate staff members into violating organizational policies and procedures. In our study, the inmates were asked about the types of levers they used to manipulate correctional employees, and one of the exploiters responded as follows:

If we see an officer that is dipping or smoking, we can use this against him. Also, if a boss tears u

another officer's disciplinary case, we might use this to get the boss to do us a favor.

Another exploiter expressed a similar sentiment but also claimed to use tactics that were much more extreme and intimidating. When the respondent was asked what he would do if an employee wanted to terminate an inappropriate business relationship, the offender stated:

If a boss wants to stop, I'll give her a couple of months. But you never let them quit. An inmate can always threaten to go to rank, and if that don't work then I tell him something like, "I ain't got but 15 months to go before I discharge. I know you love your kids. I'd hate to see them get hurt." Bosses with kids won't want anything to happen to their family.

Respondents also stated that it was not uncommon for inmates to intimidate staff members into engaging in inappropriate relationships, and these threats were often physical or psychological in nature. An example given of a psychological threat was a situation where a staff member was led to believe by a group of offenders that she had misplaced the inmates' mail, even though she had not. One interviewee suggested that naive employees could be "strong-armed" into bringing in tobacco, especially if enough inmates threatened to write a grievance or go to Internal Affairs to report fabricated wrongdoing.

Interestingly enough, the most common entrapment technique among exploiters involved the exchange of small items with prison staff members, like food or reading materials. Exchange of these minor items was used to establish an inappropriate relationship. One interviewee, for example, stated:

Here a boss may go a whole shift and not get a lunch break. We can take advantage of them because of this. You know, we might offer a boss a candy bar or a soda on a hot day. Sometimes we might offer them a sandwich or something, and this can lead to all kinds of things. Sometimes they take it and sometimes they don't. When they do, it's like a fish on a hook. You just got to reel them in slow. It takes patience. Hey all I got is time, man, so time is on my side.

Other exploiters claimed to provide staff members with newspaper or "jack books" (pornography) to develop a unique type of rapport. Interestingly, both female exploiters stated that it was not unusual for inmates to solicit staff members to put money in their trust funds. One female exploiter stated:

TDCJ doesn't require people to put their name on trust fund slips. So all a boss has to do is send in a money order and an inmate can get money added to their books. This happens a lot.

Exploiters used these transactions to develop "levers," which often led to inappropriate business relationships (Allen and Bosta 1981). Although exploiters were primarily motivated by profit and the need to dominate the prison marketplace, the vast majority of these offenders also claimed to have engaged in sexual relationships with prison staff members. There was, however, at least one instance where an exploiter chose not to mix "business with pleasure," and abstained from having sex with a female staff member who was supplying him with contraband. As the respondent stated:

My cellmate used me as a contact with a female laundry officer. He and I were working together to bring tobacco in and were making good money. I was just happy to be involved and didn't want to do anything stupid to bring down any heat. Also, at the time, I was married to someone in the free world and didn't want to mess that up either.

In the above cases, the respondents indicated that levers were necessary to coerce staff members into illegal business arrangements. Some interviewees, however, stated that occasionally staff members are more than anxious to make extra money by bringing in contraband. This may be especially true, given that prison staff members are enormously underpaid and in dire need of additional money. In Texas, for example, a starting correctional officer grosses a modest income of \$1,716 per month (Broddy 2002). Many inmates explained that because of the low pay, employees often enjoyed earning the extra money, which could be more than

the income they earned with the prison system. One offender stated:

Soon bosses start to feel pretty good once they see that they are making some real money by bringing in tobacco. If things are good, and I want other things, I might say something like, "so what else do you play with?" An officer can make \$1,000 a week by bringing in cocaine. A nickel, which is \$20 worth of coke out in the free world, goes for \$1,000 in here.

Finally, most exploiters were very perceptive and quickly took advantage of any opportunity derived by chance. One offender explained how he became involved with a female correctional officer and made the following statement:

She got on to me for no good reason, so I cussed her out and next thing I knew she started crying. After a while, we started talking and she began telling me things. I loved this and just listened. She said that her husband was abusing her mentally and then she began telling me what a whore she could be. She even showed me her tattoos and said she got them for free because she screwed the guy. Pretty soon, I knew she'd be screwing me too. I mean I wanted her to get me stuff and then I'd screw her later.

The exploiter immediately began talking to the guard in the above situation after seeing her cry. This led to a series of conversations in which she revealed aspects about her personal life, which included an abusive marriage. This was consistent with Marquart and colleagues' (2001) research, which found that in many cases involving employee-inmate relationships, the staff member often "suffered from domestic trouble, or recently finalized a divorce, or separated from a spouse" (p. 31). The inmate realized that the officer was in an unfortunate predicament, and he exploited this weakness to gain a sexual conquest.

Exploiters were inmates who were exceptionally skilled at targeting staff members who often appeared vulnerable and had what Cressey (1973) referred to as "non-sharable problems." Although

Sykes (1958) and other early prison researchers delineated several inmate roles or types, these studies did not consider argot roles that involved inmate-staff interactions. In other words, our research extends the old prison sociology by uncovering exploiters or inmates who systematically seek out staff to manipulate for personal gain and/or to normalize the prison experience. Exploiters cultivated staff to establish heterosexual relations or to obtain contraband.

HELL-RAISERS

Last were "hell-raisers," or inmates who engaged in a unique kind of psychological warfare. As many of these offenders admitted, they simply wanted to cause trouble and create hell for the prison system. These "rebels with a cause" (or "ballbusters" in Sykes' (1958) terminology), "were consumed with the idea of creating havoc and trouble for an institution for the sake of it. There were eight inmates in this group, and all were male: three were White, two Hispanic, and three were African-American. It was not unusual for these inmates to have long histories of personal involvement with correctional employees and many hell-raisers claimed to presently be engaged in a least one inappropriate relationship with staff members. In addition, these respondents admitted that they actually thrived on putting staff members into situations that compromised their jobs as well as the facility's security. All eight hell-raisers aimed to embarrass correctional administrators, and many claimed they enjoyed the notoriety that followed after their relationship was exposed. As one offender explained, having an inappropriate relationship with a prison staff member was the "ultimate way to out-con the law."

Hell-raisers focused on staff members, not security officers. Of these eight offenders, six stated that they had engaged in at least one inappropriate relationship with an employee other than

correctional officer. It could be that hell-raisers perceived non-security staff members to be a challenge, and they may have enjoyed the pursuit as much as the actual relationship. In one interview, the respondent claimed to have had several sexual relationships with non-security employees, including both a chaplain's secretary and warden's wife. When asked to describe his most recent alleged relationships, the offender offered:

I've had sex with the wives of two different wardens. One night around Christmas, I went over to the house of one warden and his wife asked me to put her son's bicycle together. You know it was a Christmas present. Then she cooked dinner for me and we had sex right there in the kitchen, on the floor. I can talk my way into any woman's panties. I did it 'cause I could. You know what I am saying? Man when they busted me for that, all hell broke loose. It was hilarious. Yeah, I lost my outside trusty job but it was worth it 'cause I embarrassed the shit out of that warden and his family. I still can't stop laughing 'bout it.

Hell-raisers also claimed that they used the act of masturbation to gauge whether or not an employee was likely to participate in a relationship with an inmate. The hell-raisers suggested that female employees who ignored masturbation were either weak or enjoyed this type of behavior. One interviewee, who later married a former prison employee, expressed himself in the following way:

Before I married my wife, I used to always jack off for her and do a little show whenever she walked her runs. She used to love it too.

It was not uncommon for hell-raisers to suggest that women who decided to work in a prison were looking to "find a man." One hell-raiser was particularly adamant in his belief that female guards worked in correctional facilities as a way to be around male inmates. As this respondent stated:

Women guards work here, so they can look at a bunch of dicks. That's one of the main reasons why

they come here. That and the fact that they can't get welfare.

The previous statement by a hell-raiser also suggests that these inmates "condemned their condemners" and blamed the staff for their actions. In almost all of the instances involving hell-raisers, the inappropriate relationships were terminated by the employees, rather than by both participants being caught by other personnel. In one instance, a staff member wrote a letter to the unit warden detailing her sexual involvement with an offender and even testified later against the "turner" during his disciplinary hearing. It may be that employees who involved themselves with hell-raisers came to find that they actually shared very little with these types of inmates "turners," who seemed to hold values that were both anti-social and very detrimental to the institution.

CONCLUSION

While the research literature and popular media have reported on prison staff engaging in inappropriate relationships with prisoners, we hear very little about the reverse situation. Allen and Bosta (1981) developed a typology of four inmates, over 20 years ago, who manipulate correctional staff. The present paper focused on inmates types who established inappropriate relationships with staff members for deviant purposes. These inmates utilized such tactics as addressing employees by their first name or a nickname, offering staff members' food items, requesting special favors, or through touching the employee (Allen and Bosta 1981). Over an extended period of time, this type of behavior ultimately led to boundary violations or at least a profound sense of familiarity between staff members and inmates (Marquart et al. 2001).

The 32 inmate manipulators who participated in this study by no means represent the entire number of inmate turners that are presently incarcerated within Texas prisons or other penal institutions.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious limitations with regard to its external validity, this research validates the typology designed by Allen and Bosta (1981), and it supports the notion that it is often the inmate, rather than the staff member, who initiates inappropriate relationships. Offenders were found to be much more likely than staff members to initiate inappropriate relationships. Of the 32 turners, 25 stated that inmates were more likely to initiate the relationship. Two stated that staff members were more likely to initiate the relationship and five respondents suggested that staff members and offenders were equally likely to initiate the relationship.

This article extends Allen and Bosta's (1981) concept of an inmate turner and suggests that turners can also be "heart-breakers," "exploiters," or "hell-raisers." Each type was fundamentally different from one another and carried its own set of rationalizations and motivations for engaging in deviant behavior with staff members. Heart-breakers sought out and established inappropriate romantic relationships with staff members. The relationships had romantic overtures and broke down the barriers between the keepers and the kept, and facilitated heterosexual relationships in response to institutional deprivations. Hell-raisers established inappropriate relationships for "the hell of it," to throw a wrench into the institutional regimen. For heart-breakers and exploiters the relationship served as a means to an end. On the other hand, for hell-raisers the relationship was an end in itself. Prison staff members were often the "victims" of inappropriate relationships, and it was not uncommon for these interactions to be carefully orchestrated and initiated by inmates.

The interactions between inmates and prison employees seem to have become more complex in recent years, especially as prisons have reduced the amount of single-sex staff members. Not too long ago, in Texas prisons, it was almost unheard of for guards to fall prey to inmate manipulators, namely because of the largely informal control mechanisms which were implemented by an all male staff (Marquart 1983). This is not to say that there has

not always been corruption in Texas prisons. It is likely, however, that the addition of female guards has provided inmates with more opportunities to engage in inappropriate relationships. Also, Texas penitentiaries no longer exert the same type of heavy-handed control over inmates which was once employed in the "building tender" days, and this undoubtedly has shed more light on the nature of inappropriate relationships.

Today, it is not unusual for staff members to unwittingly become the target of inmate manipulators. This is especially true because of the enormous shortage of guards in Texas facilities, which has caused prison officials to hire virtually anyone possessing the minimal job requirements (Broody 2002). This is disheartening because employees with a low level of education and job experience have been found to be the most likely to engage in inappropriate relationships with inmates (Marquart et al. 2001). Also because Texas correctional employees continue to be underpaid, this exacerbates any tendencies that a staff member might have toward engaging in an inappropriate business transaction with an offender. Some employees may in fact see nothing wrong with smuggling in tobacco, since it is not a mind-altering substance and has only recently become restricted. As Silverman (2001:240) argues,

Since the ban in Texas, tobacco has become the number one contraband item. Moreover, many C.O.'s and other staff members are smokers, and some do not feel that bringing tobacco in is "really a violation," because they disagree with the ban. For some, throwing a carton of cigarettes over the wall to make an extra \$100 is more of a game than a law violation. It presents staff with an easy way to supplement their income without really feeling guilty or that they are violating the law.

This is not to say that such behavior has become the rule rather than the exception in penal environments. Nevertheless, prison administrators everywhere must understand that offenders are very persistent in initiating interactions with employee for a variety of reasons.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What policy changes might be necessary in light of the findings of this article?
2. Are there any conditions under which a "friendship" between a correctional officer and an inmate would be acceptable?
3. For what reasons—individual/personal or institutional—might correctional officers be motivated to engage in relationships with inmates?
4. For what reasons might inmates be motivated to engage in relationships with correctional officers?
5. What similarities (e.g., background, social class) might inmates have with correctional officers, and how might this impact the likelihood that relationships will develop?
6. What uses—prison policy or other uses, such as further research—might the typologies ("heart-breakers," "exploiters," "hell-raisers") developed by these authors have?

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JOB STRESS AND BURNOUT AMONG CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Positive changes within correctional officers' jobs have emerged in recent decades. Symbolically, many states have changed the job title of prison security personnel from "prison guard" to "correctional officer," for example. Along with this nominal change, increasing attention has been paid at times to work load, inmate-to-staff ratio, and other factors that contribute to the difficulty many correctional officers encounter in their day-to-day activities. Nonetheless, being a correctional officer remains one of the most stressful jobs in the "human service" realm. Research continues to reveal that correctional officers have higher than average rates of absenteeism, higher rates of job-related stress disorders, and overall lower job satisfaction. As a result, state prison systems suffer, since these job-related problems lead to very high rates of turnover compared to other professions. Prison systems with high turnover rates have correctional staff who are less experienced and more likely to make mistakes that threaten security. Job stress and burnout among correctional officers are explored in depth in this comprehensive cross-national literature review by Schaufeli and Peeters. While correctional officers across the board are shown to suffer from more negative job-related factors than those in other professions, it appears that officers in the United States have particularly high rates of professional difficulties. Many factors are examined in an effort to uncover the reasons for such high rates of burnout and job-related stress, which prompted one study subject to state that "we're just paid inmates."

This literature review presents an overview of occupational stress and burnout in correctional institutions, based on 43 investigations from 9 countries. First, the prevalence of various stress reactions among correctional officers (COs) is discussed: turnover and absenteeism rates, psychosomatic diseases, and levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout. Next, empirical evidence is summarized for the

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existence of 10 specific stressors in the CO's job. It appears that the most notable stressors for COs are role problems, work overload, demanding social contacts (with prisoners, colleagues, and supervisors), and poor social status. Finally, based on 21 articles, individual-oriented and organization-oriented approaches to reduce job stress and burnout among COs are discussed. It is concluded that particularly the latter (i.e., improving human resources management, professionalization of the CO's job, and improvement of the social work environment) seems to be a promising avenue for reducing job stress and burnout in correctional institutions.

Working in a prison as a correctional officer (CO) is a stressful job. At least this seems to be the prevailing opinion among professionals and the lay public alike. This current literature review seeks to find empirical support for this assertion by trying to answer three related specific questions: (1) What kinds of stress reactions are observed among correctional officers (COs)? (2) What kinds of job stressors are found among COs? (3) What preventive measures can be taken in order to reduce job stress among COs? Special attention is paid to burnout since this is considered a long-term stress reaction that occurs among professionals who, like COs, do "people work."

The majority (about 55%) of studies to be reviewed were conducted in the United States. Relatively few were carried out in Europe, most notably in Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands, or in other countries such as Israel, Canada, or Australia. This might complicate the interpretation of the results since the situation in prisons in the United States differs greatly from those in other countries, particularly in Sweden and in the Netherlands. For instance, in the United States institutions with 1,500 prisoners are not uncommon, whereas in Sweden and in the Netherlands the maximum number of inmates is about 250. In addition, in the United States inmates may have to share cells whereas in Sweden and the Netherlands every inmate has a private cell. Also, the ratio of

officers to inmates is less favorable in the United States than in these European countries. Finally, it is likely that COs' personal characteristics differ between countries since recruitment and selection policies vary considerably. In the United States selection criteria are rather broad (e.g., high school education, particular size and weight, good sense of sight) whereas, for example, in the Netherlands psychological criteria are included as well (e.g., a particular level of intelligence, certain skills, and personality characteristics). Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that job stress is more common among COs in the United States because of higher workload (i.e., larger institutions and more inmates to deal with) and fewer personal coping resources (i.e., less adequate skills and personality characteristics).

Despite these differences similar developments can be observed between countries as well. Most notably, there is a tendency toward further professionalization of the CO's job, which is well illustrated by the fact that the old-fashioned "prison guard" in most countries is replaced by the modern "correctional officer." Not only has the job title changed, but so has the content of the job. The most important changes include (Stalgaitis, Meyers, & Krisak, 1982; Jacobs & Crotty, 1983; Kommer, 1993): (1) growing size and changing composition of the inmate population (i.e., increasing number of drug addicts, mentally ill, and aggressive inmates); (2) introduction of new rehabilitative programs, (3) liberalization (e.g., conjugal visits, inmate access to telephones); (4) influx of new treatment professionals; (5) growth of more middle-level supervisory positions, which provides better opportunities for career advancement; (6) recruitment of better-educated officers; (7) an increased sense of professionalism through improved pay and fringe benefits, increased training in legal matters and inmates' rights, and stricter adherence to written policy and procedures. Therefore, as a result of these recent developments COs' jobs may have changed likewise in various countries....

REVIEW: CO STRESS AND BURNOUT

THE NATURE OF THE REVIEWED STUDIES

Typically, empirical studies on job stress and burnout among COs use cross-sectional study designs and self-report questionnaires. Of all 43 studies that were reviewed only one used a prospective design in order to predict future turnover (Jurik & Winn, 1987) and one was longitudinal in nature in the sense that questionnaire data was collected at two waves. The remaining 41 studies employed one-shot designs that do not allow one to disentangle cause and effect. Moreover, with one notable exception (Lombardo, 1981) *all* studies used questionnaires: 33 (80%) used exclusively questionnaires; two studies also used interviews (Poole & Regoli, 1981; Hughes & Zamble, 1993); four studies included administrative records (Verhagen, 1986a,b; Junk & Winn, 1987; Härenstam, Palm, & Theorell, 1988; Augestad & Levander, 1992); two studies used physiological measures in addition (Härenstam et al., 1988; Härenstam & Theorell, 1990); and finally, one study also used a daily event-recording approach in addition to questionnaires (Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995). Only the Swedish study of Härenstam et al. (1988) is truly multimethodological in nature because in addition to a questionnaire, data administrative records, physiological measures, and a physical health examination are included. Finally, with three exceptions that used large representative samples (Härenstam & Theorell, 1990; Saylor & Wright, 1992; Britton, 1997) all studies employed small and/or convenience samples. Thus, the results of the empirical studies to be reviewed should be interpreted with caution because: (1) cross-sectional designs do not allow drawing of conclusions about the causal direction of the relationship between stressors and strains; (2) self-reports are known to be sensitive to all kinds of response biases; and (3) results obtained in small and nonrepresentative samples cannot be generalized (see Frese & Zapf, 1988, for a methodological discussion of these three issues).

WHAT KINDS OF STRESS REACTIONS ARE OBSERVED AMONG COS?

Broadly speaking, four kinds of stress reactions can be distinguished among COs: (1) withdrawal behaviors; (2) psychosomatic diseases; (3) negative attitudes; and (4) burnout. Behavioral stress reactions (i.e., turnover and absenteeism) that are documented by archival data suggest that COs work in stressful jobs. This is illustrated by alarmingly high turnover rates. For instance, recent figures from a national survey of correctional facilities in the United States reveal an average turnover rate among COs of 16.2% with some states reporting turnover rates as high as 38% (Corrections Compendium, 1996). Needless to say, such rates are likely to create administrative nightmares, desperate recruiting, and much overwork. Most turnover in the United States occurs in young, inexperienced COs within six months after beginning their jobs. Likewise, in Israel 50% of the COs leave correctional service within 18 months of being hired (Shamir & Drory, 1982). Obviously, initial expectations of neophytes do not correspond with the everyday reality of the job. Probably, the less rigorous personnel selection in these countries explains these high turnover rates relative to the Netherlands, about 4–5% annually, where more strict criteria are applied than in the United States (Greuter & Castelijns, 1992).

In addition, *absenteeism* is also quite high among COs. For instance, absenteeism rates among New York COs are 300% higher than the average rate of all other occupations in that state (Cheek & Miller, 1983). In the Netherlands, absenteeism rates among COs are not as high as in the United States, but are nevertheless nearly twice as high as the country's average (Greuter & Castelijns, 1992). In the mid-eighties, the absenteeism rate among Dutch COs was 15% against 8.5% for all other occupations. It was calculated that on average, a Dutch CO was absent for two months per year. These alarming figures prompted the Dutch Ministry of Justice to grant a number of studies to investigate the cause of absenteeism. It appeared from these studies th

about one-third of the COs' absenteeism was stress-related (Verhagen, 1986a). More than half of the Dutch COs receive their work disablement pensions on mental grounds. That is, they are work incapacitated because of the stressful nature of their jobs. This disablement rate is well above the Dutch average; about one-third of the disabled workers in the Netherlands leave their jobs for psychological reasons (Houtman, 1997).

It has been observed in the United States that *psychosomatic diseases* are more common among COs than among members of most other occupations, including police officers—a comparable profession (Cheek & Miller, 1983). In the period up to six months prior to the United States survey, 17% of the COs reported that they visited a physician because of hypertension (vs. 10% of police officers and 9% of other professions). Another 3.5% suffered from heart disease, which is rather high compared to police officers (1.4%) and members of the other occupations (2.1%). These figures agree with a carefully designed Swedish study that shows that COs are at higher risk to develop cardiovascular diseases (Härenstam et al., 1988). It appears from this study that COs not only had significantly higher levels of blood pressure compared to the control group, consisting of physicians, engineers, traffic controllers, and musicians, but also their levels of the stress hormone plasma Cortisol, were much higher (Härenstam, 1989).

Perhaps most typically, COs report a number of *negative job-related attitudes*. For instance, their level of job dissatisfaction is remarkably high compared to a dozen occupations that are quite similar with respect to levels of pay and education (Cullen, Link, Cullen, & Wolfe, 1990). Moreover, abundant empirical evidence suggests that COs experience alienation (Lombardo, 1981; Toch & Klofas, 1982), occupational tedium (Shamir & Drory, 1982) and powerlessness, and are characterized by cynicism, authoritarianism, skepticism, and pessimism (for a review see Philliber, 1987). For instance, in the study of Toch and Klofas (1982) about 70% of

COs in the United States agree with the statement: "We're damned if we do, and we're damned if we don't." Many officers viewed their work as dull, tedious, and meaningless. As one CO put it, "We're paid prisoners." Their skepticism and cynicism is nourished by the repeated failure to successfully rehabilitate prisoners, which is illustrated by high relapse rates. Research has shown that cynicism is more prevalent in treatment settings than in custodial settings where the accent is less on rehabilitation (Philliber, 1987). Moreover, cynicism is more common among officers who are in the middle of their careers. Younger COs are still idealistically motivated, whereas only those of the older COs have survived who did cope well in their jobs—this survival bias is also called the "healthy worker effect" (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

How many COs are *burned out*? Although a valid and reliable burnout measure exists—the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Leiter, & Jackson, 1996)—this question cannot be answered straightforwardly since it is wrongly posed; like length, burnout is a continuous variable. Obviously, the answer to this question depends on the criterion that is used, and the criterion for burnout is arbitrary. For instance, Lindquist and Whitehead (1986) used as a criterion for each dimension of burnout that one crucial symptom should occur at least once a week. Based on this arbitrary criterion they estimated that one-third of the COs experiences considerable emotional exhaustion, approximately one-fifth treated prisoners in an impersonal manner (depersonalization), and about one-quarter evaluated themselves negatively (reduced personal accomplishment). Schaufeli, Van den Eijnden, and Brouwers (1994) found that burnout among COs was particularly characterized by feelings of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. These findings are in line with other empirical findings that suggest that, in comparison with other occupational groups, COs experience more feelings of alienation, cynicism, pessimism, skepticism, and powerlessness

(Philliber, 1987; see also the previous discussion about negative job-related attitudes). In a similar vein it has been observed that the level of psychological distress—as measured with the General Health Questionnaire—was significantly higher for Australian COs than in a national sample of that country (Dollard & Winefield, 1994). A recent Canadian study by Pollack and Sigler (1998), however, reported that compared to United States inner-city teachers and police officers, Canadian COs experience exceptionally low levels of job stress. The authors explain this finding by pointing to the harsh environment of northern Ontario that might have produced a selection effect: COs with a weaker constitution have left the service or did not apply for a job in this area in the first place.

Do differences in gender, race, and age exist as far as stress reactions in COs are concerned? Although many would probably expect that, for instance, women, non-whites, and older COs report higher strain levels, this is not supported by empirical results. Huckabee (1992) reviewed the literature and found that the effect of gender, race, ethnicity, and age on stress reactions "remains unclear" (p. 483). More recent research confirms that no significant *direct* relationship exists between gender and age on the one hand and job dissatisfaction (Cullen et al., 1990; Dollard & Winefield, 1995, 1998; Morrison, Dunne, Fitzgerald, & Cloghan, 1992), depression, boredom, trait anxiety, and minor psychiatric symptoms (Dollard & Winefield, 1995, 1998), physical health (Morrison et al., 1992), burnout (Hurst & Hurst, 1997), and stress symptoms (Triplett & Mullings, 1996) on the other hand. Race and ethnicity have been studied much less in relation with stress and burnout. Triplett and Mullings (1996) did not find significant relationships between stress reactions and race and Shamir and Drory (1981) who studied COs with Druze, Jewish North African and Jewish Georgian backgrounds in Israeli prisons, concluded that "the realities of the job are clear enough to be perceived in a similar manner by people with different

cultural backgrounds and the pattern of relationships among perceptions and evaluations of the job is also generally similar across cultures" (p. 280). However, the fact that no direct relationships exist does not mean that gender, race, ethnicity, and age do not play a role at all; it seems that their role is more subtle. For instance, Britton (1997) found that among minority male COs, greater efficacy in working with inmates was associated with lower job stress, while white female COs' higher levels of overall job satisfaction were mediated by quality of supervision. Furthermore, Härenstam et al. (1988) found that understimulation was associated with a high sick leave rate for male prison staff and high mean levels of Cortisol and symptoms of ill health for female staff. Finally, Holgate and Clegg (1991) showed that the process of burnout differs between age groups; for younger COs role conflict contributed to increased emotional exhaustion and to increased contact with inmates, whereas for older COs emotional exhaustion contributed to decreased contact with inmates. The results of these three studies suggest complex patterns of interactions rather than direct effects of gender, ethnicity, and age on stress reactions.

In sum: COs are under stress. This is illustrated by relatively high turnover, absenteeism, and disablement rates compared to other occupations. Moreover, they suffer more than other professionals from psychosomatic risk factors such as hypertension and elevated secretion of stress hormones. Additionally, stress-related cardiovascular disease is more common among COs. Finally, and probably most typically, COs experience a number of negative feelings and attitudes, including job dissatisfaction, cynicism, and burnout.

WHAT KINDS OF JOB STRESSORS ARE FOUND AMONG COS?

Based on earlier reviews of literature on job stressors (e.g., Warr, 1987; Kahn & Byosiene, 1994; Buunk, de Jonge, Ybema, & de Wolff, 1998), we distinguish between ten psychosocial risk factors for developing

stress reactions. Each of these risk factors will be briefly discussed in relation to the CO's job so that a particular psychosocial risk profile emerges.

High Workload

Many studies indicate that the workload of COs is high (for reviews see Philliber, 1987; Huckabee, 1992). For instance, in several Dutch studies, between 65% and 75% of the COs report that they feel under strain because of high workload (Kommer, 1990). More particularly, they complain about high peak load (i.e., having too much to do in too short a time), brief periods of recovery (i.e., intervals between peak hours are too short), and multiple workload (having to perform different tasks simultaneously). It is quite likely that the workload of COs has increased over the past years because of financial cutbacks and reduction of staff. Furthermore, it was observed that high absenteeism rates have a negative impact on COs' workload since more overtime has to be performed (Kommer, 1990). A study among COs in the United States showed a positive relationship between workload and burnout: the higher the workload the more burnout symptoms were observed (Dignam, Barrera, & West, 1986). In a somewhat similar vein, COs who report problems with shift-work showed more burnout symptoms (particularly emotional exhaustion) than officers who did not report such problems (Schaufeli et al., 1994). Shamir and Drory (1982) found work-overload to be a significant predictor of tedium among Israeli COs. Finally, a recent study among Australian COs not only found that those who experienced high job demands reported more psychological distress, more job dissatisfaction, and more physical health symptoms, but also that these negative effects were aggravated when high job demands were accompanied by low control and lack of social support (Dollard & Winefield, 1998). Obviously, a combination of high demands, poor control, and lack of social support constitutes a special risk for COs' health and well-being.

Lack of Autonomy

As noted above, a recent test of the so-called Job Demand Control Support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) in Australian COs was successful in that it showed both significant main effects and interaction effects of job demands, job control (or autonomy), and social support on various measures of health and well-being (e.g., psychological distress, job dissatisfaction, physical health symptoms) (Dollard & Winefield, 1998). More specifically, two aspects of job autonomy can be distinguished: skill discretion and decision authority (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The former refers to the level of control the worker has in performing the task, whereas the latter refers to the level of social authority over making decisions. It appears that COs who report low levels of skill discretion experience fewer feelings of personal accomplishment, compared to COs who report higher levels (Schaufeli et al., 1994). In addition, COs' perceived influence on administrative supervisors (decision authority) appeared to be negatively related to cynicism (Ulmer, 1992), whereas lack of participation in decision making is positively associated with job stress (Lasky, Gordon, & Strehalus, 1986; Slate & Vogel, 1997). A possible explanation for these relationships is offered by Whitehead (1989) who showed that role problems play a mediating role between lack of participation in decision making and burnout. Because COs do not sufficiently participate in decision making (i.e., lack decision authority), their role problems are not solved and as a result of that burnout might develop. On the other hand, COs with supervisory responsibilities perceive less job-related stress and more job satisfaction than their colleagues who have less decision authority (Saylor & Wright, 1992). In the Netherlands, a small but significant proportion of COs (15%) complains about lack of decision authority (Kommer, 1990).

Underutilization of Knowledge and Skill

A job that requires the use of knowledge and skills is challenging and provides learning opportunities.

However, a large majority (69%) of Dutch COs indicate that only "every now and then" they have the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills they acquired during their training (Kommer, 1990). In other words, most COs feel underutilized, particularly in custody-oriented institutions as compared to rehabilitation-oriented institutions (so-called "half-open prisons"). In Sweden, "understimulation" of COs was associated with higher sick-leave rates and higher levels of stress hormones, like plasma Cortisol (Härenstam et al., 1988). Willett (1982) claimed that many Canadian COs feel "trapped" because they are paid a disproportionately high salary for a job that requires a low level of education and few skills. Another Canadian study showed opposite results suggesting that the stereotype of COs is incorrect (Hughes & Zamble, 1993): COs felt neither undereducated, nor did they evidence exceptional stress, in fact they were content to stay in their job. Since the authors do not present any rationale for their deviant findings, it may be speculated that these are due to sampling bias.

Lack of Variety

Typically, the CO's job is considered to be dull and routine (Philliber, 1987). In recent decades, task variety has been further reduced by the influx of other professional staff such as social workers and counselors who have taken over part of the traditional CO's job (Fry, 1989). Although this might make the CO's daily work even more tedious, in the Netherlands only a small minority (15%) experiences lack of variety to be a problem (Kommer, 1990). Moreover, skill variety was not significantly related to burnout in an Israeli study (Drory & Shamir, 1988). Hughes and Zamble (1993), however, found among Canadian COs that boredom was the second source of stress after poor management. But as noted previously, they found COs, in contrast to previous reports, to be reasonably effective and adaptive, with little evidence of job stress.

Role Problems

Perhaps the most important job stressor COs are faced with are role problems of several kinds. After a thorough review of empirical studies Philliber (1987, p. 19) concludes: "Overall, role difficulties in prisons appear to take a rather serious toll." Basically two different kinds of role problems are observed among COs: role ambiguity and role conflict. The former occurs when no adequate information is available to do the job well, whereas the latter occurs when conflicting demands have to be met. The role of the CO is problematic by its very nature since two conflicting demands have to be met simultaneously—guarding prisoners and facilitating their rehabilitation. This typical role conflict is convincingly demonstrated by the results of a Dutch survey (Kommer, 1990) in which a large majority (80%) agrees with the statement that "keeping peace and order" is a crucial task for COs. At the same time, however, a similar percentage (74%) agrees with the statement that "encouraging the inmate to understand himself better" is a crucial task as well. Clearly, to a large degree both tasks are incompatible. The former statement implies that rules are applied strictly, whereas the latter statement implies that the rules are interpreted rather smoothly. Role problems are aggravated because the objectives of rehabilitation are usually rather vaguely described so that, in addition, role ambiguity is likely to result. That is, COs hardly know what is expected of them when it comes to rehabilitating prisoners. Not surprisingly, it has been argued that the emphasis on rehabilitation and the recent influx of other professionals have increased role problems of COs (Philliber, 1987). COs feel uncertain about their role, are doubtful about which services they have to provide, and blame their superiors for the lack of standardization of policies in dealing with inmates (Poole & Regoli, 1981; Toch & Klofas, 1982). It was demonstrated that such role ambiguity resulting from poor leadership is strongly related to job stress (Rosefield, 1981; Cheek & Miller, 1983). In somewhat similar vein, Poole and Regoli (1980)

observed that changing correctional philosophies and institutional practices concerning the handling of prisoners produced stress among COs because they are associated with role conflicts. Similar direct relationships between role conflict and stress have also been found by Cullen, Link, Wolfe, and Frank (1985), Lindquist and Whitehead (1986), and Grossi and Berg (1991). However, interestingly, in another study of Poole and Regoli (1980b), a reverse pattern was suggested—namely, that stress increases levels of role conflict as well as conflicts between professional and nonprofessional staff. Despite claims for causality, all above-mentioned studies are cross-sectional in nature, so that a causal order between variables cannot be determined.

In various studies, role problems such as role conflict and role ambiguity were found to be predictors of burnout (Shamir & Drory, 1982; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986; Dignam, Barrera, & West, 1986; Drory & Shamir, 1988; Whitehead, 1989; Schaufeli et al., 1994). Whitehead's (1989) model of CO burnout illustrates the crucial function of role problems in the burnout process. The model is based on survey data of over two hundred Alabama COs and suggests that role problems have both a direct and an indirect effect on burnout. Indirect paths run through job dissatisfaction and job stress. In its turn, role problems are aggravated by lacking social support and by poor participation in decision making.

Demanding Social Contacts

Intensive and emotionally charged contacts with prisoners are the hallmark of the CO's job. The relationship between CO and prisoner has been characterized as a situation of structural conflict (Poole & Regoli, 1931): the role of the officer ("the keeper") fundamentally contradicts the role of the prisoner ("the kept"). Recently, several changes in the population of the prisoners have intensified the stressful social contacts between COs and inmates. For instance, more and more mentally disturbed delinquents and drug addicts are imprisoned

(Harding & Zimmermann, 1989). Härenstam et al. (1988) found a high proportion of drug abuse in correctional institutions to be positively correlated with COs' symptoms of ill health, high sick-leave rates, and low work satisfaction. Moreover, prisoners are more entitled than they used to be, whereas the authority of COs has declined. The demanding nature of prisoner contact is further illustrated by the positive relationship between the intensity of prisoner contact and CO burnout. The more hours per week COs spend in direct contact with prisoners, the more burnout symptoms are reported—particularly, diminished personal accomplishment (Whitehead, 1989).

A distinction should be made between positive and negative direct contact with prisoners (Dignam, Barrera, & West, 1986). The former is positively related with COs' feelings of personal accomplishment, whereas the latter is positively related with both other dimensions of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Schaufeli et al. (1994) showed that the discrepancy COs experience between their investments and outcomes in relationships with prisoners is positively related to all three dimensions of burnout. That is, COs who feel that they continuously put more into relationships with prisoners than they get back from them in return tend to burn out.

Social contacts of COs are not restricted to prisoners but include colleagues and superiors as well. It has been argued that group loyalty and collegiality among COs are weakly developed because they interact only occasionally (Poole & Regoli, 1981). The main reason for this is that the organization emphasizes individual responsibility rather than team responsibility. As a result, an individualistic culture develops in which asking for social support is considered to be an expression of incompetence. Therefore, it is not surprising that the so-called *John Wayne syndrome* is often observed: the CO as a tough lonesome cowboy who is emotionally unaffected by his job, and who can solve his own problems without the help of others. As in many occupations

(for overviews see Warr, 1987; Buunk et al., 1998), social support of colleagues and supervisor reduces stress among COs (Dollard & Winefield, 1995). This was particularly the case among COs with high levels of anxiety. However, results concerning social support are equivocal since other studies suggested that peer support *increases* rather than reduces COs' level of job stress (Grossi & Berg, 1991; Morrison et al., 1992). Similarly, a Dutch study showed that COs' social support does not unconditionally lead to positive affect (Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995): COs perceived social support as a restriction of their personal freedom, which in turn induced feelings of inferiority to the donor of the support.

COs have rather negative attitudes about their superiors. For instance, 42% of the COs in the United States believed that prisoners are treated better by their superiors than they are (Toch & Klofas, 1982). One-third of the COs fully agree with the statement: "My superiors care more about the inmates than about the officers." The poor relationship between COs and their superiors constitutes a serious problem since feedback and support from superiors are crucial for performing adequately on the job, particularly when structural role problems exist. Typically, COs attribute much of their stress to poor communication with their supervisors (Cheek & Miller, 1983). Drory and Shamir (1988) found lacking management support to be positively related to burnout.

Uncertainty

Two types of uncertainty can be distinguished among COs: the threat of losing one's job and uncertain career prospects. In many European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden, COs are civil servants who enjoy strong legal protection against dismissal. It has been noted that such a high level of job certainty also has a negative side in that COs tend to accept poor working conditions in exchange for a stable job (Kommer, 1990). It is quite likely that the present discussions in many countries about the privatization of prisons

will enhance feelings of job insecurity among COs. There is ample evidence that the psychological effects of anticipated job loss are at least just as serious, or perhaps even more so, than actual job loss (Hartley, Jacobsen, Klandermans, & Van Vuren, 1991). In the Netherlands, the majority of the COs (54%) is quite uncertain about their future career prospects and many COs (39%) indicate that they experience a career dead-end (Kommer, 1990).

Health and Safety Risks

The situation of structural conflict between COs and prisoners may easily escalate and end up in a violent confrontation. Thus, the threat of violence is an important stressor for COs. For instance, 75% of Israeli COs considered potential violence as the most stressful aspect of their work (Shamir & Drory, 1982). Similar figures have been reported in the United States (see Philliber, 1987). Danger is reported as another major source of stress (e.g., Lombardo, 1981; Cullen et al., 1990; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996). Recently, the risk of AIDS or hepatitis infection has increased because many inmates are drug addicted.

A Dutch survey showed that many COs complain about the physical climate in the institution (Verhagen, 1986b), most notably dry air (41%), lack of fresh air (74%), and draught (70%). Jacobs and Crotty (1983) found specific job conditions that are associated with prison employment—such as dirt and odor—to be related to COs' level of job stress.

Inadequate Pay

Research on pay shows that the experienced fairness of the pay level is related to the worker's well-being, rather than absolute pay (Warr, 1987). Is the pay appropriate for the kind of job that is performed compared to other similar jobs? Indeed, a moderate negative relationship was observed between satisfaction with pay and burnout among Israeli COs (Shamir & Drory, 1982). Rosefield (1981) found factors as low pay, slow promotions, and insufficient fringe benefits to contribute to work-related stress.

Poor Social Status

Working in a prison has low social status. This is illustrated by the fact that for most COs their current job is their second choice (Philliber, 1987). Rather than being unemployed, COs "choose" to work in the prison. The major attraction of their job is employment security and pay. Stalgaitis et al. (1982) found that COs considered the poor social status of their job as a significant source of work-related stress. Among Israeli COs, community esteem for the incumbent's occupation was about as strongly correlated with burnout as was role conflict (Shamir & Drory, 1982). The poorer the experienced community support, the more burnout symptoms were reported. In addition, the status of the job is also poor in the eyes of the prisoners. As one prisoner notes: "We don't actually have any respect for a regular guard, he just carries the keys. It's those up there who have something to say; captain, doctor, and inspector" (Kommer, 1990, p. 36).

In sum, virtually all psychosocial risk factors that have been identified in the occupational stress literature apply more or less to the CO's job. However, the most prominent psychosocial risks that may lead to stress and burnout among COs are: (1) role problems; (2) stressful social contacts with superiors, prisoners, and colleagues; (3) work overload; and (4) poor social status. In addition, three risk factors seem to play a minor role: lack of participation in decision making, inadequate pay, and underutilization of knowledge and skills. It should be noted, however, that these conclusions are almost exclusively based on cross-sectional surveys that are conducted in relatively small and/or nonrepresentative samples....

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How might the findings of this article be used to improve the way prisons operate?
2. Which of the reasons for correctional officer stress and burnout appear to be the most applicable to correctional officers in the United States?

3. How could each of the kinds of job stress identified by the authors (high work load, lack of autonomy, etc.) be mitigated?
4. In what ways could the findings of this selection be used in the hiring of correctional officers or for job-orientation materials once a new officer is hired?
5. What appear to be the primary differences in correctional officer burnout and stress between the United States and other countries?
6. What might be the reasons for the differences in job-related stress for correctional officers between the United States and other countries?

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