

# Achieving and maintaining prison officer-prisoner relationships: Tasmanian perspectives from a time of culture change.

Submitted by John Cianchi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Criminology and Corrections in the School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania

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## Abstract

Prison officer-prisoner relationships are at the heart of prison life. This thesis seeks to understand what, from the perspective of the prison officer, is an effective officer-prisoner relationship. Secondly it asks how a prison that overtly places the prison officer-prisoner relationship as the central mechanism through which organisational and operational policies are understood and implemented might differ from a more traditional way of managing the prison.

Effective staff-inmate relationships enable staff to maintain a peaceful prison environment in which staff and inmates are able to meet their needs. They are characterised by mutual respect, trust, humanity, good communication and a clear understanding of the correctional officer role. Effective relationships are important because they contribute to a safe prison environment and greater inmate compliance. They are also necessary before officers can work with inmates to address their problems and reasons why they are in prison.

The basis for effective relationships seems to lie in the prison officers' attitudes and beliefs about inmates. The prison officers interviewed in this study view the inmates as autonomous human beings who have individual differences and who are entitled to humane treatment. They hold values about relationships that include notions such as respect, honesty, empathy, compassion, humanity, fairness and a belief that inmates can change. Importantly the officers are able to balance the security and welfare dimensions of their role.

A prison that places the prison officer-prisoner relationship at the centre of prison management would respond to prisoner misconduct and disorder by first examining the status of prison officer-prisoner relationships and monitoring efforts to improve their effectiveness. It would endeavour to broaden the prison's imaginative circumference to incorporate a rich correctional landscape that extends beyond simply warehousing criminals, to encompass a role that is concerned with the human rights and dignity of the prisoner, a belief in their capacity to grow and a desire to play an active part in this process.

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## Introduction

Prison officer-prisoner<sup>1</sup> relationships are at the heart of prison life (for example Liebling and Arnold 2004: 228), yet, until recently at least, relatively little research appears to have been undertaken into the nature of effective prison officer-prisoner relationships and their importance in achieving the goals of the prison. This thesis addresses two questions that I hope will contribute to thinking in this area. In the first place it seeks to understand what, from the perspective of the prison officer, is an effective relationship. Secondly it asks how a prison that overtly places the prison officer-prisoner relationship as the central mechanism through which organisational and operational policies are understood and implemented might differ from a more traditional way of managing the prison.

The first question is perhaps the easiest to address and I hope that the literature review and small research project presented in this thesis provide some reasonable answers that are reproducible, observable and, therefore, measurable. It is hoped that the ideas presented in response to this question will be useful for prison policy development, operations, auditing and staff training.

I fear, however, that my discussion about and suggested answers to the second question may be less convincing. After several years as a senior manager in the Tasmania Prison Service I would observe that the management of prisons has less to do with a critical appraisal of the evidence base and more about what people feel and believe about how things should be done. Nonetheless, I hope that the challenges I present in my answers to the second question may be taken up in the future, here or elsewhere.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one introduces the prison and the two main communities of the prison: the prison officer and the prisoner. It also provides a description of the Tasmania Prison Service. The following chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Various terms are used to describe the prison staff who are charged with day to day responsibility for the care and control of prisoners. These include custodial officer, prison warden, prison officer, prison guard and correctional officer. In Tasmania they were known as custodial officers until the end of 2005, when they became correctional officers. I have chosen the term prison officer because it seems the most commonly used in the literature and is more neutral in its meaning (for a discussion of meaning see Toch 1978). Similarly the term prisoner is used to describe those who are imprisoned, rather than other terms such as inmate or detainee.

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reviews the literature about staff-prisoner relationships, in order to provide some insight into the dynamics and dimensions of these relationships. Prisons are complex institutions and the elements that comprise them will often be found to be contingent upon and in a feedback loop with each other. For example, architecture, accommodation options, other physical environment issues, types of prison industry, training programs and staff-prisoner ratios will all impact upon the quality of a prison. However, while undoubtedly important to achieve positive correctional outcomes, the above issues are, in my opinion, peripheral. As Alison Liebling noted at the 2006 Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology conference, she has been to several prisons which have appalling physical environments but which function well. Relationships remain, therefore, the primary focus of this chapter.

Chapter three introduces the views of four Tasmania Prison Service prison officers. It seeks to understand the nature of effective prison officer-prisoner relationships, from their perspective, and how they are achieved. It is in this chapter that an answer to the first research question is suggested, in combination with the discussions in the preceding chapters.

The conclusion briefly explores how prisons might purposefully achieve and monitor prison officer-prisoner relationships. By largely referring to the Tasmanian experience, it tries to imagine how prisons might operate if they placed the prison officer-prisoner relationship at the centre of prison management rather than as a secondary or peripheral consideration.

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## Chapter I

### The prison as the site for prison officer-prisoner relationships

Prisons are unique institutions where one group of people, prison officers, is charged with controlling another group, prisoners. Prisoners are held involuntarily, often for considerable periods of time, and live a totally structured and regulated existence that provides few opportunities to exercise personal choice, freedom or privacy. The majority of prisoners face a variety of challenges including anti-social attitudes and beliefs, mental illness or disorder, drug and alcohol addiction, the emotional distress of family separation and often significant difficulties with self-regulation, cognitive and social skills. They may frequently be deeply unhappy and may experience periods of suicidal ideation during their incarceration.

Prison officers are expected to perform the complex role of caring for this difficult population. They perform a control and surveillance role to ensure the security and safety of the prison. They must then integrate this with their second role, which is to care for a prisoner's welfare and rehabilitation. While these roles are obviously connected (for example, improvements in prisoner happiness and behaviour could reasonably be expected to contribute to a safer, more secure prison environment), balancing these two dimensions when working with such challenging people can be difficult.

The prison (as a site of punishment) is a modern phenomenon that was born in Europe and America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sometimes it seems that not much has changed since then. Foucault in his history and analysis of the prison, *Discipline and Punish*, quotes a detailed timetable of an institution for young prisoners in 1838, given by Leon Faucher (Foucault 1991: 6-7). If one were to compare this timetable with a contemporary prison timetable such as, for example the Tasmania Prison Service Structured Day (Tasmania Prison Service 2006b:1) one would find that 171 years after Faucher, the prison regime has changed remarkably little. This thesis is not concerned with an historical analysis



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of the sociological or political functions of the prison, however, and we will move on to explore what the prison means for those who work and live in it.

### **Achieving a complex task**

Prisons are tasked by the State with administering the punishment of imprisonment (or in the case of unsentenced prisoners the loss of freedom pending the resolution of court proceedings) and the site of this is the prison. An obvious statement, but as Sykes reminds us in his description of an American maximum security prison, achieving the State's expectations of the prison is a complex task:

“The administrator of the maximum security prison, then, finds himself confronted with a set of social expectations which pose numerous dilemmas when an attempt is made to translate them into a concrete, rational policy. Somehow he must resolve the claims that the prison should exact vengeance, erect a specter to terrify the actual or potential deviant, isolate the known offender from the free community, and effect a change in the personality of his captives so that they gladly follow the dictates of the law – and in addition maintain order within his society of prisoners and see that they are employed at useful labor” (Sykes, 1958: 17-18).

Little has changed in the fifty years since this was written. The purpose of prisons remains much the same and the challenge of achieving a workable and affordable balance of these expectations continues. Indeed, Sykes' descriptions of the interplay between prison staff and prisoners resonates with the state of play in today's prisons,

“Far from being omnipotent rulers who have crushed all signs of rebellion against their regime, the custodians are engaged in a continuous struggle to maintain order – and it is a struggle in which the custodians frequently fail” (Sykes, 1958: 42).

Even more bleak is his observation that,

“unable to depend on a sense of duty among their prisoners as a basis for obedience, barred from the habitual use of force, and lacking an

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adequate stock of rewards and punishments, the custodians find themselves engaged in a constant struggle to achieve even the semblance of dominance” (Sykes, 1958: 130-131).

Whether the competing or even paradoxical objectives of control and containment can be reconciled with rehabilitation continues to be debated. As Carlen writes, “prisons cannot plausibly claim to rehabilitate at the same time as their primary custodial function necessitates regimes which debilitate. The most that can be hoped for is humane containment” (Carlen 2005: 437). What has changed, however, are the language or discourses and theoretical models used by prison organisations to describe how their role is performed, or more precisely, how prison officers should achieve the prison’s tasks. An example is the extent to which rehabilitative purposes are supported. The 1970s saw an increased focus upon the security and authoritarian aspects of the prison officer’s role, with a diminished emphasis on rehabilitative functions (Cullen et al 1989). Prison officers were expected to maintain formal relationships with prisoners and avoid involving themselves with their problems, “officers use their authority to control prisoners and to suppress the prisoners’ problems” (Hepburn and Knepper 1993: 332). In the early 2000s the pendulum has swung again and prisons once again promote the human services function of prison staff; the relatively recent use of the term ‘correctional officer’ (which was introduced in Tasmania at the end of 2005) as opposed to ‘guard’ or ‘custodial officer’ is an illustration of this swing.

Changing organisation discourse can change what is and is not permissible. For example, a key influence upon staff behaviour is the fear of prisoner violence against them and that staff-on-prisoner violence was believed to deter prisoner-on-staff violence (Grant 2005: 192). Or as Woodham, head of New South Wales Corrective Services, writes:

“As recently as the 1970s, the prevailing philosophy for prison security was management by force. The systematic use of brutal physical force ensured that prison routine was observed” (Woodham 2005: 53).

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Prison officers today are expected to use more sophisticated approaches to maintaining order that demand higher levels of interpersonal skills and a willingness to work constructively with prisoners to assist them with problem solving and cope with prison life (Hepburn and Knepper 1993: 331-332), although Edney (1997) would contest this. The interplay between organisation discourse, prison officer discourse, and what prison officers think and believe and do is fascinating (see King 2006 for an extensive discussion on this). Sufficient here though, is to recognise that the task of the prison since its inception has not changed significantly and remains complex and paradoxical.

## **Prison Standards**

The way prisons are run is prescribed in standards, legislation, operating rules and correctional philosophies. They are mentioned here because they provide parameters and guidance about the treatment of prisoners and staff and may therefore inform officer-prisoner relationships. Guidance about how good prisons might operate is provided by various international and Australian standards. At the highest level they include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1966) and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1984), which set out principles ratified by Australia that govern punishment and imprisonment. These set out basic human rights and principles about how prisoners should be treated. Of particular relevance to prison staff prisoner relationships are articles 7, and 10 of the Covenant:

Article 7. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 10. (i) All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

(ii) (a) Accused persons shall, save in exceptional circumstances, be segregated from convicted persons and shall be subject to separate

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treatment appropriate to their status as unconvicted persons; (b) Accused juvenile persons shall be separated from adults and brought as speedily as possible for adjudication.

(iii) The penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation. Juvenile offenders shall be segregated from adults and be accorded treatment appropriate to their age and legal status.

The United Nations has also published the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1955), which cover general issues such as record keeping, lawful custody, separation of different groups of prisoner, accommodation, clothing, bedding, working conditions, food, health care, discipline and punishment, instruments of restraint, information, complaints, access to the outside world including books and media, religion, contact with relatives, prison staff, inspection by qualified people. The Rules also provide guidance about the treatment of different categories of prisoner, that is, sentenced, insane and mentally abnormal, unsentenced prisoner, civil prisoners and persons arrested or detained without charge. The rules recognise the harm of imprisonment:

57. Imprisonment and other measures which result in cutting off an offender from the outside world are afflictive by the very fact of taking from the person the right of self-determination by depriving him of his liberty. Therefore the prison system shall not, except as incidental to justifiable segregation or the maintenance of discipline, aggravate the suffering inherent in such a situation.

They also provide clear guidance about the purpose and manner of a sentence of imprisonment:

65. The treatment of persons sentenced to imprisonment or a similar measure shall have as its purpose, so far as the length of the sentence permits, to establish in them the will to lead law-abiding and self-supporting lives after their release and to fit them to do so. The

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treatment shall be such as will encourage their self-respect and develop their sense of responsibility.

Within Australia the above standards have been incorporated into the Revised Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia (Northern Territory 2004) and adopted by all jurisdictions. While not legally binding “the guidelines and the accompanying principles constitute outcomes or goals to be achieved by correctional services” (Northern Territory 2004: 2). The standard guidelines provide guidance in the areas of custody, prisoner care and well being, rehabilitation, reparation, and systems management. Guideline 1.45 is the only guideline that speaks to the relationship between staff and prisoners:

1.45 Consistent with the security and good order of the prison, interaction between staff and prisoners should promote dignity and respect.

Within Tasmania the *Corrections Act 1997* provides for the establishment and administration of prisons. Section 4 outlines the principles by which corrections should be administered and they are directly relevant to prison staff prisoner relationships:

“4. Guiding principles

The powers conferred by this Act are to be exercised with proper regard to the following principles:

- (a) the community is entitled to an appropriate level of protection from illegal behaviour by people subject to this Act;
- (b) people who are subject to this Act retain their normal rights and responsibilities as citizens, except as these are limited in accordance with law;
- (c) services and procedures should be fair, equitable and have due regard to personal dignity and individuality, as far as is consistent with the need for appropriate levels of security and control;

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(d) individuals are capable of change;

(e) people subject to this Act continue to be members of the community and should be assisted to become socially responsible. Whilst their liberty is restricted to various degrees, demonstrated social responsibility should lead to less intrusive control and intervention.”

## Human rights

While human rights considerations are obviously implicit in the above standards, I would like to review briefly how human rights considerations might also guide the development of ideal prison officer-prisoner relationships. Despite the *International Bill of Human Rights* and, in some jurisdictions, human rights legislation, agreement remains fluid about what is just and appropriate in the treatment of prisoners and what rights prisoners should retain while they serve their sentence. Apart from the obvious loss of a whole range of rights through imprisonment, the concept of citizenship is one that has attracted significant attention and one that presents a useful barometer of political and public attitudes towards prisoners. One of the most frequently stated purposes of imprisonment is to render the offender a productive member of the community. Yet, in many jurisdictions prisoners are restricted in their capacity to participate as citizens, whether because of their geographical isolation, separation from the community, creation of the prisoner identity or disenfranchisement and the notion that the offender has forfeited their rights to citizenship (Brown 2002: 320). Operational or management demands may also constrain prisoners' rights:

“Upon conviction and the sentence to a term of imprisonment what rights the citizen previously enjoyed are denuded to the extent necessary to operate the correctional institution. Moreover, correctional administrators tend to operate prisons in a manner that privileges the end of the good order and security over the ability of prisoners' to function in an autonomous and self directed manner” (Edney 2001).

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Developing operating prison philosophies, principles and procedures on a human rights basis is more likely to deliver good prisons. As Andrew Coyle (2002: 11) writes, managing prisons through a human rights approach is not only the right thing to do, it also works as the safest and most effective way of managing prisons.

Coyle also stresses the need for prisons to be managed ethically (2002: 11). This is hardly surprising, but what is surprising is that it is repeated so often. Prison services around the world have struggled to operate within an ethical and professional framework. One could look to the sociological literature about the prison experience to gain an understanding of how prisons so frequently become places where prisoners and staff are engaged in a form of warfare and where abuse is rife. One of the most significant inquiries into failed prison services is the Woolf report of prison disturbances that occurred across the UK in April 1990 (Woolf and Tumin 1991). Woolf found the prisons failed because of the unsanitary and overcrowded physical conditions to which prisoners were subjected; the negative and unconstructive nature of the regime; the lack of respect with which the prisoners were treated; the destructive effects of prison on the prisoner's family ties and the inadequacy of visits; the lack of any form of independent redress for grievances; lack of staff training, and lack of support from the head office (1991: 16-17).

Woolf (1991: 17) recognised that for a well managed and harmonious prison there are three interconnected elements that must be present in the proper balance: security (to prevent escapes), control (to prevent disturbance or disruption by prisoners) and justice (to treat prisoners humanely and fairly). If any of these elements are out of balance, Woolf argued, the quality of the prison would diminish. Typically, prisons overemphasise the elements of control and security, sacrificing justice, which is one of the most frequent causes of prison disturbance. The sieges of May 2005 and April 2006 at Risdon Men's prison may be understood as revolts by prisoners against the conditions in which they live and about alleged inhumane treatment by the prison administration, that is, a failure to give sufficient weight to Woolf's element of justice.

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## Humanity

The notion of humanity in prisons has been raised on several occasions in the preceding paragraphs and represents key principles for the operation of prisons and nature of effective prison staff prisoner relationships. Humanity is concerned with sympathy, compassion and regard for others. It is outward looking and involves a Kantian notion of the human being as an end in itself. It is invested with dignity and is realised through respectful, compassionate and fair treatment. Liebling and Arnold define humanity as “an environment characterized by kind regard for the person, mercy, and civility, which inflicts as little degradation as possible (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 226). Coyle (2003) identifies four elements that combine to define humane treatment in prisons. They are:

- preserving human dignity
- respecting individuality
- supporting family life
- promoting personal responsibility and development.

With respect to prison staff Coyle argues that:

“humanity requires that prison staff regard prisoners as human beings like themselves. Staff should try to imagine what prisoners might be feeling, what kind of treatment might lead them to be humiliated or degraded, and how their self-respect might be reduced as a result of any decision made by the prison authorities. It requires staff to take all of these factors into account when exercising the coercive authority that is intrinsic to deprivation of liberty” (Coyle 2003: 35).

Liebling and Arnold’s studies of several UK prisons found that when humanity was present, so were respect, fairness, trust and support (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 228). These dimensions of staff prisoner relationships frequently appear in Liebling’s work and were also frequently raised as significant in interviews with Tasmanian prison staff which are discussed in chapter three. A failure to respond with humanity to prisoners, is often preceded or accompanied by a stereotyping or



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conceptualisation of the individual in negative terms. To do so permits, in my experience, behaviours that would otherwise be unacceptable.

## **The prison officer**

The role of the modern prison officer is complex. Imagine some of the situations that a prison officer will experience in the course of his or her duties:

- Induct a newly sentenced prisoner who may be fearful, angry, ashamed, resentful, suicidal and concerned about family.
- Put himself or herself between two prisoners who are fighting.
- Sit with an illiterate prisoner and help him write a deeply personal letter to his girlfriend.
- Decide whether or not to submit an intelligence report about a colleague who is behaving strangely.
- Counsel a prisoner who is so desperate to kill herself that she is was trying to jam her head in the toilet bowl and break her neck.
- Maintain a professional approach in the face of abuse and threats, assaults or packets of faeces and urine thrown by an angry prisoner.
- Forcibly remove an armed, violent prisoner from his cell.
- Escort a prisoner to her mother's funeral.
- Separate a prisoner from her newly born baby.
- Distinguish between their emotional response to a prisoner's criminal behaviour, and their duty to respect the prisoner's dignity, rights and capacity to change.
- Console a prisoner who has received a phone call from their partner explaining their relationship is over.

The above situations illustrate the range of the prison officer's role and responsibilities in caring for people who are incarcerated. To perform it effectively demands an extraordinary range of interpersonal skills, courage, self-discipline and humanity to ensure they exercise their responsibilities

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professionally. The correctional officer is often characterised as a ‘turnkey’ whose role is narrowly defined around the functions of ensuring prisoners do not escape or hurt someone, but, of course, the role is far broader (Hemmens and Stohr 2000: 327). Unfortunately, compared with other aspects of imprisonment, relatively little research has been undertaken into the prison officer, in part, because of the difficulty of accessing prisons, but also from a seeming lack of interest or recognition of the contribution that the prison officer and prison officer culture makes to the nature of prisons (for a summary see Philliber 1987 and King 2006: 22-25).

Despite the complexity and responsibilities inherent in the role, “the role of the prison officer has been observed to be at the base of the criminal justice pyramid. Consequently the notions of education, training and career development have not been central to the role” (O’Toole 2005: 212). When one considers the kinds of situations described above, the ‘bar’ for officer recruitment is surprisingly low. Officers, in Tasmania at least, do not require formal school qualifications (Tasmania Department of Justice 2008: 10), but must pass literacy, numeracy, and aptitude tests. This has been addressed to some extent through the provision of training from certificate to tertiary levels by corrections agencies (O’Toole 2005: 217-221), but the role remains low status compared with other public safety professions. Further, officers receive little formal training in officer-prisoner relationships at recruitment or on an ongoing basis. They are expected to develop appropriate skills and attitudes ‘on the job’.

### **The paramilitary nature of prisons**

Sources of attitudes will obviously vary. King argues that the paramilitary nature of prisons and prison discourse influences conceptualisations about the role of prison staff (King 2006: 179). While references to military or paramilitary conceptualisations of prisons may not be present in modern prison policies or documents, the paramilitary nature of prison services is evidenced through military style uniforms and regalia and paramilitary units such as emergency or tactical response groups. Prison services are frequently viewed as a natural source of employment upon retirement from the armed forces. In Tasmania, for example the majority of the Tasmania Prison Service Senior Management Team has been

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recruited from uniformed services, including the Director (police), Assistant Director (army), Manager Organisation Development (customs) and Manager Compliance (police). Senior prison managers are farewelled at a formal mess luncheon at the Tasmania Police Academy Officers' Mess and the Assistant Director has promoted the establishment of a prison service mess for prison managers. The Assistant Director directly manages the service's tactical response group (TRG), a group of selected officers who undertake advanced weapons training, including the use of Tasers and firearms, and incident management. The TRG is frequently used to deal with situations where prisoners are not complying with directions. This seems to resonate with King's observation of South Australian prisons that with its emphasis on "control as the overriding purpose of imprisonment the prisoner is constructed as the person who threatens that control, the danger and good order of the prison" (King 2006: 118). And from that perspective a military style organisation is best equipped to deal with an involuntary, dangerous population (for example, Thomas 1972 in King 2006: 118).

This is not to suggest that this is the only discourse about prisons, their role, prison staff and the nature of prisoners. However, it is one that continues to compete strongly and frequently overrides other discourses, such as those published in the Tasmania Prison Service's policy framework, the Integrated Offender Management Framework, that promote rehabilitation or normalisation of prisoners. One example about the response of the Tasmania Prison Service to breaches in security may serve to illustrate this point. The new medium prison at Risdon was designed to provide accommodation in housing style units composed of bedrooms (rather than cells) leading onto a common area. A prisoner was detected climbing out of his bedroom window to retrieve drugs thrown over the prison fences by an accomplice. This resulted in the fitting of bars over all accommodation windows in the medium security prison. Of course this did not stop attempts to smuggle contraband into the prison and prisoners developed a sophisticated 'fishing line' that they could throw through the bars to snare and drag contraband thrown over the fence into their, what are now cells. The prison service has allocated approximately \$1m to the establishment of a new perimeter

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fence that will increase the distance that accomplices need to propel their projectiles.

An alternative to this response would be a normalisation (with its focus on individual responsibility) or rehabilitation discourse that would argue that it is possible to achieve security goals without further tightening an already rigid regime by comparing the current prison officer-prisoner relationship with the period prior to this series of incidents, when prisoners were not climbing out of their rooms.

### **The effects of working in prison**

Prison officers are affected by the experience of working in prison. These effects begin from the moment new officers begin their training and continue through at least the early stage of the officers' careers (Arnold 2005). Many of these effects are adaptations or coping strategies developed as an adjustment to the prison environment and the role which the officer is performing. Arnold identifies cognitive, emotional and behavioural effects that are located in the prison, in the officer's relationships and internally (2005: 414). Arnold warns that while some adaptations might be positive adjustments to the work environment, for example cynicism, these adaptations can have negative impacts if they extend to aspects of the officer's life.

### **The prisoner**

Much has been written about the prisoner and it is not necessary to repeat or summarise the literature here. However, it is useful to be reminded of the range of challenges and experiences that many prisoners bring to prison. The South Australia Department of Corrections website provides information about selected characteristics of Australian prisoners, Table 1 below (South Australia Department of Correctional Services). A persistent feature of my experience working in prisons and corrective services more generally has been that senior managers and prison officers are reluctant to accept that prisoners with these life experiences and characteristics will not necessarily behave in the same way that they behave. The prison officer is frequently exasperated by the failure of a prisoner to behave in the 'rational' way that the officer expected (based upon how

he or she would behave in that situation) and, in my experience, this strengthens negative beliefs about the prisoner. This dissonance between the officer's conception of the prisoner and the reality is, in my opinion, one of the elements that can contribute to the development of adversarial relationships (and worse) between officers and prisoners.

Table I Who do our prisons deal with?

male prisoners	female prisoners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44% are classified as long-term unemployed at the time of offence;</li> <li>• 5-10% are illiterate/innumerate;</li> <li>• 60% have below functional levels in literacy and numeracy;</li> <li>• 60% did not complete Year 10 studies;</li> <li>• 5-13% are intellectually disabled;</li> <li>• 50% have an anti-social personality disorder;</li> <li>• 50% consume alcohol at dangerous levels;</li> <li>• 30% are pathological gamblers;</li> <li>• 70% are smokers;</li> <li>• 75% have alcohol and other drug problems;</li> <li>• 21% previously attempted suicide;</li> <li>• 37% are Hepatitis C antibody positive;</li> <li>• 31% are Hepatitis B core positive;</li> <li>• 16% are obese;</li> <li>• 25% have attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 81% have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder;</li> <li>• 75% have been physically or sexually abused;</li> <li>• 38% have drug related health problems;</li> <li>• 39% have previously attempted suicide;</li> <li>• 23% are on psychiatric medicine;</li> <li>• 36% have previously been admitted to a psychiatric or mental unit;</li> <li>• 66% are Hepatitis C antibody positive;</li> <li>• 42% are Hepatitis B Core Positive.</li> </ul>

While a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to describe and understand the prisoner community, its values and norms (for an overview see Philinger 1987, and King 2006) there is relatively little recent work that tests whether the previous work remains relevant (Crewe 2005: 178). Of particular relevance here are cultural norms about conduct towards prison staff. For example, is today's prisoner culture as cohesive and resistant to prison staff as was identified in previous studies?

## The Tasmanian context

The Tasmania Prison Service's mission is similar to that of prison services elsewhere in Australia and internationally: "to contribute to a safer Tasmania by

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ensuring the safe, secure containment of prisoners and providing them with opportunities for rehabilitation, personal development and community engagement (Tasmania Department of Justice 2009).

Caroline Evans describes the changes in approach to managing Risdon Prison between 1960 and 2004 (Evans 2004). She describes a cycle of approaches to prison management that swing between a harsh authoritarianism, or disciplinarianism, to a more relaxed regime that provides room for education and rehabilitation programs. In the 1980s having anything but a formal conversation with a prisoner was frowned upon and the prison was run in a military fashion (Evans 2004: 64). The late 1980's and 1990's saw a flourishing of education and work programs. This period was also characterised by a focus on modernising staff training which was considered, by some at least, as contributing to a decline in prisoner suicides (Evans 2004: 82). The turn of the century saw a return to a harsher approach, with reduced funding of prisoner programs. This was accompanied by a sixty percent increase in the prison population, increasingly adversarial relationships between staff and prisoners, and a series of suicides that led to damning findings in Coroner and Ombudsman investigations. In 2001 the government announced that it would build a new prison, which would enable "ideas of modern penal theory to be implemented" (Evans 2004: 101).

During 2006 new men's medium and maximum security prisons (the Risdon Prison Complex) were opened at Risdon. The women's prison was refurbished and extended to provide new accommodation for maximum rated prisoners and a women and children's centre. Several accommodation divisions of the old Risdon men's prison were also refurbished and the prison reclassified as a minimum security prison. The commissioning of the new facilities also saw the introduction of a new prison service operating model, the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Framework. The new operating model sought to implement an evidence-based approach to prisoner management. Essentially the framework provides for the introduction of the risk-needs-responsivity model of offender management and treatment, underpinned by a systematic approach to prisoner assessment and case management, a contract system of privileges to encourage compliant behaviour and the expanded provision of rehabilitation, education and reintegration services.

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At the end of 2005 a new industrial agreement for prison staff (the Correctional Officers Agreement) was implemented. This agreement supported the IOM Framework by creating a staff hierarchy based upon essential training and qualifications for each level and the provision of prisoner case management by prison staff.

The designs of the new men's maximum and medium prisons were based on recently constructed Queensland prisons. While the maximum prison is conventional in the sense that it is designed as a series of units with cells opening onto an internal day use space, the medium prison has created a series of units where prisoners are housed in units of eight rooms with a shared lounge room, washroom and kitchenette. Such a design is based on the premise that "normalised environments will produce normal behaviour" (Wortley 2002: 42).

In 2009 the Tasmania Prison Service manages 6 prison facilities holding over 500 prisoners and employs approximately 340 prison staff and 35 non-prison therapeutic/rehabilitation staff in addition to administration and other support staff with an annual budget of over \$30m.

While the IOM Framework remains incompletely implemented, it is clear that the combination of new facilities and the services provided by the IOM Unit have achieved improvements in prisoner management. Presented in Table 2 are two nationally reported indicators that support this claim. While admittedly blunt and only counting the first two financial years since the introduction of IOM, the reduction in assaults and increased time out of cells suggest that prison has become a better place than the years that preceded 2006.

All has not gone smoothly however. In particular the medium prison has struggled to achieve the expectations held for it. Instances of prisoner disobedience and the concerns held by staff about their safety (frequently resulting in industrial action) have frequently resulted in a tightening of the prison environment and regime, including the strengthening of the physical environment by, for example constructing additional fencing and placing bars over windows.

I think the experiences of the Medium Prison is significant and points to ongoing discourse within the Tasmania Prison Service about the purpose of imprisonment

and the way prison should be run. It also assists us to better understand the relationship between the way we conceptualise prisoners and how they should be managed and the relationships we develop with them. In many ways the response by senior management and other staff also illustrates how difficult it is to replace old conceptualisations with new ones. When things become difficult, we often retreat to the old and trusted ways of doing prison work, despite their obvious limitations and negative consequences. For us however, the experiences of the Tasmania Prison Service provide a fascinating lens through which to view prison officer-prisoner relationships.

**Table 2 Assaults in custody and time out of cells 2005-06 to 2007-08**

Indicator	2005-06 (pre IOM)	2006-07	2007-08
Assaults in custody (per 100 prisoners)			
Tasmania (jurisdiction ranking)	8.14 (2 <sup>nd</sup> highest)	5.05 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	3.52 (lowest)
Australian average	9.01	8.47	8.52
Time out of cells, secure custody (hours)			
Tasmania (jurisdiction ranking)	8.7 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	11.6 (highest)	11.8 (highest)
Australian average	9.3	9.5	9.2

## Summary

Prisons are the site in which relationships between prison officers and prisoners are played out. While much has changed, much about prisons remains essentially unchanged since the birth of the prison in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. While a prisoner's life is less physically demanding, prisoners remain subject to a restrictive regime that tends to debilitate rather than reform them. Prison administrations and staff are tasked by the state with the apparently paradoxical goals of imprisoning people as punishment but also endeavouring to rehabilitate them. Administrators, prison officers and prisoners seem, at times at least, to be engaged in an ongoing struggle to achieve these competing goals. Guidance about how prisons should be run and how prisoners should be treated is provided by international human rights standards, prisons guidelines and jurisdictional statute.



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The notion of treating prisoners (and prison staff) with humanity is a key principle that should inform prison policy and prison officer-prisoner relationships.

Prison officers have a far more complex role than the typical image of the ‘turnkey’ might suggest. They remain relatively low status roles compared with other public safety occupations and the ‘bar’ for recruitment is relatively low. The training that officers receive is often modest and by and large they are expected to pick up the skills they need on the job. Attitudes about the role, about prisons and prisoners vary, but there is a tendency for the paramilitary nature of many prison organisations to influence the development of prison discourses. Staff are affected by the prison experience in both positive and negative ways. A key element of working as an officer is to maintain the respect and support of other staff, something that is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Prisoners are a very challenging group of people to work with. They often present with histories of disadvantage, substance abuse and trauma. Prison officers need to appreciate the differences between prisoners and themselves if they are to relate to them in a productive way.

The Tasmania Prison Service, like other prison services, is tasked with imprisoning and rehabilitating prisoners. In 2006 it moved from an old-fashioned warehousing model to one that introduces a risk-needs-responsivity rehabilitation model. The years preceding the move to a new model and into new facilities were preceded by regular prisoner riots and disturbances. The service has achieved significant improvements in prisoner care, but has failed to completely move to the new model. Instances of prisoner misconduct are frequently responded to by tightening the prisoner’s regime and by returning to the previous model of prisoner management. This retreat highlights the difficulty of achieving organisation and culture change and the difficulty in particular of persuading people to risk conceptualising prison in different ways. What are the alternatives to this retreat, which is a response that, if history is any guide, will end in failure? This thesis argues that the solution lies in an appreciation of the potential of prison officer-prisoner relationship to achieve prison order and an environment that encourages rehabilitation. First though we will review the literature about prison officer-prisoner relationships.

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## Chapter 2

### Dimensions of prison officer-prisoner relationships

“At the end of the day, nothing else that we can say will be as important as the general proposition that relations between staff and prisoners are at the heart of the whole prison system and that control and security follow from getting that relationship right” (Home Office 1984 in Liebling and Arnold, 2004: 229).

The relationship between those who imprison and the imprisoned is a key ingredient of a well run prison. Critical tests of the quality of a prison will point to the quality of the relationship between prison staff and prisoners. They will also explore the nature of the complex project that staff and prisoners are engaged in. Put simply this is to assist prisoners to adapt to life in prison, to encourage them to make positive use of their sentence and to assist them to prepare for release. In the words of an English prison governor, “Prisons have to turn people into prisoners, and helping them to cope with custody is a first duty. But prisoners have to become people again, and prisons fail in their duty to the public if they fail to help them to do that” (Pryor, 2001: 1).

While significant research has been undertaken into the sociology of the prison community (for example, Morgan 2002, White and Perrone 2005) the nature of the prison correctional officer’s role and culture (for example, Grant 2005), and the effects of prison work upon correctional officers (Arnold 2005), less work appears to have sought to understand how correctional officers achieve effective relationships with prisoners or the qualities of officers known to develop effective relationships (Liebling and Arnold 2004:230).

Morgan stresses the importance of the relationship between prisoner and prison officer, describing it as critical to the quality of prisoners’ lives (Morgan 2002: 1157). A relationship that is just or fair is central to the prisoner’s sense of security, safety and distress (Liebling et al 2005).

Within Australia some research has been published about how effective caseworkers relate to involuntary clients (Trotter 1999). But again, little research

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appears to have been undertaken that seeks to understand what correctional officers consider important about their relationships with prisoners. Trotter has undertaken research about the attributes of effective corrections officers. He has identified relationship characteristics such as honesty, empathy, non-blaming, pro-social modelling and optimism, as attributes that are more likely to deliver better correctional outcomes. Liebling, Price and Elliott (1999: 78) emphasise the importance of the peacekeeping and discretionary aspects of prison officer work in maintaining stable staff prisoner relationships and that a key driver in the officer's efforts to work effectively with prisoners is the goal of a quiet, peaceful day.

Effective relationships are important not just to keep the peace, but because they are also likely to be conducive towards prisoners actively participating in rehabilitation programs rather than simply coping passively to get through their sentence (Harding 2000:10). Harding cites as an example Grendon prison in the UK, which is run as a therapeutic community and which achieves better recidivism figures than the general prison population.

What correctional staff think about prisoners and how they behave towards them has a profound effect upon the prison environment. "A hostile, superior, contemptuous, or dismissive attitude on the part of a staff member constitutes an attack on the prisoner's self-esteem and inspires resentment both against the staff member and against the values and standards which he symbolises" (Hawkins, 1976 in Liebling and Arnold 2004: 229). Liebling and Arnold's interviews with prisoners and prison staff noted that "in 'good' prisons, relationships between staff and prisoners provide the glue which holds establishments together" and that the reverse is also the case (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 229).

### **Prison order and the exercise of power**

A key issue in the operation of prisons is to maintain order. While there are several factors that will influence this, such as architecture and staffing numbers, prison order is achieved and maintained through the implementation by prison officers of a regime. To illustrate, I would like to discuss the way the Tasmania Prison Service manages its prisons using Di Iulio's classification of prison regimes. The previous operating model and to a large extent the current operating

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model is consistent with Di Iulio's control model (Di Iulio 1987, in Wortley 2002: 49-50). The control model is characterised by a paramilitary organisation in which:

“personal relations between levels of staff are characterised by respectful formality. A similar formality is shown in inmate-staff communication. Individual discretion by staff is minimal – guards run the institution ‘by the book’ – and the daily routine of prisoners is highly regimented and predictable. If inmates do break the rules, or are disruptive, the official response is swift and certain. It goes without saying that prisoners are considered to have no role in the management of the institution” (Wortley 2002: 49).

The above description aptly describes the general approach to the management of staff and prisoners in the Tasmania Prison Service. The Medium Prison, however, was built to implement a different approach, one that would be described by Di Iulio as the responsibility model. Under this model:

“relations between staff members, and between staff and inmates, are casual and egalitarian. Guards exercise considerable discretion and are encouraged to use individual judgement rather than a strict adherence to the rulebook. Rather than having their days ordered and managed by the administration, prisoners have considerable free time and are given choice in the activities in which they participate. Minor rule violations may be overlooked or dealt with informally and the official response to disruptive behaviour is likely to involve negotiation with inmates. Participation of inmates in prison affairs is encouraged” (Wortley 2002: 51).

The responsibility model favours the provision of treatment programs and privileges them at the same level as work assignments. It encourages prisoners to develop a greater sense of personal responsibility and the capacity to live harmoniously with others. Wortley pithily sums up the differences of the models, writing, “where the control model sets out to divide and fragment prisoners, the responsibility model explicitly attempts to foster a sense of community” (Wortley

2002: 51). Liebling and Arnold (2004: 2860), describe two contrasting regimes in UK prisons that aptly express the differences between the two models (Table 3), which they describe as the control and negotiation models. Liebling and Arnold emphasise that neither model is perfect in maintaining prison order (2004: 286-287). For example, benefits of the control model are greater clarity, predictability and less opportunity for rule violation. The negotiation model, while seeming, to this writer at least, a more tolerable regime, saw lapses in safety and consistency.

**Table 3 Two ideal types of penal order (after Liebling and Arnold 2004)**

<b>the control model</b>	<b>the negotiation model</b>
due process efficiency amenity and service assertive authority consistency (little discretion) formal (but cordial) relations situational control 'control, safety, supervision'	support participation responsibility and choice soft policing (non-confrontation) flexibility (wide use of discretion) close relations social control 'choice, responsibility, self-respect'

Prisons therefore are places where balance must be achieved, which is what Woolf was expressing in his calls for a correct balancing of the elements of security, control and justice. For the prison to be effective this balance is created and recreated each day (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 287). Drawing on Giddens' structuration theory they remind us that:

“the structural properties of social institutions are not ‘fixed’ but are continually reproduced in action by individual agents...The routine in prison is inherently fragile. Yet both staff and prisoners are engaged in the reproduction of these structures most of the time (eg when prisoners return to their cells at lock up time), without force.”

The capacity to reproduce stability in the prison every day depends upon the consent of the actors and legitimate exercise of prison officer authority. Prison authority is seen to be legitimate when prisoners see it as fair. A sense of fairness draws upon not just the procedures, but also the manner in which staff treat prisoners (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 288). Liebling and Arnold raise this issue to argue that prison practice has a moral dimension, or in other words, prison order

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should not be an end in itself, because order should be achieved for the right reasons. I include this discussion, however, to stress again that it is the relationship between staff and prisoners that is the fulcrum through which order, legitimacy and balance are achieved. Prison staff success at achieving order in the long term depends on whether, “prisoners come to see the behaviour of their custodians as being justifiable, comprehensible, consistent and hence, fair – or, alternatively, unwarranted, arbitrary, capricious, and overweening” (Bottoms and Sparks 1997: 22 in Liebling and Arnold 2004: 472).

Why has the Tasmania Prison Service failed to achieve the responsibility/negotiation model in the medium prison? I think it is because this model is incomprehensible to an organisation that continues to conceptualise prisoners and the work of managing them through the lens of the control model. A recurring complaint by prison staff is that they are unsafe in the medium precinct, despite the fact that the assault rates defy this claim. But for any officer who has worked prior to the commissioning of the new model, or who works in most other Tasmanian prisons, officers can rely for their safety on physical barriers between them and prisoners, barriers that can minimise staff-prisoner interaction. But safety in the medium precinct is to be achieved through the elimination of traditional barriers and the greater levels of interaction between staff and prisoners “in the hope that prisoners and staff will come to know one another as individuals” (Wortley 2002: 52). The medium environment, therefore, approached from a control perspective is unsafe. Staff are reluctant to interact with prisoners despite the fact that it is these relationships that are necessary for the environment to work.

As institutions in which one community, prisoners, is held against its will by another, prison staff, the maintenance and exercise of power is crucial to prison order. Competition for power, at the micro level at least, is ongoing as prisoners resist and accommodate the regime under which they are held, “order is threatened, interrupted and repaired constantly” (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 285). How do prison officers exercise power? Hepburn (1985) in a survey of prison officers in five American prisons describes six ways that prison officers may exercise power (Table 4). Hepburn found that legitimate and expert power were,

in the opinion of the prison officers surveyed, the most important reasons why a prisoner obeyed directions. The officers believed “their control to be based largely on their positions as guards and on their reputation for competence and good judgement” (Hepburn 1985: 154). Reward and coercive power were ranked as least effective. Hepburn acknowledged that the value of coercive power may have been underscored because of the nature of the survey questions. Coercive power was recognised as a significant power base that is always available to support legitimate power, “coercive power is most effective when it is always available but rarely used” (Hepburn 1985: 160).

**Table 4 Power bases drawn upon by prison officers (after Liebling 2000)**

	<b>power base</b>	<b>description</b>
1	coercive power	the use of segregation, searches, transfer, disciplinary system, etc.
2	reward power	the distribution of privileges, prized jobs, favourable reports, etc.
3	legitimate power	formal authority, the rule of law.
4	exchange power	the informal reward system, negotiation.
5	expert or professional power	expertise and experience in the role
6	respect or personal authority	officers’ manner of working with prisoners, leadership skills.

The officer’s length of experience influenced ranking, with the greater the experience the greater the reliance upon expert power. Hepburn also compared the ranking of power bases with the officer’s attitudes towards prisoners. He placed officers into three categories: custody orientation (the degree to which the maintenance of control is emphasised), punitive orientation (the degree to which prison life should punish the prisoner) and socially distant (the degree to which interactions with prisoners are detached, impersonal and contractual). Hepburn confirmed earlier studies that the greater the custody orientation of the officer the less respect was important and the more significant coercive power became; the greater the punitive orientation the more valued was coercive power; and the greater the social distance the less important was respect or personal authority power (Hepburn 1985: 160).

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Wortley, citing several studies, suggests that the key to staff is legitimacy (Wortley 2002: 203). Legitimacy, in the eye of the prisoner, is achieved when staff are seen to be exercising their authority consistently, fairly and in accordance with rules and standards of behaviour.

The judicious use of officer power is also essential. “It was dangerous, perhaps especially in a maximum security setting, to be reluctant to use power, as it was to be over-eager...those officers who were prepared to use it, rarely had to resort to coercive means” (Liebling 2000: 343)

### **Prison officer and organisational discourses about purpose and process**

How do discourses about the role of prison and prison staff and the nature of prisoners affect staff-prisoner relationships? Will a prison service that has rehabilitation as a priority have staff-prisoner relationships that promote rehabilitation services and a belief that prisoners can change? How and to what degree do staff adopt organisational discourse? King’s research into prison officers in three South Australian prisons sought to understand how prisons used discourse about prison purpose and processes to construct work identities for prison officers. In particular she sought to find out to what extent organisational conceptualisations of the roles of prison officers had been adopted by the staff themselves (King 2006: 13-14). King recognised that while previous research has tended to describe prison officers as a homogenous group, and often negatively, modern prison officers work in diverse settings, have diverse roles and hold diverse opinions. She traces changes in conceptualisation of how prison officers understood their work in South Australia differed with changing organisational policies, with their length of experience and the prisons (and therefore the audience) in which they worked.

King identifies eight conceptualisations of prison officer roles in the literature, that move beyond the overly simplistic and competing notions of prison officers as a custodian or a human services worker, which “limit the recognition of the complexity of the role, discourage differentiation of the role, and limit the capacity of the role to be developed in terms that make sense within the prison



context” (King 2006: 145). The eight conceptualisations and related prison officer roles identified by King are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5 Conceptualisations of prison officer roles found in the literature (after King 2006)

conceptualisation of prison purpose	conceptualisation of prison officer role
controlling the prisoner (security discourse)	paramilitary officer, security officer, warehouse
imprisoning and delivering services to citizens (normalisation discourse)	professional, public servant/bureaucrat, manager of prisoners
rehabilitating the prisoner/supporting behaviour change (normalisation and human services discourses)	therapist, case manager

King’s interviews with prison staff in South Australia found that in conceptualising their work, prison officers were seeking to gain respect for their work and manage their vulnerability working with prisoners while struggling to accommodate competing discourses about their roles as custodial or human service workers. Officers saw prisoners as a key audience for the performance of their role, but other audiences included non-uniformed staff, management and the public. Of particular interest to our thinking about staff-prisoner relationships is that prison staff found greatest comfort in the custodial construction of their work because it had clear goals and performance measures about which all staff could agree (2006: 228). In contrast human services conceptualisations of their work were less clear and with less chance of success. Keeping prisoners locked up and safe, and staff safe, are clear and tangible goals about which officers felt they have control. Rehabilitation goals on the other hand depend upon the capacity and willingness of the prisoner to change. Similarly normalisation goals were also dependent upon the prisoner’s acceptance of the service delivered by staff. Officers expressed cynicism about how likely these goals could be realised.

Somewhat ironically, King notes that although the custodial role was considered one that could be achieved successfully, it carried lower status than roles associated with human services and rehabilitation. This may be why, as King argues, that the majority of subjects that she interviewed identified with the *manager of prisoners* conceptualisation of their role – a conceptualisation that

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signifies authority and control of the officer (control discourse) but recognises also the status of the prisoner as a citizen (normalisation discourse). Prison officers, therefore, are tending not to adopt the rehabilitation discourse to conceptualise their role, but are demonstrating a willingness to move towards it beyond the traditionally conceived notion of the prison officer as 'custodial officer'.

Finally, King explored the effect of organisational discourse about the purpose of prisons upon prison officers. She found that the capacity of the department to achieve an adoption of its discourses depended upon the length of experience of the officer and the clarity of purpose of the prison. She described two old prisons in which various discourses about purpose competed with the department's (recognising that its discourses had changed with time) and contrasted it with a new prison, with relatively less experienced staff, which had a clear sense of purpose and role that aligned with the department's.

King finds that organisations can influence the construction of prison officer roles and the performance of their work with prisoners. However to be successful, prison services must understand that the desired role conceptualisations must be framed to meet prison officer's concerns that the role be respected by internal and external audiences and that officers vulnerability be minimised. In older prisons where successive discourses have been promulgated by management strong leadership will be required to overcome the influence of previous discourses:

“Although newer departmental discourses impact upon staff at the time as which they are employed in corrections, maintaining the influence of these discourses involves being more powerful than other competing discourses in the prison context in which the officer's role is performed....[in older prisons] staff are assailed by conflicting discourse between which they must make choices. These choices are governed by staff desires to construct a role worthy of respect and in which the vulnerability of the officer is minimised” (King 2006: 330).

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## Attitudes towards prisoners

If we accept that what we do is guided by what we think and believe, it is reasonable to assume that what prison officers think and believe about prisoners and about prison will influence at least the nature of their relationships with prisoners. King, citing Hemmens and Stohr (2000) identifies two models to understand the determinants of what correctional staff think about prisoners and how they behave towards them (King 2006: 44). These are the individual experiences importation model and the work role or prisonisation model. The individual experiences importation model explains the officer's attitudes as being imported by the officer to the workplace. The work role model concentrates upon the influence of the organisation environment and policies on officer attitudes. While various evidence has been put forward to privilege one model above the other (Hemmens and Stohr 2000), it is clear that both impact upon the nature of the institution and the people who work in it.

Lariviere et al surveyed Correctional Service of Canada staff, including almost 2,000 prison officers, responses to the dimensions of empathy, punitiveness and support for rehabilitation (1996). They found that prison officers were less empathic (only 23% held empathic views towards prisoners), more punitive (76% held punitive views) and less supportive of rehabilitation (54%) than all of the other eight occupational groups surveyed. These results also highlight however that there is diversity of views along these dimensions and prison officers are not a completely homogenous workforce.

Other factors that can influence officers' attitudes towards prisoners include the officer's rank and time in the job (Shamir and Drory 1981). Shamir and Drory found that the officer's rank is negatively associated with belief that prisons can rehabilitate prisoners (1981: 247). Similarly, and as previous researchers have found, time in the job seemed to be associated with a decrease in belief in rehabilitation (1981: 247). This does not mean that treatment programs do not have value to prison staff. Cullen et al (1993) found that while "maintaining custody and order are the dominant concerns of wardens" prison staff valued rehabilitation programs, in spite of their cynicism about their effectiveness, because they saw them as useful in keeping prisoners busy.

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Some studies that sought to identify whether gender influenced prison officer custodial or rehabilitation ideology have found that it is not a significant issue (Cullen et al 1989, Whitehead et al 1987). Other research has found that female prison officers favour a more human services and rehabilitation-oriented role (Lariviere et al, 1996, Farkas 1999, Gordon 2006) although Lariviere also found that male and female officers were comparable on empathy and punitiveness dimensions.

### **How consistent are prison officer attitudes?**

Prison officers tend to overestimate colleagues punitiveness and lack of sympathy for prisoners (for example Kauffman 1981 and Wheeler 1961). Kauffman argues that because prison officers are usually out-numbered by prisoners they must rely on each other to survive. It is this reliance on colleagues in an unsafe environment that leads to the development of the prison officer 'code' or sub-culture. Kauffman confirmed Wheeler's earlier work, finding that prison officers consistently perceived fellow officers as less sympathetic to prisoners and treatment programs than they considered themselves to be; "officers appear to be systematically perceiving a climate among their fellow officers that is more antagonistic to prisoners and treatment than the reality of individual officers' attitudes warrants" (Kauffman 1981: 287). Kauffman described this situation as form of pluralistic ignorance caused by a fear of ostracism through being seen to threaten staff solidarity. She noted that prisoners also demonstrate pluralistic ignorance and that this is unsurprising given the nature of the prison environment in which group solidarity is seen as essential for survival:

"In such situations, mere expression of dissent may appear so threatening to the group's well-being that it is not tolerated even by those who may be silently sympathetic to the particular opinions being aired. Individuals voicing dissent will have to content with those who legitimately oppose their position as well as with those who feel a need to appear to oppose it...Under such circumstances even majority views may go unspoken and thus unheard" (Kauffman 1981: 292).

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Kauffman and Wheeler's findings resonate with my experience of the Tasmania Prison Service. Privately many officers will express support for the delivery of treatment programs and rehabilitation activities, however, this support frequently vanishes in the mess room when issues such as staff safety and the need for tighter control of prisoners are raised by vocal staff, including some staff representatives. Indeed it would interesting to ask whether the choice of staff representatives, so frequently staff who seem to have a quite extreme set of punitive attitudes towards prisoners, is a consequence of pluralistic ignorance.

The extent to which this lack of accurate perceptions of officers' attitudes towards prisoners is reflected in behaviour is unclear, but one could reasonably assume that it might be expressed at least in front of other officers. Achieving the right emotional and behavioural balance is critical in achieving the right relationship with prisoners and maintaining the respect and support of fellow officers. As Crawley observes,

“working in prisons is emotionally demanding and the emotions generated by prison work are many and varied. They are rarely, however, freely expressed. On the contrary, prison officers try to ensure that when they perform emotion they do so in the ‘right’ circumstances and settings, and they draw upon an array of well-rehearsed emotion-work strategies to keep unwelcome emotions in check....a failure to display the ‘right’ emotions is to risk the acquisition of a deviant identity – someone who is either not ‘one of us’ or not ‘up to the job’” (Crawley 2004: 424).

Similarly Arnold notes that officers need to take care to demonstrate appropriate levels of empathy and care towards prisoners. She argues that officers, “want to care for prisoners, but without showing it, or without experiencing distress themselves on the one hand, or disapproval from others on the other” (Arnold 2005: 416).

## **Role conflict**

Role conflict between custodial and treatment goals is often cited by researchers (for example see Gordon 2006: 226) as a key dilemma in the prison officer's

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attempt to identify how best to work with prisoners. Hepburn and Albonetti found a positive association between role conflict and punitive attitudes towards prisoners (1979: 456). They also found that staff in minimum security prisons experienced greater role conflict than staff in maximum security prisons. They concluded that this was caused by the stated goals of the minimum security prison, rather than the type of person working there (1979: 55-456). Shamir and Drory also found that role conflict was positively associated with negative and hostile attitudes towards prisoners (1981: 246-7).

“Men at the top of prisons often talk corrections and act custodially. Their formula is ‘humane custody.’ But humane custody is a myth, because it is a paradox. Where custody thrives, humanness does not. Security defines a staff-inmate gap which widens, and makes men obdurate and difficult. A man usually bites the hand that reluctantly feeds it” (Toch 1978: 35)

### **Modes of staff-prisoner interaction**

The work of custodial staff is performative. It is performed before an audience of prisoners and other colleagues. Officers, therefore, must find a way of relating to prisoners that achieves the above discussed goals of retaining the support of other colleagues. Ben David describes four modes of staff-prisoner interaction that characterise the relationship: staff perception of the prisoners; orientation of the relationship; relational model; and social distance (1992:210-211). Five types of staff-prisoner relationship are characterised by these four modes of interaction (Table 6).

The punitive type of staff-prisoner relationship is the typical turnkey, also described by Goffman (1961b), where the prison officer minimises communication with and company of prisoners, and requires complete submission. Prisoners are perceived in negative terms and misconduct is punished severely and uniformly.

The custodial mode shares similarities with the punitive mode in that it is primarily concerned with controlling prisoners, who are expected to obey directions, with communication limited to tasks and role requirements. In this

relationship the officer is concerned with running, or managing, a prison in which prisoners are kept at a distance with no emotional interaction.

Table 6 Ben David's typology of five modes of staff-prisoner relationships

mode of interaction	modes of relationships				
	<i>punitive</i>	<i>controlling</i>	<i>patronage</i>	<i>therapeutic</i>	<i>integrative</i>
perception	offender	prisoner	weak-dependent	patient	person
orientation	punitive	custodial	custodial-therapeutic	therapeutic	therapeutic
relation model	active-passive	active-passive	guidance-cooperation	guidance-cooperation	mutual participation
social distance	total	professional	guardian	professional	professional

Ben David (2000: 214) describes the patronage type of relationship as a bridge between the above custodial-management orientations and the therapeutic relational types. Staff perceive the prisoner as weak or in need of care and protection and while the overall concern is control, the staff member is allowed a therapeutic role. This enables greater involvement with prisoners, including emotional involvement and while interaction is largely controlled by the staff member, prisoners have greater interaction.

The therapist type sees a further involvement of the prison officer in advising, guiding and treating the prisoner. The officer continues to control the level of involvement and social distance and association is limited to professional concerns.

Finally, the integrative type of relationship attempts to deal with the prisoner as an individual with individual circumstances. The prisoner "is perceived as a person, with almost equal standing to the staff member" (2000: 215) and interaction is far freer, while mindful of prison regulations.

Ben David and Cohen (1996) report that prison staff are more likely to adopt a punitive mode of relationship when they are experiencing anxiety or insecurity. A response to fear can lead staff to "retreat towards ritualism and keeping a low profile," that is, avoidance, or a "punitive and tough attitude towards inmates and penal policy" (Ben David and Cohen 1996: 96).

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## Relational dimensions of staff-prisoner relationships

There are two contrasting truisms relating to prison life: first, that prison is full of tension and conflict; and secondly, that prison life is all about relationships (Liebling and Arnold 2004: 258).

This section draws upon the work of Alison Liebling and Helen Arnold and their study of moral values and prison life in five British prisons (Liebling and Arnold 2004). Liebling and Arnold identify several dimensions to prison life, which they subdivide into relationship, regime, and social structure and meaning dimensions. These dimensions refer to what prison officers do to prisoners and how they do it, to the way in which the prison regime is expressed and mediated by officers and the overall quality of life and meaning given to the prison experience (Table 7).

Table 7 Dimensions of prison life (after Liebling and Arnold 2004)

category	dimension
Relationships	respect
	humanity
	staff-prisoner relationships
	trust
regime	support
	fairness
	order
	safety
	well-being
	personal development
	family contact
	decency
social structure and meaning	power/authority
	prisoner social life
	meaning of imprisonment
	quality of life

The above table suggests that regime and social structure and meaning categories are distinct from relationships, but this is not the case. As Liebling and Arnold stress “all the dimensions are about staff-prisoner relationships or the interpersonal conditions of imprisonment” (2004: 229). Liebling and Arnold’s work demonstrates firstly the importance of achieving desirable relationships with prisoners, and secondly, the need to maintain a complex balance of the different aspects of the prison experience. There is not space here to describe each



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dimension; they are tabulated here to remind us of the complexity of the challenge faced by prisons, and prison officers in particular, in running an effective prison. These dimensions are present in every prison and it is the nature and quality of staff-prisoner relationships that will define this balance and differentiate between prisons (2004: 230). The challenge for each prison is to consciously attend to these dimensions to create what it considers is a suitable prison environment. While policy statements, senior level leadership and compliance auditing may play a role in this (see the discussion of King's work above) it is the daily performance of prison officers as individual actors that is crucial.

## Summary

Prison officer-prisoner relationships are key ingredients of a well run prison, but remain less well understood than other aspects of the prison. Diverse factors contribute to shape the officer-prisoner relationship. How prison order is conceptualised and how officers maintain power over prisoners are influenced by organisational and officer discourses about prison purpose and process. At a more intrinsic level officers' attitudes towards prisoners will shape how they relate to them. Also influencing how they relate is how they perceive the attitudes of their colleagues because of the pressures to maintain officer cohesion. Interestingly, officers tend to incorrectly assume that they are more supportive of rehabilitation than their colleagues. This can lead to a shared expression of attitudes towards prisoners that is overly punitive. Officers may also experience conflict between their control tasks and rehabilitation tasks. Such role conflict can lead to negative attitudes towards prisoners.

The prison officer role is performed in front of prisoners and other colleagues. The challenge for the officer, therefore, is to find a way of performing this role. Characterisations of this role tend to be understood along a continuum from a punitive extreme which maximises the social distance from the prisoner, to a way of relating that closely engages the prisoner in the day to day maintenance of prison life. Recent work undertaken by Liebling and Arnold (2004) identifies discrete, but related, dimensions of prison officer-prisoner relationships. They create definitions sourced from prison officer and prisoner interviews that are measurable and observable. The dimensions are concerned with how prison staff

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behave towards prisoners, the nature and expression of the prison regime and the overall quality of life and meaning given to the prison experience.

This thesis wishes to apply a Tasmanian perspective to our understanding of prison officer-prisoner relationships. It is, therefore, interested in the perspectives of Tasmanian officers about their relationships with prisoners in particular what constitutes effective relationships. This is the subject of the next chapter.

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## Chapter 3

# An investigation into officer-prisoner relationships in Tasmania

### Introduction

This chapter describes a study into the views about staff prisoner relationships held by four of the Tasmania Prison Service's prison officers. The study, which was conducted by the author, was undertaken by holding in-depth, semi-structured interviews the four officers, known in Tasmania as correctional officers, who work with maximum and medium security rated prisoners at the Risdon Prison Complex. The interviews were designed to better appreciate the skills of prison officers working in these difficult areas and to explore the features that are present when officers and prisoners work well together. Of particular interest was a desire to learn more about the attitudes and ideas that guide prison officers' work and the conditions that are necessary to achieve high quality work in such difficult environments.

### Research design & approach

The research methodology adopted for this study was informed by the studies undertaken by Liebling and her research partners in the United Kingdom (Liebling and Arnold, 2004). In particular I employed the 'appreciative inquiry' method of interviewing prison officers that they used. Appreciative inquiry is an approach to social research that is purposefully non-critical and focusses on asking interviewees to consider what is best about the subject area. I wanted to use a research approach that would give interview subjects the confidence to engage with me and to focus on their best experiences of prison work rather than feel obliged to defend or comment about negative experiences and practices. The appreciative approach is more than simply being positive. It requires the researcher to take an empathic and supportive stance towards the experience of the subject. It has also been argued that, at a broader level, the appreciative inquiry approach also encourages organizations to move to achieve their best, as

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opposed to a more traditional problem-focussed approach, which tends to result in organisational hostility and resistance to change.

The Director of Prisons and Assistant Director of Prisons provided a list of ten prison officers who they recommended that I should interview. The Director and Assistant Director nominated ten officers who they viewed because, in their opinion, they supported the goals of the Tasmania Prison Service. All officers who were contacted agreed to be interviewed, but time and other constraints meant that only four interviews were conducted.

Interviews were semi-structured and based on 15 questions (Table 8). Several questions were informed by Liebling et al's interview protocols (Liebling et al 1999: 79) with others added to cover my particular interests. The reader will observe that some questions are similar. This approach was taken to enable subjects to provide information that would have been lost if only the earlier question had been asked. The subjects seemed to take some time to warm up and the data collected was richer for covering the same ground more than once.

**Table 8 Interview questions**

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1	What it is like when things are working at their best?
2	What do you enjoy about working there...what is it you look forward to?
3	Can you describe the day you remember as the best day of your life as a correctional officer?
4	What sort of relationship do you think is best to achieve between correctional officers and inmates?
5	What do you do to achieve and maintain this kind of relationship?
6	Can you tell me about the best piece of work you have done this year?
7	Thinking about your time in the Tasmania Prison Service, when have relations between staff and inmates been at their best?
8	Please tell me about a time when staff-inmate relations were not too oppressive or too relaxed. What do you recall was special about that time?
9	What are the disadvantages of relationships that are too oppressive...too relaxed... How can these disadvantages be avoided?
10	When have you felt most clear about your role in the prison...What experiences have given you an understanding of your role?
11	Please think about a correctional officer who you admire. What does he or she do that you admire...what values and ideas do you think he or she holds about inmates?
12	Can you describe when you worked with an inmate and you prevented a bad situation from occurring...what happened that got things back on track?
13	If you had one wish for staff-inmate relationships what would it be?
14	Tell me about a time when you worked with an inmate and you feel like you made a positive difference to their life?
15	What would you stress to recruits about how they should relate to inmates and about where they should draw the boundaries in their relationship?

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The interviews were designed to elicit information about staff-prisoner relationships. The questions addressed the following areas:

- the nature of successful prison work (questions 1-3, 6, 11-15)
- the values and attitudes of prison officers underlying effective relationships (2, 4, 6, 10-15)
- what happens in effective relationships (3-8, 10-12, 14)
- when the prison environment is too oppressive or too relaxed (4, 7, 9, 10)
- how other officers might develop more effective relationships with prisoners (4, 5, 9, 11, 13, 15).

## Results

### The nature of successful prison work

Several questions sought to elicit the subjects' views about successful prison work. This issue was explored in order to find out the subjects' motivations, what they were trying to achieve during a shift and how they measured whether their work was successful.

The subjects all stated that successful work is characterised by a peaceful, harmonious environment when prisoners and staff are able to meet their respective needs. Each of the following statements is provided by a different subject:

*There's no confrontation. It's a calm environment. They are content to be themselves and we are content to be ourselves...On Saturday I came to work and the weather was good, the mood in the gaol was good. There was interaction between officers and inmates. On the hard court the officers were playing cricket with the inmates. It was just a satisfying day...it sounds silly, but the day we had done the least was probably the best day and it was proof that what we had been doing and the relationships that we had built to allow us to play cricket with them and have that sort of interaction. To sit down when they are doing visits and stay for a few seconds and say hello to their*

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*wife and just leave them to it. Small things, but it signifies big things (PO1).*

*Everyone's paper work has been done, they have been able to make their phone calls, their visits have been organised, they are not bored. They have been to work, their canteens are ok, they are not having any major issues (PO2).*

*Well, in a word it's calm. Everything is happening as it should and there are no significant issues (PO3).*

*When things are ticking over smoothly people know where they are meant to be, there's good order. There's good motivation as well, people are trying to do the right thing. Inmates and staff want to get from one end of the day to the other. You still have that level when you always have to be on your guard I suppose. You don't want to be manipulated unfairly, but when things are working well you can extend the boundaries a little bit (PO4).*

Control is a key requirement and a good day is one in which the subjects have a feeling of control. Control over prisoners is, to some extent, allowed by the prisoners themselves. This point was reinforced later in the interviews when the notion of over-restrictive environments was explored.

*Everything works like clockwork, it is not something you can measure that easily. It's a feeling. You have control. You understand what's going on behind the scenes and you have control over your immediate environment. So I suppose I am doing a good job if inmates are telling me, giving me intelligence, about what's happening. And, they will be doing what they are told and getting what they need and everything works (PO1).*

Two subjects indicated that achieving this level of functioning between prisoners and staff was necessary before attempting to work with prisoners to address offending behaviour.

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*You don't want to be manipulated unfairly, but when things are working well you can extend the boundaries a little bit...having more conversations with inmates, getting to know them a bit more in terms of relating to them and their actual issues and taking their motivation to the next level (PO4).*

Achieving good outcomes for prisoners was a recurrent theme in discussions about what the subjects find satisfying about working with prisoners. As will be discussed later, this may be a key difference between these prison officers and other prison staff.

*I look forward to seeing them go and not come back. When I was in the kitchen I looked forward to seeing them getting their certificates and getting jobs out of that. I used to love it when I was in the kitchen and the fellow from minimum was doing his apprenticeship and actually got a job and is really successful. I love seeing that sort of thing (PO2).*

*I wouldn't say that I was completely driven by a desire to improve somebody's life, and I do not pretend to be that person. But, I do see that as a good outcome of the job (PO3).*

*Providing for needs. And it doesn't mean that you are soft providing for needs. A lot of officers think that (PO3).*

*I am proud of the fact that I was able to sit through a shift at the O Wing of the Royal Hobart Hospital with an inmate. And the baby was born prematurely and having involvement with the family she was able to tell me some intel on some officers and other things like that. Basically being there and supporting her through that and being able to help her out with some relationship problems with her partner. And she had obviously been harassed by an inmate in here. Dealing with that sort of stuff. I was quite proud of that. They gave me a photo to keep of the baby (PO2).*

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Positive outcomes were about more than meeting a prisoner's immediate needs. They included working to achieve change. In the following quote the subject is determined to achieve a positive outcome from a confrontation with a prisoner.

*I had a confrontation with an inmate on the division front which was quite intimidating. And then after I had booked him I went to see him to explain to him why he was booked. He tried to argue the point and I finally understood that I wasn't going to enter into the argument and I explained to him to put himself in my shoes and he turned around and said, 'I got it, I'm sorry'...If you simply book the person you are shirking your responsibility. Perhaps some officers would let their nerves or fear get in the way, but you have got to follow it to the final point and you have got to show the inmate that you are not backing away from the challenge (PO3)*

All subjects seemed to be people who were prepared to work tenaciously to achieve positive outcomes. For the subjects this clearly meant doing things differently to other prison officers.

*So if an inmate says, 'We are not coming out, you so and so' people react in different ways. They won't panic, but they will ring the Chief and say they need the TRG<sup>2</sup> and that's like the next step. I can't believe that is the next step. There's got to be heaps of steps between those two things (PO4).*

*I am making huge inroads with (inmate's name) who's constantly been a belligerent and recalcitrant inmate. I think he's really doing well. I have got him doing three courses and he's enjoying them, he's turning up every time and his attitudes improved. Another one there, we recently found shivs<sup>3</sup> in his cell. He started off treating officers like a dog when he wants something. I sat him down and told him, 'look, you are not going to get anywhere when you talk to someone like that. I suggest you think about how you communicate and talk civilly and*

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<sup>2</sup> Tactical Response Group. A specialist team of armoured officers trained in use of force.

<sup>3</sup> Material, such as plastic, metal or wood fashioned into a blade.



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*see what happens.’ He turned around and said to me sometime later and said, ‘it’s amazing, you were quite right. I get twice as much now as I asked for.’ So I mean, little things happen all the time (PO3).*

A key element of successful prison work is the prevention and management of conflict and other harmful incidents. The subjects provided examples of how they managed incidents by responding firmly and using effective communication skills.

*PO2: I suppose the day when he decided he would hit his girlfriend in contact visits. And actually stopping him from hitting her and calming her down, getting her out and then dealing with him later.*

*Interviewer: Yes, what was it that you did?*

*PO2: I just basically gave him the riot act about how you treat females and that there were children in the contact visit room that didn’t deserve to see that sort of behaviour, and older people. I really made him feel bad.*

*I: So you sort of shamed him, and did he feel ashamed?*

*PO2: Oh yes, big time. Ashamed so much that he asked me to speak on his behalf at the Parole Board, later on down the track. I did realise that she had just told him that she was pregnant to another man, but still it was no excuse. There are other times, when I have had an inmate slash up in my division and just dealing with that, getting your hand over the blade and not going any further. That’s all about talking.*

*I: And what are you doing when you are talking? That must be incredibly hard.*

*PO2: You just come out with the right things to say.*

*I: Where do you find them?*

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*PO2: Well you have to not say the wrong thing, you can become paranoid about that.*

Observation, gut feeling, intuition and experience are also important attributes, as one subject illustrated in the following quote:

*I think the best intervention I had with an inmate was a young offender who was in Division 4 and he asked to go back to his cell early at about 11.00am. I took him back to his cell because I knew he was being bullied in the yard. I knew it wasn't quite procedure but I did that and said he could go back to his cell until lunchtime. So I took him back to his cell and then I was relieved for a drink about a minute later. 10 or 15 feet down the division front I grabbed an officer and said, 'let's go and look at him, I don't feel right about this.' I opened the door and he was just hanging himself as we opened the door. And so, you know, I believe I saved his life. So it was just something that wasn't quite right and I had to go back (PO3).*

Successful prison work was also about not resiling from dealing with difficult issues:

*I: So, you are about problem solving, ensuring people are heard?*

*PO1: Yeah, just bringing two or three people together...Two or three people in different divisions arguing with each other was growing into a situation where 20 or 30 people were having issues was becoming a collective thing. Pulling two or three people out and sitting them down and saying, 'sort it out'. Obviously making sure there were more officers than them, but encouraging conversation. They both went back to their collective camps and the issue was finished. Misunderstanding and innuendo were festering and every time it gets passed on there was another tentacle on this thing. So getting them together and saying did you say that, and he saying no he didn't, but someone said this. Saying right, do we have an agreement? Okay, back you go.*

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*Well, you have got to stand there and communicate in the face of a storm. Even if your legs are going to jelly you can't let that be seen. Inmates don't respect weakness. So, no matter who you are, you have got to stand in their face and be firm. An inmate will always back down, unless you are being a prick. An inmate will always step back eventually. You have just got to weather the storm and stay strong basically (PO3).*

Interestingly the subjects were very comfortable with the dual roles of the job. That is, they were able to balance the control/surveillance role and welfare role. They seemed to put this into practice by being clear about their role with prisoners and behaving accordingly.

*I might have an inmate who I get on really well with, but next week I might have to go in there and take him down or gas him in my role as TRG. Knowing I can do both and still have the respect of that inmate means a lot to me (PO2).*

While these officers have the capacity to be friendly with prisoners, they do not confuse friendliness with losing sight of their role.

*Yes, you can be friendly but not be their friends. I am there for a purpose and they are there for a reason, and if we can keep that in the background for the majority of the time that is good. But if it ever comes to the fore, we have to have an understanding about what part they play and what part we play (PO1).*

Subjects were asked to describe a prison officer they admire. Interestingly all subjects mentioned the same officer. Their descriptions provided rich insights into what an effective officer does.

*I admire him for his ability to do everything that I am trying to do, which is equality with an inmate, empathy, be approachable, put himself out, which means he stays back a half an hour in his own time to sort things out. If he says he's going to do something he does it. If there is a problem with doing it, he will go back to the inmate and say,*

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*'look, I can't do this. I don't have the authority, I don't have the clout'...There's no loose ends. He doesn't give an opportunity to an inmate to doubt anything he says. He's been like this the whole way through, so he's proved himself to inmates (PO1).*

*He has a great way with inmates and a great way with staff and he is not backward in coming forward. And he is a little bit like myself. He will do what he can to get the job done. ....he has got their respect. He doesn't panic, he knows what to do. He's calm.....I think he knows that you are not here to punish them. I think he's a bit like me you know. If there is one who really gets up your nose you never show it. You might not think very highly of them but there is that professional face and that's really important to keep that all the time (PO2).*

*Both of them have a great degree of empathy. Both of them are very firm about where the line stops. Both of them communicate clearly and respectfully to their subordinates and explain what is going on. Both of them, I believe, are willing to stand up in front of an inmate and say no and why and talk an inmate down. You know, calmly and clearly (PO3).*

*Inmates always know where they are going to stand with him...He is very up front with them and they respect him a great deal...when he comes to work he invests himself in the people he works with, whether it is an officer or an inmate. He will sit there and he will try and understand things and he will try to find a way through it...If he can't deliver it he will say. And, I think he has got the art of carrot and stick down pat. He will explain to an inmate, this is what can happen or this is what will happen and give them a choice (PO4).*

The officers that the subjects admired had similar attitudes towards prisoners that informed their own practice. This was clearly in stark contrast to other prison officers.

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*Well, I believe both of them view inmates as human beings. I know I have said human beings a number of times but there's a lot of officers who don't see them as human beings (PO3).*

#### **The values and attitudes underlying effective relationships**

Several interview questions sought to understand the attitudes that the subjects held about prisoners. This study assumes that attitudes towards prisoners will inform and direct prison officer behaviour. It is, therefore, interested in learning about the attitudes held by prison officers who are regarded as particularly effective. A further study could be undertaken to learn how prison officers develop attitudes about prisoners – what values and attitudes do they bring with them when they become prison officers and do they change? The information provided by the subjects confirmed that their attitudes influenced how they developed relationships with prisoners and their understanding of their role as prison officers.

The subjects all stated that they did not approach their work as people whose job is to punish prisoners. They all stressed this point and compared themselves with other officers who had a punitive attitude.

*I have always felt clear about what my role is, from day one. Although there are lots of barriers I have never felt like I am here to punish anybody. I am not one of these people who book inmates just like that. There's other ways and generally communicating and talking are the best way to get through to people. At the same time I do my job without being soft. I have just got that happy medium if you know what I mean (PO2).*

*It's not my role to punish them. It's not the department's role to punish them. The courts have punished them by sending them here. We accommodate and house them and hopefully put a little bit of shine on them before they go out and either reduce their level of offending or stop it (PO1).*

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Three officers also stressed that they did not judge prisoners for the offence(s) they had committed. They held the attitude that a prisoner's offence history should not affect their approach to working with them.

*I am not interested in what they are in here for. It's a lot easier to do the job without knowing it. Even though I know what most of them are in for. I mean, a lot of them (officers) won't pick up a baby in contact visits. I will hold the baby. I will ask them how their kids are going (PO2).*

These attitudes towards prisoners seem to be strongly related to notions of respect for prisoners as human beings, who have genuine needs and rights and also about the role of the prison officer. The subjects expressed their views about their desire to treat people respectfully.

*Being an inmate doesn't make them a lesser person. This person's an inmate. This person's a correctional officer. This person's a plumber... They still have the same feelings and family issues that anyone else has (PO1).*

Respect runs two ways and winning the respect of prisoners allows officers to work effectively.

*I put myself in the position of being their welfare connection with the outside. So you are talking to them, talking to their families. If you do that properly you get their trust and their respect (PO1).*

*In this environment respect really means an inmate understands how I tick and what I want and is willing to provide that without causing any trouble (PO3).*

*If you can get an inmate something they have a right to, that works really well and makes a big difference to your relationship. But what makes a huge difference to your relationship is if you can't get that thing and you return to them and explain why. Because then you get respect (PO3).*

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Respectful behaviour constitutes a key element of their practice because of their attitudes towards prisoners and because they see themselves as having a responsibility to model pro-social behaviour.

*I try to relate to them as a human being. I am very strong with them treating me how they believe they should be treated and I often tell them that they should consider me a mirror and they get back what they give. I believe that works really well. I demand a certain degree of respect and I believe they deserve and have the right to get that respect back (PO3).*

This includes providing space and opportunities for prisoners to manage their own behaviour and make decisions.

*I refuse to let them get away from responsibility and I explain to them what steps they can take to get worse or get better. I am willing to give them a little bit of slack if they say they I have emotional issues or I'm coming off drugs or whatever. Ok, well I will give you a little rope, let you hang yourself with it. I let them know I am giving them the rope to hang themselves. Not literally, you know what I mean. And then they can do as they wish and they choose which path to take (PO3).*

*I think, he thinks they should be their own person, whoever they are. He gives people the freedom to be who they are as long as they don't cock it up in gaol (PO4).*

Non-judgemental respect for prisoners was one of the key areas where they saw themselves holding different attitudes to some other officers. A couple of officers discussed how stereotyping prisoners can lead to loss of respectful attitudes. The following quotes illustrate this as well as how an effective officer can maintain discipline without losing respect for prisoners:

*If my brother were to come to gaol. As happens. I would hate my brother to be treated the way some inmates are treated. So I guess you want to personalise it. How I want to be respected is the respect I will*

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*give to others. I will speak to them in a cordial manner. But again your communication strategies alter as the need arises. This has been part of the dilemma of custodial work. One minute you may need to yell at somebody, 'Stop what you are doing now.' Or the next minute you might have someone going through a nervous breakdown. So you have got to have another face on, if you like. But in the midst of that there must be respect because the primary goal is the good order of the prison. And how is that achieved by calling them a dog or a maggot? (PO4)*

*It is the same as the people who have assaulted me in the past. How do I forgive them for that? Because when they come back, professionally I can't treat them as if they just hit me. So, the challenge is more about how you relate to yourself rather than how you relate to inmates (PO4)*

Empathy also arose as an important value to guide a person's work. This could be challenging in the face of difficult behaviour, however, the subjects were clear that to be effective one had to try to understand the prisoner and avoid stereotyping prisoners:

*Empathy in this job is really hard to keep hold of because you start to treat them like a pack. You have to put yourself in their shoes (PO3).*

*If you let personal feelings get involved, you lose consistency you lose your empathy, you lose professionalism (PO3).*

Integrity and honesty were values that all subjects stressed as important for successful relationships. The benefits of behaving honestly and with integrity, included winning the respect and trust of prisoners, a safer prison environment, being provided with intelligence, and being able to work with prisoners to improve their lives.

*If you get on with them and give them some trust, they will trust you and respect you (PO1).*



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*It means doing what you say, most importantly. It means being honest. In my opinion a lot of officers back away from telling the stark truth if it is not what inmates want to hear (PO3).*

*I think it depends upon integrity. So, I can talk to an inmate perhaps who's a bit antagonistic and if that inmate knows me and knows that I am the sort of person who follows through with an issue. So, I believe I can tell most inmates something they don't want to hear because they understand that I have looked at all angles and that's that and that's a fact. So, that is something that comes with a period of time so we can get to know each other (PO3).*

A key issue was the need to do what you say you are going to do. All subjects indicated that if you say you will do something you must do it, otherwise you will lose your relationship with the prisoner.

*You don't lie to them. And you don't promise to do something. To them if you tell them that you will do something they take it as a promise. So you don't tell them you are going to do something and not do it. You follow through (PO2).*

### What happens in effective relationships

Many questions sought to obtain information about what happens between staff and prisoners when relationships are effective. The answers provided information about what prison officers are doing when relationships are effective (and strongly connected to officer's attitudes to prisoners) and what it is possible to do when relationships are effective.

While this study sought only prison officer views about effective relationships it is clear that relationships must be mutual to be maintained effectively. One subject broadened this to include management, in an echo of Woolf's review of the UK prison riots of 1990 (Woolf and Tumin, 1990) in which he also separated prison staff into prison officers and management:

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*Relationships are at their best when everyone is keeping their word, being honest, and everyone's delivering. That's the three parties, management, staff and inmates (PO1).*

The subjects saw prisoners as also seeking effective relationships with staff. Effective relationships, in addition to making the day easier to get through, also provided prisoners with opportunities.

*They (inmates) want to develop and maintain relationships with staff. Because it is giving them the opportunity to break down the barriers. They are not all bastards, they are not all aggressive, whatever. If they can find someone who they can convince and prove to that they are not the person everyone thinks they are, they are up for it (PO1).*

An effective relationship also makes it easier to enforce rules when they are broken.

*The whole thing is about getting them ready for the outside. If you don't administer the rules then all they are doing is serving time in gaol and not getting ready to go out. They need to learn and understand that there's consequences if you break the rules (PO1).*

The subjects, when they described times when relationships had been at their best talked about how prisoners also contributed to rule enforcement, by providing intelligence and seeking rule enforcement by prison officers.

*You could always tell when something was going to go wrong in mainstream because someone would tell you... So you make sure you have those conversations. Ask them about their family, how things are and you keep those things going because you never know when something might happen and they might come to your aid (PO2).*

*If someone was booked and not moved the prisoners would quickly tell you about that. But they only had to do that once or twice because then those prisoners were moved. They must see the rules enforced to trust the process I guess (PO4).*

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At the same time, good relationships enabled a relaxation of the regime. The subjects were asked to describe what was happening when relationships were at their best. They talked about how prisoners and staff cooperated to get through the day and that this meant there could be a relaxation of rules. There was more room for conversation, and less tension when an officer walked into the yard or into a prisoner's cell. Often, it seems, good relationships allow officers and staff to get on with their jobs, without disturbing each other.

*They knew that if they let me get this, this and this done, the mail would be done, they could get to their cells and I could handle any other issues. But if they wanted to watch the cricket I would allow them to do it. But (a) the yard had to be clean and (b) the cells, so that compromise was there (PO2).*

*Inmates happily took on the responsibilities of that yard. So when a new person came in they would take that person under their wing and everything would just tick. It was like a yard full of yard wardsmen. They knew what they should be doing, when they should go to work, how it should all happen. But, in the midst of that we had control. It was not oppressive, but it was not too relaxed (PO4).*

The subjects were clearly exercising a significant degree of skill to manage the prison environment to achieve and maintain effective relationships. They all repeated the need to communicate openly and honestly, with empathy, firmness and by doing what they say they will do. The subjects are people who clearly have an interest in providing a good service to prisoners and assisting them to improve their situation. They did not generalise about or stereotype prisoners. Behaving towards prisoners as individuals invites respect, compliance and cooperation from the prisoner community.

*I think that if you like to treat people how they like to be treated, and I don't mean soft and fluffy, you don't have many issues (PO2).*

One subject stressed that it is important to not just do what you say you are going to do, but also demonstrate interest in the individual prisoner.

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*A few ask you to ring them up to tell them about court or whatever, because they have run out of money in their account. I will always come back and tell them I have rung, but also add, 'Shane did alright in the athletic carnival' or whatever so he knows that I rang and he got something from it. And it cost me nothing and it gives him something (PO1).*

Matching one's behaviour to relate better to the behaviour of individual prisoners appeared to be an important skill.

*They have different personalities and different moods and you have got to match up to what you are dealing with. And I guess, mainly if they are being soft you have to take a hard line, but if they are being aggressive or they have an issue, maybe you have got to take the soft line a bit. Ideally you would both settle down in the middle and have a good day. As it tips one way, you may have to tip the other. I don't think it works when they become arrogant and aggressive for you to try and match them with arrogance and aggressiveness – the whole thing goes up. And the same thing if they are particularly lazy or soft or whatever. I don't think coming down to their level will fix their problem either. That's when you have got to go up a little bit (PO1).*

One officer talked about how the capacity to have an open communication that had a sense of equality in its interactions was an indicator of an effective relationship.

*Open to me means that if I am having a day that is not a good day (it may be a problem at home or a hangover, whatever) and an inmate is prepared to come over to me and say, 'Christ you should see the way you spoke to Fred. I think you were a bit hard on him.' Being a prison officer doesn't mean I can say what I want and be how I want. And if I have a relationship with an inmate and he is prepared to say to me, 'Jim, I saw you yesterday talking to that bloke and I think you were over the top' I am happy with that relationship. It's just equality (PO1).*

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It is clear that individual relationships with prison officers are important for prisoners in a prison environment such as Risdon, which has such mixed attitudes towards prisoners. One subject described how prisoners would wait until she came on shift to put in their requests:

*Well basically you go into the yard and they would say, 'thank God you are on', and the next minute you would be handed all the paperwork because the previous officer is too lazy to do it, or didn't want to do it. So you did their request – it's not hard, it's part of your job. But people think that if you give into a request, or giving them an account balance, or not chasing up their canteen, or why they didn't get to PSU,<sup>4</sup> or why they didn't get to health, or something like that. It's not hard to do that – some officers don't like to do that (PO2).*

Further, when things go wrong, you are clearly safer if you have a positive relationship with prisoners, as described in this frightening example:

*And he came out of his cell bursting to get into the yard and he said, 'excuse me' and he had a shiv<sup>5</sup> in his hand. And I pressed my alarm and called a code yellow over the radio. He wanted to kill someone but not me (PO2).*

Effective relationships must be worked at continually and there were times when firmness and facing up to problems was necessary, rather than avoiding the issue because you wouldn't be on shift that night or the next day. In describing such situations, one subject saw himself as different from some other officers because he was concerned about more than that day or that shift.

*You need to be concerned about the ongoing management of that inmate a month down the track or two years down the track. So, it's better to have a little bit of pain now than poor management in the future (PO3).*

The subjects were also concerned that effective relationships were just the beginning, rather than an end in itself. Effective relationships provided a peaceful

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<sup>4</sup> Prisoner Support Unit

<sup>5</sup> An item of usually metal, wood or plastic that has been fashioned into a blade.

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environment that could provide an opportunity for the subjects to work with prisoners to improve their situation.

*I had a talk with him about that because he was obviously unhappy about the situation. So it is like a heart to heart really. I got him downstairs and said to him, 'You say you care for these people, but when you go around there things happen, and you scare them and you end up in custody. Can you see a pattern here?' And of course the answer is yes, but they just need it pointed out to them. I say, 'You say you love them but you are not showing it properly. I think you need to learn something about that.' I haven't seen him since. But, he really took it on board (PO4).*

#### **When the prison environment is too oppressive or too relaxed**

*They don't like bastardisation either. They just like it as it's meant to be (PO1).*

This study sought prison officers' views about what happens when the prison environment did not support effective relationships. It specifically asked the subjects to consider this within the context of too oppressive or too relaxed a control environment. Too oppressive meant a regime where there is a focus upon security and control that outweighs other considerations such as freedom of movement and association, or opportunities for rehabilitation. A too relaxed environment is one where the regime does not provide suitable security measures, controls or boundaries (in terms of procedures or officer behaviour) to maintain a safe and secure prison.

Woolf (1990) argued that a prison needed to achieve a balance between the elements of security, control and justice to run an effective prison. The Tasmania Prison Service has undergone a transition from an overcrowded and inadequate maximum security prison at Risdon, which had a very oppressive regime, to a more modern prison complex that has the opportunity to implement a less oppressive regime. There is much debate among prison officers about whether this is a good thing or not, or how one will know when it has achieved the right balance. Tom Clarke's 2005 study of Tasmanian prisoner officers' attitudes

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towards case management identified that a prison officers were concerned about balancing relational roles with security and control responsibilities. Some officers felt that even minimal work with inmates beyond maintaining control was “seen as over servicing someone who has put themselves in their current position” (Clarke 2005: 35). This study sought the views of subjects about the impact of overly oppressive or overly relaxed relationships in the hope that it would provide a barometer to help judge the right balance.

### Too oppressive

*It's like a tree isn't it? If you have a bit of flexibility you will stand up in a strong wind, but if you are rigid you will snap in half (PO1).*

The subjects expressed similar views about the disadvantages of a prison regime that is controlled to the extent that was the Risdon men's maximum prison prior to the transition to new facilities. In that prison, officers and prisoners were largely separated from each other. Prisoners were locked in their cells for much of the day and their movements were tightly controlled. Staff were expected to concentrate upon security aspects of the prison officer role. Case management, rehabilitation, education and recreation opportunities were largely absent.

A key outcome of such an environment was staff and prisoner unhappiness. This often led to tensions, which could lead to violence. The stress affected both prisoner and officer:

*I don't think people are meant to do that day after day after day. It's a hard facade to maintain. Stress levels go through the roof. Small issues become big issues. I don't think it would overly wear down the inmate. I think it is more likely to make officers targets (PO1).*

*Zero empathy. Officers get stressed and that often presents as aggression, which obviously has an escalation amongst the inmates. (There is) a breakdown in communication and an inability to properly service inmate needs. I think staff go home stressed and worn out and inmates leave prison hostile towards the system (PO3).*

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The hostility and adversarial relationships that developed in such an environment negatively affected officer's attitudes towards prisoners and towards their responsibilities.

*The environment changes you. When things go bad I will go bad if it's for too long and the care factor reduces (PO4).*

With time attitudes hardened and became more generalised or stereotyped. It was not possible provide a decent or professional service in such an environment.

*PO4: Well, I guess I would have to say it's just a lack of respect. People can look down on them, call them dogs, scum of the earth.*

*I: Yes, and what does that mean in terms of getting through the day?*

*PO4: Not caring. So officers with responsibilities do not carry them out. So what people had to do all this time was worry about our numbers.*

### Too relaxed

Officer-prisoner relationships that were too relaxed also presented risks and problems. The subjects tended to explore this issue in relation to individual officers rather than in terms of systems issues, compared with their responses to questions about too oppressive an environment. This is understandable given the old Risdon environment had an oppressive regime for several years. The subjects provided several examples of when relationships were too relaxed. Too relaxed an environment created security risks. Complacency among staff was a concern raised by more than one subject:

*Well, I think it is bad for security. It can cause a number of security issues. Officers could be not on the ball as it were. Officers should always be thinking you are living in a dangerous environment. You should not be scared but you should always be aware. And when*



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*officers stop being aware you have got a risk. And also of course, you know, they say 'loose lips sink ships'. So that as well (PO3).*

Too much complacency could lead to loss of a focus on security and staff-prisoner relationships that went beyond accepted role boundaries:

*I: So how do you know when it is too relaxed? What is it that is going on?*

*PO2: Officers are too complacent. There's lots of reasons, the guy who brings in gear under his hat will always have an easy day and it's not because he is doing his job, it's because he is doing favours for them.*

Being overly relaxed or familiar with prisoners could also affect one's relationship with other officers:

*We have officers who are a bit on the outer because they have extended too much, they have been too familiar with some of the crooks. They are still on the outer from other staff because of that (PO4).*

One subject stressed that an officer who had too relaxed or familiar a relationship with prisoners could place his or her colleagues at risk. He considered that a small relaxation in one's relationship by, for example, giving a prisoner a mint, could lead to more serious breaches of security:

*I think when officers start providing inappropriate information or being too, what's the word? It's hard without mentioning officers' names but I have seen officers telling inmates about operations that will happen in the future, or officers telling inmates about such and such officer's new car, or where an officer lives without thinking about it. All that is bad. And then you get the other angle when officers might be giving or taking things, for example, cigarettes. As far as I am concerned that sort of thing is the thin end of the wedge. I wouldn't even accept a match from an inmate. These are my matches and I cannot give them to an inmate. You know, you will always have*

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*an inmate who will say, 'can I have a mint boss?' and I say 'No I am not allowed to give them to you' and that's that (PO3).*

An element of this risk was that it could create instability with respect to behavioural norms and expectations, as described in the following comment:

*Someone who tries to keep an even keel can be undermined by someone who is too relaxed. Banter can go too far and can escalate into slurs and abuse that might stick. So someday an officer might be able to call someone a black so and so and be alright, but another officer might do it thinking that is ok and be stuffed. So we must be careful not to undermine one another, but we still need to have a level of trust and respect for other inmates (PO4).*

Another subject said that prisoners view overly relaxed officers as weak. Prisoners would target such officers in an effort to persuade them to breach security:

*Familiarity breeds contempt. If they are too soft it comes back to respect. They don't respect softness or weakness. They like it; if they were able to coerce an officer into trafficking some things in for them, they would view that officer with disdain for being so weak. They would take whatever they could off him but they don't view weakness (PO1).*

How other officers might develop more effective relationships with inmates

*It's always important to remember when we are dealing with inmates you need to be thinking on every level. You need to be alive and using every sense. You need to watch their body language, the modulation in their voice. You need to listen to what they are saying because you can pick where they are going. Whether they are going up or going down. Can you push them that particular way or push them that way? And that is something that we constantly learn (PO3).*

Several questions, and in particular question 15, sought the subjects' views about how other officers might develop effective relationships with prisoners. The main theme that came out of their answers was the importance of prisoners trusting the

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officer. This involved communicating honestly with prisoners and following up if the officer makes a promise to do something:

*Honesty. Just be honest... Don't say it if you are not going to do it, because you will probably have to wear it. You are a long time developing, establishing yourself, improving yourself, getting their trust. Once you have it, you will appreciate its worth. Get it and it's worth a fortune. If you don't have it you will struggle big time (PO1).*

One subject also emphasised the need to be demonstrate strength because this is an attribute respected by prisoners. Lack of strength or perceived weakness will lead to lack of respect from prisoners.

*Well, you have got to stand there and communicate in the face of a storm. Even if your legs are going to jelly you can't let that be seen. Inmates don't respect weakness. So, no matter who you are, you have got to stand in their face and be firm. An inmate will always back down, unless you are being a prick. An inmate will always step back eventually. You have just got to weather the storm and stay strong basically (PO3).*

A subject felt that it is also important to not show that one is personally upset or angry about a prisoner's behaviour.

*I rarely, only two or three times since I have been here, have I got personally upset or angry. The first time I let it show, but I have never let it show since (PO3).*

Two subjects stressed the need to learn how to remain inside the boundaries of the role. This meant following rules, 'doing your job' and treating prisoners consistently.

*You can't break rules and regulations so that's one of your parameters. Your next parameter is what can I do? I mean you have got to add it up. If John Cianchi wants me to go to the store to get a pair of socks, well John Cianchi has got to go through a process. You don't go out of your way if an inmate hasn't made an effort. So they*

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*fill in a piece of paper. 'I am quite happy to run around for you but you fill in a piece of paper first.' So, in my view you are breaking the boundary, as many people do, if you ran off to the store to get a pair of socks because an inmate who happened to be one of the tough guys asked you for a pair of socks and then you turn round five minutes later to one of the little guys and say, 'no, put in a request form.' Do you see what I mean? (PO3)*

## Discussion

This investigation sought to learn about effective staff-prisoner relationships. The four interviews provided rich information about what some of the Tasmania Prison Service's best prison officers think about how to develop and maintain effective relationships with prisoners. There are several aspects of the interviews that in a more comprehensive investigation would deserve a more thorough exploration, particularly the subjects' values and attitudes about prisoners. However, some common themes clearly emerged about the nature of successful staff-prisoner relationships and are presented below.

### What are effective staff-prisoner relationships?

Effective staff-prisoner relationships, from the perspective of the four prison officers who were interviewed, are relationships that enable staff to maintain a peaceful prison environment in which prisoners and staff are able to meet their needs within the obvious constraints of the prison environment. Effective relationships are characterised by mutual respect, trust, humanity, good communication and a clear understanding of the prison officer role.

### Why are effective relationships important?

Effective relationships allow staff and prisoners to get through the day without disruption; in other words, they enable the prison to function successfully and peacefully. Prisoners respond positively to those officers who are effective. The presence of ineffective officers impacts adversely upon the prison's capacity to operate properly. As one subject put it, "there are a lot of good officers out there who are like that and the prisoners will wait for that person to come on. Then you

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get the officers who, and I won't use the real words, tell them to bugger off" (PO3).

Effective communication leads to a safer prison environment. Prisoners are more compliant with staff directions. Security information will more likely be provided by prisoners to staff. It is also probable that when disruption occurs it may be more effectively dealt with if prisoners respect and trust staff.

The subjects also said that effective relationships must be achieved before they can work with prisoners to address their problems. This is not a remarkable finding in itself and one that seems obvious. But it does have serious implications for the Tasmania Prison Service in terms of policy and staff training. This is because the service has made a conscious decision to do more than simply warehouse prisoners. Keeping the peace and getting through the day is not enough to achieve the service's Integrated Offender Management Framework because the framework requires prison officers to work with prisoners to reduce their risk of reoffending. How the service might support officers to take this next step is discussed below in the section about staff training.

**What distinguishes prison officers who achieve effective relationships (the subjects) from less effective officers?**

What is it that distinguishes these officers from the prison officers they described who do not achieve effective relationships and who view prisoners as less than human? These officers are clearly highly skilled prison officers and the officers they describe negatively may have poorer skills in this area. The subjects are also conscientious and approach their work diligently; they seem to take pride in doing their job properly. However, I do not think this is the full answer. At one level I suspect the difference stems from the subjects' motivations to be prison officers. The subjects joined the prison service because they had an apparently genuine interest in working with people and seemed to be drawn to working with the kinds of people who become prisoners. It may be that the officers described as ineffective may have become prison officers for other reasons such as salary and employment conditions. Or, perhaps, their experiences have led to disillusionment and cynicism (see for example, Liebling and Maruna 2005).

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There are several other answers that can be found in the subjects' responses at interview. These officers hold a set of values and attitudes towards prisoners that promote the development of positive relationships. They view the prisoners as autonomous human beings who are entitled to humane treatment. The values the subjects expressed in their interviews included notions such as respect, honesty, empathy, compassion, humanity, fairness and a belief that prisoners can change their offending behaviours. They suggested that this is quite a different moral position to that taken by other officers.

The differences may also point to ongoing discourse within the prison service about the nature and purpose of imprisonment and the role of prison officers. I suspect that the subjects' views about the nature and purpose of imprisonment may differ from officers who do not achieve effective relationships, or at least relationships that support rehabilitation. The subjects stress that the removal of freedom (that is, imprisonment) is the punishment, and that they do not have a role to punish the prisoner by making judgements about how punitive the prison experience should be, that is, what the prisoner does or does not deserve. The subjects do not seem to judge the prisoner on the basis of their offences or term of imprisonment. They do not seem to form judgements about what different types of prisoner might deserve in terms of their prison experience. They seem to view imprisonment as an opportunity for the prisoner to change and are motivated to achieve positive outcomes for prisoners beyond basic security and welfare needs.

Finally, the subjects are able to reconcile and balance the dual security and welfare dimensions of the prison officer role. It may be that the less effective officers are unable to do this, perhaps because the two roles can seem contradictory. This is not unusual and is a challenge faced by other organisations working with mandated or involuntary clients.

#### **How do these findings compare with the literature?**

The officers interviewed in this study present views about working with prisoners that is consistent with Ben David's integrative mode of relationships (see Table 6, page 34). This is not to suggest that they remain uniformly in this mode, but their comments do suggest that this is their preferred mode of relating to prisoners. The words and descriptions provided by the officers also mirror the work of Liebling

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and Arnold in exploring relationship dimensions, for example the identification of trust and respect (see Table 7, page 35). Similarly it is possible to situate (without wishing to be overly simplistic) the officers' approach to the deployment of power, within Kaufmann's typology (Table 4, page 26). The officers seem to rely mostly on legitimacy, expert power and the respect that they have won from prisoners.

Where do they fit at the levels of the prison regime? The two regime models provided in Chapter 2 offer an either, or, approach. Prisons are more dynamic and complex than this and it is likely that in the day to day creation and recreation of order these highly skilled officers draw from both models. The officers have demonstrated their ability to work in the 'old' Tasmania Prison Service and the 'new' service, that is, they have a capacity to work in quite different regimes. While the new service has not fully implemented Di Iulio's responsibility model, the subjects' descriptions of efforts to improve the situation of prisoners and introduce case management under the old model suggest a capacity and willingness to operate within this approach. It is also possible to best place them within the negotiation model of achieving and maintaining prison order that is summarised by Liebling and Arnold in Table 3 (page 24). They seem to have an orientation towards ways of managing prisoners that is more relational and more participative than the control models.

Finally these officers seem to develop effective relationships because of their usefulness in achieving prison order. They are not an end in themselves and nor is simply being on-side with the inmate. What these officers do, and this also differentiates them from other officers, is recognise that there is a moral aspect to the formation and maintenance of relationships with prisoners, or as Liebling succinctly puts it, relationships are "instruments of control and instruments of justice" (Liebling 2000: 342). Liebling also reminds us of the need to distinguish between 'good' and 'right' relationships, "right relationships were respectful, vigilant and boundaried" and "the ability to deploy authority effectively (and not to abdicate in the interests of 'good relations') was a crucial skill for officers to possess, in the eyes of prisoners and staff" (Liebling 2000: 343).

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## Conclusion

This thesis has explored the nature of relationships between prison officers and prisoners through an examination of the literature and interviews with Tasmania Prison Service prison officers. The first question that it has addressed is what, from the perspective of the prison officer, is an effective relationship. Effective staff-inmate relationships enable staff to maintain a peaceful prison environment in which staff and inmates are able to meet their needs. Effective relationships are characterised by mutual respect, trust, humanity, good communication and a clear understanding of the correctional officer role. Effective relationships are important because they contribute to a safe prison environment and greater inmate compliance. They are also necessary before officers can work with inmates to address their problems and reasons why they are in prison.

The basis for effective relationships seems to lie in the prison officers' attitudes and beliefs about inmates. The prison officers interviewed in this study expressed a similar set of attitudes and beliefs and contrasted these with prison officers who hold different views about inmates. The officers view the inmates as autonomous human beings who have individual differences and who are entitled to humane treatment. They hold values about relationships that include notions such as respect, honesty, empathy, compassion, humanity, fairness and a belief that inmates can change. Importantly the officers are able to balance the security and welfare dimensions of their role.

The interviews also identified that within the Tasmania Prison Service there is ongoing discourse about the nature of inmates, about the purpose of imprisonment and about the role of the prison officer, despite the clear philosophical statements that provide the framework for the service's operating model. This is perhaps not surprising given the study was undertaken during a time of transition to a modern operational model, from a warehousing model that accommodated inmates in substandard infrastructure and that had a history of often violent conflict between correctional staff and inmates.

Prisons in which the regime is too oppressive are unhappy places for prison officers and prisoners. In Tasmania the normal response to conflict and prisoner



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misconduct is to tighten the prisoner management regime, but this study suggests that effective staff-inmate relationships provide a way of achieving prison order without further reducing prisoner freedom. Static security measures such as fences, separation and movement control are legitimate forms of prison control, but, as these prison officers demonstrate, the dynamic security benefits that are realised through productive relationships with prisoners will produce more richly textured and nuanced security outcomes, without sacrificing human rights and human potential. This study suggests, therefore, that examining and strengthening prison officer-prisoner relationships may be more effective in achieving the broader goals of the prison than implementing an oppressive management regime.

How might a prison service, such as the Tasmania Prison Service, respond to such a finding, and what would a prison service that places the prison officer-prisoner relationship as the central mechanism through which organisational and operational policies are understood and implemented look like? The first task is to accept findings such as these and make a commitment to privilege relationships as highly as other aspects of prison management. This requires an examination of one's intuitions and beliefs about prison management and the courage to reproduce the evidence base.

This thesis suggests that the achievement of effective relationships creates better correctional outcomes and a safer, more rewarding environment for prison officers (for example, the reduction in assault rates illustrated in Table 2, page 19). Unfortunately, when things go wrong we often tend to return to what we know and in Tasmania that means a return to an over-reliance on static security and an oppressive regime that sees humane treatment and rehabilitation as luxuries rather than integral to prison life. What we believe and how we think influences what we do. While prison staff retain beliefs about inmates that do not support the new operating model, they will not develop behaviours and strategies to support the kinds of relationships described by the officers interviewed in this study. A prison service that wishes to achieve the outcomes that this thesis suggests are possible, must engage in an organisation culture and leadership process that provides opportunities for staff to experiment and learn.

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A prison service that places the prison officer-prisoner relationship as the central mechanism through which organisational and operational policies are understood and implemented would respond to prisoner misconduct and disorder by first examining the status of prison officer-prisoner relationships and monitoring efforts to improve their effectiveness. This doesn't mean that staff or inmate safety and discipline should be compromised, but it does invite inmates to play a greater role in the day to day management of their environment.

We must endeavour to broaden the prison's imaginative circumference to incorporate a rich correctional landscape that extends beyond warehousing criminals, to encompass a role that is concerned with the human rights and dignity of the prisoner, a belief in their capacity to grow and a desire to play an active part in this process.

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