9

Prison Subculture and Prison Gang Influence

Learning Objectives

1. Compare importation theory with exportation theory.
2. Discuss the modern inmate subculture standards.
3. Evaluate the impact of prison culture on corrections staff.
4. Describe the process of prisonization.
5. Identify various aspects of guard subculture, including the unique subculture of female correctional officers.
6. Discuss the impact that prison gangs have had on prisons, including the traditional prison subculture.
7. Explain what prison systems do to control gang problems that occur in their facilities.
The Gang Is My Family; the Gang Is My Purpose

I will stand by my brother

My brother will come before all others

My life is forfeit should I fail my brother

I will honor my brother in peace as in war.

Aryan Brotherhood Oath

James Harris, known as “Cornfed” to his family and friends, was a member of “The Brand” (a term for the Aryan Brotherhood, or AB). He was hanging on the recreation yard with “Blinky,” another member of The Brand. Blinky was family to Cornfed; they had known each other for years, both inside and outside of prison.

“So if you keep your nose clean, you get on parole, you’re going on a mission, right?” Cornfed asked Blinky.

Blinky nodded. “Yep, that’s right. In fact, I am taking the mission, and then I’ll be free to conduct rahowa all that I want. I know I’ll end up back here, but at least I’ll have paid my debt and taken a couple of them with me.”

Cornfed looked at the ground and thought about what Blinky had said. Blinky had been “down” (doing time) for many years, and he had benefitted from the AB substantially throughout those years. His “mission” would be to operate a meth lab for the AB, as he was known to be a very good “cook”—someone skilled in manufacturing methamphetamine.

Cornfed also understood why Blinky would be going on rahowa, the term in the AB for “racial holy war,” which would ultimately entail some form of hate crime against African Americans. He knew that Blinky would be highly motivated to engage in rahowa because many of the AB members would be expecting it due to his past experiences.

Initially, Blinky had stayed out of the gang life, but then he had been sexually assaulted by two black men while working in the laundry area of the prison. The men had told him from that point on he would be their “punk,” a term for someone who has been “turned out” and given the identity of a woman in prison. Blinky fought during the assault, but they had caught him off guard and he was unable to defend himself. The second time they attempted to rape him, he was ready and was able to hold them off until “Big John” unexpectedly entered the shop. Big John did not work in the laundry but had been sent to gather some towels to clean up blood from another assault that had occurred just 10 minutes prior.

Big John saw what was going on and said, “My only regret today has been that I wasn’t involved in what La Eme just finished. . . . I hate being the one who has to do the cleanup for somebody else’s handiwork.” He reached behind his back with one hand and pulled out an 8-inch blade. “I want you to meet my friend here, Aryan Express. Like American Express, I never leave home without it.”

Big John carved both of the men up, holding one in the air by the throat while he repeatedly gouged the other in the abdomen. He then reached around the man he was holding and buried the knife into the small of his back. With a satisfied grunt, Big John threw
the man down on the ground. Then he glared at Blinky. “You better not say nuthin’, you understand?”

Blinky nodded vigorously as Big John stepped over to the first man and slashed the man’s throat. Then he moved to the other man and kicked him repeatedly in the head until his face was a bloody, unrecognizable mass of pulpy flesh.

When he had finished, Big John turned back to Blinky. “You now owe the AB, unless of course you like being a punk, in which case you can be the AB’s punk. They’re gonna be locking me up in just a bit, but my brothers will come for you. This completes my rahowa for now.” Kneeling, he wiped the blade, Aryan Express, across the shirt of the first man he killed and hid it under a spare mattress in the shop.

“When they come to talk with you about joining the family, let them know where I put the metal, okay?”

Blinky agreed. Leaning against one of the laundry tables, Big John pulled out a cigarette and handed another to Blinky. They smoked together in silence until the guards came.

Now Comfed looked at Blinky and said, “My brother, when you’re out there, just know that I’m proud of you and I’ll honor your name here on the inside.”

Blinky smiled and gazed through the chain-link fence at the world beyond. Soon he would be on the outside with his family, the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas.

Introduction

This chapter examines a very unique aspect of the world of corrections. Students will learn that within the institutional environment, a commonality of experiences arises between those who are involved—both inmates and staff. Many people may not be aware that in fact the mind-set and experiences of inmates often affect the mind-set of security personnel who work with those inmates. In essence, there is an exchange of beliefs and perspectives that produces a fusion between the two groups. This creates a singular subculture that is the product of both inmate norms being brought in from the outside and norms being taken from the prison to the outside community.

It is important for students to understand that prison staff are not immune to the effects of the profound social learning that occurs in prison, and, over time, as they become more enmeshed in the prison social setting, they begin to internalize many of the beliefs and norms held by the prison subculture. While this may seem to be counterproductive and/or even backward from what one might wish within the prison environment, this is an inevitable process as prison staff find themselves interacting with the street mentality on a day-to-day basis. In actuality, this has a maturing effect on correctional workers, as they begin to see a world that is not necessarily black and white but instead has many shades of gray. When staff get to know inmates on a personal level, issues become more complicated than being simple “good guy-bad guy” situations. The nuances and differences between different offenders tend to complicate what initially might seem like obvious, easy decisions.

Because correctional staff interact with offenders on a daily basis, a sense of understanding develops both among correctional staff and between staff and the inmate population. Inmates come to expect certain reactions from correctional staff, and staff come to expect certain reactions from inmates. Informal rules of conduct exist where loyalty to one’s own group must be maintained, but individual differences in personality among security staff and inmates will affect the level of respect that an officer will get from the inmate population, or, for inmates, the amount of respect that they gain from others serving time. Correctional staff learn which inmates have influence, power, or control over others, and this may affect the dynamics of interaction.
Further still, some inmates may simply wish to do their time, whereas others produce constant problems; to expect security staff to maintain the same reaction to both types of inmates is unrealistic.

The dynamics involved in inmate-inmate, inmate-staff, and staff-staff interactions create circumstances that do not easily fall within the guidelines of prison regulations. In order to maintain control of an inmate population that greatly outnumbers the correctional staff, many security officers will learn the personalities of inmates and will become familiar with the level of respect that they receive from other offenders. Likewise, and even more often, inmates watch and observe officers who work the cell block, the dormitory, or other areas where inmates congregate. They will develop impressions of the officer, and this will determine how they react to him or her. The officer is essentially labeled by the inmate population, over time, as one who deserves respect or one who deserves contempt. In some cases, officers may be identified as being too passive or “weak” in their ability to enforce the rules. In such cases, they are likely to be conned, duped, or exploited by streetwise convicts.

The various officer-inmate interactions impact the daily experiences of those involved. Understanding how a myriad of nuances affect these interactions is critical to understanding how and why prisons operate as they do. In prisons that have little technology, few cameras, and shortages of staff, the gray areas that can emerge in the inmate-staff interactional process can lead to a number of ethical and legal conundrums. It is with this in mind that we now turn our attention to factors that create and complicate the social landscape of American prisons.

Theories of Prison Subculture

Importation Theory

The key tenet of importation theory is that the subculture within prisons is brought in from outside the walls by offenders who have developed their beliefs and norms while on the streets. In other words, the prison subculture is reflective of the offender subculture on the streets. Thus, behaviors respected behind the walls of a prison are similar to behaviors respected among the criminal population outside of the prison. There is some research that does support this notion (Wright, 1994). Most correctional officers and inmates know that the background of an offender (or of a correctional officer) has a strong impact on how that person behaves, both inside and outside of a prison; this simply makes good intuitive sense.

There are two important opposing points to consider regarding importation theory. First, the socialization process outside of prison has usually occurred for a much longer period of time for many offenders and is, therefore, likely to be a bit more entrenched. Second and conversely, the prison environment is intense and traumatic and is capable of leaving a very deep and lasting influence upon a person in a relatively short period of time. While this second point may be true, most inmates in prison facilities have a history of offending and will tend to have numerous prior offenses, some of which may be unknown to the correctional system. This means that inmates will likely have led a lifestyle of dysfunction that is counter to what the broader culture may support. Thus, these individuals come to the prison with years of street experience and bring their criminogenic view of the world to the prison.

It has been concluded by some scholars (Bernard, McCleary, & Wright, 1999; Wright, 1994) that though correctional institutions may seem closed off from society, their boundaries are psychologically permeable. In other words, when someone is locked up, they still are able to receive cultural messages and influences from outside the walls of the prison. Television, radio, and mail all mitigate the immersion experience in prison. Visitation schedules, work opportunities outside of the prison, and other types of programming also alleviate the impact of the prison environment. Indeed, according to Bernard et al. (1999), “Prison walls, fences, and towers still prevent the inside world from getting outside, [but] they can no longer prevent the outside world—with its diverse attractions, diversions, and problems—from getting inside” (p. 164). This statement serves as a layperson explanation of importation theory that is both accurate and practical.
Indigenous Prison Culture and Exportation Theory

In contrast to the tenets of importation theory is the notion that prison subculture is largely the product of socialization that occurs inside prison. It was the work of Gresham Sykes (1958) that first introduced this idea in a clear and thorough manner. His theory has been referred to as either the deprivation theory of prisonization or the indigenous model of prison culture. Sykes (1958) referred to the pains of imprisonment as the rationale for why and how prison culture develops in the manner that it does. The **pains of imprisonment** is a term that refers to the various inconveniences and deprivations that occur as a result of incarceration. According to Sykes, the pains of imprisonment tended to center on five general areas of deprivation, and it was due to these deprivations that the prison subculture developed, largely as a means of adapting to the circumstances within the prison. Sykes listed the following five issues as being particularly challenging to men and women who do time:

1. The loss of liberty.
2. The loss of goods and services readily available in society.
3. The loss of heterosexual relationships, both sexual and nonsexual.
4. The loss of autonomy.
5. The loss of personal security.

Inmates within the prison environment essentially create value systems and engage in behaviors that are designed to ease the pains of deprivation associated with these five areas. Research has examined the effects of prison upon inmates who are forced to cope with the incarceration existence.

For instance, Johnson and Dobrzanska (2005) studied inmates who were serving lengthy sentences. They found that incarceration was a painful but constructive experience for those inmates who coped maturely with prison life. This was particularly true for inmates who were serving life sentences (defined to include offenders serving prison terms of 25 years or more without the benefit of parole). As a general rule, lifers came to see prison as their home and made the most of the limited resources available there; they established daily routines that allowed them to find meaning and purpose in their prison lives—lives that might otherwise seem empty and pointless. The work of Johnson and Dobrzanska points toward the notion that humans can be highly adaptable regardless of the environment.

Many of the mannerisms and behaviors observed among street offenders have their origins within the prison environment. Indeed, certain forms of rhyming, rap, tattoos, and dress have prison origins. For example, the practice known as “sagging” when adolescent boys allow their pants to sag, exposing their underwear, originates from jail and prison policies denying inmates the use of belts (because they could be used as a weapon or means to commit suicide). This practice is thought to have been exported to the streets during the 1990s as a statement of African American solidarity as well as a way to offend white society.

Another example might be the notion of “blood in—blood out,” which is the idea that in order for inmates to be accepted within a prison gang, they must draw blood from an enemy of the gang. Once in the gang, they may only leave if they draw blood of the enemy sufficient to meet the demands of the gang leadership or by forfeiting their own blood (their life). This same phrase is heard among street gangs, including juvenile street gangs, reflecting the fact that these offenders mimic the traditions of veteran offenders who have served time in prison. Consider also certain attire that has been popular off and on during the past decade, such as when Rhino boots became popular footwear, not due to their stylishness or functionality but because they were standard issue for working inmates in many state prison systems.

The Inmate Subculture of Modern Times

In all likelihood, the inmate subculture is a product of both importation and indigenous factors. Given the complicated facets of human behavior and the fact that inmates tend
to cycle in and out of the prison system, this just seems logical. In fact, attempting to separate one from the other is more of an academic argument than a practical one. The work of Hochstellar and DeLisa (2005) represents an academic attempt to negotiate between these two factors. These researchers used a sophisticated statistical technique known as structural equation modeling to analyze the effects of importation and indigenous deprivation theories. They found evidence supporting both perspectives but found that the main factor that determined which perspective was most accountable for inmates’ adaptation to prison subculture was their level of participation in the inmate economy (Hochstellar & DeLisa, 2005).

This is an important finding because it corroborates practical elements just as much as it navigates between academic arguments regarding subculture development. The prison economy is one of the key measures of influence that an inmate (and perhaps even some officers) may have within the institution. The more resources an inmate has, the wealthier he or she will be in the eyes of the inmate population. Oftentimes, those inmates who are capable of obtaining such wealth are either stronger, more cunning, or simply smarter (usually through training and literacy, such as with jailhouse lawyers) than most other members of the inmate population. Thus, these inmates are likely to be more adept at negotiating the prison economy, and they are likely to have more influence within the prison subculture. They are also more likely to be successfully adapted to the prison culture (the influence of indigenous prison cultural factors) while being able to procure or solicit external resources (this being a source of exportation outside the prison walls). In short, those who master the economy often have effective and/or powerful contacts both inside and outside of the prison. This is consistent with the findings of Hochstellar and DeLisa (2005).

**The Convict Code and Snitching**

The prison subculture has numerous characteristics that are often portrayed in film, in academic sources, and among practitioners (see Focus Topic 9.1). Chief among these characteristics is the somewhat fluid code of conduct among inmates. This is sometimes referred to as the **convict code**, and it is a set of standards in behavior attributed to the true convict—the title of convict being one of respect given to inmates who have proven themselves worthy of that title. Among academic sources, this inmate code emphasizes oppositional values to conventional society in general and to prison authorities in particular. The most serious infraction against this code of conduct is for an inmate to cooperate with the officials as a snitch. A **snitch** is the label given to an inmate who reveals the activity of another inmate to authorities, usually in exchange for some type of benefit within the prison or legal system. For example, an inmate might be willing to tell prison officials about illicit drug smuggling being conducted by other inmates in the prison in exchange for more favorable parole conditions, transfer to a different prison, or some other type of benefit.

Among all inmates, it is the snitch who is considered the lowest of the low. In traditional “old school” subcultures (i.e., those of the 1940s through the 1970s), snitches were rare and were afforded no respect. Their existence was precarious within the prison system, particularly because protection afforded to snitches was not optimal. During riot situations and other times when chaos reigned, there are recorded incidents where inmates specifically targeted areas where snitches were housed and protected from the general population. In these cases, snitches were singled out and subjected to severely gruesome torture and were usually killed. Perhaps the most notorious of these incidents occurred at the New Mexico Penitentiary in Santa Fe. This prison riot occurred in 1980 and resulted in areas of the prison being controlled by inmates. These inmates...
eventually broke into Cell Block 4, which housed known snitches in the prison. The media-reported details of how the snitch-informers were tortured and killed shocked the public conscience.

One thing should be noted about snitches in the modern world of corrections; they are much more frequently encountered nowadays. Though there is still a supposed code against snitching, during the 1990s, with the emergence of the War on Drugs, more and more inmates consented to being informants for law enforcement as a means of securing better sentencing deals. Further, the new breed of inmate that was observed during this time did not reflect behavior that was “honor bound” like that of the older inmates in prison. Though there continued to be verbal opposition to inmate snitching, wardens and other prison administrators noted the sharp increase in informants within their institutions during this period. It would appear that among modern-day inmates, the willingness to do one’s time with honor is a lower priority. Many veteran prison officials and older inmates (particularly inmates who are serving life sentences) contend that this is reflective of modern society where people are not as accustomed to being inconvenienced—a fast-food and instant coffee generation.

Sex Offenders and Punks

Sex offenders, particularly child molesters, are also afforded no respect in prison. In the early to mid-1900s, child molesters typically had a high mortality rate in prison and were often abused by other inmates. However, these types of offenses are becoming more prevalent and are more often detected by the justice system. Thus, there are higher proportions of these types of offenders in most prison systems. Further still, many prison systems have developed therapeutic programs that separate these offenders from the general population. However, this is not always the case.

Of those inmates who are sex offenders, many are singled out by prison gangs to be “turned out.” Turning out occurs when an inmate is forced to become a punk for the prison gang. The term punk is common prison vernacular for an inmate who engages in homosexual activity; it is a derogatory term that implies that the inmate is feminine, weak, and subservient to masculine inmates. In other words, the punk is considered a woman in prison and is often forced to engage in sexual acts for the pleasure of one or more inmates. Sex offenders in prison are disproportionately represented within this prison population and are considered to be at high risk for this type of victimization.

The Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003

The Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA; Public Law 108-79) requires the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to carry out a comprehensive statistical review and analysis of the incidence and effects of prison rape for each calendar year. The review must include, but is not limited to, the identification of the common characteristics of both victims and perpetrators of prison rape and prisons and prison systems with a high incidence of prison rape. In accomplishing this, the PREA requires the review adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Be based on a random sample, or other scientifically appropriate sample, of not less than 10% of all federal, state, and county prisons, and a representative sample of municipal prisons. The sample must include at least one prison from each state.
2. Use surveys and other statistical studies of current and former inmates from a representative sample of federal, state, county, and municipal prisons and ensure the confidentiality of each survey participant.
3. Provide a list of institutions in the sample, separated into each category and ranked according to the incidence of prison rape in each institution, and provide a list of any prisons in the sample that did not cooperate with the survey.

We will cover the impact of the PREA later in Chapter 11, when discussing female offenders. However, in male prisons, the negative aspects of being a punk in prison means that homosexual, transgender, or even just more effeminate males are at great risk for being assaulted behind bars. With this concern in mind, the BJS issued additional tabulations for its PREA work titled Supplemental Tables: Prevalence of Sexual

**Punk**: A derogatory term for an inmate who engages in homosexual activity; implies that the inmate is feminine, weak, and subservient to masculine inmates.
Focus From the Inside With Jonathan Hilbun, Inmate With Richwood Correctional Center

PHOTO 9.2: Jonathan W. Hilbun is an inmate at Richwood Correctional Center who is a dorm mentor in the Successful Treatment and Recovery (STAR) program. He stands here in front of a bookshelf that is part of the inmate library for the STAR program.

Hyenas are inmates who only prey on the weak inmates, and they will back off if the weaker inmate strikes back. But if the weak one does not fend for himself, then the hyenas will devour him.

An interesting point regarding inmate behavior, particularly hyena behavior, has to do with the inmates' interactions with security. In many cases, hyenas will have no respect for authority but, at the same time, be hesitant to directly challenge authority. Rather, they will tend to use subversive or indirect means of ridiculing the officer. For instance, when the "freeman" (another term for a prison guard) comes on the dorm to count, an inmate may holler something across the dorm that is crude and crass. It is at this point that the officer must make a stand quickly. If he or she does not, then the other hyenas will join along and will taunt and tease the officer to see how much they can get away with. This can actually get pretty bad, as it may even set up an ongoing officer-inmate dynamic that can go on for the remainder of the officer's employment at the facility, if such misbehavior is left unchecked enough times.

In response, the officer will usually react by applying some type of punitive measures to inmates on the dorm. For instance, he will usually restrict the TV privileges and secure the phone lines as well, if the facility allows inmates to make phone calls. Likewise, he may decide to do a "special count" that requires all inmates to sit or lie in their own rack, prohibiting them from getting up and walking about the dorm. It can get pretty frustrating, over time, to sit in the bed for prolonged periods of time, and the officer knows this. It is doubly frustrating for those inmates who did not make the comment and who do not really respect the cowardly actions of the hyena.

Usually, one of the inmates will finally tell the officer the identity of the hyena who made the unruly comments, and, in many cases, this results in a type of understood bond of respect between the officer and the inmate. Though there is nothing necessarily spoken between the two, the officer knows that the inmate is going against the common wisdom of the prison subculture in doing this, and, at the same time, the inmate knows that the officer cannot get compliance until he or she breaks through the veneer of the hyenas who have openly and publicly challenged his or her authority and mocked the officer for all to see. It is a delicate interplay, in this middle-ground area, between officer and inmate, where both groups must learn to coexist with one another within a set of informal and formal parameters.

Naturally, it takes quite a bit of courage to tell on another inmate. Inmates usually will view the act of disclosing the identity of the person who commits an infraction as an act of snitching. This is usually not respected, but, in cases where a hyena has acted in a cowardly manner and where the rest of the dorm is made to pay for his action, respect is lost for the hyena, especially if he does not step forward and take his charge, so to speak.

In addition, there is one other aspect that can make this approach actually respectable in the eyes of other inmates. This is when the informing inmate talks to the officer on behalf of the dorm and makes it clear that he cannot and will not take any incentives or benefits for the information. If he also makes it clear that he is not trying to get too cozy with the officer but, instead, is trying to simply live under the conditions of detente that exist within the prison subculture between inmates and officers, this will be considered acceptable. This is especially true if other inmates know, in advance, that this inmate will likely inform on behalf of the dorm.

At this point, the hyena is obviously crossed out among others on the dorm and is held in even lower regard by other inmates as a coward who sidesteps his charge and allows others to "pay his lick," so to speak. In some ways, this process of maintaining some semblance of decency and tangible respect for institutional authority is a means of redemption for the inmate and the dorm. In this regard, it is viewed that these men are capable of reform on at least a base level, contrasting with the typical saying that "there is no honor among thieves." In essence, even the inmate subculture has standards that the hyena has failed to maintain. Thus, the lack of respect goes to the hyena, and, so long as the officer conducts his job in a firm but fair manner, the officer is afforded his due respect.

This information was drawn from an interview with Jonathan Hilbun. It is worth mentioning that Mr. Hilbun has been incarcerated for 18 and a half years in a variety of institutions, including Angola and Richwood Correctional Center.

Victimization Among Transgender Adult Inmates. This work found the following:

1. An estimated 35% of transgender inmates held in prisons and 34% held in local jails reported experiencing one or more incidents of sexual victimization by another inmate or facility staff in the past 12 months or since admission, if less than 12 months.

2. About a quarter of transgender inmates in prisons (24%) and jails (23%) reported an incident involving another inmate. Nearly three-quarters (74%) said the incidents involved oral or anal penetration, or other nonconsensual sexual acts.

3. When asked about the experiences surrounding their victimization by other inmates, 72% said they experienced force or threat of force and 29% said they were physically injured.

4. Transgender inmates reported high levels of staff sexual misconduct in prisons (17%) and jails (23%). Most transgender inmates who had been victimized reported that the staff sexual misconduct was unwilling on their part (75%) and that they experienced force or threat of force (51%) or were pressured by staff (66%) to engage in the sexual activity.

5. Among those victimized by staff, more than 40% of transgender inmates in prison and jails said they had been physically injured by the staff perpetrator.

Two issues with this data are worth noting. First, the majority of the transgendered population within the custodial environment is male-to-female; the female-to-male transgendered population is miniscule within the correctional population around the nation. Second, the notion of being effeminate, gay, or transgendered has severe and profound negative consequences within the male prison subculture, but this is not so much the case within female facilities. Thus, this is an important area of concern within male prisons, and the results from recent PREA data confirm this.

The Strong, Silent Type and the Use of Slang

Also common within the prison subculture is the belief that inmates should maintain themselves as men who show no emotion and are free from fear, depression, and anxiety. Basically, the “strong, silent type” is the ideal. Today’s young offenders may attempt to maintain this exterior image, but the effects of modern society (the prevalence of mental health services, reliance on medications, technological advances, and a fast-changing society) often preclude this stereotypical version of the offender because a reliance on those services and medications is viewed as being “weak” in many prisons. Inmates are also expected to refrain from arguments with other inmates. The general idea is that inmates must do their own time without becoming involved in the personal business of others. Getting involved in other people’s business is equated to being a gossip, and this is considered more of a feminine behavior. Thus, to be manly in prison, inmates must mind their own business.

Inmates who stick to these two rules of behavior are generally seen as in control, fairly wise to the prison world, and not easily manipulated. In some cases, these inmates may be referred to as a true convict rather than an inmate. In the modern prison culture, the title of convict refers to an inmate who is respected for being self-reliant and independent of other inmates or the system. Convicts are considered mature and strong, not weak and dependent on others for their survival. They are considered superior to the typical inmate, and, while not necessarily leaders of other inmates (indeed, most do not care to lead others but simply wish to do their own time), they are often respected by younger inmates becoming acculturated into the prison environment.
PRACTITIONER’S PERSPECTIVE

“For my generation, law enforcement was an honored field.”

Interested in a career in corrections or criminal justice? Visit the IEB to watch Patricia Wooden video on her career as a division chief.

Within prison systems, there evolves a peculiar language of slang that often seems out of place in broader society. This slang has some consistency throughout the United States but does vary in specific terminology from state to state. The language often used by inmates, including slang, is affected by their racial and gang lineage. For instance, members of the Crips or the Bloods have certain terms that usually are only used by their group, often as a means of identifying or denigrating the other group. Likewise, Latino gang members in the Mexican Mafia and/or the Texas Syndicate tend to have their own vernacular, much of which is either Spanish phraseology or some type of unique slang. Terms like punk, shank (a knife), bug juice (referring to psychotropic medications), and green light (referring to clearance to assault another inmate) are commonly used in most prison systems.

Maintaining Respect

In nearly every prison around the United States, one concept is paramount among inmates: respect. This is perhaps the most important key to understanding the inmate subculture. Prison status revolves around the amount of respect given to an inmate and/or signs of disrespect exhibited toward an inmate. Respect is a term that represents an inmate’s sense of masculine standing within the prison culture; if inmates are disrespected, they are honor-bound to avenge that disrespect or be considered weak by other inmates. If an inmate fails to preserve his sense of respect, this will lead to the questioning of his manhood and his ability to handle prison and will lead others to think that he is perhaps weak. The fixation on respect (and fixation is an appropriate description in some prisons) is particularly pronounced among African American gang members in prison. This is also glorified in much of the contemporary gangsta music that emerged in the 1990s and continues today. Because inmates have little else, their sense of self-respect and the respect that they are able to garner from others is paramount to their own welfare and survival.

In addition, it is usually considered a sign of weakness to take help or assistance from another inmate, at least when one is new to the prison environment. Indeed, inmates will be tested when new to the prison world; they may be offered some type of item (e.g., coffee or cigarettes) or provided some type of service (e.g., getting access to the kitchen), but this is never for free or due to goodwill. Rather, inmate subculture dictates that a debt is thus owed by the newbie (a term for inmates who are new to a prison). New inmates may be required or coerced to do “favors” for the inmate who provided them with the good or service. For example, they might be asked to be a “mule” for the inmate or the inmate’s gang. A mule is a person who smuggles drugs into prison for another inmate, often using his or her own body cavities to hide the drugs from prison authorities. In other cases, the inmate may be forced to become a punk for that inmate or for an entire prison gang.

The Con and the Never-Ending Hustle

Among inmates, there is the constant push and pull between the need to “con” others and, at the same time, avoid being conned. Naturally, this constant and contradictory

Respect: An inmate’s sense of standing within the prison culture.
Mule: A person who smuggles drugs into prison for another inmate.
According to labeling theory, group reactions are the key determinant to events that become considered antisocial in nature. Labeling theory essentially asks why some acts are labeled deviant when others are not (Akers, 2000). This theory asserts that social group reactions serve to make certain behaviors deviant, regardless of the individual context in which they occur (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 1998). This begs the question as to who creates the label associated with deviant behavior. The answer to this inquiry lies with those who hold the power within a given social structure.

With the prison population being drawn disproportionately from the less affluent members of society, it should come as no surprise that prison norms may, in various subtle ways, exemplify power status norms held by the lower classes (Miller, 1958; Tucker, 1981). The members of the “prison society” are even less socially powerful than their socioeconomic counterparts who are not incarcerated. In the prison setting, physical prowess and coercion become the primary method of achieving power. Thus, aside from some rare exceptions, such as successful writ writers or inmates who have affluent family members, those who are physically powerful tend to also be the most socially powerful within the prison. Within the male inmate subculture, the expression of physical prowess as power is frequently paired with roles of masculinity, which, in turn, reinforces the subculture of physical prowess within the prison setting (Messerschmidt, 1999).

It is through both the means and the threat of violence that dominance and control are achieved, with the victim ultimately being given the label of “punk.” This is true even in cases that prison officials may term “voluntary” or “consensual” sex. This process, referred to as being “turned out,” or “punked out,” effectively redefines and labels the victim’s role in prison as that of a punk, or subjugated homosexual (Tucker, 1981). Thus, the homosexual orientation and label placed upon the deviant is not a choice or personal preference; it is forced upon him by more powerful members of the inmate subculture.

Labeling Theory as a Paradigm for Prison Rape Etiology

According to Lemert (1999), the deviant is a product of gradual, unconscious processes that are part of socialization, especially subcultural socialization. Lemert also asserted that the personality change that occurs from accepting and internalizing a deviant label is not always gradual but can be sudden. As Lemert (1999) states, “It must be taken into consideration that traumatic experiences often speed up changes in personality” (p. 386). This is especially true for inmates who are victims of prison gang rape. For these inmate-victims, entering into a sexual relationship with one man in return for protection can be an adaptive coping mechanism for survival within the prison subculture.

Lemert (1999) further states that “when a person begins to employ his deviant behavior or role . . . as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him, his deviance is secondary” (p. 388). In the previous example, the initial gang rape can be thought of as the source of primary deviance, whereas the deliberate decision to engage in “consensual” homosexuality with one partner essentially results in a more solidified self-identity. But this process creates a degree of cognitive dissonance within the individual, which, when resolved, tends to leave the victim more willing to engage in future homosexual conduct.

Indeed, this dissonance is the crux of this adjustment process, in which the victim’s original identity is juxtaposed against his or her newly ascribed identity, resulting in an eventual psychological metamorphosis from the point of primary deviance to that of secondary deviance through future acts of homosexuality (Festinger, 1958; Lemert, 1999). Throughout the process of coping with this dissonance, typical acute symptoms of this trauma, such as intrusive recollections and/or dreams about the assault, intense distress over stimuli that remind the victim of the assault, hypervigilance, difficulties sleeping and eating, and unexplained or exaggerated outbursts of anger, are likely to be experienced. Those who cannot successfully navigate this dissonance present with the previous symptoms on a chronic level, coupled with more serious and self-damaging psychological impairments associated with rape trauma (e.g., self-mutilation and suicide). The fact that these victims must repetitively subject themselves to subsequent victimization naturally exacerbates their likelihood for long-term psychological impairment and emotional injury.

But the victim of male prison rape will find it necessary to adjust to this new role since the sexual values of mainstream society are completely inverted within the prison subculture. The inmate perpetrator who willingly engages in predatory homosexual activity
would typically be given the marginalized label of "homosexual" or "bisexual" in the broader society. Ironically, however, within the prison there is exactly the opposite effect, with a corresponding increase in social status and "manhood" for the perpetrator of sexual assault. Within the prison subculture, rapists are considered masculine conquerors of effeminate punks (Weiss & Friar, 1974). The aggressor is not held as homosexual in orientation but is simply assuming a position of power within the subcultural norms of prison life. The victim of the prison sexual assault, however, suffers an injury greater than the sexual assault alone, as the victim's entire social position within the prison is effectively compromised and redefined.


set of expectations completely impedes the ability for inmates to develop any sort of true trust; they must always remain vigilant for the potential "hustle" within the prison system. **Hustle** refers to any action that is designed to deceive, manipulate, or take advantage of another person. Further, consider that the very term **convict** includes the term con, which implies that the individual cannot and should not be trusted. Thus, convicts are, stereotypically, always on the hustle, so to speak.

Inmates who are able to "get over" on others and or "skate" through work or other obligations in the prison system are considered particularly streetwise and savvy among their peers. In fact, some prison systems, such as the Texas prison system, have a term for this concept: **hogging**. Hogging implies that a person is using others for some type of gain or benefit—manipulating others into doing work or fulfilling obligations on his or her behalf. When inmates are able to find some means to manipulate others into doing their dirty work, they are active in the art of the con. The process by which they encourage or manipulate a person to provide such a service is all part of the hustle.

A classic portrayal of this type of logic, though not a prison example, can be found in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. In this novel, Tom Sawyer convinces other boys in the area that painting a fence (a chore assigned to young Tom) is a fun activity. So fun is it, according to Tom, that he will not allow anyone to help him unless they pay him to do so. Ultimately, other boys pay Tom for the "opportunity" to paint the fence and join in the fun. Once several other boys pay their fee for the privilege of painting the fence, Tom slips off to spend the money that he has procured from those duped into doing his assigned work. This example demonstrates all the fine points of the con, the hustle, and the act of hogging others.

### The Impact of the Inmate Subculture on Corrections Staff

Perhaps one of the most interesting dynamics within prison can be found between the inmates and the prison staff. This area of discussion is both complicated and paradoxical in many respects. The paradox involved with this dynamic is that although inmate subculture restricts inmates from "siding" with officers and officer culture restricts officers from befriending inmates, there is a natural give-and-take that emerges between both groups. In fact, a symbiotic relationship usually emerges between prison security staff and the inmate population. This **symbiotic prison relationship** is a means of developing mutually agreeable and informal negotiations in behavior that are acceptable within the bounds of institutional security and also allow inmates to meet many of their basic human needs. This relationship is grounded in the reality of the day-to-day interactions that prison security staff have with inmates.

Because prison is a very intense environment that has a very strong psychological impact on both inmates and staff, it is only natural that this type of relationship often emerges. While the rules of the institution are generally clearly written, these rules are not always pragmatic for the officers who must enforce them. For example, a rule to restrict inmates from having more than one blanket in their cell may, on the face of it, seem easy enough to enforce. However, consider the following scenarios when considering rule enforcement:

**Hustle:** Any action that is designed to deceive, manipulate, or take advantage of another person.

**Hogging:** A term used to imply that a person is using others for some type of gain or benefit.

**Symbiotic prison relationship:** When correctional staff and inmates develop negotiation behavior that is acceptable for institutional security and also meets inmates' basic human needs.
Scenario 1

A veteran officer with many years of experience may find that a given inmate, Inmate X, who upholds the convict code and has respect within the institution, has the flu during the winter. The officer has access to additional blankets, and this is known among the inmates. Inmate X tends to mind his own business and usually does as he is expected when the officer is on duty. In this case, the officer may decide to offer Inmate X an additional blanket and would do so with no expectation that the inmate give something in return. Likewise, the inmate (as well as others watching) would know that the officer’s kindness should not be taken for weakness or no further empathy will be shown to convicts.

Scenario 2

This same veteran officer finds that Inmate Y, who does not uphold the convict code and generally has average clout (at best) within the prison culture, also has the flu. Inmate Y sometimes causes problems on the cell block and is sarcastic with officers. The veteran officer, in this case, would likely not give an additional blanket to Inmate Y, even if Inmate Y were to be courteous enough to ask for it. In most cases, Inmate Y would know better than to ask, since he knows that he does not honor the convict code or work within the commonsense bounds of the symbiotic prison relationship. If he were to ask and especially if he were to push the issue, the veteran officer would inform him that “the rules are the rules” and would indicate that he needs to keep quiet and go to sick call when that option is available. Further discourse from Inmate Y would result in comments from the veteran officer that would imply that he is being a troublemaker and that he is not doing his time “like a man,” which would result in a loss of respect for Inmate Y among others on the cell block. This would likely shame Inmate Y and cause him to lose status, but the veteran officer would likely gain status among the inmates for being firm, streetwise, and cognizant of subcultural norms. Because he does not give in to Inmate Y, he would be perceived as strong and capable, not subject to manipulation and not an easy mark.

Obviously, Inmate X and Inmate Y are being given different standards of treatment. Regardless of whether it is overtly stated or simply presumed, veteran officers will tend to leave convicts and/or trouble-free inmates unbothered and may, in some cases, even extend some degree of preferential treatment, within acceptable boundaries that allow them to maintain respect on the cell block. However, this does not mean that they will do so for all inmates; they reserve the right to use discretion when divvying out the paltry resources available within the prison. In short, these veteran officers become effective resource and power brokers as a means of gaining compliance and creating an informal system of fairness that is understood among the inmates. Essentially, veteran officers and inmates operate with this understanding:

“I will let you do your time, but you will let me do my time—one shift at a time.”

This concept is important because it creates a connection between both groups; they are both in a noxious environment and have a role that they must uphold. Yet at the same time, some degree of give-and-take is necessary to avoid extremes in rules that do not, ultimately, create just situations. So long as inmates allow the officer to generally do his time, one shift at a time, he will, in turn, leave them to serve their time without problems. On the other hand, if an inmate does not honor this understanding, he should expect no mercy or consideration from the prison security staff; the rules are the rules, and any sense of discretion will simply cease to be acted upon.

Officers who master these types of negotiations tend to gain respect from inmates and even from other officers. They may sometimes be referred to as “convict bosses” by inmates. The term convict boss or convict officer is applied to a correctional officer who has developed a keen understanding of convict logic and socialization and uses that knowledge to maximize control over his or her assigned post. This term denotes respect gained from inmates and generally comes with time, experience, sound judgment, and a cunning personality that is not easily deceived or manipulated. The officer
is not perceived as weak but is instead thought to possess a good degree of common sense by inmates within the facility.

One important note should be added to this discussion. Students should keep in mind that the examples in the prior scenarios present a veteran officer with several years of experience. The use of this type of discretion by newer officers who do not have sufficient time and experience working with the inmate population will not have the same result. If a newer or younger officer attempted such discretion, he or she would likely be seen as a “sucker” and someone who could be easily marked for future exploitation. This person would not be perceived to understand the fine nuances of discretion with regard to prison rules, norms, and mores. This person would also not likely be trusted by peers who, generally, would expect him or her to stay “by the book” until he or she developed the level of expertise to make fine distinctions in blurry situations. This officer would likely be labeled “weak” among inmates and might even be considered an “inmate lover” by other officers. These labels should be avoided in hard-core institutions because once they are applied, it is very difficult (if not impossible) to rid of them.

Lastly, the mannerisms that are displayed, both by inmates and officers, often reflect the type of upbringing that one has had and also tend to indicate the value system from which that person operates. Within the prison, this is important because during an inmate or beginning officer’s first few weeks of indoctrination to the prison experience, he or she is being “sized up” or appraised by others who observe them. Both the officers and the inmates begin to determine if the person is likely to be easily influenced and/or manipulated. This formative period whereby inmates and staff are socialized into the prison culture is important due to the influences of the prison subculture that include the inmate’s subculture, the officer’s subculture, and the need to master the symbiotic prison relationship between the two.

**Prisonization**

*Prisonization* is the process of being socialized into the prison culture. This process occurs over time as the inmate or the correctional officer adapts to the informal rules of prison life. Unlike many other textbook authors, the author of this text thinks that it is important to emphasize that correctional officers also experience a form of prisonization that impacts their worldview and the manner in which they operate within the prison institution. In his text on prisonization, Gillespie (2002) makes the following introductory statement: "Prison is a context that exerts its influence upon the social relations of those who enter its domain (p. 1)."

The reason that this sentence is set off in such a conspicuous manner is because it has profound meaning and truly captures the essence of prisonization. Students should understand that the influence of the prison environment extends to all persons who enter its domain, particularly if they do so over a prolonged period of time. Thus, prisonization impacts both inmates and staff within the facility. While the total experience will, of course, not be the same for staff as it is for inmates, it is silly to presume that staff routinely exposed to aberrant human behavior will not be impacted by that behavior.

With respect to inmates, Gillespie (2002) found that both the individual characteristics of inmates and institutional qualities affect prisonization and misconduct. However, he found that individual-level antecedents explained prisonization better than did prison-level variables. This means that the experiences of inmates prior to being imprisoned are central to determining how well they will adapt to the prison experience. For this text, this contention will also be extended to prison guards; their...
prior experiences and their individual personality development prior to correctional employment will dictate how well they adapt to both the formal and informal exchanges that occur within the prison.

The Guard Subculture

This area of discussion is controversial and has led to a great deal of debate. One reason for developing this text and providing a discussion on this particular topic is to provide students with a realistic and no-nonsense appraisal of the world of corrections, particularly as practiced in the prison environment. In providing a glimpse of the guard subculture (and this text contends that a guard subculture does exist), it is important to keep in mind that the specific characteristics of this subculture vary from prison system to prison system and even from prison to prison within the same state system. The reasons for this are manifold but are mostly due to the fact that, unlike inmates, guards are not forced to remain within the prison environment 24/7. Rather, guards have the benefit of time away from the institution, and they can (and sometimes do) transfer from facility to facility, depending on their career path.

Further, since guards are routinely exposed to external society (contact with family, friends, the general public, the media, etc.), they are able to mitigate many of the debilitating effects of the prison environment. Likewise, their integration into society mitigates the degree to which prison socialization will impact them, personally and professionally. Thus, there is greater variability in the required adaptations of prison guards when compared to inmates. The type of institution that they find themselves working within can also impact this socialization. A guard who works at a maximum-security institution or one for particularly violent offenders will likely experience a different type of socialization than a guard assigned to a minimum-security dormitory. All of these factors can impact how the prison culture affects individual officers and the degree to which they become enmeshed into the guard subculture.

The discussion that follows is intended to address guard subculture in maximum-security prisons or those institutions that have histories of violence among inmates. Larger facilities that have more challenging circumstances tend to breed the type of subculture that will be presented here. Though modern-day correctional agencies seek to circumvent and eliminate these subcultural dimensions, they nonetheless still exist in various facilities.

The popular Hollywood image of prison guards is that they are brutal and uncaring and that their relationships with inmates are hostile, violent, and abusive. However, this is a very simplistic and inaccurate view of prison guards that makes for good entertainment but does not reflect reality. For many, corrections work is a stable job available to persons in rural areas where few other jobs exist, and it produces a livable wage for the effort. For others, prison work may be a stepping-stone to further their career, particularly if they are interested in criminal justice employment. Indeed, the author of this text worked at Eastham Unit in Texas while attending school at a state university in the area, and this was a common practice among many students of criminal justice or criminology studies. This means that, at least in this case, many of the prison guards employed in the region actually had an above-average education and most likely possessed depth and purpose that exceeded the Hollywood stereotype.

The author of this text would like to acknowledge the work of Kelsey Kauffman (1988) in explaining the overall processes behind prison guard socialization and the development of prison guard subcultures. Like Kauffman, the author of this text encountered a similar transitional experience where, over time, the aloof and distant feeling between himself and his fellow coworkers grew into a feeling of camaraderie.
and close connection in identity. To this day, this author considers himself, first and foremost, a prison guard at heart. However, it is Kauffman who so eloquently and correctly penned the formation and description of the guard subculture, and it is her work that will be used as the primary reference for this section.

According to Kauffman (1988), the guard subculture does not develop due to any single contextual characteristic, such as prisonization, indigenous forms of influence, or the importation of values. Rather, the culture is a product “of a complex interaction of importation, socialization, deportation, and cultural evolution” (Kauffman, 1988, p. 167). Kauffman notes that prison guards have a distinct and identifiable subculture that separates them from other professionals. The central norms of this subculture dictate how they proceed with the daily performance of their duties, such as with the example scenarios provided earlier when discussing the impact of the inmate subculture on custodial staff. In describing the prison guard subculture, Kauffman produced a list of the basic tenets behind it. These same tenets are presented in this text due to the author’s perception that they are reflective of those encountered in most prisons throughout the United States. They include the following:

1. **Always go to the aid of an officer in distress.** This is the foundation for cohesion among custodial staff. This tenet also can, in times of emergency, provide justification for violating norms within the bureaucratic system. This tenet applies to all guards, regardless of how well accepted the officer in distress may or may not be. This norm is key to officer safety and is fundamental. If an officer fails to uphold this norm, he or she will likely be ostracized from the group and will be treated as an outsider.

2. **Do not traffic drugs.** This is also considered fundamental because of the danger that it can create as inmates fight for power over the trade of these substances. In addition, the use of drugs is illegal and does not reflect well on officers, who are supposed to keep drug offenders behind bars. If an officer violates this tenet, it is considered justified within the subculture to inform authorities, but most will not do so due to the reluctance to betray a fellow officer. However, it would not be uncommon for guards to take it upon themselves to put pressure on the officer who violates this norm through threats, intimidation, and coercion. In addition, officers will likely isolate the officer from interactions and will not invite him or her to functions outside of work. The officer will be treated as persona non grata.

3. **Do not be a snitch.** In many respects, this is a carryover from the inmate subculture. This dictate comes in two forms. First, officers should never give information to inmates that could get another officer in trouble. Generally speaking, officers are expected not to discuss other officers, their business, or their personal lives with inmates. The second prohibition applies to investigative authorities of the prison system. Officers are expected to stay silent and not divulge information that will “burn” another officer, particularly when the Internal Affairs Division (IAD) is investigating an incident. While it is expected that officers will not knowingly place their coworkers in legally compromising situations where they must lie for their coworkers, it is still equally expected that coworkers will not snitch on their fellow officer.

   This tenet is perhaps one of the most difficult to follow because, in some cases, it puts officers in a position where they must lie to cover for their coworkers, even when they were not directly involved. This can occur during investigations and even if officers are brought to court in a lawsuit. Officers who comply with institutional rules still cannot be assured that they will be safe from liability if they have covered for a fellow officer. This may be the case regardless of whether the officer initiating the situation was acting responsibly or not.

4. **Never disrespect another officer in front of inmates.** This tenet reflects the importance of respect and the need to maintain “face” within the prison culture. Officers who are ridiculed or made to look weak in front of inmates have their authority subject to question by inmates since the word will get around that the officer is not respected (and therefore not well supported) by his peers. This sets the officer up for potential manipulation in the future.
5. **Always support an officer who is in a dispute with an inmate.** This applies to all types of instances ranging from verbal arguments with inmates to actual physical altercations. Simply put, one’s coworker is always right, and the inmate is always wrong. However, behind the scenes, officers may not get along and may disagree on issues related to the management of inmates. Indeed, one officer may write up an inmate for a disciplinary infraction but another may overtly object when in the office out of earshot of the inmate population. The reasons for this may be many, but generally older, more seasoned officers will be adept at informally addressing inmate infractions whereas junior officers will tend to rely on official processes. However, given the threat of employee discipline that exists within the system and the need for control of the inmate population, most officers will ultimately maintain loyalty to each other during the final stages where their official support is necessary.

6. **Do not be friends with an inmate.** This is another tenet that has complicated shades and distinctions. For veteran officers, this tenet is not much of a concern. They have already proven themselves to be reliable and/or are known to not be snitches. Further, most veteran officers are capable of enforcing the rules, regardless of their prior conversations with an inmate. However, it is not uncommon for veteran officers (and even supervisors) to have one or two inmates whom they talk with, at least on a topical level. Though they may not consider themselves friends with the inmate, they may allow that inmate some privileges and opportunities that others would not, simply because they have developed a symbiotic prison relationship with that inmate that has existed for a long period of time. In return, these inmates may do the officer small favors, such as reserving higher-quality food from the kitchen for that officer or even, in prisons where the subculture has truly created permeable boundaries, letting the officer know when supervisors or others are watching him or her while on duty. This allows the officer to operate his or her cell block in a more leisurely manner, and, as such, the entire cell block benefits from the officer’s laid-back approach.

7. **Maintain cohesion against all outside groups.** In this tenet, *outside groups* applies to members of the supervisory ranks, the outside public, the media, and even one’s own family. This tenet is based on the belief that the general public does not understand the pressures placed upon officers and that the media tend to be sympathetic to the plight of the inmate, not the officer. Officers do not wish to implicate their family members and also do not want them to fear for their safety; thus, details are seldom disclosed. Further, the administration is not seen as trustworthy but instead as being politically driven. Administrators care only about their careers and moving up the corporate ladder and are too far removed from the rank-and-file to still understand the complexities of the officer’s daily concerns. It is therefore better that officers not talk about what goes on in the institution to persons not within their ranks.

These tenets perhaps most clearly summarize the prison guard subculture. Again, these “guidelines” may not occur exactly as presented in all prisons, but in most larger and older facilities, at least some of them will be familiar to correctional staff.

As we have seen in prior chapters, numerous lawsuits emerged during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and their aftermath greatly impacted the field of corrections in the 1990s as well as the current millennium. Prison systems had to modify and adjust their operations to be considered constitutional, and this required that these systems institute organizational change among their prison staff. An emphasis on professionalism emerged throughout the nation, and, as the War on Drugs resulted in a swelling inmate population, so too swelled the number of prison guards who were hired. In addition, the elimination of building tender and trusty supervision schemes used in many southern states necessitated the recruiting and hiring of more prison security staff. During the 1990s, the term *prison guard* became outdated and was replaced with the official job classification of correctional officer in many state prison systems.
Female Correctional Officers

The correctional field has traditionally been stereotyped as a male-dominated area of work. In later chapters, students will read more about women in the correctional field; an entire chapter is devoted to female offenders in correctional systems (Chapter 11). A general subculture also exists within women’s prison facilities, but it is separate and distinct from the male prison subculture. Likewise, the issues that confront women who work in corrections tend to be different as well. We will explore the various aspects related to both women inmates and correctional workers in the next chapter.

For now, it is simply important to note that women are increasingly represented within the field of corrections. While women have had a long history of conducting prison work, they have typically been placed in clerical positions, teaching roles, support services, or the guarding of female offenders. They have not historically worked in direct supervision of male offenders. It was not until the late 1970s and/or early 1980s that women were routinely assigned to supervise male inmates (Pollock, 1986). The introduction of women into the security ranks has greatly impacted the organizational culture of many prison facilities and the subculture within them.

Women generally do not have the same aggressive social skills that men in prison tend to exhibit. Further, the prison environment tends to emphasize the desire to “be a man” and denigrates women as inferior. This means that women were not widely accepted among correctional officers and/or inmates. Since women have become integrated into the correctional industry, the male-oriented subculture has been weakened. The introduction of women into the security ranks, along with the inclusion of diverse minority groups, the professionalization of corrections, and the proliferation of prison gangs, has eroded the influence of the male-dominated and male-oriented convict code. While the convict code still exists and has its adherents, it is no longer considered a primary standard of behavior in many prison facilities but instead has become more of an ideal.

The Impact of Gangs Upon Prison Subculture

Gang members are another group that tends to not adhere strictly to the tenets of the convict code (Mobley, 2011). This is particularly true among Latino and African American gangs. These gangs, which represent the majority racial lineages among prison gangs, typically view prison stints as just another part of the criminal lifestyle. As such, they have no true use for the convict code since it is their gang family who will protect them, not their reputation according to the code. Their alliances and their allegiances are tied to outside street gangs with members who sometimes get locked up and therefore find themselves operating within prison walls as well (Mobley, 2011). Many young inner-city African American and Latino males who have been incarcerated are able to find homeboys or hombres in nearly every correctional facility within their state (Mobley, 2011). Thus, the young gang member does not need to trouble himself with adapting to the prison subculture (Mobley, 2011).

Gangsters comprise a distinct subculture whether on the street or in prison (Mobley, 2011). They “look out for” one another and protect each other, living in a nearly familial lifestyle. Few African American gang members speak to inmates outside of their gang “set,“ at least about anything of substance. Though most would claim that they do not snitch to “the man,” and most would say that they just wish to do their own time, their true loyalty is to their gang family. Gang members “run with their road dogs” from “the
Largest Case Prosecuted Against White Supremacist Prison Gang Members: The Aryan Brotherhood of Texas and the Aryan Circle

In 2017, prosecutors in the Northern District of Texas concluded what is thought to be the largest prosecution of violent white supremacist gangs in the nation’s history.

The 89th and last defendant to be sentenced in the case was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Jane J. Boyle to 20 years in federal prison, following his guilty plea in March 2017 to one count of possession of methamphetamine with the intent to distribute. The defendants were members of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (“ABT”), the Aryan Circle, the “Irish Mob,” the “Dirty White Boys,” the “White Knights,” and the “Peckerwood”—all of which are violent white supremacist gangs. Each of these gangs is organized crime groups, but during the past few years, the white supremacy ideology of each of these groups has been a lower priority compared to criminal ventures, such as drug-dealing.

The defendants in this case included several high-ranking members of these organizations. Combined, these gang members had been previously convicted of 736 crimes. Of the 736 previous convictions, 234 were drug-related offenses, 76 were violent offenses, 36 were gun offenses, 37 were burglaries, seven were sex or child abuse offenses, and one was a murder conviction. Fifteen of the defendants were deemed “career offenders” under the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines. Some defendants had as many as 25 prior convictions. In fact, only six of the 89 had no prior convictions. It is interesting to point out that of 89 career gang offenders, only one had a murder conviction. Fifteen of the defendants were deemed “career offenders” under the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines. Some defendants had as many as 25 prior convictions. In fact, only six of the 89 had no prior convictions. It is interesting to point out that of 89 career gang offenders, only one had a murder conviction.

Regardless of these interconnections, it should be pointed out that the Aryan Brotherhood was, in its beginning, first a prison gang and only a prison gang. Their genesis was at San Quentin Prison, in California. The mere fact that there is a dedicated branch in Texas attests to the idea that prison gangs have expanded beyond a one-dimensional identity behind bars. They are virtually indistinguishable from other gangs or organized criminal groups that have developed in other environments. Thus, when arrests are made on the outside, gang activity on the inside increases as they are locked up. Likewise, when gang members are released from prison, criminal activity on the streets tends to increase, as well. It is because of this that the fight against gangs sometimes becomes a circular process that has a seeming cycle of self-perpetuation.

While this recent set of convictions may seem to be more focused on sentencing and conviction rather than corrections as a primary focus, such is not really the case. Indeed, this recent conviction of such a large number of gang members demonstrates how gang activity on the streets is influenced and impacted by prison gangs behind bars, and vice versa. Most all of these gang members have done prior stints in prison and, for some, they may not have joined these gangs until after going to prison. Regardless, their new convictions will undoubtedly add to the number of gang offenders who are represented in the Texas prison system. Such a large and sudden influx of gang members into a prison system can lead to future disruption and increased gang warfare on the inside.

Likewise, when numerous members of gang leadership are in prison, they often still operate as “shot callers” on the inside for activities that occur on the outside. Many will have visitors who come on weekends and deliver and receive messages, cell phones will be smuggled in to the prisons, and messages will be received and sent in code through mail, allowing these gang leaders to still exercise influence over gang activities on the outside. Meanwhile, when doing time, these members will actively recruit inmates to join their gangs, offering protection, drugs, and money (for their prison accounts or for their families on the outside) to gain their membership and assistance.

Regardless of these interconnections, it should be pointed out that the Aryan Brotherhood was, in its beginning, first a prison gang and only a prison gang. Their genesis was at San Quentin Prison, in California. The mere fact that there is a dedicated branch in Texas attests to the idea that prison gangs have expanded beyond a one-dimensional identity behind bars. They are virtually indistinguishable from other gangs or organized criminal groups that have developed in other environments. Thus, when arrests are made on the outside, gang activity on the inside increases as they are locked up. Likewise, when gang members are released from prison, criminal activity on the streets tends to increase, as well. It is because of this that the fight against gangs sometimes becomes a circular process that has a seeming cycle of self-perpetuation.
The Impact of Cross-Pollination: Reciprocal Relationships Between Street Gangs and Prison Gangs

It is perhaps the emergence of gang life that has been the most significant development within prison subcultures throughout various state systems. In many texts on prisons and/or the world of corrections, there is a section on prison gangs. In most cases, these texts tend to present gang membership as isolated to the prison environment, with little emphasis on the notion that gang membership is permeable, found inside and outside the prison. But members of prison gangs do not simply discard membership once their sentence is served or when they are paroled out into society. Rather, their membership continues, and they will often continue to answer to gang leaders who may still be locked up in prison. In other cases, they may be required to report to other leaders outside of the prison walls and will continue criminal work on behalf of the gang, plying their criminal trade on the streets and in broader society.

Many prison gang members were prior street gang members. An offender may engage in street gang criminal activity for a number of years, with frequent short stints in jail. As noted earlier in this chapter, few inmates in state prison systems are locked up with long-term sentences for their first offense; rather, they have typically committed several “priors” before that point, some of which might not be known to law enforcement. During their activity on the streets, these offenders will develop a reputation, particularly within their gang or their area of operation (if in an urban or a suburban setting) and will develop associations with other gang members. Once they finally do end up with a long-term sentence in a state facility, they have usually already embedded themselves within the gang structure on the outside, which includes members who have been locked up inside the prison system.

In some cases, those doing state time may be the upper leadership of the street gang; these members will tend to direct prison gang activities internally and also “call the shots” for members on the outside. The term shot caller refers to those inmates and/or gang members who dictate what members will do within the gang hierarchy. The point to all of this is that a gang’s membership does not begin or end with the prison walls. Rather, prison is simply a feature that modern-day gangs must contend with—an obstacle that increases the overhead to conducting criminal enterprise.

Because gang membership is porous in nature, social researchers can only vaguely determine likely gang growth both inside and outside the prison. In 2012, there were an estimated 850,000 gang members across the nation (National Gang Center, 2013). A large proportion of these gang members had served time behind bars at one point or another throughout their criminal careers. In fact, some prison systems, such as Texas’s, were nearly controlled by gangs; the gangs even controlled many of the staff in these systems through various tactics like friendships or occasional intimidation.

As this shows, prison gangs in some state systems can be both persuasive and very powerful. Potential recruits for existing prison gangs enter prison with natural feelings of anxiety and quickly learn the value of having some form of affiliation. Indeed, inmates without the protection of affiliation are likely to be the target of
other inmates who are members of a gang. Affiliations tend to be based along racial allegiances—in fact, most prison gang membership is strictly defined by the race of the member.

Historically speaking, the main distinction between prison gangs and street gangs has been the internal structure and the leadership style of the gang (Fleisher & Rison, 1999). However, over time this distinction has become so blurred as to be meaningless in the offender world (Fleisher & Rison, 1999). In the correctional environment of today, prison gangs such as the Mexican Mafia and the Texas Syndicate are just as influential and powerful as classic street gangs like the Gangster Disciples and Latin Kings (Fleisher & Rison, 1999). More telling is the fact that the Mexican Mafia, the Aryan Brotherhood, and even emerging local groups such as the Barrio Aztecas have become just as formidable in their own respective ethnic and/or culturally based neighborhoods or regions as they are in prisons. Indeed, it is sometimes common for leaders of a gang to be incarcerated but still give orders to members outside the prison operating within the community. For this text, we will refer to gang cross-pollination, which means that a gang has developed such power and influence as to be equally effective regardless of whether its leadership is inside or outside of the prison walls.

When discussing gang cross-pollination, the term security threat group (STG) will be used to describe a gang that possesses the following high-functioning group and organizational characteristics:

1. Prison and street affiliation is based on race, ethnicity, geography, ideology, or any combination of these or other similar factors (Fleisher, 2008, p. 356).
2. Members seek protection from other gang members inside and outside the prison, as well as insulation from law enforcement detection (use of safe houses when wanted).
3. Members will mutually take care of an incarcerated member’s family, at least minimally, while the member is locked up since this is an expected overhead cost in the organization.
4. The group’s mission integrates an economic objective and uses some form of illicit industry, such as drug trafficking, to fulfill the economic necessities to carry forward other stated objectives (Fleisher, 2008). The use of violence or the threat of violence is a common tool in meeting these economic objectives.

Other characteristics common to prison gangs go beyond racial lines of membership. These characteristics are common to most any gang within jail and/or prison, though they are not necessarily common to those gangs based primarily on the street. First, prison gangs tend to have highly formal rules and a written constitution that are adhered to by all members who value their affiliation, and sanctions are taken against those who violate the rules. Second, prison gangs tend to be structured along a semi-military organizational scheme. Thus, authority and responsibility are very clearly defined within these groups. Third, membership in a prison gang is usually for life. This tendency has often been referred to, as noted above, as blood in—blood out among the popular subculture. This is one of the root causes of parolees continuing their affiliation beyond the prison walls, and this lifelong membership rule is enforced if someone attempts to exit the prison gang. Thus, when gang members leave the prison environment, they are expected to perform various “favors” for the members who are still incarcerated. Lastly, as members circulate in and out of prison, they are involved in gang activities both inside and outside of the penal institution. Thus, the criminal enterprise continues to be an active business, and prison simply becomes part of the overhead involved in running that business.

Major Prison Gangs in the United States

During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a substantial amount of racial and ethnic bias in prisons. This was true in most all state prison systems but was particularly pronounced...
Prison Gang Riots in Brazil

In 2017, Brazil was witness to one of the most bloody prison riots in penal history. A riot at the Anisio Jobim Prison Complex in Manaus, a city in northern Brazil, took place and resulted in the death of 56 inmates at the hands of other inmates. The scene was one where inmates hacked other inmates to death. In this case, the gang named the Family of the North (FDN) which is from the city of Manaus, allied with another gang, the oldest gang in Brazil, called the Red Command gang (CV), attacked rival gang members from the gang named the Primeiro Capital Command (PCC). During the incident, the Family of the North were observed holding rival gang members down and decapitating them, lining their removed heads in a row and laughing. Much of the activity was caught on film via cell phone cameras.

Less than a week later, at the Monte Cristo Agricultural Penitentiary outside the town of Boa Vista (also in north Brazil), another 33 inmates died during another spate of prison violence that was also gang-related. This violent incident largely entailed the Primeiro Capital Command (PCC) initiating attacks against other inmates.

During the past 2 or 3 years, Brazil has witnessed a number of prison violence uprisings. The news media often showcases the violence without censoring. On display via public news is footage of dismembered corpses or tortured individuals, messages left in human blood, as well as flagrantly defiant statements to the public. This gang violence, often linked to feuds over the drug trade, has also spread from the prisons back to the streets, where numerous released gang members in Rio de Janeiro carry out vendettas for fellow gang members who died behind bars.

Brazil’s prison population consists of over 620,000 inmates, making it the fourth most populous prison system in the world, behind the United States, Russia, and China. Brazilian prisons hold populations that greatly exceed the maximum capacity of the facility. At the Anisio Jobim Prison Complex it is thought that nearly 3 times the maximum allowable number of inmates were housed within the facility during the time of the massacre.

While officials have made public statements vowing to change the Brazilian prison system, many are afraid that is too late. The reforms that have been proposed are small in relation to the scope of problems that face the nation’s prison system. Indeed, the Primeiro Capital Command (PCC) has 30,000 members and dominates many of the prisons in northern Brazil. The PCC is, in fact, is the largest drug-running gang in Brazil. Further still, the PCC is a subversive group with an agenda against the nation of Brazil, stating that it is at war with Brazil, itself, not individuals, and that its genesis was in response to police brutality that had occurred in a prison incident in 1993. From that point onward, the PCC fought prison staff, other gangs, and grew to its current size. The PCC is run like a business and even takes care of its members’ families, providing them with medical assistance, legal advice, and financial help for family members on the outside of the prison.

This makes the PCC not just a prison gang, but a potential extremist group bent on the destruction of the government. Thus, this gang is dangerous to other inmates, to persons who are in the outside public, and to the government itself. This makes the circumstances even more serious. In short, the PCC is a potential threat to national security, and this cannot be easily dismissed. To do so would, most assuredly, be lethal for more persons in the future.

QUESTION 1: Given what you know about criminology and deterrence theory, do you think that the media’s graphic (and honest) portrayal of the prison gang violence in the Anisio Jobim Prison Complex and the Monte Cristo Agricultural Penitentiary is a good or bad idea? Do you think that this could have a deterrent effect in regard to gang membership?

QUESTION 2: In your opinion, what should officials in Brazil do to address the challenges associated with violent prison gangs in their correctional systems? Briefly explain your answer.


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This section provides a brief overview of some of the major prison gangs found throughout the nation. These gangs are presented in a manner that is as accurate and historically correct as possible, with attention paid to the basic feeling of the time and context during each gang’s development (see Table 9.1). Much of the information presented has been obtained from a recent document titled the *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*. The following pages provide an overview of 13 of the most prevalent prison gangs in the United States.

The Mexican Mafia prison gang, also known as La Eme (Spanish for the letter M), was formed in the late 1950s within the California Department of Corrections. It is loosely structured and has strict rules that must be followed by its 200 members. Most members are Mexican American males who previously belonged to a southern California street gang. The Mexican Mafia is primarily active in the southwestern and Pacific regions of the United States, and its power base is in California. The gang’s main source of income is extorting drug distributors outside prison and distributing

### TABLE 9.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR FORMED</th>
<th>JURISDICTION</th>
<th>NAME OF GANG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Gypsy Jokers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Mexican Mafia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Texas Syndicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>La Nuestra Familia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Black Guerrilla Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Aryan Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1970s</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Arizona Aryan Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Ñeta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Arizona Old Mexican Mafia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>New Mexico Syndicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1980s</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Aryan Brotherhood of Taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1980s</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Texas Mafia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1980s</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>MS-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1980s</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Bulldogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Arizona’s New Mexican Mafia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Mexicanemi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Mandingo Warriors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Federal system</td>
<td>Dirty White Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>415s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Hermanos de Pistoleros Latinos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Tango Blast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Los Solidos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>United Blood Nation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and marijuana within prison systems and on the streets. Some members have direct links to Mexican drug traffickers outside of the prison walls. The Mexican Mafia also is involved in other criminal activities, including gambling and homosexual prostitution in prison.

The Black Guerrilla Family (BGF), originally called Black Family or Black Vanguard, is a prison gang founded in San Quentin State Prison, California, in 1966. The gang is highly organized along paramilitary lines, with a supreme leader and central committee. The BGF has an established national charter, code of ethics, and oath of allegiance. BGF members operate primarily in California and Maryland.

The Aryan Brotherhood (AB; see Figure 9.1) was originally formed in San Quentin in 1967. The AB is highly structured with two factions—one in the California Department of Corrections and the other in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Most members are Caucasian males, and the gang is active primarily in the southwestern and Pacific regions. Its main source of income is the distribution of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine within prison systems and on the streets. Some AB members have business relationships with Mexican drug traffickers who smuggle illegal drugs into California for AB distribution. The AB is notoriously violent and is often involved in murder for hire. The AB still maintains a strong presence in the nation’s prison systems, albeit a less active one in recent years.

The Crips are a collection of structured and unstructured gangs that have adopted a common gang culture. The Crips emerged as a major gang presence during the early 1970s. Crips membership is estimated at 30,000 to 35,000; most members are African American males from the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Large, national-level Crips gangs include 107 Hoover Crips, Insane Gangster Crips, and Rolling 60s Crips. The Crips operate in 221 cities in 41 states and can be found in several state prison systems.

The Bloods are an association of structured and unstructured gangs that have adopted a single-gang culture. The original Bloods were formed in the early 1970s to provide protection from the Crips street gang in Los Angeles, California. Large, national-level Bloods gangs include Bounty Hunter Bloods and Crenshaw Mafia Gangsters. Bloods membership is estimated to be 7,000 to 30,000 nationwide; most members are African American males. Bloods gangs are active in 123 cities in 33 states, and they can be found in several state prison systems.

Ñeta is a prison gang that was established in Puerto Rico in the early 1970s and spread to the United States. Ñeta is one of the largest and most violent prison gangs, with about 7,000 members in Puerto Rico and 5,000 in the United States. Ñeta chapters in Puerto Rico exist exclusively inside prisons; once members are released from prison, they are no longer considered part of the gang. In the United States, Ñeta chapters exist inside and outside prisons in 36 cities in nine states, primarily in the Northeast.

The Texas Syndicate (see Figure 9.2) originated in Folsom Prison during the early 1970s. The Texas Syndicate was formed in response to other prison gangs in the California Department of Corrections, such as the Mexican Mafia and Aryan Brotherhood, which were attempting to prey on native Texas inmates. This gang is composed of predominantly Mexican American inmates in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Though this gang has a rule to only accept members who are Latino, it does accept Caucasians into its ranks. The Texas Syndicate has a formal organizational structure and a set of written rules for its members. Since the time of its formation, the Texas Syndicate has grown considerably, particularly in Texas.

The Mexikanemi prison gang (also known as Texas Mexican Mafia or Emi; see Figure 9.3) was formed in the early 1980s within the TDCJ. The gang is highly structured and is estimated to have 2,000 members, most of whom are Mexican nationals or Mexican American males living in Texas at the time of incarceration. Mexikanemi poses a significant drug trafficking threat to communities in the southwestern United States, particularly in Texas. Gang members reportedly traffic multi-kilogram quantities of powder cocaine,
heroin, and methamphetamine; multi-ton quantities of marijuana; and thousand-tablet quantities of MDMA from Mexico into the United States for distribution inside and outside prison.

The Nazi Low Riders (NLR) evolved in the California Youth Authority, the state agency responsible for the incarceration and parole supervision of juvenile and young adult offenders, in the late 1970s or early 1980s as a gang for Caucasian inmates. As prison officials successfully suppressed Aryan Brotherhood activities, the AB appealed to young incarcerated skinheads, the NLR in particular, to act as middlemen for their criminal operations, allowing the AB to keep control of criminal undertakings while adult members were serving time in administrative segregation. The NLR maintains strong ties to the AB and, like the older gang, has become a source of violence and criminal activity in prison. The NLR has become a major force, viewing itself as superior to all other Caucasian gangs and deferring only to the AB. Like the AB, the NLR engages in drug trafficking, extortion, and attacks on inmates and corrections staff.

Barrio Azteca was organized in 1986 in the Coffield Unit of TDCJ by five street gang members from El Paso, Texas. This gang tends to recruit from prior street gang members and is most active in the southwestern region, primarily in correctional facilities in Texas and on the streets of southwestern Texas and southeastern New Mexico. The gang is highly structured and has an estimated membership of 2,000. Most members are Mexican national or Mexican American males.

Hermanos de Pistoleros Latinos (HPL) is a Hispanic prison gang formed in the TDCJ in the late 1980s. It operates in most prisons and in many communities in Texas, particularly Laredo. HPL is also active in several cities in Mexico, and its largest contingent in that country is in Nuevo Laredo. The gang is structured and is estimated to have 1,000 members. Members maintain close ties to several Mexican drug trafficking organizations and are involved in trafficking quantities of cocaine and marijuana from Mexico into the United States for distribution.


### FIGURE 9.3

**Constitution of the Mexikanemi**

1. Membership is for life (“blood in, blood out”).
2. Every member must be prepared to sacrifice his life or take a life at any time.
3. To achieve discipline within the Mexikanemi brotherhood, every member shall strive to overcome his weakness.
4. Members must never let the Mexikanemi down.
5. The sponsoring member is totally responsible for the behavior of a new recruit. If the new recruit turns out to be a traitor, it is the sponsoring member’s responsibility to eliminate the recruit.
6. When insulted by a stranger or group, all members of the Mexikanemi will unite to destroy the person or other group completely.
7. Members must always maintain a high level of integrity.
8. Members must never relate Mexikanemi business to others.
9. Every member has the right to express opinions, ideas, contradictions, and constructive criticism.
10. Every member has the right to organize, educate, arm, and defend the Mexikanemi.
11. Every member has the right to wear tattoo of the Mexikanemi symbol.
12. The Mexikanemi is a criminal organization and therefore will participate in all activities of criminal interest for monetary benefits.
MS-13 Gang Member Trafficked Drugs to New Jersey From Inside His Prison Cell in California

A member of MS-13 admitted trafficking methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine Monday to New Jersey from inside a California state prison. The guilty plea follows an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Luis Calderon, 32, aka “Lagrima,” of Los Angeles, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge Joseph A. Dickson in Newark federal court to an indictment charging him with conspiracy to distribute, and to possess with intent to distribute, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine.

Between August 2015 and November 2015, Calderon was incarcerated at the Calipatria State Prison in California. However, Calderon had access to multiple contraband cellular telephones, which he used to communicate with conspirators outside the prison.

Law enforcement officers lawfully recorded numerous telephone conversations between Calderon and an MS-13 member based in New Jersey, identified in the indictment as “Individual-1.” Among other topics, Calderon and Individual-1 discussed plans to distribute crystal methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine in the New Jersey area. Calderon and Individual-1 ultimately settled on that plan that involved Calderon and others outside the prison sending a package containing controlled substances to a business center in Edison, New Jersey.

Shortly before the package arrived, Calderon informed Individual-1 by telephone that he was sending Individual-1 a package containing four ounces each of heroin and cocaine. Calderon stated that the package would also likely contain two ounces or more of crystal methamphetamine. Calderon told Individual-1 that the total cost for the heroin, cocaine, and crystal methamphetamine was $9,000, and stated that Individual-1 could keep the proceeds made from selling the drugs once Individual-1 paid Calderon for the shipment. Calderon subsequently gave Individual-1 the names that would appear on the package and the tracking number.

On Nov. 4, 2015, federal agents lawfully intercepted and searched the package. The search revealed approximately 95.5 grams of heroin, 54.7 grams of cocaine, and 52.4 grams of methamphetamine hidden inside a box of Little Debbie Swiss Rolls.

Tango Blast is one of largest prison/street criminal gangs operating in Texas. Tango Blast’s criminal activities include drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, sexual assault, and murder. In the late 1990s, Hispanic men incarcerated in federal, state, and local prisons founded Tango Blast for personal protection against violence from traditional prison gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood, Texas Syndicate, and Texas Mexican Mafia. Tango Blast originally had four city-based chapters in Houston, Austin, Dallas, and Fort Worth. These founding four chapters are collectively known as Puro Tango Blast or the Four Horsemen. In addition to the original four chapters, former Texas inmates established new chapters in El Paso, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and the Rio Grande Valley. In June 2008, the Houston Police Department estimated that more than 14,000 Tango Blast members were incarcerated in Texas. Tango Blast is difficult to monitor. The gang does not conform to either traditional prison/street gang hierarchical organization or gang rules. Tango Blast is laterally organized, and leaders are elected sporadically to represent the gang in prisons and to lead street gang cells.

The significance of Tango Blast is exemplified by corrections officials reporting that rival traditional prison gangs are now forming alliances to defend themselves against Tango Blast’s growing power.

United Blood Nation is a universal term that is used to identify both West Coast Bloods and the United Blood Nation (UBN). The UBN started in 1993 in Rikers Island George Mochen Detention Center (GMDC) to form protection from the threat posed by Latin Kings and Ñetas, who dominated the prison. While these groups are traditionally distinct entities, both identify themselves by “Blood,” often making it hard for law enforcement to distinguish between them. The UBN is a loose confederation of street
gangs, or sets, that once were predominantly African American. Membership is estimated to be between 7,000 and 15,000 along the U.S. eastern corridor.

The Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang originated on the streets of Los Angeles during the 1980s when numerous Salvadoran immigrants came to the United States to escape civil war and conflict that was widespread in El Salvador at that time (Wolf, 2012). The original mandate of the Mara Salvatrucha was to simply protect Salvadoran immigrants from other gangs in Los Angeles, particularly Mexican gangs that had been established on the streets and in prisons decades ago (Wolf, 2012). In fighting the effects of this gang, the United States often deported many MS members when they were arrested. Due to these deportations, members of MS-13 often recruited new members in El Salvador and other surrounding countries. As a result, the MS-13 has grown due to this cycle of deportation, recruitment in El Salvador, reentry into the United States, recruitment in the United States, followed by future deportation. Furthermore, this gang, thought to number around 8,000 to 10,000 in the United States, has migrated to the east coast of the United States, in some part, due to vigorous antigang initiatives in the southwest. Indeed, jail and prison facilities in Virginia and Maryland have seen increases in their MS-13 population, of nearly 30% in just the past 2 years, alone. Naturally, with this, there has been an increase of street crime at the hands of MS-13, as well (Hagstrom, 2018).

Gang Management in Corrections

Gang management requires a comprehensive policy that specifies legal precedents, procedures, and guidelines, including the verification of gang members. Over the years, most state systems have developed gang intelligence units and have trained correctional staff on gangs and gang activity. In modern times, state and federal corrections refer to gangs as security threat groups, or STGs, as noted above. Students may notice that most of the 13 gangs listed in the prior subsection have links to outside society where they engage in criminal activities that usually have an economic objective. This means that these gangs are all STGs because they operate inside and outside the prison and possess all the other characteristics discussed in previous subsections of this chapter.

The technical aspects of combating STGs in prison, such as the paper classification and procedures needed to investigate gang members, are fairly straightforward. However, the human element is what makes the fight against STGs much more difficult. In correctional facilities that do not emphasize professionalism or do not encourage open communication among security staff, if there is a strong underlying prison subculture (both inmate and correctional officer), STGs are likely to proliferate. When selecting correctional staff to serve on gang task forces, the prison administrator must exercise care and remain vigilant. In some cases, an inmate’s sibling, cousin, girlfriend, former wife, or friend may be employed within the facility. This is, of course, a common tactic used by gangs who seek to infiltrate the correctional system.

Gang Control, Management, and Administrative Segregation

In addition to the physical security of the facility, there are many psychological tactics that can be used to control gang activity. For instance, the immediate tendency of corrections officials may be to restrict privileges for gang-related inmates. But as Fleisher (2008) notes, withdrawing incentives or placing these inmates in long-term states of restricted movement can have financial and social
RFID in Correctional Settings

RFIDs (Radio Frequency Identification Device) have a tag or ‘chip’ that uses wireless data communication to transmit information to electronic sensors, allowing users to locate and track tagged objects with a unique identifier. RFID technology was first used during World War II to identify whether approaching planes were friend or foe. Today, commercial groups commonly use it to track merchandise from warehouse to distribution to point of sale. RFID technology is also found in access control and payment systems, such as building access keycards, transit payment cards, and highway electronic toll collection systems (La Vigne, 2016).

According to Mann (2016), RFID can be used in inmate bracelets, whether worn on the wrist or on the ankle, which are programmed with a code that has a unique number that is specific to each inmate who wears one of these devices. The specific location of the program code is in an electronic microchip that can be linked with the prison’s count room or booking area, so that data on inmate movement can be tracked. These bracelets are able to be programmed with bar codes that identify when the inmate visits medical and/or obtains their medication order, visits the law library, or the commissary. The data that is recorded can be used for movement reports and/or to corroborate an inmate’s location at a specific day and time (Mann, 2016).

Most RFIDs are ‘passive,’ meaning that the chips can be read only when in close proximity to a sensor. As an example, community corrections agencies use passive RFIDs to electronically monitor those on home detention.

Active RFIDs have a battery-operated device integrated with the chip, enabling the tagged item to both receive signals and transmit data back to the sensor in near real time (La Vigne, 2016). Active RFIDs have three components:

- A chip embedded in a bracelet, which is often worn on the ankle.
- A series of data extension units, which read and transmit data from the chips.
- Computer software that can document the location and identity those wearing the bracelets.

Those inmates on RFID tracking systems have electronic notification signals that will send an alarm back to a monitoring computer whenever they walk outside a given perimeter or zone of the facility. This is set by security staff, in advance, and can be adjusted as needed. These signals are sent via radio wave frequency and are extremely useful for low security facilities or those that do not require expensive fencing. This can also save on personnel expenditures. Further, options with these systems allow correctional staff to carry pager-like devices to wear which can send an alarm to them directly whenever an inmate breaks the perimeter boundary that is set by radio frequency. This feature works even if the staff are in another distant area of the prison (Mann, 2016).

Institutional correctional settings have been using active RFIDs for at least a decade for things as basic as perimeter control, as well as more sophisticated applications, such as issuing alerts when two rival gang members are in close proximity (Hickman, Davis, Wells, & Eiseman, 2010). RFIDs can aid housing unit “counts,” identify whether inmates are in the proper locations (e.g., classroom, yard, housing unit) according to their schedules, and even monitor inmates’ eating habits (La Vigne, 2016). The technology can also serve as a valuable investigative tool, generating historical data on an inmate’s location and the time of his or her movements.

The Northeast Pre-Release Center (NEPRC), a women’s prison in Cleveland, Ohio, that was the setting of our NIJ-funded evaluation from 2005 through 2007, intended to use RFIDs in all of these ways. Unfortunately, the implementation of the technology was filled with problems. Service was interrupted for several months, staff received minimal training, bracelets were used inconsistently (at one point, 25% of inmates did not have bracelets), and NEPRC restricted software use to perimeter control (Halberstadt & La Vigne, 2011). The prison never employed the technology’s most powerful feature: tailored, inmate-specific exclusionary zones.

However, other experts contend that, if used correctly, RFID can provide huge benefits to corrections, both in terms of improved security and economic savings (Mann, 2016). In the past world of corrections, it was common for security staff to be required to manually log an inmate’s activities into a paper log that was passed down from shift-to-shift. Naturally, human error resulted in inaccurate reporting and, to add to this problem, the processes were cumbersome and time consuming. As Mann (2016) notes, technological improvements like RFID can “provide correctional staff a user friendly, efficient system for collecting, measuring, tracking and storing inmate movement data” (p. 1). Thus, contrary to the observations of La Vigne (2016), Mann sees RFID technology as a means to provide secure, time-saving, and economically viable means of maintaining custody of inmates within their charge.

Lastly, if one considers the cost of building fences, having staff to watch the fences, as well as the routine...
maintenance of heightened security, it becomes clear that the price tag can be quite phenomenal. The use of this type of technology can actually be less expensive, in many cases. Naturally, this will require that the equipment be used correctly and that staff are trained in its use, an issue cited by Halberstadt & La Vigne with their evaluation in Ohio at Northeast Pre-Release Center. As with any tool, the appropriate use and training will determine its utility and its effectiveness. Nevertheless, the use of RFID technology is one example of innovations in the field of corrections that, like other areas of the criminal justice system, hold promise for addressing both budgetary woes as well as public safety concerns.

Sources:

consequences for the prison facility. For instance, in Texas, many gang-related inmates are kept in administrative segregation. Administrative segregation is a security status that is intended to keep the assigned inmate from having contact with the general population. It is not punitive in nature, like solitary confinement. This custody status is intended to protect the general population from the inmate in segregation. However, this form of custody is very expensive.

Further, there is a tendency for prison systems that use administrative segregation to house inmates of the same gang in the same area. This prevents them from coming into contact with enemy gang members and cuts costs that would ensue if they were kept on different cell blocks or dormitories. But doing this replicates the street gang culture, as they are all together but geographically isolated. In other words, on the street it would be one neighborhood, one gang, and here it is one cell block, one gang. This can build solidarity for the group. It can also lead to problematic situations where inmates exercise power (through the gang rank structure) over a cell block or dormitory, encouraging security to work with those in power because the gang leaders can help them maintain authority over the other lower-ranking inmates of that gang. Naturally, this should be avoided because it validates the gang’s power and undermines the security staff. Fleisher (2008) notes that other undesirable behaviors can also emerge. For instance, gangs may attempt to run cell blocks, “sell” cells on the cell block, or “own” territory on the recreation yard. These behaviors reinforce their feeling that they have power over the institution and should be avoided.

Conclusion
This chapter has provided students with a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes aspects of the prison environment. The notion of a prison subculture, complete with its own norms and standards that are counter to those of the outside world, has been presented to give students an idea of the values and principles that impact the day-to-day operation of many prisons. There has been substantial debate as to whether this informal prison subculture is the product of adjustments and adaptations to prison life or if it is more the product of norms brought in from the outside world—from the street life.

The informal subculture within prisons tends to be largely driven by inmates. The convict code has typically been presented as the “gold standard” of behavior among inmates. This code represents perceptions from older eras, and its guidelines are now out of date and not in sync with the modern era. The effects of professionalism within the correctional officer ranks, the diversity of correctional staff, and the difference in the mind-set of this generation of inmates all have led to the near demise of the honor-bound convict code. Within the informal subculture, correctional staff also have
some of their own unwritten standards and expectations. The work of Kauffman (1988) has provided very good insight on the behavior of correctional staff in prisons.

The norms associated with both the subculture of prison staff and the convict code of inmates are in a state of flux and decline. The subculture among correctional staff has been impacted by the emphasis on professionalism and the diversification in staff recruiting. These two factors have changed the face of corrections over time and have also undermined the tenets of the prison subculture. What has resulted is a state of ambiguity where inmates may pay lip service to tenets of respectable behavior (according to prison logic) but often break these rules when put under pressure. Simply put, there is truly no honor among thieves.

Gangs have emerged as a major force in state prison systems. The first recorded prison gangs began to emerge in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, primarily in the California prison system. Since that time, gangs have proliferated around the United States and have exerted substantial influence over the prison subculture and even dynamics in prison operations. In this chapter, we have covered 13 of the larger and more well-known prison gangs in the nation. From the coverage of these gangs, it is clear that they have networks that extend beyond the prison walls, and this, in turn, increases their power and influence within the prison walls. Indeed, when offenders in a street gang enter prison, they do not forfeit their membership in their gang. Likewise, when these inmates leave prison, they again do not leave their gang obligations behind. Rather, gangs exist both inside and outside the prison walls.

The methods used to control gang activity inside prisons have been discussed in this chapter. Prison gang intelligence units must have effective means of investigating potential membership and collecting data on gang members. Utilizing electronic equipment for identification, storage, and retrieval is essential to maintaining an effective antigang strategy. The ability to share data with other agencies enhances the public safety in the region surrounding the prison and also improves security within the facility. Whether we like it or not, the prison has an impact on outside society due to the manner in which the inmate population cycles into and out of prison. Thus, it is clear that prisons impact society, both in terms of keeping dangerous persons locked up and in terms of the learned prison behaviors of those persons once they are released back into society.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Test your understanding of chapter content. Take the practice quiz.

1. How are the prison subcultures for inmates and correctional officers often interrelated?
2. Compare importation theory with exportation theory. Which one do you believe is the stronger influence on prison subculture, and why?
3. Explain some of the common outlooks and views of prison subculture. How does this contrast with the conventional logic of outside society?
4. How have professionalization and the diversification of correctional staff impacted the prison subculture?
5. Explain what a “hyena” is. What are some examples of how these inmates affect group behavior in prison facilities?
6. Identify at least three prison gangs, and explain how they have impacted corrections in their respective jurisdictions. Note their allies and adversaries in the prison, and explain how this affects prison operations.
7. Explain what prison systems can or should do to control gang problems that occur in their facilities.
8. Within the prison subculture, how is labeling theory related to prison rape?

KEY TERMS

Review key terms with eFlashcards.

Blood in—blood out, 232
Convict, 236
Convict boss/officer, 240
Convict code, 233
Gang cross-pollination, 248
Hogging, 239
Hustle, 239
Importation theory, 231
Mule, 237
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Prisonization, 241
Punk, 234
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Security threat group (STG), 248
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APPLIED EXERCISE 9.1

You are the assistant warden of a large, medium-security facility within a state prison system in the southeastern United States. Your facility has a disproportionate number of African American inmates (common in prison systems throughout the United States) and a disproportionate number of Caucasian officers.

In response to concerns from the Grievance Department regarding inmate allegations of racism from officers inside the facility, the warden has asked you to develop a comprehensive diversity training program for the security staff in your facility. Currently, your facility holds an annual 1-day “refresher” course for staff. This course is actually only a 4-hour block of instruction provided at the state training facility. Everyone throughout the system knows that this instruction is not taken seriously and is simply offered as a means of documenting that the state has made the training available.

Your warden desires to change this within your facility for two reasons. First, it is just a good and ethical practice to take diversity seriously. Second, the dollars spent to resolve grievances and other allegations are getting costly enough to make diversity training a fiscally sound alternative to potential litigation.
With this in mind, you are given the following guidelines for the training program that you are to implement:

1. The program should be 1.5 days in length and be given once annually.
2. The program should address numerous areas of concern, including race, gender, age, and religion.

Students should keep in mind that workplace diversity has two components. First, it involves fair treatment and the removal of barriers. Second, it addresses past imbalances through the implementation of special measures to accelerate the achievement of a representative workforce. Further, workplace diversity recognizes and utilizes the diversity available in the workplace and the community it serves.

Workplace diversity should be viewed as a means to attaining the organizational objectives of the correctional facility—not as an end in itself. The link between the agency objectives and the day-to-day processes that occur among staff in the facility is crucial to the success of workplace diversity initiatives.

For this assignment, outline the content that you would recommend for the training session, and explain the rationale behind your recommendation. Also, explain how you will “sell” these ideas to prison staff to ensure that they take the training seriously. Lastly, explain how this training, if successful, can improve security and safety in the institution. Your submission should be between 500 and 1,000 words.

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

You are a caseworker in a state facility and work closely with the institution’s classification department on a routine basis. You have one inmate on your caseload, Jeff, who has presented with a number of challenges. Jeff, who has presented with a number of challenges. Jeff is a 35-year-old male who is an inmate in your maximum-security facility. He has recently been transferred to your facility from another facility, largely for protective reasons. Jeff has come to you because he is very, very worried. Jeff is a sex offender, and he has been in prison for nearly 11 years on a 15-year sentence. He is expected to gain an early release due to his excellent progress and behavior in prison and due to prison overcrowding problems. He has been in treatment, and, as you look through his case notes, you can see that he has done very well.

But a powerful inmate gang at Jeff’s prior prison facility did not want to see him get paroled. Jeff had received “protection” from this gang in exchange for providing sexual favors to a select trio of its members. Jeff discloses that he had to humble himself in this way to survive in the prison subculture, particularly since he was a labeled sex offender. The gang knew this, of course, and used it as leverage to ensure that Jeff was compliant. In fact, the gang never even had to use any physical force to gain Jeff’s compliance. Jeff notes that this now bothers him, and he doubts his own sense of masculinity. Jeff also discloses that he has had suicidal ideations as a result of his experiences.

Thus, while Jeff has performed well in his treatment for sex offenders, he has also been adversely affected by noxious sexual experiences inside the prison. You are the first person that he has disclosed this to. As you listen to his plight, you begin to wonder if his issues with sexuality are actually now more unstable than they were before he entered prison. Though his treatment notes seem convincing, this is common among sex offenders, and the other therapist did not know that Jeff had engaged in undesired sexual activity while incarcerated. This activity has created a huge rift in Jeff’s masculine identity. Will this affect his likelihood for relapse on the outside? Does Jeff need to resolve his issues with consensual versus forced homosexual activity?
As you listen to Jeff, you realize that if you make mention of his experiences in your report, then the classification system is not likely to release him, and this condemns him to more of the same type of exploitation. Putting him in protective custody is not an option because Jeff adamantly refuses this custody level. He fears that the gang would think he was giving evidence against them and would then seek to kill him. However, if you do not mention any of this information and thereby allow a person with a highly questionable prognosis to be released, you run the risk of putting the public’s safety at risk.

What would you do?
PRACTICE AND APPLY WHAT YOU’VE LEARNED

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