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# Prison Culture, Management, and In-Prison Violence

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## Abstract

Academic attention to violence and other forms of in-prison misconduct is on the rise, although most research continues to be framed within now stale perspectives. A broader framework is needed that builds on the more contemporary aspects of these perspectives and incorporates other elements of prison culture and management that potentially influence violent offending and victimization in prison. This article begins with an overview of cumulative knowledge on prison culture to highlight relevant ideas on inmate adaptation to confinement and how violence might manifest from (mal)adaptation. How prison management shapes and reflects culture is also discussed with an emphasis on how prison officers affect inmate safety. A bi-level framework is presented that brings together the piecemeal contributions of research to date to provide a more comprehensive understanding of offending and victimization that should facilitate crime prevention in prison while improving the humanity of the prison experience.

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## INTRODUCTION

The term prison violence is used to refer to violence at the aggregate level (prison riots or other collective disturbances) and at the individual level (inmate-on-inmate and inmate-on-staff violence).<sup>1</sup> Both forms of violence are more characteristic of prisons for men relative to those for women, although inmate-on-inmate violence clearly exists among female inmates (Wooldredge & Steiner 2016a). Each level of violence has been viewed as manifestations of both prison culture and prison management, albeit with a heavier emphasis on management for an understanding of collective violence. Prison riots have become less frequent over the past 40 years in the United States as well as in other Western European countries (Useem 2018), perhaps a consequence of alleviating many of the most heinous living conditions (Jacobs 1980) in conjunction with more professional management regimes over time (Dilulio 1987). However, there is no hard evidence that rates of individual-level violence have decreased or increased over time.<sup>2</sup> The increased research focus on individual-level violence and inmate misconduct more generally over the past 30 years has generated important developments in our understanding of the subject that also reflect an improved understanding of prison management and cultures more broadly.

At the same time, however, these developments remain piecemeal and in need of integration for a more comprehensive framework reflecting contemporary imprisonment that can guide future research on individual-level violence and more effectively address violence prevention and inmate cynicism of legal authority. The most popular frameworks still adopted by researchers emerged primarily in the mid-twentieth century and have become stale (Crewe & Laws 2018), even though the general processes outlined in these theories are still applicable.

## RELEVANCE OF PRISON CULTURE AND MANAGEMENT TO PRISON VIOLENCE

Scholars who refer to a prison/inmate culture are generally referring to the social manifestations of how inmates adapt to a specific prison environment in light of their backgrounds, including the importation/development and perpetuation of belief systems (collective values and the rules supporting them), stratification systems (based on differences in an inmate's role and status within a group), barter economies (for goods and services not legally permissible), and unique jargon (language) reflecting what is valued and allowing prisoners to communicate more freely with each other (for the earliest discussions, see Clemmer 1940, Reimer 1937, Sykes 1958). A review of prison studies over the past 50 years suggests that different environments generate different challenges to adaptation, at least for men, where environments that impose greater challenges (deprivations) can produce more radically different cultures relative to those of nonincarcerated populations [e.g., compare Carroll (1974) to Irwin (1980) and Crewe (2011) to Skarbek (2014)]. These cultures also vary across prisons based on the composition of the offenders housed [see Irwin & Cressey's

<sup>1</sup> Staff-on-inmate violence at the individual level is not addressed here because many of those causes are distinct from the precipitators of violence by inmates. Inmate-on-inmate sexual violence is also not discussed for similar reasons and because of the rarity of these events relative to other forms of violence in prison.

<sup>2</sup> Documenting trends in prison riots is straightforward given the nature of a collective disturbance (i.e., it is a facility-level event that is clearly defined and with strict reporting procedures involving multiple agencies), but assessing meaningful trends in rates of in-prison violence is challenging. Assault rates, for example, must be aggregated from individual incidents that vary in prevalence across facilities based on security level, inmate population composition, detection rates, and the management of rule violators. Coupled with having to rely on official data that ignore many of these incidents, the reliability of assault rates could vary substantially across prisons. Also, pooling assault rates across prisons for a trends analysis would produce information that is too vague to be useful given how these rates vary across facilities for these other reasons.

(1962) discussion of the relevance of offenders' subcultural values prior to imprisonment], and thus heterogeneity in cultures follows heterogeneity in environments and populations.

Prison management, particularly the custodial (officer) workforce, shapes these cultures in part based on how inmates are treated (e.g., levels of discretion with rule enforcement, the quality of communication with and assistance provided to prisoners, use of coercion for rule compliance, attitudes toward offenders in general as well as toward demographic subgroups, etc.) (Liebling & Kant 2018). Therefore, when moving (cross-sectionally) from more open facilities with greater privileges and more supportive staff to more closed and controlled environments with fewer privileges and less tolerant staff, inmate cultures appear to transition from less violence to more violence because violence itself can be a manifestation of situational frustration (Toch 1977) as well as a method of problem-solving when prisoners are more suspicious of or cannot rely on staff (Skarbek 2014).

## **The Evolution of Prison Culture Versus Knowledge of Culture**

The observation about cross-sectional prison differences can be extended to longitudinal differences within prisons, where we would expect changes over time in deprivations (Fishman 1934, Sykes 1958) and the backgrounds of offenders (Irwin & Cressey 1962) to coincide with cultural changes. It cannot be overemphasized, however, that our understanding of how prison cultures have evolved over time has been defined heavily by the academic literature, yet this literature itself has evolved in terms of scholars' foci and broader advancements in both the social and behavioral sciences. Therefore, the correspondence between the evolution of prison cultures over time and the evolution in our understanding of these cultures is imperfect, and the correspondence that does exist reflects, in part, an academic preoccupation with men housed in higher security prisons where the most serious problems of maladaptation are most likely to manifest. Thus, just because we now focus more heavily on street and prison gangs as major forces on prison culture does not mean that they had no influence before the late 1970s or that their influences on prison culture are uniform across security levels. Similarly, greater emphasis over time on the relevance of considering individuals' needs prior to imprisonment for their behaviors during incarceration should not imply that these needs became more important for shaping means to adaptation over time.

## **CUMULATIVE KNOWLEDGE ON CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS TO PRISON**

Understanding how individuals adapt to confinement in prison is similar to understanding human adaptation to any physical environment. The physical environment and its specific challenges to survival lead humans to adapt in very specific ways to overcome these challenges (Lenski & Lenski 1978). Cultures develop as a means to adaptation and are defined by their unique belief systems, stratification systems, economies, and languages. Similar processes may apply to prisoners; for example, in order to adapt to prison, inmates develop and perpetuate a subculture that helps them alleviate some of the negative effects of incarceration. These subcultures are never completely separate from the larger cultures in which they exist, however, because offenders bring in (import) their own cultural backgrounds to the prison itself (Irwin & Cressey 1962). What is valued (e.g., status and material goods for men, family and social stimulation for women) ultimately derives from the broader culture, but the pursuit of these values is shaped by the means available in a prison environment (e.g., gang membership, underground economies, pseudofamilies, and intimate partners). In turn, prison slang reflects these means and corresponding lifestyles during confinement, although most of the language derives from the streets.

Keeping in mind the above caveat about possible disjuncture between the actual evolution of prison cultures versus academic knowledge of this evolution, the literature reveals that prison cultures have changed substantially over time [compare Clemmer (1940) to Jacobs (1977) to Skarbek (2014)] although there remain remnants of older cultures, perhaps because prisons by their nature have always been coercive organizations where the threat of coercion is always present and remains a psychological barrier to assimilation despite efforts to make these environments more palatable to inmates. Nonetheless, scholars' descriptions of these cultures have changed since the 1930s (prison environments were, for the most part, ignored by scholars prior to then). For convenience, the discussion of prison culture is divided into three eras of research and knowledge. Each era contributed to subsequent approaches and frameworks, and ultimately to cumulative knowledge on prisoner adaptation.

### **First Era of Research: 1930s to Mid-1960s**

Hans Reimer (1937) provided one of the earliest academic accounts of prison life. Reimer spent three months in prison as a participant-observer and described how the prison environment was shaped by a group of inmate leaders. The first systematic examination of the prison environment and the inmate social groups found inside is credited to Donald Clemmer (1940), a sociologist who worked in the mental health unit at the Illinois State Prison in Menard, IL.

The work of Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958), Sykes & Messinger (1960), Ward & Kassebaum (1964), and Giallombardo (1966) portrayed a dominant culture within prison, in which inmates may or may not have participated, with very little influence by black or Latino inmates given their smaller proportions relative to white inmates. During this period, there was a heavier sociological emphasis on how cultures were influenced by the prison environment itself, with less emphasis on population compositional effects on these cultures. However, Irwin & Cressey (1962) quickly challenged this general perspective with their proposition that offenders' histories primarily shaped adaptation to confinement. Still sociological in their orientation, Irwin & Cressey argued that the criminal subcultures of offenders prior to incarceration played a dominant role in the values and behaviors exhibited during confinement. This minority perspective at the time is clearly applicable to an understanding of gang influences on prison cultures in the twenty-first century.

The dominant prison culture described by Clemmer, Sykes, and others during this period was characterized by a general convict code subscribed to by prisoners. The code consisted of a set of norms for preserving inmate safety (from each other and from staff) and maintaining solidarity and strength in numbers. To these ends, the cultural norms promoted social distance from staff and stand-up behaviors, such as minding one's own business, no snitching, no stealing, no displays of weakness, and no contributions to situations that place others in harm's way of staff. Adherence to the code shaped an inmate's niche in the stratification system, corresponding status, and access to illicit goods (Sykes & Messinger 1960), whereas the code itself promoted punishments for members who violated the norms, including social death and/or violence, the latter graded according to the level of perceived harm to other prisoners.

### **Second Era of Research: Mid-1960s to Mid-1970s**

Prison cultures seemed to change more dramatically beginning in the mid-1960s as a reflection of changing demographics (the influx of blacks into American prisons increased more rapidly beyond this point) and the accompanying prisoners' rights movement across US prisons (Jacobs 1977). Beginning in the early 1970s and continuing to approximately 1980, prison studies shifted to descriptions of multiple subcultures coexisting in a single prison with race, religion, and/or political ideologies as their basis (e.g., Black Muslims, Black Panthers, Aryan Brotherhood, etc.),

owing to both the increasing freedoms of inmates, in particular religion and expression, in addition to growing minority groups and racial conflicts within prisons (e.g., Carroll 1974; Jacobs 1974, 1977; Sylvester et al. 1977). Some of these groups existed previously but with smaller memberships, and this changed with changing demographics. Academic descriptions focused on the sources of group differences in values, group-specific values relevant to keeping peace with (or distance from) other groups within relatively close physical proximity, and broader anti-administration sentiments shared across groups even if not formally articulated. There was also more discussion of individual-level violence relative to the first-era literature, suggesting that violence became more prevalent during this period due to greater culture conflict and perhaps changes in how a primarily white custodial workforce dealt with changing inmate demographics and growing prison populations.

**Recognizing the psychological aspects of confinement.** Prison ethnographies have been written primarily by sociologists interested in describing and understanding collective human behavior in prison, and this is why knowledge of inmate adaptation to confinement prior to the 1980s focused primarily on prison groups. Aside from obligatory comments on the existence of outsiders to inmate groups and how involvement might have varied by preprison social factors, little attention was given to more meaningful individual differences linked to psychological factors that could moderate the effects of prison culture on inmate behavior. Much earlier, however, Murray (1938) discussed how individual needs interact with social environments to shape human behavior whereby attributes of a specific environment can hinder or facilitate need satisfaction. The broader prison literature suggests that behavioral scientists became more interested in such factors in the late 1970s, which corresponded with the rise in prison populations and the increasing heterogeneity of inmate populations, including the placement of more offenders with mental health problems in prison due to rising government and public intolerance of mentally ill offenders.

Around this time, Toch (1977) discussed how prison environments are psychological environments, noting that (more broadly) different environments generate different feelings and behaviors (Dewey & Bentley 1949). Even within the same physical environment, people respond differently to specific environmental attributes that may or may not induce stress depending on an individual's needs and how they are prioritized (Lazarus 1966). Toch demonstrated the relevance of considering inmates' needs in prison environments and how the (in)ability to meet certain needs for particular inmates can generate differences in adaptation to confinement within the same facility. He specifically examined needs for privacy, safety, structure (in routines and knowing what to expect), support (resources for self-improvement), emotional (positive) feedback, social stimulation (human contact/interaction), activity, and freedom (to make choices). Other scholars have considered some of these as well as other needs [e.g., see Goodstein et al.'s (1984) discussion of personal control], but there is substantial overlap in identified needs despite different labels. These behavioral perspectives place greater emphasis on inmate behaviors as reactions to individual needs brought with them into prison that are not adequately addressed in a prison setting. Insights that emerged at this time provided a more nuanced understanding of adaptation and where inmates fit (or not) within a prison culture. To the point of this review, individual-level prison violence is, in part, a manifestation of both personal needs imported into prison and how the deprivations of an environment may interfere with those needs.

The personal needs referred to here should not be confused with criminogenic needs (Andrews & Bonta 2017), which are target areas addressed by treatment programs to reduce one's proclivity toward subsequent criminality (criminal history, antisocial attitudes, antisocial peers, personal/emotional difficulties, family, substance abuse, education/employment, and unstructured leisure time). Offender risk and needs assessments became a greater focus in the late 1970s, and this in part

prompted Feeley & Simon (1992) to comment that the era of mass incarceration coincided with an emphasis on actuarial risk assessment for the purpose of effectively managing large criminal populations.

### Third Era of Research: Late 1970s to Late 2010s

Throughout the most recent era of research on prison cultures, we have seen greater emphases on prison gangs in facilities for men (from sociological perspectives), recognition of more heterogeneous inmate populations with a range of psychological needs that can interfere with adaptation to confinement and promote participation in deviant subcultures, and much more attention paid to the unique carceral experiences of women.

The late 1970s marked the beginning of the “get tough” movement and the corresponding prison population boom, and studies of prisons for men after this point focused more heavily on the role of street and prison gangs as the primary influence on culture, at least in higher security prisons and units (Colvin 1992, Irwin 1980, Johnson 2002, Pyrooz et al. 2011, Stastny & Tyrnauer 1983). This transition reflected, in part, the rapid influx of street gang members to prison as a result of the War on Drugs and other government crime control strategies (Irwin 1980, Lawrence & Travis 2004). As prisons became more open systems and inmates gained more contact with the outside world, reflecting inmate rights and changing management philosophies, these populations simultaneously became more crowded and more racially/ethnically diverse with the prison experience becoming much more common for gang members and minorities (especially for minority gang members). Prison cultures became nearly synonymous with gang cultures in higher security facilities, and the more open prison environments facilitated the business of these gangs both inside and outside prison.

In many states, prison gangs (separate from street gangs displaced into prison) became much stronger during this period and further reinforced the role of gangs in shaping culture as well as culture conflict (Decker & Pyrooz 2018, Skarbek 2014). Despite greater reliance on supermax prisons and maximum-security units more broadly to address the much higher security threats posed by prison and street gangs, male inmate cultures in maximum- and many medium-security prisons/units today continue to be influenced primarily by the gangs operating within them.

Skarbek's (2014) discourse on male prison gangs in California stands in stark contrast to the ethnographies from the first era of prison culture studies. A prison gang differs from a street gang in that the former is created and perpetuated by inmates (Lyman 1989) and has a “corporate entity” (Skarbek 2014, p. 8) and lifetime commitments by many of its members and, as such, has a much broader age distribution than do street gangs. A focus on California prisons today would necessarily portray prison cultures as strikingly different from earlier periods because California prisons are exceptional in levels of gang activities and violence relative to most other state prisons. Even so, prison gangs operate in many prisons across most states (Camp & Camp 1985, Decker & Pyrooz 2018), and Skarbek's work is generalizable in other respects to current elements of prison culture during post-mass incarceration. Specifically, the general convict code identified during the first era of research no longer seems to apply to an understanding of inmate governance, at least not in higher security facilities for men. By the mid-1970s, the convict code had become much less effective for preserving safety and promoting inmate solidarity (Irwin 1980). Changing inmate demographics [due to the rising incarceration rates of minorities and younger offenders (Gambetta 2009)], higher proportions of first-timers, and greater political and religious freedoms permitted the emergence of multiple cultures in a single facility.

The fate of the convict code might have been inevitable, but it led to a need for an alternate form of inmate governance to preserve their safety because many inmates do not trust officers to



protect them; officers cannot provide complete surveillance at all times; and inmates cannot turn to officers for help in resolving disputes involving illegal activities (Skarbek 2014). More inmate groups emerged at this time and were segregated by race and ethnicity, with each group following its own set of norms. Although the racial and ethnic homogeneity of these groups contributes to within-group adherence to these norms, similar to how norms are more effective in culturally homogeneous neighborhoods (Bernstein 2001, Schaeffer 2008), differences between group codes can interfere with the provision of illicit goods across groups (Alesina et al. 1999). The absence of a universal code also permits greater use of violence.

In places where prison gangs already existed, they provided the governance needed to fill the void in informal social controls created by the demise of the convict code (Varese 2011). The Mexican Mafia originated in California prisons during the 1950s (Camp & Camp 1985), but other prison gangs subsequently emerged in the 1970s to protect inmates from the Mexican Mafia [La Nuestra Familia (Camp & Camp 1985) and the Black Guerilla Family (Fuentes 2006)]. Prison gangs, in contrast to street gangs behind bars, are the most powerful inmate groups and maintain complete control of prison drug markets because only they can guarantee product quality and protect the dealers inside prison. Prison gangs are superior in strength to street gangs in prison because their members are required to have lifetime commitments to the gang; thus, they are serving the gang upon release from prison and devising schemes to smuggle drugs into prison. Prison gangs can also extort street gangs by holding incarcerated gang members hostage (Skarbek 2014). These and other factors [such as intricate sets of rules to govern social relations with both gang and nongang members on a daily basis (Trammell 2009) and the heavy demands placed on new gang members to quickly establish loyalty (Fong 1990)] serve to enhance their reputation relative to street gangs. In short, prison gangs now serve the function of inmate governance previously accomplished with the more universal convict code.

Gang membership facilitates adaptation to prison because it provides safety and camaraderie, and this has been the trend across the United States since the late 1970s. However, given the centrality of the drug trade to prison gangs, violence is more common in populations with higher portions of gang members because the illegality of any drug trade means that legal governance to control the population is not feasible. In short, violence is used to resolve disagreements within the trade (Jacobs & Wright 2006).

**Greater recognition of sex differences in carceral experiences.** The third era of prison culture studies included an upsurge in research on women in prison, although there were studies from the first two eras that portrayed different cultures for women relative to those for men (Giallombardo 1966, Heffernan 1972, Jensen & Jones 1976, Tittle 1969, Ward & Kassebaum 1965). Greater attention to female prisoners was fed by the growing literature on needs and risk assessments more broadly during the 1980s. Regardless of the era, prison ethnographies have consistently underscored male inmates' emphases on machismo, competition over status, drug use and trafficking, and other self-indulgences, explaining (in part) the proliferation of gangs and the vertical stratification systems in higher security prisons for men. By contrast, the cultures of female inmates have always appeared less conflict-oriented with more horizontal stratification systems reflecting familial roles. Sex differences in the needs prioritized by men versus women (Wright & Cain 2018) in conjunction with greater difficulties in addressing certain needs more commonly prioritized among women (Bloom et al. 2003, Owen 1998, Rierden 1997) would explain some of these cultural differences.

Correctional officers treat both men and women as offenders, but women are less likely to actually define themselves as such (Rowe 2011). The management of perception is important for coping with stress, yet coercive institutions can be devastating to one's self-perception (Goffman

1961). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, a person's identity is imported into prison but shifts in response to the individual's experiences during confinement. Rowe (2011) argued that prison staff contribute to a woman's "mortification of self" (p. 577) beyond the stigma generated by societal rejection and their physical incarceration. Also, prison staff are generally more condescending to women, and treating them as children can exaggerate their perceived loss of individual choice. In conjunction with the sexist attitudes displayed by some male officers toward female inmates, women turn to each other for improving their self-perceptions, often producing fairly strong camaraderie with a more prevalent emphasis on primary relationships relative to male prisoners.

These ideas are not entirely new, as Ward & Kassebaum (1965) noted more than 50 years ago when describing how the loss of meaningful social roles was the primary distress for female prisoners. The primary difference from contemporary discussions of prison cultures for women is the more recent focus on why women are more inclined to feel this loss intensely and more often than men. For example, Kruttschnitt et al. (2013) found that female prisoners in the Netherlands were more negatively impacted by confinement when they maintained greater control over their lives before incarceration. There is also evidence that nearly three-fourths of women in state prisons have symptoms of a current mental health problem, compared to roughly half of men in state prisons (Mahmood et al. 2012). Slotboom et al. (2011) found that women incarcerated in the Netherlands are prone to depression, addiction, and PTSD, fed heavily by their exposure to trauma and abuse prior to incarceration [see also Moloney et al.'s (2009) discussion of the trauma histories of female inmates in Europe]. In conjunction with their much higher odds of being sexually victimized by prison staff (Buchanan 2007), the management of self-perception during incarceration may play a greater role in shaping the prison cultures of women versus men.

Assuming female inmates are, relative to men, generally less prone to conflict, exhibit more prosocial behaviors and attitudes, and are more likely to have experienced abuse and serious depression, inmate-on-inmate violence might be less problematic for women in prison, whereas violence turned inward (self-mutilation and attempted suicide) could be more prevalent relative to prisons for men.

### Transitions in Thought on Prison Culture Across Research Eras

The evolution of thought on male prison cultures in higher security settings has moved from an emphasis on (a) relatively unidimensional entities with a general inmate code to (b) multi-dimensional cultures shaped more by race, religion, and/or political ideologies in conjunction with street ideologies to (c) primarily gang cultures. The substantive transition in real shifts over time involves movement away from unidimensionality to multiple gang cultures existing in the same physical space. Regardless of the era, however, there have always existed smaller and virtually powerless groups with their own codes in conjunction with the relatively large numbers of inmates (depending on the prison) who operate on the margins, if not completely outside, of these cultures. Descriptions of gang conflicts over time have also conveyed the impression that individual-level violence has increased further throughout the current era. However, the growth in the number of prison groups serves to remove the strength in numbers once reflected in the more unidimensional cultures, potentially reducing the odds of prison riots. Regardless, one can no longer examine individual-level violence in prison without recognizing the role of membership in security threat groups (STGs; whether prison or street gangs).

The evolution of thought on prison cultures as well as the actual cultures themselves should not detract from the applicability of "deprivations" to the topic. The relevance of deprivations was the first to be recognized by scholars, but cumulative knowledge on the subject underscores



the relevance of offender backgrounds, personal needs, prison management (discussed below), and their interplay with each other. The specific deprivations have changed in magnitude as well as type over time because of the prisoner rights movement and changes in management, risk assessment, inmate population composition, facility architecture, and even the privileges (not rights) granted to inmates. The deprivations identified by Sykes (1958) have morphed in degree and substance, but contemporary scholarship has expanded on these to encompass other environmental, political, and psychological deprivations that shape inmate adaptation, whether operating at the macro or micro level. Crewe's (2009, 2011) work is an excellent example; he discusses the dehumanizing and labeling effects of flawed risk assessments, the illusion of self-efficacy, and how the nature of discretionary rule enforcement necessarily sets up inmates to fail. Ironically, many of the advancements in prison practices over the past 50 years appear to have only changed the substance of the pains of imprisonment.

## **PRISON MANAGEMENT AS CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF PRISON CULTURE**

Prison management includes all personnel responsible for the daily operations of a facility, but its relevance to a discussion of prison culture and violence has more to do with the correctional officers responsible for managing inmates on a daily basis. These staff are the primary rule enforcers and the most visible representation of prison authority (Garland 1990, Liebling et al. 2011, Lipsky 1980, Lombardo 1989). According to Shamir & Drory (1981, p. 233), "due to the number of contacts between guards and inmates, the guard becomes a very salient feature of the prison experience of inmates." As such, they likely have the greatest impact on inmates' perceptions of any specific regime and whether they see these power holders as a legitimate authority (Bottoms & Tankebe 2012, Liebling 2004, Lombardo 1989, Sparks et al. 1996, Steiner & Wooldredge 2015). Discretion in rule enforcement and how specific rules are enforced likely impact prison culture by shaping an inmate's belief in (respect for) the rules and, possibly, his or her resistance to violence or any other form of conflict. The degree of integration of any inmate into a prison gang, among anyone not previously a member of a street or prison gang, might hinge on perceptions of officers as (il)legitimate and (in)capable of problem-solving. The degree of separation between inmates and officers could affect the degree to which inmates must rely on prison gangs for inmate governance.

Authorities are legitimate if they (a) occupy a lawful position that influences others, (b) act fairly, and (c) behave in ways that are morally justifiable to those impacted by their behaviors (Bottoms & Tankebe 2012, Liebling 2004, Tyler 1990). Tankebe (2013) argued that state assignment of legal authority is not sufficient to establish legitimacy in that prisoners also must hold a general perception that officers are effective and fair (see also Bottoms & Tankebe 2012). Among inmates who do not serve to profit from illegal prison economies, those with stronger beliefs regarding the legitimacy of prison officers may be less inclined to rely on gangs for protection and problem-solving because these inmates may be less cynical of prison authority and perceive that officers are capable of maintaining order (Bottoms 1999, Garland 1990, Liebling et al. 2011, Lombardo 1989, Sparks et al. 1996, Tyler 2010). In short, the attitudes and behaviors of officers toward inmates will ultimately impact inmates' perceptions of prison authority and, in turn, the cultural aspects of how they adapt to officers. Prison management can therefore influence prison cultures. However, both inmates' perceptions of officers and officers' perceptions of inmates are dynamic in that inmates and officers necessarily react to each other, so linkages between prison culture and officers' behaviors and attitudes may be reciprocal (Bottoms & Tankebe 2012).

Ethnographic studies of prison officers and prison environments have underscored the relevance of inmates' perceptions of officers for shaping the moral climate of a prison (Liebling 2004,

Liebling et al. 2011, Sparks et al. 1996). Liebling (2004) observed that inmates' perceptions of facility order were influenced by their beliefs regarding the fairness of staff and the quality of the relationships between staff and inmates. Sparks et al. (1996) found that a maximum-security prison in which staff were less coercive and fairer with inmates had fewer violent incidents and better order relative to a maximum-security prison where staff did not behave accordingly.

How prison staff react to prisoners who engage in misconduct during incarceration is also important for shaping culture, aside from inmates' general perceptions of rule enforcement. Rule violators' perceptions of the procedural and distributive justice received during these incidents might impact perceptions of legitimate authority more broadly (Franke et al. 2010, Henderson et al. 2010, Reisig & Mesko 2009, Sparks et al. 1996, Steiner & Wooldredge 2015, Tyler 2010). Distributive justice reflects the fairness of outcomes/sanctions resulting from legal deliberations over crimes/rule infractions, whereas procedural justice concerns the fairness of the procedures followed by legal authorities to arrive at those outcomes/sanctions. The general expectation of the accused is that they will be able to tell their side of the incident and that legal authorities will be neutral and treat them with dignity and respect, ultimately with the goal of doing what is right (Bottoms 1999; Sparks et al. 1996; Tyler 1990, 2010).

Linking these ideas back to the importance of meeting the needs prioritized by inmates in order to facilitate adaptation to confinement, both procedural and distributive justice are tied to (a) the need for personal control, or increasing predictability in event outcomes to avoid learned helplessness (Goodstein et al. 1984), and (b) reducing stress that can ultimately lead some inmates to act out and behave aggressively (McClellan et al. 1997, Toch 1977, Toch et al. 1989). An important difference between legitimacy and these other concepts is that legitimacy refers to beliefs about the custodial staff in general, whereas distributive and procedural justice each refer to experiences with particular staff during specific events.

How officers exert their authority over prisoners bears directly on their establishment of legitimate authority. Greater reliance on coercion as a means of achieving order among prisoners may only weaken an inmate's belief in and respect for rules and legal authority (Gordon & Stichman 2016, Hepburn 1985, Wooldredge & Steiner 2016b), thereby promoting defiance to prison rules (Kauffman 1988) and increasing reliance on the governance provided by prison gangs. Officers in some facilities might be more prone to rely on coercion due to administrative and other environmental factors, but the broader prison culture itself may perpetuate its use once established within the informal norms developed by officers to adapt to specific types of work environments. Marquart (1986) described an informal system of graded physical punishments for inmates in a Texas prison who were disrespectful toward officers during encounters for rule infractions, with the type of coercion dependent on the level of disrespect. Such an informal yet structured set of tactics cannot exist over time without subcultural reinforcement among officers, and regular use of such tactics further reinforces solidarity among the officers who rely on them for problem-solving.

By contrast, greater reliance on one's knowledge for problem-solving and the respect earned from inmates over time may promote greater faith placed by inmates in the governance provided by prison management. Officers who promote fairness and mutual respect while preserving inmates' dignity contribute to the establishment of more legitimate prison regimes and more orderly institutions (Liebling 2004, Sparks et al. 1996, Tyler 2010). Prison environments that are more just have also been found to be more stable and less tense (Liebling 2004), and inmates' perceptions regarding the stability and safety of prison environments have been linked to their psychological well-being.

Some of the earliest work on correctional officers portrayed their behaviors as products of their assigned authority and working in a coercive organization (e.g., Haney et al. 1973), suggesting that we might expect officers in general to lean toward greater use of coercion with prisoners

regardless of the facility and regardless of their initial dispositions toward criminals. Since that time, however, scholars have established great variation in officers' orientations to inmates and their work, and much of this research focuses on the impact of environmental and administrative differences across prisons on officers (akin to a deprivation theory of officers' work) (Auty & Liebling 2019, Lerman & Page 2012, Liebling & Kant 2018). Although the work role of officers is virtually identical across prisons (Liebling & Kant 2018), their orientations and behaviors can be very different depending on the broader environment. Kauffman (1988) argued that the indifference or even negative attitudes some officers developed toward both inmates and other officers over time stemmed from their occupational experiences, which varied across officers as well as facilities. Recent work also suggests that administrative-related factors, which are aspects of the prison environment, heavily shape job burnout (Griffin et al. 2012, Lambert et al. 2007, Schaufeli & Peeters 2000). Job burnout, in turn, can impact the prison culture and the credibility of officers to manage prisons effectively. Administrative factors such as job autonomy, variety, feedback, and supervision have been linked to an officer's emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of ineffectiveness (Armstrong & Griffin 2004, Griffin et al. 2012). These outcomes can have a direct bearing on their investment in both job tasks and prisoners' safety and well-being.

It is naïve to think that most prisoners can hold officers in high regard given that prisons as institutions of punishment are coercive by their nature. However, most inmates give officers a chance to demonstrate their willingness to respond to requests, provide support, resolve conflicts, and protect inmates from the harms they are capable of protecting them from (Liebling 1994).

Mutual respect between officers and inmates is feasible even while officers uphold prison regulations, albeit with the use of judicious discretion (Bottoms & Tankebe 2012, Liebling 1994, Sparks et al. 1996). Still, it is challenging to find individuals (officers) who are willing to perform the required duties and perform them well, treat inmates fairly and consistently, and stay in the job for relatively little pay.

## **A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL EFFECTS ON PRISON VIOLENCE**

As discussed, the evolution of academic thought on prison cultures has led to underscoring the influences of the prison environment (including correctional officers), particular background characteristics of offenders (including personal needs), and interactions between these micro- and macro-level effects on an individual's adaptation to incarceration. One of the manifestations of (mal)adaptation is violent offending, whether as a mechanism sanctioned by the culture for protection, retaliation, retention of one's status, or other problem-solving, or as an outcome of anxiety and stress. Similarly, the chances of being victimized by violence while incarcerated may also reflect (as well as feed) the struggles with learning how to cope with the challenges confronted by inmates on a daily basis. Not surprisingly, therefore, the most common framework adopted by quantitative researchers when examining individual-level violence in prison, and inmate misconduct more generally, has involved importation and deprivation theories (Steiner 2018), which focus on individual- and prison-level effects on violence, respectively.

Importation theory focuses on how deviance during incarceration is shaped by personal attributes people carry into prison (e.g., persons with histories of substance abuse use drugs in prison, violent offenders are more likely to behave violently, street gang members join gangs in prison and/or adopt those subcultural values, etc.) (Irwin & Cressey 1962), whereas deprivation theory posits that deviance results from barriers to adaptation posed by the prison environment and the unique experiences of inmates (e.g., using drugs to cope with harsh living conditions, using violence to protect oneself and one's property, joining prison gangs for inmate governance,

etc.) (Sykes 1958). Both sets of factors influence whether and how inmates become integrated into prison cultures, as previously discussed, and in turn how deviant behaviors result. It has become customary in related research to examine three categories of measures within this framework, although no single study has examined all subgroups within each broader category: preprison attributes of individuals (e.g., demographics, criminal histories, needs, social and economic backgrounds), factors reflecting individual-level experiences during confinement (e.g., victimization, gang involvement, visitation, work, programs), and the attributes of confinement itself operating at the macro level (e.g., administrative philosophies, workforce attributes, architecture, facility size, crowding, security levels). Granted, there are aspects of prison cultures at both the micro and macro levels that can only be proxied (and sometimes not very well) in empirical studies, and the biggest challenge for future research is generating reliable measures of these broader concepts or else acquiescing to the idea that knowledge of cultural impacts on violence should be built strictly on the basis of qualitative research.

The importation/deprivation framework has become stagnant over time, perhaps as a consequence of an overly simplistic classification of predictors without more in-depth causal explanations linking these factors to violence. For example, the importation perspective boils down to the idea that people behave the way they do in prison based on how they behaved on the outside. However, this begs the question of why these preprison factors actually matter? Deprivation theory is also unsatisfactory because possible causality is vague beyond linking a series of inconveniences to deviance. The deprivation perspective also does not (typically) address the role of prison management. Crewe & Laws (2018) have recognized the utility of a managerial perspective for expanding our understanding of inmate behaviors, but scholars have yet to integrate such a perspective within a multilevel framework.

A framework for an empirical understanding of prison violence is needed that is more comprehensive and provocative while incorporating some of the same types of measures examined previously but also moving beyond the usual suspects. One such framework might integrate social control and lifestyle/routine activities theories, consistent with the compatibility of these perspectives for explaining crime and victimization in the general population (Felson 1986, Miethe & Meier 1994, Schreck 1999, Wilcox et al. 2003). A multilevel social control–opportunity perspective recognizes that variation in both formal and informal controls over an individual’s behavior can operate at both the individual and aggregate levels, and the absence of or weaknesses in these controls in the daily lives of individuals can generate opportunities for both offending and victimization. As applied to inmate violence, individual and cultural factors are embedded in the ideas of personal/self-control, formal and informal social controls, and individual lifestyles/routines, guardianship, and target suitability.

Many relevant effects on violence cannot be strictly classified as reflecting either a control versus an opportunity perspective. This is the nature of the integrated framework, where many aspects of weaker controls necessarily coincide with opportunities for successful offending and victimization. Prison cultures include both formal and informal controls over an individual’s behavior while also shaping opportunities for offending and victimization (e.g., more crowded prisons can weaken remunerative controls due to greater demands for limited jobs and programs while also interfering with staff surveillance and creating opportunities for victimization).

A social control perspective permits consideration of personal control (Goodstein et al. 1984, Mackenzie et al. 1987) and commitments to conformity (Wooldredge et al. 2001) at the individual level as well as to facility-level processes related to administrative (formal) or nonadministrative (informal) controls (Colvin 1992, Dilulio 1987, Useem & Kimball 1989, Useem & Reisig 1999). Micro- and macro-level controls have been linked to both male and female inmates’ responses to the prison environment (Mackenzie et al. 1987, Ruback & Carr 1984, Wooldredge et al. 2001),

but it is important to reiterate that the needs prioritized by women may exert more significant influences on their behaviors relative to men's (Bloom et al. 2003, Hardyman & Van Voorhis 2004).

An understanding of violent victimization as opposed to offending places a heavier emphasis on lifestyle and routine activities theories of victimization relative to theories of social control. However, formal and informal controls are potentially important for shaping victimization opportunities (proposed by Schreck 1999; see also Holtfreter et al. 2008, Ousey et al. 2011). Lower levels of self-control coincide with deviant lifestyle choices that increase an individual's vulnerability to victimization (Schreck 1999). Therefore, lifestyles and routines are the more proximate influences on victimization risk relative to low self-control. Most relevant are lifestyle factors that influence an inmate's exposure to high-risk situations (Hindelang et al. 1978), the absence of guardians capable of protecting the inmate from harm (Cohen & Felson 1979), how vulnerable the inmate is as a possible target as well as how much negative attention the inmate draws from others (Finkelhor & Asdigian 1996), and how some or all of these factors might operate at both the micro and macro levels (Miethe & Meier 1994, Wilcox et al. 2003).

### **Inmate-Level Contributors to Violent Offending and Victimization**

This section reviews individual-level factors that should be considered in empirical studies of in-prison violence within a multilevel social control–opportunity framework, whether focused on violent offending or victimization.

**Offending.** Prisoners are invested in maintaining order so as to improve control over the environment and enhance self-efficacy (Bottoms 1999, Skarbek 2014, Sparks et al. 1996, Trammell 2009). Social controls in prison can be formal (e.g., officer surveillance) and informal (e.g., special favors granted by staff), and informal controls can operate among the inmates themselves to assist them in realizing common goals (see the earlier discussions of gangs). Both formal and informal controls can operate at the individual (inmate) or aggregate (prison) level (Sampson 1986, Wooldredge et al. 2001), and some factors that have been examined previously within the importation and deprivation perspectives might fit within a control framework.

Individual demographics are often linked to a control perspective, as they might proxy unmeasured processes reflecting informal controls. The relevance of an individual's age (Hirschi & Gottfredson 1983) and race (Wilson 1987) for understanding deviance more broadly have been discussed from a control perspective. In prison, an inmate's age may be inversely related to violent offending because of fewer ties to more law-abiding persons among younger inmates (e.g., intimate partners and/or children) and less time to invest in or to develop an appreciation for beneficial programs designed to facilitate reentry (e.g., education and vocational training), both of which may help individuals refrain from gang activities. There is substantial evidence of inverse age effects on both violent and nonviolent crimes in prison (for a review, see Steiner et al. 2014).

Regarding the role of race, Anderson (1999) described how cultural values in more disadvantaged neighborhoods often condone the use of violence as a means to gain respect among peers and for resolving problems involving situations in which residents either cannot rely on the police (e.g., settling disputes over drug trades) or refuse to do so because police have not garnered the residents' respect. The use of violence for achieving status or for problem-solving counters a commitment to legitimate (legal) lifestyles, yet violence may be more common among prisoners coming from these disadvantaged/disorganized areas and who are more often minorities (Irwin 1980). As described by Decker & Pyrooz (2018) and Skarbek (2014), gang membership in prison most often falls along racial lines as reflections of cultural values.

Social demographics such as marital, employment, and education status might also be relevant as indicators of an individual's commitment to conformity (Hirschi 1969, Toby 1957). Prisoners who are married, more educated, and/or were employed in legitimate work prior to confinement might be more likely to consider the risks of violence, whether potentially delaying their release or risking reclassification to higher security with fewer privileges (Wooldredge et al. 2001). However, assuming these types of inmates are more likely to operate outside or on the periphery of gangs in prison, as suggested by Sykes (1958) and others, they could be faced with violent encounters without protection from others.

Evidence favoring inverse effects of marriage and preprison employment on inmate misconduct more generally is mixed (Steiner et al. 2014), although inverse effects of education have been more consistent (for reviews, see Meade 2012, Schenk & Fremouw 2012). Findings are relatively consistent for both men and women, with some exceptions (e.g., Kruttschnitt & Gartner 2005). However, family status (having children) seems to be relevant for female inmates only. Bloom et al. (2003) and Uggen & Kruttschnitt (1998) found that the presence of children lowers the odds of subsequent offending among women, perhaps because attachment to children may act as an informal control over behavior when mothers are committed to their children.

Inmates who have engaged in violent offenses or have criminal histories could also be more likely to engage in subsequent violence (Alpert & Hicks 1977, Steiner & Wooldredge 2018, Wooldredge et al. 2001), assuming there is a fair amount of continuity in individual behavior (Sampson & Laub 1993). A number of studies of men and/or women in prison have produced empirical support for significant effects of type of offense, criminal histories, and gang affiliations on violent incidents and/or inmate misconduct more generally (Steiner et al. 2014). Other related factors (e.g., sentence length and risk classification) might also reflect weaker investments in the status quo prior to incarceration.

Drawing from a personal control perspective, histories of substance abuse may contribute to learned feelings of helplessness (Goodstein et al. 1984) because it interferes with the development of coping methods for stressful situations. The absence of coping mechanisms, in turn, may increase the odds of behaving violently while under stress (McClellan et al. 1997, Toch 1977, Toch et al. 1989). Steiner & Wooldredge (2013) found that inmates who used drugs shortly before their confinement were significantly more likely to assault other inmates as well as staff. Repeated restrictions on choice, outcome control, and/or predictability in the prison environment may also contribute (via conditioning) to feelings of helplessness (Goodstein et al. 1984).

Turning to individual-level indicators of the prison experience, participation in more facility programs (e.g., education and vocational training) or obtaining a job in prison might enhance an inmate's perception of personal control and perhaps reflect a stronger commitment to the status quo. Programs and jobs also provide more formal controls over inmates by staff supervisors, and they can act as remunerative controls in providing incentives to follow the rules (Colvin 1992, Huebner 2003). Similarly, visitation operates as a remunerative incentive for following rules because it is often denied to rule violators. The ability to visit with family and prosocial friends may also help an inmate maintain attachments to more law-abiding persons and lessen conflicts with inmates and staff (Cochran & Mears 2016).

Inmates who manage to avoid violent victimizations by other inmates might also be less likely to engage in violence against other inmates. Experiencing victimization in prison, however, might severely weaken an individual's commitment to the rules and respect for officers because the system failed to provide protection from harm, and prisoners often return violence for the purpose of retaliation and/or to establish boundaries with other inmates (e.g., Irwin 1980, Skarbek 2014).



**Victimization.** As opposed to violent offending, an understanding of violent victimization in prison might be better framed in lifestyle/routine activities theory. Finkelhor & Asdigian (1996) argued that certain individuals may be more vulnerable to violent victimization based on their personal characteristics (see also Garofalo 1986, Wilcox et al. 2003). Opportunities for violent attacks abound in prison because individuals with different characteristics and backgrounds interact with each other, and the more likely motivated offenders are able to target those with characteristics suggestive of greater vulnerability. If greater vulnerability is indicated by characteristics less common among motivated offenders, then the more vulnerable inmates might include those who are older, not gang members, more educated, and married, were employed and/or living with dependent children, and did not have substance abuse problems at the time of arrest (some of these factors were examined by Wolff et al. 2008, 2009; Wooldredge & Steiner 2014). Individuals who have either never spent time in prison before or spent less time in a given facility might also be more vulnerable targets if they have not yet learned how to protect themselves (McCorkle 1992).

Finkelhor & Asdigian (1996) also argued that some individuals are more likely to antagonize others and increase their odds for attack (see Sparks 1982, for a parallel discussion of victim precipitation). For example, male inmates may be more likely victims of assault compared to female inmates because men are often more physically confrontational than women (McClellan et al. 1997). Target antagonism may also be greater among inmates incarcerated for certain crimes (e.g., sex offenses) or among persons with higher peer status if beating them serves to heighten an attacker's own status (e.g., Irwin 1980, 2005).

Consistent with the idea that stronger guardianship over potential targets should reduce victimization risk (Cohen & Felson 1979), the daily routines of inmates that place them in more structured activities with greater supervision by staff and for more time each day should provide stronger guardianship against violent offenders (Wooldredge 1998). Related activities might include education classes (literacy, pre-GED, GED, and college), vocational apprenticeships, other reentry approved programs, prison industry jobs, and possibly structured recreation (although team sports might feed opportunities for conflict and violence). Wooldredge & Steiner (2014) found evidence of an inverse effect of time spent in recreation on the odds of being assaulted by another inmate, but the effect of time spent in education classes was null.

An inmate's custody level is also relevant to guardianship because lower levels correspond with greater freedom of movement, more dense populations, and lower ratios of officers to inmates. The odds of violent victimization might be higher for these prisoners, similar to Wilcox et al.'s (2003) discussion of increased exposure to risky situations in areas with more dense residential populations and less comprehensive police surveillance.

## **Prison-Level Contributors to Violent Offending and Victimization**

This section presents a discussion of aspects of prison environments that might be relevant to studies of in-prison violence framed within a multilevel social control–opportunity theory. As in the last section, factors are separated by a focus on violent offending versus a focus on violent victimization.

**Offending.** At the aggregate level, features of prison environments may act as controls on inmates in addition to inhibiting or creating opportunities for violence. Macro-level controls include structural features of the prison, such as architectural design. The newer designs of prisons built during and after the late twentieth century may have contributed to lower misconduct rates more generally (Irwin 2005), perhaps because these designs facilitate more effective supervision of prisoners and reduce opportunities for deviance. However, Morris & Worrall (2014) compared

Texas prisons with linear versus campus designs and found that these designs had no bearing on the odds of violent offending in prison.

Related to design is the security level of a prison or unit, and opportunities for violence can vary dramatically across different security levels. On the one hand, maximum-security prisons/units should provide fewer opportunities for violence based on physical design and the numbers of inmates held, but on the other hand, these environments also house more gang members and the most dangerous (and potentially more motivated) offenders. Relations between staff and inmates might also be more strained in higher security prisons/units due to less emphasis on programming and remunerative controls and more emphasis on security and coercive formal controls (e.g., controlled movement, belly and leg chains, more time separated from others, etc.), and this could weaken informal controls over prisoners. Research to date favors the idea that misconduct rates (including violence) are generally higher in maximum-security prisons (reviewed by Steiner et al. 2014), although a recent study with a more rigorous research design suggested no differences in misconduct between maximum- and lower-security levels (Tahamont 2019). Extant research also suggests that the effect of security level on violence is gender-neutral. Mandaraka-Sheppard (1986) found that female inmates serving time in more secure or closed facilities were more likely to engage in deviance, particularly violence.

More crowded facilities might also weaken both formal and informal controls over prisoners if crowding interferes with patterns of communication between inmates and staff, thereby contributing to a breakdown in control (Useem 1985) and increasing levels of conflict and violence. Crowding might also increase opportunities for violence due to weaker surveillance and more limited access to programs, as mentioned above. An institution's level of crowding has also been considered an environmental stressor (e.g., Paulus et al. 1985). Prisoners might be more likely to turn to inmate groups to regain control over their daily lives but at the cost of becoming fully enmeshed in a prison gang.

Findings from several studies suggest that crowding is positively related to levels of violence and/or other forms of misconduct (Clayton & Carr 1983, Ekland-Olson 1986, Nacci et al. 1977, Ruback & Carr 1993, Wooldredge et al. 2001), whereas some researchers have found negative relationships (Gaes & McGuire 1985, Walters 1998). Still others have not observed any relationship between crowding and violence (Camp et al. 2003, McCorkle et al. 1995, Useem & Reisig 1999), and Wooldredge & Steiner (2009) found that facility size is more relevant than crowding to levels of inmate-on-inmate assaults. Larger facilities might contribute to greater anonymity and stress (weaker informal controls), and to less efficient surveillance (weaker formal controls).

The rising over-representation of minorities in US prisons beginning in the 1960s initially corresponded with more in-prison violence (e.g., Carroll 1974, Irwin 1980, Jacobs 1977). Higher levels of racial heterogeneity can alter and disrupt interaction and communication patterns that bind social organizations together even when different race and ethnic groups share common values (Bursik & Grasmick 1993, Kornhauser 1978, Sampson & Groves 1989). As the racial composition of prisons was changing across the country, court rulings emerged that placed greater constraints on the exercise of formal controls over inmates (e.g., solitary confinement, physical force, etc.). These processes in conjunction with the growth in gang members initially contributed to racial tensions and higher levels of inmate conflict (Carroll 1974, Jacobs 1977).

Prisoners subsequently adapted to racial heterogeneity and came to share an emphasis on facility order. In-prison violence may have lessened over time because of this adaptation. From the "equal status contact" perspective (Allport 1954, p. 281), conflict may be reduced between individuals from different groups when they share comparable status and goals. Most prisoners have more comparable status relative to free citizens and also share the goals of personal safety and facility order (Bottoms 1999, Irwin & Cressey 1962, Sparks et al. 1996, Trulson & Marquart

2002). Trulson & Marquart (2002) found that desegregating Texas prisons actually reduced rates of motivated assaults among integrated cell partners.

Allport (1954) also argued that stronger institutional supports can improve the effects of contact, and one of those supports is the local atmosphere. In prison, the racial heterogeneity of staff might be relevant in this regard, as it may or may not mirror the heterogeneity found in nonincarcerated populations (e.g., all-white staff versus a mix of persons from different race and ethnic groups). Greater similarity might provide a more normalized prison experience for inmates (Camp et al. 2003), and a more racially heterogeneous staff environment might reinforce inmates' perceptions of common interests across race and ethnic groups. In short, greater racial heterogeneity may act as a macro-level informal control. Irwin (2005) discussed how racial tensions at Salono were relaxed to some extent with the hiring of minority officers. McCorkle and colleagues (1995) found that lower ratios of white to black correctional staff corresponded with lower rates of inmate and staff assaults across 371 prisons in the United States.

**Victimization.** Guardianship can operate at both the micro and macro levels (Cohen & Felson 1979), and macro-level guardianship in prison is reflected in the formal controls discussed above. That is, tighter (formal) controls over the inmate population that augment supervision and restrain potential offenders correspond with guardianship. Scholars have noted the relevance of prison architecture (Dilulio 1987, Morris & Worrall 2014, Useem & Piehl 2006, Wooldredge & Steiner 2014), ratio of staff to inmates, and prison security level (Dilulio 1987) in protecting vulnerable inmates and enhancing the overall safety of prisons. All of these factors influence the effectiveness of both electronic and human surveillance over suitable targets.

Wooldredge & Steiner (2014) found that the odds of violent victimization in Ohio and Kentucky prisons were lower in prisons with podular housing units relative to units laid out in linear designs (e.g., telephone pole) even when controlling for security level, consistent with the idea that reducing blind spots might lessen physical attacks on inmates. Facility size and/or crowding might also be relevant to victimization risk if larger facilities and higher population densities reduce effective guardianship by interfering with surveillance (Wooldredge & Steiner 2009). Finally, rates of violence may be higher in more secure prisons (Steiner et al. 2014) because higher security prisons hold individuals at greater risk to offend (i.e., proportionately more motivated offenders). More proximate indicators of administrative controls and supervision (i.e., prison-level guardianship) might involve the ratio of officers to inmates, the average custody level of the inmate population, and the rate at which rule violators are placed in restrictive housing.

## **Managerial Contributors to Violent Offending and Victimization**

This section presents a discussion of prison management factors that might be relevant to studies of violent offending and victimization framed within a multilevel social control–opportunity theory.

**Offending.** Related to prison management practices and violence, correctional officers are most relevant to this discussion, as noted above, because the rules they choose to enforce and how they are enforced are critical for shaping inmates' perceptions of the rules and the officers' authority (Bottoms 1999, Hepburn 1985, Irwin 1980, Liebling 2004, Lombardo 1989, Sparks et al. 1996, Steiner & Wooldredge 2015). A social control perspective is compatible with how these factors can influence an inmate's belief in and respect for prison authority (formal control) and, in turn, the motivation to seek governance through deviant prison groups (further weakening formal controls).

Consistent with the earlier discussion of linkages between personal control and inmates' perceptions of justice, more negative experiences during encounters and hearings with prison staff

over rule infractions might enhance feelings of learned helplessness, in turn increasing the odds of acting out and behaving aggressively (McClellan et al. 1997, Toch 1977, Toch et al. 1989). Steiner & Wooldredge (2018), however, found no significant impacts of Ohio inmates' perceptions of procedural and distributive justice during rule infraction hearings on the number of subsequent violent incidents. Reisig & Mesko (2009) found an inverse relationship between procedural justice and general rule breaking among Slovenian prisoners but no relationship between legitimacy and misconduct. A study of Dutch prisoners also revealed an inverse effect of procedural justice on rule violations (Beuersbergen et al. 2015).

**Victimization.** The inability of correctional officers to establish themselves as legitimate authorities among inmates may be relevant to target vulnerability. Inmates may see themselves as more vulnerable to attacks if they are less likely to perceive officers as legitimate authorities who are capable of ensuring the safety of inmates (Liebling 2004, Sparks et al. 1996).

The earlier discussion of how inmate violence results from weak facility management (Dilulio 1987, Useem & Kimball 1989) is also relevant to guardianship, reflected in part by the strictness of rule enforcement by officers. In a culture of greater leniency shown by officers, motivated offenders may have more opportunities for victimizing others. From an administrative control perspective (Dilulio 1987), between-prison differences exist in resources to combat violence and to keep inmates safe. Custodial staff resources as well as the general costs of incarceration might tap into variation in guardianship at the macro level.

## CONCLUSIONS

Research on in-prison violence and the roles of prison culture and management for shaping violence, as well as other forms of inmate misconduct, is in need of a broader integration of ideas that have been treated up to this point as piecemeal. Contributions to date have been important, but the time has come to think more broadly as opposed to playing up one or two particular factors that are treated only as control variables by others. A broader framework that can integrate more general theories of crime and victimization is needed, if only to provoke discussions that move beyond frameworks of deprivation and importation alone.

This review has integrated the most relevant findings and themes from extant studies of prison culture, management, and in-prison violence to develop a framework of violent offending and victimization that can move us forward in understanding the connections and interplay among seemingly eclectic predictors of individual-level violence in prison. The multilevel social control–opportunity framework presented here is arguably more comprehensive than the more traditional theories of importation and deprivation and, as such, should contribute to and inform broader studies of violence that will either favor, refute, or refine this framework and, ultimately, contribute to the development of more realistic and effective crime prevention strategies in prison. Furthermore, an advantage of this framework lies in the compatibility of concepts between control and lifestyle theories, making it preferable to integrating theories with incompatible assumptions (such as control and strain theories). Further, the incompatibility of assumptions underlying importation, deprivation, and management theories makes it difficult to bridge these perspectives into a broader and more general theory because such an integrated theory would be logically inconsistent and conceptually flawed.

The framework proposed here is by no means definitive and is but one possible alternative for moving forward. However, given the continued relevance of deprivations, offender backgrounds, and management strategies to the subject, any broader framework must incorporate these elements while also moving well beyond this pool to provide a more general explanation of violent

offending and victimization in prison. This pursuit can only improve inmate and staff safety and increase the humanity of the prison experience.

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## Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Criminology* articles may be found at  
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