**Correcting the “correctional” component of the corrections officer role:
How offender custodians can contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration**

Lacey Schaefer^{*}

School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

Griffith University

Australia

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^{*}Correspondence addressing this article should be directed to: Lacey Schaefer, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Social Sciences Building (M.10), 176 Messines Ridge Road, Mt Gravatt QLD 4122 Australia; phone: +61 07 3735 3482; email: l.schaefer@griffith.edu.au.

Abstract

Research demonstrates that for many individuals imprisonment fails to rehabilitate or deter, and may actually promote recidivism. What can be done to limit reoffending and improve reentry experiences? One malleable component of custodial corrections is the role of the corrections officer. Alterations in the practices of detention workers may significantly contribute to positive offender outcomes. Drawing from several disparate literatures, this article proposes ten recommendations for how to reform the role of corrections officers in ways that promote rehabilitation and reintegration. Discussed are ways in which corrections officers should emphasize correction, use cognitive behavioral techniques, embody other roles (crisis counsellors, health advocates, corrections counselors, and life coaches), encourage identity substitutions, suggest new routine activities, solicit crime controllers, and facilitate transitions.

Keywords

Corrections officers, prison, reentry, correctional treatment, prisoner health

Underlying sentences of imprisonment is the tenet of specific deterrence: that prison is a noxious experience that will discourage future offending for its inhabitants. Although there are a number of ways to operationalize or quantify the efficacy of incarceration, “whether a former inmate reoffends or returns to prison is perhaps the most important measure of success or failure” (Spivak & Sharp, 2008, p. 487). There are several justifications for punishment, and the prison is clearly retributive and incapacitative – yet we still hold the expectation that being imprisoned would lead an individual to not want to be imprisoned again. When relying on these sorts of deterrent metrics, however, the results of experiments in mass incarceration are not flattering. Meta-analyses demonstrate that punishment does not deter offending (Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Pratt, Cullen, Blevins, Daigle, & Madensen, 2006), with one systematic review indicating that “the great majority of studies point to a null or criminogenic effect of the prison experience on subsequent offending” (Nagin, Cullen, & Jonson, 2009, p. 178). Harsher prison conditions actually equate to increases in reoffending (Chen & Shapiro, 2007; Drago, Galbiati, & Vertova, 2011; Gaes & Camp, 2009). Offenders who are incarcerated are more likely than their community-sentenced counterparts to be rearrested, reconvicted, and reimprisoned, and the time to relapse is shorter (Cid, 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). Aggregately and longitudinally, the number of people released from prison is associated with increases in crime (Vieraitis, Kovandzic, & Marvell, 2007). Across offender demography, offense categories, and countries, the science indicates that prisons do not produce a specific deterrent effect (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011).

Beyond the conclusion that prisons fail to cease reoffending is the unfortunate finding that incarceration may actually be criminogenic; that is, that the experience of prison may actually promote further offending for many individuals. There are a number of possible explanations for this association. First, emboldening effects suggest that prison serves to

harden and reinforce criminal propensity (Camp & Gaes, 2004; Wood, 2007; Wood, Gove, Wilson, & Cochran, 1997). A second theme of research demonstrates that a failure to alter the known causes of criminal behavior will result in a return to crime for offenders released from prison (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000). Next, scholars have expanded deterrence explanations to include a resetting bias or gambler's fallacy in which offenders believe that their risk of apprehension is lowered following a sanction (Pogarsky, 2007; Pogarsky & Piquero, 2003; Sitren & Applegate, 2006). Finally, incarceration may serve as a scarlet letter that introduces structural barriers to reintegration or interferes with protective life turning points (such as marriage and employment; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005). Research has not identified one clear mechanism that moderates the positive association between imprisonment and reoffending, and there is little understanding about the processes that facilitate recidivism (Grommon, 2013; Petersilia, 2003). Importantly, however, studies have shown that offenders are generally not lacking in their desire to desist (La Vigne & Kachnowski, 2005), but simply lack the skills necessary to translate prosocial values into prosocial behaviors (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011).

Whether prisons make offenders worse or simply don't act to make offenders better, it is clear that we can do more to reduce offender propensity and improve reentry outcomes. As argued by Reiman (2007), we have developed "a society that builds prisons to prevent crime knowing full well that they do not, and one that does not seriously try to rid its prisons and postrelease practices of those features that guarantee a high rate of recidivism" (p. 2). The question then becomes: What *can* be done to improve the prison experience? How can incarceration practices be modified to improve inmate wellbeing, reduce recidivism, and enhance community reintegration? Some relevant considerations are not readily malleable, such as prison architecture (Moran, 2015). Other ideas include overarching ideologies and a commitment to the principles of effective intervention (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), which

sometimes come with political and policy hamstrings, as well as a lack of necessary resources and agency structures. A more tangible feature of the prison environment that may have positive effects for offenders is the role of corrections officers. Corrections officers have routine contact with inmates, and the nature of their interactions can be reorganized to promote desistance. Despite this promising proposition, little research has examined the potential rehabilitative influence of corrections officers. The current article provides a first step toward addressing this shortcoming, providing ten recommendations for reform.

Recommendations for reform

As will be detailed in the discussions that follow, corrections officers can significantly contribute to offenders' "correction," here meaning officers' ability to impact inmate wellbeing and add to positive reentry experiences. Prior to outlining the recommendations for how offender custodians can contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration, five important points are worth noting. First, the recommendations forwarded here may overlap conceptually, but are drawn from different streams of research support. Second, the recommendations here are not exhaustive, and there are surely other best practices. Most notably, there are a host of studies that examine the interactions of offender-officer demography (Britton, 1997; Farkas, 2001; Jurik & Halembe, 2008; Van Voorhis, Cullen, Link, & Wolfe, 1991; Zupan, 1992), attitudinal dispositions between officers and prisoners (Arnold, 2005; Farkas, 2001; Larivière, 2001; Tait, 2011), the professionalization of custodial workers (Jurik, Halembe, Musheno, & Boyle, 1987; Poole & Regoli, 1980), and the role of institutional staff as reentry coordinators (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006); while these are all important considerations, the recommendations forwarded here maintain the security aspect of the corrections officer role while reorienting interactions with inmates in ways that are readily elastic (unlike race, gender, age, education, personality, or job responsibilities). Third, it would not be necessary for an institution to adopt all of the recommendations to notice positive effects; the use of one or some of these strategies may be

valuable even if others are neglected. Fourth, the recommendations articulated in this article are not an attempt to discredit long-standing (and necessary) goals of prisons, such as security and punishment; rather, the strategies discussed are meant to complement existing institutional frameworks. Fifth, the research evidence that is supplied to support these recommendations is piecemeal. Thus, although there are studies that support components of these recommendations, this research evidence is disjointed and often lacking a guiding philosophy. While future research is needed to examine these ideas, the contribution of the current article is that it provides an organizing agenda around which interventions and evaluations can be built.

Recommendation 1: Corrections officers should provide correction

The paramount reorientation of the corrections officer role is a renewed emphasis on correction. By providing corrective services, as a department of *correction* should indeed do (Cullen, 2007), other goals of prisons are not automatically sacrificed. It is possible to provide rehabilitation, or at least protective care, while also maintaining security and providing justice (Cullen, Smith, Lowenkamp, & Latessa, 2009). The moral claim that if inmates are not harmed then they are not punished is logically flawed (Clear, 1994). Prisons, by their very nature, are both retributive and incapacitative already; inmates are separated from society and stripped of freedoms and comforts. Irrespective of whether inmates deserve this punishment, prison harms its inhabitants and the communities to which they return (Vieraitis, Kovandzic, & Marvell, 2007). The leading indicator of returns on corrections investments is the degree to which future offenses are discouraged (Pew Center on the States, 2011), and we know that sanctioning offenders without providing corrective intervention cannot reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau, Smith, & French, 2006). It is clear that rehabilitation is a necessary contributor to recidivism prevention.

Corrections officers are perhaps the most important symbol of this theoretical underpinning. Their direct and prolonged exchanges with inmates position them to be quite

influential, although the attitudes of officers and their approach to work are influenced by the overarching goals of the agency (Farkas, 2000). One study revealed that when correctional officers adopted a human service approach, they felt as though they were violating an unofficial subcultural code that demands toughness (Johnson, 2002). At the same time, however, the espousal of a counselling, rehabilitative, or human service orientation is associated with improved offender outcomes as well as increased job satisfaction for corrections officers (Gatotoh, Omulema, & Nassiuma, 2011; Hepburn & Knepper, 1993). The types of activities included in this approach position corrections officers to provide goods and services, act as referral agents and advocates, and to help with institutional adjustment (Johnson, 2002). By extending the involvement of officers into prisoners' activities, and by redefining their role from control agent to interventionist and support worker, inmates and officers are benefitted alike (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993).

Johnson describes that the objective of correctional officers is to “provide the human services necessary to make the prison a place where inmates can live as mature adults and perhaps graduate to conventional lives in the free world” (2002, p. 201). Studies demonstrate that officers can serve as a source of practical and emotional support for inmates, and can help to provide access to other supports for offenders (Hobbs & Dear, 2000). While there are practical reasons correctional officers may view inmates as “other” (such as avoiding manipulation), this unfortunately can mutate into an us-versus-them mentality (Tracy, 2004).

By educating prison staff in core correctional practice, including the empirically validated principles of human service and criminogenic needs (such as knowledge of the major risks that offenders have that must be targeted to achieve rehabilitation), officers can be trained to perform their job in a way that maximizes therapeutic utility (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Facilities with staff trained in the effective use of authority, prosocial modelling and reinforcement, encouraging problem-solving, advocacy and brokerage, and high-quality

interpersonal skills demonstrate positive effects for offenders (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Positive relationships between officers and inmates promote learning and enhance the influence of prison staff, allowing them to serve as anti-criminal role models that reinforce offenders' anti-criminal expressions (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). These relationships can only be nurtured, however, when corrections officers invest in the ideas that guide rehabilitation, and view prison as a preparatory phase for the end-goal of reintegration. As described by Cheek and Miller (2000), institutions should support correctional officers to be “developers of people.” Importantly, the ideologies of staff are a reflection of organizational goals (Gaes & Camp, 2009; Gendreau, Smith, & French, 2006; Larivière, 2001); when the institution promotes the merit of rehabilitation, officers are more likely to embody rehabilitative practices.

Recommendation 2: Corrections officers should communicate with prisoners using cognitive behavioral techniques

Corrections officers are in frequent contact with inmates as part of their everyday duties, and engage in informal and friendly conversation quite often. The content and structure of these casual conversations can be framed so that officers are willing and able to help prisoners, such as by solving problems and modifying values (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993). Important to this process is responsivity, one of the principles of effective correctional intervention. General responsivity refers to corrections staff using strategies and styles of service that are responsive to offenders' modes of learning. Meta-analyses and a cannon of literature demonstrate that cognitive behavioral treatments are the most effective form of intervention, irrespective of the problem behavior being targeted (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005). Importantly, cognitive behavioral intervention does not have to be a formalized program, but can be used as techniques in routine communications to shape behavior. Communication between corrections officers and prison inmates should be framed to include modeling, effective reinforcement and disapproval, structured learning, and

cognitive restructuring (Gendreau, Smith, & French, 2006). Correctional officers can contribute to inmates' prosocial behavior by calling attention to procriminal attitudes, identifying the link between thoughts and actions, demonstrating skills, prompting the application of skills, motivating the use of skills, disinhibiting the fear of practicing skills, and generalizing the behaviors to wider settings (Rugge & Bonta, 2014; Van Voorhis & Salisbury, 2009). Modeling, encouraging, and praising the exercise of prosocial behaviors by offenders is an important mechanism through which correctional staff can promote desistance rather than compliance (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Additionally, correctional officers can rely on motivational techniques to enhance inmates' readiness for change, which is associated with reoffending outcomes (Anstiss, Polaschek, & Wilson, 2011). Many inmates may begrudgingly attend prison programs with little investment, and corrections staff can be taught motivational interviewing skills to enhance an offender's commitment to rehabilitation as a prelude to treatment as well as serving as a support for participation (McMurran, 2009). This approach can help to develop rapport, as well, which provides an opportunity for intervention. By relying on warm and open interpersonal skills, inmates may allow officers to help them problem-solve about their attitudes, actions, and life circumstances (Arnold, 2005; Farkas, 2000). According to inmates, the development of friendly relationships with officers requires staff to be "sympathetic to the realities of the lives that they led outside prison" (Crewe, 2005, p. 193). With this level of empathy established, corrections officers are in a prime position to engage in interventive conversations through the use of cognitive behavioral techniques.

Recommendation 3: Corrections officers should act as crisis counselors

The pains and harms of imprisonment are undoubtedly real (Clear, 1994; Irwin & Owen, 2005), and corrections officers can work to limit the traumatizing effects that often accompany incarceration (Kratcoski, 2000). The transition from the free world to prison is

blunt, and many struggle with the reduced freedoms, enhanced controls, and separation from loved ones. An important role for staff is to help inmates through this adjustment period so that they can better cope with the problems inherent to imprisonment (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993; Johnson, 2002). This should extend beyond current practices such as suicide watch; indeed, the fact that incoming prisoners are watched carefully for symptoms of devolving psychiatric health is evidence of the momentous disruption that incarceration causes. Relying on interpersonal skills and a visible willingness to help, corrections officers are the primary source of support inmates have in adjusting to prison life (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993; Hobbs & Dear, 2000). Corrections officers can help to counsel offenders through difficulties, and can also raise the flag when more serious intervention is required (Kratcoski, 2000).

In addition to adjustment problems, many inmates will experience other crises while incarcerated, such as the breakdown of a romantic relationship, strained relationships with family, parenting difficulties, financial hardships, or illness and death of loved ones; these circumstances are confronting for anyone, but are even harder to manage while incarcerated (Kratcoski, 2000). When faced with such a situation, inmates may become volatile (acting out against themselves or others) and emotionally unwell. As a consequence, Sigafos (2000) has recommended that correctional officers be trained in conflict resolution as a way of managing these crises. By talking *with* inmates to diminish crises, and talking *about* inmates with professional treatment staff to facilitate formal intervention when required, corrections officers play an integral role in reducing emotional distress and promoting wellbeing (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004).

Recommendation 4: Corrections officers should act as frontline diagnosticians and health advocates

Frontline correctional staff are important collaborators in prisoner health (Applebaum, Hickey, & Packer, 2001; Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004; Walsh & Freshwater, 2009). Prison

inmates exhibit high rates of mental health problems, substance abuse (including alcohol and tobacco), and communicable diseases (Watson, Stimpson, & Hostick, 2004); this represents risks to prisoner wellbeing but also threatens public health (World Health Organization, 2007). Corrections officers can be trained to recognize illness (such as declining mental health or an aggravation of symptoms) and connect prisoners to assessment and treatment (Watson, Stimpson, & Hostick, 2004). Line staff are also best equipped to observe health concerns, provide initial counseling, consult and liaise with health providers, and oversee the selection and scheduling of medication (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004).

Unfortunately, however, illnesses are largely unrecognized by corrections officers (Walsh & Freshwater, 2009; Williams et al., 2009). For this reason, frontline officers should have a working knowledge and awareness of common physical and mental health problems (Walsh & Freshwater, 2009). Although a corrections officer may notice that an inmate is behaving differently or seems unwell, it is only with appropriate training that they may come to classify the observation as needing professional attention. This education is also important in that it helps to reorient officers away from viewing offenders as people deserving of punishment and toward the perspective that they are people in need of treatment (Applebaum, Hickey, & Packer, 2001). Correctional staff can be health advocates for prisoners, enforcing attendance with care providers, encouraging compliance with treatment, and intervening when health deteriorates (Applebaum, Hickey, & Packer, 2001). For many offenders, a supportive corrections officer is the sole voice of concern for care; these staff are an important catalyst of offender wellness.

Recommendation 5: Corrections officers should act as corrections counselors

Corrections officers are well-positioned to provide informal counseling to inmates. Officers and offenders are in frequent contact with one another, and often engage in casual but meaningful discussions (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993). Officers see inmates interacting

with one another and observe antisocial expressions, providing an opportunity to challenge and reorient undesirable attitudes (Cavanagh, 2000). Some of the core correctional practices for intervention include effective reinforcement/disapproval and cognitive self-change (Gendreau, Smith, & French, 2006). Inmates may express cognitive distortions while speaking, which are reflections of underlying values and errors in thinking patterns. Corrections officers can shape inmate behavior through the recognition of these antisocial attitudes and thought patterns, which must then be disapproved and redirected (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Van Voorhis & Lester, 2009). Behaviors, both criminal and prosocial, are a result of thoughts and feelings. Prison staff can contribute to inmates' rehabilitation by calling attention to these thoughts and feelings, condemning the inappropriate value, rejecting the flawed logic, and providing prosocial alternatives to antisocial expressions.

Helping prisoners to identify their own cognitive distortions and reconfigure their thinking is associated with reductions in post-release recidivism (Henning & Fruech, 1996). Using cognitive restructuring, corrections officers can be trained to help offenders self-evaluate the credibility of their thought process and the utility of their attitudes (Leahy & Rego, 2012). This form of counseling, in which the ideas that precipitate criminal behavior are identified and modified, is as effective in preventing reoffending in prison as it is in the community (Lipsey & Landenberger, 2005). A rigorous meta-analysis of cognitive behavioral treatment for offenders demonstrates that this form of intervention has marked effects on recidivism, even when big brand-name programs are not used (Lipsey & Landenberger, 2005). Consequently, correctional officers should be trained to utilize these methods in providing low-level but routine counseling to inmates.

Recommendation 6: Corrections officers should act as life coaches

Corrections officers can substantially contribute to offenders' likelihood of reintegration success by providing concrete life advice and skills training. Inmates have

deficits in many common life skills, some of which are closely tied to reentry outcomes. For example, stable and legitimate employment may be necessary to “go straight” and avoid reincarceration (due to a supervision order or because of the need for financial support), although offenders may have few experiences in job-seeking and networking, completing applications, interviewing, and other employment skills. Prison inmates have many concrete life needs that contribute to reentry that they may have difficulty addressing independently, such as housing, health services, parenting/family unification, or transportation. By helping prisoners to address some of these dimensions of reentry prior to release, corrections officers help to provide offenders a continuum of care with better chances of reintegrating (Grommon, 2013; Petersilia, 2003; Visser & Travis, 2003).

Importantly, life skills education by itself is an insufficient rehabilitation strategy (MacKenzie, 2006), as it does not address an offender’s core criminogenic needs (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). However, many structural impediments to successful reentry are associated with some of these skills, and some vocational and educational programs are associated with lowered recidivism rates (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2000). Thus, while receiving life skills training may not directly lead to reductions in rates of reincarceration, life coaching can ease reintegration and provide an important source of support for offenders. Correctional officers can show an investment in prisoners’ life success through simple advice and encouragement; while inmates indicate that they may be hesitant to approach corrections staff for help, they also report that they are likely to ask for *practical* help (Hobbs & Dear, 2000) and express a desire for greater emotional support from staff (Biggam & Power, 1997). Rather than a corrections officer helping an inmate to locate a job for life on the outside, for instance, an officer can provide recommendations for how to pursue this task; this models prosociality and encourages reform, signaling to the offender that another person believes in their possibilities for change and will support their efforts to desist.

Recommendation 7: Corrections officers should encourage identity substitutions

Many offenders value their criminal lifestyle (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Wood et al., 1997), and imprisonment can reinforce a procrime identity (Brezina & Topalli, 2012; Crank & Brezina, 2013). A criminal identity can be instrumental to the maintenance of offending after release (Walters, 2003), as it provides psychosocial reinforcements when prosocial identities are sensed to be unattainable (Schaefer, 2016). Some scholars suggest that offenders will initiate prosocial turning points in their lives only after a procrime identity is altered (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Holland, 2003; Kazemian, 2007). In this way, offenders work toward desistance when provided with a future life script or “working self” that aligns with a prosocial identity (Maruna & Roy, 2007; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Thus, rather than simply foregoing a criminal identity, individuals must be provided with a substitute identity: a new way of interpreting and defining who they are (Maruna, 2001).

Corrections officers have much to contribute toward this end. Offenders must develop a new sense of self as part of the desistance process (Maruna, 2001). Prison staff can help inmates to initiate the cognitive transformation that is necessary, shed their old identity, and provide alternate means of self-definition (Grommon, 2013). Offenders may have difficulty describing their prosocial contributions. By providing praise and reinforcement for prosocial expressions of self, inmates will begin to see themselves as an individual fulfilling roles other than offender (such as a caring father, a talented artist, or a capable mechanic). Particularly in an institution where antisocial expressions may be valued, corrections officers provide important recommendations for alternate identities.

Recommendation 8: Corrections officers should suggest new routine activities

The routine activities that released ex-prisoners engage in are associated with reentry outcomes. Specifically, offenders reintegrating into the community should develop patterns of activity to avoid tempting crime opportunities (Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016). An

individual's access to chances to commit crime can be constrained by a daily schedule that dictates where the person goes, what they do, at what times, and with whom; all of these conditions present greater or fewer opportunities for reoffending (Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016). Accordingly, a well-intentioned prisoner can work to establish new routine activities that will guide their behavior upon release; this new routine will steer the offender away from criminogenic situations and toward settings that contain prosocial influences that assist with reintegration (Cullen, Eck, & Lowenkamp, 2002; Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016).

Importantly, corrections officers can serve as advisors for this critical task. Corrections officers can help inmates to identify which components of their routines were previously criminogenic, and provide recommendations for a new structured schedule that will help the individual to avoid these temptations for relapse upon release.

One piece of evidence that supports this idea is that many inmates are well-behaved, and flourish with the structure provided to them by prison life; prisoners are told what they can and cannot do, and many individuals benefit from such a regimen. Unfortunately, however, the routinization and restrictions of prison life may provide temporary compliance, but long-lived desistance is less likely if released prisoners struggle with an unstructured lifestyle (Vieraitis, Kovandzic, & Marvell, 2007). The daily routine followed while in prison interferes with offenders' ability to exert control over their own lives, and disrupts their capacity to learn how to make lifestyle decisions that affect desistance versus recidivism (Irwin & Owen, 2005; Vieraitis, Kovandzic, & Marvell, 2007). The routine activities developed in prison are unlikely to translate well to life on the outside (Irwin & Austin, 1997), and many offenders will struggle to cope with the freedom of choice upon release (Haney, 2006; Irwin & Owen, 2005). For these reasons, it is imperative that prisoners be granted the power to make decisions that affect their lives; this includes pre-release choices (such as whether to attend a group recreation activity or remain in one's cell), as well as

forward-looking decisions (such as what an offender plans to do on his/her first day out of prison). Thinking about the risks they will be exposed to upon release is an important mechanism by which offenders can prevent relapse (Bucklen & Zajac, 2009; Dowden, Antonowicz, & Andrews, 2003). Correctional staff can be influential in helping inmates to develop these decision-making skills and can provide recommendations for reentry routines that will contribute to the individual's success.

Recommendation 9: Corrections officers should solicit crime controllers

Peers are one of the best predictors of individual behavior. The number of antisocial associates an individual has is directly related to their likelihood of reoffending (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), while replacing criminogenic associates with prosocial bonds can encourage desistance (Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016). Social bonds help to provide structured routine activities, encourage accountability for desistance, and help to foster lifestyle changes (Grommon, 2013). Although prosocial relationships are one of the best protective factors against recidivism, imprisonment often results in a sharp disruption of these bonds (Koschman & Peterson, 2013; Vieraitis, Kovandzic, & Marvell, 2007). One way to promote the continuation and positive influence of these relationships is for prisons to encourage and facilitate visitation and family-focused programming, which demonstrably reduces recidivism (Mears, Cochran, Siennick, & Bales, 2012). Yet beyond formal visitation, prisoners can work to maintain, repair, and prepare social bonds that will be integral to their successful reentry (Grommon, 2013). Correctional officers can help to facilitate these relationships with people that will serve as crime controllers.

Specifically, people close to an offender who can exert some type of influence over his or her choices are known as offender handlers; they help contribute to the ex-prisoner's desistance, often through informal social control (Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016). Families provide emotional and material support during the reentry process, and also help to supervise

the individual and steer him or her away from negative influences (Bobbitt & Nelson, 2004). By strengthening the kinship ties that offenders have, their social capital is enhanced and their risks of recidivism are reduced (Flavin, 2004). Prisons frequently sever these ties and communication between inmates and their support networks break down (Koschman & Peterson, 2013). Corrections officers can help to remedy this problem by identifying prospective offender handlers and then encouraging contact and reparation. Where relationships between those on the inside and those on the outside have been damaged, corrections officers can provide insights to inmates that will strengthen their social capital.

Recommendation 10: Corrections officers should facilitate transitions

One of the most important things prisons can do to enhance reintegration is to acknowledge and embrace the reality that these institutions are temporary holding facilities; the majority of prison inmates will return to their communities. Thus, prison should not solely be a house of punishment, but should also be a preparatory institution that recognizes that reentry will occur. As described by Haney, “Programmes of prisoner change cannot ignore the situations and social conditions that prevail after prisoners are released if they are to have any real chance of sustaining whatever positive growth or gains were achieved during their imprisonment” (2005, p. 78). Offenders are released from prison, and they are sometimes released substantially changed as people, but they are often released to the same criminogenic environments that facilitated their criminal trajectory in the first place. In addition to minimizing offender propensity, ex-prisoners have tangible criminogenic needs that must be addressed as part of a successful reentry strategy (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Toward this end, corrections officers are an important symbol and instrument of this transitional process. Studies demonstrate that prisoners are ill-prepared for reentry (Grommon, 2013), and that many returning offenders are unaware of the supports and services that are available to them (Brooks, Visser, & Naser, 2006). This is an unfortunate state of affairs given

that most prisoners express a desire to desist from crime but often do not know how to arrange their lives in ways that support this goal (Schaefer, 2016; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). Line staff within institutional correctional facilities can be trained to coach and motivate inmates to prepare for reentry (La Vigne, Davies, Palmer, & Halberstadt, 2008). Many corrections officers struggle to provide reentry assistance because of the prevailing belief that staff should be responsible for custody rather than discharge planning (National Research Council, 2007). Yet officers who have routine contact with inmates are instrumental in engaging offenders in reentry planning and providing guidance in release preparations.

Discussion

There are several penological principles embodied in our use of the prison; imprisonment can accomplish multiple goals. Often at the root of a sentence of imprisonment, however, is the expectation that because incarceration is a noxious experience, released offenders will make the rational choice to desist (so as not to accrue the same cost again). Yet an appreciable body of research concludes that punishment fails to reduce recidivism (Andrews et al., 1990; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Pratt et al., 2006), and that prison produces a null or criminogenic effect on subsequent offending (Cid, 2009; Nagin et al., 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). Promisingly, however, the effect of prison on recidivism may actually be heterogeneous, depending on individual characteristics and the experiences of incarceration (Mears, Cochran, & Cullen, 2015). This prompts the question of what we can do to improve the imprisonment experience toward reducing reoffending. Adherence to the principles of effective intervention and core correctional practice demonstrably reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Gendreau et al., 2006), however with increasing numbers of prisoners and fewer programs available to serve them (Seiter & Kadela, 2003), other options for promoting rehabilitation and reintegration must be explored. The current article has taken a first step toward this goal, outlining ten recommendations for how to

reorient the role of corrections officers to improve reentry outcomes. Beyond many immutable or challenging conditions (such as staff demography, funding for programs, coordination of transitional services, or facility architecture), I have proposed several ways in which corrections officers can contribute to offenders' desistance. In reflecting on these recommendations, three takeaway messages are worth noting across these ideas.

First, correction must be the prevailing ideology for correctional institutions (Cullen, 2007). An institution's regime codifies the expectations for staff behavior (Farkas, 2000; Gaes & Camp, 2009). Therefore, even with appropriately trained staff, if corrections officers feel as though their rehabilitation-oriented practices are unsupported by the guiding philosophy of the prison, they will be hesitant to apply these skills and will not be supported administratively in their efforts (Johnson, 2002). Officers may be able to perform their work better when their values and attitudes are congruent with those of the prison (Larivière, 2001; Lutze et al., 2012). Smith, Gendreau, and Goggin (2009) find that corrections staff are infrequently knowledgeable about valid criminological theories and the basic concepts of conditioning, without which behavior change cannot reliably occur; they describe how interactions between staff and inmates are often "nondirective 'chats' with no guarantee that prosocial behavior is reinforced and antisocial behavior is not reinforced or punished" (p. 323). Without the training, support, and ideological symmetry of the institution (Rudes, 2012; Wright & Cesar, 2013), it is unlikely that correctional officers will be positioned to correct offender behavior and trajectories.

Research evidence is beginning to accumulate that demonstrates that when inmates are treated in a procedurally just way, institutional misbehaviors are reduced (Beijersbergen, Dirkzwager, Eichelsheim, Van der Laan, & Nieuwebeerta, 2015) and recidivism is decreased (Beijersbergen, Dirkzwager, & Nieuwebeerta, 2016). These studies highlight the need to move beyond the view that inmates are in prison solely for punishment, such that corrections

officers should play a role in punishing; correctional staff must be reoriented to embody a human service orientation (Lutze et al., 2012). Projects investigating the influence of procedural justice in prisons showcase the reality that inmates' behaviors are impacted by their interactions with custodial staff (Butler & Maruna, 2009; Reisig & Mesko, 2009; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995). Moreover, the skills that corrections staff exhibit in relating to offenders are predictive of offenders' attitudes (Franke, Bierie, & MacKenzie, 2010; Wright & Gifford, 2016) and subsequent reoffending (Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Kennealy, Skeem, & Manchak, & Loudon, 2012). The association between staff-inmate relations and consequent (mis)behavior should compel us to reimagine how the keepers engage with the kept, insisting that offender correction be at the forefront of officers' responsibilities.

Second, all correctional staff that have routine and personal contact with inmates should receive training in accordance with (any or all of) these recommendations. There are two important reasons for this. The first is that inmates should be exposed to rehabilitation-oriented staff as much as possible. Not only does this saturate their prison experience with appropriate interventions and reinforcements, but this also creates a perception among inmates that the staff represent a unified front. When all line staff are trained similarly and are held to the same work performance standards, the inmates are less able to categorize officers as "good" versus "bad," and are thus less easily able to "work the system" or turn officers against one another (Hambrick, 2000). The second reason all staff should receive the same training is to allow corrections officers to exercise rehabilitative practices without fearing the reactions of other staff. Cook and Lane (2014) discovered that corrections officers misperceive the professional orientation of their colleagues, often assuming that other officers are far more punitive and less in favor of treatment than what they actually are. These misjudgments will affect the work behaviors of corrections staff if they worry that their expression of pro-rehabilitation values will be chastised by other line staff. For these reasons,

it is important that prisons do not attempt to overspecialize staff into “treatment” versus “custody” roles. Rather, all correctional officers should be trained to embody both orientations, particularly given the potentially reciprocating relationship between rehabilitation and control (Cheek & Miller, 2000).

Multiple studies reveal that when correctional staff are trained in the use of core correctional practices, recidivism is reduced (Bonta et al., 2015; Chadwick, Dewolf, & Serin, 2015; Robinson, Lowenkamp, Holsiger, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Oleson, 2011). Corrections officers that embody a dynamic role that balances care with control improve the outcomes for offenders under their supervision (Kennealy et al., 2012; Pew Center on the States, 2011). While many of these projects evaluate the role of probation and parole officers, the same tenets should be applicable to prison officers. The current project provides a unique contribution toward that end, offering recommendations for how we can apply the best practices in community corrections to institutional corrections. It is time to view custodial staff as providers of correction, training them in the skills required to be such.

Third, research is needed. Although empirical evidence has been used to support the recommendations forwarded here, some of these ideas have not been formally tested. Moreover, these recommendations have not been organized in a formal way until this article, so studies that examine the role of correctional line staff in (ex-)prisoner outcomes have been rare and disjointed. Indeed, Maruna and Toch (2005) note the paucity in research examining the role of imprisonment in reentry and desistance. In order to determine if and how the ideas discussed here are effective, process evaluations are required. Yet in order to evaluate the impact of correctional officers in offender rehabilitation and reintegration, their roles must first be reoriented toward these ends. This project is a call for academics, administrators, and practitioners to investigate, support, and correct the correctional component of the corrections officer role (see Wright & Cesar, 2013).

Cullen (2007) advises that “any positive agenda that is put forward will be imperfect,” but that criminologists must “give strong advice on what principles should guide the correctional enterprise” (p. 717). This article has attempted to do just that. Readers may rebut that corrections scholars have long been proposing many of these ideas for decades with little uptake. One reason for the lack of application of the proposals made here is that we have not expected or required officers to do more; prison managers have concluded that staff are hired to guard rather than reform. It is up to criminal justice researchers, then, to provide better insights into *how* correctional staff can embody evidence-based best practices. This will first require an alteration of what prison work entails. From there, redefining the role responsibilities implies that a different population of workers may need to be recruited, that new training programs will be required, that compensation may change, and that performance will be assessed differently. It may not be reasonable to expect that all current prison staff can be retrained, but this should not discourage forward-thinking efforts to redesign what corrections officers do. Rather than attempting to provide implementation advice for each of the recommendations included here, this article serves as a guiding framework for future research and practice that can help to resolve the practical hurdles that will come.

One of the largest barriers to the execution of the recommendations included here is that rehabilitative orientations are often presumed to be idealistic lip service that is incompatible with the more apparent demands of the prison’s culture of control. An effective combatant for this state of affairs is the development of a cohesive agenda for what corrections officers *should* do (Cullen, 2007); perhaps only once this is outlined will scholars and practitioners begin to take these calls to action seriously and begin to work toward putting these best practices into play. This article has attempted to initiate this conversation.

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