

**The Changing of the Guard: conceptualisations of  
prison officers' work in three South Australian  
prisons**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Summary

The prison officer is central to prison life, yet understandings of this role are limited.

This thesis argues that the two overarching (and often competitive) conceptualisations of prison officers' work as custodial work or human services work are limited. Eight conceptualisations of prison officers' work from the correctional literature are identified - *Para-military officer, Security Officer, Warehouse of prisoners, Public Servant /bureaucrat, Professional, Manager of Prisoners , Therapist and Case Manager.*

These conceptualisations are defined and related to one another by examining their construction through discourses of prison purpose and prison process (Adler and Longhurst 1994).

The thesis develops the analysis of du Gay (1996) that organisations use discourse as a means of constructing work identities for their employees and the work of Halford and Leonard (1999) who argues that workers are active agents in this process and do not always take on the identity the organisation is seeking to promote.

The thesis addresses three research questions

- How has the role of the prison officer been conceptualised by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time?
- How is the role of the prison officer currently conceptualised by personnel working within South Australian prisons, what influences the way the role is conceptualised and what purposes do these conceptualisations serve?
- To what extent have the new conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer, articulated by the Department for Correctional Services in the last ten years, been

adopted by staff within prisons and what determines the influence of these new conceptualisations?

These questions are addressed using qualitative research techniques of document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

The thesis identifies that in recent decades the Department has emphasised conceptualisations of the role constructed from normalisation and rehabilitative discourses.

Interviewees, forty-four working in three South Australian prisons, (both departmental and privately managed), conceptualised the work of a prison officer as complex and unique and identified three influential audiences for the performance of prison officers' work – prisoners, officers and their colleagues, and the Departmental hierarchy. Interviewees constructed the role of the prison officer in terms that would earn respect for the work from each of these audiences and manage the vulnerability of the officer as a worker and a prison officer. Half of those interviewed conceptualised the prison officer based on a *Manager of Prisoners*. Other interviewees, critical of the role within their prison, described it as a *Warehouser* and saw the competition between custodial and human services roles as irreconcilable.

The thesis argues that Departmental discourse can be seen to have a significant influence on the conceptualisation of the prison officer's role by those working within prisons, but that it competes for influence with the discourse of the other powerful audiences for the performance of prison officers' work – prisoners and other staff.

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. The thesis does draw slightly upon the research undertaken for my thesis for the Masters in Public Policy and Administration entitled *An Examination of the decision to privatise the management of the Mount Gambier Prison*.

Susan T King

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I have described this research as partnership research and in doing so acknowledge that the thesis builds upon conversations with staff in corrections throughout South Australia, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. I appreciate the generosity of all who have discussed the work of prison officers with me over the last decade, including the many individuals in the South Australia Department for Correctional Services. In particular I acknowledge the insights and passions of those whom I interviewed for this thesis. I have been inspired by the thoughtful approach to working in prisons demonstrated by so many within South Australian prisons.

I acknowledge also the support of my colleagues at the University of South Australia and in particular those within the School of Social Work and Social Policy. Without their willingness to juggle priorities and their encouragement to see this project through to the end, the process would have been far more difficult and stressful. The preparation of this thesis has been physically supported by the excellent transcriptions of interview tapes by Meredith Hosking.

The confidence to start on a project of this magnitude and to continue to move it along, albeit on a part-time basis, was not developed in isolation. I thank my friends, my companions in Cennednyss Community and my family for their support over the years. In particular I thank Claire and Rachel, who can barely remember life without my thesis and David Bamford whose belief that this work matters has been a foundation in my endeavours.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## Introduction

Prison officers, doing their work, are central to every prison. The mechanics of prison life are implemented by prison officers performing the repetitive acts of locking and unlocking doors; watching and counting prisoners; talking with prisoners; supporting and helping prisoners. The prison officer is responsible for the secure containment of the prisoner and the delivery of the prison regime determined by prison policy.

This thesis sets out to identify and explore a range of conceptualisations of prison officers' work in the literature and in correctional practice in South Australia and to understand how these conceptualisations are used by the Department for Correctional Services and by personnel within South Australian prisons. To achieve this, the research focuses on three central research questions

- How has the role of the prison officer been conceptualised by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time?
- How is the role of the prison officer currently conceptualised by personnel working within South Australian prisons, what influences the way the role is conceptualised and what purposes do these conceptualisations serve?
- To what extent have the new conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer, articulated by the Department for Correctional Services in the last ten years, been adopted by staff within prisons and what determines the influence of these new conceptualisations?

The analysis for this research identifies two broad conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer as a custodian or a human services worker and eight more specific conceptualisations of prison officers' work - as a *Para-military officer*, a *Warehouser*, a *Security Officer*, a *Manager of Prisoners*, a *Professional or semi-professional*, a *Public Servant*, a *Therapist* and a *Case Manager*.

Despite the role of prison officer as central agents of the state, which in recent years has imprisoned increasing numbers of its citizens, the work of prison officers has received only limited attention. Beyond the sentence of imprisonment from the court, there is little public interest in the conduct of prisons. Those who do give attention to what follows the delivery of the sentence, most often reformers or academics, turn their gaze to the prisoners and their experience and position prison officers as a homogenous group on the periphery of the prisoners' lives. As a result, until the last five years, little theoretical attention has been addressed to the prison officer, particularly in the Australian context.

Recognising that the experience of imprisonment is significantly shaped by the performance of prison officers' work, this thesis places the work of the prison officer in the centre of the research focus. This focus then brings to the foreground not just the mechanics of the work of the prison officer, but the meaning constructed for these tasks in the diverse prison contexts in which the work is performed.

Furthermore the officer can be recognised as performing the role both of a prison operative and an employee in an organisational context.

This focus highlights the complexity of prison officers' work. The role is one that is performed in very diverse prison settings, ranging from maximum security complexes to prison farms. The role is performed within prison systems that are shaped by very different understandings of the purpose of imprisonment and different expectations of prison procedures. Closer attention to the work of prison officers reveals that the expression prison officer is used to encompass a range of understandings of the role of the worker within the prison. It is these conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer that are the focus of this thesis.

Tracing the construction of prison officers' work from discourses of prison purpose (rehabilitation, normalisation and control) and prison process (bureaucratic, legal, professional and entrepreneurial)(Adler and Longhurst 1994) this thesis identifies the emergence of new conceptualisations of prison officers' work over time within the South Australian Department for Correctional Services. In particular the analysis identifies an intensification of Departmental discourses of change in prison purpose and process in the decade 1993 to 2003 and a strengthening of the promotion of conceptualisations of the prison officer as a *Manager of Prisoners* and a *Case Manager*.

Qualitative research with staff within three South Australian prisons, in Adelaide, Port Augusta and Mount Gambier, found that the work of the prison officer was conceptualised as unique and complex and that specific conceptualisations of the role of the officer were utilised by staff to garner respect for the role of the officer and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer. The most appropriate specific conceptualisation of the role of the officer was contested within the prisons with

differential patterns of conceptualisation of the role being influenced by the length of time individuals were employed in corrections and the prison within which they worked.

Interviewees who had worked in prisons for less than ten years were more likely than their longer serving colleagues to utilise the newer Departmental discourses to construct the role of the prison officer. In particular 80% interviewees at Mount Gambier prison utilised the *Manager of Prisoners* conceptualisation to describe the role. The analysis in this thesis explores the influence of length of time working in corrections and of particular prison contexts on the adoption of the newer Departmental discourses by exploring how these factors influence the audiences for prison officers' work and thus interviewees' construction of the role to garner respect and minimise vulnerability.

In this introductory chapter the social and economic importance of prison officers' work is explored, this particular research project is described and located in the broad context of Australian prisons and the thesis structure is outlined.

## **Prisons: the context for the work of the prison officer**

Imprisonment is, at this point in time, the most severe punishment that can be inflicted upon a citizen by the Australian state and is intended to be utilised only as the punishment of last resort.<sup>1</sup> It is thus a punishment of legal and ethical significance. Imprisonment is legally important as the ultimate punishment used in our legal system, as the pinnacle of the exercise of legal power of the state over its

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<sup>1</sup> S11 Criminal Law (Sentencing) Act (South Australia).

citizens. It is of ethical importance in that it involves the deprivation of liberty of citizens and an imposition on citizens of living conditions over which they have no control. This exercise of power imposes obligations and responsibilities on the state and its agents.

Prisons, the structures that have developed to administer this significant social sanction, are both physical and social entities. The physical entity that is the prison, seen by many as a symbol of the power of the state to punish (Garland 1990:259), is both the context for the prisoners' lives while imprisoned and the workplace of the prison officer. Whilst fashions in prison exteriors and structures have changed significantly over time (Garland 1990:258; Woodham 2005) the physical structure of prisons is strongly influenced by historical solutions to the problem of containing a large number of non-compliant individuals and by the durability of individual prisons.

However prisons, as the context of this research, are primarily the social institutions that have developed over the past two hundred years as the inevitable and essential means of administering the punishment of imprisonment (Garland 1990:3, 4). Through the exercise of state power, citizens are removed from their normal physical and social environment and required to live together in a particular social configuration subject to the authority of prison officers and their managers. At the end of the time of imprisonment, these citizens are intended to return to our society and take up lives as law abiding members of the community.

Although it is common to treat prisons as homogenous institutions (Sparks 1996:44), the literature reporting studies in a range of prisons suggests that the different prisoner populations, prison histories and prison regimes result in prisons that differ from one another markedly in terms of the experiences they offer prisoners and the experience of staff working within the prison (Jurik and Halemba 1984; Liebling 2005). Liebling (2005) identifies that these differences have important consequences for the performance of prisons in areas as fundamental as vulnerability to riots, escapes and prisoner self harm.

### The prisoner population

At 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005 there were 25,353 prisoners in Australia, of whom 20% were unsentenced prisoners either awaiting trial or awaiting sentence (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:10). This was a 5% increase on the number of prisoners at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 and a 45% increase on the number of prisoners a decade earlier at 30<sup>th</sup> June 1995. These prisoner numbers reflected an increase in both male and female prisoners, with female prisoners increasing at a greater rate than male prisoners (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:7).

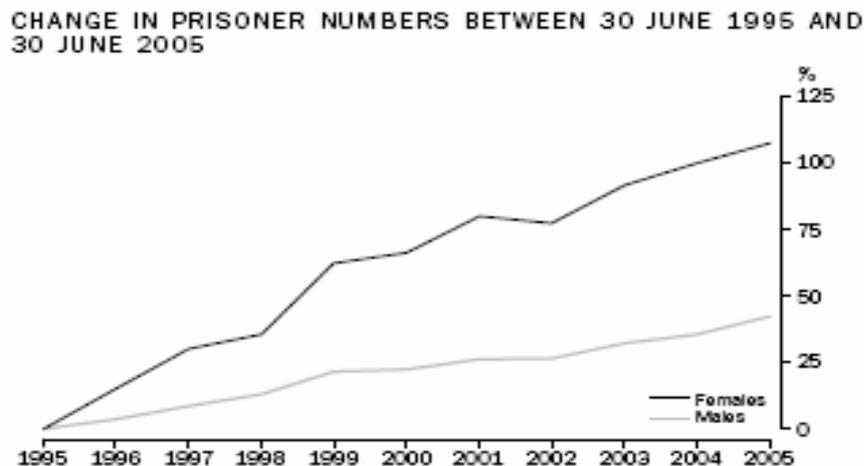


Figure 1.1 Change in prisoner numbers between 30 June 1995 and 30 June 2005, Source: ABS Prisoners in Australia 2005 (Cat. No. 4517.0 p7)

This trend of increasing prison numbers is not reflected in South Australian prisons. Although the population within South Australian prisons over the decade has fluctuated, the population of 1475 on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1995 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000) is almost identical to the population on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005 of 1473 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005).

The number of indigenous people in custody (5,656 at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005), is disproportionate to their representation in the Australian population (12 times in an age standardised comparison to the non-indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:7)). The South Australian indigenous imprisonment rate (13.8 in an age standardised comparison) is slightly above this national average (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:14).

### Ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous Age Standardised Rates of Imprisonment



Figure 1.2 Ratio of Indigenous to non-indigenous Age Standardised rates of Imprisonment, Source: ABS *Prisoners in Australia 2005* (Cat. No. 4517.0 p6)

Nationally, not only has there been an absolute increase in the number of individuals imprisoned, but the proportion of individuals imprisoned relative to the adult Australian population has increased. At 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005 the imprisonment rate was

163 prisoners per 100,000 adult population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:30). This is a 3% increase on the imprisonment rate of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:4) and 26% increase on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1995.

#### IMPRISONMENT RATES (a)

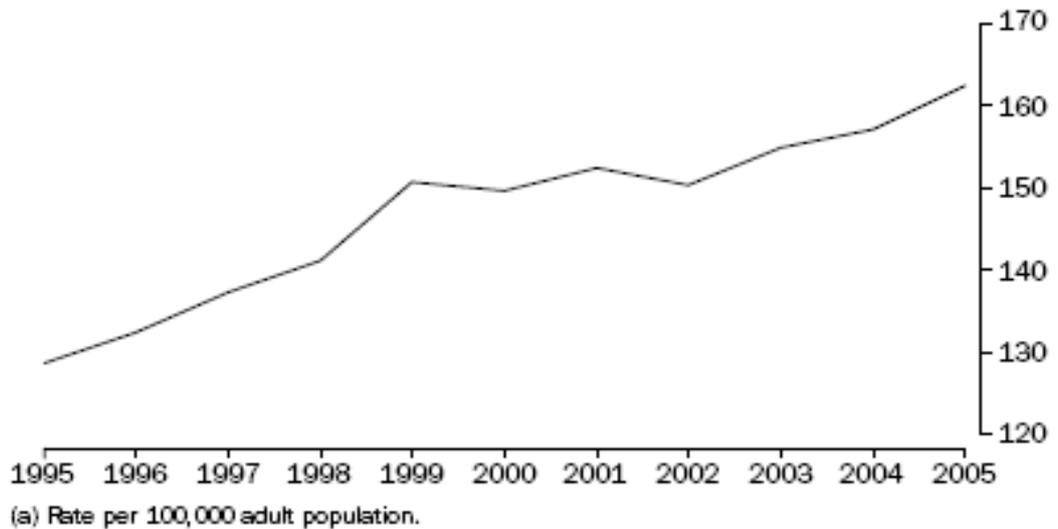


Figure 1.3 Imprisonment Rates, Source: ABS Prisoners in Australia 2005 (Cat. No. 4517.0 p5)

South Australian imprisonment rates have fluctuated, varying from 126.1 in 1995, up as high as 132.8 in 1997 and as low as 113 in 2000, but the 2005 rate of 123.2 in 2005 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:31) is one of the lowest of the Australian states. The Victorian rate of 94.2 is lower, whilst Tasmania (149.9), Queensland (176.7), New South Wales (187.6) and Western Australia (229.3) all have higher rates.

Although South Australian prisons have not been subject to the same intensity of pressures from rising numbers that have been experienced in other states, the prisons have been effected by the changing prison population that is identified in all jurisdictions. National trends identify that increasing proportions of the prisoner population are held as a result of violent offences (homicide, assault, sex offences

and robbery) (Australian Institute of Criminology 2005:86). However, other than the data about the number of Indigenous Australians in prison, there is little available data on other characteristics of the prisoner population that appear to be placing significant strain on the operations of prisons. For instance there is no national data available on the mental health and cognitive skills of prisoners (Howells et al. 2004: 33) and little data available on the use of drugs and alcohol of prisoners prior to incarceration (Howells et al. 2004:40).

### **The prison as a centre for employment**

Whilst the responsibility for imprisonment rests with the government whose courts sentence the individual, governments in Australia both own and manage their own prisons, own but contract out the management of prisons and buy imprisonment services from privately owned and managed prisons. In 2005 120 Australian prisons were owned and managed by governments and 7 were privately managed (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2006:7.3). The increasing usage of imprisonment as a punishment option has resulted in a large and growing expenditure by Australian governments on prison operations (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2006). The cost of running Australian prisons in 2004-05 can be calculated to be almost \$1.5billion.<sup>2</sup>

Staffing costs are the largest proportion of this expenditure (O'Toole 2005).

Correctional Services employs approximately 18,000 people in Australia and of these

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<sup>2</sup> Calculated from average cost per prisoner per day - \$170 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2006, *Report on Government Services 2006*, Productivity Commission, Canberra. multiplied by daily average prisoner population -24092 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2006, *Report on Government Services 2006*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.. multiplied by 365.

approximately 10,000 are prison officers (O'Toole 2005:214). The significance of prison officers within the prison is derived both from the fact that they are the majority of the workers and also from the fact that the other workers within the prison are divided into much smaller professional cohorts. The eight thousand employees who are not prison officers fill administrative and management roles, provide professional services directly to prisoners as doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers and support the infrastructure of the prison in its daily operations in trade and professional roles. Each of these occupational groups will have only a few members within each prison.

Notwithstanding the significance of the prison officer as an employee within a prison, the role is not one which is recognised as having a high status. Prison officers are employed on starting salaries that are, on average, below those for occupations with which they might be compared, such as police, firemen, ambulance officers and probation and parole officers, although above that of a commencing customs officer. Averaged across Australia, the commencing salary for a prison officer in 2003 was \$31,600<sup>3</sup> (O'Toole 2005:215).

However, despite this lack of status, the prison officer can be seen to occupy a position of great influence within the prison. As Grant (2005:191) argues prison officers control the lives of prisoners through their management of the movement of prisoners, their discretion about locking and unlocking spaces and their structuring of

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<sup>3</sup> This figure does not include overtime and shift loadings (see reference to 'base salaries' in introductory comments to data presentation in O'Toole O'Toole, S 2005, 'Human resource analysis of the Australian corrections industry', in *Corrections criminology*, ed S O'Toole and S Eyland, Hawkins Press, Leichhardt, NSW.

access to telephones and visits. This role places them in a position of influence both over the daily lives of prisoners but also over the capacity of others to work with prisoners. Other staff within the prison need the cooperation of prison officers to be able to provide services and to establish the routines within which they can perform their professional roles.

Recognising that the prison is both a site of containment of prisoners and a place of employment for prison officers broadens the theoretical perspectives that inform the study of prisons and prison officers. It suggests that whilst the prison has many unique features, it may also share attributes of other complex human service organisations. The study of prison officers' work can be informed both by sociological studies of prisons and organisational theorists' observations of other organisations.

### **Studying the prison officer in the prison context**

Although prison officers' work has received limited attention, understandings of prisons have been explored consistently by sociologists since the middle of the last century. Studies of individual prisons and prisons as institutions have used the analytic tools of studies of social relations, of sub-groups and sub-cultures to illuminate the experience of prison by prisoners (Sykes 1958; Clemmer 1965 (first published 1940)). Following the work of Goffman (1961b) prison sociologists have studied prisons as 'total institutions' as the context for every aspect of the lives of their inmates. These studies, exploring the way roles within institutions are allocated, reinforced, supported and subverted, have studied the use and abuse of power within the closed institution of the prison. A major focus of these studies has been the prisoner or inmate and the rituals, structures and processes by which the individual

sentenced to imprisonment becomes transformed into a prisoner, compliant or defiant (Sparks 1996).

The role of officers within the prison has received far less attention (although Thomas' (1972) study of the English Prison officer stands out as an exception to this void) (Kauffman 1988; Liebling and Price 2001 DiIulio, 1987). Many studies have not recognise the prison officer as a player within the prison at all, for example Greer (2000) explored the changing nature of interpersonal relationships in a women's prison without mentioning officers within the prison. Neglect of the prison officer is difficult to explain, in the light of the recognition of their importance by some of the most influential observers of prisons as Ross (1981:1) commented,

It is remarkable that so little study of the correction officer has been made when one considers how often, and how eloquently, eminent spokesmen on corrections have acknowledged the critical importance of the guard in the functioning of correctional institutions. For example, Sykes (1958: 53) referred to the guard as "the pivotal figure on which custodial bureaucracy turns".

However others, including Hawkins (1976:Chapter 4), suggest that although Sykes (1958) and Clemmer (1965, first published 1940) acknowledge the importance of the prison officer they also contribute to their later invisibility by failing to give substance to the prison officer in their description of the prison community. The phenomenon of the worker being treated as invisible is not unique to prisons. Barley (1994) who studied a similar phenomenon in scientific laboratories argued that the workers get ignored by sociologists because the focus of study becomes the endeavour. An alternative explanation of the lack of research attention to prison officers is that researchers feel that the officer is not worthy of research attention, feeling

disdain for people who would work in what is often considered a low paying lack-lustre job in an unattractive work-setting in which one must live in

unavoidable proximity to individuals who are often hostile, belligerent, abusive, and sometimes destructive and assaultive" (Ross 1981:2)

A consequence of the failure of sociology to produce a body of studies focussed on the prison officer at work has been the ease with which the officer has been demonised (Cullen et al. 1985:506; Edney 1997:289,290). Lack of detailed exploration has made it easier for the prison officer to be portrayed in broad brush as intellectually limited, prone to violence and insensitive (Edney 1997:289,290; Crawley 2004a:xiii). Additionally ignoring the officer has made their work within the prison invisible (Sparks 1996).

And yet as Edney (1997) argues, the position that people are sent to prison as a punishment and not for punishment places

incredible trust, considering the chequered history of humanity in the benevolence of the state and its functionaries. We expect that the custodial staff of these institutions – prison officers- will respect the rights of prisoners and act towards them in a professional and dignified manner (Edney 1997:289)

That correctional staff do not always perform their role as the correctional organisation or the justice system would expect has been documented over time in reports of Royal Commissions (Nagle 1978; Johnston 1991). However, there has been little systematic exploration of what McCarthy categorises as misfeasance (misuse of the occupational role), malfeasance (illegal or improper activities) and nonfeasance (negligent activity) by prison officers (Grant 2005:196,7).

Recent Australian research within corrections highlights the importance of ethical behaviour within prisons and the lack of research within Australian prisons that would enable an understanding of how the prison as an organisation affects the behaviour of staff members in particular prison officers (Grant 2005).

In the last two decades, the research neglect of the prison officer has been noted by researchers (for example Liebling and Price ( 2003; 2001;1998b; 1998a) Liebling (2000) Crawley (2005; 2004a) and Kauffman (1988) who are including or focussing primarily upon prison officers in their work (Lambert, Hogan and Barton 2002:115; Dowden and Tellier 2004:3). However, there is still very limited research within Australian prisons and in particular focussing on prison officers, the occupational group whose work most powerfully impacts on the lives of prisoners.

The research for this thesis makes a contribution to addressing this lack of research on the work of the prison officer within 21<sup>st</sup> century prisons in Australia. The thesis adopts a research focus that places the prison officer in an organisational context. This context is identified as being both a broad departmental context and a more narrow prison context. In adopting this focus the thesis seeks to explore the interaction between official organisational discourse and the conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer by individuals within the prison. The thesis explores the idea that whilst correctional organisations will express views (that change over time) about the role of the prison officer, individuals working within the prison have agency in their capacity to adopt, reject or adapt these ideas (du Gay 1996; Halford and Leonard 1999; Halford 2003)

The potential contribution of this research to increased understandings of prison officers in their prison context is limited by the narrow scope of the research, in three prisons in one Australian jurisdiction, and as a result the thesis can only claim to offer insights into how the work of prison officers in those prisons is being conceptualised. Although the research for this thesis will not directly address the question of officer corruption or abusive behaviour it will address the relationship between the organisation and the prison officer and the extent to which the organisational context of the work influences the way officers see their role. To this

extent it may provide a platform for further work about the possibilities of organisational influence on ethical behaviour within prisons.

The research process demonstrated the interest of some prison officers and other correctional staff in developing a body of knowledge within their industry and confirmed the very different contexts for the work of prison officers provided by different prisons. Both of these factors should encourage further research within Australian prisons. The research also identified common themes between these Australian prisons and that of prisons in other jurisdictions. At times the words of Australian prison officers were almost identical to those reported by their English counterparts. This suggests that research across jurisdictions may be a fruitful way of advancing our knowledge of prison officers' work and our understanding of the impact of organisational and other changes to the working context of the officer.

## **The research project**

Notwithstanding this lack of detailed research about prison officers in Australia, the impact of the significant changes in expectations of prisons in a variety of jurisdictions including Australia can be seen to be affecting the working life of prison officers (Josi and Sechrest 1998; Liebling and Price 2001:76; Grant 2005; O'Toole 2005; Crawley 2004a; Liebling 2005). The prison has become a high profile tool of governments' law and order policies, and a complex and often contradictory set of expectations of the prison are embedded both in policy and in popular discourse. Directly and indirectly penal policy and “‘penal sensibilities’ shape prison life internally” (Liebling 2004:44).

However little is known about the response of those working within prisons to these new expectations and what is known encourages the belief that staff are resistant to change (Vinson 1982; Liebling and Price 2001:4). Although staff are not always blamed for their resistance to change (see Crawley 2004a:15) the image of staff as cynical and unconcerned by the broader goals of the prison is perpetuated in these reports.

One response to the observed resistance to change of prison officers has been an attempt by correctional agencies to change the characteristics of the prison officer group through the introduction of women, prison officers from indigenous backgrounds and officers whose cultural and linguistic background reflect that of the population they serve. Although Australian agencies have not been particularly successful in their attempt to broaden the diversity of prison officers (O'Toole 2005:213) women are now employed in significant (15-20%) numbers in Australian jurisdictions. The impact of this change in the prison officer work force, whilst explored by many researchers at the individual prison level, has still to be explored in terms of its effect on the professionalisation of the prison officers' role and the impact on role status in comparison to other occupations.

This thesis seeks to explore the interface between prisons policy and workers within prisons and in particular to identify the extent to which changes in prison policy affect the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within the prison. The thesis addresses this issue by first examining prison policy within the South Australian Department for Correctional Services (as expressed in the Annual Reports of the Department). The policy is analysed in terms of the discourses describing the

purposes and processes of imprisonment (Adler and Longhurst 1994) from which it is constructed. The conceptualisations of prison officers' work that are constructed from these policy discourses are identified.

The thesis then explores the response of those working within prisons to these articulations of prisons policy and in particular to the conceptualisations of prison officers' work articulated through this policy. The research in three South Australian prisons focussed on how the role of the prison officer is conceptualised by staff (managers, senior managers, auxiliary staff and officers) working within the prison.

The research finds that the influence of departmental policy discourses on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within the prisons can be identified, but is limited. The role of the prison officer is constructed by those interviewed for this research as complex and unique and requiring a balance of human services and security roles . However the most appropriate conceptualisation of prison officers' work is contested.

Conceptualisations of prison officers' work are demonstrated to be influenced by the desire to garner respect for the work of the officer and defined and managed the vulnerability of the officer. In this process recent departmental policy discourses can be seen to be most influential amongst staff employed within corrections for less than ten years, and staff working within the private prison at Mount Gambier. This differential influence of the policy discourses can be explained in terms of the importance of the audiences for whom prison officers perform their work and in particular the influence of other officers and staff and prisoners.

## **Naming the officer**

As the research hinged upon the identification of conceptualisations of the prison officer's work through the use of particular names for the role of the officer, the language to be used in the research and the writing up of the research was of particular importance. The use of a particular term to describe the work of the prison officer can convey a position in the debates about the appropriateness of particular conceptualisations of the work (Jenne and Kersting 1996; Josi and Sechrest 2005) and thus risks either distorting the research interview or conveying inappropriate meaning.

The importance of naming is recognised in Merlo's (1995:174) comments about the inappropriateness of some references to prison officers.

The general public still refer to us as "guards" or "warders". These terms conjure up in my mind pictures of the old convict days. I always feel a bit offended that people haven't changed their ideas with the times and don't realise that the role the officer now plays within the system is completely divorced from the stockade days. They also have a very limited idea of how dangerous and stressful the job can be...

There has been little critical discussion (except Johnson (1981) and Toch (1978)) about this naming of the officer either in academic literature or in practice. Those authors (e.g. Toch 1978; Johnson 1981; Jurik 1985a; Kauffman 1988; Kommer 1993; Merlo 1995:174) who actually discuss the naming of the work of prison officers are often using this as a device to explore the question of the conceptualisation of the work and to enter the debate from their own perspective. This is exemplified by Kaufmann (1988) who uses a discussion of the appropriate name for referring to prison officers to make a point about the conceptualisation of the work, arguing

I depart from the standard practice of referring to individuals employed to maintain security within prisons as "guards" or "correction[al] officers". My use of the term "prison officer" reflects my orientation toward those I

studied and their role within prisons. "Guard" is too suggestive of a static relationship, something one does with inanimate objects. In any case, its connotations are derogatory and belittling. "Correction officer" conveys a fanciful (and, to my mind, unseemly) notion of the relationship between keeper and kept. "Prison officer" simply denotes an individual granted official authority within the specific domain of a penal institution." (Kauffman 1988:5)

Many authors avoid making their own statement through naming by using the term that is officially recognised within the organisation they are studying. This may be correctional officer (Banks 2003), guard (Clemmer 1965 (first published 1940)) prison officer (Merlo 1995; Liebling and Price 2001) or other terms (e.g. correctional services officer (Jurik 1985b) that may be in vogue within organisations at a particular point in time.

An organisation may use changing the name of the "prison officer", to convey a changed conceptualisation of the work within the organisation. In the United States the movement amongst correctional staff to avoid using the expression "prison guard" was seen as an indicator of 'dissatisfaction with the working conditions that go with being a "prison guard"' whose

work consists largely of key-turning, counting and herding inmates, conducting searches, and manning a post when most persons are supposed to be asleep. (Johnson 1981:79)

Whereas the "Correctional officers"

would see themselves as agents of change dedicated to moving inmates toward acceptance of themselves as law-abiding citizens. The officers would prefer persuasive techniques of influence and would selectively utilize coercion only as a last resort for a short-term effect (Johnson 1981:83)

Jurik (1985a) also identifies an organisational change process in the movement from correctional security officers to correctional service officers. Similarly in Holland the name change "from 'bewaarder' (keeper) to 'penitentiair inrichtingswerker'

(penitentiary institution worker usually abbreviated to piw-er)” (Kommer 1993:130)  
reflected a new policy in which

prisoners are not primarily seen as objects to be locked up or as criminals to be rehabilitated, but as people who, for that very reason, are to be treated humanely (Kommer 1993:130)

The use of a name change to suggest a change in work practice has been identified in other arenas of practice. Trotter (1999:4,5) identifies that a change of name to describe workers with involuntary clients from ‘case workers’ to ‘case managers’ has been used to denote a change in responsibility from problem solving and therapeutic services to planning and oversight of cases. This is a theme that is also explored in considering the conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer as a case manager.

However, Toch (1978) argues that a critical approach must be taken to occupational name changes proposed by organisations. He poses the question ‘Does the advent of the “correctional officer” augur an emerging role in penology, or is such an officer a rebaptised Keeper of Cons?’ (Toch 1978). He argues that name changing in itself is insufficient to bring about change and that organisational support is required for people to undertake a new role.

The linking of organisational strategy (in these cases conveyed by name changes) and the conceptualisations of prison officers’ work is central to this thesis and is discussed in more depth in the context of organisational communication and the use of conceptualisations of work within organisations in Chapter 4.

For the purposes of this research it was necessary to identify a relatively neutral expression that would allow interviewees to express their own views about the

conceptualisation of prison officers' work and the writer to address the issues without signalling a position had already been adopted. Ultimately two terms were needed to achieve these purposes. For research within the prisons, both government managed and Group 4, the term *correctional officer* was adopted. This was the expression used by the organisations to specify the role that interviewees were being asked to address. It was a clear and respectful designation and no interviewee found it necessary to clarify the role to which the research referred, although a couple of interviewees challenged its appropriateness.

*No, I actually don't see us as being correctional officers. I think we are still custodial officers. I think there are very limited resources available for the women to address their offending behaviour. [Interviewee 27]*

However for writing purposes it was recognised, as argued above that the expression *correctional officer* had been adopted by organisations to convey a particular conceptualisation of the role at a point in time, and was likely to create confusion if used in the analysis. The most generic description of the role is that of prison officer, being the name associated with the ASCO (Australian Standards Classification of Occupations) code for this occupation (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2006). This is the term that is utilised within this thesis when the writer is using her own words<sup>4</sup>. In adopting this term it is recognised that some people will see this as a rejection of the term correctional officer and the values it conveys. This is not the intent of choosing the term prison officer, rather the intent is to step back

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<sup>4</sup> When quoting either from interviewees or from writings, no alteration has been made to the language used in the original.

from the language in use and invite reflection on the conceptualisations conveyed by correctional officer and other discourse in current use.

## **The history of the research**

The topic for this thesis arose from the observation of developments in the training and education of prison officers in South Australia. In 1990, the Department for Correctional Services contracted with Adelaide TAFE to join the Certificate in Justice Studies creating a correctional services stream to sit alongside streams created for police and legal services commission personnel. In 1995 the (then) new CEO of the Department for Correctional Services asked that this education program move from TAFE to the University of South Australia to enable the University to provide prison officers (and later other staff) with a Diploma in Correctional Administration (under license from NSW Centre for Professional Development). This new initiative created a partnership between the Department for Correctional Services and the University of South Australia to provide education opportunities for its staff. Units in the Diploma in Correctional Administration were to be compulsory for new staff (particularly prison officers) moving from probationary status.

Discussions with senior managers and staff within the Staff Development Branch over the years of this partnership provided a background to this research. In particular discussions with the CEO, senior managers and training staff at the time of the transformation of the TAFE Certificate of Justice Studies into a University of South Australia, Diploma in Correctional Administration, centering on the role of university education for prison officers highlighted the intensity of the discursive transformation that the department was trying to perform. Initial awareness of the nature of the debates that surrounded this transformation and the passion that fuelled

the divisions between those who conceptualised the work of prison officers as custodians and those who conceptualised the work as human services work, developed from discussions with staff both in head office and within the prisons. The research focus that developed from this engagement with the Department for Correctional Services, on the conceptualisations of the work of the prison officer involved exploring the sense that is made of prison officers' work and the organisational dialogue through which this meaning is contested and negotiated.

This research has been supported by staff throughout the Department for Correctional Services and in the private prison management company, Group 4. At times their interests were identical to that of the researcher and at times the interests of the researcher piggybacked on other departmental purposes. However, the research has benefited from the insights of many staff within the department and from the opportunity to observe the dynamics of prison administration.

Research in prisons can be difficult to negotiate and even with the established partnerships and ongoing dialogue about the issues under consideration, the process of designing a research process that would receive departmental approval and also be acceptable within the prisons was complex. Ultimately the acceptability of the research and the welcome to the researcher within a prison depended upon broader departmental political factors rather than the particular research design and approach to interviewees.

## The structure of the thesis

This thesis addresses the identified research questions in the following six chapters.

Chapter 2 articulates the theoretical basis for the thesis, elaborating both the epistemological basis for the research, the theoretical perspective and the research method. As suggested above, this approach is informed both by studies of prisons and organisational theory.

Chapter 3 reviews the body of literature about prison officers' work and highlights the conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer in the academic literature. The chapter argues that the broad categorisation of the role as custodial or human services fails to acknowledge the complexity of the prison officers' work and is limited by the construction of these roles as mutually incompatible. The chapter identifies eight more precise conceptualisations of the role of the officer that can be discerned in the literature and policy documents and identifies the use of prison purpose and prison process discourse to construct these conceptualisations.

Chapter 4 explores how the role of the prison officer has been conceptualised by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time. It does this through an analysis of the discourse in Departmental annual reports, tracing the use of prison purpose and prison process discourse and the emergence of conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer. The chapter describes the development of the role from the *Paramilitary* conceptualisation of the role early in the twentieth century to the most recent conceptualisations of the role as *Manager of Prisoners*, *Case Manager* and *Therapeutic Agent*.

Chapter 5 explores how the role of the prison officer is currently conceptualised by personnel working within South Australian prisons and what influences the way the role is conceptualised. In so doing it reports qualitative research with staff working in three South Australian prisons. The research identified that the work of the prison officer is seen as complex and unique, that the relationship between the custodial role and the human services role is not satisfactorily conceptualised as mutual incompatibility and that the *Manager of Prisoners* was the most popular of the conceptualisations of the prison officers' role. It examines the use of specific conceptualisations to garner respect for the role of the officer and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer.

In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 the patterns of conceptualisations of prison officers' work that were reported in the previous chapter are explored. Chapter 6 explores some individual characteristics of the interviewees and finds that although there were some patterns of conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer associated with gender and previous work experiences, these factors do not explain the observed patterns of conceptualisation. Chapter 7 explores factors relating to the prison work context, role within the prison organisation, length of time employed in corrections and the prison within which the interviewee worked. It argues that the length of time that individual has worked in corrections and the specific prison in which they are working are most influential in shaping how an individual conceptualises the work of the prison officer.

Chapter 8 addresses the final research question analysing to what extent the new conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer, articulated by the Department for

Correctional Services in the last ten years, are reflected in conceptualisations of the role within the prison and what determines the influence of these new conceptualisations. This analysis identifies that recent Departmental discourses, have influenced the construction of the prison officers' role within the prison. It found that staff who had worked in corrections for less than ten years were the most likely to utilise these discourses and in particular staff at the Mt Gambier, privately managed prison, which had been open for less than ten years, overwhelmingly constructed the role of the officer using these discourses. It explores how departmental discourse competes for influence with other discourses and the powerful influence of audiences for the performance of prison officers' work – in particular prisoners, officers and prison staff and prison management.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarising the answers to the three research questions and briefly identifying the implications of these findings.

## **Chapter Two: The research approach and method**

### **Introduction**

Entering the study of prison officers' work by examining the way in which this work is conceptualised indicates a particular foundation of epistemological and theoretical thinking. This chapter examines these foundations, locates the research focus in developing theoretical understandings and shows how this foundation has shaped the research method.

The chapter commences with an elaboration of the social constructionist epistemology of this thesis. It argues that the thesis is developed from a symbolic interactionist theoretical basis supplemented with a particular focus on the use of discourse to construct the role of the prison officer. The research draws upon streams of work in the symbolic interactionist tradition concerning work as a dramaturgical performance, the identification of career and self-identity in a work context and the use of occupational culture to mediate the construction of meaning in prison officers' work.

The research questions that have been developed from this theoretical basis were explored using a two study research design. This design and the detailed research methods of the two studies are described in the final sections of this chapter. The research design is a qualitative one that involves the interpretation of public documents and the collection of data through in-depth interviews from a non-representative sample of forty-four staff in South Australian prisons. There is thus a limit to the extent to which the findings of this research could be generalised within

South Australia or beyond. However, the research design has generated a wealth of qualitative data that is pertinent to the consideration of how prison officers' work is conceptualised and what influences that conceptualisation.

## **The epistemological foundation**

The belief that conceptualisations of activities are important lies at the heart of social constructionist epistemology. Rather than approaching the world in which we live as an entity to be discovered (in the positivist, scientific style) a constructionist approach takes the position that

all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty 1998:42)

Whilst this process involves individuals constructing meaning through their engagement with objects and events, a social constructionist approach is developed from an appreciation that each individual's process does not take part in isolation – either isolation from the world around them or at an isolated point in time (Crotty 1998:52). An individual's sense making occurs in the context of their social environment and the history of their life and the lives with whom they are socially interacting.

Adopting a social constructionist approach to the study of workers within prisons involves appreciating the construction of meaning for all of the central social institutions within the lens of the research – in particular the prison and the justice system (including the officer, the prisoner and their offence) and the worker and the organisation.

The construction of prisons (being one of a set of punishment practices) through culture and the values, meaning and emotion that it embeds (Garland 1990:249) is explored by Garland (1990) who further argues that prisons are both constructed by culture and extend cultural meaning. He suggests

Instead of thinking of punishment as a passive 'expression' or 'reflection' of cultural patterns established elsewhere, we must strive to think of it as an active generator of cultural relations and sensibilities.(Garland 1990:250)

That the construction of prison officers' work is shaped in part by the construction of the prison as a form of punishment is articulated in Garland's argument that "Penal professionals" – those who make the penal system work

are defined by penal forms and penal relations in the same way as those whom they punish (Garland 1990:262).

Prison officers' work is, thus, constructed through the social construction of prisons and through the additional processes of construction of the role of a prison officer.

Whilst prison officers' work is constructed through its relationship to the process of imprisonment, it is also constructed through the relationship between officer and the prison as an employing organisation. As Watson (2003:51) points out, organisations themselves are social constructions

we all treat the organisations we work in, shop in, are born and die within as being 'real' Yet they are not entities that we can touch, feel, hear, smell or throw up in the air.(Watson 2003:51)

The role of the worker, then within the organisation, can be understood to develop both from society wide understandings that have developed about work, the role of workers, employers and the employment relationship and also from understandings that have developed over time within both the specific industry, corrections, and the specific work site, the prison.

Mannheim, whose work initiated the use of the term social constructionism (Crotty 1998:27), brought to his analysis the insight that all social life is inherently competitive (Adler and Longhurst 1994:27). In recognising that individuals inhabit very different worlds with different access to power and resources, Mannheim provides the impetus for exploring how individuals construct meaning through their construction of their position within a range of social relationships. Mannheim's argument that the construction of meaning is a part of a social competitive process forms an additional element of the starting point for the research. Within prisons, this competitive process has been discussed by Garland who identifies that the "professional audience"

Is not exactly a unified one, and will often be divided by the factional interests and the diverging self-conceptions of the various groups involved (Garland 1990:263).

The diversity of interests and positions of significant individuals and groups who contribute to the construction of prison officers' work is recognised in this thesis in the focus of the research questions which pay particular attention to the positions expressed by the department and by individual workers within the prisons.

This thesis, then, starts from the position that the acts that are performed by a person doing the work of a prison officer are physical actions which in themselves carry no meaning – they are the simple actions we describe as walking, listening, speaking, lifting etc. Prison officers' work is conceptualised in the meaning that is constructed for these tasks. The construction of this meaning is undertaken by each individual who sees, speaks about or engages with prison officers and their work. However, while individuals construct the meaning of prison officers' work they do so in a social context in which understandings are shared (Crotty 1998:52) and often contested (Adler and Longhurst 1994:28).

## **The social construction of prison officers' work**

Conceptualisations of prison officers' work, then, are images that convey the meaning that has been created for the work of the prison officer. The conceptualisation will make sense of the activities involved in this work by ordering the multitude of perceived details. This process is different to an aggregation in which all the details are somehow brought together. Conceptualising does involve incorporating those elements that are common to many repetitions of the activity under consideration, but focuses on the essential elements. In this sense to conceptualise an activity is to create an abstraction or to describe an ideal form (Hatch 1997:10). The focus of this research then is on abstractions or ideal forms of prison officers' work.

To identify and describe a conceptualisation involves selecting a name or description that characterises the essential elements of the conceptualisation. In this naming process some attributes of the described activity or object are brought into focus and others are left in the background as of lesser significance. Useful contributions to understanding the processes through which conceptualisations, conveying meaning constructed for prison officers' work, are developed can be found in the symbolic interactionist and postmodern traditions, both of which pay particular attention to the means by which identity is constructed in social interaction through language (du Gay 1996a:29; Crotty 1998:75; Watson 2003). Their contributions to the foundations of this research are elaborated below.

## **The symbolic interactionist tradition**

The idea that the meaning that we attribute to something is the basis of how we act towards it is developed in symbolic interactionist theoretical traditions. This meaning, whilst being developed through a social process of interaction, is also seen to be shaped by ‘an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’ (Crotty 1998:72). Language is one of the important symbols through which

humans share and through which we communicate. Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent. (Crotty 1998:75)

Individual’s identities are not seen to be a result of private development, but rather are developed in social interactions with others in the environment (du Gay 1996a:29).

### **Performing work**

Descriptions of this symbolic interaction in dramaturgical terms have made important contributions to both the study of work and organisations and to the study of prisons and other social institutions (Watson 1995:60; Crotty 1998:76; Crawley 2004a). These descriptions utilise a comparison between social life and the theatre. They describe the interactions between people in life situations in a similar manner to the way one might describe actors, directors, producers in a theatrical setting (Crotty 1998:76). Attention is then paid to the purposes for which people perform acts and the effect of their acts on those whom they have constructed as their audience.

A dramaturgical approach was used in the study of organisations (Watson 1995:60) to explore the way that individual workers respond to the challenges and tensions which are created by their work (Watson 1995:60). Relevantly for this thesis

focussing on prison officers' work, Everett Hughes, whose studies of occupations has significantly influenced this stream of the sociology of work, emphasised the importance of highlighting what is taken for granted and argued that the most useful workers for research purposes were those whose work was unusual and even deviant as he believed that these studies brought to light aspects of workers' reaction to work situations that might go unnoticed in arenas with which researchers were more familiar(Watson 1995:60). The focus of this thesis, work in prisons, certainly fits this criterion, being beyond the experience of most people and conducted on the fringes of most communities.

The dramaturgical approach in the study of occupations has encouraged a focus on the way that workers construct their clients or customers in order to maintain their self respect and identity. Crawley's study (2004a) of the sense that prison officers make of their role illustrated the way prison officers perform prison work to manage emotions. She argued

There is a (long-standing) cultural expectation that prison officers will be courageous, resilient, authoritative and fearless in all situations and that they will manage those emotions thought to be 'non-masculine' (for example anxiety, fear, stress and depression).(Crawley 2004a:133)

Crawley identified two important audiences for the performance of prison officers' work. She reports

prison officers are acutely aware that they must play parts and stage-manage their actions if they are to control the impressions they convey to prisoners and, just as importantly to fellow staff.(Crawley 2004a:132)

This thesis draws on the dramaturgical approach in exploring the construction of prison officers' work by seeking to understand the purposes served by

conceptualisations of prison officers' work and within the prison the influence of the various audiences for whom prison officers perform their role.

### **Career and self identity**

The concept of career has developed from the social interactionist orientation to the study of the meaning attributed to work and work transitions. This concept, whilst not limited to work or organisations, names the process whereby a person may fill a series of social roles or positions throughout their life. This is readily translated to an individual's employment or working life in which an organisational career can be identified (Pavalko 1971:Ch 5). The significant social constructionist contribution in this analysis is the recognition that an individual has a subjective career in which the individual constructs a pattern and makes sense of their life in a way that is different to the sense made by an outside observer (Watson 1995:127). Whilst this thesis is not primarily concerned with the sense made by individual prison officers of their own employment careers, it draws upon this analytic stream that demonstrates that individuals have unique understandings of themselves in their working world. This is a central premise of the study of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by individual workers.

These understandings of the individual worker in the work environment are closely entwined with the social interactionist understanding of self-identity (Watson 1995:126). The individual's sense of self is a conception developed through interactions with others over time; it is a changing rather than static concept. Applying this understanding of self identity to a work situation and deriving a concept of identity as a worker enables the description of the individual's unique

understandings of themselves in their work experience separately from the analysis of the construction of their career.

A component of a work self identity might be the work orientation of the worker.

The study of work orientation is a strand of exploration of the work experience that has developed within the sociology of occupations. Whilst the original work for this analysis by Goldthorpe and Lockwood (Watson 1995:121,122) was focussed on whether workers were gaining intrinsic or social satisfactions from work, this thesis draws upon the insights that have developed from later studies in this tradition that emphasise that work orientation is shaped by both individuals' personal biographies and their experience of processes within the work context (see discussion of the contributions of Beynon and Blackburn and Daniels in Watson 1995:123). Workers bring to their role an understanding of work that is shaped both by the organisational context and by other aspects of their life and values(Watson 1995:123).

The question of the determinants of prison officers' attitudes and behaviour has been one which has received a significant amount of research attention. In the literature two contrasting models 'dominate thinking concerning what variables affect and determine correctional beliefs and attitudes' (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:328). These are described as the 'individual experiences importation' model and the 'work role' (or 'prisonization') model (Kauffman 1988:Chapter 7; Hemmens and Stohr 2000:328). The individual experiences importation model (in future referred to as the 'experiences' model) explains an individual's role orientation in terms of the characteristics and experiences that individual brings to the job. The workrole or 'prisonization' model (in future referred to as 'the work context' model) (Hemmens

and Stohr 2000:328) focuses on the effect of organisational conditions in determining the occupational identity. Contradictory evidence about the influence of ‘experience’ and ‘work context’ on a variety of aspects of an individual’s understanding of the role of the prison officer has been reported in the literature (Jurik 1985b; Hemmens and Stohr 2000). Central to these debates, from a social constructionist perspective, is the interaction between individual and the organisation as mediated by occupational and organisational culture.

### **Occupational culture**

The concept of culture, understood as a ‘system of significant symbols’ (Geertz in Crotty (1998:53) has been used by sociologists to explore the process through which meaning is socially constructed. Individuals come to inhabit a world in which meanings have already been constructed and these meanings are shared by the inhabitants of that world (Crotty 1998:53) and communicated through cultural symbols. In the social interactions through which cultural symbols are developed, a variety of interests are seen to shape the construction and development of the significant symbols. Critical theorists argue that the meanings that are transmitted through the cultural processes are meanings that serve hegemonic interests (Crotty 1998:59) and that the power dynamics of previous time periods are reproduced in current time through the passing on of the interpretive symbols that resulted from the constructing of one group by another.

Occupational culture, from a social interactionist perspective, describes the symbolic context in which individual workers construct a work self identity through their construction of themselves as workers. An occupational culture, similar to a broader social culture, embeds a set of ideas, values, and attitudes held by members of that

occupational group. Just as an individual comes to know themselves through an engagement with the culture in which they are born, so a worker comes to develop an identity in the context of the occupational culture of the work in which he or she is employed. In common use in justice research, an occupational culture explains how things are done by workers in that occupation and ‘some fundamental assumptions about why things are done that way’ (Chan 1997:113).

The occupational culture of prison officers has featured prominently and usually negatively in discussions of prison officers and their work within correctional organisations (Hawkins 1976; Lombardo 1981; Liebling and Price 2001). Goffman’s (1961b; 1961a) influential work on the social processes within total institutions, whilst focussed more broadly on the institutions and relationships within them created a template for discussing occupational culture within such institutions. His work highlighted several aspects of the way that both inmates and staff shaped and maintained their identities within these environments (Sparks 1996:52). In particular Goffman noted that staff as a group and inmates as a group shared an image of the other which

is seldom of the kind that leads to sympathetic identification... (Goffman 1961a:89)

However, this image-of-the-other had the potential to be modified through a range of institutional interactions in which staff and inmates engaged. For staff, whilst the defining characteristic of the work was that it was ‘*people work*’, the work routines were seen to serve to impose an order on the work very similar to work upon objects and products (Goffman 1961a:73).

Liebling and Price (2001:145) argued that although the concept of culture may be useful to help

to analyse the impact of attempts to change or reform the prison (see Chan 1997) and to account for some aspects of prison officer behaviour (Liebling and Price 2001:145)

there has been little recent research on prison officer culture. However the work of Kauffman (1988), whose research was conducted primarily in a ‘hard end’ (Liebling and Price 2001:150) high security prison in the United States (Walpole, Massachusetts), made a useful contribution to describing this culture. Despite the ‘atypical’ prison from which they were derived, the norms of the occupational culture that Kauffman identified capture many of the elements of the stereotypical ‘negative values, attitudes and practices’ attributed to prison officers (Liebling and Price 2001:145, 146). Kauffman argued that the norms she has identified

cannot be defined simply by observing the behaviour of officers but depend instead upon the meaning that officers ascribe to specific behaviours.(Kauffman 1988:85)

The norms identified in Kauffman’s research were

Norm 1 Always go to the aid of an Officer in distress

Norm 2 Don’t “lug” drugs

(to “lug” drugs is to ‘bring drugs into the prison for inmate use’(Kauffman 1988:90))

Norm 3 Don’t Rat

(the expression “to rat” included, informing inmates about the behaviour of other officers and cooperating with an investigation or giving evidence against a fellow officer (Kauffman 1988:94))

Norm 4 Never make a fellow officer look bad in front of inmates

- Norm 5 Always support an officer in a dispute with an inmate
- Norm 6 Always support officer sanctions against inmates
- Norm 7 Don't be a White Hat (the expression "to be a white hat" describes demonstrating 'sympathy for or identification with inmates' (Kauffman 1988:108)
- Norm 8 Maintain officer solidarity versus all outside groups
- Norm 9 Show positive concern for fellow officers

Table 2.1 Norms identified in Kaufman's research

However Kauffman emphasises in her elaboration of these norms that they carry different weighting in the construction of prison officers' role, that in a variety of circumstances an officer can violate these norms and still be accepted and that whilst many of these norms were common to other prisons, not all were part of the culture of the prison officer in other prisons within the same state (Kauffman 1988:115).

The masculine attributes of the officer culture are identified by researchers who have observed the introduction of women as prison officers. Jurik (1985b) argued that resistance to women officers related to both the fear that they would disrupt the subculture's solidarity (as argued by Martin, 1980: 138-157) and to the fear that their presence would limit the opportunities for the men already in the roles for promotion (Jurik 1985b:381).

However, others have questioned the assumption that officers' membership of a 'work group' and dependence on one another

for support in times of crisis and at times for information and cooperation while they attempt to carry out their normal work duties (Lombardo 1981:163)

leads to the creation of an influential subculture. Hawkins (1976) pointed to attitudinal variation between officers and argues that the studies in the United States (Motivans in Morris and Morris 1960:88; Hawkins 1976) found a much greater complexity of attitudes and values within the officer group than has been assumed.

This is consistent with the observation of Toch (1982) that officers' beliefs about what other officers think and value is not consistent with the actual statements of other officers. The suggestion from this research is that the consistent officer subculture is actually a powerful and formative myth (Lombardo 1981:164; Toch and Klofas 1982).

Although there is no evidence of a "hard nosed" officer subculture, the belief in such a culture is wrongly shared by many officers and it is particularly subscribed to by officers who fit the stone age mold. Corrections officers talk volubly of "negative peer pressure" but the data suggest that "peers" exerting such "pressure" are few and wildly unrepresentative, and that their volubility is based on the intensity of their feelings, and that they are cheered on by a delusion of peer consensus. (Toch and Klofas 1982:44)

This identification that the idea of a single occupational culture of prison officers is misleading is echoed by Liebling and Price (2001) and Crawley (2004a) who from their research in United Kingdom prisons identify that occupational culture is shaped in part by the history and traditions of individual prisons. Liebling and Price (2001) also point to the contribution of the prison officers' union in the development of the occupational culture of prison officers. In the Australian context the multiplicity of occupational cultures and the influence of the prison officers' union on some of these cultures is illustrated in the study of organisational change and resistance to change in New South Wales prisons presented by Vinson (1982). Although this study describes a complex interaction of understandings of prison purpose and prison process, Vinson clearly identifies both the multiplicity of cultures within New South

Wales prisons (including that of the 'Old Guard') and the role of the union in supporting powerful resistance to unwelcome change.

Occupational culture and organisational culture are concepts that are intertwined when a single occupational group is responsible for a very large proportion of the activity of an organisation (i.e. a prison). This is the position that is adopted by Crawley (2004a) who discusses the use of 'culture change' as an organisational change strategy in the United Kingdom Prison Service. Crawley argues that it is simplistic to consider culture a 'controllable variable' (Crawley 2004a:9) and that

Although employees strive for meaning at work, that does not mean that they will embrace *any* meaning (Crawley 2004a:9)

Her studies in six public sector male prisons in the United Kingdom identified that although many organisational strategies (including changed overtime and accommodation policies, early retirement and severance packages, improved working conditions and the recruitment of new staff who must have with a higher educational standard) has resulted in many changes to the occupational culture of prison officers, there has also developed an 'alternative ideal' amongst long-serving officers(Crawley 2004a:9)

One built not around galvanising utopias for the future but around reconstruction of the (cherished) past (Crawley 2004a:9)

In making the focus of research attention the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, this thesis adopts a social constructionist approach to understanding the work of prison officers. It points the research lens at the sense that is made of prison officers' work. In so doing it recognises the centrality of some relationships in the construction of the work of the officer and that these relationships are constructed in the context of the social construction of a range of social institutions including

punishment, prisons, organisations and workers. The thesis uses a dramaturgical perspective to examine how these relationships construct audiences for the work of the prison officer and thus influence its construction. The research starts from the recognition that the work of the prison officer is constructed by officers and others with them in the prison. It does not start from the assumption that all prison officers will conceptualise their work in the same way or that other staff will have a common conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer. Rather it recognises that conceptualisations of prison officers' work will be used to describe the sense that individuals make of the work of the prison officer and that these will vary. Differences in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work may result from the influence of the social context in which it is constructed and the culture of the organisation and occupation in a specific prison or from other attributes of the individual which influence the effect of this social context and the choices that the individual makes.

### **The role of discourse**

Whilst the term postmodern is both contentious and difficult to define (Crotty 1998:183), the contribution of postmodern thinkers to creating new ways of thinking about the relation between language and that which it describes has significantly impacted on social research. In postmodern theoretical perspectives, the role of language is incorporated with other symbols, in the expression discourse, which describes

a set of concepts, statements, terms and expressions which constitute a way of talking or writing about a particular aspect of life. (Watson 1995:75)

Postmodern perspectives identify the way an individual's sense of self is shaped by the discourse which surrounds them and, influenced by Foucault, the exercise of

power that is involved in this process. Discourse is seen as constructing a reality within which an identity is constructed (Hatch 1997:95).

A key to understanding and using the postmodern perspective lies in centering your attention on the ways in which language is used to construct reality and within that reality, identity. (Hatch 1997:95)

Watson (1995:77) suggests that a soft postmodernism can be adopted, which allows researchers the benefit of positioning language as action in itself, without adopting the more extreme postmodern position that 'there is nothing in the world beyond the words we use to talk about it' (Watson 1995:77). However, in his later work, Watson (2003:50) is convinced by the argument of Hancock and Tyler (2001) that this recognition of the use of discourse represents no more than a re-emphasis of the social constructionist recognition that people construct their worlds.

In examining the use of conceptualisations of prison officers' work within the Department for Correctional Services, this thesis is positioning discourse as an action of the department. This analysis of discourse to throw light on the construction of prison officers' work and the multiple perspectives through which work roles are constructed may be thought of as a 'soft postmodern' orientation or it may be considered an extension of the social constructionist orientation of the thesis.

A focus within organisational research has been the use of discourse to shape the way individual's roles within organisations have been constructed. In particular researchers have examined the new managerialist discourses and how these discourses have been utilised to orient the worker toward a focus on

"'quality', 'excellence' or even 'liberation management' (Peters 1993)"  
(Clarke 1998)

Du Gay (1996a:Ch 4) argues that in this process

the work-based subject is also reconceptualized; the employee is re-imagined as an individual actor in search of meaning, responsibility, a sense of personal achievement and a maximized quality of life (du Gay 1996a:4th page of Ch 4)

However, critics (Halford and Leonard 1999) point out that whilst the recognition of the discursive construction of a worker's identity may be useful, du Gay's account of the processes of social construction of worker identities does not give the worker agency in this process (Halford and Leonard 1999:109). Foucault's insight that the construction of individual's social identities through the discursive labelling is an exercise of power, (Watson 1995:75) allows an appreciation that the discursive process involves attempts to dominate, to shape the terrain and thus identities and responses to those attempts. Discourse is both a means of expressing power, a contributor to power struggles and the product of power relationships (Adler and Longhurst 1994:33).

Conceptualisations of prison officers' work, then, can be considered to be shaped both by and in reaction to discursive practice. As Halford and Leonard (1999:116) suggest

new discourse – be it enterprise, managerialism or calculation- is not all-consuming, all-transformative: it merely adds to the complex and often contradictory multiplicity of discourse to which all of us are subject.

New discourse, they argue, is applied to human material

which is already highly differentiated along the lines of gender, ethnicity, class and generation for example (Halford and Leonard 1999 2120)

In extending this argument they suggest that as a result, the effect of new discourses designed to shape worker identities cannot be anticipated.

So, conceptualisations of prison officers' work are not neutral academic categories. A conceptualisation describes a position in a contested arena. Naming a prison officer alternatively as a *Para-military officer* or a *Therapist* makes statements about how the role is being constructed and adopts a position within a competitive struggle (Adler and Longhurst 1994:31).

The research for this thesis focussed on the construction of prison officers' work through discourse and the effect of discourse on the conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer by workers within prisons. To explore the discourses constructing the work of prison officers, the work of Adler and Longhurst was utilised. Adler and Longhurst (1994) explored the use of discourse within Scottish prisons and prison policy by groups of actors within the prison service. They argue that particular combinations of discourse describing both the purpose of imprisonment and the processes of prisons can be associated with different influential groups within the prison service. In identifying the patterns and structures of this set of common discourses from their study of the Scottish prison system, they argued that these discourses then become resources for use by actors within the system (Adler and Longhurst 1994:31). Although the focus of analysis of Adler and Longhurst's study of the Scottish prison service is very different to the study of conceptualisations of prison officers' work in this thesis, the schema of discourses that they identify provides a useful framework for the consideration of the elements of conceptualisations of prison officers' work.

Influenced by the work of Mannheim they argue that

Groups of social actors in specific social settings produce discourses that reflect and construct their social interests in the course of competitive struggle (Adler and Longhurst 1994:31)

Using a lens for their research that focussed on the discourses of different groups within the prison system and the discursive processes through which these groups struggled to construct the prison purpose and process (Adler and Longhurst 1994:33) they identified three distinctive ends discourses' which are concerned with the purpose of imprisonment or 'what prisons are for'. (Adler and Longhurst 1994:33) and four distinctive 'means discourses' which are concerned with 'how prisons should be run' (Adler and Longhurst 1994:34). In this focus on purpose and process, Adler and Longhurst are developing an analytic framework that has been used by others in prisons literature (see DiIulio 1987:47). They name the ends discourses as rehabilitation discourse, normalisation discourse and control discourse and the means discourses as bureaucracy, professionalism, legality and enterprise.

Briefly summarised, 'Ends discourses' express an understanding of the purpose of prisons and the relationships within prisons. At one end of the spectrum is a rehabilitation discourse that focuses on 'socializing the individual back into society'. Normalization discourse has as its key the treatment of prisoners like individuals in the community, while at the other end of the spectrum a control discourse focuses on good order and discipline within the prison. Associated with these discourses are different constructions of the individual prisoner – with the normalization discourse focusing on the prisoner as a 'normal' individual whilst rehabilitation discourse stresses the prisoner's needs or deficiencies and the control discourse the prisoner's disruptive tendencies (Adler and Longhurst 1994).

<b>Ends discourses</b>	<b>Rehabilitation</b> Socialising the individual back into society
	<b>Normalisation</b> Treating prisoners like individuals in the community
	<b>Control</b> Good order and discipline.

Table 2.2 'Ends Discourses'

To categorize the discourses about prison processes, Adler and Longhurst develop the work of Jerry Mashaw who integrates

the normative concerns of administrative law...with the positive concerns of organisation theory. (Adler and Longhurst 1994:43)

The resulting model describes three ideal types of organisation – the bureaucracy, the professional and the legal system and the associated qualities of just decision-making within the organisation.

The 'Means discourses' identified by Adler and Longhurst (1994) in the Scottish prison system express understandings of the processes by which prisons should be run. Using the Mashaw model, Adler and Longhurst identify in these discourses a model of decision-making, a legitimating goal, accountability structures and how accountability might be enforced. So, a bureaucratic discourse discusses applying rules with hierarchical accountabilities, a discourse about professional management focuses on applying knowledge with accountabilities being interpersonal (that is to the individual client) and a legal discourse focuses on fairness, independence and rights of appeal.

<b>Means discourses</b>		
<b>Bureaucratic</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Professional</b>
Achievement of uniformity, consistency and fidelity to rules	Independent accountability, fairness	Leadership, experience and judgement

Table 2.3 'Means discourses'

From their own research Adler and Longhurst (1994:237) identify the emergence in the Scottish prison service of an additional 'means discourse', a specific form of managerial discourse that as a result of the influence of enterprise culture they named 'enterprise discourse'. This discourse, which promotes 'managerial solutions to organisational problems' (Adler and Longhurst 1994:238) is argued to supplant, in the Scottish prison service, the bureaucratic and professional discourses in that both administrative civil servants and prison governors "both become managers of the 'shared enterprise'".

Adler and Longhurst suggest that 'it is unlikely that the same discourses with identical characteristics would be found elsewhere' (Adler and Longhurst 1994:243). Without denying this, the categorization of discourses relating to the purpose of imprisonment and the process of imprisonment that they have developed can be seen as prototypes, which whilst possibly expressed in different detailed form in different jurisdictions or even different locations, name a recognizable philosophical orientation to imprisonment and beliefs about the appropriate way that a prison should be administered.

A categorization of discourses will be used in this thesis to identify the combinations of discourses which are used to construct particular conceptualisations of prison officers' work. Recognising that this is a different purpose to that envisaged by Adler and Longhurst, the categories of discourse will be re-named as Prison Purpose discourse and Prison Process discourse. The Prison Process discourses will include both the original discourses identified by Adler and Longhurst – Bureaucratic, Legal and Professional and the Entrepreneurial discourse identified from their research. The matrix that they structure will thus be presented as the Prison Discourses matrix.

Prison Discourses matrix

		<b>Prison Process</b>			
		<b>Bureaucratic</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Professional</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial</b>
		Achievement of uniformity, consistency and fidelity to rules	Independent accountability fairness	Leadership, experience and judgement	Managerial
<b>Prison Purpose</b>	<b>Rehabilitation</b> socialising the individual back into society				
	<b>Normalisation</b> Treating prisoners like individuals in the community				
	<b>Control</b> Good order and discipline.				

Table 2.4 Prison Discourses matrix. Source: Adler and Longhurst (1994)

## **The research questions**

The orientation to work that results from the social constructionist basis of this thesis and the sociological understandings of work and of the use of discourse to shape the construction of work roles resulted in a set of research questions that acknowledged the diversity of constructions of prison officers' roles and purposes served by these constructions. The research questions recognised both organisational and individual conceptualisations of the role of the officer and sought to explore the interaction between these at this particular point in time in three South Australian prisons.

The resulting research questions are

- How has the role of the prison officer been conceptualised by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time?
- How is the role of the prison officer currently conceptualised by personnel working within South Australian prisons, what influences the way the role is conceptualised and what purposes do these conceptualisations serve?
- To what extent have the new conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer, articulated by the Department for Correctional Services in the last ten years, been adopted by staff within prisons and what determines the influence of these new conceptualisations?

## **Research design**

The research design for this thesis reflects the social constructionist theoretical perspective discussed. This influenced both the relationship between researcher and the partner organisations in the research and the relationship between the researcher and the individuals who contributed to the research. The research methods utilised

were focussed not on the acts that officers perform in their work, but the meaning that is constructed for the acts performed by the prison officer.

### **Partnership research**

The research design was developed in the context of an active partnership between the researcher and the South Australian Department for Correctional Services. The origin of the research was in the partnership between the Department for Correctional Services (South Australia) and the University of South Australia to provide an educational program for prison officers. The researcher was an active agent in this partnership, having negotiated the 1995 Memorandum of Understanding between the University of South Australia and the Department for Correctional Services for the provision of the Diploma in Correctional Administration. The subsequent appointment of the researcher as the Program Director of this Diploma at the University of South Australia provided an opportunity for the development of the partnership between the researcher as a University of South Australia representative and the Department for Correctional Services. The partnership that was developed was one in which both parties, University and Department, were seen to bring expertise to the delivery of this educational program. Whilst the University brought its skills and expertise in educational curriculum design and delivery and its role as an accredited provider of credentials, the Department brought its experience and expertise as the provider of correctional services and in particular prison management.

## **The role of the researcher**

The relationship between researcher and those with whom the research process brings them in contact has been much discussed in the research methods literature. The idealised model of the researcher as a scientist utilised in many social research texts (eg Strangor 1998:6) in which the researcher is expected to be without emotion and free from bias (Taylor 2001:11) has led to the development of a model of the research relationship being impersonal and distant. This results in little discussion of the researching relationships developed in the course of the research, even when this has occurred within a single institution and over along period of time. Blaikie (2000) however argues that a researcher can choose from amongst at least five other stances towards the research process and those participating in the research. In order of increasing recognition of researcher engagement Blaikie (2000: 52-54) identifies the 'empathetic observer', who focuses on 'grasping the subjective meaning used by social actors' in order to understand their actions; the 'faithful reporter' who undertakes the research process with a view to allowing participants to have voice and to ensuring tha the participants can recognise themselves in the research reports; the 'mediator of languages', whose own voice is clearly present in the research report as the researcher interprets the accounts provided by participants; the 'reflective partner' who as a researcher works in a dialogic process in which participants are recognised to both have status in the interpretation of the research and to be changed by the research process and the 'dialogic facilitator' who as a researcher seeks to express the diversity of positions perceived in the research process in authentic voices of those with whom they are researching.

Of these the stance of ‘reflective partner’ most accurately describes the position adopted for this research. This stance enables the researcher to acknowledge relationships with the participants in the research process, whilst at the same time acknowledging status as an outsider in the world being researched. A reflective partner does not enter the research process as the sole expert, but rather acknowledges the expertise of those with whom the research problem is being explored.

The description of this research as partnership research reflects the particular positioning of the researcher in relation to the workers and organisations participating in the research. Although all applied social research can be argued to involve an engagement by the researcher with the society or the organisation within which their research is located (Miller 1991), partnership research can be seen to be the result of a particular relationship between the researcher and those with whom the researcher is exploring the issues. Rather than presuming a disengaged relationship, this research recognises that only people engaged with the work of prison officers can describe the work (Blaikie 2000). This is consistent with the description utilised by Blaikie (2000) for ‘abductive’ research in that it was concerned with the sense that was being made of prison officers’ work by those engaged with that work – officers themselves and their colleagues in the prison along with departmental management. At the same time it is recognised that much of our social life ‘is routine and is conducted in a taken-for-granted, unreflective manner’ (Blaikie 2000). The contribution of the researcher as a reflective partner is to work with people to bring the meaning that they are constructing for their work into the public domain.

It is a comparable research method to that described in the “collaborative research” model by Hall and Hall (1996:14). This model, which recognises that a researcher needs to have cooperative relationships with others, places ‘the informants’ as the ‘experts’ and the client organisation with whom the research has been negotiated as the ‘partner’ (Hall and Hall 1996:13). The choice of the expression ‘partnership research’ in preference to using the expression collaborative research recognises that whilst the research has been unfunded and independently constructed by the researcher, it has grown from a partnership, been shaped by the definition of issues within the partnership and reflects the actions of the partners over time. In these terms the research partnership differs from that described by Hall and Hall (1996:36) in that the partner organisation is not considered the research client, but an active equal in the research process. The thinking and writing that has occurred in the course of this research has been shared with the partner organisations, and in particular the Department for Correctional Services on an ongoing basis. There has been no attempt to preserve the Department’s practice in the sense of cocooning it to enable the researcher to engage with an unaware organisation.

To speak of partnership research is to speak of a dynamic relationship. The partnership that resulted in this research has undergone significant change whilst the research was being undertaken. The research has been developed, executed and reported over an eight year time period. In that time, there have been three Chief Executives of the Department for Correctional Services (two substantive and one acting). The incumbents of positions with which the researcher had a direct relationship have also changed on many occasions as have their responsibilities within the Department and in the final months of the writing of this thesis the

partnership between the Department for Correctional Services and the University of South Australia to provide the Diploma in Correctional Administration has been brought to a close. This is not a unique experience and some of the challenges of researching within prisons which are changing and changing personnel around the researcher are discussed by DiIulio (1991:5). For this research, the changes of personnel had limited impact although they caused some delays, whilst the rationale for the research was re-examined and sponsorship re-negotiated. However the changes result at the end of the research in a sense of hollowness for the claim that this is partnership research. Very few of the initial sponsors of the research remain to receive the final report.

Although most research in prisons has assumed a more 'scientific' approach for the role of the researcher, an alternative research model which influenced the research design of this project was demonstrated by Liebling and Price (2001:5). Their Appreciative Inquiry approach to their exploration of staff-prisoner relationships involved the researchers in

deliberately seek[ing] best experiences, accomplishments and peak moments in organisations.(Liebling and Price 2001)

Whilst the research for this thesis does not emulate the Liebling and Price research with its rich range of research activities (Liebling and Price 1998a:8), it does share the perspective that 'new and valuable ways of looking at the work of prison officers' (Liebling and Price 2001:6) are to be found by avoiding the assumption that what happens within prisons can only be examined through a 'focus on problems and difficulties' (Liebling and Price 2001).

## **The research studies**

The research questions required a research design that created two analyses – conceptualisations of prison officers' work by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services and conceptualisations of prison officers' work by staff within South Australian prisons – and then brought these analyses together to address the final question. The research design selected was two independent studies, one using a discourse analysis methodology to undertake a document analysis and the other using qualitative research methodology to undertake semi-structured interviews. Each of these studies will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

### **Study 1: Departmental discourse study**

South Australian public sector departments are a particular form of organisation, constructed from the Westminster system of parliamentary government. The identity of the department or organisation is usually defined by the purpose it serves either in delivering government services or in providing services to the government. Statutory constraints assist in the construction of departments by describing their responsibilities and accountabilities.

Despite these constructions of a department as an entity, it must be recognised, following Watson (2003:51), as lacking body and voice. Departments can and do perform acts and make statements (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000) but they do so through the agency of individuals within the organisation. However, when individuals speak for the department or organisation they undertake an act of representation which may differ from their own personal or professional views. Identifying the point at which an individual speaks, in an official sense, for the department, rather than expressing their own position is one of the challenges in

undertaking a study of a department as an organisation that is acting upon its workers to achieve a goal.

Departments adopt descriptions of work and workers that express their expectations of the role of the worker in the organisation and position the worker in relation to the mission, values and technology of the department. These descriptions are evident in the naming of the workers' roles in job advertisements and other authoritative announcements (such as speeches to staff, parliamentary reports), the positioning of the work in terms of expectations about skill levels and qualifications in employment contracts and in implicit responsibility for relationships with clients/customers.

These descriptions of work and workers are expressed in organisational discourse in a variety of contexts. At any point in time there may be several perspectives within the department about how the responsibilities of particular workers within the department should be conceptualised.

The choice of the Annual Report of the Department for Correctional Services (and its predecessor organisations) as the 'official' voice of the Department for the purpose of this research was made in recognition of its statutory role, which had ensured its existence through various restructures of the department and also gave status to the views presented in the Report in any year. However, it is acknowledged that although the Annual report purports to be a report to the Parliament on the current state of the department, it is also a public relations exercise for the Department. As May argues

What people decide to record is itself informed by decisions which, in turn, relate to the social, political and economic environments of which they are part (May 1997:164)

It cannot be assumed that documents are 'neutral artefacts that independently report social reality' (May 1997:164). Rather documents can be viewed as persuasive texts that intend to produce a meaning (May 1997:164,165).

Whilst the Annual Report consists of data that is the result of financial audits and other descriptions of events that have occurred through the year, it is the story that the department is telling about these events that is of concern for this analysis. This story must demonstrate that the Department is meeting its statutory obligations (as constructed by current political masters) and that it is fulfilling its public service obligations in accord with community expectations. Annual reports whilst they can be seen to be the voice of the department are in reality constructed from the contributions of the heads of various units within the department. Considered in this light the discourse in the Annual report of the department tells a story that explains to both an outside and an internal audience the significance of the work of the Department in that year. It is thus an excellent source of information about how this work was being constructed at the time (May 1997:157).

### ***Undertaking the analysis***

The Annual Reports of the Gaols and Prisons Department, the Prisons Department and the Department for Correctional Services from 1904 are held as a paper copy by the Department for Correctional Services library and were accessed in that library.

All reports from 1904 to 2004 were utilised in the research.

The first research activity was a qualitative content analysis (May 1997:173) focused on references to prison officers in the Annual Reports.

In this process, the analyst picks out what is relevant for analysis and pieces it together to create tendencies, sequences, patterns and orders (Ericson et al 1991:55 cited in May 1997).

This enabled the identification of broad developments in understandings of the purpose of prisons and the processes of imprisonment and examples of descriptions of prison officers at work that appeared to typify the construction of the work of officers in a particular period.

A second more detailed analysis of the data generated by this initial content analysis was then undertaken utilising techniques of discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992; Potter 1996; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates 2001). In particular this second analysis identified the use of specific discourses of prison purpose and prison process, categorised using the Adler and Longhurst (1994) prison discourses matrix, to construct the work of the department and either explicitly or implicitly the work of the prison officer. It identified the names being used to describe the work of prison officers and compared these to the specific conceptualisations of prison officers' work identified in Chapter 3.

### ***Limitations of the analysis***

Whilst the Annual Report plays a statutory role in the relationship between the Department, the government and the parliament and thus has an authority that few other documents can emulate, it is still a limited source for the study of departmental views (Newman 2000:45). In particular it is difficult, using an official document, to nuance the use of discourse and to recognise the extent to which the language used reflects that in use within the department or just echoes language of previous reports. The Annual Reports often included sentences and paragraphs in one report that had been used in one or more previous reports.

The issue of document bias is one that has concerned researchers working with historical documents (May 1997:176). Most commonly this is concerned with the possibility that the researcher will not recognise the decisions that influence what is recorded or may be left out of that document. The study of the published version of the Annual Report disguises the process of preparation of a public document that is, like all organisational discourse, a political activity. The Annual Report may be inclusive of a range of views from within the department, may have omitted dissenting views or reflect only one perspective. The final published version may be very similar to the first draft of the document or it may be the result of significant negotiation and re-drafting to express the views of the dominant decision-makers. The lack of information about these matters diminishes the richness of understanding of the significance of what is finally recorded in the Annual Report.

Without denying these limitations, the Annual Report does provide an authoritative source for language about the work of the department and in particular prisons and

those who work within them. It also provides a contemporaneous record of official views of earlier eras of prison administration. As Telfer (2003:129) argues, these reports

provide valuable information not only on the scale, nature and significance of 'corrections' in the early part of this century, but they also provide a window through which we may view the social value and social character which imprisonment and other options were assigned by the citizens and administrators of the day

## **Study 2: Prison Staff Study**

### ***South Australian prisons as research sites***

Researching the conceptualisations of prison officers' work by staff in prisons involved creating an opportunity for staff to identify and explore their conceptualisations of the role. The research design involved seeking the views of staff from a variety of South Australian prisons. South Australia has nine (or eight if you combine the co-located Women's Prison and Adult Pre-Release Centre) prison institutions. The research was conducted with staff in three of these prisons. Although it may have been preferable to undertake research in each of the prisons in South Australia, there were a variety of reasons, internal to the prisons, why this was not possible within the time frame available.

### ***Accessing the prisons for research***

The process of selection of the prisons to be the research sites reflects both the complex nature of research partnerships within a large bureaucracy and some particular challenges that result from researching in prisons. Bryman (2004:296, 297) recognises that gaining access to organizations for research purposes (the methodology under discussion in his work was ethnography) is a difficult process and involves hard work, the utilisation of contacts and a degree of luck. This

difficulty is acknowledged also by researchers working within prisons and prison systems (DiIulio 1991:5; King 2000; Patenaude 2004). In particular, DiIulio (1987:Appendix), acknowledges the difficulties of access and some of the unusual requirements that researchers wanting to work within prisons may be required to meet. However, Bryman points out that a research question may be addressed by data collected from a variety of sites and rejection in one area does not necessarily bring an end to the research. DiIulio also points out that the defensiveness of prisons about questions of access can be balanced by the great sense of pride that many prison personnel feel in the way they do their difficult job (DiIulio 1987:269).

Whilst the Department for Correctional Services has a formal research committee that considers applications from researchers to work with staff or prisoners, the successful development of a research proposal requires the constant massaging of a research relationship, in this case a relationship of partnership. As the research focus developed in conversation with key departmental officers with responsibilities for staff development and training (who moved on from their positions with a frequency that was daunting for a part-time PhD student), it both reflected and shaped a set of concerns within the Department about the role of prison staff, how they could be prepared for that role and what actually happens within prisons. One part of this process was the ongoing conversations about the nature of prison officers' work that occurred in the partnership to provide relevant educational programs to prison officers. A second part of the process was the public sharing of the thinking shaping the research through the presentation (and subsequent circulation) of papers at appropriate academic and industry forums. In this process, the researcher presented papers at three Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology Conferences, at

the (Australian Institute of Criminology sponsored) Women in Corrections conference and at the Australian Institute of Criminology, Fourth National Outlook Conference.

Ultimately the research was ‘sponsored’ by senior staff within the Departmental executive and by others within the staff training and development branch. However, this ‘sponsorship’ could not deliver research access to the prisons and their staff. In an attempt to bridge the role of head office and the role of operational staff within the prisons, the researcher was invited to attend a prisons’ General Managers meeting to explain the research and seek the endorsement and cooperation of the eight general managers. This meeting endorsed the use of a semi-structured interview within the workplace as an appropriate research technique to explore with staff the conceptualisation of prison officers’ work. All General Managers agreed to promote this research to their staff and to be interviewed themselves if invited.

However, even this high level of support and cooperation at a managerial level could not guarantee the participation of staff. In the end, personal relations and credibility were instrumental in making possible the essential access. At Port Augusta and at the Adelaide Prison, the researcher was welcomed by the managers who knew the researcher through the educational partnership with the Department.

The dynamic that resulted in a welcome into the Group 4 prison at Mount Gambier would seem to have been at least as much about the importance of public relations for the company as it was about interest in the particular research focus. As the sole provider of private prison management services in South Australia, the management

of Group 4 appeared to be keen to be seen to be as willing as any other prison in the state to welcome researchers. In addition, the company argued that they had a very good story to tell and would be interested in having researchers test their performance against the goals of privatisation.

### ***The selected prisons***

The three prisons in which the research was undertaken, the Adelaide prisons at Northfield, Port Augusta and Mt Gambier can be seen to be representative of the South Australian prisons. The Adelaide Women's Prison and Pre-release cottages at Northfield can be seen as representative of the specialist metropolitan institutions. The foci of these prisons are very different, with the Adelaide Remand Centre dealing only with unsentenced prisoners whilst the Adelaide Women's prison provides almost all the accommodation and services for female prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) in South Australia and the Adelaide Pre-release centre has a particular focus on the preparation of prisoners who have had a longer term for their return to the community. In selecting the Adelaide Women's Prison/Adelaide Pre-release Centre [from now on referred to as Adelaide prison] as one of the research sites, the research incorporated the views of staff who were currently working within what might be called a specialist prison environment.

Yatala Labour Prison, Mobilong Prison and Port Augusta Prison are the three institutions which provide accommodation and industry opportunities for male prisoners with a range of security classifications. Yatala Labour Prison is the largest of the South Australian prisons. It houses up to 406 male prisoners (South Australian Department for Correctional Services 2005), is the point of entry for male sentenced prisoners who undergo assessment and induction at Yatala and provides a range of

industry and education opportunities. Yatala Labour Prison includes G Division which

accommodates the most notorious and dangerous prisoners and those protectees who are considered in need of constant supervision. (South Australian Department for Correctional Services 2005)

Mobilong prison is a more modern prison, having been built on a campus style in the 1960s. Mobilong prison, which houses around 240 male prisoners with a low or medium security rating, has a focus on work and education for prisoners. Port Augusta prison, housing 280 male prisoners and up to 8 female prisoners, provides accommodation, education and work for high, medium and low security prisoners. Operating from a base at Port Augusta prison is the innovative Mobile Outback Work camps, in which officers escort a small group of prisoners to an outside the prison work project for two weeks.

From this group of prisons, providing the bulk of the states prisoner accommodation Port Augusta became the research site. Whilst it would have been optimal to have been able to explore conceptualisations of prison officers' work with staff in all three of these institutions, correctional institutions are notoriously difficult to access for researchers (Conover 2001) and it was not possible to negotiate access to staff at Yatala Labour Prison (due to staff unwillingness to participate) and at Mobilong prison (due to the very fragile state of staff/management relations over a period of 12 months).

The remaining three prisons, Port Lincoln, Cadell and Mount Gambier are small, do not provide accommodation for high security prisoners and are located in small regional centres in South Australia. Each is distinctive, with Port Lincoln being the smallest prison in the state, housing only up to 68 male prisoners many of whom are

engaged in the agricultural activities of the prison. Cadell, whilst larger, housing up to 110 prisoners, also has as its major focus the agricultural activity of the farm.

Mount Gambier, whilst also located in a rural community has developed a broader range of industry and educational activities for the 110 prisoners that it can house.

Mount Gambier is distinguished within the South Australian prison system by the fact that it is managed by a private security company.

Of this final group of small, rural prisons, Mount Gambier was selected as a site for research. Whilst it may have been possible to recruit staff from each of these prisons, it was important that some balance of voices between the three groups of prisons be maintained. At the same time, it was desirable to provide a cross section of voices from the staff of the only privately managed prison in South Australia.

Group 4 won the contract to manage Mount Gambier in 1995. At this point in time, the new prison at Mount Gambier was ready for occupation, and Group 4 became the first manager of this prison. The legislative arrangements for this management are complex as the government was not able to create a new legislative framework, but rather entered into a contractual arrangement with Group 4, whilst exercising its responsibilities under the Correctional Services Act by maintaining a General Manager and two supervisory staff at the prison (Department for Correctional Services 1995; Harding 1997).

Since the first establishment of these arrangements, there have been several changes in the corporate structure of the initial company, Group 4 (GSL (Australia) 2005).

At the time of the field work for this thesis, the management company of the Mount

Gambier prison was Group 4 Falck Global Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of the United Kingdom based Group 4 Falck. Since then, Group 4 Falck has merged with Securicor to form the very large international security group, Group 4 Securicor (Group 4 Securicor 2005). As a consequence, the Australian company was sold to European equity companies Englefield Capital and Electra Partners Europe (GSL (Australia) 2005). The company is now named GSL (Australia). As at the time of the field research for this thesis, the company was referred to as Group 4 and this is the name that will be used in this thesis.

### ***The research method***

The question of how work is conceptualised is not one that can be explored through the observation of the work environment or the officer at work. It requires an exploration of the meaning that is being constructed for the tasks being undertaken and thus it was essential that the research process provided an opportunity for staff to describe the meaning they attribute to prison officers' work. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are a suitable technique for this purpose.

An alternative research method, surveying, has been used by other researchers (Hemmens and Stohr 2000) who have explored similar issues (correctional role orientation). Although they note 'the difficulty in devising a survey instrument that accurately reflects attitudes and subsequent behavior (Babbie, 1985; Pollock, 1994)', Hemmens and Stohr argue

that differentiation in responses to survey items would indicate that such an instrument could be calibrated to distinguish between a variety of perspectives about corrections work. Whether those perspectives translate into behavior on the job cannot be determined by this research (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:332)

Although this research method has the strength of being able to collect responses from a large number of respondents (Hemmens and Stohr 2000), it was not considered appropriate for the exploration of the research questions developed for this thesis, as it is optimally used for the exploration of dichotomous understandings or perceptions, requires a tight hypothesis and in particular it does not allow the emergence of new material or the challenge of assumptions included in the research instrument.

The semi-structured interview is a research technique that allows engagement between researcher and those contributing to the research, whilst at the same time placing some boundaries around the issues to be covered. An in-depth interview

provides the greatest opportunity to find out what someone thinks or feels, and how they react to various issues and opportunities (Bouma 2000:180)

A semi-structured in-depth interview allows the use of open ended questions to draw interviewees' ideas about the issues under consideration. Conceptualisations of work, whilst important to understand from a research perspective, risked sounding esoteric and irrelevant to staff working within the prison. Liebling and Price (2003) point out that officers' descriptions of their work

are far more straightforward than the behaviour in question, which is invariably more complex and more sophisticated than the unconsciously edited account. Giddens uses the term 'practical consciousness' to describe the taken for granted unwritten rules which underlie social practices. Every day decisions are embedded in knowledges that prison officers take for granted." (Liebling and Price 2003:82)

It was thus, necessary to devise an interview schedule that would draw from interviewees descriptions of their work and the meaning attributed to their work but which engaged with these issues through practical examples or metaphors. Drawing on the researchers' ten years of experience of working with prison officers and other prison staff and adopting the reflective partner positioning of the researcher (Blaikie

2000), the interview schedule was designed to acknowledge interviewees' expertise in their arena of work, ask practical accessible questions, whilst at the same time testing some of the theoretical propositions that had been developed. The same interview structure was utilised with all interviewees with adjustments being made for the particular experience of staff or their role within the prison.

### ***The interview schedule***

The semi-structured interview schedule involved four phases for the interview. In the opening phase a certain amount of data was collected about the interviewees and their role in the institution and the interviewee was oriented to the overall focus of the interview through a naming of the conceptualisations of prison officers' work that are most commonly discussed. One purpose of this was to deal with any anxiety that the interviewee may have as a result of the interview moving into unknown territory. The interview then moved, in phase two, to some very open but practical questions, soliciting the interviewee's understanding of the role of a prison officer by inviting the interviewee to talk about how they would describe the work of a prison officer to a potential new recruit, and what they had thought the work of an officer would be when they commenced work in prisons. The third phase of the interviews directly addressed central elements of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, inviting interviewees to talk about the importance of security work and human services work. The final phase of the interview utilised the simile of mixing paint to achieve the colour you desire, to explore the question of whether conceptualisations of prison officers' work are mutually exclusive or whether people construct the work as a combination of these "ideal type" conceptualisations. The use of this unusual metaphor in the final phase of the interview was a strategic decision. The question was deliberately concrete and practical. Interviewees were provided with slips of

paper naming the eight conceptualisations under consideration and invited to physically choose those they wanted to use. This very practical style was a response to the insight of Liebling and Price (2001) that staff working in prisons choose to simplify rather than make complex their descriptions of their work. However, at the same time the question was one that would require new thinking. It was not one that would have been bandied around at morning tea or after work drinks and responding to the question would require the interviewee to look at issues that may have been discussed many times before, through a new lens.

### ***Entering the research sites and recruiting interviewees***

The selection of interviewees for this research required a balancing of the interests of the researcher in obtaining as many interviews as possible, to ensure that a rich variety of views were incorporated into the research, and the interests and obligations of the participating organisations (Department for Correctional Services and Group 4) to minimise the disruption to the working of the prisons during the interview processes.

The recruitment of interviewees was a matter of concern from the commencement of the research design. Gaining access to staff within prisons can be difficult because of prison staff suspicion of outsiders (Sparks 1996:349) and the cost to staff of the research process (King 2000:303). However, experience of working in an educational context with prison staff suggested that once engaged staff would be eager to talk about their working lives. In the case of this research, despite extensive support from within the Department for Correctional Services, it was not possible to conduct interviews in a number of locations that had originally been identified as possible research sites (as discussed above in relation to Mobilong Prison and Yatala

Labour Prison). On the other hand, in those locations where it was possible to gain access, staff were generous with their time and thoughtful in their approach to the research questions.

The selection of interviewees involved a non-probability sampling process (Babbie 2001:176). The Flinders University Ethics committee sought assurance that in the recruitment of interviewees

Managers will not approach individual staff or know how individual staff respond to the invitation to participate. (Wyndram L Secretary Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee 2002)

The process that was used in each institution met this requirement, whilst taking advantage of the Ethics committee permission that

an approach to all staff at a meeting and providing the researcher's contact details for staff to initiate contact anonymously, would be an acceptable method for recruitment (Wyndram L Secretary Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee 2002)

The process that was used to recruit interviewees involved several steps after permission to interview in the prison had been obtained. Announcements were made by the Manager or senior staff member at staff gatherings at the beginning of shifts several weeks in advance of the days that had been determined to be convenient for the interviews to be conducted. A flyer, providing a tear off slip for staff willing to be interviewed to pass to the person coordinating the interviews, was circulated. A few interviewees contacted the interviewer direct or through the Staff Training and Development branch, many just made arrangements directly with the contact person within the prison for a time to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted within the administration section of the prison (most usually in a meeting room, although occasionally in an empty office).

As a result, the interviewees for this research were in effect a sample of available subjects (Babbie 2001:179). This has been argued to be a “risky” sampling method (Babbie 2001:179), in that the researcher has no way of identifying the extent to which the group is representative and thus cannot expect to generalize from the data. This is an acknowledged limitation of this research. The effect of the non-representative nature of the interviewees was minimized by the care that was taken to encourage staff with a diversity of experiences and views, that they might have thought differed from their colleagues, to participate in this research. Those staff who were interviewed volunteered in response to a flyer that said in part

Sue’s research recognizes that there are many ways of thinking about Correctional Officers work and she is keen to hear from people holding a variety of opinions

And

“Sue is hoping to interview staff from each Unit within the prison and staff with a broad range of Correctional experiences”

The prisons in which interviews were conducted were generous in enabling interviewees to participate in the course of a working day. This had not been explicitly addressed in the planning for the research, but certainly made a significant difference to the number of staff willing and able to participate. (It should however be noted that several staff did come into the prison on a day off to be interviewed). Staff participated in the research for a variety of reasons. Many appeared to volunteer from a general interest in the topic and appreciated the opportunity to talk in detail about their work, some volunteered because they wanted to express their views on a specific aspect of prison officers’ work and others wanted to talk with the researcher about other issues, such as their own educational plans.

Although care was taken to attract a diverse group of staff, those who volunteered to be interviewed cannot be assumed to represent a cross section of staff and attitudes. In addition to the distortion of the selection process as a result of relying on staff to respond to a request to volunteer to be interviewed, there is an inherent distortion in the process of interviewing employees about the nature of their work. If an individual staff member has views about the work that are not acceptable to the management and these views are expressed either in actions or in words within the organisation, then that person is likely to end up no longer employed within that organisation. The right to hold a view about conceptualisation of work and to act on that view is a negotiated one and the framework around that relates to the power of the employer and the necessity of the manager to achieve certain organisational goals. A future research project may explore the effect of this distortion by interviewing staff who seek to work as prison officers but do not stay in the work; however this was beyond the scope of the current research project.

The minimisation of the disruption to the prison (and thus the prisoners) was addressed by the attendance of the researcher at the prisons on occasions that were deemed appropriate by the General Manager of the prison. This involved avoiding particularly busy days and aiming for days on which staffing would enable the release of staff for interview. It involved the cooperation of staff amongst themselves to free up people for interviews. In Mount Gambier, with its different rostering structure, interviews were conducted over one two day visit, whereas in Port Augusta the interviews were undertaken during two visits of two days a week apart.

Interviews at the Adelaide prison were conducted over a period of three weeks – with half day visits on convenient occasions.

### ***The interviewees***

In recognising that this is a non-probability sample of staff in South Australian prisons it is important that the conclusions from this research are not generalised in a way that suggests that the sample was representative of those working in the correctional industry in South Australia. The following snapshot of the interviewees that were selected through this process focuses on those characteristics that have been suggested to influence performance within correctional institutions –role within institution, gender, length of employment and previous employment background.

### **Role within Institutions:**

For the purposes of this analysis, interviewees can be grouped into four role groupings. The first and most numerous group, **the prison officers**, are those who perform the immediate custodial role – they are responsible for working with prisoners on a day to day basis and for the security functions of searching and monitoring. Twenty-five interviewees filled this role. The second group, **the senior officers** (12 interviewees) includes experienced staff not currently working as prison officers, although they have performed this role in the past. At the time of the interview, these interviewees were performing a variety of roles including a first line management role and Case Management Coordinators. The third group, **the auxiliary staff** (4), have not necessarily worked as prison officers and contributed in the interviews from the perspective of their role as social worker or aboriginal liaison officers. The final group, **the managers**, are the three managers responsible for each institution. Although each of the managers I interviewed had also worked as prison officers, they are separated from other senior officers on the basis that their current

role involves a greater breadth of responsibilities, involvement with policy and less day to day contact with prisoners and the staff who have the immediate management responsibility.

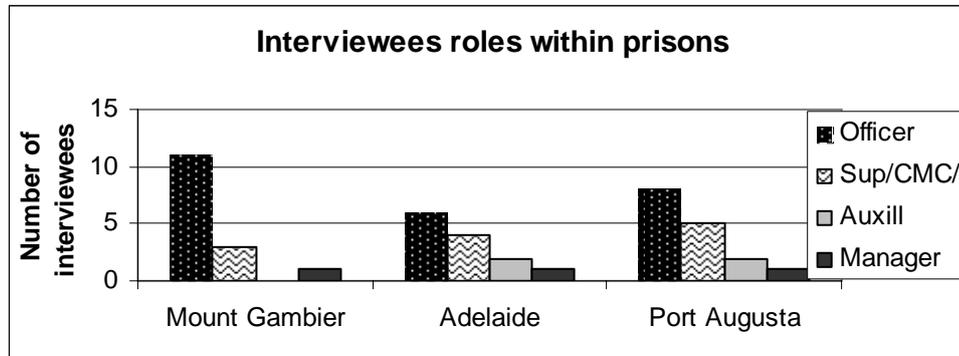


Figure 2.1 All interviewees roles within prisons

### Gender

Correctional Services has been a male dominated industry. The majority (27 out of 44) of those interviewed were men, although there was a strong representation of women from each institution and the majority of interviewees from the Adelaide prison were women. The proportion of female interviewees in the interview sample is greater than the proportion of female interviewees in the prison officer population.<sup>5</sup>

	Number	% Interviewees
<b>Male</b>	27	61%
<b>Female</b>	17	39%

Table 2.5 Proportion of male/female interviewees

This over-representation of female interviewees results both from the fact that in each prison female staff responded to the invitation to be interviewed at a proportionately higher rate than male officers and the fact that the Adelaide Women's Prison, which employs a much higher ratio of female to male staff than the

<sup>5</sup> At 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002, 20% DCS Operational staff were female.

rest of the prison system, was one of the research sites<sup>6</sup>. All auxiliary staff (social workers and aboriginal liaison officers) interviewed were female.

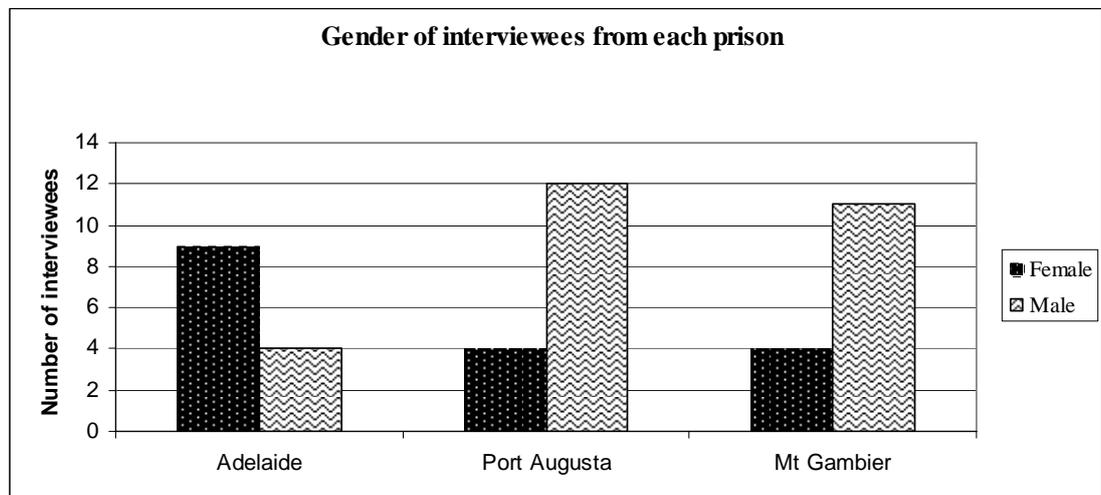


Figure 2.2 Gender of interviewees from each prison

### **Length of Employment**

Interviewees had been employed in corrections for periods of time ranging from three months to 20 years. The new Mount Gambier prison managed by Group 4 had only been operating since 1995, and although a couple of staff interviewed had some prior correctional experience, Group 4 staff had all worked in corrections for less than 10 years.

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<sup>6</sup> 56% of the Operational (Ops 1 – 8) positions at AWP were filled by women at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002

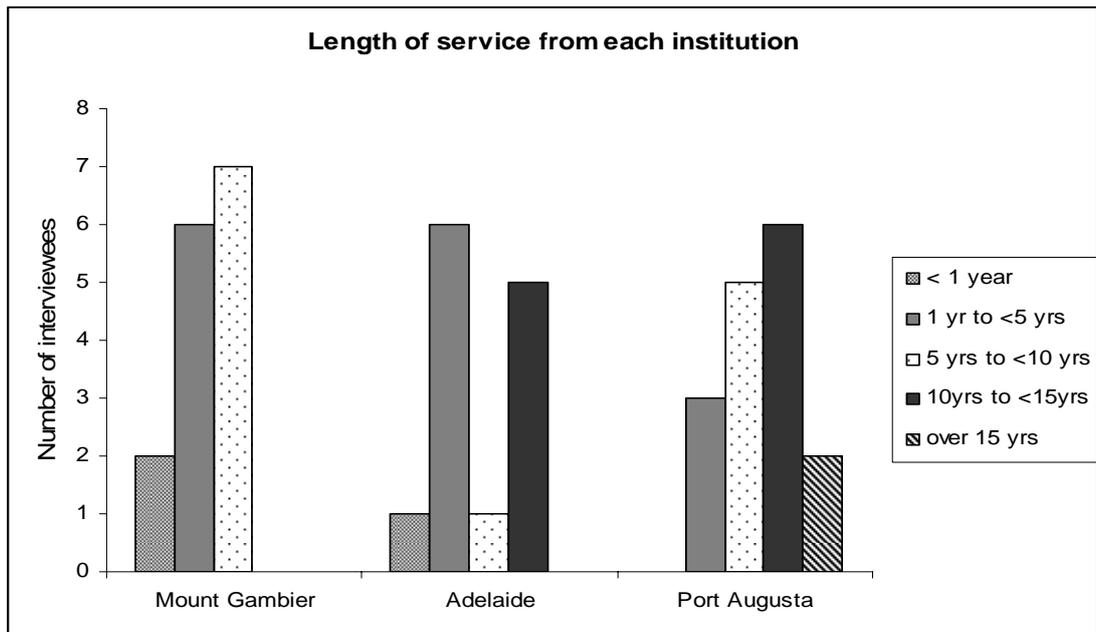


Figure 2.3 length of service from each institution

Interviewees were fairly evenly spread in the middle range of service length, with 15 interviewees having completed between 1 and 5 years of service, 13 having completed 5 to 10 years of service and 12 having completed 10 to 15 year of service.

### Previous employment background

Interviewees brought to their reflection on prison officers' work a range of previous employment experiences. Only one interviewee had worked solely in corrections.

Most interviewees had had several other employment experiences before coming to work in corrections, including in security related roles (police, security officer and other correctional experiences) and in general commercial, human services and industrial experiences. Of those interviewees who identified their previous work experience (n = 40), half had some military or other security or correctional experience and half did not (see discussion in Chapter Six).

## **Data analysis**

### **Recording the data**

Once an interviewee had consented to participate in the research interview, the question of the tape recording of the interview was discussed. Only one participant chose not to have the interview recorded and one other participant ended up with a partially recorded interview as a result of technological failure. In both of these cases notes were written during the interview and further elaborated immediately after the interview. However, there is no doubt that the data available for analysis from these two interviews was not as rich as that from those that had been recorded. The physical presence of the tape recorder can be identified as one of the influences on how interviewees responded to the questions in the interview. Whilst it may have been an inhibition to interviewees there was no way of knowing the influence of this inhibition in comparison to other possible inhibitions including the level of trust that the interviewee placed in the researcher, the understanding of the confidentiality issues of the interviewee and the level of risk that the interviewee perceived in the interview.

The tape recording of the interview was supplemented by the recording of personal details and the results of the 'paint mixing' questions on the paper copy of the interview schedule during the interview.

In the interests of confidentiality, the interviewees' names were not used in the course of the interview. The tapes were labelled with an interviewee code and were

transcribed by a professional typist. They were then uploaded into the computer program NUD\*IST for the recording of analysis.

The question of confidentiality was discussed with all interviewees. However, a particular discussion was held with the three prison Managers who were interviewed for this research. The researcher pointed out to these Managers that Adelaide is a small correctional environment and that if they expressed views in this interview that they had used in public meetings or departmental discussions these views, although reported anonymously, may well be recognisable and result in their identification. The Managers acknowledged this assessment and each indicated that they were aware of this risk and were happy to participate on this basis. One Manager subsequently contacted the researcher to have one section of the interview deleted as, on reflection, the view expressed was not one that the Manager would like to have circulating.

The question of whether the actual prisons involved in the research would be identified was not one that was discussed with the participants. King (2000) argues that even in the United Kingdom with its much larger prison estate 'the prison is bound to be identifiable' and that attempts to disguise the prison are futile. Furthermore he argues that naming the prison involved in the research is in the public interest (King 2000:307). With some reservations, this was the position adopted for the reporting of this research. It was appropriate that the public-private divide between the prisons be acknowledged in the reporting of the research results. Having made this decision, to attempt to disguise the two publicly managed prisons

would probably draw more attention to their identities than naming them in a straightforward manner.

## **Analysing the data**

The analysis of the data involved 'detailed and repeated reading' (Wood and Kroger 2000:95) of the transcripts of the interviews and the identification of patterns of language use to convey conceptualisations. The use of the NUD\*IST program was an important aspect of the analysis of the data. The first identification and coding of the themes from the interviews were done using a paper printout of the interviews with the data then transferred to NUD\*IST. Subsequent analyses were undertaken using the computer program, with re-coding and re-grouping of data being undertaken directly onto the computer. These re-codings and re-groupings of data were undertaken at several different points in the analysis of the data as the issues raised in the interviews came into a sharper focus. Although the data was only coded by a single coder, the re-visiting of the data over a period of months and even sometimes more than one year, did provide a check on the interpretation of the data for coding.

An important capacity of the NUD\*IST program was the creation of tables that summarised data in a form that allowed the correlation of themes and characteristics of the interviewees. This capacity was used to explore the influence of length of employment in corrections, gender, prison in which interviewees worked and work role on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work.

The initial analysis of the data was focussed on the response to individual questions or groups of questions in the phases of the interview. From this analysis a series of themes bearing on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work emerged. The

exploration of these themes was then undertaken by examining the connections between themes raised in response to one set of questions and themes raised in response to other questions. For example, using NUD\*IST, the responses of all interviewees who had described the basis for their conceptualisation of prison officers' work as a *Warehouser* were examined. In this process their preferred basis for the conceptualisation of the role was identified and then what they had said about their expectations when they first started work in prisons and what they said about the security conceptualisation and the human services conceptualisation. This analysis enabled an enriched understanding of the use of this conceptualisation, which read behind the response to the question to an understanding of the purpose that the interviewee was seeking to achieve with that response.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis places the research lens on conceptualisations of prison officers' work.

This chapter has adopted a social constructionist epistemology to argue that conceptualisations of prison officers' work describe both the construction of the prison in society and the social construction of the worker within the prison.

Conceptualisations of prison officers' work describe the meaning attributed to the actions performed by prison officers at work. It has been argued in this chapter, drawing on the sociological concept of career, that individuals' personal biographies and their experience of the work context will contribute to their conceptualisation of work within the prison.

Specifically the chapter has identified that conceptualisations of prison officers' work are products of discourses used within prison organisations both to contribute to the construction of prison officers' work and to express a particular position in debates

about the appropriate conceptualisation of the role of the officer. In identifying that organisations, including prisons, consist of groups of actors who utilise discourse in a competitive context to achieve a variety of purposes, this chapter has utilised the research of Adler and Longhurst (1994) to create a matrix of prison discourses describing three sets of discourses concerning the purposes of imprisonment (Rehabilitation, Normalisation and Control) and four sets of discourses describing the processes of imprisonment (Bureaucratic, Legal, Professional and Entrepreneurial). In Chapter 3 this matrix is utilised to establish the shaping of eight specific conceptualisations of prison officers' work through these prison discourses.

The final section of this chapter showed how these theoretical understandings of conceptualisations of work have informed the research design for this thesis. The research explored organisational discourse and discourse in use by individuals within prisons using two separate studies. In the Departmental discourse study Annual Reports of the Department for Correctional Services were analysed to identify conceptualisations of prison officers' work being used within the department over time. Acting as a reflective partner, the researcher provided the opportunity for workers in three South Australian prisons to describe their conceptualisations of the work of prison officers.

# Chapter Three: Conceptualisations of prison officers' work in the literature

## Introduction

A prison officer has been likened to G K Chesterton's postman

'so common place and routine a feature of the scene as to be invisible'  
(Hawkins 1976: 76)

This review of the literature seeks to make visible the prison officer and conceptualisations of prison officers' work. The review commences by exploring the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, as Custodial or Human Services work (Hemmens and Stohr 2000). These conceptualisations appear most frequently in the literature and can be detected in many of the debates about prison work. However the dichotomous nature of this categorisation is limiting and this chapter argues that a more complex set of conceptualisations can be discerned in the literature.

Eight conceptualisations of prison officers' work are identified in the literature – *Security Officer, Warehouse of Prisoners, Para-military officer, Public Servant /bureaucrat, Professional/semi-professional, Manager of Prisoners, Therapist and Case Manager*. Utilising the matrix of prison discourses developed from Adler and Longhurst (1994) in Chapter Two, these conceptualisations are explored in terms of the orientation to prison purpose and prison process expressed in the conceptualisation.

The discourses of prison purpose are utilised to structure this discussion of the conceptualisations of prison officers' work. The overarching tasks of controlling the

prisoners (control discourses), imprisoning citizens (normalisation discourses) and rehabilitating prisoners (rehabilitation discourses) are used to group the conceptualisations of prison officers' role.

		<b>Prison Process</b>			
		<b>Bureaucratic</b> Achievement of uniformity, consistency and fidelity to rules	<b>Legal</b> Independent accountability fairness	<b>Professional</b> Leadership, experience and judgement	<b>Entrepreneurial</b> Managerialist
<b>Prison Purpose</b>	<b>Rehabilitation</b> socialising the individual back into society			<i>Therapist</i>	<i>Case manager</i>
	<b>Normalisation</b> Treating prisoners like individuals in the community		<i>Public Servant /bureaucrat</i>	<i>Professional /semi professional</i>	<i>Manager of prisoners</i>
	<b>Control</b> Good order and discipline.	<i>Security</i>	<i>Warehouser</i>	<i>Paramilitary</i>	

Table 3.1 Prison purpose and process and the eight conceptualisations of prison officers' work

The literature reviewed in this chapter reflects understandings of prison officers' work developed across a range of jurisdictions. The literature has been drawn from books and journals published in English. Predominantly (but not exclusively) the studies have been undertaken in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Whilst the literature reviewed thus reflects the major influences on prison administration in Australia, it is acknowledged that this is a narrow range of texts and

that explorations of the process of imprisonment occurs in cultures and jurisdictions that do not focus on English language publications. The literature is also drawn from writings over many decades. In part this reflects the very small body of work that addresses the question of prison officers' work, but it also reflects the persistence of some understandings of prison purpose and prison process. Ideas from one decade are either transported in their entirety or slightly adapted in later decades. The eight ideal type conceptualisations identified in the literature are explored in this chapter.

## **Custodian or Human Service worker**

Whilst conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer as custodial or human services work are implied in much of the literature, the most clearly articulated conceptualisations of prison officers' work are expressed in the debates about whether the role is, or should be a custodial (sometimes emphasised as security) role or a rehabilitative (latterly described as human services) role (Hemmens and Stohr 2000). These debates have echoed the broader debates about whether prison serves to contain, punish or to rehabilitate prisoners and whether it is possible to achieve multiple goals, (see DiIulio 1987, discussion of this debate p.40 ).

### **The custodian role**

The prison officer as a simple custodian is the conceptualisation that has been brought forward with the prison institution since at least the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Lombardo 1981:159; Hemmens and Stohr 2000). The idea is conveyed in the colloquial descriptions of the role as that of a 'turnkey', 'screw' or 'hack' (Whitehead and Lindquist 1989:83), and official naming as warden or guard (see Merlo (1995:174) for lament about the inadequacy of these expressions and Lombardo (1981)). This is the conceptualisation of prison officers' work assumed by

Sykes in his foundational analysis of prison officers in their work (Sykes 1958) and by Goffman in his description of total institutions (Goffman 1961b).

Although the custodian conceptualisation, with its emphasis on the repetitive security tasks of locking and unlocking and counting prisoners, has a neutral, if somewhat boring tone there is a negative shadow to this conceptualisation. Associated with the historical conceptualisation of prison officers' work as a custodian is the image of the violent bully (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:326). Cullen et al (1985) have argued that this image is reinforced by researchers who have paid little attention to prison officers' work and then

without benefit of data, they reinforced the notions that officers either come to the job imbued with authoritarian impulses or are inevitably transformed into brutish creatures by the inherent inhumanities of the prison social structure (Jacobs and Crotty (1983: 133-134) cited in Cullen et al. 1985:506)

It is a conceptualisation supported by images in the media (e.g. the film *The Shawshank Redemption* (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:327), the controversial social science experiment known as the Stanford Experiment (Haney, Banks and Zimbardo 1981) and commissions of enquiry into prison administration (Hawkins and Ellard 1988).

This negative shadow to the custodial conceptualisation of the role has been identified by staff working within prisons who have believed that the image of the officer in the broader community is as 'bullies', 'brutes', 'sadists' or 'thugs' (Liebling and Price 2001 quoting Colville) and more recently as a

'load of bullies, and we go around beating up inmates and so on.' (Liebling and Price 2001:34).

The extent to which this label is justified at any point in time is, of course, very difficult to ascertain. As Edney (1997) argues

Occasionally we may read newspaper reports, view expose documentaries, and follow the proceedings of Royal Commissions when violence reaches a critical level. However, as to mundane, day-to-day acts of violence and terror that occur in our prisons we remain comfortably oblivious (Edney 1997:290)

However, the reality of violence in prisons in excess of 'reasonable force to maintain the good order and security of the prison' (Corrections Act 1986 (Vic) s.23(2) cited in Edney 1997:297) is described in a number of powerful texts (Kauffman 1988; Edney 1997; Conover 2001) that identify both specific perpetrators of violence and others who acquiesce in systems that allow this violence to occur.

Edney (1997) observes from his personal experience as a prison officer in Pentridge that a culture of violence is a part of the control regime of prisons, but identifies that actual assaults and other violent acts often occur away from the main prison accommodation

...officers vary in their understandings of what constitutes a justifiable ground for using violence against prisoners and often this is a product not only of an individual's predisposition and personality, but also of where they work within the prison. As a general rule, prisoners are most likely to become victims of violence from officers working within the prison's internal security group or officers located within management or punishment units. Officers in mainstream units may also use violence, but as they tend to work with the same prisoners every day, violence is rather a crude and cumbersome way to deal with problems that may arise in the unit. Verbal control and persuasion is often more profitable in these units and is the preferred method of control. (Edney 1997:291)

For Edney, the relationship with the prisoner serves to curb excesses of the control role of the officer

Also, these officers are more likely to know the prisoners on a personal basis which reduces the dehumanising effects of the prison environment. Put simply, the moral distance between the officers and prisoners is narrower and tends, therefore, to curtail the resort to violence. (Edney 1997:291)

Studies of the impact of a violent image of their work on prison officers have had different and somewhat contradictory findings. In the late 1970s and 1980s the stigmatising effect of the image of the prison officer as a bully was considered in studies of officers' stress (Johnson 1981:77; Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a: 12) and some studies identified that officers felt stigmatised as a result of excessive criticism and popular assumptions that any bad act by an officer is typical of all officers (Johnson 1981:77) whilst others did not find any evidence to support this (Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a:12). Crawley's (2004a:241) more recent research in the United Kingdom suggests that officers did feel that they had been 'contaminated' by their contact with prisons, and that they managed the negative image of their work by identifying the source of the negative characterisation was behaviour in prisons other than the one in which they were working. Prison officers thus acknowledged, but distanced themselves from the negative elements of the conceptualisation of their role as custodians.

The custodial conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer, with its emphasis on physical control of the prison, constructs the role as a masculine role (Graham 1981; Farnworth 1992:279,280; Pogrebin and Poole 1997; Farkas 1999:26; Crawley 2004b)}. This masculine construction of the role of the officer was made explicit in studies of the introduction of women as prison officers into male prisons where the difficulties experienced by female officers both resulted from and brought to the fore the masculinity embedded in this conceptualisation. (Crouch and Alpert 1982; Jurik and Halemba 1984; Jurik 1985b; Zimmer 1986; Zimmer 1987; Zimmer 1989; Merlo 1995; Farkas 1999) More recent research (Pogrebin and Poole 1997; Liebling and Price 2001; Crawley 2004a:10, 190-199; Griffin, Armstrong and Hepburn 2005)

suggests that this masculinity remains an influential attribute of the conceptualisation of the officer as a physical custodian.

Despite developments in correctional administration, the conceptualisation of the prison officer as a custodian remains the fundamental concept from which others can be differentiated or developed. The discussion of alternative conceptualisations below explores the relationship between this concept and the human service worker conceptualisation.

### **The emerging human services role**

The conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer as human services work emerged in academic writing at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s (Lombardo 1981:160; Hemmens and Stohr 2000). It reflected a very different understanding of the purpose of imprisonment from the control emphasis of the custodian conceptualisation. Developed from changing penal philosophies that emerged towards the middle of the twentieth century and were given increased impetus from reactions to World War II and the horrors of concentration camps and other prisons that were revealed at the end of that war, the emerging philosophy recognised the citizenship of the prisoner (O'Brien 1998:194-195) and the purpose of imprisonment as being to 'socialise the individual back into society' (Adler and Longhurst 1994:37).

The human service worker conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer was sufficiently broad brush to draw in both understandings of the role developed from the expectation that prisons might rehabilitate prisoners and expectations of prison officers' work developed from an emphasis on the purpose of imprisonment being to

achieve 'humane containment'. Although in his 1981 description of prison officers' work Lombardo introduces the 'human services' concept by putting inverted commas around it, suggesting that this is an unusual use of language, he subsequently reports from his study of officers' work, perceptions of the human services role

the officer responds to opportunities and occasionally seeks opportunities to ease the 'pains of imprisonment' experienced by inmates. As a *provider of goods and services*, the officer lessens the inmate's material deprivation. As an *institutional referral agent or advocate*, the officer provides the inmate with a chance to exercise autonomy, albeit indirectly. If an inmate knows an officer will intervene on his behalf, the inmate can influence his environment by approaching an officer with a problem. At the same time, the officer lessens the inmate's frustration with the slowness of bureaucratic responses. The human services role also demands that the officer deal with the emotional and psychological problems of *inmate institutional adjustment*, including institutional concerns and conflicts, and personal or family problems.(Lombardo 1981:160)

In Lombardo's analysis the human services role was a result of spontaneous interactions between prisoner and officer and was seen as being 'outside of the formal institutional structure' (Lombardo 1981:161). However in many jurisdictions, encouraging the engagement between officer and prisoner was an official strategy designed to facilitate the achievement of institutional goals (Toch 1978; Hepburn and Knepper 1993; Kommer 1993:133).

The emergence of a new conceptualisation of the role of the officer can be seen in the new names that were used for the prison officer role, with many jurisdictions adopting titles intended to symbolise a changed understanding of the purpose of imprisonment, such as correctional officer or correctional services officer in the United States (Toch 1978; Jurik 1985b:378) and Penitentiary Institution Worker in Holland (Kommer 1993).

The new conceptualisation of the work of the officer can be seen also in changed staff selection priorities. Krug-McKay, McKay and Ross (1981) show that early selection processes in the US were driven by the need to find bodies to fill positions and that testing as a part of the selection process was designed to screen out those 'with a propensity for engaging in inappropriate violent behaviour' (Krug-McKay, McKay and Ross 1981:246). The shift in conceptualisation of prison officers' work to a human services conceptualisation occurred alongside a move to a more positive recruitment process with the emphasis on positively selecting staff (see also Toch 1978). This involved the identification of the desired qualities of an officer. Empathy, self-confidence, a positive interested attitude, common sense and communication skills, named in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Toronto Jail and Custodial Services and also by a variety of investigative bodies (Krug-McKay, McKay and Ross 1981), became identified as the qualities needed for the new role of the prison officer.

This conceptualisation of the role of the officer as a human service worker can be seen to have had an ongoing influence in correctional administration (see Hepburn and Knepper 1993). Writing twenty years after Lombardo's analysis, Larivière (2001) identifies admiringly that the Correctional Services Canada mission statement 'genuinely resembles a Human Services Model'. However the relationship between the conceptualisation of the prison officer as a human service worker and the prison officer as a custodian was an arena of tension and vehement disagreements.

### **Contesting the new conceptualisation**

The emergence of human service conceptualisations of prison officers' work generated vigorous debates amongst correctional administration practitioners and

researchers. These debates about the comparative merits of the conceptualisation of the role of the officer as a custodial officer or a human service worker can be seen to have had several strands. The discussion below elaborates three debate strands centring on

- competing purposes of imprisonment and conceptualisations of the prison officers' role
- the impact of prison processes on conceptualisations of prison officers' work
- the effect of new conceptualisations of the role on officers as workers.

### **Competing purposes of imprisonment**

One strand of the debates about conceptualising prison officers' work as custodial or human services work derives from fierce competition to define the purpose of imprisonment. Thomas (1972), whose historical study of the English prison officer stood alone for many years, argued vigorously that the conflict between goals of prison administration must be resolved in favour of the goal of secure control and that this must then set the priority for the work of officers

The prison system is usually described as an organisation which has conflicting goals. If, however the principle of demonstrable failure is applied to the examination of the goals, then, the primary nature of one goal becomes evident.' – holding prisoners (Thomas 1972 p5)

A conflict between the goals of custody and treatment that then translates into conflict between conceptualisations of prison officers' work (Cressey discussed in Hawkins 1976:89; Liebling and Price 2001:58) is the basis for many studies of prison officers' work (eg Shamir and Drory 1982; Stohr et al. 1994). Hepburn and Albonetti (1980) argued, on the basis of 'a study of treatment and custody staff' within one American state, that a role conflict resulting from contradictory organizational goals of custody and treatment was established by the finding that in the minimum security

prisons, where the conflict between these goals was assumed to be more intense than in higher security prisons, custodial (and therapeutic) staff experience greater role conflict. This role conflict was indicated by responses to questions designed to elucidate the extent of interviewees' perception of ambiguity and contradictions in expectations of them in their performance of their work.

However, other researchers have found evidence that these different purposes of imprisonment do not necessarily create conflict in the work of the prison officer. Lombardo (1981) observed from his study of officers' role that 'a substantial number of prison officers tend to define their work, at least in part, in 'human services' terms' (Lombardo 1981:161).

Correctional orientation, an expression used to focus on officers' understanding of the purpose of imprisonment (Cullen et al. 1985), has been used to explore the impact of the human service workers' role on the officer, including the stress experienced at work and job satisfaction (Cullen et al. 1985). Cullen et al (1985:523) found in their exploration of prison officer stress amongst southern United States prison officers, that 'treatment oriented officers were less dissatisfied' with their occupational experience than staff with more custodial correctional orientations. They used this finding to argue that departments that chose to emphasise an exclusively custodial orientation in their training or to abandon rehabilitative goals risk increased dissatisfaction amongst custodial staff (Cullen et al. 1985:523).

Kommer's (1993) later study of Dutch prison officers also found that officers did not see much conflict between the two major elements of their job: guarding and treating (Kommer 1993:136).

From more recent studies, it has been argued that conflict over the purposes of imprisonment is having a lessened impact on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work. Hemmens and Stohr (2000), using a correctional role instrument, established that in their sample of 222 prison officers in the Idaho State Correctional Institution

correctional officers are no longer just guards but are charged with a variety of tasks that are only indirectly related to security issues. As the demands on staff have increased, staff have responded by adopting a more professional approach to their job, and many have adopted, in whole or in part, a human services approach to their job (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:343)

Liebling and Price(2001), from their research in English prisons, argue that stress is undoubtedly considered an issue by prison officers. However the source of stress was not seen to be the incompatibility of the goals of imprisonment, but rather organisational issues such as high workloads, lack of support and more recently 'the possibility of job loss, or of changing employer' as a result of the privatisation of prisons

### **Prison Process and conflicting understandings of relationships with prisoners**

Although concerns about the purpose to be achieved by imprisonment and thus the work of the prison officer underpins many discussions of innovation in prison officers' work, issues relating to the processes of imprisonment also contribute to the way that prison officers' work is conceptualised. Johnson (1977) while arguing that guards have a potential to respond to prisoners needs, argued that

there are a number of obstacles to remedial work in prison which reduce the impact guards might have on potential clients.

These obstacles included the lack of expertise amongst officers to skilfully respond to the crisis, the barrier created by the uniformed nature of the work and perceived unresponsiveness of professional staff to the initiatives of prison officers (Johnson

1977:269). Despite these difficulties, Johnson argued that, even in the then discouraging climate in which

correctional policy has discouraged such cross-fertilization between custodial and treatment activities on the assumption that attempts to maximize contradictory tasks will result in lowered performance across the board (Johnson 1977:263),

some guards were able to combine the roles and contribute to the mental health networks for vulnerable prisoners.

At the heart of the perceived conflict between treatment and custodial orientations is the understanding of the relationship (see Liebling and Price 2001:76,77 for discussion of the use of the word relationship in this context) between prisoner and prison officer and how this is operationalised in the day to day operation of the prison. Jurik's (1985b) study of the experience of women being moved into correctional roles led her to argue that staff saw the two goals of prisoner control and inmate service or rehabilitation as colliding. She found that whilst the two roles were intended to complement one another, the reality was that they required two different relationships with prisoners (Jurik 1985b:380). Staff who were hostile to the new philosophy felt that in the new conceptualisation of the role of the officer as involving inmate service they were losing essential power over inmates. As a longer serving male officer described

This emphasis on the service functions of officers makes it seem like we're maids or something. We have less power than the inmates now. (Jurik 1985b:381)

The diminished power of the officer in new conceptualisations of prison officers' work was the focus for the research of Hepburn (1985) who argued that the perception that power was diminished depended upon a simple understanding of the

bases for the power of the officer. He argues that a more sophisticated analysis of the sources of power leads to a different appreciation of the control process. His research demonstrated that guards thought that the most important reasons why prisoners obey them were that they held 'legitimate power' (defined as power resulting from the structural position of guard and prisoner) and 'expert power' (an informal power that the officer must earn). Hepburn suggested that officers' belief that their power was diminished indicated that the basis of power of the officer was perceived to have changed from the traditional combination of legitimate power, coercive power and reward power. Hepburn argued that legitimate power supplemented by expert power may produce more harmonious and humane relationships between guards and prisoners (Hepburn 1985:161).

The difficulty officers identified in finding an appropriate way to develop this expert power, can be seen in the study conducted in the United States in both Alabama and New York by Lindquist and Whitehead (Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a; Whitehead, Linquist and Klofas 1987) who found that, just over sixty percent of both sample groups agreed that 'the way you get respect from inmates is to take an interest in them', and at the same time approximately sixty five percent of both samples agreed that 'a personal relationship with an inmate invites corruption' (Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a:20). Despite the finding that thirty-one percent of the New York officers and nearly seventeen percent of the Alabama officers agreed that 'if an officer wants to do counselling he should change jobs' (Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a:20), Lindquist and Whitehead (1986a) concluded that officers are looking for an enriched role with greater responsibility (and commensurate

resources) for a variety of tasks with objectively measurable goals (Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a:23).

The human services and custodial conceptualisations of prison officers' work embedded different understandings of the exercise of power between officer and prisoner and describe a different 'right' relationship. However with each conceptualisation of the role there are instrumental (getting things done) and normative (an end in themselves) reasons to establish effective working relationships (Liebling and Price 2001:91,92). Liebling and Price (Liebling and Price 2001) found, from their study of Whitemoor prison in the United Kingdom, that

Relationships were the route through which everything else was achieved, and through which prisoners perceived the delivery of fairness, respect ...and justice (Liebling and Price 2001:93)

### **Impact of the human service worker conceptualisation on officers as workers**

A third strand of the debate about the comparative merits of conceptualising the work of the prison officer as custodial or human services work has focussed on the impact of the new conceptualisations on workers within the prison. Two foci of research contributed to understandings of this impact. One focus was on the job enrichment effects of the human services role and the other was on correctional administration effects.

#### **Job enrichment**

An expectation that the human services role would result in more satisfied and thus more effective workers was developed from the job enrichment literature (Toch and

Klofas 1982). This was explored by Toch and Klofas (1982) who sought to establish the extent to which officers experienced job related alienation as a result of their inability to influence their work environment and officers' interest in a role that was 'more than custodial' (Toch and Klofas 1982:37). Their research demonstrated that whilst officers were 'disaffected' there were indications that officers were interested in a more rounded role. Interestingly they identified that

officers tend to overestimate their peers' alienation and consistently assume that the majority is more custody oriented (less job enrichment oriented) than they are (Toch and Klofas 1982:42).

Testing the hypothesis that prison officers were experiencing job burnout or related problems was another aspect of the research, already discussed, by Lindquist and Whitehead (1986:24). Contrary to their expectations, developed by drawing a parallel between prison officers' work as human service workers and other workers who have intense contact with clients in stressful situations (see also Lasky, Gordon and Srebalus 1986:318), they found that

the correctional officers in Alabama do not associate inmate contact with burnout, in terms of either emotional exhaustion or depersonalization (Whitehead and Lindquist 1986:35)

Also contrary to Lindquist and Whitehead's expectations was the finding that

the officers who report greater inmate contact also report the most frequent feelings of personal accomplishment. (Whitehead and Lindquist 1986:35)

Identifying that a consequence of conceptualising prison officers' work as human services work was the employment of staff with higher formal education, Jurik and Winn (1987) tested the hypothesis that 'more highly educated and female officers' would become dissatisfied with the work they were asked to perform and exhibit higher rates of turnover. Their initial reporting of results was that they found 'no empirical evidence for these expectations' (Jurik and Winn 1987:20). However, later

research by Jurik, Halemba et al (1987) did find that more highly educated officers were frustrated by the lack of recognition of their skills and in particular the lack of input into policy decision-making (Jurik et al. 1987:120).

A focussed attempt to establish the relationship between type of job (human services or custodial) and job satisfaction was undertaken by Hepburn and Knepper (1993). Their study, whilst suffering from some methodological limitations which they describe as the inability to exclude a 'selectivity factor' resulting from the fact that the human service workers had all been correctional security officers who had applied for the enhanced role (Hepburn and Knepper 1993), identified that

Job satisfaction amongst correctional officers is explained by the intrinsic rewards of their work and by the degree of their perceived authority over prisoners. (Hepburn and Knepper 1993:331)

In their analysis of their results that found that flowing from the finding above,

job satisfaction is significantly greater among Arizona's human services-oriented correctional program officers than among the traditional custody-oriented correctional security officers (Hepburn and Knepper 1993:331)

but that this is not a significant main effect when other factors are controlled.

Creating enriched jobs for prison officers was a means to a normatively established end, rather than the purpose of change within prisons. However, the job enrichment movement and the development of a human services role for prison officers coincided in the proposal of change for prison officers' work (Toch and Klofas 1982).

### **Correctional administration effects**

An unintended consequence of conceptualising the work of a prison officer as a human service worker was associated with the identification of a strain in the relationship between worker and their organisation. Whitehead and Lindquist who found that administrative practices were contributing to job stress and burnout

amongst prison officers argued that this is consistent with the understanding of prison officers' work as human services work and the lack of boundaries that can be associated with such work (also \ (Toch and Klofas 1982). It is also consistent with the descriptions by Lipsky (1980), of how street level bureaucrats in human services experience 'the administration's' desire for control and accountability as conflicting with workers desire for autonomy (Whitehead and Lindquist 1986:38).

That the correctional organisation itself is the greatest stressor was emphasised by Huckabee's (1992) review of available studies . This conclusion is drawn from the identification that 'organizational factors such as departmental chain of command', 'role definition problems and supervisory practices', 'lack of participation in decision-making', 'supervisory and management personnel', 'poor communications with administrators', the belief that other staff 'not only fail to assist them, but also actually work against them' have each been identified as causes of stress within correctional studies (Cheek and Miller 1983; Lindquist and Whitehead 1986a) Alongside other strategies (including training, and individual coping enhancement) suggested to address correctional stress are administrative changes (Huckabee 1992:484) including 'greater participation by employees in the decision-making process' and 'meaningful recognition of workers'(Huckabee 1992:485)

The complexity of the relationship between changing conceptualisations of prison officers' work and the organisation surrounding the work is identified in the Australian research of Lennings, Lancefield and Thomson (1996). Their initial finding that the movement to Unit Management (a model of prison administration that utilises high levels of engagement between officer and prisoner) resulted in

lower levels of self-reported stress in prison officers was later tested by a revised understanding of the effect of negative affectivity, and in this analysis the impact of the new organisational structure could no longer be seen. Lennings, Lancefield and Thomson argue that methodologically identifying the effect on workers of the new prison management processes and thus conceptualisations of prison officers' work could only be explored in a longitudinal study involving random allocation of officers to different organisational structures (Lennings, Lancefield and Thomson 1996:10).

In the organisational context, the contribution of gender to the development of the human service worker role is difficult to disentangle. Female officers can find themselves evaluated by inmates and staff alike not just in terms of their capacity to manage prisoners through the high level communication skills required of the human services role, but also their capacity to intervene physically in a crisis situation (Kissel and Katsampes 1980:222). Underpinning this evaluation has been an assumption that men and women 'do perform the job differently'. This assumption, which was the basis for resistance to the introduction of women into men's prisons (Belknap 1991; Farnworth 1991; Rafter 1992), has been contested (Farkas 1999:27). Some researchers (Zimmer 1982; Belknap 1991) have found that the gender of an officer results in different attitudes and approaches to the job, whereas others (Jurik and Halemba 1984; Zupan 1986) found that gender was not influential in the way the role was performed. Methodological issues in isolating the effect of gender and conceptualisations of prison officers' work make exploration of this issue, which is of significant interest within correctional administration, difficult. These difficulties are illustrated by the study of Farkas (1999:27). The case studies used in this study

involved highly confrontational situations, some with physical violence as the opening event. The role of the prison officer was thus conceptualised as a custodial role requiring physical restraint of prisoners and a battle for control and deference to the officers' authority, and the study of gender differences occurred in this context. However, some of the officers (male) responses to the scenarios challenged this conceptualisation of the work as being inappropriate. In response to a question about how they would manage when they had told a prisoner to move out of the doorway and the prisoner refused to move, several officers said 'it makes no sense for him not to move, I would find out what was going on' (Farkas 1999).

The introduction of female prison officers into male prisons is both consistent with the conceptualisation of the role of the officer as a human service worker and a result of equal opportunity initiatives. Feminist research agendas which extended to interest in the effects of the gender of prison officers on how they do their work and the experiences of female prison officers have generated interesting research material about workers in prisons including one of the few Australian studies of prison officers at work (Farnworth 1992). Farnworth's study of the integration of female prison officers into Pentridge Prison in 1989, illustrated both the diversity of roles undertaken, but often not acknowledged, by the prison officer and the coincidence of the equal opportunity initiative with emerging conceptualisation of prison officers' work as human services. Farnworth argues

the job responsibilities and therefore the job performance, of prison officers at Pentridge are changing and these changes support the style of prisoner interaction frequently used by female officers (Farnworth 1992:294)

## **Limitations of the oppositional construction of the custodian and human services conceptualisations**

The focus on human services work as the opposite of custodial work limits the complexity of the conceptualisation of the work of prison officers. It creates a dichotomous relationship between the roles that precludes conceptualisations of the work of the prison officer as involving an accommodation for both custodial and rehabilitative purposes of imprisonment. In such an analysis the concepts custodial work or human services work are necessarily broad and incorporate undistinguished understandings of the work.

Another effect of this dichotomous characterisation of the role of the officer is to limit the exploration of the contribution of the organisational context to constructing the work of the prison officer. In recognising this limitation, Ben - David (1992) argues that flowing from Goffman's (1961) characterisation of prisons as total institutions that construct 'inmate-staff' relationships involving great social distance and stereotyping of one another, studies that have developed and challenged Goffman's characterization of inmate-staff relationships have still been limited by 'over-generalization and simplification' (Ben - David 1992:209). She points to the tendency in studies to describe 'staff as one block of people and to the inmates as another' (Ben - David 1992:209). This obscures the diverse settings and the constantly changing social environment in which prison officers work and in which they develop a variety of relationships with prisoners.

Maintaining a focus on two polarised roles also limits the possibilities for the development of the role of the prison officer or indeed for prisons in which they

work. Prison officers like other public servants are responsible for the implementation of government policy or if mandated through a contract with a private company are responsible for the implementation of that contract. The broad dichotomous conceptualisations of prison officers' work encourage competition for ideological ascendancy and create little capacity for the implementation of policy which will inevitably change over time and require the achievement of multiple goals.

In the discussion that follows a framework for the exploration of differentiated conceptualisations of prison officers' work is developed. Exploring these conceptualisations of prison officers' work does not deny the centrality of the two roles – custodial and human services work. However if conceptualisations are recognised as having several dimensions then both the custodial and the human services role can be expanded to provide a more adequate framework for the consideration of prison officers' work in the varied prison environments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **A framework for the exploration of differentiated conceptualisations of prison officers' work**

The quest for a differentiated description of prison officers' work is advanced by Ben - David (1992) who from her research with a range of staff in a maximum security prison in Israel, suggests four variables can be used to describe the modes of interaction between staff members and inmates

- staff perception of the inmates
- orientation of the relationship – custodial to therapeutic

- relation model – describing the degree of control and initiative that rests with both staff member and inmate
- social distance describing the level of engagement between staff and inmates.

Using these four variables, Ben David (Ben - David 1992:213) identifies five prototypes of staff-inmate relationships, Punitive, Controlling, Patronage, Therapeutic and Integrative. Each prototype describes the relationship in different combinations of the variables identified above and are summarised in the table below.

<b>The Typology of the five modes of staff-inmate relationships</b>					
Variables	Modes of Relationships				
	Punitive	Controlling	Patronage	Therapeutic	Integrative
Perception	Offender	Inmate	Weak/dependent	Patient	Person
Orientation	Punitive	Custodial	Custodial/therapeutic	therapeutic	Therapeutic
Type	Active-passive	Active-passive	Guidance-cooperation	Guidance-cooperation	Mutual participation
Social distance	Total	Professional	Guardian	Professional	Personal

Table 3.2 The Typology of the five modes of staff-inmate relationships. Source: *Ben-David (1992:213)*

Whilst these prototypes were used to describe relationships between prisoners and all staff (Guards, Therapists, Nurses, Secretaries, Students and Social Worker) within the prison, the analysis demonstrated that among the officers all the prototype

relationships appeared<sup>7</sup>. This analysis is useful in identifying that a diversity of relationships can be constructed within a single prison environment, much less a number of prisons and in identifying that the same set of prototypes can be used to describe the relationships between prisoners and staff performing various roles within the prison.

The limitation of the analysis is that it focuses exclusively on one aspect of the process of imprisonment, the relationship between staff and prisoner. Although this relationship is an essential component of the role of the prison officer (Liebling and Price 2001: 75), to describe the role only in terms of this relationship is unnecessarily confined and does not provide a framework that acknowledges officers' role within a prison organisation that has a distinct purpose and accountabilities that flow from this purpose.

Another typology of prison officers' work styles is proposed by Gilbert (1997) who parallels the work of the prison officer with Lipsky's (1980) street level bureaucrat who exercises significant discretion in reconciling the needs of prisoners with the limited resources available within the prison. He identifies that exercising this discretion in a justice setting using 'state-authorized coercive power' (Gilbert 1997) gives officers much in common with police from whom Muir (1977 cited in Gilbert 1997) developed a typology of discretionary behaviour. The typology constructs working styles of officers in terms of their Human Relations perspective (Tragic or Cynical) and in terms of their morality (Integrated or Conflicted). The resulting

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<sup>7</sup> With the possible exception of the Personal. There is a discrepancy between the analytic text and the illustrative table on pp 216 & 217.

typology of officers, named as Professional , Enforcer, Reciprocator or Avoider is affirmed by Liebling and Price (2001) who indicate that the working styles in the typology could be used to describe ‘many officers we have encountered during fieldwork’ (Liebling and Price 2001:47).

Muir's Typology of Discretionary Working Styles		
	Human relations perspective	
	Tragic	Cynical
<b>Integrated morality</b> (Able to use coercion without damage to self-image or values)	<b>Professional</b> (Reasonable, innovative, able to make exceptions)	<b>Enforcer</b> (Aggressive, by the book, unable to make exceptions)
<b>Conflicted morality</b> (Unable to use coercion without damage to self-image or values)	<b>Reciprocator</b> (Counseling orientation toward enforcement duties)	<b>Avoider</b> (Defines tasks out of the job to limit enforcement activities)

Table 3.3 Muir's Typology of Discretionary Working Styles. Source: *Gilbert (1997:4)*

The emphasis on the management of discretion as a defining attribute of the performance of prison officers' work is central to the sophisticated analysis of prison officers' work provided by Liebling and Price(2001). They argue from their extensive fieldwork in United Kingdom prisons that

Officers are faced with a situation where they:

- have a great many rules at their disposal;
- are responsible for the maintenance of security and order, and for helping prisoners lead a good and useful life (and additional goals of their own prison or wing) and are meant to do this mainly through the application of the rules

- know that the total enforcement of the rules is
  - impossible (there are too many rules); and
  - highly undesirable (the prison would not function, prisons would become frustrated, other officers would resist, etc.); and so
- must choose which rules should be enforced and which should not, and to what extent'.(Liebling and Price 2001:131,132)

Although Gilbert (1997) contextualises the Muir typology by providing behavioural descriptors appropriate for prison officers' work, the limitation of the Muir typology is that it places the emphasis on the individual's personal moral capacities and empathy and the context in which these capacities are exercised is secondary.

This conflicts with the observations of Lipsky (1980) and in a specific prisons context, Liebling and Price (2001) that the context itself is central to the work of the officer and the exercise of discretion in the course of that work. In an attempt to address the limitations of the typologies considered above and to provide a framework for describing conceptualisations of prison officers' work that are grounded in the prison itself and recognise both the understandings of prison purpose and of prison process that construct the conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer, this thesis draws upon the Adler and Longhurst (1994) analytic framework, described in Chapter 2.

From this framework, two primary dimensions of a conceptualisation of prison officers' work, associated with the Prison Purpose (Ends) discourse and the Prison Process (Means) discourse, can be developed. The Prison Purpose dimension for describing conceptualisations of prison officers' work describes the implied purpose of imprisonment and the associated characterisation of the prison inmate. This

dimension incorporates Ben David's relationship describing variables of 'staff perception of the inmates' and the 'orientation of the relationship'.

A Prison Process (Means) dimension can describe the officers' role in terms of the vision of the prison organisation which it embeds and the associated characterisation of the authority and accountability of the officer (Adler and Longhurst 1994: 43-46). This dimension incorporates the Ben-David variables of 'relation model' and 'social distance'. It also constructs the use of discretion by prison officers through this understanding of the processes of imprisonment.

Using these dimensions for identification and exploration, this review of the literature identifies eight conceptualisations of prison officers' work. These conceptualisations, named as a *Para-military officer*, a *Security officer*, a *Warehouser of prisoners*, a *Professional-semi professional*, a *Public servant*, a *Manager of Prisoners*, a *Case Manager* and a *Therapist*, are constructed by unique combinations of prison purpose discourse and prison process discourse.

		<b>Prison Process</b>			
		<b>Bureaucratic</b> Achievement of uniformity, consistency and fidelity to rules	<b>Legal</b> Independent accountability fairness	<b>Professional</b> Leadership, experience and judgement	<b>Entrepreneurial</b> Managerialist
<b>Prison Purpose</b>	<b>Rehabilitation</b> socialising the individual back into society			<i>Therapist</i>	<i>Case manager</i>
	<b>Normalisation</b> Treating prisoners like individuals in the community		<i>Public Servant /bureaucrat</i>	<i>Professional /semi professional</i>	<i>Manager of prisoners</i>
	<b>Control</b> Good order and discipline.	<i>Security</i>	<i>Warehouser</i>	<i>Paramilitary</i>	

Table 3.4 Prison purpose and process and eight conceptualisations of prison officers' work

These conceptualisations, explored in the literature review that follows, are ideal types or ways of thinking abstractly about the role of prison officers. It would be easy to fall into the trap of reifying these conceptualisations. One danger of this would be that the debates would again become focussed on the choice between conceptualisations – either a *Para-military officer* or a *therapist*. It is more useful to recognise that these conceptualisations describe roles performed by prison officers at work. Another danger is that in the reification of the conceptualisation, the role of discourse would become obscured. The debates about the role of the officer can be seen to reflect the debates about the purpose of imprisonment and the means of

achieving these purposes of imprisonment. In adopting a position about the conceptualisation of officers' work, researchers, staff and organisations are positioning themselves in these debates.

## **Controlling the prisoner**

### **The Para-military officer**

The conceptualisation of prison officers' work that was dominant until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was that of a *Para-military officer*. Thomas (1972) in his detailed treatise on the development of prison officers' work in England, argues that this was a result of the essence of the task of the officer being the physical control of the prison. His argument was that as the prison population is, by definition both involuntary and not law abiding, it is not possible to expect 'good order' to be achieved other than by physical domination (Thomas 1972:7). As, for prisons, it is the escape of prisoners or riots by prisoners that are deemed a failure, Thomas argued that the role of the officer should be modelled on others who achieve tasks similar to the primary role of the prison, to impose order by force.

Since the armed services have been manifestly evolved to deal with critical situations, it is no accident that the military structure has been adapted for use in other organisations, such as prisons, which have a controlling task. The para-military staff structure of the prison system is a means not of repressive punishment (although this may be an incidental effect), but of control. In prison services, the para-military structure is above all a crisis controlling structure, which can be quickly mobilised to deal with threats to that control. (Thomas 1972:8)

The essence of the *Para-military* conceptualisation is the emphasis in the Prison Purpose dimension on control as the overriding purpose of imprisonment. The prisoner is thus constructed as the person who threatens that control, the danger to the good order of the prison.

The para-military prison is a hierarchical one in which accountabilities were designed to ensure that decisions could be taken and implemented effectively at a time of crisis. A professional prison process discourse can be seen in the construction of the *Para-military* officer, as someone who has learnt from generations of earlier prison officers how the prison is effectively controlled. For Thomas(1972), relationships within the prison environ were predicated on the necessity of the officer being able to exercise the central responsibility of controlling the prison population by the use or threat of force. Instructions to officers and from officers must be followed as a matter of course. The professional *Para-military* officer took pride in his responsibilities and demonstrated that pride in the way he wore his uniform. He expected to be treated with respect by prisoners.

This *Paramilitary* conceptualisation of prison officers' work is the role ascribed to officers by DiIulio (1991) in his analysis of the 'Texas Control model' of prison administration. DiIulio's exploratory research was a study of three prison departments in the United States. The departments in Texas, California and Michigan were selected because they were seen to run their prison systems in ways that differed significantly from one another (DiIulio 1991:5). Implicit in each model of prison management was a differently conceptualised role for the prison officer. The *Para-military* conceptualisation in the Texas control model will be discussed here, whilst the conceptualisations of the officer as a *Professional* and a *Public servant* in the California and Michigan models, whilst less clearly defined than the Texas paramilitary model will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

The Texas Control model was characterised by DiIulio as ‘emphasising inmate obedience, work and education, roughly in that order’ (DiIulio 1991:105)

Central to the administration of the prison was the strictly hierarchical chain of command.

‘In each prison, correctional officers were organised along strict para-military lines running from the warden and his assistant to the major, all the way down to the most junior correctional officer. Official rules and regulations were followed closely and enforced rigorously.(DiIulio 1991:105)

The chain of command was followed rigorously. Officers had a sense of mission, an esprit de corps and an amazing knowledge of the system’s history (DiIulio 1991:105).

DiIulio’s characterisation of the prison officer as a *Para-military* officer, whilst emphasising the control purpose of imprisonment, is less competitive than that of Thomas in the way it responds to alternative goals. DiIulio argues that this control model of prison administration incorporated a treatment program for prisoners that was also administered with military style precision. An example was provided in relation to the delivery of educational services. Prisoners were required to undertake an academic competencies test and those who did not reach the established standard were required to attend school one day in every week (DiIulio 1991:107). Of the relationship between custodial staff and treatment staff DiIulio says

Tension between custodial and treatment personnel was virtually non-existent (DiIulio 1991:105)

In emphasising that para-military control of the prison enables the delivery of a range of services to prisoners, DiIulio implies that the *Para-military* conceptualisation of officers’ work gives officers a professional responsibility for the good order of the prison that underpins the contributions of other professionals – educationalists and

others. However DiIulio does not describe this as an equal partnership. The control of the prison by professional custodians was seen as the top priority and the provision of services a secondary issue. More importantly than enabling the work of other professionals, the professional behaviour of officers in insisting that prisoners conform to the required prison standards through the disciplined response to rule infractions, is seen to provide an experience of disciplined law abiding behaviours to the prisoner population (DiIulio 1987:175-179).

Conceptualising the prison officer as a *Para-military* officer constructs the officer as a follower of orders, an enforcer of rules and thus as an agent with very limited legitimate discretion. The prisoner is constructed in this process as a person of danger. The role of the officer may be to anticipate potential disruption, but then to perform the role in the manner laid out in the regulations. An essential component of performing this role is maintenance of a social distance. This understanding of prison officers' relationships with prisoners, developed from the work of Sykes (1958) (Glaser and Fry 1987) in which he named the role of guards as rulers of the prison and from this position argued that any compromise on the social distance between guard and prisoner was in fact a corruption, has been influential in prison literature (Long et al. 1986:338).

The conceptualisation of the prison officer as a *Para-military* officer is often invoked by prison reformers as the exemplar of the undesirable. This can be seen as both a rational positioning and a discursive creation of a counterpoint to new conceptualisation being promoted. The conceptualisation of the prison officer as a *Para-military officer* is argued by its critics to be a source of some of the problems in

prison administration (Cullen et al. 1985:508; Edney 1997). Cullen et al (1985) argue that a source of role conflict, leading to prison officer stress, is that prisons are structured as para-military organisations, but that the task with which the officer is faced

demands flexibility, the judicious application of discretionary justice, and the ability to secure inmate compliance through informal exchanges which deviate from written rules (Sykes 1958) (Cullen et al. 1985:508)

In a similar vein, Edney (1997) argues that prison violence (that is the violence inflicted by prison officers on prisoners) is a product of

the process of dehumanisation that we allow in our prisons and the prison's own paramilitary type structure (Edney 1997:297)

Associated with the *Para-military* conceptualisation of prison officers' work are symbols such as the uniform, military parades and morning musters and other traditions, including the addressing of superiors with honorifics such as 'Sir', which have been highly prized within prison systems. Removing or changing these symbols has often served to signify a change from the *Para-military* conceptualisation of the role of the officer and has been met with intense resistance (see DiIulio 1987:122, for description of the resistance to demilitarization in the Michigan system).

The use of the control discourse of Adler and Longhurst's analysis to construct the *Paramilitary* officer is common to two other conceptualisations, the *Security* officer and the *Warehouser*. However whilst the Prison Process dimension of the *Para-military* officer can be seen to be constructed through the Professional discourse, the *Security* officer and the *Warehouser* are constructed through other Prison Process' discourses.

## The Security Officer

Naming the role of the prison officer as *Security* officer has been a strategy used by writers seeking to emphasise the control aspect of the role without necessarily associating it with the para-military structures. 'Correctional security work' is the description used by Jurik and Halemba (1984:555).

First and foremost, correctional officers are charged with the supervision of residents and the maintenance of security, order, and discipline. (Jurik and Halemba 1984:555)

Kauffmann, in her discussion of the prison officers' role, developed from her observations whilst employed herself as a prison officer in Connecticut and then from a research project in Massachusetts, identifies that a degree of institutional chaos is not inconsistent with the conceptualisation of the prison officers as a security officer. Her observation of the officers' work was certainly not one of para-military style total control, but rather of a more functional focus on the essential security standard that had to be achieved.

Walpole officers were thus left with two aims: prevention of escape (isolation) and maintenance of internal order. The officers took isolation of the inmates from the community outside very seriously and they performed the task exceptionally well.

...

As for the internal order, it is a task they had pared to the bone: the prevention of large scale riots and of injury to officers. The blood- and excrement- stained walls of Walpole attested to their inability to prevent much else. Thus, of the diverse and often conflicting expectations of prisons, Walpole officers concerned themselves with only two reasonably compatible ones: prevention of escape and maintenance of a minimum of internal control. (Kauffman 1988:46)

This acknowledgement that the control within the prison was not total can be explained by the Prison Process dimension of the conceptualisation. Although the *Security officer* role is still constructed within a hierarchical control structure, this is a more bureaucratic, rule focussed orientation. As Jurik and Halemba (1984:555) identify

Much of the work officers performed involved following orders and showing respect for superiors (Jurik and Halemba 1984:555)

and

officers also spent significant amounts of time writing reports and managing records of their activity. (Jurik and Halemba 1984:555)

In contrasting the role of a prison guard with that of a correctional officer, Johnson (1981) invoked a set of understandings of the role of the prison guard that would seem to fit with the *Security officer* conceptualisation. His prison guard is not a *Paramilitary* officer in that the top down direction is lacking, as Johnson emphasises the officer is a 'man in the middle'

without clear guidance from above, between the incompletely communicated instructions from his superiors and inmates who present behaviour that could be interpreted, at least technically, as rule violations. (Johnson 1981:82)

The Prison Process dimension of Johnson's prison guard is shaped by the pressures of prisoner numbers and the impersonality dictated by the need to expeditiously manage them. As such, Johnson identified a classic bureaucratic dilemma

prisons cannot be expected to treat personally and with complete understanding the unique meaning of each inmate's deviation from the official rules (Johnson 1981:82)

The techniques utilised in the security role identified by Johnson include a range of institutional strategies such as

'rotation of inmate job assignments, the shuffling of cellmates and intra prison transfers to keep 'trouble makers' off balance'(Johnson 1981:83)

These are the techniques developed by a bureaucratic organisation to support the officer whose control is not total.

The *Security Officer* conceptualisation is shaped by control discourse in the Prison Purpose dimension but is shaped by the bureaucratic discourse in its Prison Process dimension. However, the boundaries between para-military control and the bureaucratic control of the *Security Officer* are not impermeable. Oliver (1991) argues from his experience at Goulburn gaol that although much security work involves repetitious acts of control, this must be able to be backed up by more aggressive action on occasion.

Most of the work is monotonous and routine but recently a prisoner in the high security area on Stage 1 of the intensive management programme demonstrated over a property issue...I was placed on the assault team, having had experience of similar situations. We donned protective clothing over our overalls or uniforms and CS gas was deployed into the yards ...Thankfully this sort of thing does not happen too often. (Oliver 1991:46)

## **The Warehouse**

*The Warehouse of prisoners* conceptualisation of the work of prison officers is not one that is named frequently in literature concerning prison officers' work. Rather it is a conceptualisation that can be derived from descriptions of the prison as a 'warehouse' for prisoners. In origin it is probably an American expression and certainly has been used in a disparaging sense in the United States, Canada and Australia (Coulter 1999).

The *Warehouse* conceptualisation of prison officers' work, like the *Para-military* and the *Security* conceptualisations of the role of the officer, is constructed from a

Prison Purpose discourse of control, but control in the sense of product stock taking rather than domination. It is an expression used in DiIulio's (1987) report of changes in the Michigan keepers' philosophy

The stress on incapacitation gave way to the keepers' commitment to do more than simply 'warehouse' inmates' (Dilulio 1987:182)

and by the prison Governor in Scotland who argued that he did not have to concern himself with provision of adequate facilities to enable social work services because he was only

in the business of warehousing bodies for the court' (Parsloe report Social Work Units in Scottish Prisons quoted in Adler and Longhurst 1994:134)

The *Warehouser* is shaped by a very simple legalistic view of the role of prison as an incapacitator that removes individuals from society for the legally determined length of time. This emphasis on being the servant of the legal system does ensure that the responsibility of the officer to protect prisoners' rights is recognised, but it creates no further interest in the development of the prisoner into a law abiding citizen. In Michigan the rejection of this *Warehouser* conceptualisation was articulated as

If we don't act as agents of positive change, we leave them to themselves and to each other to degenerate further....(Dilulio 1987:182)

In Australia, the *Warehouser* conceptualisation was acknowledged by the NSW Independent Commission against Corruption

As recently as ten years ago, the role of a correctional officer was purely custodial with their authority reinforced by the well-defined hierarchical order established within the prison. The officer's job was to oversee the good order of the prison, to keep records and maintain a social and psychological distance from prisoners. Prisons really were warehouses for people (Coulter 1999:13)

The *Warehouser* conceptualisation, although seldom explicitly acknowledged is an important conceptualisation in that it highlights the logical outcome of understanding the purpose of imprisonment as being for safe containment of prisoners, that has been influential in the last decade.

## **Imprisoning citizens**

The development of newer conceptualisations of prison officers' work which emphasise a relationship with the prisoners as a citizen and the role as human services work have been constructed through normalisation discourse (King, 1980, cited in Adler and Longhurst 1994:39)}. This discourse emphasises the prisoner as a 'normal' individual

who happens to have committed a crime, for which he or she has been punished (by being sent to prison) but for whom the experience of the prison itself should not be punitive (Adler and Longhurst 1994:39)

Despite this common understanding of the purpose of imprisonment, the officer as a *Professional*, a *Public servant* and a *Manager* embed very different officer-prisoner relationships. In the discussion below these three conceptualisations of prison officers' work are identified in the literature and distinguished from one another through the influence of prison process discourse.

## **The Professional**

Conceptualisations of prison officers as a *Professional* (or semi-professional, following Etzioni (1969)) are associated with prison reform initiatives (Jurik and Halemba 1984; Coulter 1999). Although the definition of a professional in these contexts is often vague, the expectations of professionalisation are high, as Josi and Sechrest argue

It is generally assumed by management that a 'professional staff' will do what is necessary to ameliorate a crisis and better serve the community. (Josi and Sechrest 2005:207)

In contrast with traditional professionalisation strategies utilised by workers to achieve autonomy and control over resources (Watson 1995:224) the initiative for the professionalisation of prison officers usually comes from employing organisations (Jurik et al. 1987: 106). The professionalisation process has involved increasing the salary, formalising procedures for hiring, terminating and promoting officers, changing the job description 'to incorporate new service/program-related duties' and upgrading of educational qualifications (Jurik et al. 1987:111).

Jurik, Halemba, Musheno and Boyle (1987) take a somewhat cynical view of this push to professionalisation, arguing

workers have neither initiated nor been the primary beneficiaries of this movement. Instead professionalization has been mandated by those at the top of the criminal justice bureaucracies in order to improve the public image of their agencies and ultimately the power of these administrators in the governmental process. Second, this movement toward professionalization has not involved the systematic acquisition of occupational characteristics that attribute theorists consider essential elements of professionalism. Instead, the central thrust of this process has been limited to increasing the educational level of individual front-line workers as a quick route to establishing a professional image for these bureaucracies (Frank, 1966; Wicks, 1980) (Jurik et al. 1987:107)

It is the ethical dimension of professionalisation that is the focus of Edney's (1997) argument

'What is required, in my view, is the development of ethical countercultures within our prisons that reduce the corrosive effects of dehumanisation on prison officers' decision making. This itself may be difficult given that the processes and structures of prisons are constructed in a way that encourages prison officers to view prisoners as objects rather than subjects and as people deserving of few rights. However, some change may be possible if the status of prison officers as an occupation can be improved so that officers are viewed as deliverers of human services rather than traditionally as mere turnkeys. Professionalism of the prison service is

essential not only to improve the treatment of those we imprison, but to increase the job satisfaction and skills of officers so that resort to violence is not to be considered the natural or inevitable response to a prisoner's threat to officers' collective authority.(Edney 1997:292)

Central to an ethical relationship between officer and prisoner is the exercise of legitimate authority. As Hepburn found from his research exploring the five bases of power

prison guards believe their control over prisoners to be based largely on their position as guards and on their reputation for competence and good judgement (Hepburn 1985:154)

Consistent with this, Jurik (1988) found that female officers seeking to develop a 'Professional Image' focussed on the exercise of authority.

One female officer characterized this approach in the following manner:

To gain authority, it is important to treat prisoners in a professional manner. Authority comes from confronting infractions and demanding conformity while maintaining respect for the perpetrator. You treat all inmates fairly and consistently – not just your buddies. You can be supportive of inmates, but you must let them know ...that you are a *professional* caretaker – not their mom or their girlfriend. (Jurik 1988:296)

This is amplified by Liebling and Price (2001) from their range of studies in United Kingdom prisons

Being a good prison officer involves being good at not using force, but still getting things done, and being prepared to use the various power bases officers can draw on when necessary. It means being capable of using legitimate authority and being in control without resorting to the full extent of the officer's powers. It means establishing relationships and investing those relationships with real aspects of one's personality. (Liebling and Price 2001:191)

Underpinning this professional exercise of authority is the question of the body of knowledge on which prison officers draw on a daily basis. It is the development of an educated workforce that has been the most commonly utilised professionalisation strategy. Jurik, Halemba, Musheno and Boyle (1987) argue that this reflects the

appreciation that educational levels is one lever that an organisation can control in a complex organisational dynamic. Organisations using this strategy have been encouraged by research that demonstrates that education is a 'strong predictor of empathy, punitiveness and support for rehabilitation'. (Lariviere, 1996:22)

The complexity of this strategy is that correctional literature does not make the claim to a discrete body of knowledge (Liebling and Price 2001), that is the hall mark of most professional claims. However, correctional administration is not alone in this challenge of identifying a specific body of knowledge. Other occupational groups that explore their professional status can be seen to face similar challenges. Laycock (2001) in a discussion of the professionalisation of the police force argues that advances in this area are limited by a lack of a published knowledge base on what works and what does not work in the profession'.

It can be argued that this emphasis on a published body of knowledge defining the right of an occupation to be classified as a profession privileges one form of communication over other methods through which knowledge about prisons and their management may be disseminated. Such an argument would echo the sociological analysis that suggests that professionalisation is a strategy for maintaining the status and exclusivity of some occupational groups (Watson 1995:222). However, although prison officers are reputed to have a very strong oral history culture, the work of Liebling and Price (1998b; 2001) suggests that the gap in linking theoretical knowledge to skills is not just in the published literature. As a result of a number of studies within the United Kingdom Prison Services they argue

that the skill required for the successful performance of prison officers' work has not been articulated

There is an important gap here – in the literature, in the research, and in prison officers' self-conscious grasp of what it is that makes their job highly skilled. The movement from tension to 'peace' is not described (Liebling and Price 2001:8)

In an echo of the Adler and Longhurst (1994) professional discourse, Liebling and Price argue that the professionalism of prison officers is seen in their exercise of leadership and judgement which is used to best effect when the officer acts as a peacekeeper (See also Shapira and Navon 1985). The peacekeeping role is described as requiring a high level of skill

Resolving and avoiding conflict, avoiding the use of force, and under-enforcing some of the rules were not omissions but were acts requiring skill, foresight, diplomacy and humour. (Liebling and Price 2001:7)

In seeking to understand the tension between these (and other) contradictory demands of prison officers' work, Liebling and Price explored with prison officers, managers and prisoners at Whitemoor prison, the characteristics of officers who could be seen as role models. Although there were, not surprisingly, differences between the groups interviewed and also between different sections of the prison, there was agreement that

Good officers had verbal skills of persuasion, could use authority appropriately, had human relations skills, leadership abilities and could use straight talk or honesty. They had the ability to maintain boundaries – all boundaries – with different departments, between management and staff, and with prisoners. They had personal strength or 'moral courage' and a sense of purpose. They needed patience, empathy, courage and a professional orientation (Liebling and Price 2001:46 & 47)

Several researchers have pointed out that there are some negative side effects of conceptualising the prison officer workforce as a group of *Professionals*. Jurik, Halemba, Musheno and Boyle (1987) found that the correctional organisation was unable to adapt to the more highly educated recruits 'who expected greater

opportunity for policy input than was granted their 'unprofessional' colleagues (Jurik et al. 1987:120). In particular they noted the inconsistency between expecting staff to act as professionals and the hierarchical control model of the prison, a theme echoed in relation to Dutch prisons by Kommer (1993). Lariviere, argues that the evidence on which the professionalisation strategy is based, that is that education is a predictor of empathy and other desired prison officer attributes, is contradictory (Lariviere, 1996:22) and from an analysis of the responses of a selection of prison officers in Correctional Services Canada, points out that in the prison context,

despite their more positive attitudes, highly educated individuals reported significantly lower job satisfaction. This may suggest that highly qualified individuals might be under-utilized and/or under-compensated by their employer. (Lariviere 1996:22)

### **The Public servant or bureaucrat**

Two major enquiries into aspects of prison administration, the United Kingdom, Prison disturbances April 1990: report of an inquiry by the Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Woolf (parts I and II) and His Honour Judge Stephen Tumin (part II) (known as the Woolf Report)(Tumim and Woolf of Barnes 1991) and the Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC)(Johnston 1991), have articulated the central concerns of prison administration as stemming from the nature of the public service performed within prisons. By extension, those who act for the state within the prison are constructed as public servants.

Lord Woolf, in reporting on his enquiry into the Strangways riots in the United Kingdom prison service, suggested that such widespread riot could only occur when a large number of prisoners felt that they were being treated with a lack of justice by the prison system. Lord Woolf emphasised

‘the theme of justice in prisons secured through the exercise of responsibility and respect. The achievement of justice will itself enhance security and control...’

(Woolf cited in Sparks (1996:305). In naming this issue, Woolf emphasised both the importance of the prison regime and the necessity of ‘just’ procedures. By implication Lord Woolf asserts the rights citizens, albeit imprisoned, to fair treatment.

In discussing the Woolf report, in the context of a discussion of the legitimacy of prison, Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996) point out that there is a significant gap between the ‘broad outlines of policy’ provided by such a report and ‘the local construction of social relation in prisons’. Sparks, Bottoms and Hay argue that in other policy arenas the interaction of the broad policy and the local social relations are given consideration and that the exploration of the role of police in implementing justice is an example of this (1996:307). Furthermore Sparks, Bottoms and Hay argue that there is a representational dimension of people’s encounters with criminal justice agencies

People view the behaviour of public officials as representing aspects of the system whose agents they are. (Sparks 1996:307)

Thus they argue, prison staff, of necessity, ‘represent the state’s position’ (Sparks 1996:308).

The public servant conceptualisation of the prison officer at work bridges the gap between broad policy and actual practice. The prison officers’ role is constructed through the intersection of a normalisation discourse recognising the citizenship of the prisoner (Adler and Longhurst 1994:pp34-47) and bureaucratic and legal discourses emphasising the uniformity with which prisoners should be administered

and the fidelity to rules that will achieve fairness for which the officer should be accountable.

The public servant, thus constructed, takes on not just the states responsibility to treat its imprisoned citizens fairly and in an even handed manner, but also

‘the fact that prisoners are in a dependent position imposes on state authorities duties of care for physical well-being and psychological survival that are qualitatively greater than those the state assumes over the free citizen.’(Sparks 1996:309)

The Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston 1991), which derived its findings about the operational policies and need for change in prisons from an examination of the 99 deaths that occurred in prisons and police lockups in the preceding 10 years, also focussed on this duty of care of the state and its employees, the prison officers. Whilst making a finding on each of the deaths examined, the most potent of the Royal Commissioner’s findings related to the overall operation of the prison system. The Royal Commission named as a contributory cause of deaths in custody a failure of custodial authorities and individual officers to appreciate their responsibility for custodial care.(Johnston 1991) This Royal Commissioner, thus, emphasised that the prison officer’s position as a public servant determines key responsibilities in the role.

Earlier than these major enquiries from Australia and the United Kingdom, the prison officer as a *Public Servant* can be identified in writings from the United States. The *public servant* conceptualisation emerges from Lombardo’s(1981) exploration of officer’s understandings of their work. In the context of exploring the human services role of officers, Lombardo identifies officers’ roles in ‘handling inmate institutional

problems', 'handling inmate personal problems' and sharing their institutional or personal problems with inmates. The motivation for taking up these tasks can be seen to be derived from bureaucratic and legal understandings of prison process; the officer wanted to see other parts of the institution treating inmates fairly and to prevent problems that if escalated would be difficult for the officer.

The majority of officers also identified that they became involved in supporting inmates with their personal problems. However, in Lombardo's analysis this does not suggest a therapeutic relationship between officer and prisoner, but rather emphasises the commonality of the humanity of the officer and the inmate.

'A factor that appears to have a special importance in contributing to the establishment of 'human services' relationships between officers and inmates and in promoting their acceptance by inmates and officers is the 'non-professional' character of such relationships. Officers and inmates both seem to believe that officers are paid to be 'police', guards, security personnel. It follows from the logic of the situation that any personal relationships that develop between officers and inmates are developed out of personal choice and not paid for by the state.'

This normalised conceptualisation of the prisoner can also be seen in the fact that almost half of the officers discussed their own institutional problems (such as uniform requirements) with inmates (Lombardo 1981).

Although in the Michigan responsibility model of prison management, as described by DiIulio (1987) the conceptualisation of the work is difficult to discern from DiIulio's report, there are sufficient echoes of the duty of care discourse to suggest that the role of the prison officer is conceptualised as that of a public servant. The normalisation discourse identified (Adler and Longhurst 1994) is explicitly espoused by staff who identify that the goal of the prison is to control prisoners in a way that allows them to live their lives as normally as possible (DiIulio 1987:120). Associated

with this emphasis on normalisation were bureaucratic and legal discourses which resulted in an extensive set of guidelines about how any situation should be managed (DiIulio 1987:124) and an extensive appeals mechanism that prisoners were definitely encouraged to utilise as necessary.

The *public servant* conceptualisation of the prison officer is thus constructed by the understanding of prison as an institution for restraining citizens, in which the citizens are encouraged both to live as normally as possible and to know and exercise their rights. The officers' role can be seen to be to facilitate this process in a way that ensures fairness for all.

### **The Manager of Prisoners**

The emphasis on normalising prison life can also be seen to play a central part in constructing the prison officer as a *Manager of prisoners*, which was arose from the Scandinavian prison systems' Unit Management model. This model which influenced the development of Australian prison systems from the 1980s(Gorta 1988) , involved the grouping of prisoners in stable residential (and sometimes industry) units and the staffing of these units by a consistent group of staff (Office of Corrections 1989; Gerard 1991; Levinson 1991). Embedded within the Unit Management system of prison administration was a conceptualisation of the prison officer as an active shaper of the prison environment through the development of ongoing relationships with prisoners. This model of prison management involved a significant departure from old rostering practices which had been developed in times when social distance and impersonality were the desired characteristics of relationships between prison officers and prisoners.

The conceptualisation of prison officers' work as *Managers of prisoners*, as a part of a progressive change agenda for prisons, occurred at a time when managerialist language and ideas were permeating workplaces. The changes in public sector organisations in Australia, and other countries, as a result of the critiques of the bureaucratic and professional models of public sector management (Clarke and Newman 1997:4-8) focussed first on efficiency and effectiveness and then latterly on market-based reforms (Clarke and Newman 1997:20). Closely associated with this latter phase has been an emphasis on achieving culture change within organisations using transformational discourse as an important strategy. (Leach, Stewart and Walsh 1994; du Gay 1996a; Clarke and Newman 1997:37; Halford and Leonard 1999) In this process being a manager has become a desirable role and attribute, and many workers have renamed or had renamed for them their work to take on this handle (e.g. care managers in the human services, resource managers in libraries and student services managers in Universities), in order to position themselves appropriately in the managerialist agenda (Gursansky, Harvey and Kennedy 2003:128).

This managerialist agenda impacted on prisons in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom (Adler and Longhurst 1994; Faulkner 2000; Liebling and Price 2001:175-177; Liebling 2004). It shaped both the structures through which prisons were managed, involving both new relationships between central administration and individual prisons, and the privatisation of the management of many prisons. The managerialist influence on correctional services can be seen in the emphasis in recent years on the mission of correctional services agencies. In particular an emphasis has developed on managing offending behaviour both within the prison and in post

prison services. Managerialism introduced new language and new understandings of accountabilities into the prisons.

The conceptualisation of the prison officer as a *Manager of Prisoners*, then, has two interconnected histories. This development of a conceptualisation that echoes descriptions of work in other contexts enhances the normalising discourse about the nature of prisoners and the relationships between officers and prisoners by utilising metaphors for prison life that reflect broader communal life. The metaphor of the *Manager* constructs the prison officer from professional and entrepreneurial discourses, that emphasis both the engagement between officer and prisoner and the responsibility of the officer for managing that engagement.

## **Rehabilitating the prisoner**

That the purpose of imprisonment could be to rehabilitate the prisoner is an idea that has waxed and waned in popularity and in interpretation. Adler and Longhurst (Adler and Longhurst 1994) argue that rehabilitation (or the treatment model), unlike reform that is dependent on the individual's response to punishment, should be defined as recognising deficits in the individual that can be addressed in a social setting.

The aim of the prison as a state agency was to socialise the individual back into society. (Adler and Longhurst 1994:37)

Although faith in this goal of imprisonment changes over time (note the impact of Martinson's 'what works?' (Sarre 2005)), it remains present in public discourse and indeed policy.

## The Therapist

The idea that a prison officer should be conceptualised as a *Therapist* has recently been expressed persuasively by Dvoskin and Spiers (2004) who argue in relation to prisoner mental health that

many roles and duties traditionally attributed to clinicians can and often should be performed not only by mental health professionals, but by line staff such as correctional officers and nurses (Dvoskin and Spiers 2004:41)

They develop this position by arguing that

The specific activities which comprise mental health treatment in prison are described as 1) counselling and psychotherapy – talking *with* inmates 2) consultation – talking *about* inmates 3) special housing, activities, and behavioural programs, and 4) medication. (Dvoskin and Spiers 2004:41)

And they argue

Line personnel, such as correctional officers, nurses and case managers (i.e. correctional counsellors) carry out the preponderance of mental health care for inmates.(Dvoskin and Spiers 2004:47)

Conceptualising the prison officer as a *Therapist* is a logical extension of the argument that officers are the most important people in responding to a mental health crisis such as a suicide threat, and that their power includes both their capacity to support the prisoner in moving forward safely and also to escalate the crisis through mockery or other signs of not recognising the prisoner's needs.(Dvoskin and Spiers 2004:48) In addition to their role in crisis intervention, Dvoskin and Spiers argue that prison officers can act as supportive (or indeed the exact opposite destructive) counsellors (Dvoskin and Spiers 2004:49)and as providers of referrals. This echoes the much earlier observation of Johnson (1977) who explored the possibility of prison officers being a part of a therapeutic network for meeting the needs of prisoners with mental health problems. He observed that, whereas some officers are oblivious to or unwilling to take up this role, others have taken it on as part of their work. One component of this role is to refer prisoners observed to be experiencing

difficulties to sources of support. However Johnson also identified a more immediate helping role

'officers may also intervene on their own, offering personal assistance and advice to the troubled inmate'(Johnson 1977:268)

He supports this assessment of the role of prison officers with a quote from a prison psychologist who asserted that the officer-inmate relationship is

'the most important relationship in the institution for therapy' (Johnson 1977:270)

In later work Johnson(Johnson 1981) explored the role of the 'correctional officer' as a contrasting development to the security oriented 'prison guard'. His correctional officer was defined by a rehabilitative prison purpose discourse,

'moving inmates to seeing themselves as law-abiding citizens.'(Johnson 1981:83).

At the same time the role is described as being performed in

'partnership with treatment workers who would be expected to accept correctional officers as co-participants in change processes.'(Johnson 1981:83)

In concluding their argument that prison officers should be considered a significant part of a prison mental health service, Dvoskin and Spiers report on the role of prison officers in effectively designing behaviour management programs for prisoners whose disturbed behaviour had been the subject of significant professional attention without a definitive diagnosis or improvement in that behaviour.(Dvoskin and Spiers 2004:54)

The role of the prison officer as a therapist has been recognised in prisons, or prison sections, that have a mandated therapeutic goal. One example of such a prison is Grendon in the United Kingdom, where one part of the prison has been operating

with a therapeutic mandate since 1962 (Genders and Player 1995:5). Officers' work in this unit is conceptualised as therapeutic,

In essence, officers are expected to exercise control through therapeutic means and to interpret such [ swearing at members of staff and refractory ] behaviour as the material for discussion rather than as an offence requiring a formal hearing.(Genders and Player 1995:124)

In their analysis of this prison, Genders and Player argue that it is the prison officers who unite what is actually two institutions – a prison and a therapeutic community (Genders and Player 1995:120-2). To be successful in performing the complex role expected of them, officers needed to ‘approve of the objectives they are being asked to work towards’ (Genders and Player 1995:125).

Another example of a therapeutic unit operating within a prison is the Barlinnie Special Unit in Scotland, established in 1973 to contain prisoners from the Scottish Prisons who are deemed to be exceptionally violent. The success of this prison in limiting the number of assaults within the unit has been attributed to the staff-prisoner relationships in the Unit (Cooke 1991). The Unit operated under a regime developed from therapeutic communities (Cooke 1989) and the relationship between prisoner and officer was intended to contribute to this regime. This relationship was established from the moment of entry to the Unit. Officers, along with other professionals were engaged in assessing prisoners for entry into the Unit

a detailed assessment by three senior prison staff together with a psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist (Whatmore 1987 in Cooke 1989).

Other significant aspects of the prison regime which shaped staff-prisoner relationships were the Community meetings in which staff and prisoners together participated in making central decisions about the management of the Unit and at

which issues could be discussed frankly and expressively.(Cooke 1989) In becoming co-participants in these meetings staff took up a therapeutic role to enable prisoners to find new ways of behaving that did not endanger their own or others' safety.

In broader prison environments the conceptualisation of the officer as a therapist can be seen in the developing role of prison officers as deliverers of prison programs, particularly programs that can be seen as 'therapeutic' in their goals and processes.

Liebling and Price note

officers in the modern prison deliver (and help to deliver) professional treatment and development programmes for sex offenders, violent offenders, drug users and others, and arguably have developed a strengthened 'treatment intervention' role over recent years.(Liebling and Price 2001:40)

The prison officer as a therapist can be recognised in initiatives to enhance staff capacity to recognise suicidal and other self-harm potential in prisoners – either new arrivals or more settled prisoners. This responsibility is reflected in the argument of Dollard et al.(2003) and Cooke (1990:7) that staff should be trained to use specialist skills in approaching disturbed and difficult prisoners.

The *Therapist* conceptualisation of prison officers' work is constructed from rehabilitative discourse of prison purpose and from a professional discourse of prison process in which the leadership and judgement of the officer are emphasised as essential to performing the role.

## **The Case Manager**

One component of Unit Management was the role of the prison officer as a *Case manager*. Although, like the *Manager of prisoners*, shaped by the Unit Management model, the conceptualisation of the officer as a *Case manager* can be seen to stem

from an understanding of the purpose of imprisonment that differs significantly from the normalisation discourse of the manager of prisoners. The *Case management* conceptualisation can be seen to be derived from an understanding of the purpose of imprisonment, in which the 'deviant' prisoner (Adler and Longhurst 1994:35-37) must be treated before being returned to the community.

The expression, case management, which is currently utilised in a broad range of human service arenas, has many definitions and manifestations. (Wolk, Sullivan and Hartmann 1994; Moxley 1997; Coulter 1999; Gursansky, Harvey and Kennedy 2003) One understanding is that the central focus of the prison is the individual prisoner around whose needs the prison and its supporting services are intended to revolve (Moxley 1989). Conceptualising the role of the officer as a *Case Manager*, in this sense, can involve a winding back of the engagement of other human service specialists, such as psychologists and social workers in the prison environment. An alternative focus for case management is as an organisational device that uses the *Case manager* as a broker for individual prisoners, ensuring that the services needed so that the prisoner successfully leaves the prison at the appropriate (and only the appropriate) time are provided (Moxley 1989).

The implementation of case management within prisons usually involves the allocation of a small group of prisoners to an officer with the expectation that the officer will communicate regularly with them. The communication can be formal and informal, but includes a particular focus on checking whether prisoners have problems with which they need support (Coulter 1999) and involvement in sentence planning. It was described by NSW Corrective Services as

a personalised interactive approach to the management of offenders in custody (NSW DCS Operations Procedures Manual, 1997, Section 17-4) cited in Coulter 1999:17)

In recent years this conceptualisation, also named case officer or personal officer in the United Kingdom (see Liebling and Price 2001) has become prominent in discussions of prison officers' work. In addition to the therapeutic discourse that it shares with case management outside the prison, the case management conceptualisation is shaped by its purpose in mediating between the individual and the organisation. In this, it is constructed by the entrepreneurial discourse of managerialism in which the prisoner is constructed as the customer (albeit involuntary) of the prison service.

Moxley (1997) points out that whilst the ideal for this role, within or outside prisons, is the achievement in uniformity in the distribution of resources, the reality is that observed by Lipsky (1980) from his study of street level bureaucrats. The problem faced by case managers (and other street level bureaucrats) is the problem of

addressing human needs with limited resources and with limited personnel. The coping of case managers 'must be done not only to render 'good' or adequate service, but also to survive in order to practice another day.'(p26)

## **Conclusion**

Despite the apparent simplicity of working with a defined group of people within a contained space, the role of the prison officer is a complex one and one that can be conceptualised in diverse ways. Conceptualisations of the role of the officer can be seen to be constructed from different understandings of the purpose of imprisonment and the processes by which prisons are run. This review of the literature has identified that whilst the two broad conceptualisations of prison officers' work as Custodians or Human service workers are often used in discussions of prisons and

their workers these conceptualisations and their construction as oppositional limit our understandings of the role of the prison officer. Polarised conceptualisations of the role of the officer limit the recognition of the complexity of the role, discourage differentiation of the role, and limit the capacity of the role to be developed in terms that make sense within the prison context. The need for this development is identified by Liebling and Price, who report that the officers they have interviewed

articulated a sense of uncertainty about the 'modern' way of being a prison officer, although they were clear about the need for balance between care and control (Liebling and Price 2001:10)

The range of conceptualisations of prison officers' work identified in this review of the literature confirms the inappropriateness of focussing on a competitive relationship between these two broad conceptualisations. Eight distinct conceptualisations of prison officers' roles are identified in the literature and when analysed these can be seen to be constructed from distinctive combinations of Adler and Longhurst's prison discourses (Adler and Longhurst 1994). Classified by commonality of prison purpose these discourses describe a broad spectrum of roles of the prison officer.

### **Controlling the prisoner**

*Para-military officer, Security Officer, Warehouser*

### **Imprisoning Citizens**

*Professional, Public Servant / bureaucrat, Manager of Prisoners*

### **Rehabilitating the prisoner**

*Therapist, Case Manager*

In the chapters that follow, these conceptualisations will be utilised in an analysis of the discourses of the South Australian Department for Correctional Services and staff within its prisons. Chapter Four will explore what conceptualisations of the work of

the prison officer have been utilised by the Department in its official reports, while Chapters Five, Six and Seven will investigate how staff in three South Australian prisons conceptualise the work of the prison officer.

## **Chapter Four: Changing the guard: policy discourses constructing the role of the prison officer**

### **Introduction**

The responsibility for imprisoning citizens is an important exercise of state power and as such is the responsibility of elected governments. Prisons in South Australia are funded and managed by the State Government, providing a contractual service to the Commonwealth government for the accommodation of federal prisoners. The Government, thus, is both responsible for the conduct of the prison and accountable for its performance. However government responsibility and accountability for prisons, like all other activities, is exercised through a series of structures and actions within a public administration context.

In South Australia the government agency responsible for the administration of prisons is the Department for Correctional Services, which currently exists within the Department for Justice. This chapter focuses on the Department for Correctional Services (and its predecessor agencies – first the Sheriff's and Gaols and Prisons Department and then the Prison's Department) and a particular aspect of the exercise of their responsibility to give effect to government policy concerning prisons. The chapter examines the use of discourses of prison purpose and prison process by these agencies to discursively construct South Australian prisons and consequently the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within the prison. In so doing it addresses the thesis' first research question

- How has the role of the prison officer been conceptualised by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time?

This focus on the Department's use of language and other symbolic acts to broadcast into the prison understandings of prison purpose and process that were consistent with government policy and Departmental needs, is influenced by the argument of du Gay (1996b) that organisations' discourses

play an active role in the formation of new images and mechanisms, which bring the government of the enterprise into alignment with political rationalities, cultural values and social expectations (du Gay 1996b:53)

In the articulation and promotion of particular discourses of prison purpose and process at any point in time, the Department is constructing conceptualisations of prison officers' work that are consistent with current understandings of the purpose of imprisonment and the best administration of prisons to achieve that purpose. As du Gay argues

changes in the ways of conceptualizing, documenting and acting upon the internal world of the business organization actively transform the meaning and reality of work (du Gay 1996b:53)

Although the relationship between Government, Department and individual prison is exercised through many structures and actions one formal symbol of this relationship is the Annual Report of the responsible agency to the Minister and thus to Parliament. This chapter uses these Annual Reports as the principle source for the analysis of official Departmental discourse about prisons and prison officers.

Within the Department for Correctional Services, the discourse describing prison officers' work has changed significantly over time. In the analysis that follows these changes are traced and illustrated with excerpts from the South Australian Department for Correctional Services (and its predecessor institutions) Annual Reports. The analysis of the Annual Reports is presented chronologically in this

chapter, starting with the discourses evident in the earliest Reports and moving then to the later reports and the discourses that emerge. The analysis shows new discourses and combinations of discourse emerging in the particular socio-political environment of the Department at a particular point in time. The analysis commences with the exploration of the construction of the *Paramilitary* officer through prison purpose discourses of control and prison process discourses of professionalism and then traces the changing use of discourses of prison purpose and prison process to construct other conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer.

### **The Para-military prison officer (1900-1950s)**

The development of appropriately secure imprisonment facilities had been a preoccupation of the new South Australian province from early in its establishment (Telfer 2003 Chapters 3 - 5). By 1904, the year for which the first Annual Report of the Gaols and Prisons Department (Gaols and Prisons Department 1904) is available there were two metropolitan gaols (Adelaide Gaol and Yatala Labour Prison) and five country gaols (Gladstone, Mount Gambier, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln and Wallaroo).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, as South Australia became a State, the work of prison officers was conceptualised as being similar to that of the military. The Australian prison at the beginning of the century was one in which the removal of law -breakers from their activities in society was the major goal. The understanding of prisons and how they functioned was focussed on the issue of external control, of imposing the will of the government representing the law-abiding citizenry on criminal offenders. Significant attention was paid to ensuring that

prisoners undertook hard work, including work in quarrying and forestry, which made a return to the society (Gaols and Prisons Department 1904).

To achieve this goal the government recruited workers who could perform in a military type role and dressed them accordingly in uniforms. Officers were trained to keep communication to prisoners to a minimum and to avoid forming any relationship with prisoners. This was deemed to enable the effective imposition of order on an otherwise unruly mob. This model of prison relationships can be seen to have been influenced by developments in English and American prisons in the previous century that emphasised the orderly prison as one in which silence prevailed and prisoners became passive (McGowen 1998).

The para-military conceptualisation of the role of the officer was evidenced in the discourses of control and professionalism that were used to describe the officers' work. These discourses are exemplified in the following description of officers' response to an attempted escape from the quarries

*It was the most serious outbreak that has occurred at the prison...it is a matter of astonishment that none of the prisoners were hit by bullets as I have the assurance of all the officers that every effort was made to disable the escapees. A large number of rifle and revolver shots was fired,...it is perhaps to be regretted that some of the prisoners were not disabled as this would have acted as a deterrent on future similar attempts to escape. Regular target practice with rifle and revolver has now been undertaken with a view to improving the marksmanship of the guards. (1904 report in Telfer, 1996: 70)*

This para-military discourse of control was a very physical and masculine one. In this it typifies the construction of prisons and prison officers' work. However women did end up in prison – usually for offences such as prostitution or fraud. There were

always very few of these women and the processes by which they were held in custody were always seen as different from ‘real prisons’. (Rafter 1992) Women officers were employed to take charge of women prisoners and in South Australia the prison officers’ award recognised this with a full scale of pay for female officers, which corresponded to, although it was much less than, the male rate of pay. Following traditions developed in the United Kingdom in the middle of the previous century the common way of thinking about the senior woman guarding women in prison was as Matron. This reflected the understanding the deviant women were to be treated as “sick” or child-like rather than “bad” (Rafter 1992).

The *Para-military* conceptualisation of prison officers' work that was embedded in prisons in this early part of the century can be seen to have an ongoing influence in the Departmental discourses. In the analysis that follows it is argued that innovation and change always occurs as a departure from this para-military model. The control discourse that underpins the paramilitary conceptualisation constructs the demands of security as requiring the capacity for the effective use of force. Staff groups such as Emergency Response Teams (as they are named in South Australia) can be seen as an indicator of the extent to which this para-military model remains a base on which prisoner management rests (Thomas 1972).

Notwithstanding this influence of discourses of control on understandings of the purpose of imprisonment as physical control, the influence of other understandings of the purpose of imprisonment can also be seen in the early reports of the Comptroller of Prisons, Schomburgk, as expressed in 1913

*The discipline adopted is mainly intended to be deterrent, but reformatory as far as the special circumstances of each case may render it possible. The agencies employed*

*are disciplinary penalties and the exhortations of the religious instructors. (Gaols and Prisons Department 1913)*

This acknowledgement of the reformatory goal of imprisonment to be achieved alongside deterrence and retribution (Adler and Longhurst 1994 35, 36) embeds a competitive tension that recurs in future decades and influences the successive conceptualisations of prison officers' work.

## **Changing constructions of prison officers' work in**

### **Departmental discourse**

#### **Post war initiatives – a focus on prison process**

Changes in the South Australian discourses about the purpose of imprisonment and the processes by which this is to be achieved can be traced from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Post World War II ) when penal philosophy in many western jurisdictions began to alter.

A legal discourse, shaping this changed penal philosophy which emphasised the citizenship of those imprisoned, was actively promoted in international discussions by the United Nations. The acceptance by the Geneva Congress of the United Nations in 1955 of the influential “Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners” was the culmination of these cross national discussions (O'Brien 1998:195). The influence on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work of this emerging discourse can be seen in the inclusion of penal law amongst the topics in the training course for prison officers

*The training course comprises discipline, security, prison administration, rifle and pistol training, unarmed combat, penal law, dismounted drill, first aid, fire-fighting, prison officer relations to prisoners, and Court procedure (Sheriff's and Gaols and Prisons Department 1956: 10)*

Whilst the emphasis on fire-arms and unarmed combat, illustrates the ongoing influence of the *Para-military* conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer, those being trained can be seen to require a more complex set of skills than earlier in the century.

Concurrent with the development of this legal discourse seeking to construct prison processes as a microcosm of a civilised society, new professional discourse about prison process and in particular prison officers' work emerged. Initiatives associated with the construction of a prison officer as a Professional included training courses for staff, recruitment drives and a review of the pay and conditions of officers. As reported in consecutive annual reports

*A training school for prison officers was instituted at Yatala labour Prison and all temporary officers now undergo a course of instruction and are equipped with uniforms before being posted to other prison institutions. (Sheriff's and Gaols and Prisons Department 1952:1)*

*The salaries and conditions of prison officers were recently reviewed and improved. The numbers applying for appointment to the Service have increased and the staff shortage, which has prevailed for some years, has been overcome. (Sheriff's and Gaols and Prisons Department 1956:3)*

*The improvement in the staff recruitment position mentioned in last year's report has continued. The number of applicants for positions in the Department has increased and a selection of suitable persons for appointment is now possible.*

...

*During the year, two courses for Probationary Officers and one course for senior Officers were conducted. Since the introduction of the training courses in February 1956, 64 officers have passed through the school. (Sheriff's and Gaols and Prisons Department 1957)*

An increased use of this professional discourse emphasising the experience and leadership of officers, can be seen in Annual reports from the late 1950s onwards,

*Irrespective of modern methods and modern buildings, the most important factor in the satisfactory working of any department or institution is the interest, aptitude and commonsense shown by the officers in the performance of their duties, together with ability to work together in the common cause of the department. (Gaols and Prisons Department 1968)*

## **Changing prison purpose discourses**

Alongside the changed understandings of prison process that shaped the post war changes in philosophy and policy, were fundamental changes of emphasis in terms of prison purpose. New normalisation and rehabilitation discourses shaped prison administration and innovations, as illustrated in this description of the working of the prison

*Everything possible is being done to re-habilitate the delinquent, teaching him to be proficient with modern machinery and equipment and up-to-date methods, thus assisting him to obtain suitable employment on his discharge. (Sheriff's and Gaols and Prisons Department 1947:3)*

The normalisation discourse constructed prisoners as having human needs comparable to those of other community members (in this example the need for skills for employment) whilst the rehabilitative discourse was a development from the reformatory aspirations of early century prisons. The emphasis on conversion from evil, of the reformatory discourse, has developed into a focus on changing behaviours and encouraging the offender to assume a law abiding lifestyle on release.

These new discourses were reflected in the very important development of opening up the prison to other professionals such as psychologists and social workers (Thomas 1972; Hill 1988; O'Brien 1998). In contrast with the previous prevailing philosophy in which the prisoner was identified by a prison number, the arrival of

these professionals heralded an emphasis on the individuality of the prisoner. The rationale for the psychological services (offered since 1960) provided in the 1965-66 report, illustrates the normalisation and rehabilitative understandings of prison purpose of the time,

*Recent developments in the field of penology have emphasized the need for prisons to view their role as one of correction rather than mere custody of inmates. Obviously those in prison have indulged in behaviour that the community considers undesirable. A rehabilitation or correctional policy for prisons, therefore, must concern itself with their behaviour and should provide appropriate learning experiences so that socially acceptable behaviour is learned. As their behaviour is corrected inmates may be returned to the community more able to conduct themselves in a socially acceptable way. Both from the human and economic viewpoints such a situation is desirable. (Prisons Department 1966:4)*

## **Man management**

These changed articulations of prison process and prison purpose impacted directly on workers in prisons, particularly prison officers. As the legal discourse of prison process and the normalisation discourse of prison purpose began to intersect in this evolving correctional environment, a new construction of the control process within the prison was articulated with the naming of the work as ‘man management’.

Inspired by other institutions, such as factories, which were beginning to conceptualise the organisational challenges they faced in these terms, in correctional services the adoption of ‘man management’ can be seen to move from a construction of the prisoner as a danger in need of subjugation to a citizen prisoner who must be managed to maintain the good order of the prison. As described in 1966,

*The current trend in the treatment of prison inmates throughout the world is one which demands a much wider appreciation of individual requirements. This places more responsibility upon officers generally, in that they are required to use their own discretion in the handling of their charges. (Prisons Department 1966:6)*

These changed expectations of the work of the officer led to broadening range of training opportunities in South Australia

*The lot of the prison officer, like that of the inmate, has changed considerably over the last decade; training schemes, new approaches, human relationship and man management have been introduced. All members now have the benefit of specialised training. (Gaols and Prisons Department 1968)*

An emphasis on the recruitment of the “right people” to be prison officers was a consequence of these changed conceptualisations of the role. Not only was the language in which officers were being described transformed from that of a para-military tool, only expected to undertake tasks under orders, to that of a professional, with the capacity to use a broad body of knowledge and skills and with the capacity to change as the role changed, but an increased attention was being paid to the personal attributes of these new professionals.

*The duties of a prison officer are most complex and whatever aims may be set, the result depends on the individual. Not all people have the required attributes or qualities to become an efficient prison officer. We can do so much in the training sphere, in the introduction to what we consider the necessary qualifications, but, unless the psychological and human outlook and understanding is there, difficulties do arise. We are indeed fortunate in having in the Service officers who will move with the times, endeavouring to understand what we are trying to do, and impart that knowledge to those officers joining the Service. (Gaols and Prisons Department 1968: 3)*

Through the 1960s a range of psychological tests were introduced to aid in the selection of staff.

These changes created tensions within the prison system. The prisoner was being recognised as a citizen (Grant 1988:2 & 3; O'Brien 1998) but the essential dilemma created by the decision to imprison the citizen, the quandary of how to restrain the prisoner against his or her will, remained. The essence of the dilemma lies in the contradiction between the notion of citizen prisoners to be managed and the notion of dangerous prisoners to be restrained and controlled.

Concern about this can be seen in this description of the challenge the work of prison officers

*The present-day programme of treatment is such that a prisoner enjoys much more freedom of movement than was the case some decades ago, and this in itself, affords a far greater opportunity for trouble. This calls for the utmost vigilance on the part of staff, and it speaks well for their alertness and devotion to duty that so few serious incidents took place. (Gaols and Prisons Department 1968:7)*

This tension between discourses of control and discourses of normalisation and rehabilitation is a theme that continues through the developments in the expectations of the prison and the conceptualisations of prison officers' work.

### **Gendered professionalism**

The conceptualisation of prison officers' work shifted again in the 1970s as wider communal debates about the role of women in society impacted on correctional services departments. Until this time female prison officers had in an operational sense remained separate from male prisons. This was consistent with the prevailing notion that women prisoners were different to men both in motivation for their criminal act and in the way they could effectively be managed. The work of female officers, whilst still being constructed using a professional discourse had been separated from that of men with gender specific expectations built into the role, as illustrated in this commentary in which female prison officers were constructed through comparison with other female professionals

*Members of female staff showed a devotion to duty equal to any nursing service. They have handled the women prisoners with firmness, kindness and great understanding to their personal problems.*

*In June, when the Prison Aid Auxiliary expressed the desire to organize a concert at the Adelaide Gaol for the inmates, the whole staff, including relieving officers, volunteered for duty for the evening. (Gaols and Prisons Department 1964:3)*

By the mid 1970s the notion that men and women may be involved in very similar work began to prevail (Rafter 1992). In South Australia this was first evidenced by the inclusion of male and female officers in the same training programme (Department for Correctional Services 1974). Then came the move to have male and female officers work together. The first experiments in having male and female officers doing this were located in the Women's Prison and were deemed a success in the Annual Report of 1979-80

*It is interesting to see the co-operative manner in which male and female staff work together at this place and it is seen as a model for similar future distribution of staff in male prisons (Department for Correctional Services 1979).*

The subsequent introduction of female prison officers into male prisons (into Yatala Labour Prison in the 1982-8 year (Department for Correctional Services 1983; Telfer 2003:260) highlights an important development in the discourse that constructs prison officers' work. Whilst the 'man management' conceptualisation of prison officers' work had been given prominence within training courses and policy documents, the arrival of women in a male prison challenged at a practical level the notion that this was just window dressing and that the ultimate control of the prison depended upon officers' capacity to 'out muscle' prisoners. The arrival of women, controversial and conflict ridden though this was, reinforced the shift in discourse from physical control to "man management" (Farkas 1999; Crouch and Alpert 1982; Jurik and Halemba 1984; Jurik 1985b; Zimmer 1986; 1987; 1989).

The introduction of female prison officers into male prisons can be seen to be an important marker of the development of prison discourses. Their arrival makes clear that prisons are not the institution entirely separate from society that they had been

thought to be. The permeability of the walls of the prison to social change is clearly demonstrated. These were times of enormous social change. Those changes relating to work and understandings of gender roles in society affected both structures of prison officers' work and understandings of offending behaviour and the management of men and women in prison.

Other social changes had significant impact on who was sent to prison and thus the prison itself. Levels of imprisonment of Indigenous Australians continued to increase. Escalated availability of a range of illegal drugs in society was reflected in prison populations. Other health issues, such as the spread of Hepatitis, AIDS and HIV are reflected in prisons and particularly influential has been the move to deinstitutionalise the care of patients with mental health problems which has resulted in increases in the presence of these individuals in prisons (Tonry and Petersilia 1999).

## **Competing Professionalisms**

Professional discourses were given increasing prominence in the late 1970s and 1980s. However conflict between control and normalisation discourses describing the purpose of imprisonment resulted in competitive positioning of conceptualisations of the work of the prison officer as professional-para-military work or professional-human services.

A central element of the development of a professional identity is the identification and ownership of a body of knowledge. The development of a tertiary level prison officer education course commenced in this decade.

*In line with the recommendations of the First Report of the Criminal Law and Penal Methods Reform Committee, a departmental committee has been formed and negotiations are under way for the preparation of a Certificate course in Correctional Administration to be conducted by one of the Colleges of Advanced Education. (Department for Correctional Services 1974)*

This initiative can be seen to be an important symbol of the professionalisation of the work of prison officers and a significant step in developing a professional-human services conceptualisation of the role. The professional discourse that constructed this important development was enhanced in the following year when, in describing progress, the Annual Report acknowledged that the program was being developed using the existing body of knowledge within the organisation.

*Progress was also made in the development of the Certificate course in Correctional Administration through the Department of Further Education. The core courses have now been established and a number of officers have embarked on this certificate. At least two of the three correctional administration electives are in the process of being written and the Superintendent of Cadell Training Centre has been seconded for a period of three months to write up the departmental segment of these electives. Once these have been established, it will no longer be necessary for the in-service promotional examinations to be undertaken as completion of the electives will provide the basis for promotion. (Department for Correctional Services 1975:9)*

The competitive context in which this construction of the prison officers' role as requiring specialised professional education occurred, is illustrated by the concurrent impetus to create specialist security units capable of bringing expert intervention in highly charged security incidents. This initiative asserts of the importance of the Professional-Para-military conceptualisation.

*As an additional security measure, during the year a Special Operations Squad was formed at Yatala Labour Prison. These volunteers trained partly in Departmental and partly in their own time. Skilled in controlling disturbances, fighting fires, resuscitation, first aid, and other techniques, this group is an undoubted asset in the event of a*

*number of emergencies that can occur in any institution. Officers at Adelaide Gaol are also preparing to form such a squad. (Department for Correctional Services 1977:3)*

The South Australian tensions about the appropriate conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer were consistent with tensions in other jurisdictions. As Cullen et al (1985:522) describe, concerns arose from United States research

that efforts to professionalize the guard force through education may have the unanticipated consequence of creating a dissatisfied group of officers.

But in reporting their research they argue

there is no evidence that educated officers are unable to adapt to the rigors of guarding inmates. Compared to officers with less schooling, they were no more likely to experience work or life stress. (Cullen et al. 1985:522&3)

The intensity of the tension around the conceptualisation of prison officers' work increased in South Australia in the early 1980s, which was also a time of high drama and increased industrial action by prison officers (Department for Correctional Services 1981:4). A report of the longest strike in the department's history is set in the Annual Report alongside discussions about problems of a lack of budget for staff development and the cost of arranging staff reliefs for staff development (Department for Correctional Services 1981:16).

In the turbulence of these years (C Division was destroyed by fire in August 1983, a riot occurred at Adelaide Gaol and a 'mass escape' of six men from Yatala in June 1984 (Telfer 2003:264)) a re-emergence of the ascendancy of the *Paramilitary* conceptualisation of prison officers' work can be seen in the emphasis in the reports.

The emergency response squad was reported as a popular role

*The re-introduction of the response squad was well received by the staff. The squad, trained in emergency response situations, was able to put this training into practice during disturbances in the Assembly Hall and at Adelaide Gaol. A good spirit of comradeship exists among the squad. (Department for Correctional Services 1984:24)*

And the popular training was in the control oriented courses.

*A number of new training courses have been introduced this year and the attendance figures are very pleasing. So popular were the courses in Oxi-Viva, Red Cross and breathing apparatus that there has been a long waiting list of staff members for them. (Department for Correctional Services 1984:24.)*

## **Normalisation discourse and Unit Management**

In the search for a credible alternative to this paramilitary role, Scandinavian prisons began to influence correctional managers as providing a model for Australian prisons. Visits were made to Scandinavian prisons by South Australian officials and discussions of the Scandinavian model were widespread (Vinson 1982; Hill 1988).

In the Scandinavian model the prison officer was constructed as a person of initiative and effective caring who is able to combine security and human services roles. The influence of this can be seen in the 1984-85 annual report,

*Many of the newer officers coming into the system bring with them a much more caring attitude to prisoners and confinement and several have shown that their safety and security duties do not conflict with being caring towards prisoners*

...

*There is now strong evidence overseas as well as at Yatala that the prisoner staff relationship is a key ingredient to maintaining a secure environment free of unnecessary tensions. (Department for Correctional Services 1984:38)*

The Scandinavian model of Unit Management utilised a new discourse of dynamic security. The prison officers' role was constructed as one with a high level of engagement with prisoners. Unit Management sought to break down some of the dehumanizing effects of institutionalisation by associating officers and prisoners on a regular basis and creating prison environments in which prisoners were known as people and retained responsibility for as much of their life as was consistent with loss of freedom (Andersen 1988). The discourse of dynamic security sought to subsume a control discourse into a normalisation discourse and emphasise a high level of professionalism, as evidenced in this description of the work of the prison officer

*The successful management of prisoners is often dependent on how skilfully the staff in contact with them can operate. A potential incident can be defused by well-trained personnel. Similarly a minor comment or action can escalate, over a period of time or rapidly, into a disaster with far-reaching effects if staff react aggressively and personally. (Department for Correctional Services 1985:6)*

This model of prison management was constructed through a strong normalisation discourse, which was already influencing prison administration in South Australia. The opening of “The Cottages”, self-contained, self-catering units in which individual male prisoners lived in a bedroom and shared a living and kitchen space with four or five other prisoners, in February 1984 epitomised normalisation principles (Telfer 2003:266). The subsequent development and opening of Mobilong Prison, although providing accommodation in units containing 40 single cells, also reflects the influence of normalisation discourse.

*The prison has been designed and built to operate on the fundamental philosophy that prisons exist as punishment, not for punishment. It therefore provides, within a secure perimeter a campus style institution allowing free prisoner movement which is appropriate for the medium security status of the prisons it will accommodate. (Department for Correctional Services 1987:26)*

However struggles with the notion of security and how control is achieved continued within the Department and were manifest in dilemmas about the conceptualisation of prison officers’ work. The powerful symbols of the historical origins of prison officers' work were used in these struggles, illustrated in the annual report of 1987-88 (Department for Correctional Services 1988). On the one hand the report argues for a conceptualisation of the officer that is very different to the para-military model

*More also needs to be achieved in developing alternative management strategies in prisons. The vision of cooperative, inter-active prison management must be packaged and made attractive to base-grade prison staff, training programs developed staff skilled, and appropriate auditing mechanisms put in place to ensure compliance.*

...

*Many of the most commonly expressed grievances through the year by prisoners contacting the Minister, the Ombudsman, Visiting Inspectors and the Chief Executive Officer were complaints about the attitudes of some staff to prisoners, for example, selective and punitive attitudes by a few correctional officers, failure to act or pass on correct information to prisoners, stereotyping of prisoners and the emphasis by some officers of their aggressive para-military role.*

But elsewhere in the report, the commissioning of a new banner, acknowledged as closely linked to the para-military symbols, is recorded.

*Since its earliest military-based beginnings in the early 1830's the South Australian Department of Correctional services has expanded into a professional service, providing safe, secure and humane custody for prisoners, according to the directions of the courts. And, in common with all other correctional jurisdictions in Australia the department has followed in the British tradition of requiring custodial staff to wear a uniform as a symbol of the authority and responsibility it is given.*

*It was therefore considered appropriate for the department to acquire a banner featuring the departmental crest which, on ceremonial occasions, would emphasise these traditions. (Department for Correctional Services 1988:6)*

## **RCIADIC**

Whilst these internal tensions about the purposes and processes of imprisonment were negotiated and contained, the performance of the Department and in particular the work of the prison officer was also a matter of public scrutiny. The credibility of the justice system was challenged within the community by the articulation of concerns about what happened to Indigenous people within the prison system. A high level of Aboriginal deaths in custody in every State and Territory became the impetus for the establishment in 1987, by State and Federal governments of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Royal Commission (Johnston 1991) and its extensive examination of the deaths of 99 Aboriginal prisoners over the previous decade provided a high profile vehicle for exploration of issues relating to the prisoner population and the management of prisoners. As the death of Kingsley Dixon, in Adelaide Gaol in July 1987, was one of the precipitating

factors for the establishment of this Commission, Commissioner Muirhead selected South Australia for the first hearing of evidence (Telfer 2003:275). This Commission resulted in a higher than usual public profile for prisons and their management for the four years until the final report in 1991.

In reporting its findings, the Royal Commission (Johnston 1991) acknowledged that it had been established in the expectation that prison officers might be found to be abusing Aboriginal people, but that despite thorough investigation, this had not been found to be the case.

*The investigation into the deaths was extremely thorough. No effort was spared to get to the truth. All contemporary documents were subpoenaed and studied. Relevant people were interviewed wherever possible and in the great majority of instances this, was possible. In many cases post-mortem reports were reconsidered by eminent pathologists. Not only the cause of death, but all aspects of custodial care and the orders binding on custodians were critically examined. Hearings were held in public; families of the deceased were represented by legal counsel. All documents were made available to counsel. Reports on the ninety-nine deaths have been delivered to government. At the time of writing almost all have been tabled in parliament and thus made public.*

*The conclusions reached in this report will not accord with the expectations of those who anticipated that findings of foul play would be inevitable and frequent. That is not the conclusion which Commissioners reached. As reported in the individual case reports which have been released, Commissioners did not find that the deaths were the product of deliberate violence or brutality by police or prison officers.*

*But Commissioners did find that, generally, there appeared to be little appreciation of and less dedication to the duty of care owed by custodial authorities and their officers to persons in custody. (Johnston, 1991 Sections 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3)*

The Royal Commission findings demonstrated that the Aboriginal deaths in custody were not the result of some individuals in the system acting out of overt racism and

abuse of power (Johnston 1991: Preface). Rather the Commission found that Aboriginal people died in custody at a rate proportional to their presence in the prison system. However it argued that these deaths were the result of a system that failed to deliver to these very vulnerable Aboriginal people a high level of care whilst they were in custody.

The Royal Commission reasserted a legal discourse and identified the accountability of each individual worker within the prison. The Commission named as a contributory cause of deaths in custody a failure of custodial authorities and individual officers to appreciate their responsibility for custodial care and argued that this needed to be addressed

*I think it also important that, in accepting and recognising their duty of care, custodial authorities should take appropriate steps to properly inform their officers about the existence, and the nature and extent, of that duty. ... It is only fair that those persons having the immediate responsibility for the care of prisoners fully understand what the law requires of them so that they can carry out their duties in a competent and professional way. (Johnston 1991: 3.3.14)*

The Commission and its findings also highlighted a normalisation discourse. The stories of the lives of those who had died in custody, documented in the Report, were not the stories of dangerous criminals, but rather sad stories of individuals taken into the care of the state at young ages, individuals who were caught in cycles of alcohol and drug dependency and individuals whose families were grief stricken at their death. In emphasising the citizenship of those who had died, the Commission emphasised responsibility and skills required of officers who needed to be alert to the potential for suicide and death relating to medical conditions in addition to the more traditional concern with safety from other prisoners.

## Ongoing conflict over conceptualisations of prison officers' work

A specific policy move to the adoption of Unit Management, with its changed conceptualisation of prison officers' work is identified as a high priority in the 1989 Annual Report

*Foremost amongst the issues which have been identified [as key planning issues] is the need to develop and enrich the role of correctional officers. Some early development in this regards has occurred in several interstate and overseas jurisdictions. Within the Special Care Unit and Parklea Prison in New South Wales and in two prisons in Western Australia which are using a model based upon the experiences of the Danish authorities, management is attempting to introduce methods which emphasise the human relations skills needed by staff to relate successfully to prisoners. The major impact which will be felt within the department in the short term will be on training programs provided to correctional officers (Department for Correctional Services 1989:5).*

Despite the enthusiasm with which Unit Management was heralded as a model of prison management, at the point of implementation and change of prison officers' roles it struggled, as acknowledged in the Annual Report of 1992.

*The new prison staffing structures have been developed in line with structural efficiency requirements and are designed to reduce management levels, enhance the role and skills of correctional staff and change the culture within prisons through improved interaction between staff and offenders. Considerable work has been undertaken to implement the structures which have been independently developed by each prison.*

...

*Whilst the major steps have been taken to introduce the new structures in the prisons, the objective of broadening the role of the correctional officer is yet to be fully realised. The cultural change required is dependent on increased training, further delegation of responsibilities and increased understanding of correctional objectives by staff, all of which will take time. (Department for Correctional Services 1992:5)*

The level of conflict over the appropriate conceptualisation of the prison officers' role intensified. Those advocating for the paramilitary and security officer conceptualisations waged a campaign that utilised their powers as workers within the system. The Annual Report, 1992-93 takes the unusual approach of acknowledging this conflict

*It was disappointing that during the year the Occupational health safety and welfare Act was used to challenge that correctional philosophy and current government policy. Under the guise of workplace safety and allegations of increasing incidents of assaults on staff and drug trafficking by prisoner and their visitors, the improvements made in the prison system have been threatened by demands for tighter controls. While drug trafficking within our prisons remains a worrying issue, the department's opposition to these moves is supported by the statistics which show a decreasing trend in the number of assaults on prison staff over the last four years. The Department aims to make further improvements in staff safety by changing the role of the correctional officer to place greater emphasis on positive interaction.*

*Interestingly recent research undertaken in a South Australian prison found that prisoners perceived the current prison environment to be oriented towards order, clarity of rules and control; not one which is supportive and encourages involvement in the prison regime or allows prisoners to express themselves. There is considerable congruence between how officers and prisoners view their shared environment. While this remains the case, communication and interaction between prison staff and prisoners is unlikely to be extensive or meaningful. (Department for Correctional Services 1993:4)*

## **Accelerating impetus for change**

The next decade (1993-2003) saw prisons in South Australia move to a more visible position in public policy and increased attention from outside corrections to articulations of prison purpose and prison process. Increased prison populations, community concern about the impact of imprisonment on Indigenous Australians and governments with an agenda for creating new models of public service delivery each contributed to the impetus for change within prisons.

Prison populations were changing and increasing at a rapid rate throughout Australia. In 1984 84 people per 100,000 of the adult population were imprisoned and by 1993, there were 120 per 100,000. This trend was to continue throughout the following decade although at a somewhat slower rate. In particular Indigenous imprisonment, increasing from 14% of the prison population in 1992 to 21% in 2004 was impacting on prison populations (Australian Institute of Criminology 2005:84, 90).

### **Enterprising leadership**

Political change contributed to the movement of correctional services to the centre stage of South Australian public administration. A change in Government resulted in the appointment of an influential Chief Executive with expertise in human services leadership and public sector management. The Government itself articulated a strong public sector reform agenda and identified correctional services as an appropriate arena for the implementation of its privatisation strategy.

With the arrival of the new Chief Executive, Sue Vardon, the impetus for change in South Australian prisons intensified. Ms Vardon, a former Chief Executive of Community Welfare and Public Service Commissioner, who was named as both South Australia's Businesswoman of the Year and Australian Businesswoman of the Year whilst Chief Executive of the Department for Correctional Services (Telfer 2003:286) brought a high level of expertise in the use of discourse to bring about organisational change. Her first Annual Report introduced a positive and assertive perspective on the change process and the positioning of prison officers. Emphasising authority and responsibility, she acknowledged the interests of those seeking to construct the role of the prison officer using control discourse.

*The principles for unit management in the prison system were finalised and the guide-lines for implementation have been determined. Unit management provides custodial staff with increased authority and responsibilities in the management of prisoners at the local level. (Department for Correctional Services 1994:2)*

But her underlying message was that Unit Management, with its new conceptualisations of prison officers' work needed to be taken up by staff within the prisons (Department for Correctional Services 1994:2). To achieve this, a program of restructuring and reconfiguration of the large prisons was undertaken, resulting (with a reduction in size of Central Office) in employment terminations through redundancy payouts of 133 Targeted Separation Packages. The responsibility for implementation was passed to local work units.

*Because the introduction of unit management is an evolutionary process, involving a change in prison culture and because it is specific to location, these guide-lines will be observed as changes take place at the local level. Such implementation will continue as staff accept and are trained to take responsibility and delegations. It has been accepted that unit management also requires the development and demonstration of appropriate values and attitudes. (Department for Correctional Services 1994:5)*

A component of the change process was an aggressive assertion of professional discourse advocating for the status and centrality of the prison officers' role and investment in staff education. In the next few years this became a central plank in the organisational change process and the Department entered into a partnership with the University of South Australia to enable officers to acquire a relevant professional qualification.

*The Department, recognising that continuous improvement and on-going education are linked, has formed a partnership with the University of South Australia to offer to staff the Diploma in Correctional Administration – a University accredited course which can articulate into a Degree in Social Sciences. Eighty-one students enrolled in 1995-96. (Department for Correctional Services 1996:32)*

This partnership with a University was a highly symbolic act in the construction of prison officers' work. Officers taking up this opportunity, and all new staff were to be encouraged to do so, could achieve a credential comparable to other professionals within the Department – social workers and psychologists being the most numerous.

Associated with this professionalising discourse was the escalation of expectations of prison officers in their work. An emphasis on the case management role of the officer within Unit Management was achieved through increasing use of a rehabilitative discourse. The delivery of programs to offenders was increasingly incorporated into the mainstream operation of the prison and prison officers were being involved in the delivery of programs and train the trainer programs to enhance the availability of these programs throughout the state. Case management and the role of the officer as a *case manager* were central to a 'through care' strategy in which offenders were to be given consistent opportunities to change, whilst in prison and whilst under Departmental supervision on parole.

*Case management is an individualised service delivery process that is planned and coordinated to achieve throughcare. Adopting a case management approach was one of the most fundamental changes recommended by the review into probation and parole service of the Department. In essence case management requires an integrated plan for each offender from reception to termination of contact with the Department. Each offender will be assigned to a caseworker who is responsible for the day-to-day management of an agreed case plan thereby ensuring that the throughcare policies are implemented. (Department for Correctional Services 1996:11-12)*

This aspirational conceptualisation of the prison officer as the deliverer of services to prisoners influenced Departmental discourse at the same time as two other initiatives impacted on understandings of imprisonment processes – the privatisation of a prison and the correctional services competencies.

## Privatisation shaping the discourse

The privatisation agenda of the new government reflected changes in public sector management practise and the new managerialism, both outside and within Australia (Exworthy and Halford 1999:3). As the Minister demonstrated in the second reading speech of the Correctional Services (Private Management Agreements) Amendment Bill (Matthew 1994) managerialist discourse was to construct prison administration in the immediate future.

*Outsourcing and private management of prisons also provides a benchmark against which to measure the delivery of Government services. The Government believes that increased competition through the outsourcing of selected correctional services will direct attention to the real costs of providing services through the public sector (including the costs of capital, legal advice, insurance, transport and administration overheads) and expose subsidies and restrictive work practices.*

...

*The Government also believes that increased involvement of the private sector in provision of Government services will lead to the transfer of technology and ideas between the public and private sectors of the economy and will introduce positive changes in public sector management culture.*

...

*The outsourcing of correctional services is not a new phenomenon. Prison services have been contracted out to the private sector in the Eastern States for a number of years. Currently Queensland has two private prisons, New South Wales has one, and Victoria recently announced the calling of tenders for the financing, design, construction and management of a new private prison. Two other private prisons are also planned in Victoria. Private prisons also operate successfully in the United States and Great Britain. Prisoner services have also been outsourced in Australia. Victoria has recently awarded contracts for the management of prisoner transport, St Augustine's Security Ward, (St Vincent's Hospital), prisoner security at the Melbourne Supreme and County Courts and prisoner court transport services. (Matthew 1994)*

The managerialist discourse the Minister uses, emphasising 'exposing restrictive work practices' and 'changing public sector management culture' echoed the

discourse in other western administrations in which the overall emphasis was on a shift from traditional public sector cultures to an 'enterprise' culture (du Gay 1996a:56). In this South Australian context, the government introduced this new enterprise discourse as it argued for the introduction of a private prison manager that was to improve the quality of prison services through innovative and flexible management strategies (Department for Correctional Services 1995).

The changes to prison process described in the managerialist discourse was intended not just to construct a different form of prison service in the private prison, but also to affect change within the other state administered prisons. The government's discourse was directly aimed at changing the attitudes of both prison managers and prison officers. In announcing the success of Group 4 in tendering for the management of the Mount Gambier prison the Minister said that private management of the prison was contributing to the restructuring of the Department for Correctional Services as a result of

*employees being aware of that need, under this Government to compete with the private sector. (Matthew 1995)*

The introduction of the managerialist discourse of prison process was designed to move the conceptualisation of prison officers' work from a secure, tradition ridden, public servant to a conceptualisation in which responsiveness to government goals and objectives was central to the role. Not only did the government introduce the threat that failure to respond to government policy could result in the abolition of the job through its privatisation, but it issued a challenge that said that private enterprise would both manage prisons in a more cost effective manner, and would delivery better outcomes for prisoners.

## **The Correctional Services Competencies**

Concurrently with these local initiatives to change the way prisons and prison officers' work was constructed, national initiatives in workplace reform were also contributing to the construction of the prison officers' role. The initiative to create national Correctional Service Competency Standards within the Australian Standards Framework involved developing a consensus description of the work competencies required in correctional services. The national competency standards were developed in a broad consultative process involving all Australian state and territory correctional services jurisdictions, with New Zealand Department of Justice, with private companies involved in the correctional industry and with unions (Department for Correctional Services 1997b: 6).

Although the competency standards for the custodial stream developed from this process provided a great deal of detail about the tasks a prison officer must undertake at work, the most important indicator of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work in the correctional services competencies lies not in the minutiae of analysis, but rather in the positioning of correctional services competencies within the then Australian Standards Framework. This Framework was developed to indicate the hierarchical relationship between skill levels for occupations. There were eight levels of the Australian Standards Framework, with the lowest being level 1. Entry level of the professions was at Level 7. The correctional services competency standards were positioned at levels 3, 4, and 5.

This national discourse positioning the work of prison officers relative to other workers, reflects a conceptualisation of the role of the worker shaped by tradition and the interplay of power and interests, as Harris, Guthrie et al argue

The distinctions between professionals, technicians, trades and skilled workers are socially constructed and not by some sort of logical deduction from the natural order of things. (Harris et al. 1995:13)

Although the contribution of the competency process to the development of the Australian workforce and specific industries was itself contested, within corrections this classification of the work of prison officers, predominantly at Levels 3 and 4, created a discourse competitive with the professionalisation discourse in which prison officers are constructed as professional human service workers in their interactions with offenders.

## **The emergence of case management**

The intensity of attention to prisons and prison officers' work from the late 1980s created a highly politicised social context in which the prison officers' work was constructed. The Royal Commission had emphasised the accountability of individual officers for responses to prisoners' needs. The normalisation discourse, positioning the prisoner as a citizen and as a member of the community, that underpinned the RCIADIC findings was picked up by the new Chief Executive with an interest in service delivery and by a Government wanting to see a more responsive public sector. The effect was to magnify the entrepreneurial discourse that was central to the government's managerialist approach to public sector management (du Gay 1996b).

In this context, the emphasis on Unit Management shifted to Case Management which was raised from its place as one element of Unit Management to a service delivery model in its own right. A service delivery model that was constructed both

from the managerialist discourse, with a focus on responding to the needs of 'customers' and a rehabilitative discourse with its emphasis on achieving the community goal of increased safety. As described by the incoming Chief Executive, John Paget,

*We have continued to give effect to our Duty of Care and endeavoured to address the criminogenic needs of a complex and diverse group of people who place a challenging demand on available services and resources. Our commitment to a continuum of Throughcare, from reception and assessment, and along a program pathway from prison to Community Corrections, has seen expression in the successful pilot of Case Management and the commencement of the subsequent "roll-out" into the total correctional system. Case Management will remain a "core" activity in 1997-98. Within the developing Case Management framework, we have continued to place emphasis on the delivery of programs, in particular, the Cognitive Skills program, which are directed specifically at offence-related behaviour. (Department for Correctional Services 1997a: Chief Executive's Report)*

A new conceptualisation of prison officers' work entered the discourse of the Department, with officers being described as case workers,

*The Case Management process has been introduced. It is anticipated that staff will be trained as case workers, with prisoners case files in place by September 1997 (Department for Correctional Services 1997a:23 under the heading Therapeutic Community)*

The implementation of Case Management involved allocating prison officers a prisoner caseload to be managed in consultation with the introduction of the role of the Case Management Coordinator (Department for Correctional Services 1999).

As in previous decades, the re-conceptualisation of prison officers' work was associated with a renewed attention to recruitment and specification of particular qualities required by a prison officer.

*To ensure that those the Department now recruits have the attitudes and potential appropriate to the culture and strategic direction of a modern human services organisation, the Department introduced literacy and numeracy screening and the Australian Institute of Forensic Psychology Test System. The latter also assisted the*

*Department in meeting its obligations under the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. (Department for Correctional Services 1999:3)*

Managerial discourse, with its emphasis on key performance indicators and departmental 'Report Cards' assessing performance, intensified in the years that followed. Core programs to address offending behaviour were introduced into the Department's offerings to prisoners and prison officers were trained to be involved in the delivery of these programs (Department for Correctional Services 2000:35).

Case Management became the predominant service model. The managerialist discourse was shaped by a strong rehabilitative discourse as case management was used to manage the offering of core programs addressing offending behaviour to prisoners. Prison officers, in addition to taking up their role as case officers, were trained to be involved in the delivery of these programs (Department for Correctional Services 2000:35)

The rehabilitative emphasis in the understanding of prison purpose led to the development of specialist units within the wider prison system dedicated to providing opportunities for prisoners to achieve behaviour change. In particular, the Mobile Outback Workcamps, Operation Challenge and the Therapeutic Community all had an intense emphasis on supporting prisoners in new ways of behaving (Department for Correctional Services 2000: 37,46). The conceptualisation of prison officers' work in these units contained a significant element of therapeutic work, as officers chose to work within a program in which rehabilitative goals were predominant.

Rehabilitative discourses shaping the work of prison officers reached their peak in the Annual Reports of the years 2000 and 2001 and then the discourses reverted to a more managerialist focus on the provision of core programs. Discourses of control had not disappeared from the Department's repertoire, but in reporting a continued low number of escapes from prisons (4 in 2002-03), the Department was more concerned by prisoner management issues arising from overcrowding and diversity

*An increase in prisoner numbers, particularly those on remand, coupled with a rising number of prisoners and offenders who present with complex personality disorders and special needs presented particular challenges for staff in both Community Corrections and Custodial Services. It became increasingly evident that longer-term strategies have to be developed and adopted to respond to those challenges in a sustainable manner. This relates particularly to available prison infrastructure and the ability to deliver targeted intervention, appropriate and effective for the changing offender population. (Department for Correctional Services 2003: The Year in Review)*

At the time, 2003, at which the research for this thesis was being conducted, prison officers, in their case officer role were being described as central service deliverers to this diverse and needy prisoner population.

*The Department has an established Case Management process. Under this process, a Case Officer is allocated to each sentenced prisoner to work with him/her to satisfy the program needs identified by the Department and to monitor the prisoner's progress. Whilst individual Case Officers may change as prisoners progress through the different prison regimes, extensive documentation is transferred with each prisoner to ensure continuity of programs through the prison system and, where appropriate, through Community Corrections. (Department for Correctional Services 2003:15)*

## **Conclusion**

Despite the common characterisation of the prison as a 'total institution' (Goffman 1961b) isolated from the community, the environment within which prison officers perform their role is not an isolated unit but rather a physical and social institution that has been shaped both by historic practices and by its past and current governance context. Although the physical barriers that define the prison are intended to keep

both prisoners in and unauthorised persons out, these barriers serve to manage the flows in and out of the prison rather than prevent entry and exit. The Annual Reports of the Department for Correctional Services (and its antecedent organisations) studied in this chapter illustrate that along with this physical flow of people in and out of prisons there is a flow of ideas about every aspect of life, including the appropriate conduct of prison and conceptualisation of prison officers' work.

This study of the discourses utilised in the Departmental Annual Reports to describe the purposes and processes of imprisonment has shown the development of some discourses, the introduction of new discourses and the ongoing tensions in the negotiation of conceptualizations of prison officers' work. The *Para-military* officer of the early twentieth century, whose job performance was assessed on his ability to accurately shoot escaping prisoners, was an influential conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer. The influence of this conceptualisation can be seen through the Annual Reports up until the 1990s. Beyond that date, whilst reference to this conceptualisation of the prison officer has disappeared, the ongoing use of a military style of uniform and the training of staff groups such as the Emergency Response Group, perpetuate its influence.

The movement to a 'man management' conceptualisation of prison officers' work, developed from changing understandings of the purpose of imprisonment expressed through transition from control discourse to a normalization discourse. This conceptualization of prison officers' work was enhanced by the presence of men and women working with prisoners of either gender. In association with the normalisation prison purpose discourses, the professionalism of the prison officer

was re-defined from a military efficiency to a capacity to know and interpret behaviours within the prison.

This normalisation discourse was the original focus for the intensification of the impetus for change that started with the change of government and Chief Executive in 1993. The associated prison process discourses of professionalism were complemented by the entrepreneurial discourses that emphasised the performance of prisons in terms of service delivery and accountability. Although the reforming or rehabilitative discourses of prison purpose can be seen in Departmental discourses from earliest reports, in this period these discourses were enhanced by their usefulness in addressing concerns about community safety. In the managerialist context of public sector management of the decade 1993—2003, this rehabilitative discourse contributed to the development of conceptualisations of prison officers work in departmental language from a *Manager of Prisoners* to a provider of case management.

Departmental discourses, competitive and shaped by the changing political context, are a component of the social context in which the work of the prison officer is constructed. This research has identified the changing uses of prison purpose and prison process discourses to shape conceptualisations of prison officers' work in the official organ of the Department for Correctional Services. In the chapters that follow, the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by personnel working in three South Australian prisons will be examined (Chapters 6 and 7) and in the Chapter Nine the extent to which staff conceptualisations have been influenced by the Departmental discourses identified in this chapter will be explored.

# **Chapter Five: Conceptualisations of prison officers' work in South Australian prisons**

## **Introduction**

Conceptualisations of prison officers' role as expressed in official organisational documents both provide evidence of the goals of the department responsible for implementing correctional administration policy and engage in the construction of the role of the prison officer. However the views of personnel actually performing the work of prison officers and, as colleagues, assisting in the construction of the officers' role are not evident from these publications. These personnel, whilst engaged in and objects of the transformational process within the prison organisation (du Gay 1996a:53), are also agents in their own right within this process and make decisions about their placement in relation to these new discourses (Halford and Leonard 1999:119; Halford 2003:302).

The conceptualisation of prison officers' work by personnel working currently within the three prison sites of this research is explored in this chapter which reports the views of prison officers, supervisors, managers and auxiliary staff as expressed in interviews. The chapter examines their construction of the role of the officer through the use of discourses of prison purpose and prison process. In analysing these views, this chapter looks in particular at the question of the audience for the construction of this role and what interviewees sought to achieve through these constructions.

In reporting the findings from these interviews, the structure of this chapter follows the structure of the interview. It looks first at the broad conceptualisations of the role

of the officer, identifying that the work was seen as complex and unique by these interviewees. The chapter then explores the conceptualisation of the role of the officer in terms of the central elements of custodial and human services work before utilising interviewees responses to 'mixing' the officer to identify more precise conceptualisations of the role of the officer. Interviewees' utilisation of these conceptualisations to construct the role of the officer as being worthy of respect and to reduce the vulnerability of the officer, themes that emerge throughout the findings, is the focus of the final discussion of interviewees' conceptualisations of prison officers' work in this chapter.

This analysis demonstrates that whilst those interviewed for this research construct the role of the officer as complex and unique and requiring a balance of human services and security roles, the appropriate conceptualisation of prison officers' work is contested. Notwithstanding the different views about the conceptualisation of the role it can be seen that interviewees constructed the role in terms that garnered respect for the work of the officer and defined and managed the vulnerability of the officer. In so doing they recognised that, as important audiences for the performance of prison officers' work, prisoners and other officers and staff influence the construction of the role. The factors that influence the diversity of constructions of prison officers' work and the uses for which these conceptualisations of the role are deployed are explored in the chapter that follows.

### **Engaging in exploration**

The interview schedule was designed to give effect to the research stance that the researcher was a reflective partner in the research process, working with experts in their own working lives (Blaikie 2000). The interview questions were open ended,

seeking to engage the interviewees in reflection on the role of the prison officer. The exploration of conceptualisations of the role was approached from a different angle in each of the four phases of the interview. First broad conceptualisations of the role were explored by providing an opportunity for the interviewees to stand outside the role and their engagement with it and describe the role to an outsider, and then there was an opportunity to share their own history of thinking about the role and how this had changed over time. The interview then moved to focus on the two central elements of correctional work –security and human services work before finally exploring the specific conceptualisations identified from the literature.

Opening the substantive interview questions by focussing attention on describing prison officers' work to someone who was thinking about applying to become a prison officer, was a device designed to move the focus of the 'telling' away from the researcher and develop the partnership between interviewee and interviewer that was opened in the introductions and background setting. The device was intended to draw from the interviewee a summary of their conceptualisation of prison officers' work that would emphasise the key elements, as he or she saw them, of the role. There were two questions in the interview schedule that created this opportunity. The first asked the interviewee to describe the work of a prison officer to a potential new recruit. The second asked the interviewee to compare the work of a prison officer to that of another occupation.

The next phase of the interview explored the history of interviewees' conceptualisations of prison officers' work. It invited interviewees to explore the idea that their conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer was a changing and

developing concept. Inviting interviewees to speak about the history of their conceptualising of prison officers' work and how this had changed over time was intended to identify both how the individual views had developed over time and also how the interviewee saw the field of correctional practice and the philosophies that guided this practice developing. There were three questions in the interview that presented this opportunity. Interviewees were asked 'What ideas did *you* have about correctional officers' work when you decided to become an officer?' and 'How have these changed?' Additionally, slightly later in the interview when the human service role is being explored, this role is described as a newer role for the officer and whilst the focus of the question is on the relevance of the human services role, that underpinning introduction of this role drew some further historical reflections from some interviewees.

The third phase of the interview approached the arena of contestation about conceptualisation of prison officers' work by addressing each of the roles of security and human services in separate questions and thus providing interviewees with an opportunity to share their understandings of these roles separately from an attempt to describe the relationship between them. It acknowledged these specialised aspects of prison officers' work and provided space for a detailed comment on how the interviewee saw these roles in current correctional practice. The questions that provided this opportunity linked these roles to the organisational mission of the employer (either the Department for Correctional Services or Group 4) and invited the interviewee to talk about how important an aspect of the prison officers' work it was seen to be.

Finally interviewees were asked to integrate the various elements of their understanding of prison officers' work and select an appropriate description of prison officers' work from the conceptualisations that had been identified – the officer as a *Para-military officer*, a *Public servant/bureaucrat*, a *Manager of prisoners*, a *Warehouser of prisoners*, a *Professional/semi-professional*, a *Therapist*, a *Security officer* and a *Case manager*. The question that was asked was designed to test the relevance of the conceptualisations from the literature for current practitioners and to explore whether the security roles and the human services roles in prison officers' work were seen as incompatible.

To achieve this purpose a practical, but imaginative question was used. In the research process this question was to reconfirm the role of the researcher as a respectable reflective partner, a concrete practical person rather than just a theoretical academic and at the same time to require original thinking – not just the regurgitation of views that might have been expressed many times before and serve a political purpose in the interviewees professional life. The interviewee was asked to 'mix' an officer as one might mix the paint for a house – starting with the most appropriate base and then tinting it to get the exact shade desired.

This chapter reports the themes that emerged from the exploration of conceptualisations of prison officers' work from these four angles. The major themes emerged from the exploration of prison officers' work from several of the angles utilised in the interviews.

## Findings

### **Broad conceptualisation: Prison officers' work as complex and unique**

Two key themes emerged from the first reactions of interviewees to being asked to describe the work of a prison officer to an outsider. There was an emphasis on the complexity of the work and its uniqueness. These characteristics, linked by many interviewees, served to create an aura around the work of the prison officer that positioned those who performed this role as deserving of respect.

The complexity of the work was constructed both through an emphasis on the variation in roles between institutions and also through describing the day to day diversity of tasks within institutions. Constructing the role of the officer as involving great variety in the situations to be dealt with on a day to day basis was common to interviewees from all prisons and many saw this as one of the aspects of the work that required a high level of skill. As described by this interviewee from Mt Gambier

*Be prepared for the unexpected. [Interviewee42]*

And from Pt Augusta

*your days are repetitious, you come in and you do the same thing every day but every day is different. Like you always come and do counts, you unlock, you supervise prisoners, you lock up for lunch, and that's all day to day stuff. But it's different in that the fact that you're dealing with so many different types of people, with prisoners and officers. You've got to be able to work with other people and also on your own at some times, not that often. You've got to be able to communicate. You've got to have a sense of humour and just generally you've got to like people, pretty much. [Interviewee9]*

In this description of the variety involved in the performance of prison officers' work the interviewee also clearly identifies the prisoner and other officers as important

audiences for the work. Most interviewees would agree that the prisoner is both central to the work of the prison officer and the source of the variety in their work, as this interviewee described

*You've got a collection of people that have got a very diverse background, have diverse education standards; communication levels are very poor with some and quite well with others. [Interviewee44]*

The claim for respect for the role of the prison officer based on the complexity of the role is also illustrated in its contrast. Although most interviewees constructed the role of the officer as involving variety and thus a range of skills, this was not a unanimous position. Indeed, one interviewee argued the exact opposite and in expressing this also sought to demean the role

*I'd say basically, I find the work mind numbing. Not the work, but the job at times. Sitting around, it's basically supervision, supervision, supervision... [Interviewee 13]*

It was the unusualness of the work of a prison officer that resulted in many interviewees describing it as unique.

*It's so unique, in the sense that you come home from work and for example, you've had a woman crying for the last six hours because she got sentenced to two months and she thought she was going to walk. Those types of feelings and those type of... seeing these women lead these lives is so difficult and you take that home. I think it's very difficult for partners and children to understand why sometimes you get really quite pessimistic about the view of the justice system... [Interviewee 25]*

The difficulty experienced by this interviewee and many others in describing the role to someone who had not worked in a prison, contributed to its construction as unusual work that can only really be understood by experience.

*It's fairly difficult - to explain to them. I don't find it a difficult job but it's difficult to explain to someone. Until they really get here on the ground you don't know whether they can do it or like it even. [Interviewee 25]*

*Unless you've been into a prison you've really got no concept of what it's like, despite what you see in movies and TV. It's really nothing like that and I would probably just say to them your days are repetitious, you come in and you do the same thing every day but every day is different. [Interviewee 9]*

Compounding this difficulty, but adding to the construction of the role as one with status, some interviewees argued that security requirements of the job were a severe limitation to how much they would talk about their work to an outsider. Several interviewees mentioned the limitations of confidentiality on how much you could explain to a potential new recruit.

The construction of the work of the prison officer as complex and unique was also used to focus attention on the vulnerability of the officer at work. As seen by the interviewee below, this vulnerability related both to the role as a prison officer and as an employee.

*I don't think I could compare it to any other occupation. I'd say it would be better than being an ambulance or a police officer, but it would be worse than a normal working environment because you've got a double jeopardy. You've not just got the risk of the prisoners, and the activities and the way you can get involved in that, but there's also the double jeopardy of it's a dangerous environment to be in physically, mentally and a prisoner's only got to not like you and you could be stood down, purely because, under suspicion of something.*

*And so, to me, that makes it a very different environment to working for BHP Steel, for example, where you wouldn't have that. If your job performance is good, then you could relax and carry on and enjoy it. But here, if your job performance is good, it doesn't mean anything if somebody one day comes along and says, 'Ah, I don't like you and I'm going to make life difficult for you.' [Interviewee 14]*

In particular the unusual risk and danger involved in the work were emphasised by interviewees constructing the officer as vulnerable to physical risks on a daily basis. One officer described a conversation in which he tried to explain to a friend that his job was not an easy one

*I said, 'How would you feel going to work at quarter to eight in the morning, and be prepared to run in on someone who's armed with a homemade knife or a piece of glass, or who's cut his wrists open or something like that?'*

*'Oh that'd be bloody awful,'*

*'Well that's what I did two days ago.'*

Emphasising this construction of the role as being carried out in a context of ever present risk, two interviewees compared the work to being in the army in Vietnam.

Their comments indicated that they were emphasising not the act of combat, but rather the sense of ever present, unseen potential danger that underpinned their work everyday. As one interviewee expressed it

*War zone combat. And that's not the 'bang, bang, shoot, shoot' type thing. It's where you're under the perceived threat all the time. I think if you talk to most Vets. It's not traumatic events, but it's the ongoing thinking that any moment could be my last. Got to keep an eye on my back and all that, being constantly on alert. [Interviewee 8]*

Emphasising the unique danger in the work of the prison officer was used by interviewees to both construct the officer as vulnerable and to make a claim for respect for the courage and commitment of officers undertaking this work.

The uniqueness of the role was emphasised by interviewees arguing that no single job could serve as an adequate comparator for the work. A large number (17) of the interviewees who responded to the invitation to compare the job to another (42) argued that the prison officers' work was so distinctive that they were unable to compare the role to any other single job.

Many of these interviewees made a two pronged claim for respect for the role of the prison officer in discussing how it might be compared to another job. First they constructed the role as unique and then qualified this by a comparison to aspects of another respectable occupation – police, teaching social work. The role was also often compared to parenting. The uniqueness of the role was also argued by the

interviewees who were willing to nominate another occupation as comparable to a prison officer, but then qualified this by suggesting an additional occupation with different characteristics. The paired comparators included fighting in Vietnam and police work, an advocate and a police officer, a security guard and a social worker.

### **The prisoner and the performance of prison officers' work**

At the centre of this complex and unique work interviewees placed the officer-prisoner relationship, and the exercise by the officer of authority, discretion and responsibility. The centrality of the officer-prisoner relationship to the conceptualisation of prison officers' work was illustrated by all interviewees. It was a relationship that was constructed in different ways by interviewees, many of whom found it difficult to find language to appropriately describe the relationship.

Although no-one referred to prisoners in disparaging or derogatory terms in these interviews, the conceptualisation of a prisoner was seldom based on dignified equality.

In exceptional cases interviewees recognised that their performance of the work of the officer needed to take account of the common humanity of officer and prisoner, as exemplified by the following comment

*If you treat them with respect and a bit of dignity which some people look at you and, 'They're just crims.' And true, they are but they're people. [Interviewee 9]*

Other officers identified that their performance of the role reflected not just of a common humanity, but a common background and life experience. This common background was claimed as a source of particular professional expertise by one officer

*I think, in my case, because I come from the northern suburbs, the lower class northern suburbs, and a lot of people I went to school with end up coming into the*

*system and I was brought up with them, I actually understand a bit more about them. I remember years ago prisoners used to always say when I was on, 'I hate it when you're on because you think like us. You're not trying to be above us, or someone that looks down at us.' They'd say 'The problem we have with you is you understand us too much because you think like us.' [Interviewee 4]*

However, most interviewees constructed the officer prisoner relationship in terms that emphasised the power differential between officer and prisoners. Drawing on other social relationships in which one partner in the relationship has authority over and responsibility for the other, many interviewees used a normalisation discourse to construct the officer prisoner relationship. They described the work as babysitting, or teaching (including kindergarten teaching) or officers as like a parent or a role model. A manager summarised

*They're managers of people. They need to be role models for prisoners. They need to have an understanding that the people that they're working with would look up to them and the correctional staff will have life skills and life experience that the prisoners generally don't have." [Interviewee 44]*

Others utilised a rehabilitative discourse to underscore the difference between officer and prisoner by constructing the prisoner as 'needy', describing prisoners as 'unfortunate', recognising that offenders are often victims themselves and identifying the problems that have shaped their lives.

*We're the last straining device for society. Everything that goes through here has got a huge social problem somewhere, whether it's a problem at home, whether they just didn't fit in, whether they were abused, whether they weren't happy at school, sexual abuse: we get them all here. [Interviewee 11]*

In constructing the prisoner in these terms interviewees emphasised the role of the officer to recognise and address the needs of the prisoner.

The importance of positioning the prisoner as someone who could be treated with respect was emphasised by some interviewees, who saw a respectful relationship as the key to performing officers' work, both for philosophical and for practical reasons. Thus the construction of the prisoner by officers was described as crucial to the performance of prison officers' work and lay at the heart of some of the differences about the conceptualisation of prison officers' work.

Practically many interviewees believed that fair treatment of prisoners can be expected to result in proper behaviour in response. To achieve this, a number of interviewees argued that it was important that officers be able to separate the prisoner from the crime and thus be able to establish an ethical, professional relationship with the prisoner.

*everybody here's done different crimes but you can't judge one prisoner against the other. You cannot discriminate against the paedophile and talk to a bank robber, sort of thing. [Interviewee 31]*

However the idea of performing the role through respectful interactions with the prisoner was acknowledged as one of the areas of contestation in the conceptualisation of the role of the officer. Interviewees reported that a proportion of officers conceptualised prisoners in terms that allowed them to behave in disrespectful and arrogant ways toward them, exercising petty power in dealing with them and being unwilling to take small steps to make a prisoners' life run more smoothly.

*He men: they can't be human about it. They pull on the blue shirt, 'I'm the fucking boss, look out.' What they do it belittle themselves in the eyes of these people and these people have got all the time under the sun and they'll square up one day. Now we had an assistant manager in Bluebush here not long ago calling them 'fucking pieces of shit' and they heard it. Now, if anyone called me that I'd floor 'em. And the day's going to come this bloke's going to get his just desserts, but he'll scream and cry*

*'Poor me, what have I done wrong?' They're shot in the head, they really are.*  
[Interviewee 24]

Ethical issues that stemmed from the exercise of authority were raised by several interviewees. The idea that the whole imprisonment project was ethically challenging was expressed by some interviewees.

*I think that chore in itself is actually quite daunting, for people to actually have a fellow human being and you are actually physically locking them in this room which is appalling, absolutely appalling conditions. I think that in itself is a shock to people quite often.* [Interviewee 25]

*Security? I think security is I think, looking at it at a glance, is a moral issue. It's a moral issue.* [Interviewee 28]

The role of the prison officer was thus constructed as involving the performance of authority and responsibility in relation to prisoners. Prisoners were positioned as an audience for the performance of prison officers' work and officers and other staff demonstrated that they were also a critical audience for the performance of prison officers' work.

### **Central elements constituting prison officers' work: Security and human services**

The relationship between the security and human service roles of the officer troubled many interviewees, who sought to conceptualise the work in terms that reconciled the competing demands without overly simplifying either role. They argued that constructing the work of a prison officer in a way that achieved a balance between security and human services work was both essential and challenging

*we actually are asking people at times to take two roles, one as a security officer, and a turnkey at times, to one as a case manager and one that portrays empathy and actually does contribute to making these people better citizens and getting them through that.* [Interviewee 21]

In exploring these issues, different combinations of the Adler and Longhurst (1994) discourses (as discussed in Chapter 2) of prison purpose (Rehabilitation, Normalisation and Control) and prison process (Bureaucratic, Legal, Professional and Managerial) were used to construct the roles and express interviewees' understandings of how they could be reconciled. Central to the understanding of the role as security or human services or a balancing of the two were the concerns of interviewees to establish the respect due to the performance of prison officers' work and to recognise the vulnerability of the officer as a worker and an officer and to minimise that vulnerability.

## **The Security role**

### **Constructing the security role**

The security component of prison officers' work was constructed by interviewees in ways consistent with the control discourses identified by Adler and Longhurst (1994). However, the work was constructed with three different emphases. Whilst in all definitions the purpose of imprisonment was clearly identified as being to control prisoners the emphasis on different prison processes resulted in a focus on either, control for its own sake (control and bureaucratic discourses), control as a means of keeping prisoners within the walls (control and legal discourses) and control as a means of keeping prisoners safe (control and professional discourses).

The focus on control for its own sake positioned security work as the fundamental building block of the prison officers' role. It was the security of the prison and the prisoner which dictated the nature of the relationship between officer and prisoner, that structured the day and that provided the challenge of the role. Combined with a bureaucratic approach, the security role was described with reference to the

importance of adherence to the rules and procedures. This account of security work emphasised the vulnerability of prisoners, staff and community and argued that safety required the prison to be securely under the control of officers. Through sharing stories of times when failures to keep to the rules could have resulted in prisoners escaping from prison or being unsafe within the prison, interviewees claimed respect for this role and the public service it performed.

A competing construction of the security role as mechanistically focussed on keeping prisoners inside the prison walls was used in a number of interviews. Security technology featured strongly in these definitions, directing attention to the formal institutional acts that create a secure prison, such as running the control room,

*And we've got the control room area which is bringing the vehicles and doing all the initial security types areas in itself, and the control room which is more into the lines paper orientation and observation by cameras. [Interviewee 42]*

A legal discourse was often used in the construction of this understanding of the security role. Prisons and those who worked within them were seen to be accountable for delivering the safety that the community expected by ensuring that those sentenced to prison were contained within the prison.

*Certainly security is probably the most important thing that we have to do. Our mandate is to keep prisoners inside prison so the community can feel safe. We do that but it must be said that in the modern day and age your static security systems are pretty reliable. They are pretty foolproof. You have to be trying fairly hard to make a mistake. Having said that, the biggest battle is probably complacency among staff. Your electronic systems will do their job but if you take your eye off the ball they won't do their job, if that makes sense. [Interviewee 27]*

Although this definition of the role was not constructed as requiring a high level of skill, it served to establish performance indicators for the prison and those who work within it that were both measurable and achievable.

The third definition of security work, as ensuring the safety of those within the prison, was a construction utilised by many interviewees. In this construction of the role, the most important audiences for officers' work are those who live and work within the prison – prisoners and officers. In constructing the role with an emphasis on the vulnerability of those within the prison, this definition constructs the successful performance of the role as ensuring the safety of prisoners and staff, as described

*... the security of people's safety inside, not just our safety to the prisoners, but the prisoners' safety to other prisoners. So, it's every single day, it's a major part of the day is what's happening; who's doing what; who's collecting, what sort of an atmosphere have you got in this room? It's every day. Security in that sense, not the escape security but the safety inside of here: behaviour and possible misbehaviours happening. [Interviewee 14]*

Prisoners' safety is at risk not just from other prisoners, but also from their own actions and this security role was constructed to include a focus on the issue of self-harm.

*We're not only making sure that our security, our safety is paramount, but also the prisoner's safety is also paramount. We definitely don't like the idea of a prisoner slashing up or committing suicide because then the question's asked, 'Well, what was done to help him?' and if we just shrug our shoulders there'll be a lot of trouble. As I said, the prisoners' safety is paramount. [Interviewee 30]*

This emphasis on internal order was constructed by combining a professional discourse with the control discourse and many interviewees constructed this security role as involving significant engagement with prisoners. The expression dynamic security was used to describe how security obligations are carried out by engaging prisoners and becoming knowledgeable about them as people and as a small community. The professionalism of the security role was also emphasised by those

interviewees who talked about security awareness being constantly present in the work of officers, often operating at a subliminal level. Respect for the skills required to perform this role were claimed by interviewees who identified the observational component of security as an important intelligence operation.

*I guess I talk about, it's not physical, it's not a physical job it's more a of a mental job about observation of prisoners and the security sorts of things, about how you have to be on your toes all the time about what you think about and what you do and what you say and how you deal with people. [Interviewee 19]*

*a lot of it's intuition as well. You'll sense if something's not quite right or you'll see a lot of movement around the prison. We had an instance a week or two ago where there was a couple of blokes walking around the perimeter, it was about half past six, seven o'clock at night, in the dark. Two that don't normally walk around and before we knew it there was car outside the fence and we were expecting that they would get a drop over the fence, which was foiled because we were on to it and it didn't happen. So that's I guess what you call dynamic security. Everyone was aware that those two don't normally do the laps and it's dark and another officer was looking out and saw the vehicle pull up with the headlights off and then cracking branches and all that sort of thing. So you've got to be switched onto it all the time. [Interviewee 35]*

### **Challenging control discourses**

Despite this acceptance of the centrality of the security role, the value of the control discourse in the construction of the prison officers' role was explicitly challenged by many interviewees who argued, either that the overarching emphasis on control was unnecessary or that it had detrimental effects.

In challenging the use of the control discourse to construct the security role interviewees sought to differentiate prisoner groups as the audience for the performance of the officer's work and highlight alternative ways of performing the role with particular groups of prisoners. Interviewees involved in the women's prison questioned the way security was constructed

*But I don't think the security needs to be as much of a focus as what it is. I think women are different. I think women, when they come to prison, are in a sense relieved*

*... people think that's so odd. But I think when they come into prison it's the first opportunity they can start focussing on themselves, rather than what are their kids doing, what are their husbands doing, what are everyone else doing, are the bills getting paid and this and that, cooking meals and all the washing and I think it's the first time they can just sit down and think about where they've been and where they need to go.*

*So, security is... I mean it's important - we're in a prison - but I don't think it needs to be as much of a focus as what it is, with women in particular. [Interviewee 25]*

Other prisoners were also seen as having special needs that required the officer to perform with a more compassionate creativity than control.

*A lot of the prisoners now have got mental health issues, so you deal with them. You're trying to basically keep the ones who've got serious problems; you're trying to keep them occupied. You're trying to keep them occupied and it might be mundane jobs. 'Do you want to come and clean the bins for the day?' 'Oh yeah!' and they'll go off, and do the best job in the world. They'll work their guts out just to clean half a dozen bins. It keeps them busy. And you try and find mundane jobs like that just to keep them going. [Interviewee 16]*

Working with Indigenous prisoners was also seen to require a performance of the role that was inadequately described by control discourses.

*You're controlling them for the eight hours that you're here and, as I say, you're telling them what to do and you're trying to teach them things, not so much like a school... like a lot of these people you've got to teach them how to clean a cell.*

*Interviewer: So not book learning?*

*No, general life skills. Particularly with the Nunga fellas, the Aboriginal fellas, they live out in the lands and they've never had to clean anything and they don't know how. There's only a handful of us that will do it but we'll actually go and put gloves on and actually clean the cell with them there and say to them, 'This is how you do it.' And once you've done that you don't have a problem. Because they don't know and they won't come and ask because it's an embarrassment, a shame, to come and ask. [Interviewee 9]*

These challenges to the construction of the role from control discourses were based on the argument that control discourses did not create a role that was sufficiently

flexible or responsive to the particular needs of some client groups. Other challenges to the supremacy of the control discourses claimed that a detrimental effect of these discourses was to increase the vulnerability of those who worked within the prison.

One approach to this issue was to argue, using a professional discourse that the interviewee could imagine situations, involving the safety of prisoners or staff, in which obeying the rules may not achieve the highest levels of safety and that the interviewee would rather use professional expertise and judgement which were seen to be superior to the specific rules.

*...because someone has a shiv to an officer's threat and says 'Let me out otherwise I'll slit it,' it's still security. You won't open the gate. Touch wood it never happens to me. We're told not to open the gate but I wouldn't like my mate with a knife at his throat because I probably would open the gate and worry about the consequences later.*  
[Interviewee 28]

Officer vulnerability resulting from the performance of the security role was described with intensity by a number of interviewees. Issues raised included the destructive impact of the work on their relationships with others, the resultant lack of trust that underpinned all their relationships even with colleagues and people outside the prison and the burnout effects of the constant alertness.

### **Successfully performing security work**

Whilst constructing the security role with these different and often competitive emphases, interviewees described measures of success in the security role. Many such measures were explicitly related to a particular definition of security work, for instance keeping prisoners inside the prison, but interviewees also constructed performance indicators for the security role that were inclusive. For many success in the security role was associated with a lack of problems.

*A quiet day's a good day. [Interviewee 31]*

*Most correctional staff have a saying, 'If you come and you go home and no-one gets hurt we've had a good day. After that nothing else matters.' And the next step up is prisoners got hurt but no staff hurt. It can be a war zone in there sometimes.*

*[Interviewee 19]*

Achieving that quiet day was seen as a skilful role about which there were distinct professional differences. Ultimately the audiences for the performance of this role were recognised as those who experience the consequences of the success or failure, prisoners and other officers. Legal discourse was used to emphasise this point by several interviewees who focussed on the accountability of prison officers who owed a duty of care owed to prisoners.

*The important things are ensuring that you're there for prisoners to approach, care and consideration of prisoners, carrying out a duty of care with them and day to day normal activities that are involved with the particular area you're working in and they vary with each area. [Interviewee 39]]*

## **The Human Services role**

### **Constructing the human services role**

Whilst the human services role was important in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work for many interviewees, some constructed the role of the officer with human services work at the centre

*That is your job. That is the job. Getting to know 'em. You can't help someone you don't know. You gotta get to know 'em and you've got to know how they tick. What makes them tick, what makes them fire up. [Interviewee 24]*

*I've probably got a bit of a radical view on case management. I think every officer should basically be involved in every prisoner's case management...*

*Every officer should be saying to the prisoners, 'do this, do that.' You're in here for beating up your missus or doing something like that. It's got to stop sometime. Now do you want to stop it in 2003? Or do you want to stop it in 2008 after you've been in jail for three of those five years?' [Interviewee 11]*

However, as with the security role, there were alternative constructions of the role even for those interviewees for whom this was the central role. The two predominant constructions involved the use of rehabilitative discourses (as illustrated by the second interviewee above) and normalization discourses (as illustrated by the first interviewee above) to construct the human services worker. These alternative constructions, whilst both positioning the prisoner as the central audience for the performance of the role of the prison officer, constructed the prisoner with quite different emphases.

Rehabilitative discourses were used extensively, both in constructing the prisoner and in defining a mission or sense of purpose for the prison officer. Many interviewees expressed their own desire to see the imprisonment experience being one that led to change for the prisoners. In positioning prison officers as having a contribution to make in motivating that change interviewees made a strong claim for the importance of the human services role. These rehabilitative discourses constructed the prisoner as a person needing to change and to be supported in this change. Whilst there were many explanations of the prisoners' circumstances, the combination of drug use and mental health issues were nominated as explanations by many.

*We seem to have a, and I guess it's fairly well know, from what I've seen over the last ten years, I think we deal with more and more prisoners that are.. Well they certainly keep re-offending, but it's drug related type crime. Therefore, eventually they become almost a special needs type of prisoner with the psychotic problems that go with it.*  
[Interviewee 15]

A specific example of human services work constructed by rehabilitation discourse was case management. The majority of interviewees referred to case management when defining the human services role. For many the title *Case manager*, related to a

small group of prisoners for whom prison officers performed important and responsible aspects of their role, as a case officer. This was constructed through professional discourse that emphasized increased responsibility of the officer for meeting the needs of the prisoner

*There has been numerous restructures and stuff to try and get more responsibility to the base grade staff and not so much left to the professional services, social workers and psychs and counsellors and drug counsellors etc, the list goes on. So it has become good case management, the responsibility is back onto the case officer to work with a small group of prisoners, in some issues it's one on one and our guys have one to six each and I think that it is a big part of the officer's role. [Interviewee 7]*

Performing the role of case manager was constructed as responsible work, with the emphasis not just on the relationship between officer and prisoner, but also the role the officer performed as a case officer in the prison system contributing to sentence plans, case reviews and the availability of programs.

An alternative construction of human services work, in terms not synonymous with case management, was to utilise a normalization discourse with a focus on interaction between officers and prisoners.

*Working with the offender: an officer's work with the offender is based around just interacting on a day to day basis, and the operational instructions of Group 4 say something along the lines of 'try to make their every day activities as normal as they would be if you were outside'. [Interviewee 39]*

In these terms the prisoner was often constructed as experiencing not just a loss of liberty but a limitation on their capacity to exercise the normal responsibilities of life. The role of the officer was constructed by some interviewees as minimizing the destructive effects of these limitations

*It's really frustrating for them to call out to a partner and if the partner hangs up the phone and they don't have any money left and I can imagine how frustrating that would be if you've got no money and you can't talk to the person who's hung up or keeps hanging up on you continually. And then they're locked in their cell, unable to do*

*anything about the problems they've got at home and they stew on it, and so we can talk to them. We can't actually give them advice. We're not qualified to [Interviewee 42]*

An important aspect of the officer's performance of the human services role was seen to be engaging with the dramas of prisoners' lives, being available to chat with them about what was happening, and to provide support when necessary. In this context, there were a range of views about what interaction might be considered human services work. One interviewee argued that even the most symbolic of security interactions (such as conducting a body search) could provide the opportunity for positive interaction with a prisoner.

The importance of the human services role in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work can be seen in the comparisons drawn between prison officers' work and other occupations. Of those who were able to nominate a comparable occupation (25 interviewees), 17 nominated a human services occupation and 8 nominated police or other security work.

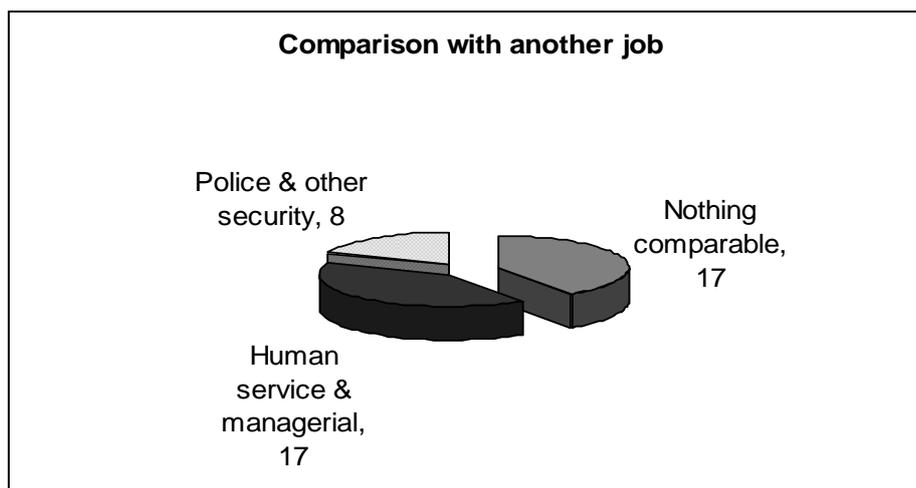


Figure 5.1 Comparison with another job

This comparison of the work of an officer to a human services professional or a manager made a claim for respect for the role based on the similarity between the

client relationships and responsibilities of human service workers and prison officers' relationship to prisoners and responsibility in that relationship. For instance one of the officers who nominated a counsellor as the comparable occupation indicated

*I suppose you could look at, with the case management role, getting more into like a counsellor area because I've had prisoners tells me about their sexual abuse, and they'd sooner talk to me than a female officer. [Interviewee 28]*

### **The challenging discourses**

The rehabilitative discourse that is a strong underpinning element of many constructions of the role of the prison officer as a human services worker was challenged in many interviews. Challenges, designed to undermine the respect being accorded to the human service role focused on the participation of the prisoner as an audience to this performance of prison officers' work, and on the vulnerability of officers in performing this new role.

That the capacity of the officer to perform as a case manager was dependent on the participation of the prisoner in the process was identified as a significant flaw by some interviewees who suggested that there was very limited motivation for this process.

*And when it's time for contact with the prisoner, it's the same old same,  
'How're you travelling?'  
'Fine',  
'Everything going all right?'  
'Yep, fine'. [Interviewee 28]*

The idea that prisoners would change their behaviour as a result of their imprisonment experience was challenged by many interviewees, who argued that the forces that shaped individual behaviour were complex, social and rooted in individual histories.

*And when he gets out, you don't know. Most of them re-offend but that's more in their life, that group of people. You see people that come in to see other prisoners, their families and that; it's like a different world. Even the areas they live tend to be all together. [Interviewee 31]*

The vulnerability of the officer in performing the human services role was argued from two different perspectives. One small group of interviewees, emphasizing the services in human services, constructed the need to provide a range of services to compensate for the prisoners' inability to do things for themselves as demeaning, and possibly lessening the authority of the officer and thus the respect due to the role.

*...we spend a lot of time actually waiting on prisoners. That's how I see it. [Interviewee 27]*

*We are at times, we're everybody's secretary, we feed them and we supervise kitchen duties and, you know, we're cooks, cleaners, post office, we're everything. [Interviewee 6]*

From a different perspective, several interviewees argued that a range of ethical issues that arise from the interactivity of the human services role created a vulnerability for the officer in performing the human services role. They argued that there were dangers in these interactions between officer and prisoners, expressing concern about interpersonal boundaries and the maintenance of appropriate professional relationships. The issues were summarized

*[The human services role is] a major part [of correctional officers' work], sometimes a troublesome part because you're trying to walk a very thin line. By nature, I'm very open and prisoners tell me everything about their life, their background, their hopes, their dreams: everything. So this is where this emotional involvement comes in. And at the same, all the time, you're forever on guard against that becoming too much the other way, where it could be seen to be being taken advantage of, or being put in a compromising position. So you're balancing that all the time. With one hand I'm putting out my hand and saying, "I wish you the best for the future. Try and do this, try and do that. What don't you head in this direction? Why don't you..?" You know? And at the*

*same time, but I don't want you to know who I am, or where I live. So, it's a fine line.*  
[Interviewee 14]

### **Successfully performing the human services role**

Underpinning the construction of the human services role by interviewees was both a strong philosophical commitment from many interviewees to making a difference to prisoners' lives and a concern about the extent to which this could be successfully achieved. The importance of defining these success measures was described by one manager,

*A crucial part of our role is human services. We don't make anything in prisons. We don't make a product, our product is people, our product is interaction and human relationships. It's not as though we make green bottles and at the end of the day we can measure how many green bottles we've made in order to measure our performance.* [Interviewee 44]

Success indicators differed depending upon whether the human services role was constructed from a rehabilitative discourse or a normalization discourse. Those utilising the rehabilitative discourse faced a challenge if they constructed success in the human services role as dependent upon changes in prisoner behaviour as they had identified that behaviour change did not depend just on the activity of officers. Success in performing this role required the officer to motivate the prisoner to engage in change and even then was only one intervention in a complex arena. In this context the human services role was constructed as requiring significant resources. The difficulty of performing the human services role in a context in which resources were limited was raised by several interviewees who were committed to conceptualising the prison officers' role in human services terms.

*I consider myself a very soft, lenient easy going sort of officer. I'm tarnished by the fact that the barriers that are presented before a correctional officer or someone in corrections, and it's not just a correctional officer, it's all professions within, and obstacles inhibit the performance in the rehab side of it. It's all very well having*

*strategic plans and the 20/20 vision plans and all the rest of these things, and they say lots of wonderful things but when it comes down to brass tacks, generally we're understaffed, not so much in the blue shirts as most people say, but in the professional areas. We're definitely understaffed in social workers and we're definitely understaffed in obviously psychiatrists because we don't have one, and even the medicos.*

*[Interviewee 8]*

The incompatibility of the human services and security roles was identified as a barrier to success in the human services role by some interviewees. At the heart of the construction of the security and human service roles as incompatible lies a conceptualisation of the prisoner as the audience for the work of the prison officer. Those who constructed the roles as incompatible argued that the prisoner would be fundamentally confused by an officer performing both these roles

*I think the dual role is really, really difficult, how to be the tough security type person and then to be the friend and the companion and to assist these women at 2 o'clock in the morning when they can't sleep. I think that's really, really difficult. I think people forget that. [Interviewee 25]*

Others constructed the human services and security roles as requiring very different skills sets in those who performed them and argued that an individual officer may not be a strong performer in both skill areas

*Some people are more one side than the other. Some people are really security focussed and lose sight of the fact that they are also dealing with living, feeling people. Other people are living feeling people focussed and forget that, 'Shit, we've got rules for a reason. We don't bring mobile phones through the gate for a reason. We don't come to work with \$500 in our pocket for a reason.' So the best officers are the people that can get a grip on both of those things and mesh them together and work effectively, without losing sight of the importance of either of them. [Interviewee 37]*

The construction of the human services role using a normalization discourse gave rise to different success measurement issues. Some interviewees utilised a construction of the prisoner as a consumer of services, with entitlements including an entitlement to be satisfied that their needs were being met

*Obviously they [security and human services] overlap, for sure, because if they're happy, or as reasonably happy as they can be, being in here, there's less chance of them doing something wrong, that they shouldn't do basically. Because a lot of them get frustrated very easily and if they think they've had a win they're happy and it keeps them quiet which is what we're here to do. [Interviewee 40]*

Interviewees utilising this construction of the role argued that the human services and security roles were complementary. For these interviewees the prisoner was the audience for both roles, often performed in the same interaction

*As an officer their daily activities revolve around full on interaction with prisoners, meeting their needs, answering their questions, carrying out documentation required by the company, searching, ensuring security is adhered to..." [Interviewee 39]*

*I would say that the primary focus for all officers would be security but I think what we've done out here is try to focus on the issue of dynamic security. So, that really involves interaction with the prisoners and that may mean sitting down and talking to prisoners and that's how they learn most of their information by hearing things, by listening to what other prisoners have to say, so that in itself is, I suppose, it's a dual role in many respects. So, they're performing the function of a security officer but they're also performing the function of a case officer. [Interviewee 1]*

The conceptualisation of prison officers' work as involving a human services role was accepted by most interviewees and very important to some. However measuring success in this role was an unresolved issue that diminished the respect for the role and potentially made officers vulnerable in performing the role.

### **More precise conceptualisations: 'Mixing' the officer**

These discussions of the human services and the security roles illustrate the factors that led interviewees to conceptualise the role of the prison officer as unique and complex. They also highlight the competitive interplay of discourses through which the role of the prison officer is constructed. The influence of the often competing interests of the audiences for prison officers' work can be seen in the discussion of both security and human services roles.

Moving from the two central conceptualisations of prison officers' work to the more specific conceptualisations in the 'mixing' the officer questions provided the opportunity for interviewees to describe more precisely how they resolved these competing tensions in their conceptualisation of prison officers' work in their working lives. The question asked interviewees to work with eight identified conceptualisations to 'mix up' an officer, first as they saw the role in their institution and then as they would like to see it.

Question:

"I have been thinking that understanding prison officers' work might be like understanding how to get the paint colour you want for your house. First you have to get the right base colour. Then you tint it or shade it with a variety of other colours. Would you have a go at 'mixing up' a prison officer? – first based on what you think your work is now and then we could do it again for what you would like it to be?"

So to mix up a correctional officer as you see the work now, select your base from (spread out cards bearing the names of conceptualisations)

*Para-military officer, Public servant/bureaucrat, Manager of Prisoners, Warehouse of prisoners, Professional/semi-professional, Therapist, Security Officer, Case Manager.*

Now you can tint it with four more components.

(spread out packets of cards bearing the names of conceptualisations – four of each conceptualisation clipped together)

You can choose all the same if you want, and they could all be the same as your base."

## **Definitions and relevance**

The ‘mixing’ an officer questions tested the relevance of the eight conceptualisations, the officer as a *Para-military officer*, a *Public servant/bureaucrat*, a *Manager of prisoners*, a *Warehouser of prisoners*, a *Professional/semi-professional*, a *Therapist*, a *Security officer* and a *Case Manager* to practitioners in South Australian prisons. In providing interviewees with an opportunity to choose a base for the conceptualisation of prison officers' work and then “tint” it with four tints, the question created the possibility that particular conceptualisations would be ignored or that their meaning would be questioned.

As the forty-four interviewees in three prisons ‘mixed’ their prison officer each of the eight conceptualisations was selected by some interviewees and all but one of these conceptualisations was selected as the base for the conceptualisation of the prison officers’ role by at least one interviewee. This broad utilisation of the conceptualisations can be seen to confirm their relevance to current practitioners. Interviewees spent very little time pondering the definitions of these conceptualisations, and their comments suggested that they were confident in their definition of each conceptualisation.

Choosing a conceptualisation of prison officers' work involved interviewees in expressing a precise position in the ongoing dialogues about the purposes and processes of imprisonment and the work of the prison officer. For many interviewees choosing a base for ‘mixing up’ a prison officer was both an affirmation of that conceptualisation of prison officers' work and a denial or negation of an alternative conceptualisation. In the analysis that follows the patterns of conceptualisations

chosen by interviewees when invited to describe the role as currently performed within their prison are considered first as an affirmation of a conceptualisation and then as a more complex expression of a position within the ongoing debates about the work of prison officers. The more complex use of the conceptualisations is elucidated by considering the pattern of responses to the invitation to ‘mix up’ a prison officer as the interviewee would prefer to see it.

### Conceptualising the role as currently performed

The *Manager of prisoners* was the most frequently used base for conceptualising prison officers' work as it is undertaken in their own prisons at the time of the interview. Half of those interviewed (22/44) selected this base. This far exceeded the other popular selections of *Warehouser of prisoners* and *Security officer* (each selected by 7 interviewees). Only the *Therapist* was not selected by any interviewee as their base.

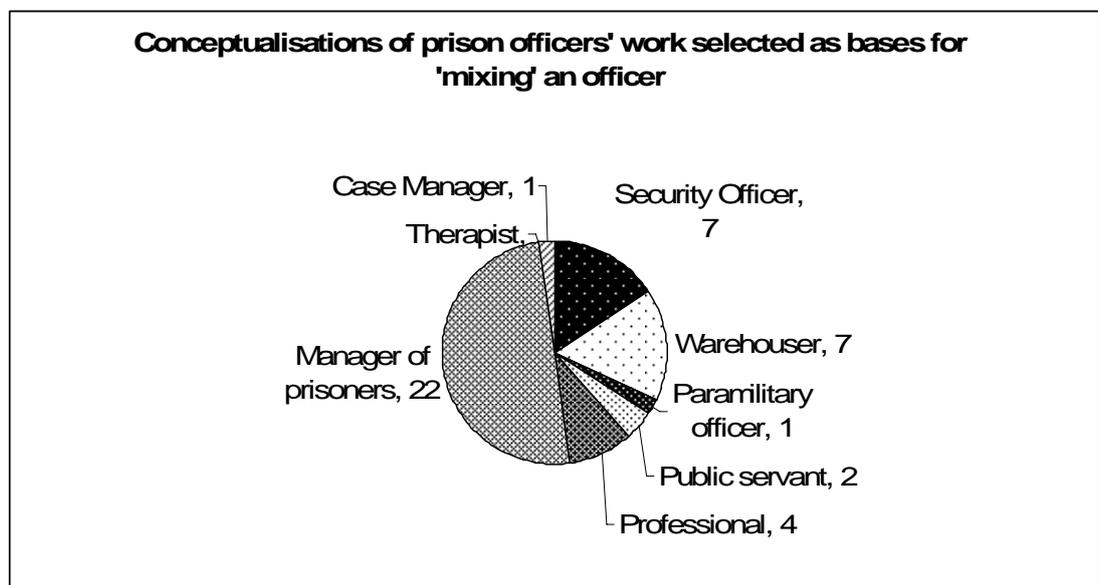


Figure 5.2 Conceptualisations of prison officers' work selected as basis for 'mixing' an officer.

This spread of selections of bases in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work supports the claim by interviewees that the role of the prison officer was one of great

diversity. It also illustrates the degree of difference that exists within prisons about precisely how the work is to be conceptualised. Although the selections show that each of the three prison purpose discourses and each of the four prison process discourses were used to describe the base of the prison officer role there was a clustering of choices that reflected agreements about the most useful constructions of the role. Only one interviewee chose to base the role of the officer on a rehabilitative discourse (as *Case Manager*), whilst 28 interviewees constructed the role using normalisation discourse (as *Public Servant*, *Professional-semi-professional* and *Manager of Prisoners*) and 15 using control discourse (as *Security Officer*, *Warehouser* and *Paramilitary officer*).

### **Exploring the complexity of prison officers' work**

The concept of mixing paint, used as the basis for questions in this interview, was designed to explore the dichotomous construction of prison officers' work and avoid focussing on a single conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer that might force an artificial choice on interviewees and thus result in a distorted representation of their views. The question provided a structure for the exploration of the balance of roles that may more completely describe prison officers' work. Before returning to an exploration of the choices made for the base of the conceptualisation, the discussion that follows explores the construction of the role of the prison officer through the patterns created when interviewees selected both a base conceptualisation and tints.

### ***Rejecting complexity***

The simplest construction of the role of the officer, using only a base conceptualisation, was chosen by only one interviewee who argued that mixing roles was not desirable and that the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation provided the

closest description of the role. This interviewee, one of a group who believed that the officer became vulnerable to failure if they tried to achieve a broad range of goals in their work, when provided with the opportunity to describe how the prison officers' role should be constructed, argued for a division between *Security Officer* and *Case Manager* with different people filling each of these roles.

### **Dominant conceptualisations**

Although each of the conceptualisations was selected by some interviewees, the conceptualisations of *Security Officer*, *Manager of prisoners* and *Case manager* dominated the choices of interviewees in 'mixing up' the officer. Whereas the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisations was the clear favourite as the base for conceptualising the role of the officer, when the tints were added to the mix, the *Security Officer* was used 40 times, the *Manager of prisoners* 39 times and the *Case Manager* 37 times. The conceptualisation of the prison officer as a *Professional/semi-professional* was also utilised frequently (31 selections). Less common selections were the *Therapist* and *Warehouser* (each selected 14 times), the *Public servant/bureaucrat* (13 selections) and the *Para-military officer* (only 7 selections).

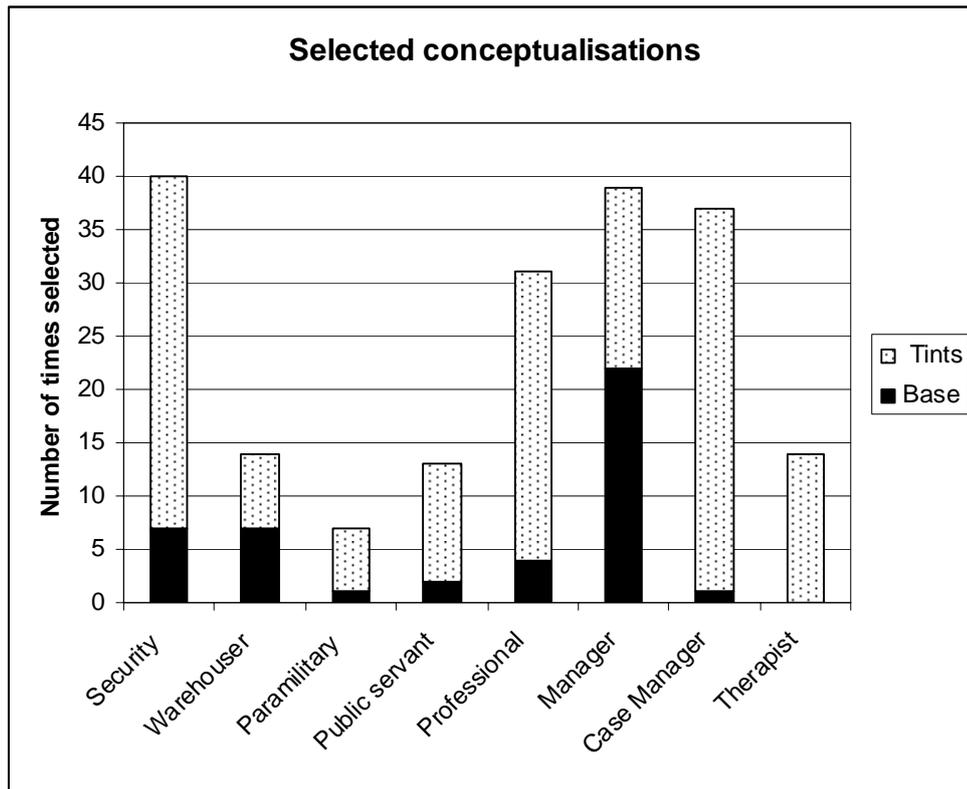


Figure 5.3 Selected conceptualisations

### ***'Mixing' patterns***

Faced with the opportunity to select one base and up to four tints, the forty-four prison staff interviewed each chose to 'mix up' their own particular conceptualisation of a prison officer. Forty-one distinct combinations of base and tints were selected by interviewees if the order of selection of tints is treated as being significant. Three sets of two interviewees chose exactly the same tints in the same order<sup>8</sup>.

The framing of the interview question did not suggest to interviewees that the order of selection of the tints was significant. In the metaphor used, what order paint tints

<sup>8</sup> The repeated combinations were

Manager of prisoners, Case Manager, Security Officer, Professional-semi-professional

As above with the addition of Public Servant

Manager of prisoners, Professional-semi-professional, Case Manager, Security Officer

are added to a base does not affect the final colour when the paint is fully mixed. So, in the analysis that follows the order in which the tints were selected has been ignored. Without distinguishing tint order, interviewees still chose thirty-five distinct combinations of base and tints.

Some patterns emerge from these combinations. Those who selected *Manager of prisoners* as a base predominantly (16 out of 22 interviewees) chose *Case manager* and *Security officer* as two of their tints. Thirteen of the interviewees who chose the *Manager of prisoners* as their base chose the three tints of *Case manager*, *Security officer* and *Professional/semi-professional* in some order as their tints. *Professional/semi-professional* and *Security officer* were chosen by three interviewees without including *Case manager*.

All the interviewees who chose the *Security Officer* as their base tinted it at some point with the *Case manager*. Five of these interviewees also chose *Professional/semi-professional* as a tint. Of the seven interviewees who chose *Warehouse of prisoners* as a base, six selected both a *Security officer* and a *Manager of prisoners* as tints.

<b>Summary of most frequent patterns in the ‘mixing’ of the prison officer</b>		
<b>Base</b>	<b>Tints</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Manager of prisoners	Case manager- Security officer	16/22
Manager of prisoners	Case manager- Security officer - Professional/semi-professional	13/22
Security officer	Case manager	7 (all)
Security officer	Case manager- Professional/semi- professional	5/7
Warehouser of prisoners	Security officer - Manager of prisoners	6/7

Table 5.1 Summary of the most frequent patterns in the ‘mixing’ of the prison officer

Whilst interviewees displayed great individuality in their precise selection of conceptualisations, drawing on the analysis of the discourses constructing these conceptualisations from Chapter 3 shows that the majority of interviewees (36/44) constructed the role of the officer utilising conceptualisations that reflected all of the prison purpose discourses of control, normalisation and rehabilitation. At the same time, interviewees used a range of prison process discourses, with 22 of the 44 interviewees selecting conceptualisations of the role that drew on all four prison process discourses.

These responses to ‘mixing’ an officer demonstrate that whilst there is a common view as to the palette from which the officer is to be painted, there are sharply defined differences about the precise ‘mixing’ of the prison officer. The common palette can be seen in the choice by interviewees to use of all discourses in ‘mixing’

up a prison officer. The sharply defined differences are seen between those who conceptualise the base for the role of the officer as a *Manager of prisoners* and those who conceptualise it using control discourses as either a *Warehouser* or a *Security officer*. These conceptualisations reflect strongly held and competitive positions by these interviewees about the purpose of imprisonment and the processes through which imprisonment should be managed.

The selection of the base for the conceptualisation of prison officers' work marked the position an interviewee was adopting in the intense debates about the role of the prison officer. Although these debates were often conducted using the rehabilitation and control discourses, it was the *Manager of prisoners*, constructed from normalisation discourse, that was selected by half the interviewees.

### ***The popularity of the Manager of prisoners***

The role of a manager is multifaceted, involving attention to audiences 'within the unit' and 'outside the unit' (Mintzberg 1994) and, under regimes of managerialism, the manager is a central and respected figure within an organisation. Constructing the role of the officer as a manager served to claim respect for working with prisoners and assisted in managing the challenges facing officers within the prison.

Constructing the role of the officer as a manager enabled the interviewee to claim respect for the range of tasks carried out by the officer and to give coherence to the diversity of tasks undertaken. Performing as a prison officer involved engaging with the organisational hierarchy, prisoners and fellow officers. It involved interpreting the system to individual prisoners as illustrated by this officer describing how he responded to a prisoners' anxiety

*He was told if he had a [dirty] urinalysis he'd be going up to Port Augusta. Somebody had told him that about two years before he got here, and if he had a urinalysis he was almost ready to go on suicide watch. So I had to talk with him for a fair whack of time to say 'Look mate, don't be stupid over it. This is what goes on'...and just explain it to him. [Interviewee 42]*

In other contexts this included informing prisoners about developments within the prison including that they are moving within or from the prison, reporting infractions of rules or issuing penalties for infractions.

The managerial style of interpersonal engagement with prisoners was emphasised by interviewees. One officer described how this shaped the way he did his work

*these days there's a respect required on both sides, and so you can't get that respect by pointing your finger in somebody's face and saying, 'You do this because I told you to do this.' Whereas I will say, 'You do that because that's what the rules expect you to do.' That's the difference. [Interviewee 14]*

And another officer described

*...we're trying to give them responsibility so it's sort of that [manager of prisoners]... as well as like a security officer. But we're really not primarily just, sort, of basic all-in security, making sure that they're always locked away, because we need to have a flexibility, you know, take them out for recreation but also making sure that we have 12 prisoners and that there's always 12 prisoners. [Interviewee 26]*

Leadership was an attribute of the manager that was explicitly and implicitly acknowledged by several interviewees, as exemplified by this senior officer.

*It's very much a leadership thing but there's also... I mean you can be a leader within a Country Fire Service brigade or in the local CWA but that leadership is slightly different here in that you also need to be caring and compassionate, because there's a speech that we give to the new officers - 'you can be a friend, you be a mother, you can be a father, you can be a brother, you can be a sister, you can be a social worker, a psychologist: we're all those things. [Interviewee 19]*

One aspect of leadership in the managerial role was the anticipation and management of problems

*You manage the prisoners and it's how you manage them is what counts. And if you can manage them with the case management type support, encouragement,*

*whatever it may take, or just talking commonsense to them and bringing them down from an anger level, by just talking to them, like you would, like I do to my own children, you talk them down to where they start listening to what you're saying, thinking a little bit rationally,[so] they don't go off and job somebody - officer or prisoner, and they then start to work through it. [Interviewee 24]*

Within prisons, the officer was identified as having numerous opportunities for programmatic and interpersonal initiatives. In particular 'entrepreneurial' possibilities were seen within outreach camps, prison industries and pre-release and education programs.

Conceptualising the officer as a *Manager of prisoners* can be seen to negotiate some of the tensions between control and normalisation discourse. The role of a manager can be seen to use a social control discourse in which the authority and respect for the manager is recognised along with the accountability of those managed. At the same time the essential humanity of the process means that skill as a manager is essentially determined by ability to communicate interpersonally.

The *Manager of prisoners* role was popular with interviewees because it conceptualised the role of the officer in terms that made sense of the diversity of tasks, claimed respect for the work of the officer and normalised the relationship between prisoner and officer whilst constructing the relationship in terms that recognised the authority of the officer. A level of satisfaction with this construction of the role was indicated by that fact that when interviewees were provided with the opportunity to 'mix up' an officer as they would like the role to be, only four of the twenty-two interviewees who had chosen *Manager of prisoners* as the base for their conceptualisation of prison officers work chose to make significant changes.

## **Preferred conceptualisations of prison officers' work**

The opportunity to describe how they would like to see prison officers' work conceptualised was created at the end of the interview to allow interviewees to express their vision for prisons and the role of the prison officer. The responses given to this opportunity to 'mix up' a prison officer as they would like to see it provides a useful insight both into the aspirations of interviewees in terms of the construction of the prison officers' role and also into the significance of the position that they adopted when describing their conceptualisation of prison officers' work as it is currently performed within the prison.

Although many interviewees adopted a critical stance to the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within their prison, only 23 interviewees chose to explore an alternative desirable construction of the role<sup>9</sup>. Seventeen of the interviewees expressed the view that the work of the prison officer as it is in their institutions was about right. Of these interviewees, three argued that their preference would be to see some aspect of the prison officers' work improved, but expressed the view that the overall balancing of roles was appropriate.

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<sup>9</sup> A small group of interviewees (4) either felt that they were not in a position to comment on preferable arrangements within prisons or did not answer.

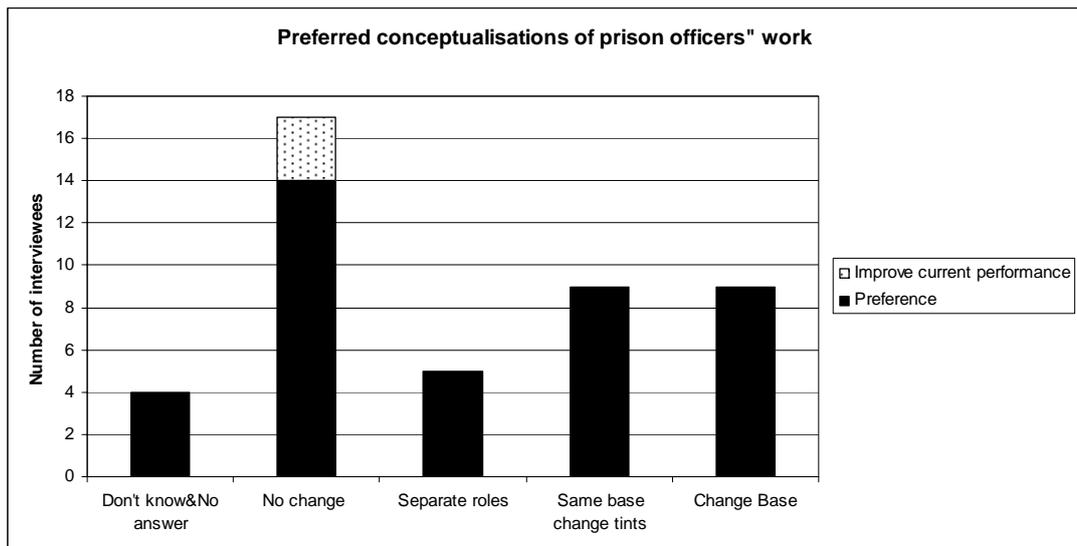


Figure 5.4 Preferred conceptualisations of prison officers' work

Constructing the role of the officer as being satisfactorily conceptualised within their prison was characteristic of those interviewees who had selected the *Manager of prisoners* as the base for their conceptualisation of the role. Of the seventeen interviewees who did not look for any change in the role within their institution, twelve had selected the *Manager of prisoners* as the base for their conceptualisation of prison officers' work. Another five of the interviewees who had chosen the *Manager of prisoners* as their base just altered the tinting of their 'mix up' officer, in most cases increasing the emphasis on rehabilitation in the tints.

This satisfaction with the way that the role of the officer was conceptualised distinguished those who had chosen the *Manager of prisoners* as the base of their conceptualisation from other interviewees. The starkest contrast is with those interviewees who had chosen the *Warehouser* as the base for their conceptualisation of prison officers' work. Of these seven interviewees, five argued that they would prefer to see the role of the officer conceptualised using an alternative base. No interviewee actively chose the *Warehouser* as their preferred conceptualisation of

prison officers' work and of those who had selected it as a description of the current base for conceptualising the role only one saw it as the way that the officer's role needed to be conceptualised (one had no opinion on the preferable conceptualisation of the role).

This rejection of the *Warehouser* conceptualisation as an ideal is described by an interviewee in the following terms

*I don't think a Warehouser of prisoners is a very good term because of the fact that a warehouse is just something where you stockpile people, in other words you've placed them into a box and forget about them until it's time for them to be drawn out of the box... [Interviewee 42]*

The construction of the role as a *Warehouser* can be seen to be an expression of disillusion and frustration in interviewees' perception of the lack of effectiveness in the work of prison officers.

*I actually started counting, when I first started here, how long it took before I saw a prisoner return. So somebody that had been in prison, had left, and returned again. I met them when I came, they left and they were back in three months and I had seen seven return within the next three month period. So I gave up, after that. That's it. In fact the first one that returned had returned for the third time. [Interviewee 27]*

So, discussing a preferred conceptualisation of the prison officers' role served to highlight the interviewees' adopted position in the debates about prison purpose and prison process. Those who utilised the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation were, on the whole, satisfied with a role constructed from a normalisation prison purpose and enterprise and professional prison process discourses. Whereas those who had selected the *Warehouser* and also, but not as starkly, the *Security officer* conceptualisation can be seen from their 'mixing up' of their preferred

conceptualisation to be less satisfied with how the role is constructed in their prison at the current time.

This dissatisfaction with current roles was most clearly expressed by those interviewees (5) who rejected the opportunity to use the paint mixing simile again, and argued for a complete restructuring of how prison officers' work was conceptualised – with a division being created between *Security officers* and *Case managers*. Each of the interviewees who advanced this proposition had a slightly different idea about how such a division would work, and in particular about whether the *Security officer* would actually have any contact with prisoners, with some seeing *Security officers* being responsible for the static security within the prison and others seeing them engaged in all security activity including the regular searches of prisoners and their cells. However, the premise on which the proposal was based was a common belief in the difficulty of undertaking both roles effectively, as described

*You're talking about the duality of roles. I think in an ideal world, if we were resourced well enough to do it, I would have case managers, case officers and I would have security staff. I would actually separate it, because I think it's hard to ask people to do both. And I think we do get some people who can do both but...*

*Obviously if you're working with a person as the case officer and you're trying to support them and link in with the families or whatever you're trying to do, but an hour later you've got to go and chastise or lock them up, report the person for whatever behaviour and actually take some punitive action against them, I think it just makes it very hard for people to switch on.*

*... You talk about maturity: prisoners aren't, at times, intellectually mature enough. A lot of prisoners are basically adolescent with their behaviour because of their poor cognitive upbringing; I don't think they can cope with that. 'You just told me off and now you want to help me?' So I think that is the real challenge in that. So I think there is a role, especially within high security, to have specialised people to do the cell searches. [Interviewee 21]*

Just as those who wanted to separate the roles preferred to see the role of the officer with greater definition of purpose, other interviewees expressed a preference for greater definition in the conceptualisation of the roles of the officer, although their preferences varied in both in the nature and magnitude of the change that they would prefer. Some (9) preferred an officer 'mixed' with the same base, but different tints, others (a further 9) would prefer a conceptualisation of the prison officers' role based on a different base role.

Whilst the magnitude of the preferred change differed between these two groups, there were patterns in common. The preferred roles reflected decreased use of normalisation discourse and polarised between the use of rehabilitative and control discourses. Some (6/18) interviewees constructed their preferred prison officer with a more distinct rehabilitative discourse, with increased selection of the *Therapist* and *Case manager*, as a base and the greater prominence of these conceptualisations in the tinting of other bases. Others preferred a role constructed with increased attention to the control discourses, seen in the selection of the *Security officer* as a preferred base conceptualisation. In common would seem to be a desire to enhance the status of the role of the prison officer by providing a more distinctive sense of purpose.

## **Discussion**

Staff working in prisons participates in the construction of the work of the prison officer. They construct the officers' role to make sense of relationships and with a view to the effect on prisoners, colleagues and the management and departmental hierarchy. Conceptualisations of prison officers' work adopt a position in the ongoing competitive dialogues (verbal or symbolic) about the conduct of the prison that is part of the context of the work of the officer.

In conceptualising prison officers' work, interviewees were concerned to achieve two broad objectives. These objectives – the garnering of respect for work within prisons and the managing of the vulnerability of those working with prisoners – were advanced through their discussion of the role of the officer and the measures of success for officers' work.

### **Garnering respect for working with prisoners**

The lack of respect and recognition of the role of the prison officer was discussed explicitly by many interviewees in terms of the recruitment of prison officers and explaining the role to people in their lives, but this was not the only audience from who respect was sought. Staff within prisons conceptualised the role of the officer in ways also designed to elicit respect in the eyes of three other audiences for their work, prisoners, fellow workers and the departmental hierarchy. Specifically they sought respect for three aspects of prison officers' work- working in prisons with prisoners, working in particular ways with prisoners and working with individual prisoners.

#### **a) Respect for working in prisons with prisoners.**

Interviewees demonstrated a central concern that working with prisoners be respected as being complex and unique. The construction of the prisoner group as consisting of diverse individuals with a range of needs supported the construction of working with them as requiring high level of skill. The respect to be accorded working with prisoners was justified using professional and managerialist discourses of prison process. It was enhanced by a comparison to the work of others

professionals who worked with this client group, in particular police and social workers.

This claim for respect due to those who worked within prisons was directed to an audience outside the prison, to senior managers as well as to their broader community, and challenged a perception that the role was constructed as unskilful because it just involved the physical control of the prison and not worthy of respect because it involved working with “unworthy” prisoners.

b) Respect for specific ways of working with prisoners,

In the competitive dialogue about appropriate prison process which constructs the prison as a work context, debate about the preferable performance of prison officers' work is central. The most active participants in this dialogue are prison officers and others working closely with prisoners, their managers, case officers and auxiliary staff. In this dialogue, constructing the prison officers' role involved not just the use of prison process discourse, but a coherent position about prison purpose.

Interviewees demonstrated a strong desire to have their conceptualisation of prison officers' work, with the associated construction of prisoner and officer, respected and although people found ways of working with others who had different conceptualisations of the role, they were critical of those conceptualisations and often those who held them. The importance of winning respect for your understanding of appropriate ways of working with prisoners can be related to the need discussed below to manage vulnerability as a worker and officer.

c) Respect for particular officers in their dealings with individual prisoners

The prisoner is an important audience for the performance of those working within prisons. In discussing their conceptualisation of prison officers' work interviewees explained their observations of what impressed prisoners and established a relationship that contributed to the achievement of a peaceful day. Divergent accounts of the prisoner, constructed as person whom it took great skill to manage or a person of lesser status than the officer or as a needy individual were central to claims for respect based on an individual's skill in working with prisoners.

Accounts of what worked well, examples of skilful interventions or rehabilitative relationships and sometimes stories about the performance of others that did not work well, served a purpose beyond that of claiming respect for a particular way of working. These accounts claimed respect for that individual as a skilled worker and certainly addressed the sense of the officer's vulnerability within the work place.

### **Managing vulnerabilities**

In the discursive construction of officers' work, vulnerability and its antidote, a particular conceptualisation of the role of the officer, are twinned concepts. In conceptualising the work of the prison officer, interviewees sought to construct a role that protected the officer from perceived (and contested) vulnerabilities. Officers were seen to be vulnerable not just in their roles as prison officers but also in their roles as workers in an organisation. Managing these vulnerabilities can be seen to have been a powerful and connecting motivation in the construction of prison officers' work.

a) Protecting the vulnerable worker

That interviewees considered the identity of the officer as a worker a relevant and important category was evident from the discussions of why interviewees who had worked as prison officers had chosen that career. Rather than focus on the nature of the prison and the work conducted within it, interviewees discussed more general characteristics of employment. Interviewees reported that they were attracted to the role because of the job security and pay it offered and, for those employed in Departmental prisons, the career opportunities provided by access to other public service positions. As this interviewee reported

*When I started off my only idea of this place was that I talked to a few people that worked out here and they said it was a safe, economic job, as long as you do your job you'll never get sacked. And I was only looking for job security because I'm local, wife and two kids. [Interviewee 11]*

As a worker, the prison officer was seen to need respect for their work and security that came from performing their role satisfactorily. The prison officer was seen as vulnerable to performance critique (and indeed to a large extent officers were seen to have common cause with other workers within the prison). The conceptualisation of the role of the officer as custodial or human services creates different accountabilities and different success indicators.

The construction of the custodial role as one that provided essential key performance indicators – keep them in, keep them safe and keep staff safe – provided real opportunities for success. These are indicators over which the officers and their colleagues have significant influence and thus capacity to ensure success. Whilst different philosophical positions may suggest different strategies for achieving

success in these terms, this construction of the role provides concrete goals around which officers can unite.

Constructing the role as human services work does not provide such clear indicators that are likely to meet with success. Performance indicators in human services work developed from a rehabilitative discourse, depend upon change from the client (in this case prisoner) and many interviewees were concerned about the likelihood of success in this work, expressing cynicism or doubt about prisoners' willingness or capacity to change in this context. Human services work constructed through a normalisation discourse created other success indicators that depended upon the reaction of the prisoner. In these terms success in the role depends upon delivering a service that an involuntary client feels is satisfactory. Many interviewees felt that this was unlikely or unrealistic.

So the custodial role was constructed as one that could be performed successfully, whilst the human services role was constructed as one for which performance proofs are difficult and indeed unlikely. Inversely proportional to this capacity to protect the worker from charges of failure to perform is the capacity of the conceptualisation to deliver status.

The custodial role, with its emphasis on the mechanical tasks of security, appeared to have a lower status in the eyes of interviewees than human services work that could be compared to other professional roles and indeed already had deliver pay rewards associated with this.

## b) Protecting the vulnerable prison officer

As custodians, prison officers had always seen themselves as vulnerable and the infamous prison officers' code had developed to ensure that officers banded together to protect one another. In this construction of the role the vulnerability of the officer came from scheming, dangerous prisoners who might physically attack the officer at any time. The protection in such a role was from the presence of physically strong and in control colleagues.

The human services role was seen to create new vulnerabilities that could not be addressed by a muscular brotherhood. These vulnerabilities, derived from being unable to protect prisoners from themselves, from becoming ensnared in relationships, being unable to manage the dynamics of a prison unit with prisoners with mental health problems and to accusations of improper conduct, required different and more professional protections.

However the human service work conceptualisation offered officers and other prison workers a different form of protection from what might otherwise be a very negative work environment. It offered a sense of purpose or mission, developed from the rehabilitative discourse. Prison workers make a contribution to making the world a better place. This sense of mission cannot offer physical protection, but it does offer a reason to come to work each day.

### **Maximising respect and safety**

Conceptualising the role of the prison officer as balancing both human services and custodial roles, as so many interviewees did, positioned the officer to gain the benefits of both these constructions of the role and to minimise the vulnerability

arising from the role. Maintaining the custodial role, with its emphasis on physical safety and the importance of colleagues for support in the role of the officer, contributed performance measures that could be reported to management as successfully achieved. Joining this with a human services role enhanced the status of the role and thus the respect due to it and created a sense of purpose for working within prisons that helped to address much of the negativity of the prison environment.

Specific conceptualisations of the role of the officer can then be seen to make concrete these claims for respect and for protection from vulnerability. Through the way that they incorporate discourse of both prison purpose and prison process they embed both understandings of the mission of the prison officer and the way in which the role can be carried out. The popularity of the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation as a base for the role can be understood as reflecting the extent to which this conceptualisation maximised these benefits.

Manager, in most contexts, is a title that is respected and is associated with authority, responsibility and leadership. It is a title that can be understood both within and outside the prison and that aligns the prison officers with workers in other industries. In drawing this respect for the work being undertaken, conceptualising the role as *Manager of prisoners* addresses the complexity of the role of the prison officer.

In recognising the complexity of tasks undertaken by the prison officer, conceptualising the role as a *Manager of prisoners* also provides the opportunity for balancing the human services and custodial responsibilities and thus addressing some

of the vulnerability of the officer within the prison. Whilst the *Manager of prisoners*, constructed from a normalisation rather than a rehabilitation discourse, does not bear the same sense of purpose for those who want to change prisoners' lives, it was consistent with a more limited conceptualisation of the purpose of creating a safe environment in which prisoners can make their own choices about life. The *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation does enable a focus on achieving both custodial and human service performance goals as well as constructing a relationship with the prisoner that both recognises the citizenship of the prisoner but also the authority of the officer.

## **Conclusion**

In conceptualising the prison officers' role, interviewees shared a broad view of the role, but also held sharply contrasting positions. In common was the construction of the role as complex and unique, involving a diverse range of activities and responsibilities and being quite different from any other job. The diversity of the role's responsibilities contributed both to its complexity and to the high level of skill required of officers. Interviewees' conceptualisation of the role served to garner respect for the work of the prison officer and this was enhanced by the uniqueness of the role which made it difficult to adequately describe it to someone from outside the prison system and, for many interviewees, to compare it to another job.

Also common to the conceptualisation of the prison officers' work was the recognition of the prisoner as an important audience for the performance of this role. A few interviewees acknowledged how much officers and prisoners had in common, however for most interviewees the differences in authority and status between officer and prisoner were central to the conceptualisation of this relationship. Interviewees

reported important differences between those who constructed the prisoner as a person to be treated with respect and those who saw this respect as unnecessary and perhaps diminishing their authority.

Both security and human services roles made significant contributions to the conceptualisations of prison officers' work. The security role, created from control discourses, aligned security with community expectations of prisons and created performance indicators that would be successfully achieved by officers and their colleagues. However it was a role that gave emphasis to particular aspects of the prison officers' role and the overarching importance of the control discourse was challenged by some interviewees on the grounds that it increased the risks for those within the prison and was perceived as earning limited respect for the complexity of the prison officers' work.

Alternative definitions of the human services role for the prison officer were utilised by interviewees. A rehabilitative discourse was used to construct the human services role by emphasising the importance of prisoners' change of behaviour and the contribution of the officer to support that change. An alternative definition, constructed from normalisation discourse, emphasised the delivery of services to prisoners. However, these conceptualisations of the role were challenged by interviewees who argued that the necessary resources to implement such a vision of prison officers' work were lacking, by those who raised ethical questions about the construction of the role in this way and by those who challenged the assumptions about prisoner capacity and willingness to change on which it was based.

Notwithstanding these reservations and the difficulty of measuring success in this

role, the conceptualisation of the role of the officer as a human service worker was seen to be worthy of respect and allowed interviewees to compare the role to other human service professionals – social workers, nurses, teachers.

In ‘mixing up’ a prison officer, interviewees illustrated both distinct and competitive differences of conceptualisation and also a common understanding of the role within the prison. Interviewees selected a diversity of bases to ‘mix up’ the officer but when it was tinted most interviewees had drawn upon all the prison purpose discourses and had also used a range of prison process discourses.

The differences in conceptualisation of prison officers' work were demonstrated by the decisions made by interviewees in selecting a base for the conceptualisation of prison officers' work. Whilst half the interviewees chose to base their conceptualisation of the prison officers' role on the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation, the other half of the interviewees made a wide range of choices for the base. Constructed predominantly from prison purpose discourses of normalisation and control these selections reflected strongly held positions about the role of the prison officer.

Whilst the base of the officers' work provided a focus for the debates about the priorities in prison officers' work, the opportunity to ‘mix up’ an officer using both a base and tints illustrated the degree of commonality in the understandings of prison officers' work within the prison. Most interviewees constructed their fully ‘mixed’ officer from all the prison purpose discourses and over half the interviewees also drew upon all the prison process discourses in ‘mixing’ their officer.

Interviewees' discussions of their conceptualisation of prison officers' work illustrate that these conceptualisations serve multiple purposes in the professional lives of those who work within prisons. In particular these conceptualisations served to garner respect for the role of the officer and to manage the vulnerability of the officer. The differential use of conceptualisations of prison officers' work to achieve these purposes raises questions about the factors that influence individuals in their conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer. In the chapters that follow a range of factors influencing the conceptualisation of prison officers' work are explored. Chapter Six examines the extent to which interviewees' personal characteristics and experiences can be seen to be influencing how the role of the prison officer is constructed. Chapter Seven explores the contribution of the work environment to the conceptualisation of the role by individuals.

## **Chapter Six: Patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work**

### **Introduction**

Exploring conceptualisations of the work of a prison officer by interviewees working within South Australian prisons highlighted both a common set of understandings about the role and strongly stated differences about how the role should be conceptualised. Dominant conceptualisations of the role of the officer included conceptualising it as being complex and unusual work, requiring a balance of custodial and human services roles and for half the interviewees, based on the idea of the officer as a *Manager of prisoners*. However, for each of these constructions of the role of the officer there were interviewees who would argue for a contrasting or even conflicting construction. Interviewees utilised conceptualisations of prison officers' work to garner respect for the work of the prison officer and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer as a worker and a prison officer.

The diversity of conceptualisations of prison officers' work within these three South Australian prisons focuses attention on the social process through which individuals construct their conceptualisation of the role. The individual worker entering the prison enters a social context in which both common and contested meanings have already been established. Individuals bring their own unique life experiences into this social context which is itself not homogenous, but geographically and philosophically differentiated and changing over time. Without entering into the competitive debates about the explanatory powers of 'experiences' and 'work context' models discussed in Chapter Two, these two approaches to understanding

how individuals reach are utilised in this and the subsequent chapter to explore the patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work by interviewees in this research. In this chapter the influence of individual's characteristics and experiences on their construction of the role of the prison officer are explored. In the chapter that follows (Chapter Seven) the influence of the prison context on the patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work is examined. These chapters illustrate that the patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work are most fully explained by the interaction of individual's characteristics and experiences and the prison context in which they are working.

The analysis in this chapter echoes the 'experiences' model, examines the effect of individual characteristics (gender) and the life experiences (prior work experience) on the construction of the role of the officer. The chapter first identifies interviewees' perception of the influence of gender based expectations of prison officers' work held by the audiences for the performance of this work, prisoners and other staff. Then the chapter examines the patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work by interviewees' gender and by their prior involvement in 'security' work.

Key findings of this chapter are that despite identifiable gender based expectations of both male and female prison officers, male and female interviewees share common conceptualisations of prison officers' work. However subtle gender related differences can be discerned.

In Chapter Seven, the conceptualisation of the prison officers' role in similar and contrasting ways by interviewees is examined in terms of their work context through

an exploration of the patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work relating to the prison in which an individual works, their length of service and their role within the prison. In this process patterns are sought amongst individuals who, despite sharing common relationships, are themselves unique. This difference between individual officers was emphasised by several interviewees and is succinctly expressed by this auxiliary staff member

*But as far as the officers themselves are concerned they vary that much in their own attitude that.. No two of them are the same, I don't think. Some of them go out of their way to help you, and they treat the prisoners as people, and others treat us the same way they treat the prisoners which isn't the greatest, if you know what I mean. And some of them just won't go out of their way to help you in any way whatsoever.*  
[Interviewee 23]

## **The influence of individual characteristics on the construction of prison officer's work**

The two attributes of gender and previous work experience, have been seen to figure prominently in the construction of the work of prison officers (Jurik 1985b; Crawley 2004a:10, 14) and in the establishment of powerful norms of behaviour for officers (Hemmens and Stohr 2000:342 - 343). The analysis that follows explores the influence of gender and previous work experiences on interviewees' conceptualisations of prison officers' work and the purposes for which these conceptualisations are utilised. .

### **Gender**

Corrections has been a male dominated industry and, as discussed in Chapter 4, it has only been in the last thirty years that men and women have worked together as officers in prisons for male and female prisoners. The majority of the workforce is still male and for this research the majority (27 out of 44 61%) of those interviewed

were men, although there was a strong representation of women from each institution and the majority of interviewees from the Adelaide prison were women (See graph in Chapter Two).

The proportion of female interviewees in the interview sample is greater than the proportion of female interviewees in the correctional workforce.<sup>10</sup> This over-representation of female interviewees results both from the fact that in each prison female staff responded to the invitation to be interviewed at a proportionately higher rate than male officers and the fact that one of the departmental prison sites included the Adelaide Women's Prison, which employs a much higher ratio of female to male staff than the rest of the prison system<sup>11</sup>. All auxiliary staff (social workers and aboriginal liaison officers) interviewed were female.

Despite reports from both male and female interviewees of gender based expectations of officers' performance from both prisoners and the staff of the prison, the effect of gender on conceptualisations of prison officers' work was not as marked as the literature and practice mythology would have suggested (Belknap 1991; Farnworth 1992; Rafter 1992).

### **Gendered expectations of male and female officers**

A few female interviewees in this research discussed the effect of gender on their performance of the role of the officer in terms of their audience of fellow officers. In each case their observation was of the negative reaction of a few officers to female officers. As the most senior female interviewee reported

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<sup>10</sup> At 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002, 20% DCS Operational staff were female.

<sup>11</sup> 56% of the Operational (Ops 1 – 8) positions at AWP were filled by women at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002

*In 92, when I decided to go full-time, to prepare myself for an interview I actually went to a supervisor, and I said to him, 'can you give me an idea of what's expected?' And he said, 'We don't need women on the bloody job,' and I got nothing. [Interviewee 29]*

However more interviewees, male and female, discussed the influence of prisoners' gender based expectations on the performance of the prison officer's role. These interviewees did not necessarily present these expectations in a negative light, but rather identified that gender was one of the attributes an officer brought to their work. A female interviewee made the following observation of her performance resulting from the different reactions to her based on her gender.

*I find being female some [prisoners] won't come near you and others do come near you for a couple of different reasons. Some of them just really like to get a female perspective on things, which is good, for them, sure. And others don't like females in a prison and you can sense that from them and they'll tell you, 'A female shouldn't be working here,' but that's for their own reasons. [Interviewee 35]*

and a male interviewee made similar observations of prisoners' reactions to him based on gender,

*I suppose you could look at, with the case management role, getting more into like a counsellor area because I've had prisoners tells me about their sexual abuse, and they'd sooner talk to me than a female officer. I know it sounds weird but... [Interviewee 28]*

This male interviewee, identifying gender based reactions of prisoners to officers, suggested that the gender of an officer was a tool that could be used in achieving peaceful outcomes in the prison.

*If you're getting ready to do a cell extraction or whatever, sometimes a female officer comes along and sometimes it soothes the beast, you know what I mean. I'm not being sexist by saying that, but it does actually work sometimes, whereas you'll stand there and they'll sooner take on the male officers, like real Rah Rah Rambo sort of crap, but yeah I learned a lot. [Interviewee 28]*

## Similarities between male and female conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer

Despite these gender based expectations, the interviewees for this research showed only limited gender related differences in their conceptualisation of prison officers' work. Male and female interviewees shared the conceptualisation of the work as unique and complex. Rehabilitation and professionalisation discourses featured a little more strongly in female constructions of the role, whilst a few male interviewees looked for new constructions of the role that would diminish the conflict they perceived between security discourses and normalisation and rehabilitation discourses.

Although there were slight gender differences in the way it was expressed, both male and female interviewees saw the prison officers' role as unique. Most women and men had either no idea about the role when they first started working in the prison or had unrealistic expectations. Women, however, were more likely than men to identify that they had expected a more security oriented role.

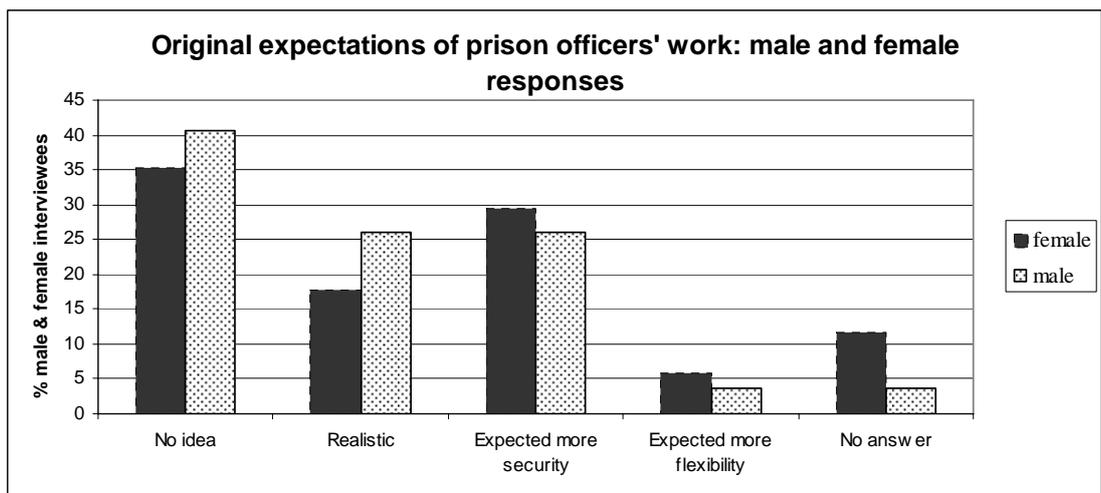


Figure 6.1 Original expectations of prison officers' work: male and female responses

Similar proportions of male (10/27 37%) and female interviewees (7/17 41%) argued that the prison officers' role could not be compared to any other job although there were some gender differences between men and women who did attempt to compare the role to another job. In considering a comparison with another job, women were more likely than men to compare the role to human services work such as teaching, social work and child care and other managerial comparisons or to emphasise the failure to achieve the rehabilitative standards they expected. Men were more likely than women to compare the role to police work and other security roles. However, whilst these differences reflect stereotypical gender differences in attitudes, it is important to note that the differences were not great, and a third of male interviewees (9/27 33%) demonstrated their conceptualisation of the role by comparing it to other human service and managerial work and some (2/17 12%) of the female interviewees compared the work to police and security work.

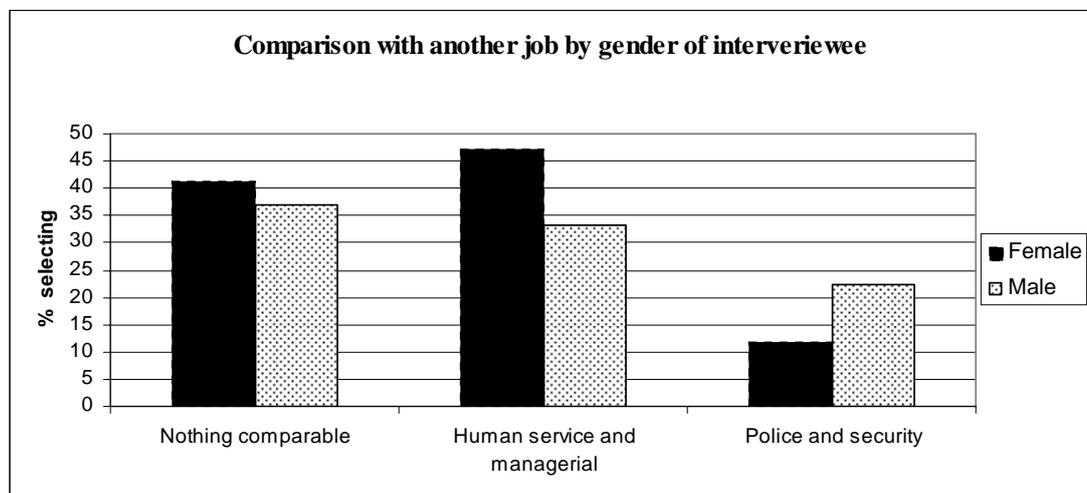


Figure 6.2 Comparison with another job by gender of interviewee

Both men and women drew on comparisons that involved dealing with children, comparing the role to parenting (especially to being a mother) to child care work and to teaching.

*Because there's so many aspects: you're mother and you're sister sometimes, you are nurse sometimes, they come to you for counselling. You're everything. Try to be everything anyway but we're not always good at everything [Interviewee 34].*

Women were more likely to acknowledge the emotional impact of the work.

*Exactly. And I sometimes tend to take it a bit personal. It is really hard to disassociate yourself from it, if they start talking about your family and your children or whatever they'd do to them, or whatever... but god, you just have to hold your tears there and don't show that it actually hurts, which is pretty hard to do, specially being new to the job. But I've seen old timers doing that and going in to battles with them and calling each other names and whatever..., but it doesn't fix the problem, I don't think so. So I go into my car and have a good cry and ... then I go home. It's basically how you deal with it. [Interviewee 6 female]*

Although men also identified that the work impacted on them as people, as illustrated by the two men (and no women) who when asked to compare the role of the prison officer to another job, emphasised the vulnerability of the officer to physical attack by comparing the work to being a Vietnam veteran. As one responded

*Unless you've been there you don't understand it. That's my reasoning behind that, in that some days you can in through the fence and your life is literally on the line, and your life is in someone else's hands be it your partner alongside you or the person at the end of the wing or the people in the control room. [Interviewee 19]*

### **Gender patterns in 'mixing a prison officer'**

When the conceptualisation of prison officers' work is refined in the 'mixing up the officer' question, the similarities between male and female interviewees remains striking. Although the range of conceptualisations selected by female interviewees for the base description of prison officers' work was broader than that of their male colleagues, with seven of the eight possible conceptualisations being utilised by female interviewees and only four of the conceptualisations being selected by male interviewees, for both women and men, *Manager of prisoners* was the most often selected conceptualisation, being chosen by 14/27 (52%) male and 8/17 (44%)

female interviewees. *Security officer* and *Warehouse* were then selected next most frequently by both men (5/17 18.5%) and women (2/17 12.5%) although the *Public servant* conceptualisation was selected by the same (2/17 12.5%) proportion of women.

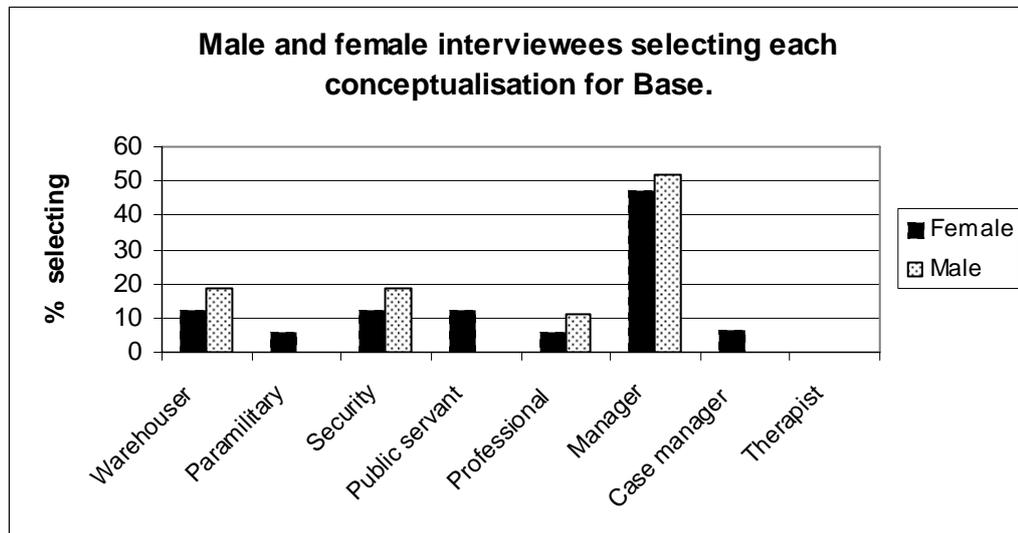


Figure 6.3 Male and female interviewees selecting each conceptualisation for Base

When the choice of tints is combined with the base, the slight difference between the genders is less obvious again. Men and women shared the common understanding of the broad palette from which the prison officer is to be painted. All female interviewees used at least three tints to describe a prison officer, as a result women made slightly more selections than men (4.76 selections per interviewee compared with 4.22 for men).

As the graph below demonstrates, in aggregate men and women conceptualised the prison officers' role with similar balances between conceptualisations, although there were slight differences between the genders in the selection of the two extreme conceptualisations, the *Therapist* (used 4 times in the 81 selections made by female interviewees and 10 times in the 114 selections made by male interviewees) and the

*Paramilitary officer* (used 7 times in the 81 selections made by female interviewees and 9 times in the 114 selections made by male interviewees).

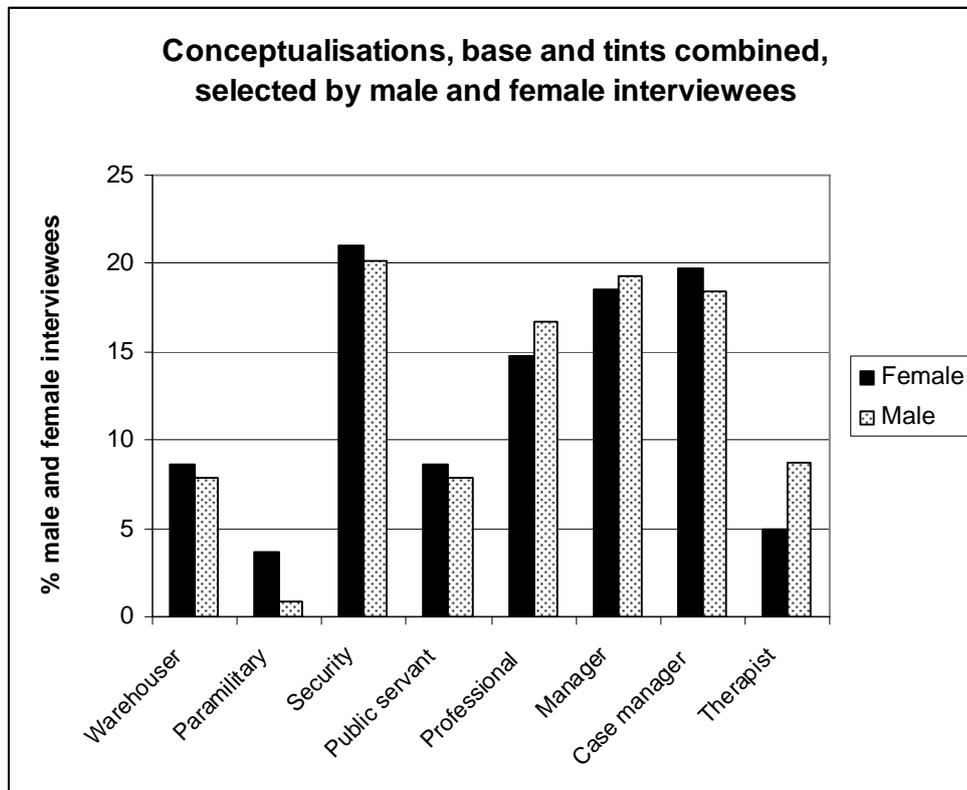


Figure 6.4 Conceptualisations, base and tints combined selected by male and female interviewees.

## Gender Differences

Although this data suggests that gender does not influence the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, the research method utilised may have allowed gender differences to be disguised in two ways. The first is that there was no attempt to constrain or classify interviewees' use of language, so the expression *Manager of prisoners* or any other named conceptualisation could possibly be used differently by different interviewees. Gender difference in the definition of these terms would not necessarily have been detected within the data analysis. The second possible way that gender differences may have been disguised is that the variety of work encompassed

within the role of the prison officer may have resulted in interviewees focussing on a particular version of a conceptualisation in which the balance between human services and custodial work reflected gender related preferences.

Gender related differences can be seen in the preferred conceptualisation of the role of the officer as described by men and women. Change to the basis on which the prison officers' role was conceptualised was favoured by the largest group (6/17) of female interviewees and although 5/17 wanted to see the role stay the same, another group of 5/17 were looking for more modest changes to the conceptualisation of the role. On the other hand, the largest group (12/27) of male interviewees preferred to see the role stay as it was currently conceptualised within their prison. The radical restructuring of the work and separation into human services and security roles was only proposed by male interviewees.

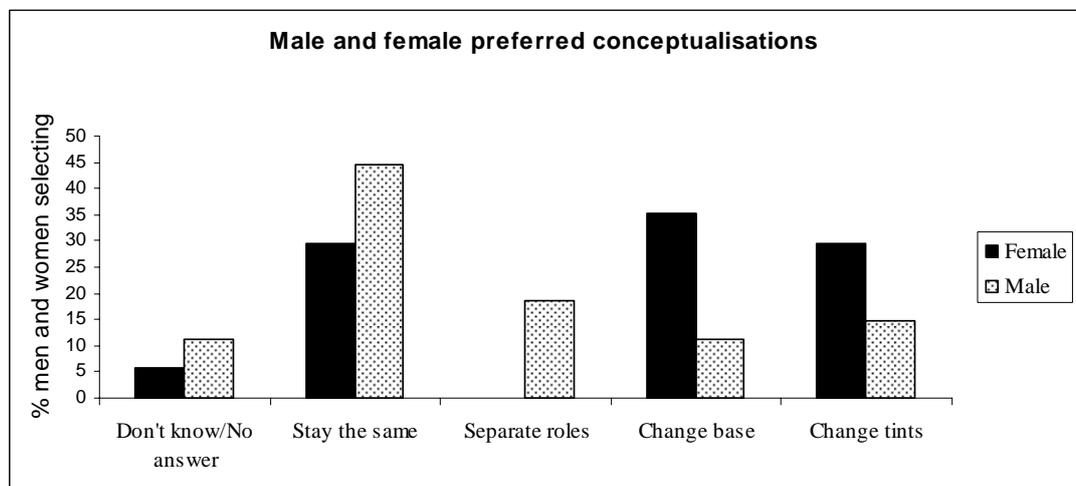


Figure 6.5 Male and female preferred conceptualisations

This difference in preferred conceptualisations of prison officers' work suggests that there might be other subtle gender related differences in male and female conceptualisations of the role. An analysis of the data from those interviewees currently working as prison officers, confirms this. Male officers (10/15 66%) were

more likely than their female counterparts (4/10 40%) to describe the work as managerial, whereas female interviewees were more likely to construct the role from control discourses, describing the base for the role either as *Paramilitary* (1 female officer was the only interviewee to use this base) or *Warehouse* (3/10 female officers compared with 2/15 males)

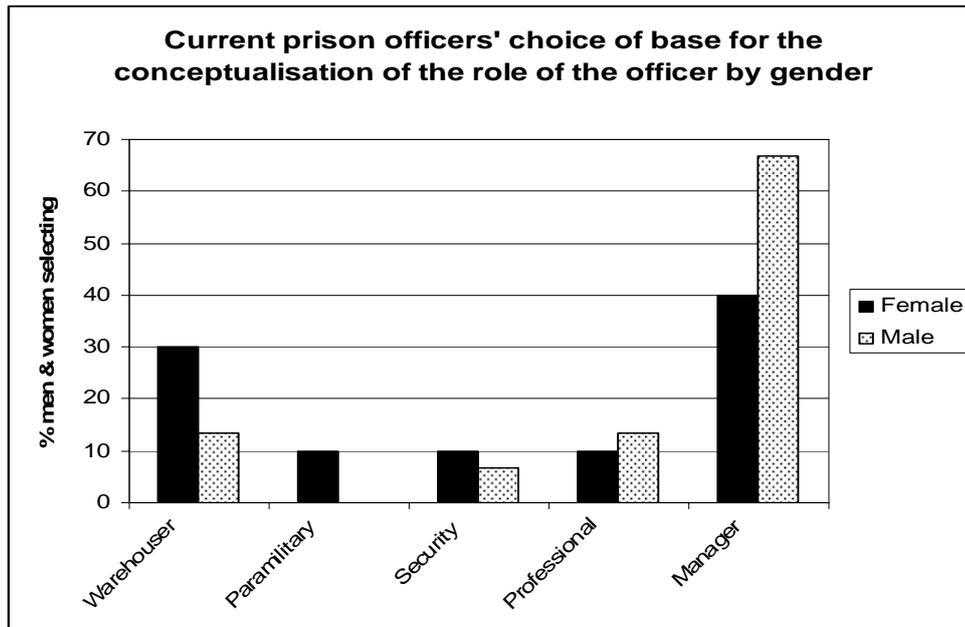


Figure 6.6 Current prison officers' choice of base for the conceptualisation of the role of officer by gender

### Gender patterns: Garnering respect and minimising vulnerability

Considering the use of these conceptualisations of prison officers' work to garner respect for the role and to minimise the vulnerability of the worker and officer two possible explanations for these results can be developed. The first explanation focuses on a gendered need for authority and status. Male prison officers, having given up the authority and status that in earlier times came from the physical control of the prison, have constructed a role with 21<sup>st</sup> century authority and status, drawing on these qualities associated with the role of the manager. In this process they have

addressed any perceived increases in vulnerability that may result from the newer conceptualisations of the role of the officer

At the same time, female interviewees, suggesting that what was needed was a greater professionalism in the role, displayed a common gender pattern of seeking credentials to give them authority.

*And I really think that further down the track they need to look at probably adopting a far more, I suppose, I think it almost needs to become a professional environment. I mean, you wouldn't have someone who comes in and says, 'I think I want to be a nurse,' run them on an 8 week or 12 week training program, and expect them to be able to care for people and provide the right amount ... the right amount of care, medical care for a person. Yet we expect officers to run through a 12 week training school and then manage quite complex behaviours and quite complex problems: it's silly, [Interviewee 1]*

Returning to the consideration of the gender differences in the conceptualisation of the role of the officer by those interviewees currently working as an officer, it can be seen that whilst male officers were more likely to describe the role as managerial they were also more likely to be complacent about the way the role was conceptualised within their institution whereas the conceptualisation by female officers of the current role as one constructed from control discourses was not a situation with which they were satisfied and thus they wanted to see this changed in their institution. The critical approach that female officers adopted to how the work within their institutions is currently carried out made them less likely to claim respect for the role of the officer – a respect that they thought would be appropriate if the role and the broader structuring of the prison were more professionally conceptualised.

Gendered definitions of vulnerability can also be seen in the construction of the role of the officer. The five male interviewees who would prefer to see the role of the officer constructed as two separate roles – human services and security – emphasised the vulnerability that comes from attempting to achieve too many goals and not feeling in control.

*And that's a big problem with case management is ... one minute you're looking after security and then all of a sudden [you are] being a case officer. It's very, very hard and people find it very difficult to do both of them and mix both of them, and that's why in some other prisons they have actually got case officers and then you got operational officers and the operational officers only deal with the operation of running the prison, the security [Interviewee 4 ]*

Gender, individual's own gendered life experiences and expectations, and the gendered expectations of the audiences for officers' work, clearly influence the conceptualisation of prison officers' work. However in this research, this influence is neither as marked as former studies had suggested nor do men and women hold markedly different views about the role. Although the research identified some differences in conceptualisations between men and women currently working as officers that reflected gendered patterns of adoption of the language of management, the conceptualisation of prison officers' work that is common to both men and women is not the stereotypically male view of the role constructed from a physical control discourse. Men and women predominantly conceptualised the role of the officer using a normalisation discourse, as that of a manager, working with complex human beings in styles that engage the prisoner at the very least in cooperation around the day to day operation of the prison. As illustrated by this female officer

*Certainly a couple of girlfriends they do say, 'Well you're only so tiny, how can you do that job?' or 'You're female, why are you doing that job?' 'You'd have to be pretty tough to do that job.' And I just don't think that's the case at all. A lot of people say that*

*though, 'Oh, you must be pretty tough,' and I say, 'No, not at all, just human  
[Interviewee 17]*

## **Previous employment backgrounds**

The military background of prison officers has been seen as a significant force in the construction of the role as an extension of the armed forces. Although only a few interviewees (5) in this research study had prior military background, as discussed in Chapter Two, a significant proportion of those interviewed had some other security industry background before commencing their current job. These experiences, often one of several employment experiences prior to working in prisons, included police, security officer and some correctional experiences with other employers (n = 15). In addition interviewees who discussed their previous employment experience (four did not) had a range of general commercial, human services and industrial employment experience (n = 28) including working as a baker, bar attendant, fitter and turner and real estate agent, many holding qualifications appropriate to that employment. Only one interviewee, the most highly qualified of those interviewed, had only ever worked in the correctional industry (having had one year at TAFE between school and taking up a post as a prison officer).

In the discussion that follows the influence of individual's previous employment background, and in particular whether or not they came to the prison with security industry background, on their conceptualisation of prison officers' work is explored. To explore the influence of previous security industry background on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, the interviewee group was divided into those who had this background and those who were known not to have a security background (each group numbered 20 interviewees).

There were differences between these two groups. Interviewees with a security industry background before they were employed in their current correctional role were more likely to be male (16/20) and all those with army experience were men. Interviewees from the private prison at Mt Gambier were more likely to have a security industry background (9/15 60%) than interviewees from the Department for Correctional Services' prisons (Adelaide 5/11 45%; Port Augusta 6/14 43%). Officers (0.54) and senior officers (0.55) were slightly more likely to have a security industry background than to have only non security work experience. None of the auxiliary staff identified previous security industry experience.

However, the group of interviewees with a security industry background and the group of interviewees without a security industry background had similar patterns of employment in corrections, with three quarters of each group having been employed for less than ten years and one quarter for ten years or longer.

### **Effect of previous employment experience on conceptualisation of prison officers' work**

Interviewees with a security industry background were more likely than those without this background to arrive at prison work having already developed expectations of the role of the officer. That these explanations often (7/20) overemphasised the security role was explained by an interviewee with extensive police experience in the following terms

*Despite the fact that I'm used to working with these type of people in the police force, there's an entirely different situation with working in a prison, because in that job I was involved with investigating crime and questioning people to get a result. With*

*this it's a matter of ... care and the duty of care, the day to day activity to meet their needs, and carry out your duties. [Interviewee 39]*

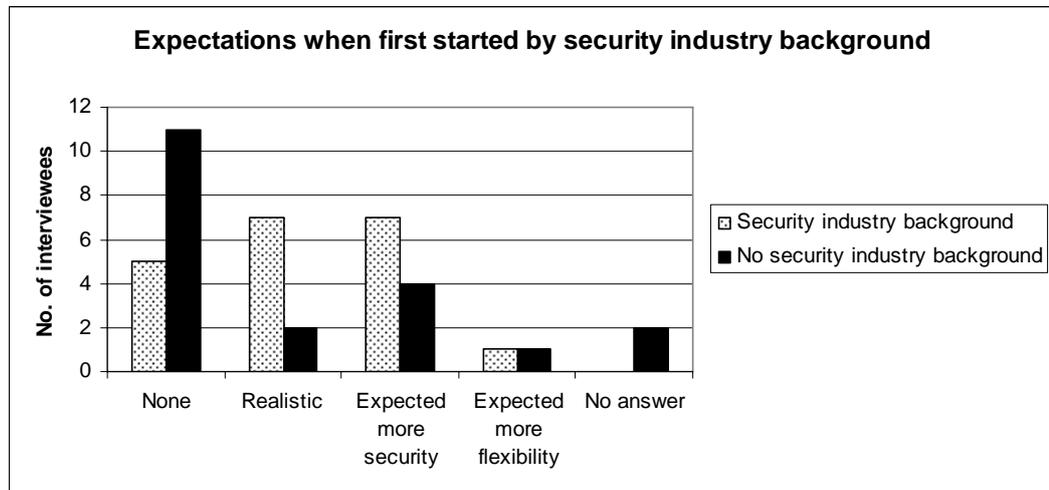


Figure 6.7 Expectations when first started by security industry background

It would seem that for interviewees with a security industry background, the conceptualisation of prison officers' work became more complex with their increased exposure to the role. These interviewees were a little more likely than their colleagues who did not have any security industry background to argue that there was no other job to which prison officers' work could be compared, with almost half the interviewees who answered this question asserting this position.

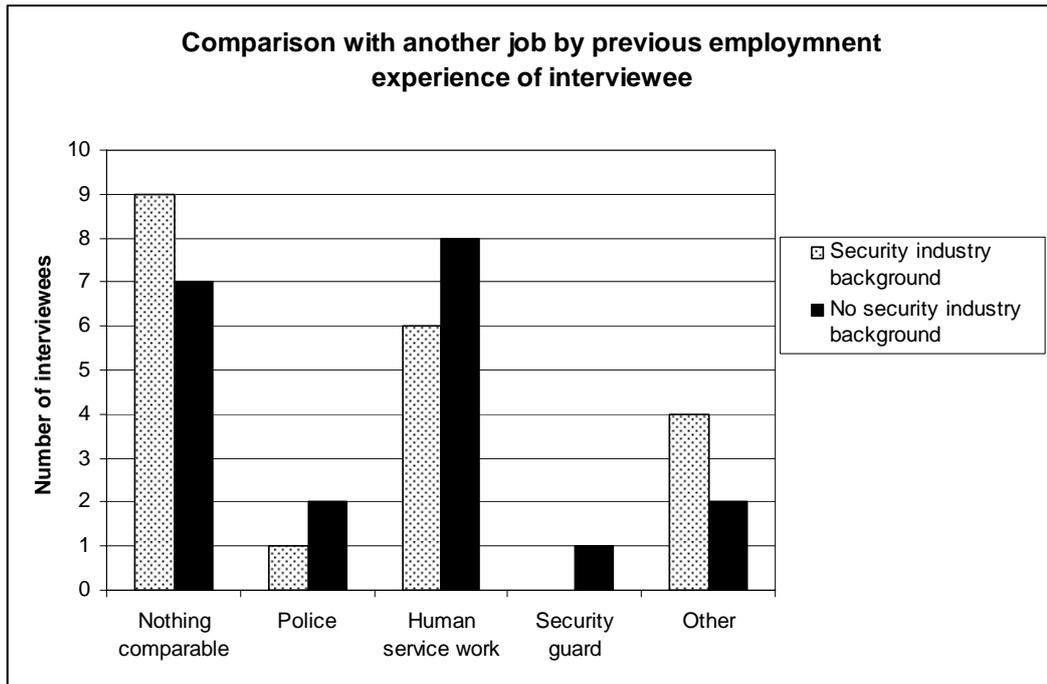


Figure 6.8 Comparison with another job by previous employment experience of interviewee

Although the *Manager of prisoners* was the most frequently nominated base conceptualisation by interviewees with prior security industry background when the choice of conceptualisations was more precisely defined in the ‘mixing the officer’ question, a smaller proportion of them made this selection than those with no security industry background (8 compared to 11). At the same time, the *Security officer* and *Professional* conceptualisations were selected more often by these interviewees with a security industry background (6 compared to 1 selections and 3 compared to 1 selections).

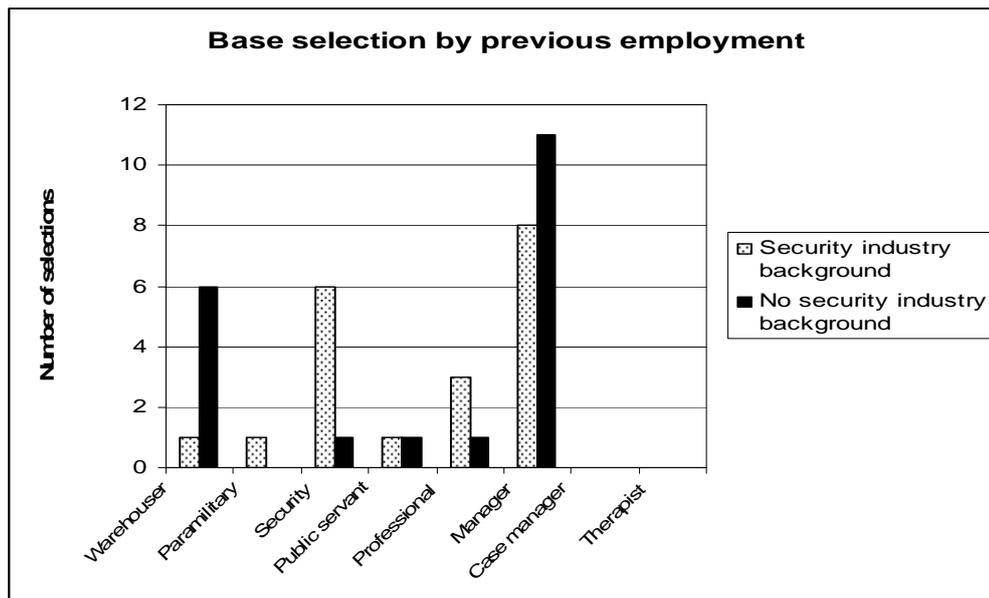


Figure 6.9 Base selection by previous employment

So, although the influence of previous employment in the security industry is not as all encompassing as may have been expected, the promotion of a professional security discourse by those interviewees with a security industry background suggests that they construct the role in terms that positioned their own previous security experience as relevant and thus a source of respect.

This use of the conceptualisations to create a role for which interviewees had the skills can also be seen amongst those who had no security industry background, who were more likely to argue that the role could be compared to another human service role, as illustrated by this former nurse

*... I find lots of similarity with nursing, in that you are trying to look after their needs and a lot of them do have health issues.*

*Interviewer: Do you find your background helpful from that point of view?*

*No, I actually try and stay out of that because we have a medical team*

*here so I try and stay removed from that. But there's a lot of mental health issues that come up here and I find that some of my background I guess helps in understanding the women that do have those issues. [Interviewee 27]*

In so doing they constructed a prison officer role for which they felt they had skills and some expertise.

This construction of a role for which the interviewee is well qualified is further illustrated by the responses of those with security industry background to the opportunity to express a preference for how the role of the officer should be constructed. Although both interviewees whose previous employment background was in the security industry and those who had no security background were likely to argue that their preferred conceptualisation of prison officers' work was as the work was currently (8 out of 20 and 7 out of 20), those with security industry background who did have a preference were more likely than their colleagues without this background to want the role to be constructed with an enhanced emphasis on control. Whilst security industry background interviewees wanted to separate the security and human services roles (3) and to change the base for the conceptualisation of prison officers' work to one constructed from control discourses (3), interviewees with other employment backgrounds wanted to decrease the use of control discourses to construct the base of the role (4) and to see increased use of professionalisation discourse in the construction of the role (3).

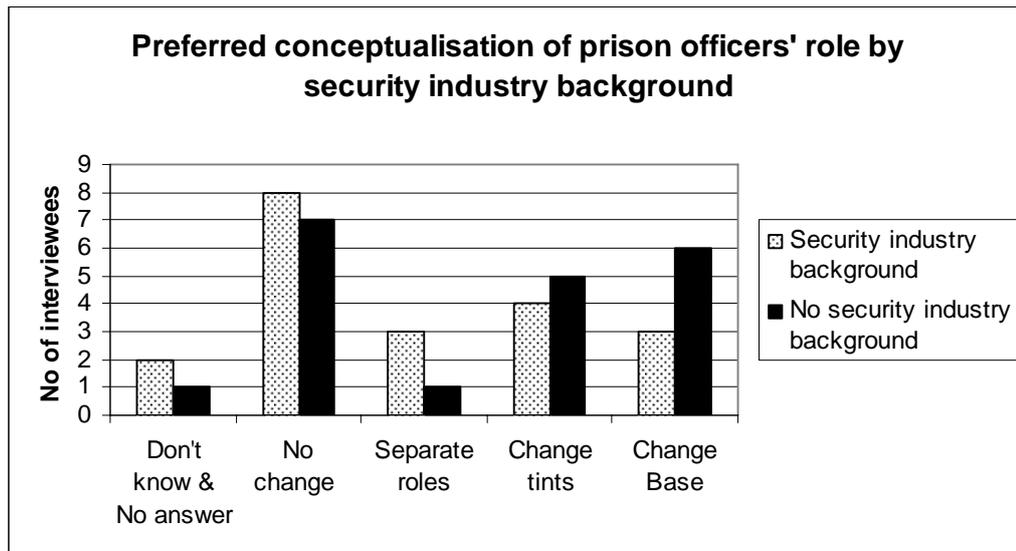


Figure 6.10 preferred conceptualisation of prison officers' role by security industry background

Associated with wanting to see the decrease of control discourses and increase in professional discourses, interviewees with no security background were more likely to emphasise the inadequacy of current imprisonment practices. This construction of the work of the officer as being performed within an inadequate structure is illustrated by the high proportion of interviewees with no security background choosing the *Warehouser* as the descriptor of the base for prison officers' work (6 compared to 1 with security background) and preferring to see the role constructed from rehabilitative or professional discourses (5/6). As argued in Chapter 5, the selection of *Warehouser* would appear to reflect a level of disillusionment about the possibilities for rehabilitation, a disillusionment expressed most strongly by those interviewees who had no previous security industry background

*Like I said, we get people that have done wrong. I know the emphasis now is to make them understand what they've done and make them better people but the communities that they come from, all colours, all kinds, the community just seems like it's too hard, or their problem is too hard to handle these people. And jail being the last option, that's usually the quickest option for the community. We get people that are horribly drug withdrawn and we get people that have been sexually abused.*

*... In the ideal world you've got a prison where they've got a single cell, everyone's on their own. They've got time, they've got a bit of space where they can walk around, but in reality it's not like that.*

*...Jail - jail can't do anything for them. It's all the mess they create out in the community. Whether it's a rich kid ripping off his parents or a kid coming from a poor background that's done a few housebreaks, or whether it's an abused kid that's turned to drugs or whether it's a young girl who couldn't handle the country and gone to the city and turned to prostitution. [Interviewee 11]*

## **Individual experiences and characteristics influencing the conceptualisation of prison officers' work**

The construction of the role of the officer to garner respect for the work and to limit the vulnerability of the officer can be seen to be subtly influenced by both gender and whether or not the individual had a prior military or security background. The influence of gender on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work is subtle and although interviewees identified gender related expectations of officers' performance of their role both from prisoners and other officers, male and female interviewees conceptualised the role in remarkably similar terms. The subtle gender differences can be seen in the preferred construction of the role and in differences between those interviewees currently serving as officers. Although the construction of the role of the officer with the balance between human services and security conceptualisations was common to both men and women, gender related differences in the construction of vulnerability can be seen to result in different constructions of the role of the officer to both garner respect and minimise vulnerability.

The image of a prison officer's work being an extension of the military work undertaken by officers in their former careers is not substantiated in this exploration of the shaping of conceptualisations of prison officers' work in three South Australian prisons. However in constructing the role as one worthy of respect, some

individuals have favoured conceptualisations in which skills and expertise from their previous, security or non-security, work experience position them well. As a result, a difference in the conceptualisation of the role of the officer between those with a security industry background and those without is discernable notwithstanding the fact that interviewees from both groups were more likely to conceptualise the role as that of a *Manager of prisoners* than to nominate any other conceptualisation. In addition interviewees with no security industry background were more likely than those with a security industry background to express dissatisfaction with the context in which prison officers' work is performed and the limitations on the role that results from this context.

Notwithstanding the demonstration in this chapter of some influence on patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work by the gender and previous work experiences of the interviewee, the strongest patterns of conceptualisation of the role are shown to be independent of these attributes of the individual interviewee. In Chapter Seven, in terms similar to the 'work context' model for explaining workers attitudes, alternative explanations for the patterns of conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer are explored by an exploration of the particular prison context in which interviewees' are working, their role within the prison and the length of time that they have been employed in a correctional environment.

## **Chapter Seven: The Prison context shaping the construction of prison officers' work.**

### **Introduction**

Conceptualisations of prison officers' work are developed in the social context which is the prison, both a justice institution and a work environment. As explored in Chapter Six, individuals come to this context with their own life experiences. They enter an environment with a history in which there is both a common understanding of prison purposes and prison processes and contestation about how and why the prison should be run.

The context of prison officers' work is not homogenous. Conceptualisations of prison officers' work by interviewees for this study had been developed in diverse prison locations (including but not exclusively the three in which they were currently working). Each prison is placed in a particular community context, plays a particular role within the prison system (including housing groups of prisoners with different security mixes), has a unique history and is of specific size. Prisons may be run by government or private organisations.

In examining 'work context' influences on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, this chapter examines the differential conceptualisation of the role by interviewees in different prisons and with different management accountabilities (Department for Correctional Services and Group 4), the influence of the workrole of the individual within the prison organisation and of the length of correctional employment on how individuals conceptualise the work.

The analysis illustrates that the prison context strongly influences the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by individuals working within the prison. In particular patterns of conceptualisation of the role were discerned amongst staff who had worked in corrections for less than 10 years and those who had worked in corrections for more than 10 years. These patterns were moderated by the specific prison context in which the interviewee worked.

The audiences for the performance of prison officers' work provided in the three prisons differed and this influenced the approach to garnering respect for the work of the prison officer, although interviewees in each prison had in common the difficulty they experienced in establishing the role as one worthy of respect in the outside community. Within each prison there were also different understandings of the vulnerability of the officer as both a worker and a prison officer. The importance of the prisoner group as an audience for the work of the officer and as a determinant of the vulnerability of the officer was illustrated by interviewees from these different prison contexts.

However prisons, by their nature, also have much in common with one another and interviewees constructed the role of the officer through an emphasis on particular characteristics of the prison as a work environment. In particular attention was drawn to the negativity of the environment, the dangers it presents as a work context and the isolation of prison work.

This chapter first reports the analysis of the interviews with personnel from the three different prisons, then explores the impact of the interviewee's role within the prison

and the length of time the interviewee had worked in a prison environment.

Following this analysis, the chapter explores how these factors and the experiences and characteristics of the interviewee interact to contribute to the construction of the work of the prison officer.

## **The prison context: negative, dangerous and isolated**

That prisons should be seen as a negative work environment may not be surprising,

As interviewees described

*It's a very angry place, jail because the anger, they're supposed to contain it but they can't and...[Interviewee 11]*

*and it's very aggressive, and it's mean and they talk really horrible to you and I have had to learn words in English that I had never heard in my life before [Interviewee 25]*

However, for many interviewees the negativity of the prison as a work environment related to failed expectations, to a sense of failure to change prisoners or their situation, as described by an auxiliary staff member

*Lots of hard work and lots of disappointment and they're the ones that get the brunt of the women's anger and, if they want to throw things they're the ones that see it. [Interviewee 25]*

In addition to this negativity that comes from angry people unable to change themselves or their environment, the danger of the prison as a work environment was emphasised. This danger, that made officers' vulnerable, threaded itself through the comments of many interviewees, but was powerfully expressed by this interviewee who had worked through the feelings of anger and frustration that resulted from the harm done to his friend,

*Yeah, my best friend got stabbed seven times a couple of years ago. But there ain't much point in dwelling on it; I can only hate the bloke that did it. I can't say because he's a prisoner all prisoners did it. That's really not fair. [Interviewee 11]*

Whilst these attributes of the prison as a work environment contributed to the construction of the role of the prison officer as complex and unusual, it was the isolation of officers and others working in the prison that was identified as creating a unique work environment. Time after time interviewees argued that the best, but implicitly impossible, way for someone wondering about working in a prison to come to understand the work would be to come into the prison and experience the environment and observe officers at work. However security considerations make this impossible.

The physical isolation of the work behind the walls both created and compounded a social isolation in the role. Several female officers talked about the isolation they experienced as a result of the fact that their families could not visit them at work – if they had to call in to work whilst off duty, children had to be left in the car. Other officers identified the isolating impact of shift work

*I have a bit of a problem at times with [unclear] my wife's family and some of her friends and because of the shifts we work, we work 12.5 hour shifts [Interviewee 36]*

Uncertainty about public reaction to the work enhanced this social isolation and officers talked about the need to cover their uniform on a visit to the shops on the way home from work and of avoiding identifying what they did for a living in social situations.

So, conceptualisations of prison officers' work served to address the vulnerability of the officer resulting from the negative, dangerous and isolating work environment. As was seen in Chapter 5, one response to this environment was to construct conceptualisations of the role in terms that garnered respect. The construction of

bonds between those who work within the prison and indeed between prisoners and staff was one strategy by which the audiences for prison officers' work were harnessed to provide respect for the role. However, the idea that these bonds created a 'community' which was acknowledged by several interviewees created additional vulnerability for the engaged prison officer. This is a community in which many of the interconnections bring grief

*I've sat there with young lads who are suicidal and their girlfriend's left them and ran off with their best mate and taken their kids and they get pretty depressed. The lad that 'necked' himself yesterday down in Lincoln, I've sat and talked with him, young Bill<sup>12</sup>, but it's hard to put yourself in those positions of grief.[Interviewee 11]*

## **The differential impact of specific prisons on conceptualisation of prison officers' work**

Each of the prisons in which interviews were conducted has a unique history and sense of mission that contributes to the working environment for staff. The prison complex at Northfield, encompassing for the purposes of this research, the Adelaide Women's Prison and the Northfield pre-release centre (named as the Adelaide prison in this research), is an urban environment which has both been at the centre of some of the most innovative imprisonment strategies (the pre-release centre, the fine default centre and the mothers and babies unit being examples of these innovations) and is currently the site for the most controversially poor prison infrastructure in the state (in the Adelaide Women's centre).

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudonym used

Port Augusta prison, located in a large rural centre in South Australia, is a multipurpose prison providing accommodation for men (and a few women) with special attention to the needs of prisoners from the indigenous Australian communities both on the Pitjantjatjara lands and in the nearby rural centres of Whyalla and Port Augusta. The prison houses 280 prisoners of all security levels. It provides a base for the Mobile Outback Work Camps (MOWCamps) through which groups of prisoners work away from the prison for several weeks before returning to the prison base.

The Mount Gambier prison, the newest prison infrastructure in South Australia, is privately managed under contract to the Government by Group 4 (at the time of this research). This private management is a very obvious and politically controversial difference between this and other prisons in the state. Along with other privately managed prisons in Australia this prison has been the subject of important philosophical debates about the nature of citizenship and imprisonment. However, in addition to the important philosophical differences between a government owned and managed prison and one that is managed by a profit making company, the private prison is differentiated from the others in the state by the unique process through which the prison mandate has been agreed and recorded in a management contract, the political attention that has been paid to the goals to be achieved by this private prison manager and the high levels of accountability established for the prison management.

The purpose of conducting interviews in three institutions was not to compare institutions, but rather to gather a range of perspectives about prison officers' work

that would contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of how prison officers' role was constructed within prisons. Due to the sampling processes discussed in Chapter Two, there were different numbers of interviewees from each prison – Mount Gambier, 15, Adelaide Prison 13, and Port Augusta 16.

A few interviewees had worked in more than one location and one interviewee had worked in both a public and a private prison. Each of these prison environments can be seen to have contributed to the shaping of the conceptualisation of the work through the distinctive nature of the work that was undertaken in that context.

The difference between prisons and in the way the work was conceptualised in different prisons was explored by interviewees who had worked in more than one prison

*there's a culture within prisoners because the security of where they are and you even notice it here in this institution between the high security, which is inner walls, and the medium units, as opposed to the low, in the difference in their interaction and prisoners that I know very well from many years ago at Cadell, if they're here I can talk to them and I talk to them, but I can't talk to them for the same length of time even, or the same depth here as I could at Cadell, because they are like, 'I can't talk to you any longer because if I am the prisoners will see me as giving you information, or whatever'. [Interviewee 19]*

*All the institutions around the state range so greatly from the initial remand centre to our place, front and back door and there's a lot of difference in the violence of prisoners and a lot of difference in [violence] in staff, a lot of formal stuff at the front and perhaps a little bit more informal at the rear where we are, but I couldn't work I've done in service there and I've worked a little time down at Yatala in the assessment unit, more of an admin role which I enjoyed and I'd go down that path again, but as far as working in the remand centre it's too much like kids in prison for starters. [Interviewee 7]*

*Well, I can only... my personal experience is only in private prisons but I can safely say that those two prisons operated were very, very different. Junee is a large prison and it probably retains a lot of the culture of the state system in New South Wales whereas Mount Gambier prison was a greenfield site. One of the main objectives of the company was to have a significant culture change at this prison. And I think we achieved that. There's no doubt that we achieved that. [Interviewee 44]*

## **Respect for the work within 'our prison'**

Interviewees used the identification of the difference between prisons to develop a competitive construction of the role of the officer within their prison as deserving particular respect. Yatala Labour Prison<sup>13</sup> was positioned as a benchmark by many interviewees who emphasised that by comparison to Yatala, the prison officer role in their prison was constructed from rehabilitative and professional discourses rather than the old control discourse

*And there's some that still don't agree with the case management process and still [adopt the attitude] 'You're the prisoner, I'm a screw. There's the line, don't bother even crossing that line because I'll bust you'. And there's still that mentality, it's very few and far between now.*

*It depends where you work. Port Augusta is pretty good. Most staff here are pretty forward looking.... You look at the likes of where it's entrenched. Where it's entrenched would be the YLP, the ARC. They're probably the two strongest areas where it's really entrenched in that respect. [Interviewee 16]*

However, other benchmarks were used to enhance the competitive positioning of their own prison officers. Staff of the private prison differentiated their institution from the departmental prisons; staff from the women's prison differentiated their work from prisons catering for men. In both cases the differentiation served to illustrate the superiority of their institutions and thus the respect due to those who

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<sup>13</sup> Yatala Labour Prison (YLP) is the largest prison in South Australia. Located in Adelaide close to the Northfield prison complexes utilised in this research, the prison can hold 406 medium to high security prisoners. Pressure of prison numbers often results in Yatala also holding significant numbers of remand prisoners.

worked in them. For example this interviewee from Mount Gambier saw the officers in Mount Gambier prison delivering a more professional service to prisoners,

*This prison's a lot easier than DCS prisons. I've been to Port Augusta and I thought it was an absolute shit pit. I did. It opened my eyes, it really did. The freedom that these guys get to what the government prisons, they're only out of their cells, eight hours a day isn't it? ...but here these guys are getting 12 hours a day out of their cell. [Interviewee 43]*

and interviewees working in the women's prison saw themselves dealing with a very different dynamic than that in the male prisons

*The women especially are sometimes difficult to handle because they're the special needs prisoners, and so therefore the workload that we have here is actually probably a lot higher than in the male prison, from what I've heard - I can only go by what I've heard and with working very sporadically at Yatala, in different areas there....*

*You're not just here to turn a key and all the rest of it. We have to be a counsellor, a mother, case manager I suppose. We'll probably be abused, we'll be argued with. Women tend to argue the point with you if you say, 'No, you can't do this,' or 'Why not?' where the men will just usually swear at you and off they go, so it is quite significantly labour intensive working with females rather than men. [Interviewee 2]*

Despite this emphasis on the difference between institutions, there were commonalities in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work across all three, very different prisons. The idea that prison officers' work was complex and unique was a theme developed by interviewees from all prisons. The difficulty in understanding the work before starting in a prison was emphasised in each institution, although in slightly different ways. In Mount Gambier and Port Augusta, the highest proportion of interviewees reflected that they had had no conceptualisation of prison work when they first started, whilst amongst interviewees from the Adelaide prison the emphasis was on the inaccurate notions with which they had commenced work.

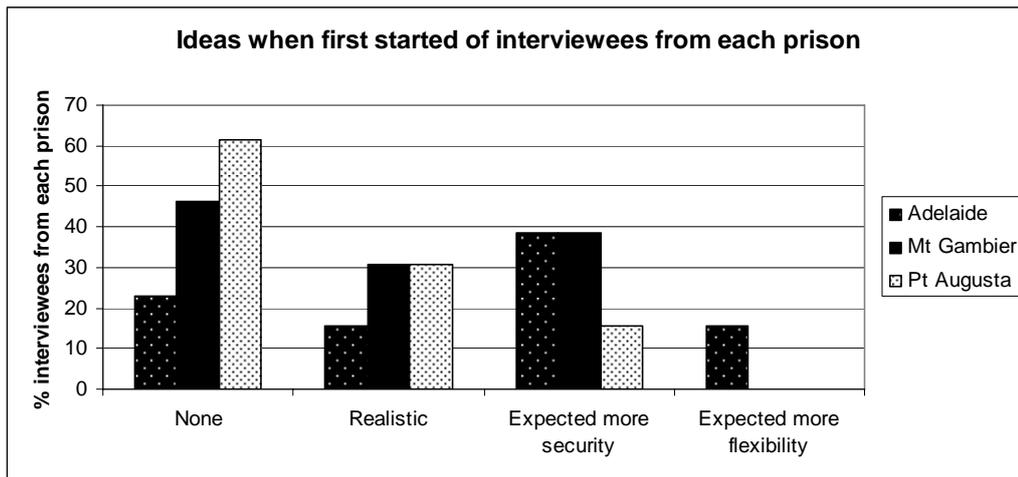


Figure 7.1 Ideas when first started of interviewees from each prison

## Individual prisons influencing the conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer

### Differences in broad conceptualisations

In comparing the work of prison officers to other jobs, the majority of interviewees from the private prison at Mount Gambier emphasised the uniqueness of the role and argued that there was no comparable job, whereas interviewees from both Port Augusta and Adelaide were more likely to choose a human services or managerial job as a comparator than to describe it as unique. Only a small group from each institution (almost a quarter of the interviewees from Port Augusta and Adelaide and somewhat less for Mount Gambier) compared the work of prison officers to police or security work.

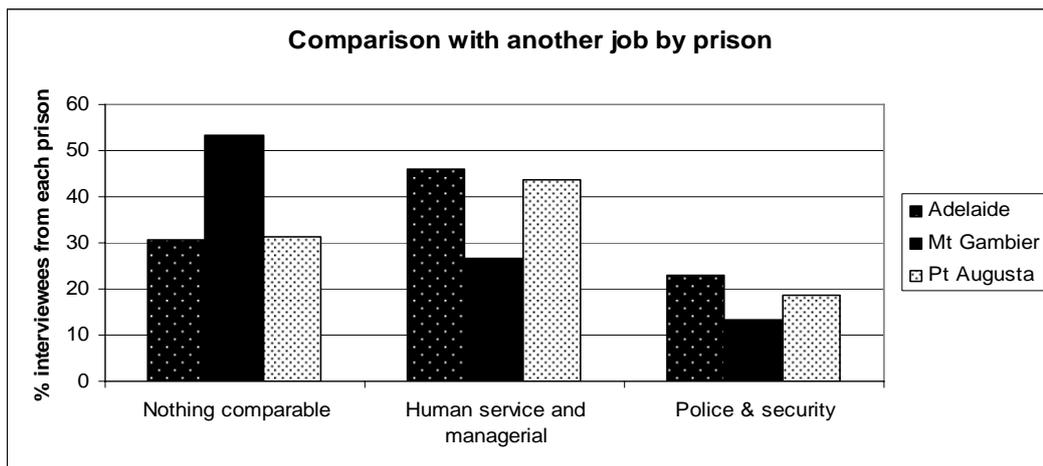


Figure 7.2 Comparison with another job by prison

### Differences in specific conceptualisations

There was a clear distinction between staff of the three institutions when their attention was focussed on specific conceptualisations. At Port Augusta and Adelaide interviewees demonstrated a diversity of views about the basis for conceptualising prison officers' work, choosing six base conceptualisations each, but interviewees from Mount Gambier were more concentrated in their choices, using only three base conceptualisations. In addition, whilst the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation was the most popular in each of the institutions, staff from the Mount Gambier prison were the most likely to select the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation as their base with 12 of the 15 (80%) interviewees selecting this conceptualisation. In Port Augusta and Adelaide this was also the most common conceptualisation, but it was only selected by approximately one third of each group (5/13 38% and 5/16 31%). The only interviewee to select a paramilitary conceptualisation of the prison officers' work was located at the Adelaide and the only interviewee to select a case manager conceptualisation was located at Port Augusta.

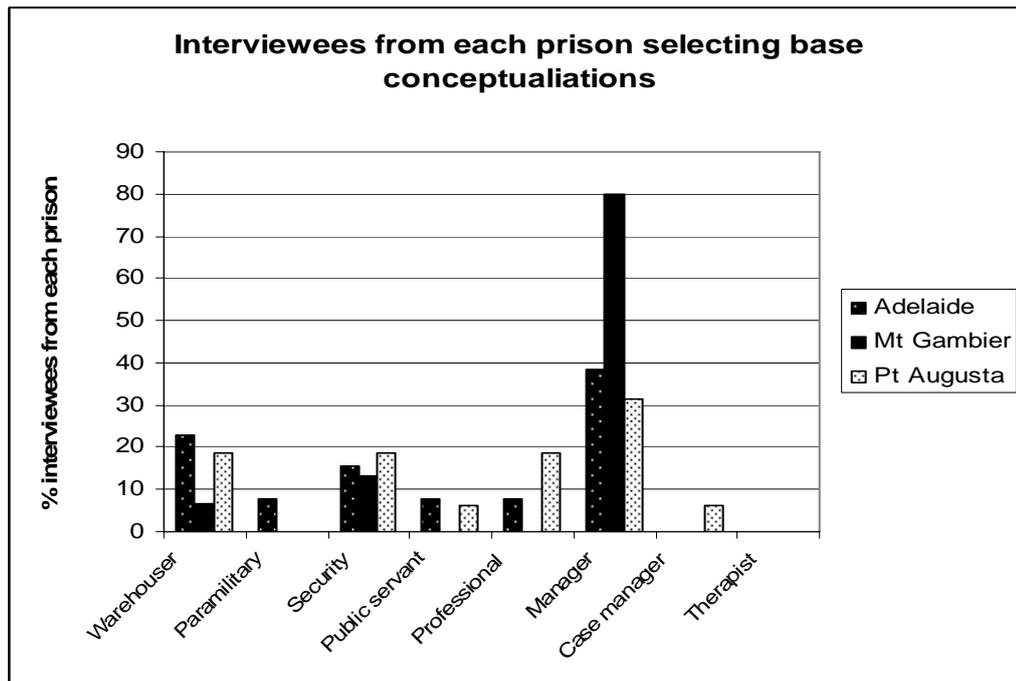


Figure 7.3 Interviewees from each prison selecting base conceptualisations

The remarkable congruence in responses from interviewees at Mount Gambier prison (80% choosing the same base conceptualisation) is a result of some significance. The explanation for this difference would not seem to lie in differences in the characteristics of the interviewee group in terms of gender or previous work experience. Not only did gender seem lacking significant influence on conceptualisations of prison officers' work, as discussed in Chapter Six, but the distribution of male and female interviewees between this prison and Port Augusta is very similar, and the construction of the role very different (80% choosing *Manager of prisoners* compared to 38%).

The previous work experience profile of interviewees from Mount Gambier prison differed from that of the other prisons in that proportionately more interviewees from Mount Gambier identified as having a security industry background than interviewees in the other two prisons.

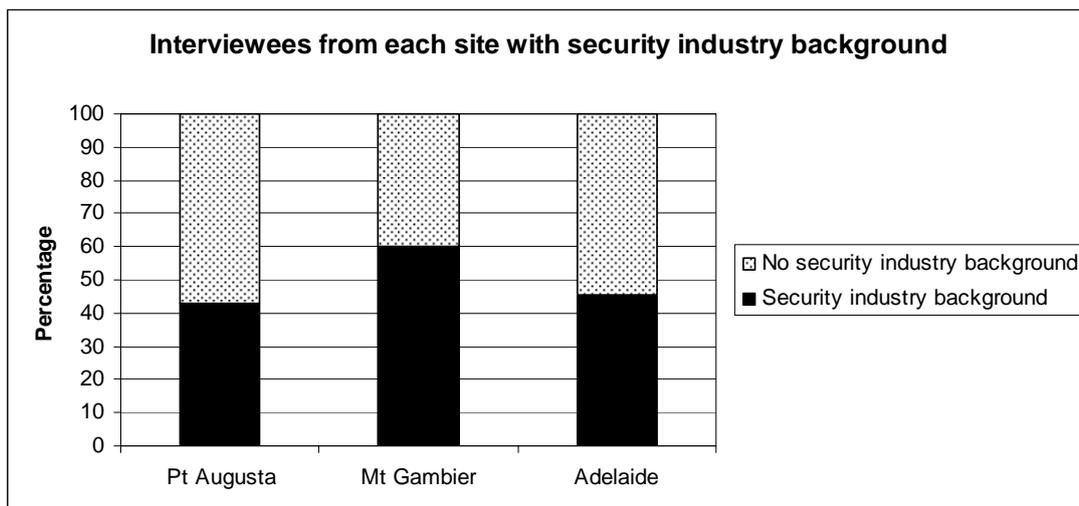


Figure 7.4 Interviewees from each site with security industry background

However in Port Augusta and Adelaide, those staff with a previous security background were less likely to select the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation than others (Adelaide 0/5 interviewees with security background selected *Manager of prisoners* and Port Augusta (2/6) whereas at Mount Gambier 6/9 interviewees with a security background selected this conceptualisation).

This suggests that something in the organisational context of that prison serves to overcome the diversity of individual characteristics and life experiences with which staff entered the prison and encourage this particular construction of prison officers' work. This will be further explored in this chapter.

Despite this significant variation in the selection of the base characterisation of prison officers' work, the dominance of the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation in each prison suggests that conceptualisations of prison officers' work, whilst impacted by the distinctive attributes of the prison are fundamentally determined by characteristics that prisons have in common. When interviewees' more complete (base and any tints used) constructions of prison officers' work is examined this

impression that there is more in common between the prison institutions than differentiates them is enhanced. Interviewees from each of the prisons predominantly drew on the *Manager of prisoners*, *Security officer*, and *Case Manager* conceptualisations to construct the role of the prison officer. In this they all constructed the role of the officer drawing on rehabilitative, normalisation and control discourses.

There were small groupings from each prison of selections of *Therapist* and *Warehouser*. The *Para-military officer*, whilst only selected a small number of times in Port Augusta and Adelaide was not selected at all in Mount Gambier. Some variations occurred in the selection of *Professional* and *Public servant* (which whilst selected less often by Mount Gambier staff was also seen by some to be an appropriate descriptor of their role).

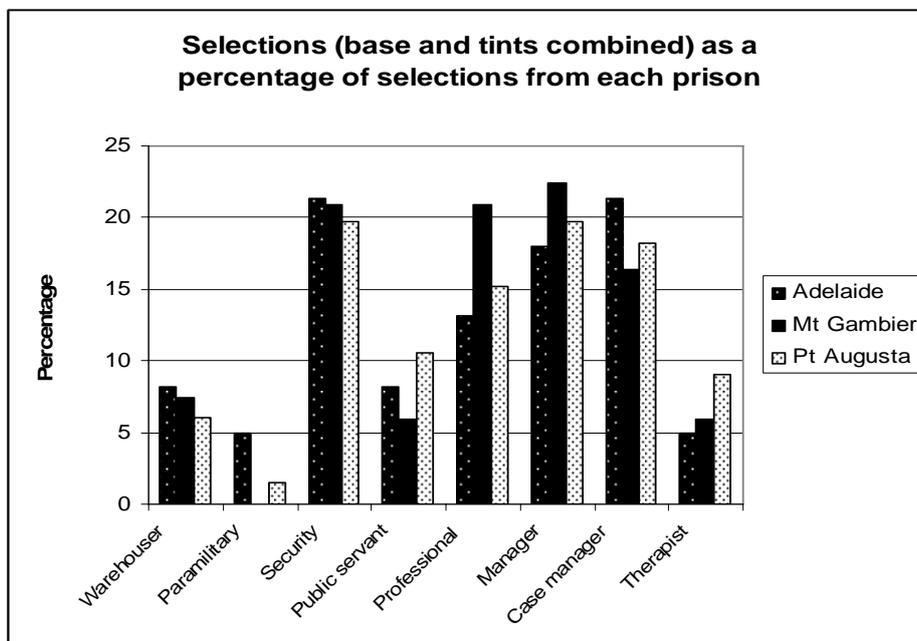


Figure 7.5 Selections (base and tints combined) as a percentage of selections from each prison

### **Respect and vulnerability within individual prisons**

At Mount Gambier interviewees not only demonstrated a consistent conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer but also sought to distinguish it from the way that the role was constructed in departmental prisons. The attention paid to differentiating Mount Gambier from other South Australian prisons can be seen to serve two purposes. Constructing the Mount Gambier prison officer as different from others around the state positioned the officer as a figure to be respected.

At the same time, this construction of the role positioned the officer positively, not just as prison staff but also as workers within an organisation whose legitimacy needed to be bolstered and affirmed. The officer was constructed as a vulnerable worker, whose job might disappear,

*Yes. Group 4 is very important to me. I don't think they realise how important it is because I've got such a lot to lose if anything happens. I know when I finish here it's most likely I will not work again because of my age. [Interviewee 36]*

Arguing that the construction of the role at Mount Gambier was unique and superior served to justify the ongoing private management of the prison and thus maintain the jobs that interviewees valued.

Interviewees in the government managed prisons at Port Augusta and Adelaide did not display the same consistency of conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer. The choice by interviewees from these prisons of a broader range of constructions of prison officers' work both reflected and created more turbulent workplaces, where tensions were expressed about the importance of different skills sets and the risks involved in the construction of prison officers' work in particular

ways. Interviewees had worked in a variety of institutions and units within institutions and brought to their current role appreciations of the different ways that the role could be performed and a critical awareness of the limitations of their own institution. The vulnerability of the officer to criticism of a failure to perform was recognised in these prisons with conceptualisations of the role as a balance between human service and custodial work, being utilised to protect officers and their institutions from critical questions about the extent to which they were achieving their purpose by pointing to the changing fashions within the correctional services department and the resultant shifts in goals for prisons. As workers they also sought to limit their vulnerability by pointing to the many constraints on their work with prisoners.

Interviewees in these institutions demonstrated a greater awareness of the audience for whom prison officers' work is performed and the implications of describing the role of the officer in particular terms. As audience themselves they were more inclined to be intensely critical of others who constructed the role in terms that differed from their own.

Whilst conceptualisations of the role of the officer were used in many similar ways by interviewees from Port Augusta and Adelaide, there were also significant differences. Half the interviewees from Port Augusta prison were satisfied with the way the role was conceptualised in their prison, or unable to envisage an alternative, whereas staff from the Adelaide prison were more restless and critical both about possible conceptualisations of the role of the officer and other issues such as the very poor state of the prison estate in their area. In this they can be seen to be protecting

themselves from the public criticism being made of the women's prison and joining with the critics who argue for better facilities, more and appropriately non-gender stereotyped employment possibilities. However, these interviewees also identified themselves with the Adelaide prison and asserted the significant differences between this prison and others within the system. A common theme was that you required a very different skills set to work as a prison officer in the women's prison to that required when working with men.

### **Role within Institutions shaping conceptualisations of prison officers' work**

The prison institution is not experienced in a homogenous manner by those who work within it. Responsibilities and accountabilities vary with organisational positioning and occupational designation. The analysis of gendered conceptualisations of prison officers' work suggested that those working directly with prisoners as prison officers might understand the work differently to others in the prison, notwithstanding the fact that many others in the prison had also worked as prison officers. To explore this hypothesis the responses of those interviewees currently working as prison officers (25) were compared with the responses of a 'non-officer' combination of senior officers (12), auxiliary staff (4) and managers (3).

### **Broad conceptualisations**

Differences in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work between officers and non-officers were slight. Officers were slightly more likely to see the role of the prison officer as unique and non-officers were slightly more likely to compare the work to other human services work.

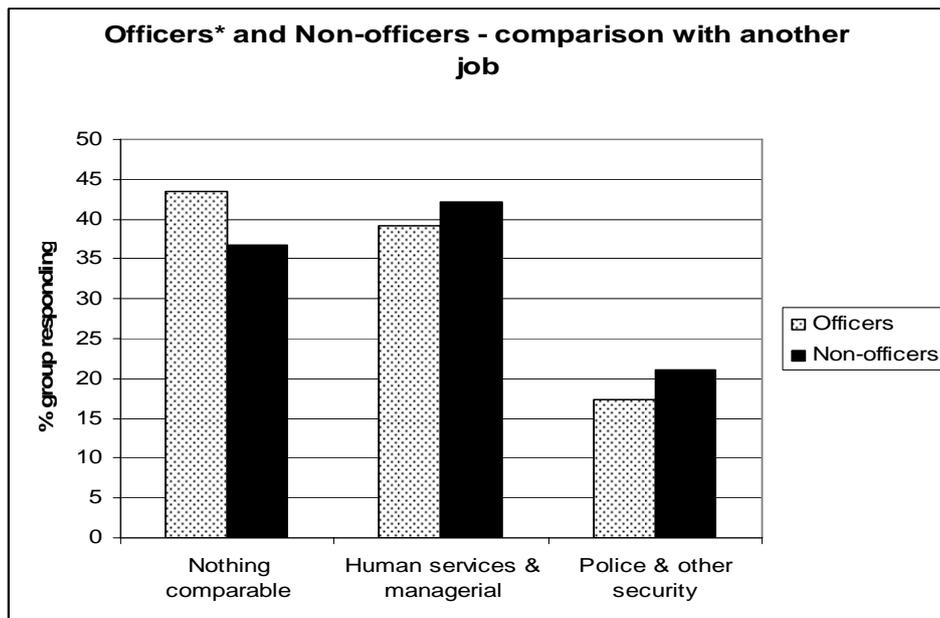


Figure 7.6 Officers and Non-officers – comparison with another job

\*Two officers did not address this question

### Specific conceptualisations

The base for the conceptualisation of the officers’ role when ‘mixing up’ an officer selected by those currently working as prison officers indicates that officers’ choices reflect a similar balance to that of their colleagues. Officers were slightly more likely than their non-officer colleagues to describe the role as managerial (56% compared to 42%) and non-officers were slightly more likely than those actually working currently as officers to emphasise the control role in the choice of *Security Officer* (26% compared to 8%).

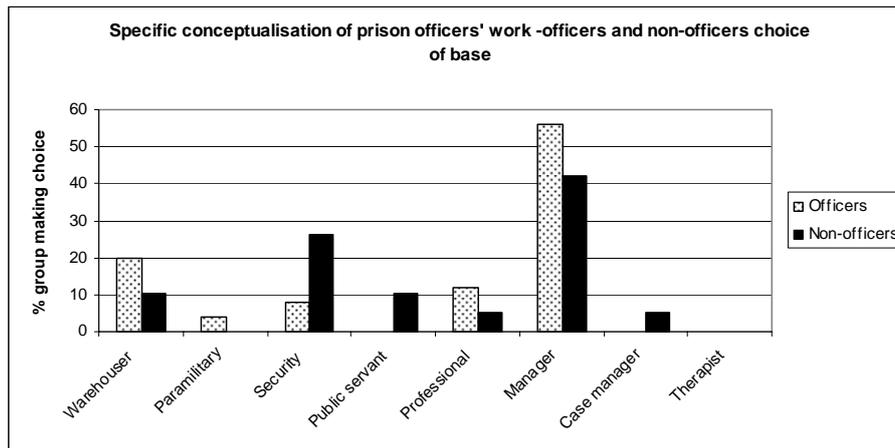


Figure 7.7 Specific conceptualisation of prison officers' work – officers and non-officers choice of base

As identified in Chapter Six, the use of the *Manager of prisoners* description was influenced by both role and gender. Male officers were proportionately more likely than female officers to describe the role as *Manager of prisoners* (67%:40%)

Officers and non-officers varied only slightly (40% compared to 35%) in their likelihood to argue that the role should stay as it is, however where non-officers arguing for change were more likely to use a professional discourse, officers arguing for change were more likely to use a control discourse.

## Vulnerability

The selection of the *Warehouse* conceptualisation as the base was very role sensitive. This conceptualisation, which was not a complimentary one, was selected by auxiliary staff (2/4) and the officers (5/25) and not by senior staff. The use of this conceptualisation highlighted the vulnerability of the prison officer to being held responsible for performance failures of prisons. Whilst the auxiliary staff acknowledged that the role was performed differently by different officers, they used the *Warehouse* conceptualisation to illustrate the lack of proactive work by officers;

*Some officers do it quite well, some officers are... I mean, you hear conversations all the time, the place isn't sound proof by any means, and you hear officers sort of say, 'Well, if you'd broken into my house..' and they relate it back to their own personal experiences and they do it really, really well and on a real basic level and the women sort of think, 'Oh, I didn't think of it like that,' and that's great. Then you get other officers who make comments like, 'You don't deserve to see your children, you shouldn't have you children in here. Our children shouldn't be in prison,' and so within the prison officer itself, there's so many different cultures, there's cliques or groups.*

*.....*

*Well it's hard... because... to generalise for all of them because some of them are just so good.*

*...but, as a whole, I guess the officers are just... I think their primary focus is just ensuring that the women are safe and they're not doing what they shouldn't be doing. So, yes, so maybe we'll start with Warehouse [Interviewee 25]*

In response, officers constructing the role using this *Warehouse* conceptualisation saw the constraints on the role relating to the resources that were available

*...I actually don't see us as being correctional officers. I think we are still custodial officers. I think there are very limited resources available for the women to address their offending behaviour... [Interviewee 25].*

## **Length of correctional employment**

The stereotype, and indeed the image conveyed by some interviewees, of longer serving staff exercising great power over the conceptualisation of prison officers' work suggested that the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by staff who had worked within prisons for varying lengths of time should be explored with a view to establishing whether length of employment in corrections is related to the identified variations in conceptualisation of the role of the officer. The analysis reported in the section that follows indicates that interviewees who had worked in corrections for different periods of time did indeed show different patterns of conceptualisation of the work of prison officers.

Interviewees themselves noted that these variations were present within the prison, identifying that officers who had entered the work more recently brought different attitudes and values to those who had been performing the role for longer periods of time.

*And I think with the younger officers, in particular, maybe because they're close to the age group - I've got no idea - they tend to be, the communication is a lot higher, the respect levels are a lot higher between the prisoners and the officers. But the older type of officer I think, who's been in the system a long time, especially working in the men's prisons and coming through to the women's prison, who hasn't had the professional sort of guidance or supervision in a sense, they're the ones that I think are causing some of the hard work. And it's unintentional. I'm sure they don't intentionally mean to go out there and go... whatever. But I don't think they've learned their skills and their abilities to be able to say, 'Well, no, let's be objective. This woman's been sent there. This is her punishment. Now we need to support her the best that we can', as opposed to reinforcing the punishment mode. [Interviewee 25]*

The point of difference between longer serving and newer interviewees, as indicated by their responses to the 'mixing' an officer question, was the ten year employment mark. These two groups of interviewees, albeit of different size (31 interviewees had been employed for less than 10 years and 13 had been employed for 10 years or more) and gender balance (see table below) conceptualised the role of the prison officer in quite different ways.

Table 7.1 Years in correctional employment of interviewees

	Less than 10 years correctional employment	10 years or more correctional employment
Female	14	3
Male	17	10

## Broad conceptualisations of role of the officer amongst longer serving and newer staff

The first indication of the differences related to length of correctional employment can be seen in the discussion of the different expectations that interviewees had when they started in corrections and in the comparison they would draw with other jobs

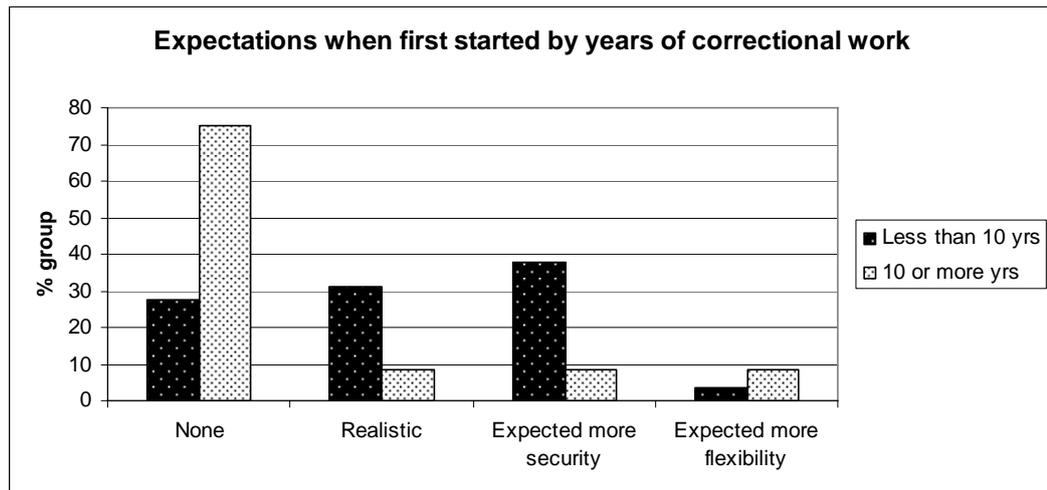


Figure 7.8 Expectations when first started by years of correctional work

Interviewees with less than 10 years experience were more likely to claim to have realistic ideas about the role when they first started than their colleagues who had been employed earlier, although even those who described themselves as having realistic expectations acknowledged that the role did not always develop as they had thought, as described by this interviewee (5-10 years employed) responding to a question about his expectations when he first started,

*[I expected it to be] basically as it is, but not as frustrating I suppose. The care and maintenance of prisoners... more than a security guard, more than working for the courts which is just one aspect of it, but the care of prisoners through, and basically the rehabilitation was the sort of thing I was interested in. not so much the punishment areas. [Less than 10 years, Interviewee 8]*

Of those who described their original view as not being consistent with the reality, there was a large number (over one third) of these interviewees who found that

prison officers' work was much less militaristic than they had expected. As one interviewee (5-10 years employed) described

*Before I joined the job I really thought it was a bit of a militant environment with strict structures, rules and guidelines that were followed by prisoners to the nth degree. But as I got to know the job my whole perception changed. [Interviewee 12]*

However, when asked to compare the role to another job, the uniqueness of the role was emphasised even more than its human services or managerial aspects by interviewees who had been employed less than ten years, whilst their longer serving colleagues were more likely to compare it to a human service or managerial role.

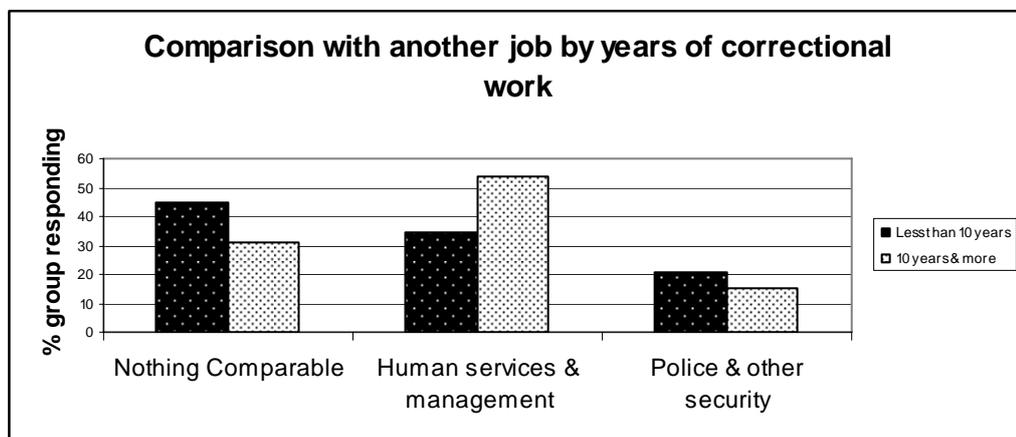


Figure 7.9 Comparison with another job by years of correctional work

### Specific conceptualisations

The clearest differences between longer serving and newer staff can be seen in the selections made when 'mixing up' a prison officer. Staff who had been employed in corrections for less than 10 years predominantly selected the *Manager of prisoners* as a base conceptualisation of the role of the officer and all of these interviewees used the *Manager of prisoners* at some point in 'mixing up' the prison officer. In contrast those who had worked in corrections for 10 years or longer were much less

likely to base their conceptualisation of the role of the officer on the *Manager of prisoners* or even to incorporate it into their conceptualisation of the role at all.

The majority (19 of 31 61.3%) of staff who have less than 10 years service selected *Manager of prisoners* as their conceptualisation of the base of prison officers' work. Whereas this group of staff constituted 70.5% (31/44) of those interviewed, they were 86.4% (19/22) of the interviewees who selected the *Manager of prisoners* as their base.

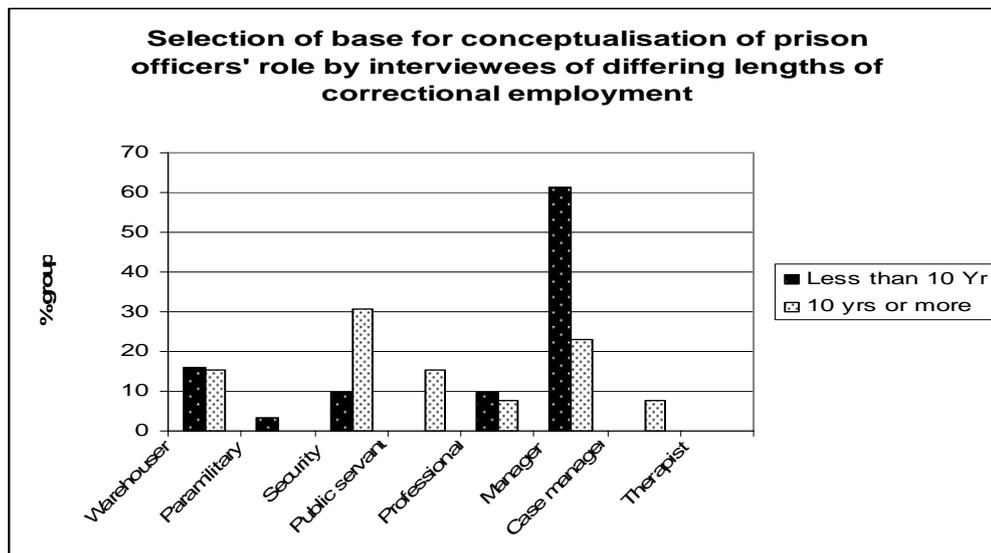


Figure 7.10 Selection of base for conceptualisation of prison officers' role by interviewees of different lengths of correctional employment

### Length of correctional employment and specific prison contexts

The difference in conceptualisations of the role of the officer between the longer serving and newer group of interviewees is influenced by the fact that, as discussed, four fifths of the interviewees from Mount Gambier (all of whom had worked in the prison for less than 10 years) selected the *Manager of prisoners* as their base conceptualisation. However interviewees in the other institutions who had served less than 10 years also favoured this conceptualisation with half the Port Augusta

interviewees and just over one third Adelaide interviewees selecting this conceptualisation.

## **Claiming respect**

### **Interviewees with less than 10 years correctional experience**

In construction of the role through a managerial and rehabilitative discourse many interviewees who had been in corrections for less than 10 years defined the public service that they were performing

*there are some [prisoners] that I'm pretty sure will turn themselves around and there's some I'm pretty sure we will never see again, and they're worth considering and giving a little bit more time perhaps, and spend a bit of time with them and listening to what they've got to say.[Interviewee 41; employed 1 to less than 5 years]*

*I was more into the rehab and perhaps the deterrence aspect of it. The protection also comes into those as well. But I was more interested in what I could do to make a difference which is very sort of... not high moral... Some people say it's dreaming, but one person can make a difference, basically based on how they conduct themselves basically: lead by example, if you like.[Interviewee 8; employed 5 to less than 10 years]*

This involved a particular conceptualisation of the relationship between prisoner and officer and some interviewees acknowledged, that this form of the work involved an emotional engagement in the role

*Emotionally, it's draining. Unless you have a maturity, maybe some people younger have that maturity, to be able to handle that emotional baggage that you have to carry, then it would overwhelm them. I mean I'm not being melodramatic here but that's how, after three years now, I'm already getting this, 'how much can you take of this? How many times can you wrench your heart out?' because you do become involved and emotionally involved with a lot of the people here, so naturally it takes a little piece out of you each time...*

*Every time somebody comes back I lose a little bit, that, 'Oh, we're not doing this right.' So, I work on the optimistic side all the time, thinking they could make this,*

*because he's starting to talk, like he's had enough of this silly game of coming in and going out and coming in. So I'm happy with that. [Interviewee 14]*

Interviewees who had worked in corrections less than ten years argued that the prison officers' role involved highly skilled human relations work. In conceptualising the role as that of a *Manager of prisoners* they emphasised that the use of force to ensure prisoner compliance destroyed the peace of the prison and enhanced the vulnerability of officers and prisoners. The dominant discourses constructing the role of the prison officer amongst these interviewees were rehabilitative, normalisation and entrepreneurial.

### **Longer serving interviewees**

Longer serving officers have been characterised as reluctant to embrace new modes of working and believe that prison officers' work should be respected as a security or paramilitary activity. As seen by those wanting to construct the role using rehabilitative or normalisation discourses, these staff were seen as being very powerful within prisons, with the capacity to influence the terms in which respect for the role should be constructed. As an experienced interviewee described, longer serving staff formed a critical audience for the performance of the work of newer prison officers

*What stops it fully going is the old brigade that are still around after twenty, twenty-five, thirty years and we do have officers like that in the system and they give off the wrong message because if something goes wrong in that interactive thing.. I mean you could be interviewing a prisoner or they hear that their prisoner has gone over to the medic and something goes wrong there and they hit the doctor or hit the nurse then it's like, 'Oh, they're right. I shouldn't have thought good things of that person. Look what they've just done. They've hurt the doctor.' Or it could have been another officer. So their thinking can change and maybe go back a little bit. [Interviewee 29]*

The staff who volunteered to be interviewed for this research did not illustrate this stereotype. (The self volunteering process by which interviewees were recruited for

this research process means that the views of the interviewees cannot be assumed to be representative of the whole prison staff population. It would be inaccurate to generalise from the views of these 13 longer serving staff to the views of all longer serving staff ) However, longer serving interviewees were much less likely to select the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation, so popular with newer staff. Not only did proportionately fewer of these interviewees select it as a base (23% compared to 61%) but they were much less likely than their newer colleagues to include this conceptualisation when tinting an officer – with 7/13 of these interviewees not using this conceptualisation.

The divergence from the stereotype can be seen in the variety of responses longer serving interviewees gave to the invitation to ‘mix up’ a prison officer. The base conceptualisation of *Security officer* (n = 4) was selected only one more time than *Manager of Prisons* (n = 3) and *Public Servant, Case Manager* and *Professional* were selected in preference to *Paramilitary* by longer serving staff.

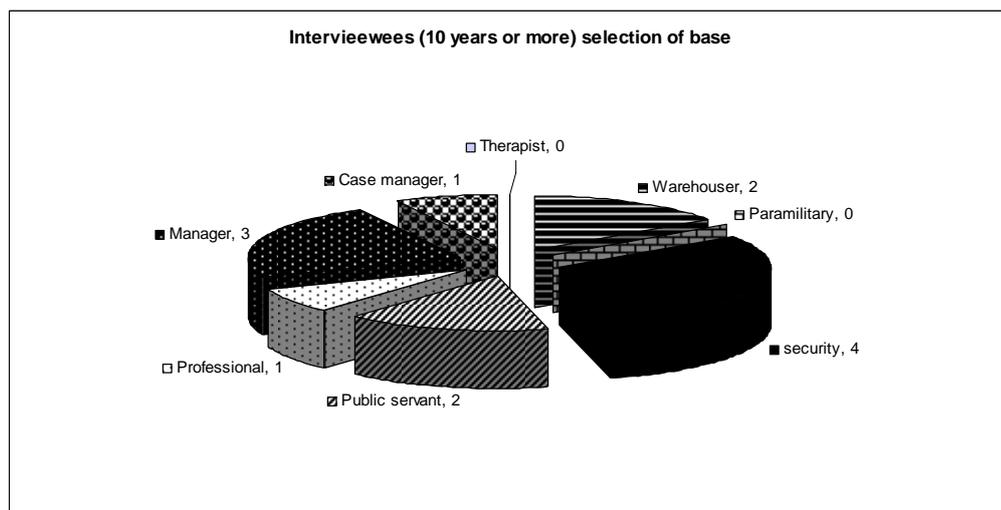


Figure 7.11 Interviewees (10 years or more) selection of base

In addition to constructing the role of the officer from diverse bases, these interviewees also failed to show the resistance to change that is attributed to longer

serving staff. Many of the longer serving interviewees identified that their conceptualisation of the role had evolved, as described by this interviewee who had been in corrections between 10 and 15 years,

*Oh there's no two ways about it. My ideas have changed over the years. I started probably with the same sort of attitude as I was taught when I was on the school: a prisoner is a prisoner; and officer's an officer. There's the line drawn in the sand. You don't step over it. Full stop. There's still that there bit the line's a little bit blurred now. It's sort maybe a bit wavy because there's certain functions you are operating. At my level you've got to be able to have a laugh and a joke with a prisoner.*  
[Interviewee 16]

When asked to consider how the role of the officer could be in an ideal prison setting, these interviewees favoured no change in approximately the same proportion as their newer colleagues. However, the separation of the human services and security roles, allowing greater attention to security was suggested by 4 of the 13 longer serving interviewees does indicate that there was a small group of longer serving interviewees who still strongly wanted to claim respect for the role of the officer in terms of physical control of the prison.

### **Patterns of use of discourse**

Whilst these longer serving interviewees did not fit the stereotype of the para-military officer, the research does show that differences in the use of discourses describing prison purpose and prison process can be clearly delineated in terms of length of time interviewees had spent working in corrections. Analysing the discourses utilised in the construction of the base of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, interviewees with less than 10 years in corrections strongly favoured a normalisation discourse in constructing the role of the officer whilst interviewees with longer employment in corrections were more evenly divided in their use of

control and normalisation discourses (and someone even used a rehabilitative discourse).

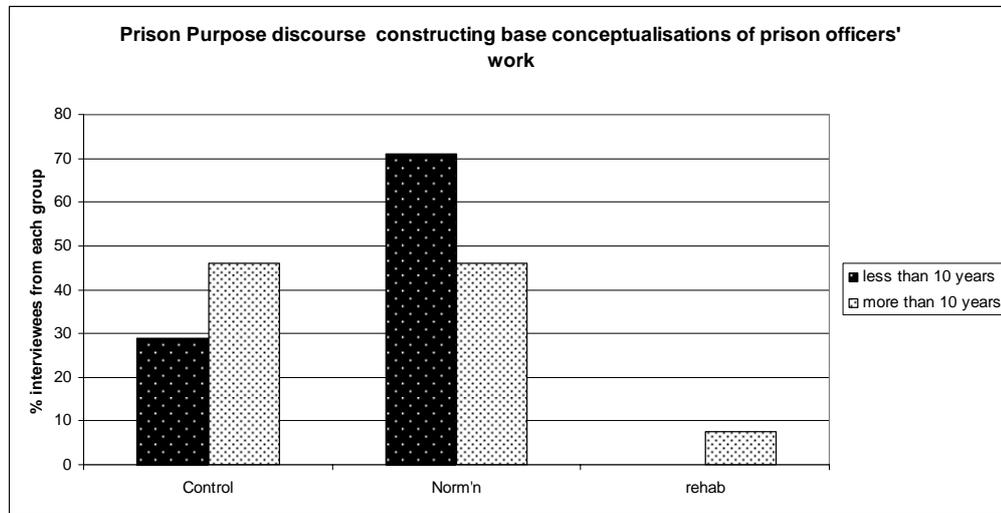


Figure 7.12 Prison Purpose discourse construction base on conceptualisations of prison officers' work

In the construction of the role of the officer using prison process discourses, the legal and bureaucratic discourses were used more frequently by the interviewees who had worked in corrections for 10 years or more and in contrast those who had worked in corrections less than 10 years used the managerialist and professional discourses more frequently.

### **The prison context shaping conceptualisations of prison officers' work:**

The diverse conceptualisations of prison officers' work, constructed from different combinations of prison process and prison purpose discourse by staff within the prison, as explored in Chapter 5, both describe a common understanding of the role of the prison officer and outline significant differences in conceptualisation. Whilst commonality can be seen in the broad conceptualisations of the role as complex and unique and requiring a balancing of human services and custodial roles, distinct

differences of understandings of prison purpose and process resulted in contestation about the base of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work.

The exploration of the patterns of conceptualisations of prison officers' work displayed by interviewees for this research has shown that interviewees who had been employed in corrections less than ten years were more likely than their longer serving colleagues to conceptualise the role of the officer as a *Manager of prisoners*. Furthermore this pattern was enhanced for those interviewees working in Mount Gambier prison, all of whom had worked less than ten years, who demonstrated a remarkable commonality in their conceptualisation of the role of the officer.

Although overall patterns of conceptualisation of the role did not differ between individuals in different roles within the prison, gendered differences in conceptualisation of the role of the officer can be seen amongst those interviewees who currently work as prison officers.

Although the findings of Chapter Six that individual characteristics of gender and previous security work experience on their own make a very limited contribution to shaping the way the staff within the prison conceptualise the role of the prison officer, the analysis of these two chapters has shown that patterns of conceptualisation of the role of the officer can be seen to be shaped both by gender and role within the prison. This suggests that it is the interplay of characteristics that warrants attention. At the same time, whilst 'work context' factors, the nature of the prison, the role of the interviewee within the prison and the length of time interviewees had worked in corrections, were associated with patterns of

conceptualisation of the role of the officer, the patterns here, too, are most interesting when the interplay of factors is considered.

### **Garnering respect and minimising vulnerability**

Although interviewees with less than ten years correctional work experience constructed the role of the officer using similar patterns of prison purpose and prison process discourses, in the Port Augusta and Adelaide prisons this pattern is less marked than in Mount Gambier where the staff had all worked in corrections for less than ten years.

Analysis in Chapter 5 showed how interviewees used conceptualisations of prison officers' work to establish the role as being worthy of respect and to minimise the vulnerability of the prison officer. Recognising these uses of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work provides a framework for considering why interviewees employed in corrections for similar lengths of time conceptualise the role of the officer differently.

The three prisons created very different contexts for the construction of prison officers' work. Each prison provided different audiences for the performance of prison officers' work and as a result the basis for respect for prison officers' work and the vulnerability of the officer differed markedly.

Mount Gambier prison, with its separate identity as the only private prison in South Australia and employing only staff who had worked in corrections for less than 10 years was an environment in which three key audiences for prison officers' work, prisoners, officers and management, had similar expectations of the role. A

particular point of distinction between Mount Gambier interviewees and those from the two government managed prisons was the confidence with which they asserted that the prisoner audience for the performance of prison officers' work appreciated that Mount Gambier was a good place to serve their sentence. At Mount Gambier prisoners were constructed as having a choice about whether to abide by the rules of the prison or to return to government managed prisons. Prison officers' work was conceptualised as engagement with a relatively willing group of prisoners.

However interviewees from this prison faced challenges in common with those of their colleagues in Port Augusta and Adelaide in establishing the prison officer as a respectable role to the outside community and they experienced an additional urgency in this challenge as a result of the questioned legitimacy of their prison. The consistent description by interviewees from Mount Gambier of the work as unique and different to other jobs was used not just to differentiate the role of the prison officer from other occupations, but to differentiate the role of the officer at Mount Gambier from that elsewhere in the prison system. Mount Gambier interviewees consistently constructed the work being done at Mount Gambier as very different to that being done elsewhere in the state.

For interviewees at Mount Gambier the vulnerability of the prison officer was constructed as deriving as much from their position as a worker in an organisation as from their specific prison related duties. Although these interviewees identified the vulnerability of the prison officer to danger and attack the more pressing vulnerability for them was the vulnerability as a worker. The vulnerability of the worker was constructed as resulting from the vulnerability of the organisation whose

legitimacy was the subject of community debate. They managed this vulnerability by an emphasis on professionalism in performing the role determined by the contract as competently as possible and by actively setting aside any questioning of the contractual terms. Arguing that the construction of the role at Mount Gambier was unique in its professionalism and commitment to service served to justify the private management of the Mount Gambier prison and thus maintain the jobs that interviewees valued.

At Mount Gambier officers and other workers were an audience to one another's work, but rather than a critical audience they constructed themselves as a professional and supportive audience. Interviewees had in common their understanding of the prison's mission of providing a top quality service and constructed the role of the officer as needing to be able to exercise discretion in order to deliver this service. Conceptualising the work of the prison officer as working with "gray and blurry" rules positioned the officer as superior to that of the officer in government managed prisons who was constructed as bureaucratic and rule bound.

Neither Port Augusta nor Adelaide prisons provided such a cohesive social context for the construction of prison officers' work. These prisons differed both from Mount Gambier and from each other in the audiences that they provided for the performance of prison officers' work, although they shared a departmental context that influenced understandings of prison purpose and prison process.

Port Augusta prison, with its large, diverse prisoner population was a prison context in which divergent conceptualisations of prison officers' work were constructed and

defended. A higher proportion of interviewees from this prison had worked in corrections for 10 years or longer (8/16 compared to 5/15 at Adelaide and none at Mount Gambier), and the two longest serving interviewees were from Port Augusta. The prison operated within the broader departmental context and interviewees' conceptualisations of prison officers' work took into account both changing political developments within the department and its political context and perceived gaps between rhetoric and resources.

The prisoner audience for prison officers' work was entirely involuntary and diverse both in racial mix and in security ratings. Although interviewees shared a common agreement about the importance of officer prisoner relationships for the safety of officers and prisoners, those who constructed the role of the prison officer in normalisation terms emphasised respectful relationships and the safety that they would bring, while those who constructed the role from control discourses emphasised power and control as the needed strategies for achieving this. Very different expectations of prison officer relationships were built into their conceptualisation of prison officers' work by interviewees working with different groups of prisoners. Interviewees focussed on long term prisoners or the MOWCamp were less likely to emphasise their vulnerability to attack and to construct the role using normalisation discourses.

Conceptualising the role of the prison officer to garner respect both from within and outside the prison involved positioning oneself in debates that were vigorous and ongoing about prison purpose and process. Officers' vulnerability, both as prison

officers and workers, was a significant concern to interviewees and exacerbated the differences about appropriate prison purpose and process.

At Port Augusta prison interviewees who had worked in corrections for ten years or more and those who had worked in corrections for less than ten years showed different patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers' work. These conceptualisations, which shaped their perception as audience for prison officers' work, reflected in a moderated version, the pattern of conceptualisation of their colleagues in other prisons. Half the interviewees who had worked in corrections used normalisation discourse to construct the base of the conceptualisation of prison officers' work and the eight longer serving interviewees used six base conceptualisations between them.

Other officers and colleagues provided a highly critical audience for the performance of prison officers' work and in this prison interviewees identified that they felt vulnerable when working with others who conceptualised the role of the officer very differently to the way they did. Interviewees constructing the role through normalisation discourses emphasised the danger created through aggressive attempts at domination of prisoners by officers and interviewees constructing the role with an emphasis on control as the purpose of prison constructed their vulnerability as resulting from a failure of others to attend to security procedures.

Adelaide prison, incorporating interviewees from the co-located Adelaide Women's prison and Northfield Pre release centre, provided the context for officers undertaking a range of unusual roles – working with women and with prisoners in

their last 12 months prior to release. Although these different roles allowed interviewees to construct the work of the prison officer in these contexts as unique they also positioned the role as being outside the mainstream of prison work and thus needing to be promoted as equally demanding and thus worthy of respect as other prison officers' work.

In addition the Adelaide Women's Prison is antiquated and was described by interviewees as not providing either security or human services to an appropriate level. Although interviewees, individually, seemed proud of their own work, the role of the prison officer in this context was not seen as a highly valued one. The lack of societal respect for the imprisonment of women as demonstrated by the highly criticised prison infrastructure, lack of credible work for prisoners and security limitations, was demoralising to interviewees working in this context. This demoralisation created a context in which there was little agreement about the conceptualisation of prison officers' work and a sense that unrealistic expectations of the role left officers vulnerable both to harm and to being seen to fail in their job.

Interviewees from this prison were those most likely to want to see the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within their prison changed. The majority of interviewees, whether they had worked for 10 years or more or less than 10 years, argued that they would like to see the basis for the construction of the role of the officer altered fundamentally. The difference between these groups of interviewees was that those with less than 10 years correctional experience were likely to want to change the base of the conceptualisation of the role and those who had worked for 10 years or longer wanted to separate the human services and security roles.

## Conclusion

In this analysis the factors influencing the individual's exercise of agency in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work has been explored. Notwithstanding the construction of prison officers' role by interviewees from all prisons utilising discourses of prison purpose of control, rehabilitation and normalisation and legal, bureaucratic, managerial and professionalisation discourses of prison process, distinct patterns of conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer can be identified from the responses of interviewees in three South Australian prisons.

The argument of this chapter is that patterns of conceptualisations of prison officers' work are most fruitfully understood if the interconnections of factors influencing the individual's exercise of agency are explored. The individual characteristics of gender and previous work experience were demonstrated to have only slight influences on the patterns of conceptualisation of prison officers by these interviewees. However these individual attributes can be seen to modify the conceptualisation of the role when considered in the context of the role of the individual within the prison.

Although the single most influential factor in determining the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by an individual would seem to be the length of time that they were employed within corrections this influence was modified by the prison in which the individual was working. Each prison provided different audiences for the performance of prison officers' work which resulted in different priorities in the claiming of respect for the role and different pressures in the defining of the vulnerability of the officer.

This identification of the work or prison context as influential in the construction of prison officers' work is closely related to the final research question of this thesis, which examines the extent to which the Departmental discourse, analysed in Chapter 4, influences the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within the prison. This question is addressed in the following chapter.

# **Chapter Eight: The extent of influence of departmental discourse on conceptualisations of prison officers' work**

## **Introduction**

Officers, senior officers, managers and auxiliary staff working in three South Australian prisons claimed that prison officers' work should be conceptualised as a complex balancing of custodial and human service roles. Using a range of conceptualisations of prison officers' work constructed from different combinations of prison purpose and prison process discourses, these individuals constructed the role of the prison officer with different emphases and the most appropriate construction of the role was strongly contested. This contestation derived both from concern to establish the basis on which the role would be respected and the concern to construct a role that would minimise the vulnerability of the officer. The most influential factors in shaping how an individual conceptualised prison officers' work were identified as the length of time that the individual had worked in corrections and the specific prison in which they were working.

The use of conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services was analysed in Chapter 4 and changes in the construction of the role of the officer in official Departmental documents through changes in discourse of prison purpose and prison process identified. In this final chapter these two separate strands of analysis are drawn together and the extent to which the Departmental discourses constructing conceptualisations of the work of

the prison officer have influenced the conceptualisations of those working within prisons are examined. The chapter draws together the analysis of the conceptualisations of prison officers' role from the literature, the analysis of the discourse of prison purpose and process in departmental documents and the research with staff working within prisons to address the final research question:

- To what extent are the new conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer, articulated by the Department for Correctional Services in the last ten years, reflected in changed conceptualisations of the role within South Australian prisons and what determines the influence of these new conceptualisations?

In so doing the chapter returns to the theoretical position that discourse within organisations is used in a competitive process in which key actors seek to influence the conduct of the organisation. This competitive process is often described as a hierarchical interaction in which the organisation (or actors on its behalf) seeks to dominate and construct the workers as described by du Gay

...managerial discourse of excellence, operating as it were 'from above', constructs new ways for people to be at work. (du Gay 1996a:75)

Although studies of imprisonment, often focused on power negotiations between prisoners or between prisoners and staff, have revealed that power negotiations are seldom just linear and that authority is almost always limited (Bosworth and Carrabine 2001), these insights have not been applied to the relationship between workers and management within prisons. In studying the extent to which Departmental discourses can be seen to have influenced the conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer within the prison, this chapter draws on the idea that in the multiple power relations that constitute a work environment such as a prison, people

are addressed by and respond to conflicting discourses and that in this process 'discourse can be questioned altered or reinterpreted' (Raby 2005:167). This chapter utilises these theoretical insights about the use of discourse to give effect to power relations and thus to construct worker identities and the possible engagement of workers in this process to explore what can be learnt about the effect of departmental discourses on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within the prison.

Although the mandate of actors within the correctional services industry has become complicated by the movement to contractual delivery of imprisonment services, the role of the Department as the articulant, under direction from the Minister of Correctional Services, of overarching policy remains unchanged. The Department thus plays an active role in the conduct of prison organisations through contributing to the discursive construction of prison purpose and process and to the conceptualisation of the prison project, including the role of the prison officer.

However, the discursive construction of the prison project and the identity of workers within the prison is not a unilateral process and those within the prison have agency in their response. Workers, and others, including prisoners, within prisons conceptualise the role of the prison officer in response to a range of discursive stimuli.

In this chapter the effect of the South Australian Department for Correctional Services' promotion of new conceptualisations of the prison officers' role is examined by an analysis of the extent to which these new conceptualisations are utilised by staff working within the prison. The new conceptualisations of the prison officers' role being articulated by the department between 1993 and 2003 (identified

in Chapter 4) and the discourses from which these were constructed are compared to the conceptualisation of the prison officers' role being expressed by staff within three South Australian prisons (identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). The analysis examines the extent to which staff utilise the new conceptualisations and the understandings of prison purpose and prison process from which they are constructed and examines the factors that appear to influence the adoption of the new departmental discourses amongst staff.

### **Changing conceptualisations of prison officers' role within prisons**

Prisons were constructed as changing work environments by many interviewees who described both the nature of the changes that they saw within prisons and changed understandings of the work of prison officers. In response to the twinned questions about their ideas on prison officers' work when they first started work in a prison and how these have changed only 10 of the 41 interviewees who answered these questions responded that they now saw their original ideas as an accurate conceptualisation of the role. Developing understandings of the role were described by those who had started with no idea (17/39) or had expected the role to be different (14/39).

However while individuals identified that their conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer had changed over time, they constructed the change as a response to different stimuli. Interviewees identified that their conceptualisation changed in response to their recognition of the norms and practices already established within the prison, their perception of change in the prisoner group over time and also in response to departmental reconstructions of the role of the prison officer.

## **Responding to established norms and practices**

Changing conceptualisations of prison officers' work resulting from changed understandings of the prison context were noted by many interviewees, who reported that their conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer had been changed as they came to appreciate the new environment. New recruits entered a social context in which relationships were already constructed through the norms and practices within the prison. Conforming to those norms and practices was an important part of earning respect for the performance of the role of the officer from both the audience of officers and that of prisoners. In particular interviewees noted that their conceptualisation of the role of the officer changed when they appreciated that the norms and practices constructed a prison that was less of a controlled environment than they had expected.

*Firstly, I realised that it wasn't the militant environment I thought it was, it was heading towards more of a social human service sort of environment, so my first impressions were blown out of the water the minute I joined the job. [Interviewee 12]*

## **Responding to prisoners**

Interviewees reported changed conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer resulting from both changes in their construction of the prisoner and their perception of actual changes in the prisoner population. Some interviewees reported an adjustment of their conceptualisation of the role of the officer resulting from a diminished use of rehabilitative discourse as they became more experienced in working with prisoners and less idealistic about what might be achieved in working with them.

*Certainly. I guess I used to feel sorry for everybody. Now there's a few I don't have a lot of sympathy for because I can see that they don't want to change their circumstances, they're quite happy. Some of them actually say to you, 'I'll be back.'*

*They really have no intentions of, or they may not be capable of changing their ways, but they certainly have no intentions. But some people, they're offered courses inside prison to help them attain a job when they get outside and they say, 'No thank you, I want to stay on the pension.' So you do see that and I didn't think people... I thought everybody would strive to better their family life and better something for their children, but they just don't, well a lot of them ... [Interviewee 41]*

However the influence of rehabilitative discourse was increased for other interviewees as they perceived prisoners having greater health and social needs.

Changes to the prison population were identified as the driver of change by these interviewees

*I think we deal with more and more prisoners that are... well they certainly keep re-offending, but it's drug related type crime. Therefore, eventually they become almost a special needs type of prisoner with the psychotic problems that go with it.*

*So, nowadays you've got to be very switched on to a prisoner. We used to see five years ago, he used to come in and just do his time and go home. At worst might do the basic childish little things that some of them might do, try to pinch a ruler or pencil off the desk or something, now become... their aggression, they become violent much quicker and for no apparent reason. [Interviewee 15]*

This increased volatility of the prisoner constructed the officer as being at the one time both more vulnerable to sudden attack and being more worthy of respect for both the courage and the skill required to perform the role.

*It can be very trying at times. I know the department's looking at it and training specialist officers or training a group of officers who specialise in dealing with those sort of prisoners. Self-harm is one the things that gets to you... most people you can't understand why they do it, but again, it's something that must just switch on in the brain and they self-harm themselves and that can get traumatic then for the staff around here as well. [Interviewee 15]*

This recognition that specialist prison officers might need to be trained to respond to these changes in prisoners reinforces the conceptualisation of the role as being worthy of respect.

## **Disputing the influence of Departmental views of prison officers' role**

Although most longer serving staff identified that Departmental expectations of prison officers had changed over time, the effect of Departmental initiatives to change the way prison officers do their work was contested by interviewees. While some argued that their conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer had changed in response to Departmental initiatives, others argued that the Department's changes had had little effect.

The most common ways of referring to changes in response to Departmental initiatives were to describe a movement toward engagement between officer and prisoner and to case management

*The work's changed: having been in the Department for the so long there's been a real culture change in that it was very much... I actually talked about it last night.[at a recruitment information evening]. In the past it was very much you were just a turnkey. All you did... we were a warehouse. You had prisoners and you warehoused them and that all you did. You locked them behind a barrier and opened and closed doors and that was it.*

*There was a keyword which came out a few years ago which was 'interaction', and I see that as very high now, in that we tend to treat prisoners as individuals a lot more, not as best as we could, but we did it a lot more and we talk to prisoners more and we have a rapport I guess with prisoners, whereas before it was like, prisoner scumbag, you just don't talk to them and they don't talk to us. [Interviewee 19]*

Evidence for the impact of this change was identified in the changes in the language through which the prison officers' role was described and a consequential alteration to the relationship between officer and prisoner

*I know that when I first started, which would nearly be ten years ago, being called a social worker was a real insult in the job. Now it's gone more towards case*

*management and more involvement with the prisoners, and that's good, I think. And you get more involved in what they're doing and even their outside lives you know more about, because they'll tell you. You don't have to know that but they generally will talk to you. So there's more follow through really. [Interviewee 38]*

Those contesting the extent of the influence of recent Departmental discourse sought to minimise the effect of this discourse by emphasising the continuities in correctional philosophy and practice and arguing that the promotion of new conceptualisations of the prison officers' role such as case management merely involved a change of emphasis. The interviewee quoted below used a professional discourse to argue that case management was just a new name for work that officers had already done.

*Case management is probably something that we've been doing for a long time: it's just been given a name. That's my concept of it. It's probably formalised now. Ever since I've started there have always been programs that you have for prisoners. You look at their offending issues and you work out from there what programs would best suit them, say if their crimes are drug related you refer them for drug and alcohol, or domestic violence, or anger management and stuff like that. [Interviewee 9]*

Assertion of a professional independence in this context served to position officers and others working within the prison as the most influential audience for the performance of prison officers' work. It claimed respect for the knowledge and commitment of those who work within prisons and resisted the notion that good ideas come from outside the prison (certainly not from the Departmental hierarchy).

In the chapter sections that follow the impact of Departmental discourse on the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within the prison is mapped. In the first section the key elements of the Departmental discourse are summarised from Chapter 4, then these elements are mapped against the conceptualisation of prison officers'

work identified by interviewees within the prisons. From this mapping the extent to which Departmental discourses in recent decades have shaped conceptualisations within the prison is identified.

New Departmental discourses are identified as only one of the discursive influences on the construction of the prison officers' role within a prison. In the use of prison purpose and prison process discourses to construct new understandings of prisons, the relationships within prisons and conceptualisations of prison officers' work, the Department is attempting to assert its leadership power over other forces perceived as powerful by those within the prison. In particular the Department is seeking to over ride both the perception that current practice is inevitable and requiring individuals to conform and that the nature of prisoners determines officer prisoner relationships

The active agency of workers within prisons to adopt, to change to partially adopt or to reject new conceptualisations of prison officers' work and the relationships within that work role is recognised and the factors that influence that decision explored.

## **Mapping new Departmental discourses within prisons**

### **Key elements of Departmental discourse**

The conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer as *Case Manager* and *Manager of prisoners*, promoted by the department in the new initiatives from 1993, were constructed from new combinations of discourse of prison purpose and process including new discourses brought into the prison system as a result of wider public sector reform movements. The articulation of these new discourses and the conceptualisations of prison officers' work that they construct was not a linear

process in which the new ideas completely take over the Department but rather a contested process in which ideas ebb and wane in status and popularity, are tested in particular situations and enthusiastically promoted in others.

That discourse of prison purpose and prison process once introduced into correctional services remained present in the Departmental palette/repertoire was demonstrated in Chapter 4. New discourses are layered on top of the old, and whilst their proponents may attempt to eradicate old discourses, it was argued in Chapter 4 that they seldom completely supplant the old but rather build on it in a particular way for periods of time. However although continuing threads of discourse about prison purpose and prison process can be seen to weave through the Departmental reports, 1993 marked a significant transition in these discourses. As identified in Chapter 4, in this period, with the change in government, the move to privatise the management of the Mount Gambier prison and the arrival of Sue Vardon as Chief Executive resulted in an intensity of departmental discourse of change.

From 1993, departmental discourse strongly emphasised in words and actions, discourses of normalisation and rehabilitation as the purposes of imprisonment. The prison processes necessary to achieve these goals were described in both professional and managerialist/entrepreneurial terms. The *Managers of prisoners* and *Case Manager* conceptualisation of prison officers' role that resulted from these discourses succinctly described a new prison administration policy.

The analysis that follows explores the presence of these discourses and conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer within the prisons in 2003. The

analysis examines to what extent and amongst which groups of interviewees the Department's normalisation, rehabilitation, professional and managerialist discourses have been adopted and to what extent control discourse has been eliminated. As one aspect of this exploration, the adoption of *Case Manager* and *Manager of prisoners* will be considered as evidence of this impact. The analysis first examines the extent to which the Departmental discourses of prison purpose, moving from control to normalisation and rehabilitation are reflected in the construction of prison officers' work by personnel within prisons and then examines the presence of Departmentally promoted discourses of prison process – professionalism and entrepreneurialism can be seen within the conceptualisations of prison officers' work by interviewees.

In the popularity of the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation can be seen the influence of the normalisation discourses promoted in the Department since the 1980s.

The later rehabilitative discourses, promoted through the Case Management process have not been successful in establishing this as the basis for prison officers' work but have been influential in adding this as an element of the role. The control discourses of earlier times have not been displaced by rehabilitative discourses, but rather the control function is recognised as one essential element in the conceptualisation of the work of the prison officer.

The influence of the professional and entrepreneurial discourses is also seen in the popularity of the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation. Tension about appropriate prison processes can be seen in the valuing of the bureaucratic discourses by some

staff and the use by others of these discourses to epitomise the inflexibility of the system.

### **Prison purpose discourses: moving from control to normalisation and rehabilitation**

Understandings of prison purpose lie at the heart of conceptualisations of prison officers' work. Whilst the exploration of conceptualisations of prison officers' work within prisons in Chapter 5 identified that the role was constructed as complex and unique and requiring a balance of custodial and human service roles, at the same time, interviewees engaged in vigorous dialogue about the appropriate basis for the conceptualisation of prison officers' work and in particular about which discourses of prison purpose should be used in constructing the role of the officer. Within this contested arena the research for this thesis showed that the most popular basis for the conceptualisation of the role of the officer was as a *Manager of prisoners* (created from normalisation discourses) and that conceptualisations of the role as a *Warehouser* and a *Security Officer* (both constructed from control discourse) were most frequently used by staff who dissented from this managerial conceptualisation of the role. These findings demonstrate the influence of the normalisation prison purpose discourse, the strong use of control discourse and in this analytic framework the very limited influence of rehabilitative discourse.

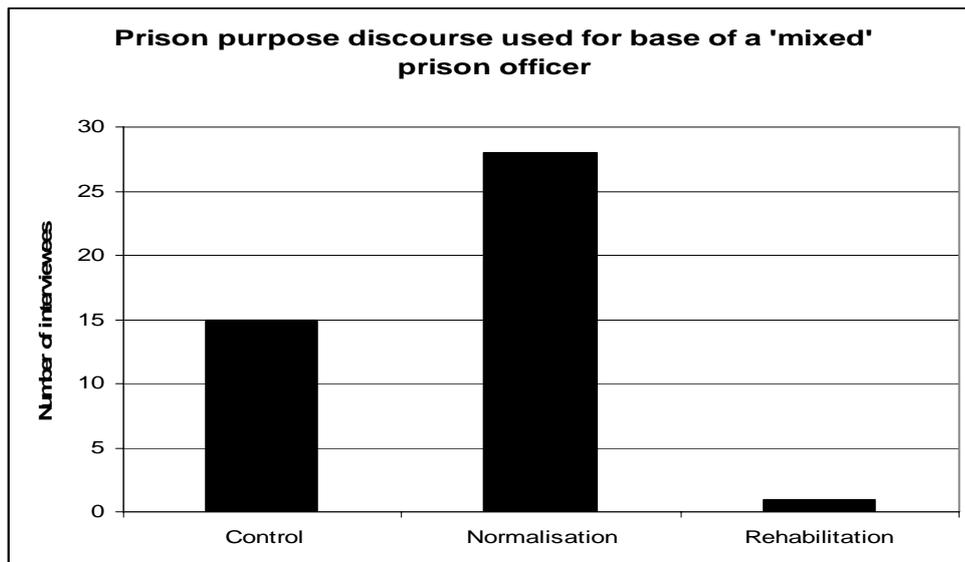


Figure 8.1 Prison purpose discourse used for base of a 'mixed' prison officer

### The contested influence of rehabilitative discourses

The rehabilitative discourses, reintroduced by the Department through its emphasis on case management and the addressing of offending behaviour, has not been adopted as the defining discourse for the construction of prison officers' work by these interviewees within South Australian prisons. Only one interviewee chose to base their conceptualisation of the role of the officer in rehabilitative discourses.

However, although conceptualisations of prison officers' work based on rehabilitation were not favoured as the base for prison officers' work, the analysis of Chapters 5, 6 and 7 showed that rehabilitation discourse had influenced interviewees. Many interviewees drew on this rehabilitative discourse in their discussion of prison officers' work. This discourse, describing the purpose of prison as to provide prisoners with an opportunity to change their behaviour, was seen in the frequent references to case management as a task undertaken by prison officers and in the descriptions of the relationship between officer and prisoner, including the need to sit

with prisoners through difficult times and to encourage them to look differently at their behaviour.

The consistent inclusion of the *Case Manager* as one of the tints in 'mixing up' a prison officer as interviewees saw it in their prison illustrates acceptance of the Department's promotion of this discourse. An additional indication that the rehabilitative discourse has an accepted position in the conceptualisation of prison officers' work within prisons can be seen in the indication by one third of the interviewees who wanted to see the role of the officer change, that their preferred conceptualisation of the role of the officer would be constructed with an increased use of this rehabilitative discourse (6/18).

Despite this identification of case management as one component of the role of the officer by thirty seven of the forty-four interviewees, rehabilitative discourse was challenged on both philosophical and practical grounds. In particular, some interviewees within the prison resisted defining the prison officers' role in terms that would result in performance indicators relating to the changed behaviour of prisoners on their release. Whilst interviewees within the prison were largely committed to working with prisoners in a positive and responsibility inducing way, they rejected the idea that within the context of a prison regime it was possible for them to be expected to change prisoners' behaviour. They argued that this was not realistic both because of the problems of motivating an individual to change whilst living in a prison and because of the inability of prison workers to affect change on the more complex socio economic circumstances in which prisoners will live their lives on their departure from prison.

### **The continuing influence of control discourses**

.The idea that rehabilitative discourse would both become influential in its own right and displace the control discourse within the prison was not borne out by the findings of this research. Interviewees argued with great consistency that the security role, centrally constructed through control discourse, was a fundamental building block from which the prison regime and the prison officers' role must be conceptualised. Whilst in the main, this notion of control differed from the authoritarian notions associated with the *Paramilitary* conceptualisation of the role and was rather described in terms of containment, good order and safety; it was nonetheless a discourse in which the need for control within the prison was an absolute priority. The control discourse established performance indicators in terms of escapes and prisoner and officer safety that enabled officers and their managers to point to successful outcomes of their work

### **The wide acceptance of normalisation discourses**

The prison purpose discourse being used most pervasively by interviewees within prisons to construct the role of the prison officer was the normalisation discourse. This discourse, which had been present in Departmental discourse since before the 1980s, was "re-launched" in the late 1980s with the Unit Management model of prison management. It was retained as a fundamental plank of the mid 1990s high energy refocussing of departmental discourse and only moved to back seat with the prioritisation of the notion of Case Management in prisons. Its impact within prisons can be seen to result partly from its usefulness in steering a middle line between control discourse and rehabilitation discourse.

The normalisation discourse was used by interviewees to place the control issues, often seen as unique to prisons, in the context of other social control processes and other institutions within which they are exercised – in particular workplaces and homes. In so doing the normalisation discourse addresses ethical issues that are acknowledged both by the department and by those working within the prisons to flow from the act of imprisoning a citizen. The use of this discourse to compare the work of prison officers to teachers, police and parents illustrates the normalising of the authority and accountability elements of the relationship between the prisoner and the officer.

However, the normalisation discourse does not incorporate the control discourse that constructed prison as a place of punishment and sought to shape regimes that reflected this. Some interviewees rejected the use of normalisation discourses to shape prison officers' work on this grounds and the group of interviewees who challenged the viability of relationships within the prison based on both control and rehabilitation and argued that these prison purposes needed to be separated, supported this rejection.

***Normalisation and rehabilitation – the commonalities and tensions***

The relationship between the rehabilitative discourse and the normalisation discourse both within departmental discourse and within the prisons is complex. On the one hand, as one element of the normalisation discourse is individual responsibility it resonates with the underpinnings of the rehabilitative discourse that is expressed in the case management articulation of rehabilitation. This Case Management model is a very individualised model of rehabilitation in which the particular elements of individual's behaviour that result in imprisonment are to be addressed by the

provision of services both within the prison and at the time of release. On the other hand, choosing to base the conceptualisation of prison officers' work in a normalisation discourse can also be seen to challenge the relevance of rehabilitation discourse in constructing prison officers' work as it offers an alternative purpose for the relationship between prisoner and officer.

### **Prison process: promoting professionalism and an entrepreneurial service orientation**

Although the prison process discourses do not occupy centre stage in discussions of prison officers' work in the way that the competition about prison purpose does, inclusion of these discourses delineates more precisely the debates about the conceptualisation of prison officers' work. The pattern of usage of prison process discourses by interviewees for this research indicates that the recent Departmental discourses of professionalism and entrepreneurialism have influenced those working within prisons. This influence can be seen in the discourses constructing the conceptualisation for the 'mixing up' the officer question.

The managerialist discourse, brought into corrections from other public sector reform innovations has been the reform leader creating a focus on service delivery and the role of the prison in serving the community and the justice system as well as working with the prisoner. The nature and status of the service to be provided to the prisoner was contentious with some interviewees emphasising the contribution to security that working with the prisoner achieves and others arguing that it was demeaning to the role of the officer to wait on prisoners. However the conceptualisation of the role of the officer as *Manager of prisoners*, constructed from this entrepreneurial discourse, was used by interviewees to both claim respect for the role of the officer from the

diverse audiences for the performance of prison officers' work, prisoners, colleagues and the broader community.

The ongoing promotion of professional discourse, underpinning Departmental initiatives such as moves to increase the education levels of prison officers, recognised that the officer has autonomy and discretion in their day to day work. The professional discourse was used by interviewees to establish and claim respect for the specialist knowledge base of the prison officer. Its use is most obvious in the construction of both the popular *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation of prison officers' work and the *Professional/semi-professional* conceptualisation, also shaping the *Therapist* and the *Paramilitary officer*.

The bureaucratic discourse, which had been the language of reform of an earlier era, retained influence in the construction of the important *Security Officer* conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer. In the debates about the appropriate conceptualisation of prison officers' work, the bureaucratic discourse was utilised both to emphasise the adherence to rules that have been developed over time. In particular, this discourse was used by many interviewees to describe the careful attention to detail required to ensure a secure prison. In contrast, bureaucratic discourse was also used by interviewees to describe the a culture in which addressing prisoners' needs was not given priority.

## **Factors influencing the impact of Departmental discourses within prisons**

Departmental influence on the construction of prison officers' work by interviewees within the prisons can be seen to follow the patterns of conceptualisation identified in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The Departmental discourses have most strongly influenced interviewees who have worked in corrections for less than ten years and the prison context can be seen to have mediated this influence.

### **Length of employment in corrections and the influence of Departmental discourse**

The strong influence of the normalisation discourses of prison purpose, as evidenced in the adoption of the *Manager of Prisoners* conceptualisation for the base of prison officers' work has already been identified as being related to the length of time interviewees had worked in corrections. Their longer serving colleagues did not so much reject the newer normalisation and rehabilitation discourses as construct them as highly competitive with the control discourses. In so doing they constructed the role of the officer as involving great tension and conflicting goals. When 'mixing up' a prison officer they were much less likely than their newer colleagues to choose the *Manager of prisoners* at any point in their 'mixing', but they were more likely to choose both the *Security Officer* on the one hand and the *Case Manager* and *Therapist* on the other hand, thus embedding the competing goals of control and rehabilitation within the conceptualisation of the role. This construction of the role as involving competing styles and goals was given particular expression by the group of four (of thirteen) longer serving interviewees who argued, when invited to describe how they would prefer the role of the officer to be constructed, that the human

services and security roles of the officer should be separated with different people performing each role.

Similarly, the influence of the Department's promotion of the professionalism and entrepreneurial prison process discourses can be seen differentially amongst interviewees with less than 10 years employment in corrections. This differential impact can be seen most clearly in the analysis of the construction of the bases of conceptualisations of prison officers' work, which highlights the strong influence of the professional and managerialist discourses, expressed in the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation.

#### **Prison contexts mediating the influence of Departmental discourses**

The influence of the length of time that an individual has worked in corrections on the extent to which their conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer reflects recent innovations in Departmental discourse, is moderated by the effect of the prison within which the individual works. The differential influence of departmental discourse on those working within particular prisons, highlights the influence of other discursive stimuli and the effect of each audience for the performance of prison officers' work.

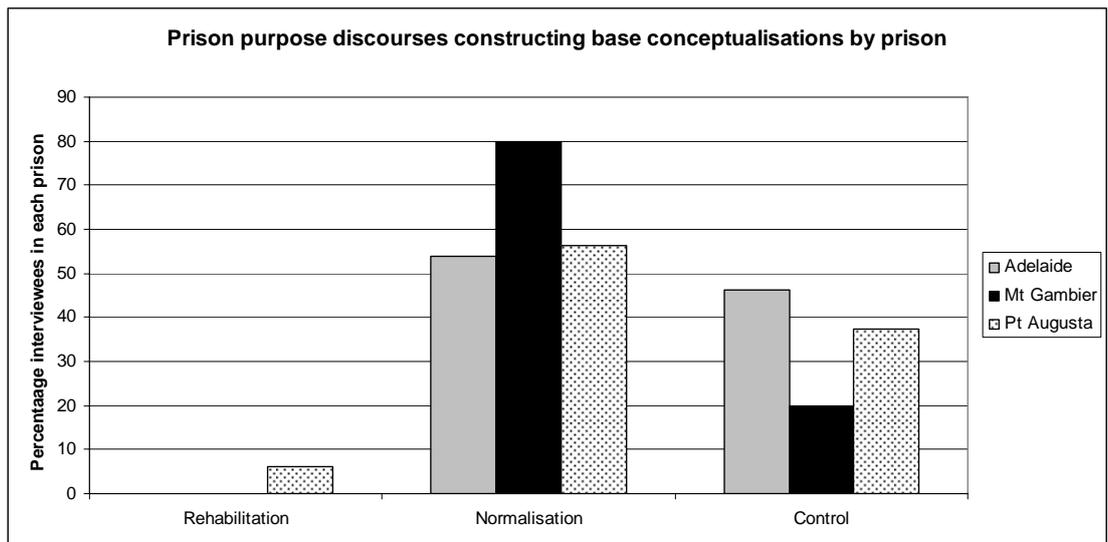


Figure 8.2 Prison purpose discourses constructing base conceptualisations by prison

In Port Augusta and Adelaide, in which longer serving and newer correctional workers need to find modes of operating together, the impact of the newer discourses about prison purpose are diluted. This pattern, is repeated in the uptake of the discourses about prison process where the influence of professional and managerial discourses was most marked amongst interviewees from Mount Gambier, as a result of the overwhelming use of the *Manager of prisoners* conceptualisation by interviewees in that prison.

The exploration of conceptualisations of prison officers' work amongst staff in the three prisons in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 identified that interviewees utilised conceptualisations of the work of the officer to garner respect for the role and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer. The discussion that follows considers how these purposes of conceptualisations of prison officers' work impacted on the influence of Departmental discourses on the construction of the role of the officer within prisons.

## **Garnering respect and minimising vulnerability**

The construction of prison officers' work in order to garner respect for the role and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer underpins the patterns discerned in the analysis that length of correctional employment and specific prison contexts influence the extent to which conceptualisations of prison officers' work within prisons reflects the Departmental promotion of the *Manager of Prisoners* and the *Case Manager* as desired roles for the officer.

## **Linking respect, vulnerability and the point at which an individual enters the corrections industry**

The effect of the amount of time individuals worked in corrections on their attitudes has been identified (Kauffman 1988: Chapter 9; Conover 2001:282,283) or assumed (Crawley 2004a:220) in many analyses of prison officers at work. The idea that performing productively as a prison officer was a time limited career was one that was raised by a number of interviewees in discussing their experience of working as a prison officer. As this interviewee explained when describing the role to a potential new recruit

*if it was a younger person I'd say it's an excellent training base to then go looking for something else. It's not, unless you're have managerial aspirations, it's not a long time career thing.*

...

*Well, I don't think they would last 40 years. I think there's a burn out thing in this job. Emotionally, it's draining. [Interviewee 12]*

In constructing longer serving staff as not being in tune with current correctional practice and as yielding significant power in shaping the organisational culture of the prison, interviewees did not explore the source of their non cooperative behaviour, but descriptions such as “the old brigade” encouraged the listener to infer that it resulted from their having worked in corrections for too long.

However, focussing on interviewees' desire to construct a role that can be respected and one which addresses the vulnerability of the officer as a worker and an officer, suggests an alternative approach to the question of an individual's length of employment in corrections. Instead of focussing on measuring how long the individual has been within corrections, attention should be turned to the point in time at which the individual entered correctional work and the effect of this entry point on their conceptualisation of prison officers' work. This entry point defines a number of elements of the initiation of the individual into the prison organisation (Kauffman 1988: Chapter 7; Conover 2001:Chapter 2; Crawley 2004a:65-75). It defines the image of the prison and prison work with which the individual was presented when responding to an employment advertisement, it defines the training that was provided to the individual, what ideas about the purposes and processes of imprisonment were presented to the individual in the recruitment and training processes and what expectations of the role of the officer were prevalent within the organisation as the individual commenced work.

The impact of training on their conceptualisation of prison officers' work was described by interviewees as being formative of their initial ideas about the role and establishing a reference point for future ideas about the role.

*Especially with the training that we're doing for the first twelve months, and the competency based training and everything else that's involved, they're actually getting a bit of a different mentality, mind set. [Interviewee 16]*

*I didn't... had very little idea of what it was all about until I actually went to Day one on the school. So it was a huge learning curve. [Interviewee 19]*

In these processes the employer, either the Department or the private prison manager, conveyed to staff explicit and subtle messages about the conceptualisation of prison officers' work. Underpinning the processes are understandings of prison purpose and process which guide selection criteria and processes, shape the content of training and the processes by which the prison officer is initiated into the prison. In these processes and an additional range of symbolic discourses, such as pay arrangements, the presentation of union membership and provisions for ongoing professional development, the employer conveys to the prison officer and other staff messages about the respect with which the officer is viewed by the employer and defines the vulnerability of the officer within the prison.

The marked changes in departmental discourses noted from 1993 pervaded all elements of the attraction, selection and training of the new prison officers in the period 1993 – 2003. Whatever their own values and ideas about the purpose of imprisonment new staff were introduced to the idea that the prison officers' role needed to serve the purposes of rehabilitation and normalisation and that the processes were to be consistent with managerialist and professional understandings of prison administration.

*I must confess I thought it would be like in the movies or the old time, like Alcatraz where you rattle a couple of keys and open doors all day.....  
but when we actually started doing the training and found out we were virtually social workers, secretaries and whatever in between, I thought, 'My God, what am I getting myself into,' but it's been quite fascinating and I've really enjoyed it so far. It's the first job I've really had where I can say I don't mind waking up in the morning and coming to work. [Interviewee 30]*

Those who were employed within prisons for ten years or longer were employed prior to the consistent use of the normalisation discourses and prior to the

reintroduction of the rehabilitative discourses. The prison process discourse pervasive in their orientation and training were most likely to be legal and bureaucratic. For these staff the newer discourses of normalisation and rehabilitation were promoted by the Department after they had been trained in an alternative set of understandings of the purpose of imprisonment and had started work within the prison,

*I've seen the role develop from turning keys back in the 80s, where they used to move prisoners from one place to another and drink coffee and stuff and there wasn't much interaction, everybody was like Smith and Jones: it was none of this... But now, in my view, it's more of a... it's developed over the years to more of a interactive welfare type role. You still get some para-military type people who will only turn keys and bark orders, and there are others that do the more dynamic security of getting to know their prisoners, and more of the case management type role, which has been a lot better, since that was introduced.[Interviewee 20]]*

The struggle of these longer serving staff to adjust their understanding of the activities for which a prison officer can be respected and how the safety of the officer should be ensured can be seen in the argument that human services and security roles do not effectively mix. Longer serving staff had entered the prison service at a point in time where proper relationships between prisoner and officer were distant and non-engaged. These staff were taught that prisoners are manipulative and that 'getting' too close' to them would make the officer vulnerable to breaches of security.

Departmental discourses of prison purpose and prison process powerfully affect staff at the point at which they join the corrections. This research suggests that subsequent changes in discourse are only fully adopted by a small number of staff although most staff interviewed for this research had adjusted their conceptualisation of prison officers' work to some extent.

### **Constructing respect and vulnerability in specific prison settings**

However this research has identified that the point at which a person begins to work in the correctional system does not on its own explain differences in conceptualisation of the role of the prison officer. Interviewees in the Adelaide and Port Augusta prisons who had worked in corrections for less than ten years were less likely than their colleagues employed for similar lengths of time at Mount Gambier to conceptualise the role of the prison officer as a *Manager of Prisoners*. The explanation for this difference would appear to lie in the influence of the individual prison as a specific site for the work of prison officers.

That prisons had distinctive characteristics as places of imprisonment and as places of work for prison officers (and other staff) was one observation that was shared by staff from all prisons. Although their evaluation of the reason for and the benefits of these differences reflected the position they were adopting in the ongoing debates about the purpose and processes of imprisonment, observations of differences were common and indeed served as a benchmark for discussions of officers' work in their prison. Each of the prisons provided officers with distinctive audiences for the performance of their work.

### **Respect and vulnerability at Mount Gambier prison**

The critical audiences for the performance of prison officers' work at Mt Gambier - prisoners, officers and staff, Group 4 and Department hierarchy, shared an understanding of the prison's mission and the role of the officer in implementing that mission. This shared understanding created a culture in which staff were confident of the grounds on which prison officers' work could be respected. It also defined, although did not remove, the basis for officer vulnerability. A number of

characteristics of the prison contributed to this shared understanding including the privatisation process, the length of time the prison had been operating and the contract between prisoners and management.

***Privatisation – clarifying the grounds for respect and shaping vulnerabilities***

The political and administrative processes that led to the privatisation of the management of the Mount Gambier prison contributed to the shared understanding of the prison’s mission amongst the audiences for the officers’ work. As the only privately managed prison in South Australia, significant public administration attention has been paid to the articulation of the goals of the prison and the definition of the contract between prison management and the government. In the public policy debates that preceded the privatisation of the management of the prison at Mount Gambier, the government had identified that the privatisation provided an opportunity to establish at the Mount Gambier prison a new culture. For the government this involved pairing a reduction in costs with improvement in “the quality of correctional services to prisoners in the form of programs, education and work” (Department for Correctional Services 1995)

However, Group 4 positioned themselves as the preferred provider of this service by their commitment to “changing prisoners into people” (Brand 1995) In this process their organisational philosophy constructed the prisoner and thus the prison officer from normalisation and entrepreneurial discourse, as illustrated by the evidence of Group 4’s Director of Operations in his evidence to the Select Committee of the South Australian Legislative Council

*The prisoner is a customer in the sense that he or she is the immediate consumer of our services and we have a very definite customer focus on prisoners. (Twinn 1995)*

*..First we have to offer what the commercial sector has to offer Government, and that is a much more rapid and flexible approach to managing anything. The public sector tends to be driven by precedent. The public sector tends to be driven by working parties and committees. It tends to be slow, unreactive and unresponsive. The private sector, by the very nature of the market is the opposite of all those things. It is very much more flexible and is quicker to respond and change. Those are not all benefits. The private sector might argue at times that it is too quick to react to changes and that if it stuck at things it might be better. The first thing Group 4 can bring is what the commercial sector brings: a different style of management and a different approach to managing organisations.*

*People may raise their eyebrows at this, but I believe that the private sector can bring a much greater degree of accountability to the administration of prisons. We are accountable because we are so vulnerable. Our contract can be terminated. If there is too much outcry in the media and too many parliamentary committees and Enquiries, we do not have business any more. However much you disapprove of the way the State sector runs its business and however unpleasant, the events which happen there, you cannot sack them or get rid of them or cancel their contracts.*

*In practice - and I have been a prison manager in public and private - you are far more accountable because you are far more vulnerable in the private sector. You may be more accountable theoretically in the public sector, but in practice as a public sector prison governor I was not very accountable at all. In practice, the wishes of Parliament have often not been reflected in the operation of public sector prison services. They have all sorts of ideas for improvement. The reality is that they have found it very difficult to change them. They are very conservative and resistant organisations...*

*There are people who do it a lot cheaper than us, and we all know who they are. Their origins are in Texas, where people from Whackenhut will provide that for you, if that is what you want. We have deliberately positioned ourselves at the opposite end of the spectrum. We pride ourselves on providing quality services ...*

This understanding of the mission of the prison was a shared one amongst interviewees from Mount Gambier. It made a powerful contribution to shaping both interviewees understanding of the basis on which the work of the prison officer could be respected in Mount Gambier and also how the vulnerability of the officer as an

employee might be addressed. Performing to a high level of professionalism, delivering a prison service that was beyond criticism was identified as the goal by interviewees,

*Especially with Group 4, that we are a private company - this is my opinion of it, whether it's the company's or not - I like to think that we've got to be seen to be doing it better, cleaner, more efficient, everything like that, to be able to keep the contract. [Interviewee 32]*

And as another interviewee explained

*We are delivering a public service of housing and keeping of the prisoners. ...And certainly we're under very strict guidelines and we have to act very professionally and deliver what the contract, the government want us to do..[Interviewee 35]*

### ***The staff audience for the performance of prison officers' work at Mount Gambier***

The shared understanding of the mission of Mount Gambier prison and the role of the officer in implementing that vision was reinforced by the fact that the staff group at the Mount Gambier prison had worked in corrections for a similar period of time. Mt Gambier prison was established in 1995 and as a result of the recruitment decisions made by Group 4, all interviewees at Mt Gambier had commenced their correctional careers since 1993 and thus been selected and trained in a context shaped by the new prison discourses.

Interviewees at Mount Gambier identified that being in a position to construct the role of the officer in a greenfields site helped staff recruited with the new understandings of the role of the officer to maintain this conceptualisation of the role. The prison itself was a new building with its design reflecting in its use of residential cottages the normalisation principle of deinstitutionalisation. This normalised design was modified by the presence of a prison wing which included a set of modern cells.

The importance of the clear start that Mt Gambier provided was identified by an interviewee who had experience in Junee, a longer established prison that went into private management. Despite the move to private management the established culture of the prison had a significant impact

*Well, I can only... my personal experience is only in private prisons but I can safely say that those two prisons operated were very, very different. Junee is a large prison and it probably retains a lot of the culture of the state system in New South Wales whereas Mt Gambier prison was a greenfield site. One of the main objectives of the company was to have a significant culture change at this prison. And I think we achieved that. There's no doubt that we achieved that.*

The result of this new start with staff who had been entirely selected and trained within the era of the new discourses was a shared conceptualisation of the purposes and processes of imprisonment. Consequently the performance of the work of the officer was viewed by an audience of other staff and management who had common and consistent views about the basis for respecting the work of the officer.

### ***The contract between prisoner and management in Mount Gambier prison***

The only people who may have brought contrasting expectations about the role of the officer to the new Mount Gambier prison were the prisoners. However the unique position of Mount Gambier prison as a privately managed prison under South Australian legislation resulted in an explicit contract of cooperation between prisoner and management of the prison that both reinforced the normalisation philosophy of the prison and removed some of the sense of vulnerability of the prison officer.

This contract was developed from the knowledge on both sides that prisoners who would not conform to prison procedures could be returned to a government run prison.

*the way we operate here, if the prisoner doesn't live here by our rules and is an absolute arsehole, well, then he goes to Yatala, and that's where he belongs because if he can't give us in return what we give him, he doesn't belong there.[Interviewee 31]*

Although the prison was still shaped by prison purpose discourse that emphasised the need for control to keep prisoners within its environment and to keep prisoners safe, the prison process discourse was shaped by a confidence that there was an explicit understanding between staff and prisoners of the need for cooperative behaviour.

*But it must be said that this prison is a fairly easy prison to work in, because of the aforementioned culture changes. It's not a bloody kindergarten by any stretch but prisoners here - and later on no doubt you'll have a wander round the prison and you'll form your own opinions about the atmosphere and the interaction that go on - in the main, staff are courteous and pleasant to prisoners and prisoners are courteous and pleasant to staff. So, there's not a lot of tension that you'll see in other prisons, certainly that I've experienced in other prisons. So that keeps people's stress levels down. [Interviewee 44]*

The conceptualisation of prison officers' role as a *Manager of prisoners* constructed from a normalisation and professional and entrepreneurial discourses was maintained in this context by the lessened sense of vulnerability of the officer.

Regardless of this contract, however, there were times when physical control had to be exercised within the prison and the construction of the role of the officer as a professional in these circumstances was emphasised by this interviewee who saw that the resilience of relationships in this context as being what warranted the officer at Mount Gambier being viewed with respect

*And I do remember there was an occasion here some years ago where a prisoner very well known in the system, very, very well known and really does have his moments, and he ended up, we had to use force on him one day, and I remember the next morning when the officers brought him his breakfast and they said, 'G'day, Bill..' and I remember him saying to me later on, 'I can't believe this, because usually*

*if you go through one end of the extreme, you're a pariah for weeks, but these blokes yesterday were holding me down and here they are giving me my morning newspaper, I can't get my head around that,' or something like that. [Interviewee 44]*

The prison context in which the officer at Mount Gambier performed their role reinforced the conceptualisation of the role in terms of the newer Departmental discourses of normalisation and professionalism and entrepreneurialism. In this the Mount Gambier context differed markedly from the two government managed prisons.

### **Respect and vulnerability in government managed prisons.**

Whereas in the Mount Gambier context the role of the officer was constructed through an organisational culture that had a coherence and consistency, Port Augusta and Adelaide prisons provided very different contexts for the work. The central audiences for the performance of prison officers' work held conflicting views about the purpose and process of imprisonment and the extent to which the role of the officer in constructing the prison could be respected.

### ***Defining respect in Adelaide and Port Augusta prisons***

The mission of the Department managed prisons was not articulated as clearly or consistently as the mission of the Mount Gambier prison. Expectations of prison officers' role were clouded by the fact that the prisons themselves served a number of purposes, which had changed over time. Although within these prisons there were individuals who were passionate about a particular vision of prison purpose or prison process, these individuals did not have the capacity to unite the prison, with its various units and sections, in a common understanding of the role of the prison and its staff.

In some sections of the prisons, for instance in the special programs such as the MOWCamp program working from Port Augusta, there were examples of staff with a clear vision that reflected the latest Departmental discourse and the capacity to implement the vision without feeling vulnerable.

*But we are basically like that [a case manager] with everyone on MOWCamp because we're like a work gang and we need everyone to be travelling all right and getting on together. And I'm very much into fitness and stuff and I know myself how much I benefit from running and how it makes me feel better, and doing weights and so on. And I try and encourage the blokes all the time on camp. I get them up running at 6 o'clock in the morning if they're interested. [interviewee 13]*

But this was not the underpinning fabric of the Department managed prisons.

### ***Performing the work of the prison officer to multiple audiences***

The conceptualisation of prison officers' work in Adelaide and Port Augusta served to position the officer in relation to multiple audiences with competing views about prison purpose and process. In part these competing views resulted from the fact that the staff who form the audience for prison officers' work in these prisons had started work in corrections over a period of decades. Newer staff bring their conceptualisations of prison officers' work developed from the recruitment and training processes through which they were engaged into a prison context that has already established values, norms and practices. Amongst the longer serving staff already in the prison, the terms in which the work of the prison officer will be respected and the vulnerability of the officer will be minimised have already been shaped by earlier departmental discourses. The resulting audience for the performance of prison officers' work is not one united by a common vision but one in which conflicting visions of prison purpose and process strive for influence.

Prisoner populations are involuntary and although some sense of cooperation and stability may be attained in prison units in which long term prisoners live, most prison units do not attain this level of common understanding about the desirability of peaceful rule abiding existence. Prisoners, as a crucial audience for the performance of prison offices work, contribute to the vulnerability of the officer with their participation in exchanges designed to test the consistency of officers' rules and exacerbate any tensions between colleagues or between colleagues and management.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst the Department for Correctional Services, like all organisations had used discourse to shape the behaviour of staff within the organisation over the years, (du Gay 1996a:53) the use of discourse by the Department to signal changes in policy and procedures within prisons has been a more deliberate strategy since 1993.

Discourses of prison purpose and prison process have been utilised and combined to describe both to the outside world and to staff how the prison should be performing and how the work of the prison officer should be conceptualised in relation to prisoners, the Department and other staff. This use of discourse to bring about change within prisons reflects processes within the broader public sector in Australia and in other western societies (Exworthy and Halford 1999:3-5).

This study has explored the use within prisons of the new discourses being promoted by the Department by exploring the conceptualisation of prison officers' work in terms of the use of discourses of prison process and prison purpose. The analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 showed that the conceptualisation of prison officers' work was likely to differ depending upon the length of time that an interviewee had been working in corrections and the prison in which they were working. The mapping of

Departmental discourse against the conceptualisations of staff working within prisons, identifies that those interviewees who have been most affected by the Departmental discourse are those who have worked for less than 10 years in correctional work and that the effect of this influence is most marked in the privately managed prison at Mount Gambier where all staff had worked in corrections for less than ten years.

The lessened power of the Departmental discourse to influence the conceptualisation of the role of the officer amongst interviewees at Port Augusta and Adelaide can be seen to result from the conflicting discourses to which staff in these prisons are subject. Individuals in these prisons are subject to conflicting discourses of prison purpose and process from which they must construct their conceptualisation of the prison officer. This presents them with choices about how they will reconcile these conflicts and construct the role of the officer in order to achieve their own goals. As was illustrated in Chapter 5 interviewees conceptualise the role of the officer in ways that make provision for the respect due to the role and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer. In both of these cases, the audience for the performance of the role of the officer is of significance.

Interviewees in the Mount Gambier prison are both less beset by conflicting discourses and confident that the audiences for the performance of the role of the prison officer are in accord in their understandings of prison purpose and process. Interviewees in Adelaide and Port Augusta prisons construct the role of the officer knowing that the audiences for the performance of the role have divergent and conflicting views and that adopting a conceptualisation that requires the performance

of the role that is too opprobrious to critical audiences enhances the vulnerability of the officer as a worker and a prison officer.

Although newer Departmental discourses impact on staff at the time at which they are employed in corrections, maintaining the influence of these discourses involves being more powerful than other competing discourses in the prison context in which the officer's role is performed. Whilst in Mount Gambier this competition from the audiences for prison officers' work is muted, in Port Augusta and Adelaide prisons staff are assailed by conflicting discourse between which they must make choices. These choices are governed by staff desires to construct a role worthy of respect and in which the vulnerability of the officer is minimised.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The prison officer, the central figure within a prison, is often conceptualised in broad and non-distinguishing terms as either custodial or human services worker. Little theoretical attention has been addressed to conceptualising the role of the officer and how this role is shaped by penal philosophy and policy. This thesis has addressed this gap and has identified that multiple conceptualisations of prison officers' work are utilised in correctional literature and practice. Eight conceptualisations, *Security Officer, Warehouse, Paramilitary officer, Public Servant/bureaucrat, Professional/semi professional, Manager of prisoners, Therapist and Case Manager*, have been distinguished by the prison purpose and prison process discourses (Adler and Longhurst 1994) through which the conceptualisations are constructed.

Conceptualisations of prison officers' work embed a set of meanings for the tasks performed by prison officers derived from specific understandings of the purpose of imprisonment and the processes through which imprisonment occurs. This thesis has explored the way that conceptualisations of prison officers' work are used in a competitive dialogue in which the conceptualisations describe particular positions about the purposes and processes of imprisonment (Adler and Longhurst 1994).

In exploring the use of these conceptualisations in correctional practice in South Australia this thesis has addressed three research questions

- How has the role of the prison officer been conceptualised by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time?

- How is the role of the prison officer currently conceptualised by personnel working within South Australian prisons, what influences the way the role is conceptualised and what purposes do these conceptualisations serve?
- To what extent have the new conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer, articulated by the Department for Correctional Services in the last ten years, been adopted by staff within prisons and what determines the influence of these new conceptualisations?

### **Conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer by the South Australian Department for Correctional Services over time**

The Department of Correctional Services as the government agency responsible for prisons in South Australia utilises a range of discourses to convey to the community, the government and those within the prison their expectations about the way that prisons will run, the performance of the officer and the experience of the prisoner within the prison. In this process, the Department uses discourses of prison purpose and process in an exercise of power to construct the role of the prison officer within South Australian prisons.

An analysis of the Annual Reports of the South Australian Department for Correctional Services identified that different combinations of prison purpose and prison process discourses have been used by the Department over time and that these have constructed a series of conceptualisations of prison officers' work. In the first half of the twentieth century control discourses dominated the Department's

descriptions of its role and the officer was constructed as a Para-military officer. This conceptualisation of the role shaped the structuring of the way in which the work is undertaken and the presentation of the officer (including dressing in uniforms) and can be seen to have an ongoing influence in the debates about the role of the officer in South Australian prisons.

The construction of the prisoner as a citizen with rights, through the use of legal discourses from the middle of the twentieth century, resulted in conceptualisations of the role of the officer within the Department as a *Professional* and a 'man manager'. These conceptualisations, shaped by the normalisation prison purpose discourses, described developing understandings of the appropriate processes within prisons and thus the role of the officer. Social changes in the decades between the late 1960s and late 1980s reinforced these conceptualisations of the role of the officer, with the arrival of women as staff in all prisons and the recognition of the increased complexity of the needs of prisoners.

Normalisation and legal discourses were also central to the renewed emphasis on the prison officer as a *Public Servant* with accountabilities that resulted from the scrutiny of the work of the Department through the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. This identification that the officer, as an agent of the state, was responsible from the late 1980s for an increased emphasis on the training and development of prison officers that prepared the ground for the development of new conceptualisations of the role of the officer in the years that followed.

In the decade 1993-2003, the Department experienced a change of government and change of Chief Executive. The result was an intense focus on change within prisons.

The Department, as an agency of the public service, was strongly influenced by the new entrepreneurial and managerialist understandings of the role of the public sector. The privatisation of the management of the prison at Mount Gambier and the development of an emphasis on prisons achieving measurable outcomes flowed from these new understandings of the role of public sector agencies. This translated into the vigorous promotion of prison purpose discourses, first of normalisation and subsequently of rehabilitation and prison process discourses that were described in professional and entrepreneurial language. The resultant conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer were as a *Manager of prisoners* and a *Case Manager*.

### **Conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer by personnel working within South Australian prisons**

Whilst Departmental conceptualisations of prison officers' work, which have changed over time, can be understood as an attempt by the Department to influence the work performance of the prison officer, the impact of this discourse is dependent upon responses by individuals working within prisons (du Gay 1996a; Halford and Leonard 1999). Qualitative research with prison officers, senior officers, managers and auxiliary staff within three South Australian prisons explored how the role of the officer is conceptualised by personnel working within South Australian prisons.

The research identified that the work of the prison officer was conceptualised within the prisons as complex and unique. The relationship between officer and prisoner was seen as central to the role and involved the officer in exercising authority,

discretion and responsibility. Although individuals constructed the role with different emphases most of those interviewed conceptualised the officers' role as requiring a balancing of the human services and security roles. Half of those interviewed identified the most appropriate base for describing the role of the prison officer as a *Manager of prisoners*, which normalised the control purpose of the prison by drawing parallels to other social control occupations whilst emphasising a relationship between prisoner and officer constructed through professional and entrepreneurial discourses.

However the most appropriate construction of the role of the officer was strongly contested. Conceptualisations of the role constructed from discourses of control (*Security Officer*), normalisation (*Manager of prisoners*) and rehabilitation (*Case Manager*) were each utilised frequently by staff 'mixing up' a prison officer. A small group of interviewees argued strongly for the separation of the human services and security roles and other staff identified that these roles required different skill sets and that expecting officers to be competent in both areas was demanding.

### **Influences on the way the role is conceptualised by individuals**

An exploration of the patterns of conceptualisations of prison officers' work by the interviewees for this research showed that the single most influential factor in determining the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by an individual was the length of time that the individual was employed within corrections. This influence was modified by the effect of the work context of the individual, in particular the prison in which the individual was working.

Conceptualising the basis for the work of the prison officer as a *Manager of prisoners* was most common amongst staff who had worked in corrections for less than ten years. The influence of the very different prison environments in which prison officers perform their work was seen in the different patterns of responses of interviewees from the different prisons. At Mt Gambier prison, the privately managed prison at which none of those interviewed had worked in corrections for more than ten years, the *Manager of prisoners* was overwhelmingly preferred as the basis for the conceptualisation of the role. In both Port Augusta and Adelaide this conceptualisation of the role was still the most popular, but there was a greater diversity of conceptualisations of the role with interviewees' selection of base spreading across six different conceptualisations.

### **The purposes conceptualisations of prison officers' work serve for individuals**

Conceptualisations of the role of the prison officer were utilised by personnel within the prisons to establish that the work of the officer was deserving of respect and to protect the officer from vulnerability as a worker and as a prison officer. A variety of conceptualisations were used to garner respect both for the broad role of the officer working with prisoners in prison and to make a claim for respect for specific (and often competitive) ways of working with prisoners and also to recognise the skills of particular officers in undertaking their work.

Additionally, conceptualisations of the role of the officer embedded understandings of the vulnerability of the officer as a worker and a prison officer and constructed the role to diminish that vulnerability. The construction of the role of the officer using control discourses (as a *Para-military officer*, a *Warehouser* or a *Security officer*)

provided the officer as a worker with performance objectives that could be clearly defined and thus achieved. On the other hand, constructing the role using rehabilitative or normalisation discourses, as a human services role, established more ambiguous and possibly unachievable performance objectives.

The different audiences, prisoners, colleagues and management, for the performance of prison officers' work in each prison resulted in different priorities in the claiming of respect for the role and different pressures in the defining of the vulnerability of the officer. At Mount Gambier 80% of interviewees based their conceptualisation of the role of the officer on the *Manager of Prisoners* conceptualisation. This reflected a consistent philosophical position within the organisation about the purpose of imprisonment and processes by which it was to be achieved and resulted in confidence about the grounds on which the work of the officer would be respected. The vulnerability of officers at Mount Gambier was seen to relate to their position as employees in a private company whose tenure was determined by government contract.

In Port Augusta and Adelaide the competitive views on the purpose of imprisonment and the processes by which these purposes were to be achieved that were held by the audiences for the performance of the work of the prison officer resulted in a far greater diversity of conceptualisations of prison officers' work. Officers were seen to be vulnerable to critique of their performance by others who held opposing views of the appropriate conduct of the role as well as vulnerable to physical and psychological aggression from prisoners.

## **The influence of Departmental conceptualisations of the role of the officer on personnel within prisons**

The research found that recent Departmental discourse describing the prison purpose in normalisation and rehabilitative terms and prison process in professional and entrepreneurial terms, has influenced the construction of the prison officers' role within the prison. It found that staff who had worked in corrections for less than ten years were the most likely to utilise these discourses of prison purpose and prison process. In particular staff at the Mt Gambier, privately managed prison, which had been open for less than ten years, overwhelmingly constructed the role of the officer using these discourses.

The circumstances in which departmental discourse successfully influences the conceptualisation of prison officers' work in South Australian prisons can be understood by focussing on the dynamic of discursive interactions within prisons. Staff within prisons are subject to a range of conflicting discourse about prison purpose and prison process and the consequential conceptualisation of prison officers' work. It was notable that many staff commenced work in corrections without clearly defined views of the work of the prison officer. However, the capacity of the Departmental discourses that influenced interviewees through recruitment and selection to continue to influence once an individual starts work in a correctional environment can be seen to be related to the acceptance of this discourse by three audiences for the performance of prison officers' work – prisoners, colleagues and organisational hierarchy. The exceptional consistency of conceptualisation of the role of the officer in Mount Gambier in terms shaped by normalisation but not by rehabilitation and in professional and entrepreneurial terms

can be understood to be the result of the common views of staff within the prison who had all been recruited in the same time frame, management and Departmental hierarchy whose agreement was constructed through the contract for the private management of the prison and the prisoners whose cooperation was essential if they were to remain in Mount Gambier prison.

The government managed prisons lacked cohesion amongst each of the audiences and thus presented staff with complex choices about how they would construct the role of the officer. Seeking to construct the role as one worthy of respect and to minimise the vulnerability of the officer resulted in interviewees constructing the officer in a dynamic process in which a range of discursive stimuli needed to be balanced to allow interviewees to continue to perform within the prison. For most interviewees these conflicts were resolved in the emphasis on the role of the officer as complex and unique and requiring a balance of custodial and human service roles. The *Manager of Prisoners* conceptualisation of prison officers' work provided scope for recognising this complexity.

## **Some implications of these study findings**

This study was a limited qualitative study in three prison institutions in South Australia. The results cannot be generalised to all prison staff in South Australia or to prisons elsewhere. However, the implications of these findings do bear upon the debates in correctional administration and organisational research.

The influence of the Department of Correctional Services on the conceptualisation of work within prisons is an important correctional administration and public policy

issue. Unlike other human service arenas staff within prisons had few sources of knowledge about the work prior to their arrival in corrections and there is no independent professional association contributing to the development of understandings of the role. The major influence on conceptualisations of the role of the officer was the Departmental and prison context of the work. In this context the Department plays a significant role in mediating between the government determined policy agenda and the workers and prisoners within prisons. The Departmental discourse translates government policy into operational terms and in the process moderates the effects of public debates.

The findings illustrate the use of organisational discourse to shape the conceptualisation of prison officers' work, as identified in other organisational research (see discussion in Chapter 2 of the role of discourse). Organisational descriptions of the mission of the organisation and the ways in which it is to be achieved are shown to influence the conceptualisation of the role of the worker even in complex and demanding work roles such as that of the prison officer. However, that these discourses had maximum impact at the point in time at which the worker is recruited into the organisation and that the effect was moderated by the prison in which the individual was working, contributes to the argument of those who emphasise that the discourse of the employer is not overwhelming, and that individual's have agency in their response to organisational discourse.

Departmental discourses were subject to a reality test when the worker enters the workplace. The research demonstrated that organisations in which discourses are consistently adopted, both in words and actions, have the capacity to perpetuate the

influence of these discourses. However this consistency is lacking in workplaces in which workers have been recruited over time and in which there have been shifts in organisational discourse. New workers entering these workplaces are required to exercise agency in making choices about their work in ways that reconcile tensions between discourses rather than just give effect to the current organisational discourses.

In illustrating the strength of influence of factors relating to the organisational context of work in shaping the conceptualisation of prison officers' work and the limited influence of the personal characteristics of the interviewee this research adds to discussions both in correctional administration and in organisational research (see discussions in Chapter Two and Three). It suggests that post recruitment activities in training and development of staff have potential to influence their understanding of key work roles. In addition the findings relating to longer serving employees suggest that successful organisational change requires the refinement of strategies to transition workers employed under one discursive regime to the new regime and organisational strategies to support new workers in the maintenance of conceptualisations of their workrole developed through the recruitment and training processes.

### **Future research**

This research has, inevitably, examined only one limited aspect of the work of prison officers. One contribution of the research is to enhance the visibility of the prison officer and to affirm the importance of the officer in the administration of prisons. In this it suggests the social importance of future research that will contribute to an understanding of the prisons created by society. Exploration of the different

conceptualisations of prison officers' work suggests a number of directions for future research.

This thesis has identified, but not been able to explore, that prisoners act as an influential audience for the performance of prison officers' work. Future research exploring the conceptualisation of prison officers' work by prisoners and the influences that shape these conceptualisations would build a more complex understanding of the dynamics within prisons.

The diversity of conceptualisations of prison officers' work within prisons, identified in this thesis, raises important questions about the connection between conceptualisations of prison officers' work and the performance of the tasks of the prison officer. Research exploring how understandings of the purposes and processes of imprisonment influence the day to day activities within prisons would build on this research and contribute to the development of a professional body of knowledge in prison administration.

This research has recognised that the prison context for prison officers' work is shaped by contexts outside the prison. Conceptualisations of prison officers' work will continue to evolve and emerge as a result of changes in these contexts. Future research should trace the impact of these changes, both in the broader socio-economic context of prisons and in the particular political context and the discourses that position prisoners and prisons within this context. The role of the Department for Correctional Services in mediating these contexts will remain an important focus for researchers in the future.

## Appendix: Interview schedule

(The language of this interview is adapted when the individual being interviewed is not a correctional officer).

The interview will commence with a series of questions to collect the following information

### **Statistical data:**

- Gender                    M/F
- No of months/years employed by DCS/Group 4
- Qualifications

### **Employment data**

Current role

Career History

### **Semi structured Interview schedule**

Introduction:

My research is designed to explore understandings of prison officers' work. In recent decades prison officers have been described in a variety of terms including Para-military officer, Public servant/bureaucrat, Manager of Prisoners , Warehouse of prisoners, Professional/semi-professional, Therapist, *Security Officer* , *Case Manager* .

In my interviews with staff I want to see how relevant these terms are and how these ideas about prison officers affect the way you work. It is not the sort of interview where there are right or wrong answers. It is an attempt to use a conversation to drill down into some ideas.

1. If someone who trusted you said

“I am thinking about applying to DCS/Group 4 to be a correctional officer, could you tell me about the job” what would you say?

2. What ideas did *you* have about correctional officers work when you decided to become an officer?

3. How have these changed?

4. If, in order to make your work clearer to someone, you were to compare it to another occupation or occupations what would you choose? Why?

5. Security is central to the mission of the Department/Group 4 in Mount Gambier prison. How important an aspect of your job is the security component? Would you choose a description of your work that focussed on this as the dominant component of the work?

6. In recent years the development of relationships with prisoners, working with prisoners to address offending behaviour, knowing prisoners and responding to their needs has been emphasised when the Department or Group 4 talks about its work.

How important an aspect of your job is what I have loosely termed the “human services work”? Would you choose a description of your work that focussed on this the dominant component of the work?

7. I have been thinking that understanding prison officers’ work might be like understanding how to get the paint colour you want for your house.

First you have to get the right base colour. Then you tint it or shade it with a variety of other colours.

Would you have a go at mixing up a prison officer – **first based on what you think the work is now** and then we could do it again for what you would like it to be?

So to mix up a correctional officer as you see the work now select your base from  
(*spread out cards bearing the names of conceptualisations*)

Para-military officer, Public servant/bureaucrat, Manager of Prisoners, Warehouse  
of prisoners, Professional/semi-professional, Therapist, Security Officer , Case  
Manager .

Now you can tint it with four more components. (*spread out packets of cards  
bearing the names of conceptualisations – four of each conceptualisation clipped  
together*) You can choose all the same if you want, and they could all be the same as  
your base.

8. Thanks, now would you like to mix up an officer as you think the job should be?

Select a base -

Para-military officer, Public servant/bureaucrat, Manager of Prisoners, Warehouse  
of prisoners, Professional/semi-professional, Therapist, Security Officer , Case  
Manager .

And now your tints.

9. Thankyou, before we end this interview is there anything else you would like to  
talk about?

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