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James W. Marquart , Maldine B. Barnhill & Kathy Balshaw-Biddle

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FATAL ATTRACTION: AN ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS IN A SOUTHERN PRISON SYSTEM, 1995-1998*

JAMES W. MARQUART**

MALDINE B. BARNHILL***

KATHY BALSHAW-BIDDLE****

Sam Houston State University

Prison employees are trained to maintain their distance from prisoners and to do their job professionally without personal entanglements or abuse of prisoners in any way. Efforts are made to ensure that those who enter the correctional service serve honorably; these efforts, however, do not prevent some prison employees from ending their careers in disgrace. Some employees engage in career-ending infractions whereby they are suspended and/or reprimanded; some are terminated for engaging in inappropriate relationships (or boundary violations) with inmates. This paper examines boundary violations among 508 Texas state prison security staff members disciplined between January 1, 1995 and December 31, 1998.

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** James W. Marquart (Texas A&M University, 1983) is a full professor of criminal justice at Sam Houston State University. His long-term research and teaching interests include prison organizations, capital punishment, criminal justice policy, and research methods. He has also published a number of articles on social control and change in prisons. His current research involves youth advocacy, underage drinking, and inappropriate staff-inmate relationships in prisons.

*** Maldine Beth Barnhill is a graduate of the Joseph Henry Lumpkin School of Law at the University of Georgia. She is currently ABD at Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas and a member of the faculty at Charleston Southern University, Charleston, S.C. Her interests include research of current Supreme Court issues and evidentiary issues in criminal investigations.

**** Kathy Balshaw-Biddle is a doctoral candidate in criminal justice at Sam Houston State University. Her research interests include inappropriate relationships in prison organizations, correctional policy, and social control.

Over 40 years ago, Gresham Sykes (1958:42) stated, "[F]ar from being omnipotent rulers who have crushed all signs of rebellion against their regime, the custodians are engaged in a continuous struggle to maintain order—and it is a struggle in which the custodians frequently fail."

Prison employees maintain only a theoretical dominance over inmates. Three institutional influences corrupt their authority. First, the staff cannot physically coerce the prisoners into total submission, and therefore must make deals with inmates wherein they let some things slide to secure compliance elsewhere. This has been termed the "norm of reciprocity," whereby employees exercise power over inmates by giving them "freedom" in return for good behavior. Second, the custodians rely on prisoners to perform numerous institutional chores (e.g., bookkeeping); such reliance cedes power to the kept. Third, the prison staff works closely with the kept; this situation increases the desire to get along with the inmates. Pressures to get along blur the boundary between employees and prisoners. As a result of their constant interaction with inmates, staff members often redefine inmates as "people in prison" rather than as dangerous offenders.¹ In the present paper we focus on this latter aspect of the corruption of authority.

Proximity fosters personal bonds between prison employees and inmates, encouraging favoritism and selective rule enforcement (Crouch and Marquart 1989). Worse, such proximity can facilitate romantic relationships, "consensual" love affairs, or even criminal sexual involvement (Baro 1997; Hanson 1999). In general, correctional occupational deviance refers to inappropriate work-related activities in which correctional employees participate (Kappeler, Sluder, and Alpert 1994:22). We define actions that blur, minimize, or disrupt the professional distance between correctional staff members and prisoners as boundary violations; such activities represent one form of correctional occupational deviance. Boundaries are violated when the managerial desire to maintain formality and distance between keepers and kept erodes in the face of the operational realities of institutional life (i.e., the norm of reciprocity). Correctional staff members' violation of traditional boundaries through the formation of friendships, romantic relationships, or

¹ We interviewed one of the first women employed as a security officer in a male Texas prison. She said she interacted with a notorious male prisoner who worked in the front office with her. Shortly after the inmate was paroled, he was killed while robbing a 7-11. Upon hearing of the inmate's death, the officer became upset. She remembered saying to a coworker "Who would want to kill Bill [an alias]? He was just trying to make it." This employee assumed that Bill was working in the store, not that he was trying to rob it. This story illustrates how staff members sometimes see inmates as people who happen to be in prison rather than as dangerous felons.

sexual involvement with inmates constitutes a major compromise of correctional work ethics and values. Such violations represent an extension of Sykes's (1958) concept of the corruption of authority.

Before the advent of sex-segregated prisons in 1870, female prisoners often were housed in separate wings of male prisons; accommodations set the stage for sexual victimization by male custodians (Dobash, Dobash, and Gutteridge 1986; Rafter 1985). Even sex segregation, however, did not eliminate sexual encounters between staff and prisoners. Zedna (1995:310) reported that "undue intimacy" between female prisoners and their female warders occurred with "surprising frequency" in Victorian prisons. The National Women's Law Center (1996) suggested that correctional employee sexual abuse of prisoners is widespread. United Nations researchers contend that guards' sexual involvement "is common in women's prisons" in America (Day 1998; Olson 1999). As Amnesty International (1999:1) noted, "[M]any women in prisons and jails in the USA are victims of sexual abuse by staff." In 1999, 11 male jail officers were indicted for sexually assaulting female prisoners in the Travis County (Austin, Texas) Jail between 1998 and 1999 (Phillips 1999). Most recently, the notorious child killer Susan Smith admitted to sexual contact with a male security officer (Geier 2000). Sexual misconduct, primarily by male staff members against female prisoners, has prompted lawsuits against 23 prison systems and jails (Hanson 1999; Siegal 1999; "Virginia Governor" 1999). In light of this problem, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government have enacted laws prohibiting staff members' sexual misconduct with inmates (National Institute of Corrections 2000).

These reports imply that sexual misconduct involves only male staff and female prisoners. Inmate sexual contact, however, is only one form of occupational deviance resulting from prison personnel's close association with, and proximity to, inmates. Other forms of boundary violations, such as excessive familiarity, friendships, and romantic relationships, are probably much more common than overt sexual contact. Three other gender combinations also are possible in contemporary prisons: male staff-male prisoner, female staff-male prisoner, and female staff-female prisoner.

Until quite recently, prisons and jails were sex-segregated by both correctional staff and inmates (Jacobs 1983; McDonald 1997). Sex segregation, however, severely restricted women's employment and promotional opportunities in corrections (Jacobs 1983). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned sexual discrimination and gave women a foundation for seeking legal remedies (Martin

and Jurik 1996). Female correctional employees filed lawsuits² and won the right to work in male prisons (Pogrebin and Poole 1997). In 1998, women constituted 22 percent of the American correctional officer workforce. Currently, eight female officers in 10 work in male prisons. Men accounted for 78 percent of the correctional officer workforce in 1998, but only 4 percent were assigned to female institutions (Camp and Camp 1998).

Sexual integration of the correctional workforce has expanded the employment possibilities for women. Ironically, it also has facilitated female prison staff members' opportunity to engage in occupational deviance, especially boundary violations (forming personal relationships with male prisoners). We currently know little about gender differences in boundary violations among prison staff members: prison administrators customarily have regarded this matter as taboo (Mooney 1995). Sykes's (1958) discussion of the corruption of authority centered on male officers and male prisoners, and modern prisons are far different places than he described decades ago. Despite recent media attention to male prison employees' sexual exploitation of female inmates in Florida, Georgia, and Michigan (Rivera 1999), as well as anecdotes (Mooney 1995) and testimony from court cases (Elliot 1999), the research literature on deviance in prison organizations lacks systematic inquiry into prison boundary violations (Stewart 1998).

Building on Sykes's (1958) concept of the corruption of authority, we develop the rudiments of a general theory of boundary violations in prisons. We employ Goffman's (1974) model of social frames to examine gender differences in a group of prison staff members investigated for establishing personal relationships with prisoners. Our perspective helps us to understand gender differences in boundary violations, and illustrates how the processes that pull male and female prison employees into boundary violations may differ (Steffensmeier and Allan 1996).

BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL FRAMES

Boundaries demarcate areas where we are welcome or forbidden. Epstein (1994:15) states, "The concept of personal boundaries employs a spatial metaphor that helps us describe and define our relationships with other beings and objects in the external world." Social and psychological boundaries demarcate space and protect our individuality. Boundaries and their maintenance are essential

² See *Coble v. Texas Department of Corrections* (1983); *Dothard v. Rawlinson* (1977); *Griffin v. Michigan Department of Corrections* (1982); *Grummett v. Rushen* (1985).

to the survival of human communities; without them, social organization would be impossible (Erikson 1966).

Social Frames and Boundary Maintenance

Erving Goffman (1974) defined social frames as principles of organization that govern social events and our subjective involvement in those events. At any level of human discourse, whether loving intimacy, group processes, business dealings, or sporting events, we tend to maintain a basic set of expectations and rules to comprehend reality. Goffman (1974) stressed that nearly every interpersonal situation included frames, or "ways of doing," that delineate the purpose and meaning of the relationship. Social frames organize involvement by providing participants with a sense of what is going on, as well limiting how deeply the individual is to be carried into the activity. Involvement and a sense of purpose are critical aspects in fiduciary relationships, wherein one party has a professional obligation to care for or provide service to another (Friedman and Boumil 1995).

Conceptualizing the Custodial Frame

In keeping with Goffman's (1974) notion of social frames, we conceptualize the custodial frame as a set of expectations that organize and give meaning to staff-inmate interactions. It is commonly understood that prison systems differ greatly as to how far inmates can and should be trusted, the causes of criminality, the role of treatment, and the proper scope of prisoners' rights. Prison personnel share the "keeper" philosophy, which guides staff behavior (DiIulio 1987). In their encounters with prisoners, prison employees are expected and trained to be firm but fair, nonabusive, impersonal, dispassionate, and nonconfrontational. These interaction rules are gender-neutral; they constitute the "custodial frame" that legitimizes and enforces the boundary between superordinates (staff) and subordinates (inmates). The custodial frame also facilitates cohesion among the staff members.

Throughout the history of prisons, employees have been forbidden from becoming personally involved with prisoners. The "no friendship" rule in prisons is akin to the incest taboo. Contemporary prisons ban interaction beyond the custodial frame, and have established disciplinary procedures to punish employees who engage in inappropriate relationships with prisoners (National Institute of Corrections 2000). The custodial frame is maintained through physical barriers such as uniforms, grooming standards, and a variety of duty posts (e.g., gun towers, perimeter patrol cars,

catwalks) and shift work. At the social level, formal modes of address (Sir, Mrs., Ms., Mr., Officer, Boss) have been institutionalized to enforce a polite but firm impersonal boundary between prison employees and prisoners. Inmates are expected to be polite, docile, nonthreatening/nonconfrontational, and impersonal in their interactions with staff.

Sometimes, however, the well-established and historic boundary or custodial frame between staff and inmates is broken. Staff members may denigrate inmates, ignore inmates' requests for assistance, physically abuse inmates, or bring contraband such as drugs or weapons to prisoners (Crouch and Marquart 1980, 1989; Marquart 1986). In his discussion of the corruption of authority, Sykes (1958) described how prison staff members bend the rules to secure inmates' compliance. The custodial frame is not absolute, nor can it govern every staff-inmate interaction.

Breaking the Frame

Social frames can be broken, as in cases of child abuse, theft by employees, and situations where doctors or therapists victimize their patients (Epstein 1994; Eschholz and Vaughn 2000; Rutter 1989; Sapp 1997). Breaking a social frame constitutes a boundary violation, a well-researched topic in psychology, psychiatry, and health care (Gabbard 1995; Gabbard and Lester 1995; Gonsiorek 1995). This body of research on power imbalances posits that boundary violations encompass an array of activities and behaviors. Most important for the present paper is Strom-Gottfried's (1999) research on the violation of therapeutic boundaries by social workers or therapists with their clients. She reviewed 894 ethics complaints submitted to the National Association of Social Workers over an 11-year period.

Strom-Gottfried uncovered three types of ethical transgressions: general blurring of roles (i.e., discussing personal information with clients, meeting with clients after hours); dual or overlapping relationships (i.e., dating, pursuing joint hobbies and social activities with clients); and sexual contact. One hundred and forty-seven cases went to formal hearings and resulted in affirmative findings of boundary violations. Of these cases, 107 involved some form of sexual violation, 62 entailed dual relationships, and 70 involved general breaches. Moreover, Strom-Gottfried found that each boundary violation, or frame break, consisted of a series of steps or a sequence of actions committed by the clinician. Further, a minority of cases involved a "slippery slope": clinicians began with a general blurring of roles, which progressed into sexual contact (Strom-Gottfried 1999).

In the present paper we apply to the prison Strom-Gottfried's (1999) typology of boundary violations among social workers and their clients. Our goal is to extend current theorizing to inform future research. We strongly suggest that the typology of boundary violations presented here is not exhaustive, but is a first pass at an unexplored problem in prisons.

Applying the Boundary Violation Perspective to Penal Organizations

In our application of Strom-Gottfried's (1999) continuum to the prison, general boundary violations constituted "unserious" framebreaks committed by employees who accepted from inmates, or exchanged with inmates, items such as soft drinks, food, and craftwork or materials, or wrote letters to prisoners whom they had known before incarceration.

Dual relationships occurred when employees blurred the boundary between themselves and inmates, and established romantic relationships with prisoners through excessive flirting and disclosure of personal information. These employees pursued an inmate's attention or affection, and fell in love. Staff members who engaged in dual relationships committed one or more of the following behaviors:

- Discussed their personal life in detail with a prisoner (including sexual life, social life, marital status, spouse and/or children, experiences with domestic abuse);
- Exchanged letters and/or personal photographs (including nude photos) with a prisoner;
- Exchanged erotica (pornographic poems and letters) with an inmate;
- Placed money in an inmate's trust fund;
- Used aliases and post office boxes in nearby towns or cities to hide the relationship;
- Contacted an inmate's family to relay information about the prisoner;
- Established a relationship with an inmate in prison and then lived with the inmate upon his or her release from prison;
- Moved in with an inmate's family member;
- Provided a cellular phone to a prisoner, or took collect calls to facilitate off-duty conversations with an inmate;
- Engaged in on-the-job subterfuge to hide the relationship.

We realize that placing money in an inmate's trust fund and/or exchanging "dirty" letters certainly stretch the definition of dual relationships. In our view, however, dual relationships encompass diverse behaviors up to, but not including, sexual contact. It is possible that the exchange of erotica may constitute another behavioral type suggesting eventual sexual contact. Additional research in other prisons (based on more cases) may further clarify the differences among dual relationships.

Staff-inmate sexual contact is the most serious boundary violation. In keeping with the research literature on sexual contact between patients and therapists (Wincze et al. 1996), we defined employee-inmate sexual contact as vaginal and/or anal intercourse, fondling, masturbation, genital exposure, and/or any oral-genital contact. Sexual boundary violations had to be observed or corroborated by a third party (another employee), and/or the employee under investigation must have admitted to the act (in written statements or under oath during a polygraph session).³ Momentary kisses, hugs, and hand holding were not considered sexual contacts. For example, one employee admitted to investigators that she loved inmate X and had delivered 30 letters and 11 photos of herself to this inmate. She admittedly had kissed inmate X, had deposited \$700 in his trust fund, wanted to have a "quickie" with him, and "fantasized about having sex" with him. These incidents were not considered sexual contact. Our criteria for sexual contact yielded 42 incidents (involving 18 males and 24 females) of reported employee-inmate sexual contact.⁴ Additional acts of sexual contact in the same period probably went unreported (Day 1998).

Some scholars and practitioners will argue that, because the relationship between staff and inmates is coercive, the kept cannot refuse a sexual relationship with employees. We suggest, however, that under certain circumstances it may be possible for the keeper and the kept to establish a consensual sexual relationship. The organizational links (e.g., a culture of silence) and the legal implications (e.g., consent) of sexual contact between prison employees and inmates are complex, and merit additional scholarly inquiry.

³ Eighty-eight employees had alleged or inferred sexual contacts, and 32 engaged in nonsexual contacts (e.g., hugging, hand holding).

⁴ Studies of psychologists have yielded rates of sex misconduct between 5 percent and 12 percent for males, and 1 percent and 3 percent for females (Stake and Oliver 1991). Research on male psychotherapists revealed that 7 percent had reported sexual contact with female clients (Pope and Bouhoutsos 1986). Kardener, Fuller, and Mensch (1973) found that between 5 percent and 13 percent of therapists had engaged in erotic behavior with their patients. We found that 5 percent of the female officers and 4 percent of the males engaged in sexual misconduct with inmates.

What kinds of employees had sexual contact with inmates? Where did this behavior occur? Where were the supervisors when the behavior took place? Answers to these questions will have important policy implications for prison management. Rather than simply developing a "kinds of people" explanation, we also examined the situational aspects of correctional employees' framebreaks. To this end, our research was guided by the research conducted over the past 25 years by Phillip Zimbardo and his colleagues, who emphasized the surprising and ironic power of institutional environments over the participants. Their research illustrates clearly how situational dynamics can distort an individual's judgment so far as to defy all individual expectations (Haney and Zimbardo 1998:710).

In keeping with this line of research, we expect to find that certain situations and places in the prison will be conducive to staff-inmate framebreaks. We expect to find that such framebreaks will be more prevalent where supervisors and colleagues are absent. The lack of authority figures to exert formal control over an employee's contact with prisoners should be conducive to boundary violations. These violations will be more prevalent in unstructured employee-prisoner situations (i.e., choir practice, recreational activities) than in structured work-intensive situations such as supervising inmates on industrial work details (Osgood et al. 1996). Unstructured activities involving staff and inmates (one-on-one situations away from the supervisors' view) set the stage for blurring the line between staff and inmates, disrupting formal relations, and weakening the custodial frame.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this inquiry were obtained from the personnel files of 549 employees of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Institutional Division (TDCJ-ID). These employees were investigated by Internal Affairs and were formally disciplined between January 1, 1995 and December 31, 1998: They were punished for violating Rule 42 of the "Employees' General Rules of Conduct."⁵ Originally the data set consisted of security officers, parole staff, health services staff, clerical staff, teachers, chaplains, and other members of

⁵ Rule 42, Employee-Inmate/Client Relationships (association or correspondence): Employees are prohibited from continuing or establishing any personal relationships with inmates/clients or with family members of inmates/clients which jeopardizes, or has the potential to jeopardize the security of the Agency or which compromises the effectiveness of the employee. Employees are required to report to agency officials any previous or current relationships between: (1) the employee with an inmate/client; (2) the employee with a family member of an inmate/client; (3) a family member of the employee with an inmate/client; or (4) a family member of the employee with a family member of an inmate/client.

the support staff. We focused on the prison staff members (security personnel, mail room clerks, secretaries) who had daily interactions with inmates. We eliminated 41 employees (parole officers and health services staff)⁶ to reduce the data set to 508 "investigated" prison employees.⁷

Data and Contents of Personnel Files

Personnel files included employee applications, background investigations, and in-service work records. The employment application and background investigation contained demographic, educational, employment, military, and criminal history information. In-service records contained prison unit assignments, academy test scores, promotions, annual performance evaluations, initial interview and evaluation scores, records of sick and injured leave, disciplinary actions, dispositions of complaints, and all official correspondence or records. Each file contained the case and investigation history surrounding the circumstances and actors and/or actions leading to the employee's investigation for violating Rule 42.

We content-analyzed each case history, searching for themes in the employees' version of the events (87 data categories emerged from this examination). We developed a coding instrument to capture relevant variables. (Employees' and inmates' names used in this paper are pseudonyms.)

We readily acknowledge that our analysis is employee centered and that we have lost a great deal by not incorporating the inmates' perspective. The inmate's voice is critical but it lies beyond the present paper's scope; we will deal with it in subsequent papers. Currently we are obtaining records and interviewing inmates who were investigated for inappropriate relationships with staff members.

Sample of "Successful" Employees

At the request of human resources administrators, we conducted a comparative analysis of "successful" and "unsuccessful" employees to determine, for recruiting purposes, whether significant demographic differences existed between the two groups. We were provided with a random sample of 585 prison employees hired between 1995 and 1998, who were still employed as of December 31,

⁶ Parole/health services staff members work for separate agencies. We lacked access to these records.

⁷ We began in 1995 because these personnel files represented the most recent and most accessible files for individual review, coding, and analysis.

1999. These individuals had undergone no Internal Affairs investigations and were considered successful employees. In the comparative analysis we explored differences between investigated and noninvestigated employees, based on the same data elements as gathered from the employment application and background investigation and from in-service records.

Interviews With Supervisors and Internal Affairs Investigators

Finally, to obtain personal insights into inappropriate employee-inmate relationships, we interviewed 12 employee supervisors (lieutenants, majors, and wardens) from five Huntsville-area prisons, as well as four internal affairs investigators. We asked the supervisors and investigators to explain the process by which employees become involved in inappropriate inmate relationships, why and how such relationships develop, and whether or not improved hiring standards and training could deter such relationships and improve retention of employees. We also asked the interviewees about the impact of recent organizational growth on staff recruitment, retention, and inappropriate relationships. The 20-question interviews averaged 60 minutes each; we carefully noted and later content-analyzed all responses.

Background Characteristics of the Investigated Employees

At the time of the investigation, the average age of the 508 prison employees was 36 years (31 at initial employment), and their tenure averaged slightly less than four years (46 months on the job). Fifty-four percent were Anglo, 30 percent were African-American, and 16 percent were Hispanic. Over two-thirds (68 percent) had a high school diploma. Thirty-eight percent reportedly were attending college, and three subjects claimed to be criminal justice majors. Most subjects (85 percent) had no prior military experience, and eighty-six percent reported performing service work or manual labor before their prison employment.

Seventy-seven percent of the investigated employees were females. This skewed proportion (or sex ratio) must be interpreted cautiously, however. In 1978, Texas prisons were sexually segregated workplaces for security staff members. In 1988, 17 percent of all female security staff worked in male units. By 1998, this proportion had increased to 80 percent. On the other hand, 95 percent of all male security officers worked in male prisons (Camp and Camp 1998). Thus a larger proportion of female employees were exposed to male prisoners.

Raw percentages can be misleading, however. Table 1 presents employment data on male and female security officers between

Table 1. Employment Figures for Security Staff Members by Year and Rate of Disciplinary Actions

Year	Total	Males	Females	Females in Male Institutions	Number of Females Disciplined	Rate of Female Violations	Males in Female Institutions	Number of Males Disciplined	Rate of Male Violations
1995	18,920	14,067	4,853	3,941	98	2.40	348	12	3.50
1996	22,846	16,655	6,191	5,332	115	2.10	542	12	2.40
1997	26,894	19,229	7,665	6,317	100	1.60	540	9	1.60
1998	27,509	19,009	8,500	6,616	54	.80	571	4	.70

1995 and 1998. In 1995, 3,941 females worked in male prisons. In the same year, 98 female security employees (in our data set) were investigated for engaging in inappropriate relationships with male prisoners (a rate of 2.4 per 100 officers). In comparison, 348 male officers worked in female prisons; 12 were investigated for engaging in inappropriate relationships with female prisoners (a rate of 3.5 per 100 officers). Our analysis, although preliminary, shows that the overall rates of inappropriate relationships per 100 officers between 1995 and 1998, for male and female employees in sexually integrated settings were roughly the same.

Yet despite the similarity in rates of boundary violations, we suggest that the risk for deviance is far greater for female than for male employees in sexually integrated prisons. A male-dominated work environment, especially a prison, is characterized by a sexual ambiance and by the expression of male sexuality (Carroll 1974). Women employed in male-dominated settings are more likely to experience social-sexual behaviors (e.g., invitations to sex, innuendo, harassment), a point underscored by research on sex and the workplace (Statham 1996). We strongly suggest that sex-role spillover (the carryover into the workplace of gender-based expectations about behavior) also helps to explain the higher proportion of employee boundary violations by females (Gutek 1985:149). It was highly likely that male prisoners perceived the women security officers as females first and employees second. Thus male prisoners, in keeping with sex-role behaviors, may have planned and initiated relationships and sexual interaction. (Research on the inmates' version of the events will help to clarify this process. Male prisoners also may "hit on" female employees to advertise and validate their heterosexuality to themselves and their peers.)

The sexual ambiance, sex-role behaviors, and expectations surrounding male employees in female prisons are different and deserve separate analysis. Although the rates of deviance may appear on the surface to be similar, the dynamics involved in male and female employees' boundary violations are probably very different, making any comparison difficult and subject to interpretational error.

Boundary violations occurred quickly, often within the first year of employment. Fifty-seven employees were investigated for engaging in inappropriate relationships with inmates after less than one month of employment, 161 employees were investigated after one to 12 months of employment, 99 between 13 and 24 months, and 64 between 25 and 36 months. In all, 381 subjects were investigated within 36 months of employment.

Most (71 percent) investigated employees were hired between 1994 and 1998, in part because of rapid ID growth in the mid-1990s. During that period many existing criminal laws were enhanced, and new laws mandating longer sentences were enacted. Texas spent \$1 billion on prison construction in the early 1990s, and thousands of individuals were hired to manage the influx of new prisoners (Robison 1991). Between 1995 and 1998, the ID prison population increased from 118,386 to 140,718, and the number of prisons jumped from 69 to 108. Between 1995 and 1998, TDCJ-ID also increased its annual operating budget from \$1.5 to \$2 billion, increased the number of employees from 35,458 to 39,418, and increased its total security force from 18,920 to 27,509 (Camp and Camp 1995-1998). Roughly equal numbers of subjects were assigned to "old" prisons (1989 and earlier) and to "new" prisons (1990 and later). Fifty-five percent were terminated or dismissed, 23 percent resigned, and 31 percent received disciplinary probation.⁸ Employees who resigned did so after they were confronted with the prospect of an investigation. Those who resigned were allowed to leave the prison service without any negative comments or blemishes in their personnel file. We also realize that some unknown number of employees simply quit to avoid formal investigation when that they felt they were under suspicion.

Eligible applicants undergo an interview and take five pre-employment tests.⁹ A final evaluation score is computed from the combination of pre-employment tests, along with nine dimensions evaluated by interviewers. Applicants with high school diplomas, no felony convictions, and evaluation scores of 60 and above are offered positions. Human resource managers review applicants with scores of 59 and below; depending on the factors that caused the low score and on the needs for facility personnel, some applicants may be offered employment. The average evaluation score for investigated employees was 63; 119 (23 percent), however, scored 59 or less, and one scored 38.

In summary, the "average" employee investigated for establishing an inappropriate relationship with an inmate was a 31-year-old white female with a high school diploma and a history of service

⁸ Internal Affairs investigators informed us that employees who resigned would have been terminated in most cases. Therefore we decided to keep resignation in the database.

⁹ The criteria are as follows: (1) eligible to work in the United States; (2) at least 18 years old, with no age maximum; (3) high school diploma or GED; (4) males age 18 to 25 must be registered with the Selective Service; (5) not on active duty in the military; (6) no felony or convictions for drug-related offense; (7) no convictions for offense involving domestic violence; (8) no Class A or B misdemeanor convictions within the last 5 years; (9) not on probation for any criminal offense or pending charges; and (10) pass TDCJ pre-employment test and drug test.

and nonmilitary work, who was employed by the prison system in the mid-1990s as a uniformed security officer. These employees typically established an inappropriate inmate relationship within 36 months of employment.

FINDINGS

In this section we compare the "investigated" employees with the "successful" employees, and apply Strom-Gottfried's (1999) continuum of boundary violations to the data from the Texas prison system. We then discuss the importance of situational dynamics as a possible explanation for inappropriate relationships in prisons.

Investigated versus Non-investigated Employees

As stated above, prison human resource administrators wanted to know, for recruiting and training purposes, whether significant demographic differences existed between successful and unsuccessful employees. Accordingly we gathered relevant background and ID employment data from a random sample of 585 noninvestigated employees to compare with the investigated employees (see Table 2). A comparative analysis uncovered several important differences between the two groups. Investigated employees were significantly more likely than nondisciplined employees to be Anglos and females. In addition, they were significantly more likely than successful employees to have a general equivalency degree instead of a high school diploma, were significantly less likely to have military experience, and scored significantly lower on the pre-employment application (with average scores of 63 versus 68). Another important and statistically significant difference involved prior disciplinary problems: 45 percent of the investigated employees had at least one disciplinary write-up, compared with 31 percent of the noninvestigated employee group.

Analyses of Three Kinds of Boundary Violations

Using Strom-Gottfried's (1999) categorization scheme, we found that 38 employees (8 percent) had committed general boundary violations, 428 (80 percent) had engaged in dual relationships, and 42 (12 percent) had had sexual contact with prisoners (see Table 3). A significant relationship emerged between gender and the type of boundary violation: female employees were more likely than males to commit a boundary violation, and 80 percent of non-sexual dual relationships involved female employees. Minor breaks typically resulted in disciplinary probation, while more serious boundary violations led to severe punishment. Employees investigated for dual relationships were significantly younger (average

Table 2. Investigated Staff Members Compared With Sample of Successful Staff Members, 1995–1998

Variable	Investigated Staff (<i>N</i> = 508)	Successful Staff (<i>N</i> = 585)
Race/Ethnicity*		
White	54%	51%
African-American	30	27
Hispanic	16	22
Gender***		
Male	23%	68%
Female	77	32
Education***		
GED	32%	14%
High school diploma	68	86
Marital Status		
Married	50%	52%
Single	50	48
Military Experience***		
Yes	15%	26%
No	85	74
Employment History		
Service	86%	93%
Supervisory	14	7
Prior Disciplinary Violations***		
Yes	45%	31%
No	55	69
Application Score***		
59 or less	24%	11%
60 and above	76	89
Average Application Score***	63	68
Average Age at Employment	31	31

p* < .05; **p* < .001

age 30) than employees investigated for the other boundary violations. In 1998 the average age of an ID prisoner was 35; this age differential (35 to 30) may be related in some way to dual relationships.

General boundary violations. Among the 38 employees who committed general boundary violations (e.g., accepted or exchanged food products or craft work/materials with prisoners, or wrote letters to prisoners), most were Anglo (53 percent) and female (63 percent), had high school diplomas, and were 36 years old when hired by the ID. Most (79 percent) were hired between 1994 and 1998, and were investigated (66 percent) between 1997 and 1998. Slightly more than three-quarters (76 percent) were punished with disciplinary probation and received a second chance. All admitted their offense and expressed some degree of remorse.

The following vignettes (taken from the case files) illustrate common themes involved in general boundary violations:

Table 3. Investigated Staff Members' Background Characteristics, 1995-1998

Variables	Type of Boundary Violation		
	General Boundary Violations (<i>n</i> = 38)	Dual Relationships (<i>n</i> = 428)	Sexual Involvement (<i>n</i> = 42)
Race/Ethnicity			
African-American	29%	30%	36%
White	53	55	50
Hispanic	18	15	14
Gender***			
Male	37%	20%	40%
Female	63	80	60
Education			
GED	32%	32%	31%
High school diploma	68	68	69
Marital Status			
Married	43%	49%	66%
Single	57	51	34
Year Hired			
1977-1987	8%	5%	4%
1988-1993	13	25	17
1994-1998	79	70	79
Year Investigated			
1995	21%	26%	19%
1996	13	31	45
1997	32	27	24
1998	34	16	12
Case Outcome**			
Terminated/dismissed	16%	57%	62%
Probation	76	19	5
Resigned	8	24	33
Unit Opened 1989 and Before	37%	48%	45%
Unit Opened 1990 and After	63	52	55
Application Score			
59 or less	24%	24%	17%
60 and above	76	76	83
Mean Application Score	64	63	65
Average Age at Employment*	36	30	34
Average Age at Termination	38	35	39
Mean Number of Months on Job	35	57	36

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001

Case 1. In April 1998, Officer Daly admitted that she corresponded with Inmate Y and submitted a written statement that she was writing the inmate. She also stated that she had known Y before his current incarceration and did not realize that corresponding with former inmate friends was a violation of policy. She freely admitted that they were friends and that she wrote all the letters.

Case 2. In a written statement, Officer Jones admitted that he corresponded with Inmate A. He wrote: "I have known A since we was kids. His mom used to baby sit me.

We have been friends before I became a CO [correctional officer]. I wasn't thinking when I wrote him. I did not mean to break policy. I thought I would write to give an old friend some advice."

Case 3. In July 1997, a unit investigation found that Officer Bailey deposited \$20 in Inmate B's trust fund in return for a leather watchband. When confronted, Bailey admitted to the actions and further stated, "I deeply regret this and apologize for my actions and want disciplinary actions. I didn't think this was a big deal."

Most (63 percent) general boundary violations occurred in "newer" prisons. This finding suggests four possible explanations. First, it is plausible that the new units were flooded with rookies who failed, through ineffective training and supervision, to internalize the boundaries between themselves and inmates. When new employees enter a new prison, they may not know the organizational cultural taboos. The rapid expansion of the workforce may have weakened the organizational culture, as well as overwhelming the institutional norms that govern inmate-staff relationships. White (1995) states:

During periods of organizational turbulence, there is a weakening of organizational culture and values. The organization loses its power to shape, monitor, and self-correct boundary problems within worker-client relationships. Weak organizational cultures lose the capacity to define boundaries of appropriateness in service relationships. Weak organizational cultures exert little influence or control on individual practitioners. Rapid staff turnover or growth opens up the possibility of new workers and emergent subcultures that deviate from an organization's historical values. Turbulence within organizational systems, just as in family systems, marks a period of great vulnerability for role boundary violations. (p. 189)

Second, organizational pressure to recruit staff may have led to the erosion of standards, compromising hiring practices between 1995 and 1998. Similarly, the rapid expansion of police forces in New York, Washington, Miami, Houston, and Detroit led to careless screening and hasty training, which contributed to increases in police corruption and brutality (Krauss 1994). The recent Board of Inquiry into the Rampart area corruption incident in the Los Angeles Police Department attributed the criminal activity of several officers to accelerated hiring practices (in the late 1980s and early 1990s) and to the erosion of hiring standards (Board of Inquiry 2000).

The interviewees maintained that massive prison expansion eroded hiring standards: in the rush to build prisons and attract

"warm bodies" to staff the new prisons, hiring standards declined. As one supervisor stated:

The hiring standards were loosened up to staff the units. They had to hire whoever they could. Look, this prison system is so big now that I believe we have exhausted the labor pool of decent applicants. They hired anybody that was warm and could walk. Inappropriate relationships? The reason for these things is due to a lack of standards. It only stands to reason that when you lower the standards you get a lower-quality employee. Poor employees translate into management problems.

Third, it is possible that new units were staffed with new or inexperienced supervisors, who enforced employee rules and regulations aggressively. General boundary violations may have been the form of misconduct most visible for remediation.

Fourth, some of the post-1990 prison units are new-generation prisons, with an open design, which could reduce the supervisors' span of control and facilitate staff-inmate deviance. In short, new prison architecture may be associated with inappropriate relationships.

All four explanations underscore the unintended consequences of organizational growth on employees' misconduct, and require further research. In addition, organizational growth represents a serious historical effect that could confound the internal validity of the present inquiry (Cook and Campbell 1979). The data presented here clarify the effects of system expansion on personnel recruitment and boundary violations.

Dual relationships. As stated above, the analysis found 428 employees who broke the custodial frame by becoming personally involved with an inmate. Each of these employees was both a friend and a supervisor of an inmate. Dual relationships commonly involved Anglos (55 percent), females (80 percent), security officers (91 percent), and male prisoners. These relationships involved one employee and one prisoner, and appeared to be consensual. Most of the employees had high school diplomas (68 percent), were hired between 1994 and 1998 (70 percent), and were investigated in 1996 and 1997 (58 percent); more than half were terminated (57 percent). Their average age was 30 at employment, and they were on the job for roughly five years at the time of investigation.

We failed to determine whether inmates or employees initiated these custodial framebreaks. The employees' accounts of the events, however, suggest that inmates initiated the relationship for a variety of reasons such as companionship, loneliness, money, desire for favoritism, sex, contraband, boredom, and competition with

other inmates). It is possible, for example, that male inmates engaged in "fox hunting" and manipulated the employees to violate policy (Sapp 1997). The employees' version of the events revealed no instances in which the inmate forced the staff member into a relationship. The staff members allowed the relationships to develop despite their training.

Dual or overlapping relationships involved a process or series of steps. Glances were exchanged; notes, photographs, and rings were passed; smiles and friendly conversations were offered. Typically an inmate engaged an employee in small talk (e.g., on the weather or current events). If an employee reciprocated, then other topics (such as personal likes and dislikes or home and social life) were broached incrementally until the employee disclosed sensitive personal information (e.g., marital status, friends, and off-duty interests). In other cases, an inmate passed a "hook letter" (see below) to an employee and waited for a response. Employees who corresponded with the prisoners were approached and engaged in additional small talk. Sometimes an employee requested a duty assignment near his or her inmate "friend."

Dear Officer Jones:

Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.

(Proverbs 16:3)

Giving all praises an [sic] honor to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I'm praying that this small note becomes a long lasting friendship based on truth and honesty. To let you know that I am a honest man from the heart. Just searching for someone to relate to on verious [sic] issues of life. Most of all, life itself and what it truly means. To let you know a few things about me; I'm 36 years of age and I have a 30 yr. sentence. This is time that has no true meaning. I'm from Houston's North side. I'm a quiet type of guy and I stay to myself most of the time. So if this grabs you or even suits your fancy. Let me know, and of course let me know what turns you on and makes you happy. Just maybe I'm that friend you've been looking for.

"Looking to hear from you!"

Ricky

Dual relationships were typified by "lovesickness" (Gonsiorek 1995)—situations in which employees became infatuated and then fell in love with inmates. These employees desired a soulmate. The two typically exchanged letters detailing their life histories, goals, aspirations, and devotion to each other. Many letters contained

erotic themes and a desire for marriage when the inmate was paroled. Dual or overlapping boundary violations often involved romantic love and idealization of the inmate. Some employee-inmate correspondence revealed that female employees were drawn to male offenders to "straighten them up" or to tame a "rowdy man." In other cases, the employees were so consumed with romantic love that they identified (like Patty Hearst) with the prisoners rather than with the staff. The following vignettes from employees' letters or cards to inmates illustrate the intense emotions at work in dual relationships:

Dear Jay, As I lay here alone, listening to music, all I can think of is you. Do you realize that in such a little time we developed a love that is undescrivable. In my heart I have so many feelings, we have a bond that will last forever. I need you at home with me so that I can love you right, you're my dreams, love, and you being locked up is the ultimate test of our friendship and love. (Female employee to male inmate)

I love you, I need you. I want you. Forget the past, I only wanna hear about the future. I dream about you every night. Please don't leave. I would marry you now. (Female employee to male inmate)

I love you as always. I have you in my thoughts and dreams. Girl you will always have a special place in my heart. I love you, and your whole body. God just made you so beautiful—I can't resist you. Oh yeah, never argue with the officers for It's bad news. (Male employee to female inmate)

I love you and I love this feeling also, the desire, the anxiety and excitement. I can't wait to get to work. (Female employee to male inmate)

Look darling, We've been through a lot together. We've risked a lot together and Today we came together to be man and wife. I am not only your friend and lover, or girlfriend anymore. I am your partner in life. I will always be there for you until the end of time. This is my solemn vow to you. PS. They are watching all the female officers because of that shit with that boss on the first shift, be careful. (Female employee to male inmate)

Remember I love you. My heart is yours forever. I know there is an age difference between us, but that does not matter to me because I love you, I live for the time that we can be together. (Male employee to female inmate)

These letters voiced obsession, excitement, romantic love, and a desire for a life together beyond the penitentiary. These employees were eager to come to work and to overlook the prisoner's criminal past. In eight dual relationships, the employee fell in love with an

inmate gang member. Many married employees caught up in dual relationships appeared to be personally vulnerable.

Employees investigated for this violation often went to great lengths to keep the relationship secret. When we examined employee-inmate messages and letters, we often found employees instructing inmates to “keep a low profile,” “lay low, they’re [security staff] watching us,” or “keep away for now, let things cool down.” Security staff members often accidentally discovered the relationship during cell/property searches, after finding the employee’s artifacts (e.g., love letters, poems, cards, photos) in the inmate’s possession. In four incidents, inmate property searches unearthed an employee’s cellular telephone. In one case, an inmate informed unit supervisors of an employee-inmate dual relationship “because everybody knows about it and it was causing friction on the wing.” In two cases, employee-inmate relationships were discovered when the employee’s name was found boldly tattooed, one on an inmate’s stomach and the other on an inmate’s leg. In six cases, the employee’s spouse uncovered love letters in the employee’s possession and informed unit supervisors. In four cases, investigated employees spoke of their relationships to their colleagues, who then informed investigators.

Where were the supervisors? The Mollen Commission, which investigated police wrongdoing in the New York City Police Department, reported that supervisors had a “willful blindness” to police misconduct (Commission to Investigate 1994). The supervisors did not want the bad publicity and scandal that would follow if it was discovered that employees under their watch were engaged in misconduct. As a result, they looked the other way and refused to take action against officer wrongdoing. It is possible that the prison supervisors in Texas knew of dual relationships but practiced “willful blindness” to avoid scandal and embarrassment to the agency.

Sexual contact. Forty-two acts of employee-inmate sexual contact occurred between 1995 and 1998, accounting for 8 percent of all boundary violations. Similarly, Strom-Gottfried (1999) found that over an 11-year period, 12 percent of all ethics complaints submitted by clients to the National Association of Social Workers dealt with sexual violations. Half of the prison employees were Anglos, 60 percent were women, and 79 percent were hired between 1994 and 1998. Over two-thirds had high school diplomas (69 percent), and nearly all were security staff members (90 percent) in their early thirties (average age 34) at the time of employment. These

employees averaged three years on the job when they were investigated for sexual contact. Two-thirds were married; we had no information on the quality of the spousal relationship, however. Forty incidents involved heterosexual contact; two (5 percent) were same-sex pairings (male-male). A similar percentage (4 to 5 percent) was found in the literature on sexual contact between male therapists and male clients (Gonsiorek 1995). Most of the employees investigated for sexual contact were terminated (62 percent) or resigned (33 percent) from employment. The National Institute of Corrections (2000:10-11) recently reported that in fiscal year 1998, more than 115 officers were discharged for substantiated incidents of sexual contact with inmates, and 20 were prosecuted. (Data were taken from 37 agencies.)

The following vignettes illustrate "typical" acts of employee-inmate sexual contact:

Case 1. In a written statement, Officer Flanigan stated that I was working the night shift and doing my rounds in a dormitory and I saw inmate J masturbating in her bunk. I walked up to her and told her to stop but she unzipped my pants and rubbed my penis and placed it in her mouth. Well after that she demanded \$40 from me and then \$80. I didn't pay and she turned me in. I admit to the whole thing and I know I was wrong.

Case 2. In a written statement, Officer Adams admitted that she loved inmate D and was involved in a personal relationship with D going on two years. Adams stated that she got to know D through casual conversations, which eventually grew into the present relationship. Adams also stated that she was in love with D and had discussed marriage and life together after he was released. Adams admitted that the two had engaged in acts of sexual intercourse in the chapel. She also admitted that she placed \$350 in D's trust fund.

Case 3. In written statements, Lieutenant Tan and Sergeant Green stated that they witnessed Officer Hays [female employee] stroking and fondling inmate H's penis in the dayroom. Officer Hay was also kissing inmate H and stroking his buttocks. When confronted by unit supervisors, Officer Hays, who was married and had two children, admitted the acts were true.

Case 4. In a written statement, Officer Toms observed Officer Funworth [female employee] being fondled by inmate A. The inmate had his hands under the shirt of Officer F and was fondling her breasts and she did nothing to stop it. When confronted, inmate A and Officer F admitted the act and Officer F resigned in lieu of termination.

Sexual contact typically occurred away from supervisory staff, a finding that parallels the police literature (Kappeler et al. 1994). Kitchen, chapel, closets, laundry, library, bathrooms, and offices were the primary locales for sexual contact. Discovery by coworkers was usually accidental. In eight incidents, unit supervisors staked out the employee by capturing the incident on film, on microphone, and/or through "wired" inmates. In the other cases, suspected employees under investigation for dual relationships admitted to the relationship and sexual contact when confronted by investigators.

The employees' version of sexual contact illustrates the strong gender differences in this form of occupational deviance. Male employees typically were sexual predators. The male prison officers' uniform (as a symbol of power and authority) and their custodial access to female prisoners were conducive to exploitation (Kraska and Kappeler 1995). Female prison employees' motivation for sexual contact with prisoners involved love and postprison commitments. We found no evidence that female employees used sex as a mechanism (a commodity or a quid pro quo) to exploit inmates for personal gain. The inmates' perspective, when examined, will support or negate the female employees' interpretation of the situation.

Comparison of Boundary Violations by Situations

Four general types of situation led to official punishment. The employees did not simply violate policy in a vacuum; various situational dynamics must be accounted for or explained. Table 4 presents the findings from a comparative analysis of the three boundary violations by the four situations. We found a statistically significant relationship between boundary violations and situations.

Rescue situations. In these situations, an employee felt sorry for a prisoner and then broke the rules to aid or assist him or her. We found only five rescue situations, but they involved unusual contexts worthy of separate treatment. In one instance, an employee placed money in the inmate's trust fund after the inmate told the employee of his dire situation, "now that he had AIDS." In another instance, a male employee wanted to "save" an inmate from a lesbian relationship, and counseled her on religious proscriptions against homosexuality. Rescue situations typically involved employees who violated organizational policies to save inmates from a "life-threatening" situation. Rescuers expressed no remorse about their actions and insisted that they were providing "therapy" to the inmate.

Table 4. Boundary Violations Compared With Situations, 1995–1998

Type of Situation	Type of Boundary Violation***			Total
	General Boundary Violations	Dual Relationships	Sexual Acts	
Rescuer	.00% (0)	1.00% (4)	2.00% (1)	5
Naïveté/Accidents	84.00% (32)	16.00% (67)	2.00% (1)	100
Lovesick	13.00% (5)	75.00% (326)	60.00% (25)	356
Predators	3.00% (1)	7.00% (31)	36.00% (15)	47
Count	38	428	42	508

NOTE: Numbers are given in parentheses.

*** $p < .001$

Naïveté or accidents. One hundred employees were involved in situations that we defined loosely as naïveté or accidents: situations in which the employees appeared to be naïve or socially unaware about the professional relationship between themselves and inmates (Gabbard and Lester 1995). The employees apparently were poorly prepared for correctional work, and/or had failed to internalize (or understand) the custodial frame. We found several employees who tried to place money in an inmate's trust fund after purchasing craftwork from the inmate. The hallmark of these naïve situations or accidents was remorse; the employees all expressed profound self-reproach for not knowing the rules, and regretted their transgression. Further, 69 of these situations occurred in newer prison units; this finding suggests a link between expansion, organizational culture, and the internalization of professional boundaries by employees and supervisors. Additional preservice training may be needed to prepare new employees to work in new units.

Lovesickness. We found 356 employees enmeshed in lovesick situations. These involved "romantic idealism," in which the employee disregarded the offender's personal history, placed the inmate on a pedestal, and fantasized about life together when the inmate was released. Their love was regarded as so extraordinary that employee policies and ethical codes were irrelevant (Gabbard 1995). In dual or overlapping boundary violations and lovesick situations, romantic love and idealization of the inmate were often combined.

Seventy-five percent of all dual/overlapping relationships involved lovesick situations. Additional data analysis found that 268

(75 percent) of these relationships involved female employees: The employee perceived the inmate as a person, a boyfriend, or a soulmate. These employees actively fostered a relationship with an inmate, typified by the letters presented above. Some married employees had experienced a catastrophic traumatic event before or during employment: their correspondence to inmates mentioned domestic violence, sexual frustration, marital strife or discord, boredom, ruptured dreams, or separation from their spouses. Others felt at a loss because their children had left the nest, or someone close to them had passed away. This personal vulnerability then was sensed by the inmates, who seized upon the employees' troubles to manipulate the situation.

Personal vulnerability coupled with institutional vulnerability (proximity to and manipulation by inmates) fostered or enhanced employees' deviance. Gabbard and Lester (1995) noted a similar phenomenon among therapists who fell in love with their patients, in which infatuation occurred in connection with extreme stress in the analyst's life (e.g., divorce, separation, disillusionment with their own career or marriage). The prison employees willingly accepted the inmates' attention and violated policy.

The combination of dual relationships and lovesick situations unfolded in duty posts such as the laundry, commissary, issue room, kitchen, library, chapel, dormitories, and mailroom. These situations often involved one employee (in an out-of-the-way location) and one or more prisoners. We realize that prison employees, regardless of gender, are assigned to a variety of duty posts on the basis of need. Lovesick situations, however, develop in institutional areas where supervisory contact is minimal and where employees and offenders can interact with each other as males and females, eroding the boundary between employee and offender. Not all female employees who work (for example) in ID stewards' departments succumb to prisoners' advances; our data simply suggest that specific hot spots exist in the units and bear close supervision.

Subsequent data analysis led us to conclude that the combination of dual relationships and lovesick situations led to sexual encounters: 60 percent of the sexual contacts involved lovesick situations. These data suggest a slippery slope, in which some employees (at least those who were caught) who develop a romantic relationship with an inmate have sexual contact. The progression from nonsexual to sexual contact has been found as well among psychotherapist-patient relationships (Stake and Oliver 1991; Strasburger, Jorgenson, and Sutherland 1992).

Predators. We found 47 predatory situations in which employees sought out and manipulated prisoners, and thought they could get away with it for personal or private gain (Friedman and Boumil 1995). In these situations, the employee actively preyed on an inmate for money, property, and/or sex. One employee, for example, established relationships with offenders and then cased their possessions and stole their property (e.g., watches, necklaces, rings) under the cover of cell searches. Male employees were more likely to become involved in predatory situations.

Kraska and Kappeler's (1995; see also Horswell 2000; Vaughn 1999) demonstrated that police sexual violations ranged from unobtrusive behavior (e.g., viewing photographs of victims) to criminal behavior (e.g., sexual assault). We found two primary types of correctional employee-inmate sexual contact.

First, as stated above, 25 cases (60 percent) involved lovesick situations: 22 employees were females and three were males. Similarly, Gartrell and colleagues (1986) found that 65 percent of psychiatrists who were sexually involved with a patient described themselves as in love with the patient. Among the prison employees, we found many letters filled with declarations of love, infatuation, lifetime commitment, and plans beyond the penitentiary. Some employees and inmates even exchanged vows and rings, and referred to themselves as married couples.

The employees' stories suggests that staff members took their first small steps down the slippery slope of boundary erosion, and ended up much farther down than they ever could have imagined (Strasburger et al. 1992). Our findings support those of Strom-Gottfried (1999), who found that clinicians who "break frame" often proceed from minor to major transgressions. How many dual relationships culminate in sexual contact is unknown.

In addition, we found 15 cases (all male employees and female prisoners) of employee-inmate sexual contact that involved predatory situations. In 14 of these cases, male employees used their position and power to procure sexual favors from female prisoners, such as sex in exchange for preferential treatment or marriage upon release. Sex becomes a commodity, and an underground economy evolves between male staff and female prisoners; this situation encourages female prisoners to prostitute themselves in exchange for preferential treatment and to avoid punishment or harm. Such behavior institutionalizes a form of exploitation and sexual slavery (Jolin 1994). The predatory situations we researched paralleled Sapp's (1997:146) discussion of "sexual shakedowns" committed by police officers.

Currently it is unknown whether or not these 14 employees have been criminally prosecuted or have been served with civil lawsuits. All were terminated from prison employment. In one case of sexual contact, a male employee cohabited with a female parolee, whom he met while she was incarcerated. Upon questioning, both admitted to sexual activity. Under current Texas law, it is a second-degree felony (sexual assault) for a public servant to coerce another individual to participate in sexual activity (Texas Penal Code 2000). The data suggest that male prison employees, like police officers, may be engaging in sexual activity with female prisoners simply because they can. The presence of numerous potential partners in routine encounters with inmates provides the opportunity for seduction (Crank 1998:145).

Female prisoners, like women in the wider community, are at risk of victimization by coercive sexual strategies simply because of their gender (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996; Pogrebin and Poole 1997). The data displayed in Table 4 illustrate that employees' boundary violations were linked conceptually to certain situations. Our findings indicate the need to view each boundary violation and the specific situation as part of a process rather than as an isolated deviant episode. For example, employees might begin by asking inmates about their life and how they arrived in prison. An inmate might respond to this concern by writing the employee a note of thanks. If the employee reciprocates, the inmate receives a "mixed message" and assumes that the employee wants a relationship.

Inappropriate employee-inmate relationships often involved a mixture of situations, behaviors, emotions, needs, and human desires. Breaking the custodial frame entails an array of actions that must be considered in combination with various situational determinants. Our analyses of boundary violations and situational contexts illustrate the complexity of such inappropriate relationships.

Additional analyses (not reported in Table 4) revealed a significant finding when we examined the relationship between incidents and the average number of months on the job at time of punishment. Employees involved in predatory situations averaged nearly 11 years of tenure at punishment. Predator situations are probably difficult to detect because employees take great care to cover their actions. It also appears that rescue situations occur quickly, illustrating how readily prisoners can manipulate receptive employees. Oddly, employees caught in naïveté or accident situations averaged 44 months of tenure at punishment. We expected these situations to unfold more quickly and cannot account for this finding, unless it

relates to the difficulty of detection and the need for thorough investigation. Employees caught in lovesick situations averaged 37 months at punishment.

Why would seemingly normal employees become romantically (and even sexually) involved with prisoners? Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) posed a similar question when they asked why bright, emotionally stable young male college students (most of whom were in the peace movement) would abuse their fellow students in a prisonlike environment. Their answer to this question emphasized the surprising power of institutional environments over the participants (Haney and Zimbardo 1998:710). As Haney and colleagues (1973:90) suggested, "[T]he abnormality here [the mock prison] resided in the psychological nature of the situation and not in those who passed through it." Over the past 27 years, these researchers have generated a body of research that clearly illustrates how "mind altering social psychological dynamics" can bend and twist human behavior (Haney and Zimbardo 1998:710). If one accepts the situational explanation, then complex issues such as consent become difficult to define and comprehend. The inmates' version must be researched if we are to fully ascertain how and why these dual relationships develop.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper represents the first study of boundary violations between correctional employees and inmates. It is based on four years of data, 1995-1998, a period of substantial organizational expansion that could affect the validity of our findings (Cook and Campbell 1979). Also, our formulation of the continuum of boundary violations and situational dynamics is incomplete. Clearly the types of boundary violations overlap, and it is not possible to arrange a linear relationship among these behaviors (Strom-Gottfried 1999). We suspect that each combination of boundary violation and situation contains subsets of other violations, as in the case of dual relationships and lovesick situations.

With these warnings in mind, we produced several important findings with implications for correctional personnel management, training, theory, and research on occupational deviance in penal settings.

First, the most important finding from our analysis was that inappropriate employee-inmate relationships must be understood as boundary violations. Custodial framebreaks involved various behaviors and activities. In this way, Strom-Gottfried's (1999) conceptualization of boundary violations (general, dual/overlapping, and sexual) enhances our understanding of this phenomenon in

prisons. Dual/overlapping relationships were the most frequent form of deviance; typically they involved female employees who became romantically involved with prisoners. Boundary violations, especially dual relationships, involved a process or sequence of behaviors that transpired over weeks and months.

Second, our comparative analysis found that employees who broke the custodial frame were significantly more likely than not to be Anglos and females who had a GED and no military experience. Investigated employees received significantly lower pre-employment evaluation scores than successful employees; lower scores were risk markers for boundary violations. Investigated employees also were more likely than successful employees to have a history of rule violations.

Third, inappropriate employee-inmate relationships unfolded in specific situations. The most common context involved lovesick female employees who, through manipulation by inmates or their own volition, negated the role differences between themselves and the inmate. These employees viewed the inmate as a soulmate, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a pen pal lover, or a future spouse. The most important aspect of these situations was the employee's recasting of the offender as a nonprisoner or a "person who just happens to be in prison." In some cases, the employee identified with the prisoner. Ironically, inmates, rather than being powerless in their dealings with the staff, exert some control over interested employees. Naïveté/accident situations often occurred at newer prison units; thus it is possible that organizational expansion may precipitate these situations as a result of an unsettled organizational culture.

Fourth, most custodial framebreaks occurred within 36 months of employment. The first 12 months of tenure represent an at-risk period in which some employees (e.g., those with low application scores and with general equivalency diplomas) have not bonded to the organization, and perceive offenders to be "just other people." Perhaps seasoned employees could conduct additional on-the-job training, stressing the pitfalls and consequences of boundary violations to strengthen the new employees' ties to the organization. The interviewees strongly suggested that prison organizations should use "field training officers" (like their police counterparts) to guide and mentor new employees in the critical first few months on the job. Under the rubric of employee survival skills, the Texas prison system recently has expanded its pre-service training from one hour on "games inmates play" to nearly eight hours. This

change in training underscores the agency's sensitivity to employees' vulnerability, and to the need for tools to forestall further problems.

Fifth, sexual violations represented 8 percent (or 42 cases) of all violations, a figure paralleling the research on sexual contact in other occupations. Most sexual contacts involved lovesick female employees; these situations suggest the escalation of an employee-inmate relationship from nonsexual to sexual contact. We found 14 male employees who used their position to procure sexual favors from female prisoners. Sexual contact is the most serious violation of professional conduct: currently, in 42 states, legislation prohibits sexual contact between correctional employees and inmates. Since 1996, 20 departments of corrections have developed or revised their policies regarding sexual misconduct (National Institute of Corrections 2000).

Sixth, research is needed on the effects of sex-role spillover in prisons. Females employed in male prisons and males employed in female prisons work in nontraditional jobs, and sex-role spillover can be studied empirically as an underlying factor contributing to employees' boundary violations. Such research also will clarify the changing and complex nature of the corruption of authority.

The deviant employees studied here violated policy voluntarily. To suggest that there was something wrong with them initially implies that improved recruitment, proper screening measures, psychological tests, and incentives (i.e., merit raises) can eliminate inappropriate personal contact between employees and inmates. Osgood et al. (1996:639), however, suggest that "most people have the potential for at least occasionally succumbing to an opportunity for deviant behavior." Future prison researchers, like their police counterparts (Sherman 1980), must examine the individual, situational, and organizational correlates of boundary violations in prisons. Such violations, and the situations in which they unfold, are an ironic aspect of the pathology of imprisonment, as well as an eternal defect of total power.

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