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# PRISONER PERSPECTIVES ON INMATE CULTURE IN NEW MEXICO AND NEW ZEALAND: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY

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*Medium security prisoners in two nations provided personal insights into the inmate social systems found in their facilities: Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility is located near New Mexico's border with Mexico; Christchurch Prison is in New Zealand's South Island. Besides personal biographical and sociolegal questions, the inmates in both facilities responded to a series of closed- and open-ended questions about inmate values and norms. The only modification was to cast them in terminology relevant to the prisoners in each facility. In this analysis, the authors turn to three critical dimensions of alleged inmate values. Inmate orientations on qualities or features in others that they respect provide the first focus. The second explores the respect given to a series of 15 different types of criminal offenders. The final focus is the nature and extent of prison code adoption in both facilities. The authors also address several theoretical and practical concerns revealed by these analyses.*

Prisonization is one of the most enduring and elastic concepts devised by penologists in the 20th century. The existence of a prison culture with spe-

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cific attitudes and values was acknowledged as early as 1930 by the New York Crime Commission: "It is common knowledge that there is a prison code among convicts whereby no inmate, whether he be a trusty or a potential parolee, dare inform the wardens or any of the guards against another inmate" (cited in Tannenbaum, 1938, p. 326). A discrete prison-based value system was confirmed by Reimer's (1937) participant observer study at a Kansas state penitentiary, and a similar one was described by Hayner and Ash (1940) at Washington State Reformatory.

The makeup of "the code" remained largely unknown until Clemmer (1958) observed in 1940 that the prison code protected inmate interests and revolved around subgroup loyalty. Thus, assisting officials in disciplinary matters is strictly condemned, as is leaking information about inmate activities. Stealing from fellow inmates is prohibited. Moreover, the code's fundamentals are pervasive and durable, claimed Clemmer. He called the code adoption process "prisonization," or the "taking on in greater or lesser degree of the folkways, mores, customs and general culture of the penitentiary" (Clemmer, 1958, p. 299).

In the decades following Clemmer's (1958) ground-breaking work, penologists expanded on prisonization and the oppositional code. For example, the observations of Rasmussen (1940) at Stateville (Illinois) and Weinberg (1942) at Menard (Illinois) reinforced the code's pervasiveness. Sykes and Messinger (1960) described a social code that controls not only interinmate behavior but also inmate-staff relationships by emphasizing the general protection of inmate interests, the restriction of conflict between and exploitation of prisoners, and the maintenance of inmate strength and dignity, particularly in the face of authority (Sykes & Messinger, 1960, pp. 7-9).

The inmate social system's origins came under scrutiny in the 1960s. Irwin and Cressey (1962) suggested that the inmate code is not confined to prisons but is similar to that of the general criminal culture. This free-world linkage ignited a debate over the respective roles of prison's deprivations and imported values (Akers, Hayner, & Gruninger, 1974; Thomas, 1973; Tittle, 1972): What is more important in defining the inmate subculture's negativity, the pains associated with confinement, or the orientations and values brought into the prison? Even the proposal of an integrated model, allowing for both prison deprivations and imported values, has not resolved this issue (Akers, Hayner, & Gruninger, 1977; Thomas, 1977).

Researchers employing prisonization as an independent variable have provided further evidence of the concept's elasticity. Wooldredge (1997), for example, examined the respective roles of preinstitutional (importation) and institutional (deprivation) factors on inmate perceptions of crowding in Ohio. Both sets of forces, Wooldredge (1997, p. 38) reported, are important if

we are to understand how inmates view their living conditions. Hensley (2000) explored homophobia among prison inmates, employing both models. He found support for the idea that inmates import their street views of homosexuality into the prison: female and Black inmates are less homophobic than male and White inmates (Hensley, 2000, pp. 439-440). Sorensen, Wrinkle, and Gutierrez (1998) employed both models to explore the rule-violating behavior of murderers sentenced in Missouri. They found strong support for the importation model: Age and race were the most consistent correlates of rule violations, with young Black inmates violating the prison rules most often and being overrepresented among high-rate assaultive violators (Sorensen et al., 1998, pp. 229-230). However, deprivation was also important, as the rule violation patterns of death-sentenced inmates, and lifers, in particular, converged by the third year of incarceration.

International prisonization studies reveal social systems that look like those found in the United States. For example, studies in the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth nations provide support for prisonization's cross-cultural utility. The attitudes and values that Morris and Morris (1962) found at Pentonville, London—and expressed in the biographical works of Boyle (1977) in Scotland, McVicar (1979) in England, Denning (c. 1982) in Australia, and Newbold (1982) in New Zealand—differ little from those observed by U.S. social scientists. However, these studies are largely subjective renderings of ex-offenders, often in anecdotal form.

English-language prisonization studies in non-U.S., non-U.K., or non-Commonwealth prisons exist but are relatively rare. Drawing data from 15 Scandinavian institutions, Cline and Wheeler (1968) tested limited aspects of both importation and deprivation. Although they failed to find support for deprivation, Cline and Wheeler indicated that institutions in which inmates collectively have greater crime experiences also exhibited the most antisocial climates. In their view, prior experience with the criminal justice system was evidence of the direct "importation" of hostile values into the prison community. Reising and Lee (2000) studied prisonization in 15 different Korean prisons. Their analyses used both aggregate and individual-level data. At the aggregate level, Reising and Lee (pp. 27-28) found that anticonventional attitudes were far more common in rigidly controlled prisons. At the individual level, prisonization is best understood in terms of the inmate-felt deprivations (Reising & Lee, 2000, pp. 28-29). Akers et al. (1977) conducted a massive comparative prisonization study, surveying prison inmates in five different countries (i.e., United States, Mexico, England, Germany, and Spain). There were notable exceptions to prisonization's otherwise exemplary performance. For example, prisonization was relatively low in the Mexican prisons. Nonetheless, the authors concluded that prisonization was generalizable

to other cultures: "A recognizable nonconformist inmate culture is found everywhere" (Akers et al., 1977, p. 547). The deprivation model was supported over importation; however, they also argued for an integrated model inasmuch as imported values influence an inmate's malleability to the prison's deprivations (Akers et al., 1977, pp. 547, 549).

Prison inmate argot—the prison community's specialized language—has played a major role in prisonization studies outside the United States. Bondeson (1968, 1989) conducted a series of juvenile and adult studies and found that prisonization, as measured by argot knowledge, increased recidivism and confirmed speculation that prisonization counters the therapeutic function of prison-based treatment programs. More recently, Einat and Einat (2000) found that Israeli inmate argot supported the norms and values of an inmate subculture. They concluded that "the findings support the notion that inmates do not feel any obligation to adhere to codes and norms imposed on them by the prison authorities. . . . The highest level of intensity was found for 'adherence to the inmate code and loyalty to fellow prisoners'" (Einat & Einat, 2000, p. 320).

In summary, prisonization continues to provide insights into prison life. Age, gender, race, ethnicity, or nationality seem to little influence this venerable social force. Nonetheless, some penologists challenge the view that solidary inmate subcultures exist in contemporary prisons (Irwin, 1980; also see Bottoms, 1999; Irwin & Austin, 1993; Irwin, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999). Perhaps the idea that prisons are total institutions, controlling all aspects of inmate life, is a historical artifact (Irwin, 1980; also see R. C. McCorkle, Meithe, & Drass, 1995). Others suggest caution concerning the validity of deprivation or importation, as neither are general theories that transcend time and place (Reisig & Lee, 2000, p. 29).

The present study explores, in case study form, the operation of selected prisonization elements among two inmate samples, one in New Zealand and the other in the United States. Three themes, in particular, guide this effort. First, we compare inmate expressions of the personal qualities they respect in others, qualities grounded in the inmate code. Second, even among members of the prison community, not all citizens are created equal. Hence, we compare the respect levels assigned by inmates in each prison to various offender types. Finally, the extent and nature of code adoption by prisoners is central to prisonization. Comparing inmate code adoption should reveal much about this concept's utility in a cross-cultural context. Before evaluating the two groups of inmates and their value systems, we review the literature related to the inmate culture and prisoner values and the insights it holds for this study.

### INMATE CULTURE AND PRISONER VALUES

Social stratification based on objective or even subjective aspects of the human condition, social or otherwise, is part of contemporary life. This statement is equally descriptive of life in prison (Adams, 1992). That is, all prisoners are not created equal, nor are they treated equally by their peers or others. In spite of how society may view them, prisoners are not homogeneous members of a monolithic and egalitarian brotherhood (or sisterhood). Prisoners may have a code, but like life in any diverse society, there are rules and then there are rules. Moreover, adherence ranges from near total compliance to near total resistance. As Clemmer (1958, p. 299) observed, about 1 in 5 inmates could be described as a regular member of a group approximating a primary social group in free society. Far more inmates, perhaps 4 in 10, failed to participate in prison group activities in any meaningful fashion; and among the rest, another 4 in 10 engaged only superficially with inmate groups.

The inmate subculture, and its accompanying social code, reveal how inmates see themselves and others. Three areas seem particularly most important. First, there is the idea of respectability, a crucial part of the inmate code (Clemmer, 1958; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Sykes & Messinger, 1960). For example, a consistent finding relative to the qualities one might value in a respected peer is loyalty to the inmate class and honesty in dealings with fellow inmates. In addition, exuding a sense of calmness and reservedness in the face of custodial staff is also highly prized. Importantly, the inmate code's central elements have demonstrated considerable cross-cultural versatility (Bondeson, 1968, 1989; Einat & Einat, 2000; Reisig & Lee, 2000).

The second part centers on inmate attitudes and orientations toward crime and criminals. Perhaps one of the reasons that not all inmates are "created equal" is due to the fact that they engage in a broad range of criminal activities, both outside and inside the prison. Clemmer (1958, p. 107) defined the inmate elites as comprising "more intelligent, urbanized, sophisticated offenders who, for the most part, do not toady to officials, who set themselves apart, and have their relations chiefly with each other."

Prisoners often express a unique sense of morality, one which many penologists believe originates not with prison life but in the world beyond its boundaries (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Attitudes toward the death penalty provide an instructive case in point. Stevens (1992) explored support for the death penalty among maximum and minimum security inmates incarcerated in Illinois, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Noting that the majority of the public supports capital punishment, Stevens (1992, p. 275) reported that many prison inmates also supported the increased use of the death penalty to

rid society of unwanted and dangerous individuals. Support was especially high among the more violent offenders. In an echoing of the inmate code, most inmates surveyed favored the use of the death penalty for "low lifes" but not themselves: "It was to be limited to certain individuals whom they felt were not trustworthy to live in the general prison population, let alone in the outside world" (Stevens, 1992, p. 276).

Inmates' attitudes toward sex offenders represent another interesting problem for penologists and prison administrators. Clemmer (1958) observed that sex offenders, owing to the depravity of their acts, often find themselves prison community outcasts (also see Colvin, 1982; Irwin, 1980). Akerstrom (1986), in a study of nine Swedish prisons, found "outcasts among outcasts," chief among whom were sex offenders and informers. Indeed, sex offenders and informers are typically placed at the bottom of the inmate hierarchy in U.S. prisons (Irwin, 1980, p. 14). As Toch (1978, p. 24) wrote, child molesters, in particular, are "dehumanized to make them fair game for violence-prone exploitation."

Vaughn and Sapp (1989) contend that sex offenders' low status in the free world transfers into low prison status. "Societal rejection of sex offenders, child molesters, and sex deviants creates both a low social status for such offenders and a negative treatment environment in the prison. . . . Due to the sex offender's lack of status, many are prone to victimization" (Vaughn & Sapp, 1989, p. 74). According to Vaughn and Sapp (1989, p. 75), importation theory explains this "dual condemnation of sex offenders." Hensley's (2000) study of male and female prisoners in Mississippi tends to confirm this position: Women and Blacks, who tend to be less homophobic generally, also express less homophobia as prisoners. "Thus, these [homophobic] attitudes and beliefs have been brought into the prison from the streets, again lending support for the importation theory" (Hensley, 2000, p. 440).

Sapp and Vaughn (1990a, 1990b) provide unique glimpses into the prison social system's morality. They analyzed a survey administered to adult sex offender treatment administrators in state correctional institutions, who were asked to rank their perceptions of the status inmates accorded 10 different offender types from 1 (*highest status*) to 10 (*lowest status*), creating a correctional status hierarchy (Sapp & Vaughn, 1990a). The mean scores generated two clusters. In the first cluster were, in descending order of status, robbers, drug offenders, murderers, burglars, assaultive offenders, and thieves (Vaughn & Sapp, 1989, p. 80). The second cluster averaged at least four units from the first cluster and included, in descending order, murder-rapists, rapists, incest offenders, and pedophiles (Vaughn & Sapp, 1989, p. 80).

A third dimension of prison culture is adoption of a negativistic, anti-institutional code. Penologists describe this social code as functional because

it may minimize social rejection, perhaps even stopping its conversion into self-rejection: The inmate subculture “permits the inmate to reject his rejector rather than himself” (L. McCorkle & Korn, 1954, p. 88). As the inmate moves in “the direction of solidarity, as demanded by the inmate code, the pains of imprisonment become less severe” (Sykes & Messinger, 1960, p. 14). Therefore, it is not surprising that a key component found in most representations of the inmate code is opposition to, or outright rejection of, authority generally and prison authorities in particular. Beginning with Clemmer (1958), the idea of an oppositional code, grounded in a lack of trust of, deference to, and respect for prison authorities, has dominated the operationalization of prisonization (Thomas, 1970, 1973, 1977; also see Paterline & Petersen, 1999; Reisig & Lee, 2000).

All three inmate culture elements have yielded useful insights into prisonization’s role in prison. As observed, cross-cultural studies of either prisonization or prison culture are rare. This study, as an exception to this generalization, compares the self-expressed values of two groups of prison inmates with similar security ratings, one in the state of New Mexico and the other in Canterbury in New Zealand’s South Island. The choice of prisons was largely dictated by their availability to the researchers; however, both housed similar offender types and included overrepresented minority populations. Inmates at each facility were asked about their attitudes toward other prisoners and the way they perceive the staff, along with items that reveal, in a self-report fashion, their own criminal careers. Completed surveys from 165 prisoners in these two prisons provided the means to answer the following research questions:

*Research Question 1:* To what extent are the personal biographical and legal characteristics of the inmates found in the two prisons similar or dissimilar?

*Research Question 2:* To what extent are the qualities or features in others that are respected by inmates in the two prisons similar or dissimilar?

*Research Question 3:* To what extent are the levels of respect accorded to offender types by inmates in the two prisons similar or dissimilar?

*Research Question 4:* To what extent are the levels of inmate code adoption expressed by inmates in the two prisons similar or dissimilar?

## METHODS

### THE RESEARCH SITES

The Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility (SNMCF or Southern) is a medium security prison located near Las Cruces, New Mexico. Opened in



1983 and physically unchanged since that date, the facility was intended to house 480 inmates in 10 separate housing units or "pods." Within a year, the facility was operating over capacity. A decade later, a minimum security unit was constructed nearby; however, inmates at this facility were not included in the survey. At the time of the study, Southern's main section housed nearly 550 residents. The facility first received accreditation by the American Correctional Association in 1988 and has maintained that accreditation (New Mexico Corrections Department, 1998, p. 21).

Christchurch Prison (also known as Paparua) is a medium and minimum security facility, rurally located outside of Christchurch in New Zealand's South Island. Most people sentenced in the South Island and classified as medium or minimum security risks commence their time at Paparua, and many serve their entire sentences there. The old part was opened in 1924 and consists of three wings, East, Central, and West, each of which holds 90 inmates. Most men in this part of the institution are classified medium security, but there are also a few minimum security prisoners awaiting placement elsewhere. All East Wing inmates have single cells, whereas in the West and Central Wings, some prisoners are doubled up. A 1988 expansion resulting in a number of separate and more modern 60-bed units, all outside the old prison walls, gave Paparua a total inmate muster of about 440. To provide a comparative population with the New Mexican medium security cohort, the inmate sample for the Christchurch part of this study was chosen solely from the medium security population located in the wings of the old prison.

#### SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Gaining inmate cooperation is difficult under the best of circumstances. One of the study's coauthors (Tubb) had served a 6-month internship as a classification officer at Southern. As a consequence, he was known to inmates and staff members. A week before the survey's administration, flyers were posted in the prison housing units asking for volunteers; each included a description of the survey and stressed both confidentiality and the opportunity to express one's beliefs about prison life. Given the boredom and the rumor mill common to prisons, oral knowledge of the "prisoner study" became widespread. A sign-up sheet was attached to each flyer, along with the statement that signing up did not commit one to participate.

Two procedures were necessary to gather inmate responses. For general population inmates, the prison administration gave permission to use the visitation center at the facility. On the evening the survey was administered, inmates gathered in the visitation center. We provided them with a brief explanation of the study and, once again, reminded them that participa-

tion was voluntary and confidential. Following university institutional review board procedures, we asked them to read and sign a voluntary participation form, which was collected separately. The 39 volunteers were then told to complete the questionnaires at their own pace. A research team member was available to answer questions about the survey during the mass administration.

Roughly one half of Southern's inmate population was locked down in segregation during the survey administration. The researchers were allowed to send questionnaires into the segregation unit. Classification officers, or professional staff members assigned to review inmate assignments and prepare them for parole, handed out questionnaires in the morning and returned at midday to collect the sealed responses. As with inmates in the general population, signed voluntary participation forms were obtained from the segregation inmates, although in an envelope separate from the completed questionnaires. This method added another 26 inmates.

By these two methods, we obtained a total of 65 surveys at Southern. Only a handful of the inmates who showed up for the mass survey administration refused to participate, resulting in a completion rate of more than 90%. We do not suggest that this group constitutes a random sample of the facility. It is, for better or worse, a group of inmates in a medium security prison who were willing to participate in a survey. However, we did gain access both to the general population and to inmates in segregation, and furthermore, the sample comports well with the official inmate summary for the facility in terms of age, race/ethnicity, and—with the exception of sex offenders being somewhat underrepresented—current offense. For these reasons, we feel that this group of inmates presents a reasonable cross-section of Southern's inmates.

In New Zealand, a different procedure was followed. Another of the study's authors (Newbold) is an ex-inmate, and he felt that cynicism at Christchurch Prison would result in a low response rate. Because he is well-known among inmates and staff alike, he felt that a one-on-one approach would work best. Nathan Frost, a graduate student for whom Newbold vouchsafed, assisted him. At Paparua, when either researcher entered a wing, the officer in charge located an interview room and assigned one of his staff members to assist in contacting the inmates. This officer would then approach a prisoner, who was directed to the interview room. Once we explained the purpose of the study and received a signed permission form, the one-on-one interview commenced. No staff workers were present or within hearing distance during the interview. After the interview was over, the inmate would return to the wing and another obtained. This process resulted in 100 interviews and a completion rate of nearly 80%. The group's range of offenses, ethnicity, and age all suggest that they constituted a cross-section of that facility.

As at Southern, the 100 Papparua inmates surveyed comprised an availability sample. Often the practice of using volunteers poses self-selection problems. People who volunteer to give information may be different from those who are selected by some other process. The fact that we are studying two groups of inmates at widely separated, culturally distinct facilities reduces some—but not all—of our concerns about self-selection (see also Hemmens & Marquart, 2000). Inasmuch as both groups consisted of volunteers, we are examining two groups of participants drawn in similar fashion from two distinct prison populations. Given these caveats, the two groups should be comparable. Moreover, we must not forget that even if they had been scientifically selected, after informing them of their rights to refuse participation, we would still have been left with volunteers.

#### THE VARIABLES

The survey instrument contained inmate personal biographical and sociolegal characteristics, including age, ethnic group membership, marital status, prior prisoner status, instant offense history, length of the original prison sentence, and time served. Age was reported in years. Ethnic group membership, because of the wide variety of groups represented in the two samples, was dummy coded into White (1) and other (0). Marital status was also dummy coded into two response categories: (1) married/common law relationship and (0) unmarried.

We also asked inmates a series of questions about their contacts with the criminal justice system. Prior prisoner status was based on the following question: "Have you ever been convicted of a (felony or serious offense) and sentenced to prison (not remand)?" Responses to this question were coded as (0) no and (1) yes. Instant offense, or the crime or crimes that resulted in the current incarceration, became several different variables. First, we asked inmates to indicate up to three offenses that resulted in their current incarceration status, starting with the most serious offense. We then created a series of dummy-coded variables from the following offense categories: (1) murder/manslaughter; (2) rape; (3) robbery; (4) assault; (5) burglary; (6) larceny/theft; (7) auto theft; (8) arson; (9) other violent offenses; (10) public order offenses; (11) driving offenses, including drunk driving; (12) technical rules violations (for persons on conditional release from court or prison); and (13) drug offenses. Second, we summed the total number of offenses for which a person stood convicted.

This study examined prison-related attitudes and orientations, using a method similar to Sapp and Vaughn (1990b). Inmates in both facilities were asked, "Based on how much respect you would give them (10 is the *highest*

*respect* and 1 is the *lowest respect*), rate each of the following offender types": (a) incest offender, (b) household or residential burglar, (c) business burglar, (d) wife beater, (e) armed robber, (f) street-level drug dealer, (g) rapist, (h) car thief, (i) murderer of a stranger, (j) child molester, (k) embezzler, (l) hired or contract killer, (m) major drug dealer, (n) bad check artist, and (o) murderer of a friend or family member. Vaughn and Sapp (1989) arrayed status from 10 (*low*) to 1 (*highest*). We found this mechanism to be counter-intuitive and employed the reverse ratings.

A key issue in any community is the qualities valued by its citizens. Prison communities should be no different, and we suspected that, like any community, the diversity of ideas would be great. We included the following open-ended question in our instrument: "We want to understand how people get respect in prison. What do you think about when you decide whether to respect another inmate? Give us up to five different qualities or features about other prisoners you respect." We received 54 different qualities, ranging from the prosocial (e.g., loyal, trustworthy, polite, thoughtful, and religious) to antisocial (e.g., snitch killer, cop killer, good fighter, and gang member). Only five qualities were mentioned by 10% or more of the inmates: honesty, how they treat others, intelligence, attitude, and reservedness. Two items, honesty and intelligence, have clear-cut meanings in and out of prison. We believe that the quality how they treat others refers to being good to others, as opposed to abusing or taking advantage of others, which fits with what we know about the inmate code. The response attitude also tends to be used by inmates in both prisons in a positive way rather than in the somewhat more negative phrase "copping an attitude." Indeed, these qualities are commonly associated with the classic "right guy" class of inmate described in the literature (Garabedian, 1963; Schrag, 1954). In New Zealand prisons, the equivalent is referred to as being "staunch," or a "toff" or a "gentleman" (Newbold, 1982, 1989). For these reasons, we view all five qualities as reflections of values central to the inmate subculture and social code.

Finally, both questionnaires included 10 statements about prison life, all grounded in existing prisonization research (Peat & Winfree, 1992; Thomas, 1973). Using the SPSS reliability routine (SPSS, Inc., 1985), we found that the most internally consistent scale, with the most face validity, included the following items: (a) I have learned that you can't trust anyone in prison, staff or even fellow inmates; (b) The best way to do time is never to let the staff know that anything is getting you down; and (c) Never get too friendly with the [prison-specific term for staff] because they will want you to [prison-specific term for betray] your fellow inmates. The possible response categories were as follows: (+2) *strongly agree*, (+1) *agree*, (0) *neither agree nor disagree*, (-1) *disagree*, and (-2) *strongly disagree*. To create the scale, we

**TABLE 1: Comparison of Characteristics of the Medium Security Prison Inmates**

<i>Sociolegal Characteristics</i>	<i>Percentage Central Tendency Measures</i>	
	<i>New Zealand</i>	<i>New Mexico</i>
Race (percentage indicating White) <sup>a</sup>	58.0	29.2
Age (mean in years) <sup>b</sup>	28.5	33.5
Marital Status (percentage married/common law)	73.2	63.1
Prior prison status (percentage responding yes) <sup>c</sup>	61.0	20.0
Sentence (mean in months) <sup>d</sup>	66.97	137.86
Months served (mean in months) <sup>e</sup>	19.79	33.25
Instant offense includes (percentage responding yes)		
Burglary	13.0	18.5
Drug offense	10.0	9.2
Robbery	17.0	21.5
Murder	18.0	27.7
Assault	25.0	13.8
Larceny	7.0	6.2
Sex offenses <sup>f</sup>	16.0	4.6
Other violent crime	7.0	7.7
Driving offense <sup>g</sup>	10.0	0.0
Public order offense	6.0	7.7
Technical violation	10.0	7.7
Arson	3.0	0.0
Auto theft	2.0	7.7
Total number of offenses charged (mean)	1.5	1.6
<i>n</i>	100	65

a.  $\chi^2 = 13.0$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .001$ .

b.  $t = -3.18$ ;  $df = 163$ ;  $p = .002$ .

c.  $\chi^2 = 26.77$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .001$ .

d.  $t = -5.32$ ;  $df = 156$ ;  $p < .001$ .

e.  $t = -2.449$ ;  $df = 163$ ;  $p = .016$ .

f.  $\chi^2 = 5.01$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = .025$ .

g.  $\chi^2 = 6.92$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = .009$ .

summed across the responses and divided by the number of items: The more positive the scale value, the greater the adherence to the inmate code. The inmate code scale exhibited a reasonable level of reliability ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

## RESULTS

### COMPARING THE INMATES

Table 1 contains a summary of 20 chi-square and *t*-test results. In each case, the New Zealand inmates are compared to the New Mexico cohort. We

realize that the samples are not the result of a random selection process. However, we utilize these procedures as “data-dredging” methods to distinguish differences greater than expected by chance alone.

In seven instances, the observed differences are indeed greater than one would expect by chance alone. Two of the significant differences involved the personal characteristics. Specifically, twice as many Whites were reported in the New Zealand sample compared to New Mexico. However, this finding is consistent with the respective general population of offenders from which each sample was drawn. Second, the New Mexico inmate sample was, on average, 5 years older than the group of New Zealand offenders.

The remaining statistically significant differences all involve inmate criminal histories. First, the New Mexico inmates’ sentences were, on average, more than twice as long as the New Zealand cohort: 138 months versus 67 months. This finding is consistent with the general tendency of New Zealand courts to award shorter average prison sentences than U.S. courts (see Newbold & Eskridge, 1996, p. 466). Second, and as a result, the New Mexicans had served, on average, more than 12 months longer than the New Zealanders. Combined, these two differences may account for the significant age differential observed between these two groups.

For instant offenses, only two significant differences emerged: The New Zealand sample contained more sex offenders and more driving offenders than the New Mexican sample. Otherwise, the percentages sentenced for burglary, drug offenses, robbery, murder, assault, larceny, other violent crimes, public order offenses, technical violations, arson, and auto theft were very similar. Third, and related to the above, nearly three quarters of the New Zealand inmates had been in prison previously, compared with only about one quarter of the New Mexico inmates. Recidivism rates in both countries are high (Newbold, *in press*), and the shorter sentences gave New Zealand prisoners greater opportunity to reoffend.

In summary, the New Zealand inmates were younger and more likely to be White than the New Mexicans. The crimes of the New Zealand and New Mexican inmates were very similar, except that the former included more rapists and driving offenders than the latter. Last, the New Zealanders had served significantly less of their far shorter sentences than the New Mexicans. These key differences are explored in later analyses.

#### **VALUES AND PRISONERS: INMATE VIEWS ON EARNING RESPECT AND EXTENDING RESPECT**

Given some of the differences observed in Table 1, we were interested to determine how the two groups would view their fellow inmates. Table 2 sum-

**TABLE 2: Comparison of Respected Qualities or Features Found in Other Inmates**

<i>Respected Quality</i>	<i>Percentage Indicating the Quality</i>	
	<i>New Zealand</i>	<i>New Mexico</i>
Honesty	23.0	33.8
How they treat others <sup>a</sup>	10.0	23.1
Intelligence	9.0	10.8
Attitude	12.0	12.3
Reserved	13.0	10.8
<i>n</i>	100	65

a.  $\chi^2 = 5.24$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = .022$ .

marizes the five most frequently mentioned qualities that prisoners look for in their peers. At least 10% of the inmates had to mention an item for it to be considered in this analysis. In four of five cases, the responses hovered around 10%. The exception is honesty: One quarter of the New Zealanders and one third of the New Mexicans looked for honesty in their fellow inmates as a valued trait. This is expected inasmuch as honesty is a crucial component in any society, particularly small ones where people live in close confinement. In only one case was the difference statistically significant. In New Zealand, 1 in every 10 inmates mentioned that they value how other inmates treat their peers, whereas 1 New Mexican in 4 listed this quality. This finding is difficult to explain and may simply represent a sampling anomaly. In terms of the qualities that the inmates valued in their peers, there was very little that distinguished one group from the other.

Table 3 summarizes the respect levels inmates assigned to 15 different offender types. Again, the two groups are more alike than different. For example, the six lowest respect ratings assigned by the two groups are nearly identical and in the same order, ranging from child molesters (1) to murderer of a stranger (6). The low ratings assigned to child molesters, incest offenders, and rapists are expected and consistent with the literature. The relatively low ratings (and rankings relative to other offenders) found for wife beaters and murderers of friends, family, or even strangers were not unexpected, given the way society in general views such offenders and their small representation in the samples. Contract killers were assigned fairly high ratings and rankings by both groups. Thus, if murder is for money and if one is perceived to be a professional, the respect is greater. Again, this finding is not particularly surprising, given the frequent glorification of contract killers in popular culture, film, and literature, themes found in Sapp and Vaughn's (1989) violence respect and monetary respect models.

**TABLE 3: Comparison of Respect Levels Assigned to 15 Types of Offenders by Medium Security Prison Inmates (with ranks based on mean scores in parentheses)**

Offender Type	Mean Respect Level	
	New Zealand	New Mexico
Incest offender	2.04 (2)	1.98 (2)
Household/residential burglar	4.81 (10)	4.53 (7)
Business burglar	5.66 (15)	5.44 (13)
Wife beater	2.59 (4)	2.00 (4)
Armed robber	5.39 (13)	5.17 (12)
Street-level drug dealer	5.43 (14)	4.64 (9)
Rapist <sup>a</sup>	2.52 (3)	1.67 (3)
Car thief	4.96 (11)	4.58 (8)
Murderer of a stranger	4.16 (6)	4.15 (6)
Child molester	1.79 (1)	1.54 (1)
Embezzler <sup>b</sup>	4.66 (7)	5.55 (15)
Hired/contract killer	5.18 (12)	5.16 (11)
Major drug dealer	4.67 (8)	5.55 (14)
Bad check artist	4.69 (9)	4.82 (10)
Murder of a friend/family member	2.95 (5)	2.84 (5)

a.  $t = 2.401$ ;  $df = 163$ ;  $p = .17$ .

b.  $t = -2.137$ ;  $df = 163$ ;  $p = .34$ .

There are two noteworthy areas where the two groups diverged. First, the New Zealanders assigned a higher respect score to rapists than did New Mexicans, although this higher score did not affect its overall ranking. This may have been due to the larger number of sex offenders in New Zealand, perhaps resulting from the tendency of courts to award them comparatively heavy sentences (Newbold, 2000), or a self-selection bias in New Mexico. But the difference between the two sets of mean scores (2.52 and a 1.67), although statistically significant, is not substantively greater. That is, both scores reflect a relatively low respect rating.

The second difference was that New Mexican inmates assigned embezzlers a prestige rating that was a full unit above the mean score assigned by New Zealanders. Embezzlers in New Zealand have low prestige among prisoners because they are usually middle- or upper-class individuals and, consequently, do not fit in well with the general inmate community. Moreover, they are often resented because their sentences are normally short relative to the crime, and they often serve their time in "better" prison facilities. In New Mexico, these differences in social strata and sentences are less pronounced. Nonetheless, although the contrast was statistically significant, the scores assigned by both groups were close to the midpoint for the 1-to-10 scale.



The Spearman rank-order correlation between scores in the two prisons ( $r = .842$ ) is quite high and equally significant ( $p < .0001$ ). This finding suggests extremely high concordance between the two groups of inmates on the ranking of offender types. Given the work of Sapp and Vaughn (1990a, 1990b) and others (Akerstrom, 1986; Stevens, 1992) on sex-offending and homicidal inmates, this finding must be viewed as relatively strong evidence for the importation of general values about crimes and offenders from the street into prisons.

#### **THE PRISON CODE: CONTROLLING INMATE BEHAVIOR IN A TOTAL INSTITUTION**

A comparison of the sample-specific mean values for attitudes toward prison staff members revealed that in spite of high agreement on many points, the two samples of prison inmates differ in significant ways. Two of the three scale items that reflect negative orientations toward prison staff workers are positive (more in compliance with the inmate code) for New Zealanders and negative (less in compliance with the inmate code) for New Mexicans. Only in the case of the item "Never get too friendly with the [staff] because they will want you to [betray] your fellow inmates" were the mean responses of both groups suggestive of less adherence toward the inmate code; however, the New Mexicans were significantly more positive toward guards than the New Zealanders. The results suggest that New Zealand inmates are, as a group, significantly more distrustful of authority than the New Mexicans. This contention is logically reinforced by the summary measure for inmate code: New Zealand inmates were significantly less trusting of institutional staff workers than those in New Mexico. This is an interesting finding, and it has two possible explanations. First, although the New Zealand group was younger, it had more criminal experience. Recidivists would be expected to have more hard-core attitudes than first offenders, and the New Zealand cohort had 3 times the proportion of prison recidivists as found in New Mexico.

Second, within Paparua as a whole, the wing sampled contained a large proportion of what are known in U.S. prisons as "ball-busters." These were hard young men who, because of their aggressive behavior and their negative attitudes toward authority, could not obtain a lower security rating and transfer to one of the 60-bed units. Others in the sample had previously been in the "better" units but had been moved back to the wings for security reasons. In the stark environment of the wings, their resentment toward the prison administration would have grown. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Paparua we found many with negative attitudes toward the prison's staff. By

contrast, the buildings at Southern were newer than Paparua's wings and had more inmate-focused amenities, including recreational and craft areas, prison industries, and institutional jobs. Moreover, at least one half of the inmates resided in administrative segregation. These inmates lived lives isolated from the general prison population because of security threats posed by them or to them by other inmates. Administrative segregation inmates, therefore, would have a greater dependence on protection by security staff members than other inmates, a fact that could account for their somewhat more prosocial orientation.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The survey results broadly confirm that inmate attitudes and values are fairly similar even in different parts of the world. As far as general attitudes toward other inmates are concerned, the greatest similarities between the inmate groups in this survey appear in the values that are given to honesty, intelligence, attitude, and reservedness, and, to a lesser extent, the treatment of others. Encompassed in these values are some of the strongest elements of the inmate social system originally identified by Sykes and Messinger (1960, pp. 6-9): "Don't interfere with inmate interests"; "Play it cool and do your own time"; "Don't break your word"; "Don't steal from the cons"; "Don't welsh on debts"; "Don't weaken"; and "Be sharp." In terms of these general values, particularly what is valued in another human being similarly incarcerated, inmates in two widely separated prisons expressed considerable agreement.

Inmate attitudes toward staff workers are similar as well. It will be recalled that Sykes and Messinger (1960) and numerous others have reported that some of the most important components of the inmate social code relate to staff-inmate relationships. Collaboration with the authorities is prohibited and guards are treated with suspicion and distrust. Although no specific question about informing on others was included in the questionnaire, both sets of data—but especially the New Zealand sample—detected high levels of distrust for prison staff members. Yet there were significant differences on this dimension of inmate values and orientations. It would appear that prisoners in New Zealand gave significantly more antistaff responses than those in New Mexico. In this regard, it appears that perhaps inmate rejection of staff workers is far more related to the deprivations of imprisonment than are attitudes toward offender types or respected qualities and features of fellow inmates. Given the idiosyncratic differences in architecture and facilities

noted between the prison in New Zealand and the one in New Mexico, these features alone could account for the significant differences reported in this study.

Attitudes toward offenders, however, represented an interesting blending of external and internal forces, a merging of importation and deprivations. As a general rule, the ratings were amazingly similar. Despite differences in language, culture, prison characteristics, sentence length, average age, non-random selection of respondents, and other possible nonsampling errors, the similarity of viewpoint on respect levels is almost identical in the two prisons, given the exceptionally high nonparametric correlation between the rankings for respect levels for the same types of offenders. We view this finding as very strong support for the idea that inmates import the dominant societal disrespect for sex offenders and respect for violence.

The disparities in the slightly higher respect levels given to rapists within the New Zealander group and their more negative attitudes toward authority could be explained by differences in makeup of the two populations. The New Zealand sample comprised a significantly higher proportion of rapists and repeat offenders than the New Mexican one. But the similarities are far more pronounced than the differences, and, to a large extent, we believe that the affinity of the two cultures arises from the similarities in the custodial contexts in which the two groups live. Moreover, in agreement with Irwin and Cressey (1962), we suspect that prison culture is also related to the overall criminal culture from which convict groups are drawn, an idea sometimes referred to as the importation thesis (Thomas, 1970; Thomas & Foster, 1972). The current research, therefore, in surveying two groups of medium security inmates from opposite sides of the globe, largely confirms what previously has been written about the uniformity of prisoner attitudes and values. The novelty of our project has been that this objective test of the strength of the values/attitudes relationship adds a new dimension to the field and indicates new areas for future investigation.

In summary, this study, like many prison-based surveys, must be considered in light of reservations about the sampling of inmates and potential responder bias. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that, in agreement with other U.S. and comparative studies of prisonization, the ideas originally suggested by Clemmer (1958) are as useful today as they were over 60 years ago. Prisons have changed, as have their populations (Irwin, 1980; also see Mays & Winfree, 2002; Clear & Cole, 1997). What this study suggests is that differences in correctional philosophy and prison populations notwithstanding, the culture of the incarcerated remains relatively unaltered.

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