

Changing the Narrative: Racial and Ethnic Variations in Positive Interactions between Prison Staff and Incarcerated Women

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What general themes emerge from the responses to the question “*tell me about your best experience with a staff member at this prison*”?



Are there variations in themes based on racial/ethnic identity of respondents?

Procedural Justice & Legitimacy

Perceptions of procedural justice impact the way people within the system choose to engage with the system and whether they perceive it as legitimate

(van Hall et al., 2022; Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Reisig & Mesko, 2009)

Previous studies have looked at this nuance in staff-incarcerated interactions and perceptions of authority

(Crewe et al., 2015; Beijersbergen et al., 2015)

Effects of race on perceptions of procedural justice and legitimacy

(Johnson et al., 2017; Atkin-Plunk et al., 2019; Solomon, 2019; Wheelock et al., 2019)

Instrumentality & Relationality

(Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler, 1989; Tyler, 1997)

Data

“tell me about your best experience with a staff member at this prison”

“what would you identify as your race or ethnicity?”

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Other

Method



200 responses uploaded to Atlas.ti. All 200 responses reviewed by two graduate student coders



Each coder open-codes initial 20% of responses



Coders meet to discuss coding decisions and establish coding scheme



Each coder re-coded initial 20% of responses based on established coding scheme



Coders meet to calculate intercoder agreement



Remaining 80% of responses was split between two coders to be coded using the established coding scheme



Coders met to create thematic groupings of codes, creating major themes and subthemes

What general themes emerge?

Kindness and Support from Staff	Practical Assistance from Staff	Treated with Humanity and Respect	Staff Effort and Responsiveness
(51.5%, n=103)	(31%, n=62)	(21%, n=42)	(17%, n=34)
Concern or compassion for women (n=35)	Helpfulness from staff in general (n=23)		Staff positive attitudes and optimism (n=15)
Encouragement or emotional support from staff (n=27)	Assistance with programming or education (n=17)		Staff exceeds women's expectations (n=11)
Recognition, appreciation, or opportunities from staff (n=17)	Assistance with medical needs (n=16)		Staff professionalism and accountability (n=8)
Good communication with staff (n=10)	Assistance with finding and/or maintaining employment (n=6)		
Staff advocate or stand up for women (n=9)			
Patience from staff (n=5)			
<i>“a staff member comforted me when I had a death in the family”</i>	<i>“really helpful every day. If we need something she is there for us”</i>	<i>“treating me not like an inmate but an equal human being”</i>	<i>“upbeat, uplifting, always makes your day better especially when you're having a bad day”</i>

Racial variations across themes – White/Non-white

Major Theme	White (n=88)	Non-white (n=112)
Kindness and Support from Staff (n=103)	53.4% (n=47)	50% (n=56)
Practical Assistance from Staff (n=62)	35.2% (n=31)	27.7% (n=31)
Treated with Humanity and Respect (n=42)	19.3% (n=17)	22.3% (n=25)
Staff Effort and Responsiveness (n=34)	19.3% (n=17)	15.2% (n=17)

Racial variations across themes – White/Hispanic

Major Theme	White (n=88)	Hispanic (n=58)
Kindness and Support from Staff (n=103)	53.4% (n=47)	43.1% (n=25)
Practical Assistance from Staff (n=62)	35.2% (n=31)	27.6% (n=16)
Treated with Humanity and Respect (n=42)	19.3% (n=17)	22.4% (n=13)
Staff Effort and Responsiveness (n=34)	19.3% (n=17)	18.9% (n=11)

Discussion

Themes relate back to these ‘instrumentality’ and ‘relationality’ models of Procedural Justice Theory

White respondents’ heightened interest in simply having their needs met

Non-white respondents’ heightened appreciation for acts that are indicative of respect and value of status

Limitations



Selection bias due to non-random sample



White/non-white is very broad



Racial identity is not inherently reflective of experiences of racial stigma and discrimination



Do not know the race of staff

Next Steps

- Plan to further collapse themes into categories of 'relational' and 'instrumental' to determine likelihood of reporting different types of support by race
 - Kindness and Support from Staff & Treated with Humanity and Respect > Relational
 - Practical Assistance from Staff & Staff Effort and Responsiveness > Instrumental
- Plan to recode race and expand race categories for analyses



2019 Inside Out Prison Exchange Program Class,
ASPC-Perryville

*“A teacher in GED class had so much faith in me. He didn't push too hard, but I could tell he saw the potential in me when I didn't see it in myself. **He never gave up on me.**”*

Thank you!

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Additional Themes

Many Positive Experiences (6%, n=12)	No Best Experience (12%, n=24)	Negative or Mixed Experiences (4.5%, n=9)	Don't Know or Skipped (2.5%, n=5)
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Full Results

		American Indian or Alaska Native 10 18	Black or African American 9 22	Hispanic 58 126	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 1 1	Other 34 77	White 88 208	Totals
Don't Know or Skipped	2 5			2			3	5
Kindness and Support from Staff	6 103	3	8	25	1	19	47	103
Many Positive Experiences	1 12			3		2	7	12
Negative or Mixed Experiences	1 9	1		4		1	3	9
No Best Experience	1 24	2	1	9		2	10	24
Practical Assistance from Staff	4 62	2	4	16		9	31	62
Staff Effort and Responsiveness	3 34	1	1	11		4	17	34
Treated with Humanity and Respect	1 42	2	3	13		7	17	42
Totals		11	17	83	1	44	135	291