STRIP-SEARCHING OF WOMEN IN QUEENSLAND PRISONS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Criminology and Criminal Justice, Monash University.

October, 2007
DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signed:

Date:
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Acronyms</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Security</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strip-searching Legislation and Procedure</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on Strip-searching in Prisons</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strip-searching as a contraband control strategy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erving Goffman: Interpersonal contaminations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strip-searching and re-traumatisation: the ADCQ Report</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The potential for bias</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of strip-searching and issues of prisoner violence and drug use</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A comparative analysis 18
Difficulty Accessing Information 18
Conclusion 20

Chapter One - Strip-searching in official discourse 21
1.1 Language in official documents on strip-searching 22
1.2 Analysis 24
   Self-promotion and Negative Labels of Inmates 24
   Justification of Strip-searching 29
   Strip-searching policy and implementation 29
1.3 Implications 32

Chapter Two - Strip-searching as contraband control strategy in women’s prisons 35
2.1 Quantitative analysis of strip-searching practices 35
   Strip-searching and contraband detection 35
   Findings 37
   Strip-searching and prisoner security 39
   Findings 40
2.2 Reasons behind drug use and violence in prisons 42
   Strip-searching and illicit drug use 42
   Strip-searching and violence 44
2.3 Implications 47
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three - The impacts of strip-searching on female prisoners</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of rape</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Similarities between strip-searching and rape</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strip-searching</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Effects of rape and strip-searching on women</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Responses</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger, depression, anxiety and self-blame</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashbacks and nightmares</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helplessness and loss of control</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural Patterns</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Dysfunctions</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence and self-harm</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol and illicit drug use</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Implications</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of References</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Recorded strip-searches at BWCC between 1999 and 2002

Table 2. Recorded strip-searches at DPFC between 1 July 2002
and 30 September 2004

Table 3. Violent incidents at BWCC between 4\textsuperscript{th} August 2003
and 4\textsuperscript{th} August 2004

Table 4. Violent incidents at DPFC between 1 July 2003 and 29 February 2004
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADCQ</td>
<td>Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWCC</td>
<td>Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPFC</td>
<td>Dame Phyllis Frost Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCLC</td>
<td>Federation of Community Legal Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPCS</td>
<td>Minister for Police and Corrective Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>Numinbah Correctional Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCL</td>
<td>National Council for Civil Liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLN</td>
<td>Prisoner Legal Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QDCS</td>
<td>Queensland Department of Corrective Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWCC</td>
<td>Townsville Women’s Correctional Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCASS</td>
<td>United Campaign Against Strip-searching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDCS</td>
<td>Victorian Department of Corrective Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDJ</td>
<td>Victorian Department of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCSS</td>
<td>Victorian Council of Social Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASS</td>
<td>Women Against Strip-searching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Although strip-searching has been a part of Australian prison policy for years, not much is known on the psychological impacts of strip-searching on inmates. A recent report released by the Anti-Discrimination Commission in Queensland (2006) indicated that strip-searches may have a significantly negative impact on the female prison population, while other research has questioned the effectiveness of strip-searching both as a contraband-control and as a security strategy. Therefore, extending upon previous research, the present study critically examined the use of strip-searches on imprisoned women in Queensland prisons from a perspective of policy management and also the psychological impacts of strip-searching on female prisoners. The findings of the study suggest that strip-searches may be an inappropriate security and contraband control strategy for female prisoners, and that they may have significantly negative psychological impacts on women. It was concluded that strip-searching is a form of State-sanctioned violence that is similar to sexual assault and one that negatively impacts women’s psychological well-being.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my two supervisors, Dr. Bree Carlton and Ms. Marie Segrave for their continuous guidance and encouragement during this thesis project. Your expertise, ideas, and the time you’ve invested were invaluable to this dissertation.

I also wish to thank my parents – Tara and Veljko - for their encouragement, as well as my sister Maria, my boyfriend Mark, and my friends who provided both a continuous source of support as well as a distraction from studying. And finally I wish to thank the girls from my Honours class – particularly Dejana, Louisa and Anna - who were both great fun to be around and to share ideas and frustrations of writing a thesis with.
INTRODUCTION

The present study is a critical analysis of strip-searching practices in women’s prisons in Queensland. It provides an overview of a range of Australian and overseas prison literature on strip-searching of prisoners and discusses the issues of illicit drug use and violence in women’s prisons. In addition, the thesis extends upon previous research of the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (2006) and examines the potential impacts of strip-searching on female inmates.

In the last ten years in Australia, increased attention has been paid to the issue of imprisonment, particularly to issues relating to prison conditions and standards of service (Ewart, 1995; FCLC & VCSS, 2005; George, 2002; Kilroy, 2000; Minogue, 2005; Russo, 1999). This has especially been the case for female prisoners who, as Easteal (2001) points out, have often been overlooked in prison research due to their relatively low numbers compared to men. Amongst the issues examined in Australian prison research, the matter of strip-searching has been placed under increased scrutiny by a number of non-governmental organizations and feminist activists (George, 1992; Kilroy, 2002; Simmering & Diamond, 1996; Sisters Inside, 2005b). Following the release of the report on women in Queensland prisons by the Queensland Anti Discrimination Commission (2006), which criticized current strip-searching practices of female prisoners, the issue of strip-searching has once again received attention in critical literature.
Although justified as an important security strategy (QDCS, 2004; QDCS, 2006b), strip-searching has been described as an ineffective security measure and has also been labeled a form of State-sanctioned sexual assault (George, 1992). A significant amount of feminist literature has attributed women’s drug use, violence and low self esteem to strip-searching (Carlen, 1998; Denton, 1994; Simmering & Diamond, 1996) and has labeled strip-searching as a method of controlling the female prison population (Aretxaga, 2001a; 2001b; Sisters Inside, 2005a). Despite this, there is a lack of research that has examined the effects of strip-searching on imprisoned women and the effectiveness of strip-searching as a security measure. This dissertation provides a critical overview of strip-searching practices in women’s prisons in Queensland by combining and evaluating existing research and literature on strip-searching and its impacts on incarcerated women.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to contextualize the significance of strip-searching in women’s prisons and its potential impact on women, it is important to draw upon the significant research that has been done in the field of prison research, particularly that relating to strip-searches. Bellow follows a selected review of Australian and overseas literature and research that has challenged the use of strip-searching on prisoners, both from a policy and management perspective and from a perspective of Human Rights and prisoner well-being. This research establishes the importance of examining the impact of strip-searching on female prisoners and serves as a backdrop to the present study on strip-searching practices in women’s Queensland prisons.

Prison security

The issue of prison security has always been of high importance in both public and political spheres due to the general perception of prisoners as “dangerous populations” in need of reprimand and due to the need of correction departments to establish dominance and control over “unruly” inmates (Haney, 2006, p.214-215). Problems of prisoner violence, gangs, and increased drug use have also justified, and given rise to, a range of oppressive and punitive policies that have all been implemented in the name of prison safety (Haney, 2006, pp.213-220; Garland, 2001).

Strip-searching is precisely one such policy that has been implemented in the name of prison security and prisoner and staff safety (QDCS, 2004; Russo, 1999). The procedure
originated in Northern Ireland women’s Armagh jail in the early 1980’s, and was eventually adopted in prisons around the world, including Australia (Faul, 1983; McCulloch & George, forthcoming). Prior to 1982, strip-searches in Armagh jail were only conducted upon initial admittance to prison, while pat down searches were regularly used before and after visits and before and following court visits by remand prisoners (Faul, 1983). Yet following an incident in which two young girls were found in possession of two court keys (due to a mistake made by an officer), it was decided that routine rub-down searches were to be replaced with strip-searches (Faul, 1983). From then on, strip-searches were conducted upon admission and release from prison, prior to and following inter-jail our court visits, or prior to and following any event that required an inmate to leave prison premises (Faul, 1983).

**Strip-searching legislation and procedure**

Because prison legislation falls under State and Territory jurisdiction, strip-searching practices accordingly differ between each State and Territory (Russo, 1999). For Queensland, which forms the focus of this study, strip-searching powers are set out in the *Queensland Corrective Services Act 2006* (section 33).

In its basic form, a strip-search of a female prisoner requires the inmate to remove all her clothing and hand them over for inspection by the officers (Ewart, 1995). Section 38 (2) of the *Corrective Services Act 2006* (Qld) specifies that prison guards carrying out the search must be of the same sex as the individual being strip-searched, and that no direct contact can be made between the staff member executing the search and the prisoner.
being searched (Russo, 1999). After having her clothes inspected, a prisoner is told to open her mouth for inspection, run her fingers through her hair, lift up both arms for inspection, as well as to spread her fingers and lift her breasts for inspection. She is then asked to turn her back to the officers, lift up one leg at a time and wriggle her toes to dislodge any hidden material. Finally, she must spread her legs and bend over for a vaginal and anal inspection (Ewart, 1995). If an inmate is menstruating she may be required to take out her tampon and show it to the guards before placing it in a bag and being issued a new one (ADCQ, 2006; Ewart, 1995). Legislation also specifies that prisons must keep a record of each strip or body search, including the names of individuals present during the search, and the details of anything found or seized on the person (ADCQ, 2006; Corrective Services Act, 2006).

Research on strip-searching in prisons

Although strip-searching has been used in men’s and women’s prisons for a significant period of time, its use has been widely contested in prison literature. A range of Australian and overseas prison research has critiqued strip-searching of prisoners and labeled it both an ineffective contraband-prevention and security strategy (Sisters Inside, 2005a, 2005b), as well as a method of prisoner control through depersonalization (Goffman, 1961). In addition, a range of feminist critiques have suggested that strip-searching has significantly negative impacts on some women (Carlen, 1998) and that it is used as a method of controlling the female prisoners by subjecting them to a procedure that is similar to rape (Aretxaga, 2001a). The recent release of a report on women in Queensland prisons by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (2006) also
lends partial support to these theories. The following section will examine these critiques in more detail and their significance to the study at hand.

*Strip-searching as a contraband control strategy*

Sisters Inside (2005b), a women’s advocacy agency in Queensland, has critiqued the use of strip-searches on Australian incarcerated women and questioned the effectiveness of strip-searching as a contraband prevention and security strategy. Through repeated Freedom of Information requests, Sisters Inside was able to access statistical information on the number of searches conducted in women’s prisons in Queensland and the amount of contraband detected during those searches. What those requests uncovered was high numbers of strip-searches being carried out on incarcerated women with very little contraband being recovered from these searches (Sisters Inside, 2005a). Based on these findings, Sisters Inside (2005a, 2005b) contends that strip-searching is an ineffective method of contraband detection, and that it is used on women because it is a very effective method of controlling them. This argument was justified on the fact that prison guards, who have constant contact with inmates as well as ability to access drugs in the wider community, are not subjected to strip-searches as inmates are, and can therefore smuggle contraband into prisons without being detected (Sisters Inside, 2005a).

*Erving Goffman: Interpersonal contaminations*

Whereas research by Sisters Inside (2005a) offers a critique of strip-searching from a perspective of contraband detection and prison security, other research also examined the psychological impacts that strip-searching may have on inmates. In his renowned study on “total institutions”, Goffman (1961, p.28) discusses how practices such as body
searches are used in prisons to humiliate and degrade prisoners through “forced interpersonal contact” and thus make them easier to control. In the case of body searches, both the procedure as well as the staff member carrying out the procedure are seen as engaging in a violation of the inmate’s sense of self, and together they create an individual who lacks a clear sense of identity and is easier to manage and control by those in the position of power (Goffman, 1961). Therefore, according to Goffman (1961), prisons use procedures such as body searches on inmates because these weaken an inmate’s sense of identity and make prisoners easier to manage and control.

Although Goffman’s (1961) approach does offer an explanation of how intrusive searches may lower inmates’ self-esteem and contribute to inmates’ psychological problems, it does not address the issue of gender in strip-searching. Carlen (1998) however, does acknowledge the importance of gender in strip-searching, and the disproportionate effects of strip-searching on women. She argues that because women who offend are regarded as more deviant than men who offend, they are consequently treated more harshly in prisons than men are, and through practices such as strip-searching they are denied control over their bodies and identities (Carlen, 1998). According to Carlen (1998), women’s bodies are used as a medium for the expression of prison superiority and its dominance over women’s bodies; this in turn creates feelings of subordination and humiliation in women and makes them easier to control.

In addition to Carlen’s (1998) critique of strip-searching, Aretxaga (2001a) proposes a more critical analysis of strip-searching practices, arguing that the control of women’s
bodies through strip-searching is both a show of force and an attempt at transforming inmates from rebellious and independent women to submissive and passive weaker gender (Aretxaga, 2001b). This show of force and domination is particularly effective on inmates when the guards who search them are male, or when female guards adopt masculine traits through clothing or mannerism and thus replicate the behaviour of men (Aretxaga, 2001a). To prisoners, strip-searching reinforces the message of their inferiority as a “weaker” gender and as individuals who are incarcerated and thus have no rights (Aretxaga, 2001a).

Although Aretxaga’s (2001a) argument emerged from research that focused on political prisoners in Northern Ireland, it offers an important framework for examining the general implications of gender and strip-searching that is relevant to Australian prison studies. Particularly relevant to this study are her arguments that link strip-searches to the notion of heterosexual rape, and theory that both rape and strip-searching produce the same feelings of victimization in women (Aretxaga, 2001a).

*Strip-searching and re-traumatisation: the ADCQ Report*

A recent release of the report on women in Queensland prisons by the Anti Discrimination Commission Queensland (2006) again brought to light the significance of strip-searching and its implications for women’s psychological well-being and rehabilitation aspects. Upon a written request from Sisters Inside (2004), the ADCQ (2006) conducted and published its research on women in Queensland prisons detailing a range of potential Human Rights abuses and inappropriate prison policies. Amongst other
things, the report examined the issue of strip-searches and found them to be a very humiliating experience for women, and one that emphasised feelings of worthlessness and vulnerability and had the potential to undermine any rehabilitative progress made on behalf of inmates and prison staff (ADCQ, 2006, p.73). The report found strip-searches to be particularly humiliating for victims of sexual abuse who are already over-represented in Queensland prisons and for whom a strip-search may trigger memories of past sexual abuse and trauma (ADCQ, 2006, p.72).

**Present study**

The above discussion examined a range of critical literature on strip-searching and the debate surrounding the use of strip-searches and their effect on imprisoned women. Clearly the issue of strip-searching is an area that is in need of further research and study. If strip-searching does have negative consequences for women’s well-being, then it could potentially exacerbate any pre-existing psychological problems that may have contributed to women’s incarceration and contribute to the future re-offending and victimisation of that group of women. In addition, if strip-searching is ineffective at preventing contraband from women’s prisons, that may indicate a need for a re-assessment of prison security policy and an implementation of a different, more efficient measure.

Although the ADCQ (2006) report mentioned the negative and traumatising effects that strip-searching may have on women in prisons, it failed to engage in a more extensive discussion on the psychological impacts of strip-searching on female prisoners, and thus neglected a very significant area of prison research. The report also mentioned the
humiliation and vulnerability that strip-searches reinforce in inmates to the extent that this practice can undermine any rehabilitative effort made by women in prisons. Despite these findings, the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (2006) issued a statement defending the current strip-searching practices in women’s prisons in Queensland and dismissed allegations of abuse and mistreatment in women’s prisons as “unproven” (MPCS, 2006, p.4).

For these reasons, the present study aims to address these issues by extending upon the ADCQ (2006) findings on strip-searching and its effects on incarcerated women. This thesis provides a critical analysis of strip-searching practices in women’s prisons in Queensland, and examines the potential impacts of strip-searches on imprisoned women. Because the ADCQ (2006) report exclusively focused on Queensland prisons, the present study likewise extends its focus on women’s prisons in Queensland, although Victorian prisons are also discussed for comparison purposes. This thesis proposes to explore and address issues that have been largely absent from current debate on women’s imprisonment, yet have been repeatedly labelled in critical literature as a significant obstacle to women’s rehabilitation and psychological well-being.
METHODOLOGY

The central focus of this thesis is to critically examine current strip-searching policy and practice in women’s prisons in Queensland, and to discuss the potential psychological and behavioural impacts of strip-searching on women in prisons. Although some research has been done in the area of strip-searching, most studies so far have failed to fully examine the negative implications of strip-searching on women’s psychological well-being. In addition, there is a lack of publicly available information on strip-searching practices and the effectiveness of strip-searching as a contraband-control and security strategy. The recent report released by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (2006) re-opened the discussion on strip-searching and the potentially traumatizing effects of strip-searches on women in prison. However, because the report neglected to fully examine the negative impacts of strip-searching on female prisoners, this issue remained unacknowledged by Queensland Corrections and strip-searches were still described as “best policy” in Queensland prisons (Ministerial Statement, 2006).

This study aims to bring together the available literature on strip-searching of women, and to extend upon the discussion initiated in ADCQ report (2006) by critically examining the use of strip-searching as a security measure in women’s Queensland prisons and the negative impacts that strip-searching has on women. Due to significant time constraints, the difficulty in accessing sensitive information on strip-searching practices from prison officers and inmates directly, documentary research remained the most appropriate research method for the present study. As May (2001) argues,
documentary research is both time and cost effective, and is commonly used by researchers when problems with accessing the target population for study are encountered.

The following questions formed the major focus throughout the present study:

1. How is strip-searching presented in official documents and how are prisoners and prison staff portrayed?

2. Does strip-searching sufficiently address the issue of contraband smuggling in women’s prisons? What are some of the explanations for women’s drug use and violence in prisons?

3. What are the psychological impacts of strip-searching women? How does this compare to the victims of rape?

In order to explore these questions, three sites of analysis were chosen. The first was a Consultation Paper on strip-searching practices in Queensland prisons produced by the Queensland Department of Corrective Services (2004). This was examined as an example of “official documentation” regarding strip-searching and a critical discourse analysis approach was used. Second was a data analysis on the number of strip-searches and contraband recovered, and incidents of violence in Queensland and Victorian prisons, followed by a literature review that was used to contextualize the issues of prisoner violence and drug use. Finally, the third site of analysis engaged in a literature review on
the impacts of strip-searching on women in order to extend the analysis and develop a
further critique of strip-searching practices in women’s prisons. Symptoms experienced
by victims of rape, as reported in a range of psychiatric literature (e.g. Arata, 1999;
Crome & McCabe, 1995), were compared to the psychological symptoms reported by
women who were strip-searched, as found in a range of available literature (e.g. Ewart,
1995; UCASS, 1989) in order to establish any similarities between the experiences of
rape and strip-searching, and the impacts of strip-searches on imprisoned women.

Finally, because the present study dealt exclusively with documentary research, there
were no ethical concerns to specifically address or remedy.

**Critical discourse analysis**

In order to examine dominant themes and the ways in which language is used to portray strip-
searching in official documents, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach was
required. Discourse analysis examines the ways in which texts convey meanings through
the use of language (Fairclough, 1995; Hesmondhalgh, 2006). According to Marvasti
(2004, p.108), discourse refers to written or spoken accounts that create certain
perceptions about the world. Therefore, discourse analysis examines the ways in which
different texts and words create particular ways of thinking and perceiving reality (Punch,
2005). Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that because discourse analysis examines texts
as forms of social shaping, it needs to pay particular attention to linguistic content –
topics and meanings – as well as linguistic form – grammar and cohesion.
CDA extends this focus on linguistics by also analyzing the ways in which language expresses social dominance and power (Punch, 2005; Fairclough, 1995; Hesmondhalgh, 2006). The development of CDA can be traced back to Aristotle (Soder, 2001; van Dijk, 1993) and, more recently, to linguists such as Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk (Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Cotter, 2003). CDA is mainly concerned with analyzing ideas of dominance, power, control and discrimination that are manifested in common language (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

CDA can be distinguished from other forms of discourse analysis because it has a more critical focus towards the ways in which texts form and reinforce dominant ideology. In the words of Fairclough (2003, p.9), ideology refers to different forms of thinking that contribute to establishing and maintaining power, domination, and exploitation.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2001, p.3), powerful groups are responsible for imposing dominant ideology upon those less powerful by disguising it as “common knowledge” and “truth” which is then accepted into mainstream beliefs. This is, according to van Dijk (1993, p.254) a demonstration of “cognitive control”, where powerful groups use persuasion or manipulation to “change the mind of others in one’s own interests”. CDA seeks to explore these aspects of domination and uncover the ways in which language works to maintain the status quo and dominance of one group’s views over others’ (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

The site for the application of CDA was a Consultation Paper on strip-searching practices in Queensland corrections, produced by Queensland Department of Corrective Services.
This Consultation Paper was chosen because it was aimed at informing the public of current strip-searching practices in Queensland prisons and because it represents the ‘official’ position on strip-searching as held by the Department of Corrective Services in Queensland.

The analysis of the Consultation Paper involved examining the various ways in which language is used by the Queensland Corrections Department to portray strip-searching practices in prisons and promote a particular discourse. Although there are a number of different ways a CDA can be conducted (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993; Huckin, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) the present study only engaged in a limited analysis due to space and time restrictions. The analysis involved an examination of the various syntactic properties of the text, such as the structure, topics, wording of items, and representation of participants, as well as the more general outline and structure of the document. Specifically, the analysis sought to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies (if any) are used in the document to promote the “us” versus “them” distinction?
2. How are the prisoners represented in the document, and what characteristics are attributed to them?
3. What arguments are used to justify the strip-searching of prisoners as a legitimate and necessary practice?
The potential for bias

A common criticism of CDA is that researchers who use it often read a text in such a manner so that they ‘find’ those meanings and messages they are looking for while ignoring all others (Widdowson, 1995). As Fairclough (2003) argues, it is important for a researcher to acknowledge the potential for bias in their analysis and to therefore question his or her role and opinions during the entire process of CDA. Because every individual has a different background, social standing and education, a CDA of any text can be influenced and shaped by the analysts’ perceptions. For this research, much care was taken to avoid a biased interpretation by clearly defining terms and engaging in a transparent process of analysis; nonetheless, an analysts judgment can easily be clouded by preconceived opinions and knowledge and thus create a biased analysis.

Although no form of textual analysis can ever produce a unified and ‘correct’ understanding of documents, having diverse interpretations is also a strength of CDA because it allows individuals to freely challenge dominant ideas and construct their own interpretations and meanings (Widdowson, 1995). Thus, CDA remains an important research tool for social scientists because it allows for a deconstruction of texts and an examination of power and ideology without extreme structural constraints (Widdowson, 1995). Without CDA, dominant ideologies and negative labels could easily be taken at face value and accepted as ‘common truths’, and not be recognized as domination and injustice. For this research, CDA offered a deeper and comprehensive insight into the manipulative use of language and one sided arguments employed by the Queensland Corrections Department to promote and justify the use of strip-searching, while
simultaneously neglecting to address the arguments against the use of strip-searches and the significance of gender in relation to strip-searching.

**The use of strip-searching and issues of prisoner violence and drug use**

The second site for analysis examined quantitative data on current strip-searching practices in Queensland and Victorian women’s prisons and the issues of illicit drug use and violence in prisons. First, a quantitative analysis of secondary data was used to compare the number of strip-searches with the amount of contraband detected at BWCC and DPFC. For Victorian Corrections, this information was accessed from the Victorian Prison Service Reports, which are stored at the Victorian Corrections Department in Melbourne. The author was given access to the relevant reports that contained information for years 2002, 2003 and 2004 at all women’s correctional facilities in Victoria. Queensland Corrections however, did not have any publicly available information on strip-searching, but the author was able to locate published data on strip-searching from Sisters Inside, a women’s advocacy group that publishes strip-searching information based on Freedom of Information Requests.

Next, a quantitative analysis of secondary data on prisoner violence, self-harm, and attempts of escape was used for BWCC and DPFC. Access to statistical information for BWCC was limited, but partial information was accessed from the ADCQ (2006) report and from the QDCS (2006). For DPFC, information pertaining to the period between 2003 and 2004 was accessed from the Victorian Prison Service Reports, located at the Victorian Corrections Department.
The final part of the chapter comprised a literature review on illicit drug use and violence in women’s prisons, with the aim of uncovering some of the reasons behind prisoner violence and drug use, and the ability of strip-searches to address and remedy these problems. Information on prisoner drug use and violence was accessed from relevant the Victorian Department of Justice (2002), and other relevant Victorian and Queensland studies (e.g. Hockings, Young, Falconer & O’Rourke, 2002; Kilroy, 2000).

**A comparative analysis**

The third chapter set out to propose some critical issues in relation to strip-searching through research on the psychological and behavioural impacts of strip-searching on imprisoned women. The chapter reviewed a range of feminist literature on rape of women in general society, followed by a review of critical feminist literature on strip-searching of female prisoners. This was followed by a comparative approach, where findings from research on the experiences of rape victims were compared to findings from research on the experiences of women who were strip-searched in prisons. The aim of such an approach was to examine the potential impacts of strip-searching on imprisoned women and to draw comparisons between women’s experience of being strip-searched to the experience of being raped in general society.

**Difficulty accessing information**

Cohen and Taylor (1977) acknowledged the power of prison officials to dictate the manner in which independent research is to be carried out within prisons and thus control
the type of information that is extracted from inmates during the course of a study. As the authors point out, access to sensitive prison information is often difficult and challenging because it allows dominant groups control over information and discourse and a safeguard from public scrutiny (Cohen & Taylor, 1977). Similarly, in order to safeguard sensitive information, the prison system exercises control over independent research in a number of ways; for example, through legislation that prohibits public access to sensitive information; by having stringent control over the type of research that can be conducted and ways in which prison information can be used; and also by refusing access to information that is not considered by prison officials to be in the public interest, or that is seen as potentially jeopardizing the safety of researchers (Cohen & Taylor, 1977, p.77).

These barriers and obstacles are, as Carlton (2001, p.54) points out “key factors in the preservation of prison regimes…presenting ongoing difficulties and limitations to those challenging the system.”

Similarly, the present study also encountered a number of obstacles when attempts were made to access relevant information on strip-searches of women in Queensland corrections. Requesting similar information from both the Victorian Corrections Department and Queensland Corrections yielded different responses – an approval from the former and a refusal from the latter department. It is interesting to note how on the one hand Queensland Corrections Department places strong emphasis on “safeguards” which are in place to ensure that search powers are not abused (QDCS, 2004, p.8), and yet it prevents a critical and independent evaluation of its current policies on strip-searches through legislation that makes such information inaccessible to the general public.
Therefore, the issue of safeguarding information and controlling the right to talk about and challenge authority (as addressed by Cohen and Taylor) is also apparent in the present study, as I was denied access to information on a practice that has repeatedly been criticized as invasive, distressing, humiliating and pointless (Carlen, 1998; George, 1992; Sisters Inside, 2005a). Denying public access on information involving controversial practices such as strip-searches (of both men and women) ultimately means that these and similar practices can remain hidden from public view and scrutiny and be presented to the public only by those groups that support them. This not only sabotages the possibility of a balanced discussion, but also ensures that official explanations and ideas remain relatively unchallenged and more likely to be given community support.

**Conclusion**

Due to the lack of publicly available information on strip-searching practices in Australian prisons and due to the limited research that has been done on women’s experience of imprisonment, areas regarding prisons policy and practice are in need of more research and study. In relation to strip-searching, there is a shortage of publicly available information regarding implementation, effectiveness, and its impact on women. This dissertation is of significance to the criminal justice system because it raises critical questions about strip-searching that have remained unanswered and largely absent from public debate, and it provides a platform for a critique of the use of strip-searching on female prisoners.
CHAPTER ONE

STRIP-SEARCHING IN OFFICIAL DISCOURSE

Official justifications for strip-searching emphasize its effectiveness in detecting and preventing contraband from entering the prison environment and potentially harming staff, inmates and visitors (QDCS, 2004; QDCS, 2006b; Ministerial Statement, 2006). Before examining the effectiveness of strip-searching in detecting and preventing contraband from prisons, it is important to understand the ways in which this practice is justified and portrayed to the general public. This chapter engages in a critical discourse analysis of a Consultation Paper on searches in Queensland prisons with the aim of examining the ways in which language is used to portray strip-searching to the general public.

The document analysed is a Consultation Paper on Searches in Queensland prisons, which was published following a request from the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (QDCS, 2004, p.4). The Consultation Paper aimed to provide an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Corrective Services Act 2000 (Qld) and also to gather and consider the opinions and feedback of the general public in relation to current and proposed searching practices for Queensland prisoners (QDCS, 2004, pp.4-5). Therefore, this Consultation Paper is significant to the analysis of the use of language in official discourse because it is a text produced by a Government Department that explains and informs, as well as justifies to the general public the need for strip-searching in Queensland corrections.
1.1 LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS ON STRIP-SEARCHING

In official documents of the Queensland Department of Corrective Services, the practice of strip-searching is often justified as an important component to managing “widespread” prisoner violence and illicit drug use (QDCS, 2006b; QDCS, 2004, p.9). According to Sim (2004) however, reports of drug use and violence in prisons are often exaggerated in official documents because it is in the interest of the State to portray itself as the victim and to portray inmates as violent offenders. Through repeated exaggeration of problems of violence and drug use, the State is actively helping shape “common sense” knowledge and fears of prisoners in the general public, which in turn helps legitimise the use of harsher punishments and security measures by the State (Sim, 2004).

Likewise, Scraton et al (1991) argue how prison violence is almost always explained in official discourse as resulting from a few ‘bad’ prisoners who choose to rebel, but that the significance of violence as a last resort for inmates is never acknowledged. By individualizing the problem of prison violence and attributing it to prisoners’ deviance and personality, the correctional departments relieve themselves of any responsibility for prisoner unrest and shift the blame entirely upon the inmates (Scraton, Sim & Skidmore, 1991).

The consequence of such selective representations of prison violence and drug use is a distorted public perception of the criminal justice system and imprisonment and an increased insecurity and fear of victimization in the general community (Garland, 2001;
Scranton, Sim & Skidmore, 1991). In turn, issues of prison security and prisoner management are often raised and debated in communities during elections and increased pressure is placed on politicians to enforce tougher prison policies in order to better manage the inmate population and ensure community safety (Garland, 2001). Issues of public safety and the restoration of public confidence in the criminal justice system tend to dominate discussions, and ultimately result in the enforcement of punitive and controlling practices such as strip-searches which are described as an “important and necessary measure for ensuring the security of corrective services facilities and the safety of the community, staff, visitors, and prisoners” (QDCS, 2004, p.8, emphasis added).

According to Amanda George (1992, p.212), in order for the State to justify its use of strip-searches on prisoners, it promotes strip-searching in three different ways – by emphasising it’s effectiveness as a contraband prevention and security strategy; by depicting prisoners as a class of people who are inferior to the rest of society and thus deserving of such treatment; and finally, by ignoring the effects that strip-searching has on inmates’ well-being and psychological health. As a result, the State creates a community perception of prisoners as dangerous offenders who need to be controlled and strip-searched regularly both for their own safety as well as for the safety of prison staff and the general community.

Because there is a shortage of studies that have critically analysed the use of language in official documents on strip-searching or that have explored how George’s (1992) arguments hold up in relation to the State’s use of language to justify strip-searching, the
following section uses a CDA approach to address these issues. Below follows a critical discourse analysis of a Searches Consultation Paper for Queensland (QDCS, 2004). In accordance with George (1992), the analysis centers around three major themes: the portrayal of prisoners and of the QDCS; justifications for the use of strip-searches in prisons; and descriptions of strip-searching policy framework and its implementation.

1.2 ANALYSIS

Self-promotion and negative labels of inmates

In the Consultation Paper, the topic of discussion is introduced with the sentence that the “central purpose of the correctional system in Queensland is to provide humane containment, supervision and interventions for offenders” (QDCS, 2004, p.8). This sentence frames the discussion in two ways – first, the Queensland Department of Corrective Services is introduced as an institution that is concerned with humane treatment and rehabilitation of inmates; therefore, any policy endorsed by Queensland Corrections (including strip-searches) ought to be regarded as humane, because that is what the Department stands for. Second, the use of the word “offenders” to describe inmates is also important – this connotation conveys an image of individuals who have offended against society and need to be punished, not of persons who may not even be convicted of an offence, as is the situation with remand prisoners. Therefore, the Consultation Paper is framed in a way that promotes a positive image of the Department, and a negative representation of prisoners.
Using “apparent sympathy” (van Dijk, 1993, p.267) to indicate a concern for prisoners’ welfare, the positive presentation of the Queensland Corrections Department and negative presentation of inmates continues throughout the Consultation Paper. Emphasis is placed on the protection of “prisoners’ dignity and self-esteem” (QDCS, 2004, p.11), “offender rehabilitation” (p.4), “offender reintegration” (p.4), prisoner “safety”, “prisoners’ entitlements” (p.8) and numerous “safeguards” (p.8, 11) that have been put in place by the Department to “protect the dignity” (p.18) of individuals being searched. On the other hand, inmates are placed in a position of inferiority with emphasis being placed on their “widespread…drug use” (p.9), “smuggl[ing]” of drugs (p.9), possession of “dangerous weapons” (p.16) and “instruments of escape” (p.16), the writing of “threatening letters to a victim” (p.10), and the risk of “self-harm” (p.11) and “suicide” (p.11). Such positive and negative presentations combine to portray the Queensland Corrections Department as fair and ‘normal’, and inmates as different and strange and needing to be controlled. With this, the Queensland Corrections Department would be justified in taking even extreme action (such as strip-searching) against prisoners who are all depicted as a potential risk to the community (Sim, 2004). Moreover, the emphasis on the risk of prisoner “self-harm” suggests that inmates are both a danger to others as well as to themselves, and are therefore in need of guidance and strict rules from a system that knows what is best for them.

The discussion of inmates’ drug use continues throughout the Consultation Paper, and numerous references are made in regards to “drug use among prisoners” (QDCS, 2004, p.8), “continued drug use during imprisonment” (p.8), “combating illicit drug use” (p.11)
and preventing the “supply of drugs” (p.11) to inmates. In order to give credibility to its claims, the Consultation Paper cites the “1996 Commission of Inquiry into Drugs in Queensland Custodial Correctional Centres” (p.9), which outlined “the various ways in which drugs…enter the prison environment” (p.9). This implies “the various ways” in which inmates smuggle drugs into prisons, and it fails to mention the numerous allegations that have been made against prison staff (who are not subject to strip-searches) smuggling illicit drugs into prisons (ABC, 2002; Sisters Inside, 2005a). Also, the discussion of prisoner drug use within the Consultation Paper fails to address the wider social implications involved in drug use, and the numerous reasons behind illicit drug use both in the community and prisons (Denton, 1994; Lutze, 2003). Rather, through a selective presentation of information, problems of drug use are attributed to the individual pathology of inmates.

Furthermore, stating that “efforts to rehabilitate prisoners are undermined by continued drug use during imprisonment” (QDCS, 2004, p.8) implies that some effort has actually been made by the correctional system to rehabilitate prisoners, but that it was fruitless as a result of (and again an emphasis on) repeated “drug use” (p.8) by inmates. This places the correctional system in a position of passivity – it is not unjustly punishing inmates, but rather it is only responding to, and acting upon, the widespread drug problem which the prisoners are creating. However, as the recent ADCQ (2006) report pointed out, a significant number of female prisoners are not even allowed access to rehabilitative programs, and are thus expected to manage their drug habits on their own. This not only contradicts the statement that efforts are made to rehabilitate inmates (QDCS, 2004, p.8),
but it also challenges the idea of equal access to rehabilitation for inmates, and potentially undermines the role of prisons as places of reform.

It is also important to note how the issue of prisoner rights is overlooked in the Consultation Paper and given secondary importance to prison security and the rights of the community to feel safe and protected. For example, by repeatedly emphasizing the need for “community safety” (QDCS, 2004, p.3-5, p.16) and “widespread” (p.9) drug use in prisons, and the potential “danger” that drugs pose to staff and inmates (p.8), the Consultation Paper diverts attention from allegations that strip-searching may constitute a breach of Human Rights (Ewart, 1995), and instead focuses on strip-searching as a security measure that is required for community and prison safety. The fact that the word “rights” (p.12, 13) is intentionally placed in inverted commas when referring to the rights of inmates is also important because it illustrates the official lack of regard for the existence of any rights for prisoners. It is also stated in the Consultation Paper that the rights of prisoners are “limited by the imperative to maintain order and security” (QDCS, 2004, p.16). Therefore, issues of security, order, and community protection are repeatedly emphasised in the Consultation Paper and are assumed to be of superior importance to the rights of inmates. This again relates back to George’s (1992, p.212) argument that the State portrays prisoners as an inferior group of individuals, undeserving of equal treatment to the remainder of society simply because they are incarcerated.

The use of “apparent democracy” (van Dijk, 1993, p.267) is also evident in the Consultation Paper, where the QDCS is placed in the position of representing the
interests of the majority of people. For example, the Consultation Paper states that “comprehensive measures need to be in place to uphold the community’s expectations with respect to security and safety” (QDCS, 2004, p.15, emphasis added). This reference to “uphold[ing] community’s expectations” shifts the responsibility of strip-searching from the State and onto the community, and depicts the Department as a passive structure that merely reflects and enforces community expectations and demands. The use of pronoun “our” and reference to “protecting our children” (QDCS, 2004, p.3) is also an example of “apparent democracy” (van Dijk, 1993, p.267) where the QDCS identifies with the general community, and is described as implementing prison security policies for the protection of common goals, namely “our children” (QDCS, 2004, p.3).

According to van Dijk (1993, p.263), identifying with the audience by emphasising common goals is also a technique that works to discredit the powerless group (the inmates) who are excluded from this alliance between the community and the QDCS.

Another important aspect of the Consultation Paper involves the placement of question boxes and a section titled “your views” (QDCS, 2004, p.19) towards the end, which invites the reader to submit his or her opinion on the effectiveness of new changes to legislation. The structure of all questions is similar in that it asks for readers’ opinions regarding the “adequa[cy]” (p.19) and clarity of current provisions, as well as possible suggestions to improve the safeguards of prisoner rights and “dignity” (p.19). The statement “we value your feedback” (p.19) suggests to the readers that their opinion is important and valued by the policy makers, and that they can have a say in prison issues. As Huckin (1997) suggests, such sentences carry important information regarding power
relations, because the Consultation Paper is inviting the audience to have an input in correctional procedures. The inmates are thus again placed in a position of inferiority, and the Queensland Department of Corrective Services and the community are placed in a position of authority because they have the power to mould prison policy.

**Justification of strip-searching**

In the Consultation Paper, strip-searches are described as “necessary” (QDCS, 2004, p.8) for the “safety of staff, prisoners and the community” (QDCS, 2004, p.8), and as being designed to “prevent the entry of certain items which may present a risk to the community, prisoners and staff” (p.8) as well as “items that could be used to escape” (p.8). Again, there is a connotation between ‘safety’ and ‘strip-searches’, as they are consistently associated with one another throughout the Consultation Paper. In addition, discussions of possible “escape[s]” (p.8, 10, 16) from prisons may appeal to the audience’s fear for own safety, which may be compromised if inmates are to smuggle weapons which they can later use to escape from prisons. This is a clear example of exaggeration (Sim, 2004) where facts are distorted and inflated with the aim of instilling fear into the audience, and to convince them that their community and safety are potentially at risk from dangerous criminals who are constantly thinking up ways of escaping.

**Strip-searching policy and implementation**

Statements which suggest that searches “may” be conducted without prior suspicion (QDCS, 2004, p.15); that inmates “may” be frisk searched (p.15); that a cavity search
“may” be ordered (p.15); that routine searches “may” be conducted (p.15); and that privileged mail “may” be opened (p.15) imply a degree of uncertainty and suggest that the likelihood of these searches being carried out is subject to official discretion and a response to individual behaviour. Attributing the possibility of strip-searching to individual behaviours of inmates suggests that only deviant and rule-breaking inmates are strip-searched. However, this raises important issues about prison discretion and broad searching powers that are open to interpretation by the prison staff and that can bypass any independent checks and balances. In addition, it has also been suggested that strip-searches in women’s prisons tend to be a routine practice that affects all inmates equally (ADCQ, 2006) rather than a procedure that ‘may’ take place based on reasonable suspicion on behalf of the prison staff, or based on the individual behaviour of inmates.

Moreover, the process of strip-searching is described in professional and neutral terms, thus suggesting that searches are conducted in an expert manner. Emphasis is placed on “rigorous” (QDCS, 2004, p.9), “necessary” (p.8, 9), “important” (p.8) strip-searches, which are “conducted” (p.8) “performed” (p.9) “undertaken” (p.11) only with “reasonable suspicion”(p.12), “on certain occasions” (p.15) and with “regard to [prisoner’s] dignity” (p.12-13), “self-esteem” (p.8) and “privacy”(p.14-15). In reality however, the process of strip-searching is still largely hidden from public view and scrutiny, and there is a lack of consistent accounts concerning the process of strip-searching (Aretxaga, 2001a; Ewart, 1995; Kilroy, 2002, p.122; Russo, 1999). Again, this is for the most part due to the discretionary powers allocated to prisons in regards to strip-
searching and the ambiguous wording of strip-searching policy in the *Corrective Services Act 2006* (Qld).

Strip-searches are also described as an “essential strategy” (p.11) in combating the drug problem in prisons, yet the Consultation Paper presents no evidence that firmly supports the use of strip-searches in managing the prison drug problem. On the other hand, as will be discussed later, a significant amount of critical literature has suggested that strip-searches are not only ineffective at combating the drug problem in prisons, but may also contribute to the drug use of female prisoners (Cook & Davies, 1999; Pereira, 2001; Russo, 1999; Sisters Inside, 2005b). In addition, the discussion in the Consultation Paper completely overlooks the importance of gender in strip-searching, and how strip-searches impact women in prisons. However, literature that is critical of strip-searching has acknowledged that strip-searching may impact women more negatively than men due to the fact that a large number of women are survivors of physical and sexual abuse (ADCQ, 2006; Kilroy, 2000). Again, this shows how the discussion in the Consultation Paper promotes the interests of the Queensland Corrections Department by presenting favorable information and excluding contradictory arguments that challenge the use of strip-searching.

Throughout the Consultation Paper, repeated emphasis is also placed on the numerous “safeguards” (QDCS, 2004, p.8, 11, 12, 18) that are in place to ensure that searches are conducted in a professional and dignified manner. However, there is no mention of the fallibility of these safeguards (Pereira, 2001), or of the studies that have documented women’s accounts of strip-searching and found them to significantly differ from
prescribed policy (e.g. Aretxaga, 2001a; Ewart, 1995; Carlen, 1998; Hampton, 1993). In the Consultation Paper, emphasis is placed on the need for “reasonable suspicion” (p.9, 12, 18) on behalf of prison officers before a search can take place; yet there is no mention of what “reasonable suspicion” actually is. The Consultation Paper also states that strip-searches must be conducted by “at least two officers” (p.9), but there is no mention of how this fails to set limits regarding the presence of officers, and how it can potentially result in a prisoner being searched by ten or twenty officers at a time (e.g. Aretxaga, 2001a; Russo, 1999; Simmering & Diamond, 1996). Therefore, although strip-searching is portrayed as an infallible, professional, and highly regulated procedure in the Consultation Paper, this discussion is limited in that it fails to address the numerous challenges and shortcomings of strip-searching policy that have been raised by other studies (e.g. Periera, 2001; Ewart, 1995).

1.3 IMPLICATIONS

Using a CDA approach on a Consultation Paper on searches in Queensland prisons (QDCS, 2004), this chapter demonstrated the use of language in an official document on strip-searching and the ways in which strip-searches are promoted, justified and portrayed to the general public. Consistent with George’s (1992) argument, inmates are portrayed as deviant drug addicts who are somehow inferior to the general community and lack the same rights as everyone else. The prisoners invoke an image of un-intelligent, impulsive and dangerous criminals who need to be controlled by the system for their own safety, as well as for the safety of others. On the other hand, the Queensland Department of Corrective Services is characterized as fair, impartial, concerned for the well-being of
prisoners, prison staff and the community. It invokes feelings of professionalism, security, and concern for community welfare.

Consistent with George (1992), the present analysis also found that the use of strip-searches on inmates is justified by emphasising the importance and effectiveness of the practice, while simultaneously failing to acknowledge the impacts of strip-searches on inmates. In the Consultation Paper, strip-searching is portrayed as a necessary and highly effective procedure that is rigorously monitored and conducted in respect to prisoner dignity. The text fails to address any challenging viewpoints on strip-searching (ADCQ, 2006; Carlen, 1998; Ewart, 1995; Faul, 1983; Kilroy, 2000; McCulloch & George, forthcoming), and ignores the literature that discusses the potentially negative effects of such practice on inmates (Aretxaga, 2001a; Carlen, 1998; NCCL, 1986; Periera, 2001). This leaves the issue of strip-searching relatively unchallenged, with the discussion being dominated by only one (dominant) viewpoint. By repeatedly emphasizing the drug use of inmates and connecting it with community safety and security, by ‘othering’ the prisoners and engaging in a ‘us’ versus ‘them’ discussion, by ignoring challenging viewpoints and arguments, the discussion in the Consultation Paper successfully reflects a one-sided perception of prisoners and emphasises the need for punitive measures such as strip-searches for ensuring community and prison safety.

The following chapter continues the discussion on strip-searching and prison security. It will examine alternative viewpoints on strip-searching and draw on quantitative data regarding strip-searching practices and violence in women’s prisons in Queensland and
Victoria, and by reviewing relevant literature that addresses some of the reasons behind women’s drug use and violence in prisons.
CHAPTER TWO

STRIP-SEARCHING AS CONTRABAND CONTROL STRATEGY IN WOMEN’S PRISONS

While there is evidence of changing policy commitments to the use of strip-searching in Queensland prisons (QDCS, 2004), little is known about the practice of strip-searching within prisons in Australia. The previous chapter demonstrated the use of language in an official document on strip-searching in Queensland prisons, and the different techniques used to portray strip-searching as a necessary practice while simultaneously failing to address the many critiques and shortcomings of strip-searching in prisons (e.g. George, 1992; Sisters Inside, 2005). This chapter addresses some of the critical literature on strip-searching and prisoner violence and drug use, and examines the rates of contraband detection through strip-searching and incidents of violence in women’s prisons in Queensland. Strip-searching practices and violence in Victorian women’s prisons are also analysed for comparison purposes.

2.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRIP-SEARCHING PRACTICES

Strip-searching and contraband detection

Queensland currently has three custodial prisons for women: the Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre (BWCC), the Townsville Women’s Correctional Centre (TWCC), and the Numinbah Correctional Centre (NCC) (Hockings, Young, Falconer & O’Rourke, 2002). The BWCC is a secure facility that can house up to 258 individuals at a time, and is the only Queensland facility that houses female offenders only (QDCS, 2006a). The
TWCC is a high security facility for both male and female offenders, and can house up to 494 individuals at a time (QDCS, 2006a). NCC is a low security facility for both men and women; it can accommodate up to 104 male and up to 25 female prisoners (QDCS, 2006a). In all three facilities, both inmates and visitors are subject to strip-searches (ADCQ, 2006, p.69).

As quantitative data on strip-searching from Queensland Corrections Department is not publicly available, statistical information obtained by Sisters Inside (2005) through a Freedom of Information Request was used. This information represents only one of Queensland women’s prisons – the Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre (BWCC). The number of strip-searches represents a combined value of searches for both inmates and visitors. The data are displayed in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Average Prisoner Population *</th>
<th>No of strip-searches on inmates and visitors</th>
<th>No of significant contraband found **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BWCC</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>41,728</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sisters Inside
* Source: Department of Corrective Services Annual Report 1999-2000
** This number does not represent all contraband items found, only items deemed ‘significant’ by Sisters Inside (i.e. illicit drugs).

For comparison purpose, similar information was also obtained for Victoria from the Victorian Department of Corrections in Melbourne. Although Victoria has thirteen operating prisons, only two of those house female offenders – the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) and Tarrengower prison (VDJ, 2007). The DPFC operates at maximum-
security and can house up to 260 women at any one time, while Tarrengower is a minimum-security facility with an operational capacity of 54 individuals (VDJ, 2007). In 2002, the average prison population at DPFC was 210, while Tarrengower comprised of 48 prisoners (VDJ, 2007). Due to the significantly lower prisoner population at Tarrengower prison, only statistical information for DPFC was used in this analysis. The most recent data available on strip-searching practices in DPFC was for the two-year period between July 2002 and September 2004 (VDJ, 2003; 2004).

**Table 2. Recorded Strip-searches at DPFC between 1 July 2002 and 30 September 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Average prisoner population*</th>
<th>No of strip-searches on inmates</th>
<th>No of contraband found</th>
<th>No of strip-searches on visitors</th>
<th>No of contraband found</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DPFC</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>35,288</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Corrections Victoria Prison Service Reports

*Average score based on prisoner populations in June 2003, June 2004 and September 2004.

**Findings**

Because the analysis of strip-searching data for BWCC relied on secondary data from Sisters Inside (2005), it was impossible to determine the complete number of contraband that was detected during the four-year period examined, or the ratio of contraband that was detected on prisoners and visitors. Sisters Inside (2005) only published combined data for strip-searches of prisoners and visitors, and only published the number of “significant” contraband items that were detected during these searches.
Nonetheless, looking at Table 1 and Table 2 above, it appears that inmates in both Queensland and Victorian prisons are strip-searched at significantly high rates. During the four-year period between 1999 and 2002, 41,728 searches were carried out on prisoners and visitors at BWCC – this amounts to approximately 869 searches carried out each month at BWCC. Only two significant items of contraband were detected as a result of those searches. In Victoria, between the years 2002 and 2004, 35,228 strip-searches were carried out on prisoners only at DPFC – this means that approximately 1467 strip-searches were carried out each month at DPFC. Only 20 items of unspecified contraband were detected as a result of those strip-searches. These findings are consistent with other studies that found strip-searching to have low contraband detection rates (Cook & Davies, 1999; Simmering & Diamond, 1996; Ewart, 1995). The apparently low rate of contraband detection may be interpreted in at least two ways: either as an indication of the success of strip-searches as a deterrent against contraband smuggling (Ministerial Statement, 2006; QDCS, 2006b), or as an indication of the ineffectiveness of strip-searches as a contraband detection and prevention strategy (Sisters Inside, 2005a). A number of recent studies have given weight to the latter argument, indicating that the presence of illicit drug use is still significantly high in both Queensland and Victorian women’s prisons (Hockings, Young, Falconer & Rourke, 2002; Kilroy, 2000), despite the use of strip-searches and low contraband detection rates. A study of women’s prisons in Queensland found that up to 25 per cent of the sample reported using illicit drugs during the term of their imprisonment (Hockings, Young, Falconer & O’Rourke, 2002), while another study using self-report methods on women in...
South-East Queensland prisons found reported drug use in prisons to be as high as 51 per cent (Kilroy, 2000, p.4).

Such information challenges the view that rates of contraband detection in prisons are low due to the deterrent nature of strip-searching (Ministerial Statement, 2006), as it appears that illicit drug use is still existent in women’s prisons despite the use of strip-searches and negative repercussions that are in place for anyone detected having contraband items in their possession (VDJ, 2002, p.16).

**Strip-searching and prisoner security**

In addition to preventing illicit drug use in prisons, strip-searching is also used to minimize incidents of violence and escapes from prisons by detecting and preventing the entry of items that could be used by inmates to harm themselves or others or to escape (QDCS, 2004, p.10). In order to examine prisoner safety at BWCC and DPFC, an attempt was made to gather quantitative data from BWCC and DPFC on incidents of prisoner escapes, suicide attempts, and incidents of assault and self-mutilation.

Accessing information on incidents of self-mutilation and attempted suicide by inmates at BWCC proved difficult, as this information is not publicly available from the Queensland Department of Corrective Services at present time. However, statistical information on prisoner escapes and incidents of assault was obtained for this analysis, and is displayed in Table 3 below.
Table 3. Violent incidents at BWCC between 4th August 2003 and 4th August 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Average prisoner population</th>
<th>Attempted escapes</th>
<th>Incidents of self-mutilation</th>
<th>Incidents of attempted suicide:</th>
<th>Incidents of prisoner on prisoner assault:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BWCC</td>
<td>222**</td>
<td>0**</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: ADCQ report (2006)
**Queensland Department of Corrective Services (2006a) – population between 2003 and 2004

Statistical information on prisoner escapes, inmate violence and attempts of suicide and self-mutilation at DPFC was accessed from Corrections Victoria Prison Service Reports (VDJ, 2003; 2004). Table 4 displays data for the seven-month period between 1 July 2003 and 29 February 2004.

Table 4. Violent incidents at DPFC between 1 July 2003 and 29 February 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Average prisoner population*</th>
<th>Attempted escapes</th>
<th>Incidents of Self-mutilation</th>
<th>Incidents of attempted suicide:</th>
<th>Incidents of prisoner on prisoner assault:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DPFC</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Corrections Victoria Prison Service Reports
* Based on prisoner population at February 2004

Findings

In terms of prisoner violence and escapes, the available information indicates that incidents of prison escapes are virtually non-existent in BWCC and DPFC. This information could be viewed as an indication of the effectiveness of strip-searching at intercepting weapons and items that could be used to escape from entering the prison.
environment (QDCS, 2004, p.10). However, further examination of the data indicates that incidents of prisoner assault are common at both BWCC and DPFC, despite the presence of strip-searches. Information obtained for the BWCC (refer to Table 3) indicates that at least 12 incidents of prisoner on prisoner violence took place between the period of 2003 and 2004, and information obtained for the DPFC indicates that 16 incidents of prisoner on prisoner violence were recorded between July 2003 and February 2004 (refer to Table 4).

In addition, eight incidents of attempted suicide and 25 incidents of self-mutilation were recorded at the DPFC between July 2003 and February 2004 (refer to Table 4). And although statistical information on prisoner self-harm and suicide attempts for the BWCC was not accessed for this analysis, a recent study of women in Queensland prisons found that over 21 per cent of the study sample reported engaging in self-harming behaviours (Hockings, et al, 2002, p.47), while another 31 per cent of the sample had attempted suicide (Hockings, et al, 2002, p.46). This information contradicts the argument that strip-searching is effectively used to minimize incidents of violence and self-harm from prisons by intercepting the flow of contraband or dangerous items from prisons (QDCS, 2004, pp.10-16) as such items still seem to be entering the prison environment and are used by inmates to harm themselves or others.

The available information accessed for BWCC and DPFC suggests that contraband items are present in these facilities despite the regular strip-searching of inmates. In order to understand why contraband is still present in prisons despite the use of strip-searches, it is
important to examine the reasons behind women’s drug use and violence and determine whether strip-searching addresses these issues.

2.2 REASONS BEHIND DRUG USE AND VIOLENCE IN PRISONS

Strip-searching and illicit drug use

From the available literature it appears that attempting to resolve the drug problem in prisons with strip-searches is problematic because the reasons behind inmate drug use are very diverse and thus require a more complex response. As Russo (1999, p.16) argues, for some women drugs provide a release from reality and a way of coping with the oppressive prison culture and boredom. However, research conducted by Denton (1994) indicates that for many women drug use begins at an early age and is often precipitated by a history of sexual, physical or emotional abuse. A considerable portion of women with drug addictions have a family history of drug and alcohol problems, have suffered family breakdown, lived on the streets, or have been placed on a care order as children (Denton, 1994, p.34). Thus, as Denton (1994, p.35) observes, for many women drugs are not a recreation but a coping strategy, a way of blocking out the emotional trauma and painful memories from childhood or adulthood. For this reason, responding to women’s drug addictions in prisons requires a complex policy, one that emphasizes rehabilitation and not just deterrence.

Yet as the ADCQ (2006, p.90) report indicates, accessing rehabilitative programs in Queensland prisons can be difficult, as women who are on remand or are incarcerated for less than twelve months are not given access to substance abuse and relapse prevention programs. Having in mind that the average sentence served by women in Queensland
prisons is approximately two months (DCS, cited in ADCQ, 2006, p.90), this means that a significant proportion of women who enter the prison system with a drug addiction must either manage the withdrawal effects on their own or keep using drugs during incarceration. As Denton (1994) argues, it is extremely difficult for some women to discontinue using drugs on their own, because some of the withdrawal effects can be very serious, and can include psychotic episodes and suicidal tendencies. The fact that considerable numbers of women keep using drugs while imprisoned (Denton, 1994; Kilroy, 2000) questions both the effectiveness of strip-searching as a deterrent against drug use, and the availability and quality of rehabilitative programs in women’s prisons.

More importantly, it has also been suggested that strip-searching may contribute and even exacerbate the levels of drug use in prisons because it is experienced as extremely humiliating and even as a form of sexual abuse by some women (Russo, 1999). In Russo’s (1999) research with imprisoned women, a former inmate stated that “strip-searching does not stop drugs getting in to prison it only creates a bigger reason for the women to use drugs by continually sexually abusing them” (cited in Russo, 1999, p.20). Cook and Davies (1999) similarly suggest that strip-searches may encourage drug-taking behaviour in inmates, particularly in women who have been sexually abused prior to incarceration.

Evidently, the available literature on female prisoners indicates that the reasons behind women’s drug use are often complex and diverse. Consequently, managing the drug use of incarcerated women may equally require a response that is tailored to the individual needs of inmates and has a focus on rehabilitation, not on deterrence. In reality however,
it appears that women are not given sufficient access to rehabilitative programs, but are instead expected to be deterred from drug use by practices such as strip-searching. Not only does such an approach appear to be failing to prevent drug use, but it may also contribute to the presence of illicit drugs in prisons and their use by women who wish to alleviate boredom, stress and trauma.

**Strip-searching and violence**

In addition to preventing illicit drugs from entering prisons, strip-searching is also used to maintain prison security and prisoner and staff safety (QDCS, 2004; 2006b). It is reasoned that if strip-searches can detect and intercept the entry of contraband items such as weapons from prisons, they can effectively prevent prison violence and escapes and maintain prison safety (QDCS, 2004, p.10).

However, research by Pollock (2002) indicates that violence in women’s prisons differs to violence in men’s prisons, and thus requires a different approach. Although violence exists in women’s prisons (as indicated in the analysis above), compared to men’s prisons it is extremely rare and usually takes place between two individuals who are in a personal relationship, or it occurs due to perceived theft (Pollock, 2002, p.123). Therefore, violence between female prisoners is usually personal and thus it is less likely to result in serious injury (Pollock, 2002). Women in prisons are also less likely to manufacture or carry weapons compared to incarcerated men, which further reduces the likelihood of serious violence in women’s prisons (Pollock, 2002). This suggests that violence in women’s prisons is not as serious an issue as it is for men’s prisons. Pollock (2002,
p.198) confirms this, arguing that even the prison administrators do not take violence between women seriously, and that complaints made by women in prisons are not taken as seriously as those made by men.

Although violence in women’s prisons in low, there is a perception in the general community of violent female prisoners or “butchess” who terrorize the weaker prisoners (Faith, 1993). According to Scraton, Sim and Skidmore (1991), this is because official accounts of prison violence often reduce inmates’ violent behaviour to individual pathology and psychology, and ignore the more significant institutional factors that propel some individuals to engage in misconduct or violent behaviour within prisons. Carlton (2001, pp.53-54) argues that factors like harsh prison discipline, staff brutality, an over-emphasis on security and a lack of sensory stimulation together with general boredom and idleness all combine to produce a highly unstable prison environment and violent inmates who lash out at one another out of sheer frustration and anger. It therefore seems that prison violence is propelled more by feelings of injustice, helplessness and discrimination on behalf of inmates, rather than by a few “bad apples” who choose to disobey authority (Scraton, Sim & Skidmore, 1991, p.14).

In addition, some studies have also indicated that strip-searching may contribute to women’s violence and self-harm instead of preventing them. Because the dominant culture socializes women to be modest and “cover up” in clothing, a woman’s sense of identity is often intertwined in clothing, and clothes become part of a woman’s identity and personality (WASS, 1987). And yet once incarcerated, women are subjected to a
procedure that can not only be argued as being sexual in nature, but which also violates
the prescribed norms of modesty of women by stripping them naked. Many women have
reported experiencing a sense of helplessness every time they are strip-searched (ADCQ,
2006, p.73), because if they resist the search their clothes are forcibly removed and they
are punished (Simmering & Diamond, 1996). For these reasons, many women experience
strip-searches as deeply humiliating and a violation of their body (WASS, 1987).

The feelings of helplessness that some women experience each time they are strip-
searched may eventually turn into anger and rage for those women who believe they are
unjustly targeted and harassed by the prison guards (Ewart, 1995). In these situations,
some women may self-harm or attempt suicide (Russo, 1999). One inmate explains her
self-mutilation by saying “I do it to myself instead of hurting someone else” (cited in
Denton, 1994, p.36). Another prisoner explains how “you were nearly crying when you
knew you were going to be strip-searched. It made you very angry and very violent too”
(cited in Aretxaga, 2001a, p.15). These women may become violent and lash out, as was
the case with Paula Richardson, a Victorian inmate who assaulted a staff member shortly
after being forcibly strip-searched (see Heffey, 2002).

The findings of a three year pilot study that reduced the number of strip-searches in
women’s prisons in Victoria provide further support against the use of strip-searching as
a security measure. The pilot revealed that a reduction in the number of strip-searches
carried out on female inmates resulted in fewer behavioral incidents such as self-harming
as well as fewer assaults between prisoners and assaults on staff members (cited in
McCulloch & George, forthcoming). These findings provide further evidence against the use of strip-searching on female prisoners, and suggest that strip-searching may exacerbate the levels of violence and unrest in women’s prisons.

It then appears that strip-searching, rather than preventing violence and prisoner self-harm, may play a significant role in contributing to the violent behavior of women because it is humiliating and it leaves women feeling violated and abused. As Scraton, Sim & Skidmore (1991) conclude, it is clear that prison violence and unrest cannot ever be fully understood without examining the environment within which such actions occur, and why some inmates engage in violence despite knowing there would be serious repercussions for such behaviour.

2.3 IMPLICATIONS

The present chapter examined current strip-searching practices in women’s Queensland and Victorian prisons and the issues of illicit drug use and violence of imprisoned women. A quantitative analysis of the number of strip-searches conducted at BWCC and DPFC revealed strip-searching to have a low rate of contraband detection on both inmates and visitors. Although this may be interpreted as a sign that strip-searching is a successful deterrent against contraband smuggling, a review of recent literature challenges these assumptions by indicating that illicit drug use is still widespread in women’s prisons.
In addition, a quantitative analysis of prisoner violence at BWCC and DPFC indicated that incidents of attempted escapes from prisons are non-existent, while incidents of prisoner violence, self-harm and attempted suicide are more common. These findings may indicate a lack of sufficient monitoring of inmates and challenge the argument that strip-searching maintains prison safety by intercepting dangerous items from inmates and visitors. Contraband items appear to be present in women’s prisons despite the rigorous strip-searching that takes place at both BWCC and DPFC.

In addition, research examining the reasons behind women’s violence and drug use in prisons reveal that these are complex issues that cannot be resolved with a punitive approach. This information contradicts official reasoning that emphasises deterrence through strip-searching, and it may indicate a need for a re-assessment of current strip-searching practices.

The following chapter continues the discussion on strip-searching and examines the potential impacts of strip-searches on incarcerated women. The analysis draws on a range of studies and available literature in order to examine similarities between the experiences of rape victims and women who had been strip-searched in prisons, and to discuss some of the negative impacts of strip-searching on women in prisons.
CHAPTER THREE
THE IMPACTS OF STRIP-SEARCHING ON FEMALE PRISONERS

In addition to being an inadequate security and contraband prevention policy, strip-searching has also been labeled as a form of State sanctioned sexual abuse (George, 1992; Simmering & Diamond, 1996) and, more importantly, as a method of controlling incarcerated women through humiliation and dominance (Aretxaga, 2001a, 2001b; Lutze, 2003; Sisters Inside, 2005a). Drawing on a range of literature, the previous chapter raised some critical issues in relation to strip-searching as a contraband prevention and security strategy in women’s prisons, and it’s effectiveness at managing prisoner violence and illicit drug use. This chapter examines strip-searching from a critical feminist perspective that links this practice to sexual assault or rape of women (Aretxaga, 2001a; George, 1992; Lutze, 2003; Sisters Inside, 2005a). Drawing on both Australian and overseas research and literature on strip-searching and rape, this chapter compares women’s experiences of strip-searching to the experience of rape in order to examine similarities between the two and to establish the impacts of strip-searching on imprisoned women.

Definition of rape
In Australia the offences of rape and sexual assault fall under State/Territory jurisdictions. As a consequence, definitions of these offences differ between each State and Territory. For this study the definition of sexual assault was adopted from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004, p.9), where it is described as “a physical assault of a sexual nature directed towards another person without their consent”. Such actions are regarded as sexual assault even if they do not involve penetration.
3.1 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN STRIP-SEARCHING AND RAPE

In order to establish similarities between women’s experience of rape and the experience of being strip-searched in prisons, both rape and strip-searching need to be examined from the perspective of gender control. Although taking place in different circumstances, both strip-searching and rape of women can be seen as an expression of dominance and an establishment of control of one body over another. Below follows an overview of critical literature that links rape of women in general society and strip-searching of women in prisons to the notion of gender control.

Rape

Early feminist explanations of gendered violence attempted to explain rape from a sociobiological perspective. In her groundbreaking work, Brownmiller (1976) examined rape from a sociobiological perspective and argued that all men have an innate potential to use their genitalia to control and reassert their power over women. Challenging the belief that rape is a crime driven by passion or lust, Brownmiller (1976, p.5) viewed rape as nothing more than a “conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.” She examined the historical explanations and perceptions of rape and explained how, from the earlier times, the issue of rape was never regarded as a violation of a woman’s body, but rather as a violation of a man’s private property (Brownmiller, 1976).
In addition, according to Brownmiller (1976, p.362), social structures such as the media help perpetuate the belief that women are passive beings who actually enjoy and can only awaken their sexuality through masochistic rape fantasies. Even newspaper reports sexualise and glamourise incidents of rape in order to appeal to the male sexual fantasy of rape (Brownmiller, 1976, p.375). Thus, rape has come to be associated with the beauty and powerlessness of the victim and the power and masculinity of the rapist (Brownmiller, 1976, pp.375-381). Such portrayals of rape work to reinforce men’s belief system regarding their masculinity, and allow them to further justify using violence against women (Brownmiller, 1976).

More recent explanations of rape have partially dismissed the idea that all men have an innate ability to rape women and have focused on the cognitive factors that contribute to the rape of women. Analysing the historical use of rape in war situations, Millilo (2006) regards rape of women as an expression of the male desire to maintain power and control in society. According to Millilo (2006, p.100), because men are socialised to believe in their superiority over women, they often support gendered ideologies that legitimise violence against women and help maintain the status quo. This perspective is supported by other research (Burgess, 2007; Ryan, 2004) where it was found that men’s cognitions regarding sex and masculinity may provide justifications for rape, and thus encourage some men to rape women. Therefore, men who rape women are not only trying to re-assert their masculinity and defend their masculine gender role, but they also justify their actions on the basis of a belief system that condones violence against women (Millilo, 2006, pp.200-201).
Strip-searching

Although it is acknowledged that both male and female prisoners are strip-searched in Australian prisons (ADCQ, 2006) and that both sexes experience strip-searches as humiliating (PAV, 2001), some literature suggests that strip-searches negatively impact women more than men. According to Carlen (1998), because women are socialised to be modest and “cover up” their sexual parts, being subjected to a strip-search violates these norms and is thus experienced as deeply humiliating by women. This is particularly the case for women with strong religious backgrounds where modesty is highly valued (Faul, 1983). Men on the other hand undergo a socialization process that is different to women; they are socialized to associate their gender with power, dominance and intelligence (Lutze, 2003), and are encouraged from a young age to be sexually active (Connell, 2002, pp.222-230). Therefore, although a strip-search is humiliating for both men and women, it appears to be more traumatic for women because it contradicts the beliefs they acquired through socialization. In addition, as the ADCQ (2006) report indicates, because strip-searching is experienced as particularly traumatizing for victims of past sexual or physical abuse, it may disproportionately affect women as they are both more likely to be victims of sexual and physical assault than men (ABS, 2004), and as victims of sexual and physical assault they are over-represented in prisons (Easteal, 2001).

Just as rape is associated with an expression of power and dominance of one body over another, so can strip-searches be viewed as an expression of power and dominance of a prison staff over a prisoner and her body. Although women in Queensland prisons are
usually strip-searched by female staff, it can be argued that the gender of the prison officer is irrelevant during a strip-search. What is significant is the control that the officers have over a woman when she is forced to strip naked and be visually examined. This immediately places the staff member executing the search in a position of superiority because he/she is fully clothed, while the inmate remains in a position of inferiority because she is powerless to defend herself from the officer’s gaze.

In Queensland prisons, women who resist a strip-search are forcibly strip-searched; their clothes are removed and they are physically held down on the floor and visually examined (Pereira, 2001, p.188; Simmering & Diamond, 1996). This physical process also links strip-searching and rape – in both situations, the prisoner has no control over their body or over their immediate environment; the inmate must comply with a strip-search and allow herself to be exposed and viewed against her wishes. If she is forcibly strip-searched, then there is an element of physical force (and potentially violence) exerted over her; yet if the inmate fights back, she is likely to suffer negative consequences for ‘assaulting’ an officer (Ewart, 1995; Pereira, 2001; Simmering & Diamond, 1996). Therefore, strip-searching can be compared to rape because, just as rape, it seems to operate on a notion of power and domination of one body over another.

According to Aretxaga (2001a), strip-searching is particularly effective on women because it operates on a notion of gender control by replicating the power and dominance that men exert over women during rape. Similar to a victim of rape, an inmate has no say over when she will be strip-searched or by whom, and she must submit to the requests of
the prison guards (Simmering & Diamond, 1996). This may be particularly significant for women in Queensland prisons, of whom many are victims of past sexual assault and for whom a strip-search may serve as a reminder of past trauma (ADCQ, 2006).

Despite occurring in different circumstances, both rape and strip-searching appear to have similar implications for women - both seem to be based on a notion of gender control, of women being dominated and overpowered through their bodies, which are used as sites of oppression. Having established the available literature that examines both rape and strip-searching from the perspective of gender control (Aretxaga, 2001a; Brownmiller, 1976; Carlen, 1998; Lutze, 2003), the following section of the chapter examines the available research on the experiences of rape victims and women who were strip-searched in prisons, in order to determine the extent to which strip-searching negatively impacts imprisoned women.

3.2 EFFECTS OF RAPE AND STRIP-SEARCHING ON WOMEN

This section examines the available literature and studies of women’s experience and reported symptoms following rape and strip-searching. The literature will be evaluated under two broad sections – reported psychological symptoms and behavioural patterns – and within each of these sections specific symptoms and responses will be discussed.
Psychological responses

Anger, depression, anxiety and self-blame

Amongst rape victims, anger, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem are very common responses (Crome & McCabe, 1995). Because the incident of rape is so traumatic, it often has long lasting, negative effects on the victim’s self-esteem (Crome & McCabe, 1995). Victims tend to engage in self-blame (Feinauer & Hippolite, 1987), and many may convince themselves that something in their personality or character ‘caused’ them to be raped (Arata, 1999). Anger is also one of the most common emotional responses following the incident, particularly if the victim believes she could have fought harder to defend herself (Crome & McCabe, 1995). In the words of two rape victims:

About six months to a year later some of the vulnerability disappeared. It was replaced by rage. Oh, I wish now I had hit him. Or killed him. (cited in Brownmiller, 1976, p.407).

People always say you know ‘time heals all wounds’, ‘things get better with age’, et cetera. I hate that fucker more today than I did when it happened to me. (original emphasis, cited in Brownmiller, p.407)

Feelings of anxiety are also common responses for sexually abused individuals, and for women they are often manifested as feelings of vulnerability around other people, especially men (Feinauer & Hippolite, 1987; Resick & Ellis, 1982). Many survivors of rape may also experience disruptions in interpersonal relationships (Crome & McCabe,
Because victims of rape lose trust in the people around them, this can result in difficulties in forming intimate relationships with others and a low tolerance of intimacy (Crome & McCabe, 1995).

Women who are strip-searched in prisons report similar experiences. In a 1989 study with fourteen Northern Ireland female prisoners who had been strip-searched, it was suggested that strip-searches were damaging to women’s self esteem, psychological well-being and sexuality (UCASS, 1989). Not only did women report feeling extremely humiliated during strip-searches, but they also experienced a range of emotions following the strip-searches, such as anger, low self-esteem and fear of authority (UCASS, 1989). Anxiety was also a common response to being strip-searched, and it contributed to women feeling restless and being unable to concentrate on everyday things like conversations or reading a book (UCASS, 1989).

**Flashbacks and nightmares**

Amongst victims of rape, repetitive phenomena such as flashbacks and nightmares are also frequent (Crome & McCabe, 1995; Mezey & Taylor, 1988). Although such symptoms are most frequently experienced within the first few months following the incident, they can persist for years to come (Mezey & Taylor, 1988).

Likewise, women who are strip-searched in prisons may also experience repetitive phenomena such as recurring flashbacks, nightmares and sleep disturbances (Pereira, 2001; UCASS, 1989). In the words of one inmate:
Sometimes flashbacks of [the guards] stripping me struck my consciousness like lightning, sending streaks of shock, fear and emotional pain through my whole body, so that I momentarily shivered as my body contracted inwards…[T]he new images in my mind were scenes from some sexual hell…in my mind, I’d get a vision of how [a passerby] would look in prison…naked, legs spread, bent over, having to part her buttocks for a group of guards to look at…my eyes would close, trying to shut the repulsive image out. (cited in Ewart, 1995, pp.29-31).

As the above statement indicates, strip-searches may negatively impact some women and produce repeated flashbacks of strip-searching long after these incidents have stopped. Such flashbacks and visions are not only intrusive, but also appear very disturbing for the women who experience them.

Helplessness and loss of control

Feinauer and Hippolite (1987, p.253) found that many victims of rape feel a sense of helplessness following the incident, with some reporting that they feel as though they have permanently lost an important part of themselves. Many women reported feeling as though the incident of rape took away the control they had over their bodies and their immediate environment and some women compensated for such loss by engaging in over-controlling and compulsive behaviors (Feinauer & Hippolite, 1987). As the authors conclude, feelings of losing control form the biggest barrier to women’s rehabilitation because the victims cannot move beyond the traumatic experience until they feel they have recovered that control over their environment (Feinauer & Hippolite, 1987, p.254).
Similarly, the experience of being strip-searched has also been associated with a loss of control over one’s body and immediate environment. According to Carlen (1998), strip-searches reinforce women’s feelings of subordination by taking away the control over their immediate environment. Lutze (2003, p.194) argues that strip-searching reinforces the system’s power over women by reminding them that they can be searched at any time, and that they have no control over what happens to them during a search. The words of the following two inmates clearly describe their response to being strip-searched:

I was never allowed to forget that, being a prisoner, *even my body was not my own*. It was horrible to be touched by unfriendly hands, yet I was compelled to submit – to be undressed and searched. (Cited in Carlen, 1998, p.43, emphasis added)

I have never in my life experienced such total abuse…I felt that the prison system was utterly *denying me the right to have any control over anything at all, not even my own body*. Not even my own body (cited in Ewart, 1995, p.27, emphasis added).

These statements indicate the degree to which some women may experience strip-searching as a loss of power and control over their bodies. These women experienced strip-searches not as a routine security measure, but as a violation and abuse of their bodies by the prison system. Therefore, similar to rape, strip-searching needs to be
examined from a gendered perspective because it is experienced by some women as an assault on their bodies.

Aretxaga (2001a, 2001b) connects the power and control that are evident in rape situations to strip-searching, arguing that women who are strip-searched are inscribed with the same messages of gender subordination and worthlessness. In discussing a mass strip-search that took place in 1992 at a Northern Ireland women’s prison, Aretxaga (2001a; 2001b) explains how the riot gear worn by prison guards as well as the use of force combined to create a “fantasy of rape”, where (in addition to male guards) female officers acted as an extension of masculinity, and thus (re)created the situation of a heterosexual rape. In the words of two inmates:

They came into the wing, a lot of screws, both male and female, all dressed in black, with shields, helmets, visors in the helmets, padding in elbow and knees, you couldn’t distinguish men from women (Carol, cited in Aretxaga, 2001a, p.9).

All day long these screams of anguish came from the cells and I had to sit and listen to what the women were going through, [sic] helpless to do anything about it. The male screws stood laughing and taunting the women and were in the wing while these women were being raped. It was nerve wracking waiting and knowing that they would eventually get to me (Karen, cited in Aretxaga, 2001a, p.10).
Although Aretxaga’s (2001a) research was situated in a different cultural and political context, it is still relevant to a discussion of strip-searching practices in Australia because it critically examines the use of strip-searches on women and situates strip-searching within a context of gender control. Although the riot gear used by prison guards during the mass strip-search of 1992 significantly contributed to women’s fear for safety and uncertainty because it created a militaristic scene (Aretxaga, 2001), it was clear that many of the women involved feared being strip-searched and associated strip-searching with sexual assault:

You feel as if you were nothing, you feel degraded. It’s like a rape of some kind. They are ripping the bra and the panties off you, you felt like crying, you felt like rolling back in a ball and getting into the corner and never coming out of there again! (Brenda, cited in Aretxaga, 2001a, p.15).

This is also consistent with Goffman’s (1961, p.28) study on “total institutions”, where he argues that intrusive methods like strip-searches, or “interpersonal contaminations”, disfigure an inmate’s sense of individuality and identity, break their sense of “self” and their voice, and transform an individual prisoner into a mere number in the prison environment that is easier to manage and control. Many prisoners have expressed the feelings that their bodies are used “like a weapon to penalize us, with the intention of making us collapse under pressure” (Cited in McCulloch & George, forthcoming).

From the available literature, it appears that some women may perceive strip-searching as a loss of control because they are unable to have a say over when they will be strip-
searched and by whom. Because inmates can be searched at any time and against their free will, many of them may feel as though they have no control over what happens to their bodies or over their immediate environment. This is similar to victims of rape, who may also experience feelings of helplessness and lacking control following the incident (Feinauer & Hippolite, 1987). This is a significant similarity because it highlights the negative implications of strip-searching on women, and the feelings of powerlessness that both victims of rape and women who are strip-searched experience.

**Behavioural patterns**

Behavioural patterns to rape and strip-searching can involve a range of responses (Crome & McCabe, 1995). This analysis focused on sexual dysfunctions, violence and self-harm, and alcohol and illicit drug use.

**Sexual dysfunctions**

Sexual dysfunctions are a common behavioural response in victims of rape, with sexual dissatisfaction significantly decreasing post-rape (Feldman-Summers, Gordon & Meagher, 1979). According to Feldman-Summers et al (1979), sexual dysfunctions in victims of sexual assault are only evident for those behaviors that were likely to be involved in the incident itself (e.g. intercourse), but not for actions that are usually excluded from sexual assault (e.g. affectionate acts like kissing).

Research has indicated that women who have been strip-searched in prisons may also experience sexual dysfunctions which usually arise from feelings of disgust towards
one’s own body (Ewart, 1995). Some women reported feeling self-conscious about their body long after the strip-searching was over, while others reported feeling detached from their body, and seeing it as worthless (UCASS, 1989). For some prisoners, strip-searching can significantly impair sexuality and self-esteem:

…I was surprised to find a strong feeling of revulsion for my own body. The first time in my life I had ever felt such a thing. I could not touch my genital area, or my breasts. It felt as if my body was totally defiled, filthy. It felt like bruised garbage. It was just a glob of ugly skin and bone which anybody was allowed to abuse. (Ewart, 1995, p.29).

Because inmates are required to be naked during a strip-search, this may increase feelings of vulnerability in some women who feel helpless and defenseless during the process:

You feel so vulnerable when you are naked, you expose yourself in every way.
You were nearly crying when you knew you were going to be strip-searched.
(Brenda, cited in Aretxaga, 2001a, p.15).

Such statements indicate the vulnerability and powerlessness that some women may feel during strip-searches. This is, according to Aretxaga (2001a, p.15), how strip-searches are used by prisons to subject women to humiliation and inscribe feelings of subordination through controlling their bodies and subjecting them to a process that equates them to “cattle in a market”. This may then have significant consequences for women’s behaviour both within and following release from prison (Ewart, 1995).
Violence and self-harm

As mentioned before, many victims of rape experience feelings of anger towards their perpetrator following the incident of rape (Crome & McCabe, 1995). However, because it is often difficult for the victim to direct that anger towards the source, such emotions are often directed inwards and thus lead to feelings of depression and self-destructive actions such as self-cutting (Crome & McCabe, 1995; Resick & Ellis, 1982). According to Greenspan and Samuel (1989, p.789), self-cutting is an “act of superficially lacerating the skin, usually of the wrist or forearm, with a sharp object and inducing blood flow”, and is a common behavioral response of rape victims. As the authors discovered, for many victims the action of self-cutting provides a release from the tension and anger they may feel towards their assailant (Greenspan & Samuel, 1989). Although for some victims the act of self-cutting may also reflect suicidal tendencies, for others the action of self-cutting reflects a need to relieve “overwhelming and painful tension” (Greenspan & Samuel, 1989, p.790). Therefore, the action of self-cutting may be identified as a form of a coping strategy and an indicator of some unresolved trauma and built up tension that the person seeks to release through self-cutting.

For women in prisons, self-harming behaviors are also common. Some prisoners may experience strip-searching as particularly humiliating, and this may contribute to self-harming or even suicide (Simmering & Diamond, 1996). As one former inmate explains, women cope with the trauma of being strip-searched in different ways, but mostly in a harmful and dangerous manner:
[Female inmates] deal with the retraumatising differently for example, some shut down – desensitize themselves; some will self-harm – just last week a woman after being strip-searched slashed up quite badly and was rushed for treatment. Other women have severe flashbacks at night in their cells [but] they have no support and are also at risk of self-harm and suicide. (Penny, cited in Russo, 1999, p.20).

Issues of previous trauma and self-cutting were also evident in the case involving Paula Richardson, a 23-year-old Indigenous woman who committed suicide whilst incarcerated at the Metropolitan Women’s Correctional Centre in Victoria (Heffey, 2002). Paula had a history of sexual abuse, and she was raped just prior to being imprisoned (Heffey, 2002). Six weeks before she committed suicide, Paula was forcibly strip-searched on the suspicion of concealing contraband by four prison officers, two of whom were male (Heffey, 2002). One of the male officers used a knife to cut through Paula’s clothes and underwear and reveal the contraband item, which was a soft-drink can. Following the search, Paula spoke to her parents on the phone, and kept saying “they’ve done it again, they’ve done it again” (McCulloch & George, forthcoming).

Two days after this incident Paula slashed her wrists (McCulloch & George, forthcoming) and she was described as “acting very child-like” and her behaviour as “causing concern” to the staff (Heffey, 2002, par. 19). Six weeks later Paula hung herself with a shower curtain following yet another violent outburst (Heffey, 2002). The coroner who investigated her death concluded that the forced strip-search was “unnecessary and
invasive and an inappropriate way of dealing with the problem” and questioned why a simple pat down search was not conducted by the officers to recover the soft drink can that Paula concealed (Heffey, 2002, par. 21).

This case illustrates that imprisoned women, in addition to dealing with a prison sentence, may also often be coping with past traumas of sexual or physical abuse (ADCQ, 2006; Easteal, 2001), which in turn may be exacerbated by physical contact with prison staff members, particularly if they are male (Girshick, 2003). As a former prisoner indicated above, some women may self-harm in order to cope with the memory of being strip-searched, and yet they are given no assistance or support from the prison staff (Easteal, 2001; Russo, 1999). In addition, as Girshick (2003, p.111) explains, suicide attempts by inmates are often evident in prisons where there is a high level of control over their lives. Therefore, attempts of suicide and self-harm may indicate a cry for help on behalf of the prisoner. This questions the effectiveness of strip-searching as a precautionary and preventative measure in women’s prisons, as it only aims to deter women from violence yet fails to address the reasons behind women’s violence.

*Alcohol and illicit drug use*

Alcohol and illicit drug use have also been found to be a common behavioural response in rape victims. Burnam et al (1988) found that victims of sexual assault were more likely than non-victims to develop alcohol dependence or drug abuse following the incident of rape. In addition, a 1981 study found that women with a history of alcohol abuse were less likely to recover from rape than victims who did not have these problems prior to
being raped (Frank, Turner, Stewart, Jacob & West, 1981). This suggests that alcohol and illicit drug use are negatively implicated with rape, and that each factor may contribute and exacerbate the other.

Likewise, strip-searching has also been associated with increased drug-taking behaviors by women who try to emotionally ‘shut down’ by using illicit drugs. High levels of both illicit drug use (Denton, 1994; Hockings, Young, Falconer & O’Rourke, 2002; Kilroy, 2001; QDCS, 2004) and alcohol dependence (e.g. Girshick, 2003) have been documented within women’s prisons. Girshick (2003, p.110-114) discusses how drug use may often reflect a coping mechanism by women who are abused in prison and wish to induce a state of “numbness” and regain a degree of control over their thoughts. Cook and Davies (1999) support this theory, arguing that strip-searches are not only ineffective at preventing drugs from entering prisons, but may also encourage drug taking by women who find these searches to be intrusive and humiliating. Likewise, some women may also use drugs to escape emotional pain or problems, or prison violence. In the words of two inmates at Fairlea Prison:

You get used to [prison violence]. If you didn’t, you’d go under. I don’t think about what’s happened to me, except when I’m coming off dope…that’s why I can’t wait to get some more of the ‘happy stuff’. It makes you forget. (cited in Denton, 1994, p.35).
If you’re stoned you’re not there. Being stoned gives you a nice warm feeling, so when they’re doing it to you, you’re not there, it’s just a shell. I’m still that little girl trapped in the nightmare. (cited in Denton, 1994, p.36).

Clearly this suggests that some drug-taking behaviour by women may be attributed to prison violence and memories of past trauma. Similarly, if strip-searches are experienced by some women as a form of violence (ADCQ, 2006), then a proportion of the drug-problem in prisons may also be attributable to the presence of strip-searching. Penny, a former inmate, partially blames strip-searches for the drug use of incarcerated women:

Strip-searching does not stop drugs getting in to prison it only creates a bigger reason for the women to use drugs by continually sexually abusing them. (cited in Russo, 1999, p.20)

Therefore, it appears that just as victims of rape may turn to alcohol and drug use following the incident of rape, so may women in prisons turn to illicit drugs as a way of blocking out the memory of being strip-searched and thus regain a degree of control over their thoughts and feelings.

The available literature on imprisoned women suggests that strip-searching may have negative impacts on women’s psychological well-being. The findings of these various studies raise a number of questions about the arguments put forward by the Queensland Department of Corrective Services (2004) to support strip-searching practices in women’s prisons in Queensland.
3.3 IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this analysis are reflected in some recent feminist writings that have articulated the strip-searching of female prisoners as a form of sexual assault and rape (Aretxaga, 2001a; Carlen, 1998; George, 1992). From such a perspective, strip-searching is viewed as a method of controlling the prison population because it is experienced by women as a violation of their body and as a form of rape, thus producing in women similar psychological responses as in rape victims (Aretxaga, 2001a; Sisters Inside, 2005).

The literature reviewed in the present chapter lends support to these theories, as studies on the experiences of female rape victims and women who have been strip-searched in prisons reveal similarities in psychological and behavioural responses. Both victims of rape and women who are strip-searched in prisons may experience a range of similar psychological and behavioural responses, such as anger, anxiety, depression, self-harming behaviors, illicit drug use, sexual dysfunctions and flashbacks.

Although strip-searches and rape take place in a different context and are perceived in general society as being distinct, they need to be examined from a perspective of gender control because they both appear to have an inherent quality of dominance through humiliation and control over a body. Strip-searching and rape appear to be similar in that they both take away the control women have over their bodies and their environment, and they both subject women to a humiliating process that violates the social norms of
modesty which many women are conditioned to value and follow in society (Carlen, 1998). As a result, women who are repeatedly strip-searched may experience a range of negative psychological symptoms that may persist for a significant period of time.

Although there is a lack of systematic research into the experiences of women who have been strip-searched in prisons, the available literature indicates that strip-searching may negatively impact some women and may contribute to prisoner violence and illicit drug use. Subjecting women to a procedure that appears to be experienced as a violation of one’s body and that may reduce women’s self esteem and humiliate them may ultimately impair these women’s rehabilitation aspects and lead them through a cycle of re-offending and imprisonment that is difficult to stop.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has drawn upon a range of literature and research in order to critically examine the continued use of strip-searching in women’s prisons in Queensland and the justifications for the use of this practice as set out by the Queensland Department of Corrective Services. In Queensland prisons, strip-searching has been used as an essential prison security strategy for a number of years. Its main aim is to maintain prison security and staff and inmate safety through the detection and prevention of contraband items on prisoners and visitors (QDCS, 2004). Recently however, strip-searching practices in women’s Queensland prisons have been placed under increased scrutiny following the release of the ADCQ (2006) report that raised the issue of strip-searches in women’s prisons, and some of the problems associated with strip-searching. This analysis sought to extend upon the findings of the ADCQ (2006) report in relation to strip-searching, through analysing both strip-searching practices in women’s prisons in Queensland and Victoria and through examining the literature on the negative impacts of strip-searches on imprisoned women.

A critical discourse analysis of a Consultation Paper on searches (QDCS, 2004) indicated how language is manipulated in official discourse to portray strip-searching as an important contraband control strategy and prisoners as violent offenders and drug addicts. In the Consultation Paper, the use of strip-searching was justified by appealing to the need for community safety and the reprimand and control of the prison population who
are characterized by their criminality while the situational, environmental and educational factors that lead to their imprisonment are ignored.

In the second chapter, the analysis of the use of strip-searches and violence in women’s prisons and the critical literature regarding prisoner violence and drug use highlighted some critical issues. Contrary to official discourse where prison violence and drug use are portrayed as a choice, an examination of literature indicated that the reasons behind women’s drug taking behaviors and violence are usually complex and therefore cannot be resolved with a solitary emphasis on deterrence. Women who enter prisons usually have pre-existing drug addictions and a history of sexual or physical abuse. These women are likely to be re-traumatised by repeated strip-searching, and may be more likely to increase their drug-taking behaviors, become violent towards others, or engage in self-harming behaviors as coping strategies. Thus, strip-searching may directly contribute to the problem of illicit drug use and violence in women’s prisons, rather than prevent them.

More importantly, a quantitative analysis of strip-searching data from women’s prisons in Queensland and Victoria indicated that very little contraband is ever recovered from inmates and visitors. Although these findings may be explained as evidence of the effectiveness of strip-searching, a review of recent studies on prisoner drug use reveal that illicit drug use is still widespread in women’s prisons (Denton, 1994; Kilroy, 2000). In addition, a quantitative analysis of violent incidents in women’s prisons in Queensland and Victoria indicated a significant number of self-harming incidents and attempts of suicide by prisoners. This information contradicts the argument that strip-searching is
effectively used to minimize incidents of violence and self-harm from prisons by intercepting the flow of contraband and dangerous weapons into the prison environment, as such items still seem to be entering the prison environment and are used by inmates to harm others or themselves. Such findings question the effectiveness of strip-searching at detecting contraband on inmates and visitors, and may indicate a need for a more efficient contraband and security strategy. Recent technological advances have made such a move possible (Smith, 1995), and this may need to be considered by the Queensland Department of Corrective Services.

Finally, the analysis of strip-searches on female prisoners, and similarities between the experience of being strip-searched and the experience of being raped also highlighted concerns that have not been addressed in official documents on strip-searching. The available literature indicates some degree of similarity in experiences, with both groups reporting a similar range of negative psychological experiences. The available literature indicates that strip-searching can be experienced by some women as a loss of control and a demonstration of prison’s dominance over prisoners’ bodies. Although taking place in a different context, both strip-searching and rape appear to have an intrinsic trait of dominance through humiliation; the action of forcing an individual to submit to a strip-search is experienced by some women as akin to being forced to submit to rape. In both instances women may feel as though they are relinquishing control of their bodies and their actions and allowing the most intimate parts of their bodies to be examined by strangers. Some literature indicates that such an experience is not only humiliating and
unsettling for women, but that it may also contribute to the drug taking and violent behaviours by inmates.

In line with these findings, the present study concludes that strip-searching has significantly negative implications for women in prisons, and that it may exacerbate the pre-existing psychological trauma and drug addictions that women often have prior to incarceration. Combined with the fact that strip-searching has very low rates of contraband detection despite the findings that drug use and violence are prevalent in women’s prisons, these findings contradict official explanations for strip-searching and indicate a need for a more systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of strip-searching as a contraband prevention and security measure. The Queensland Government needs to examine and incorporate any viable alternative to strip-searching in prisons; to do otherwise would constitute not only a serious breach of duty but also a blunt disregard for prisoner welfare and rehabilitation.
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**Legislation**

*Corrective Services Act 2006 (Qld)*

*Corrective Services Act 2000 (Qld)*