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# HOMOSEXUALITY: A MODE OF ADAPTATION IN A PRISON FOR WOMEN

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## THE PROBLEM

Compared to the sociological literature on men's prisons, little is known about the women's prison, and virtually no systematically collected empirical data have been published. Sociological investigations of prisons for men have in recent years been conducted from a theoretical perspective which views the behavior of inmates as a response to the material, social and psychological pains of imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> It has been con-

sistently reported that one response of male prisoners to these deprivations is the establishment of a social system militating against the process of degradation, mortification of the self, depersonalization and anomie. In response to these deprivations and pains inmates come to play certain roles, and these roles come to constitute the inmate social system to which the new prisoner adapts. The rules and maxims covering these adaptations constitute the so-called inmate code. New inmates find information available from inmate *politicians* and scarce goods are available from *merchants*. Rationalizations are provided for criminal behavior; solutions for getting scarce goods and services are made known; and methods of dealing with the staff and for interacting with fellow inmates are detailed. The code provides a philosophy for doing time and the inmate social organization provides the mechanism for implementing the maxims of the code. It has, however, become increasingly apparent that prisoner behavior is rooted in more than just the conditions of confinement. In a number of studies the impact of the inmate culture and degree of support of the inmate code have been shown to vary over time and according to type of prisoner.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Gresham M. Sykes and Sheldon L. Messinger, "The Inmate Social System" in *Theoretical Studies in Social Organization of the Prison* New York: Social Science Research Council, Pamphlet 15 (March 1960), pp. 5-19; Erving Goffman, "On the

Characteristics of Total Institutions," in Donald R. Cressey, editor, *The Prison*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961, Chapters 1 and 2; and Richard A. Cloward, "Social Control in the Prison," *Theoretical Studies in Social Organization of the Prison*, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-48.

<sup>2</sup> See Stanton Wheeler, "Socialization in Correctional Communities," *American Soci-*

These studies have prompted consideration of other factors in accounting for prisoner behavior. One theory which has been advanced to explain discrepancies in support of the inmate code and internalization of inmate culture focuses on the pre-prison characteristics and experiences of inmates.<sup>3</sup> Irwin and Cressey have recently argued that there are a number of subcultures in the prison community, reflecting the presence of different types of prisoners.<sup>4</sup> Salient factors related to past experience seem to be the history of involvement in criminal activity, the extent of experience in "doing time" and the influence of latent culture and latent identities which inmates bring to prison with them.<sup>5</sup>

*ological Review*, 26 (October, 1961), pp. 706-711; Daniel Glaser and John R. Stratton, "Measuring Inmate Change in Prison," in Donald R. Cressey, editor, *The Prison*, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-390; Peter G. Garabedian, "Social Roles and Processes of Socialization in the Prison Community," *Social Problems*, 11 (Fall, 1963), pp. 139-152; and Gresham M. Sykes, "Men, Merchants, and Toughs," *Social Problems*, 4 (October, 1956), p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> This emphasis may be found in the work of Clarence Schrag, "Some Foundations for a Theory of Correction," in Donald R. Cressey, editor, *The Prison*, *op. cit.*, pp. 346-357; and Donald L. Garrity, "The Prison as a Rehabilitation Agency," in Donald R. Cressey, editor, *The Prison*, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-380.

<sup>4</sup> Donald R. Cressey and John Irwin, "Thieves, Convicts, and Inmate Culture," *Social Problems*, 10 (Fall, 1962), pp. 142-155; see also Lloyd W. McCorkle and Richard R. Korn, "Resocialization Within Walls," *The Annals*, 293 (May, 1954), pp. 88-89.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of latent culture is described by Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, "Latent Culture: A Note on the Theory of Latent Social Roles," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 5 (September, 1960), pp. 304-313; see also Alvin W. Gouldner, "Cosmopolitans and Locals: To-

The bases for prisoner behavior are now seen to be the kinds of deprivations, limitations and hardships posed by confinement, coupled with the pre-prison backgrounds of the inmates. For any prison the content and degree of support given to an inmate code (or the number of inmates making adaptations of various kinds) should provide clues as to the kinds of needs which are being denied to that population.

From this perspective we shall describe a mode of adaptation to the pains of confinement utilized by many of the inmates in the largest prison for women in the United States. Specifically, we shall direct attention to the question of whether the behavior of female prisoners is similar to, or different from, that of male prisoners. If differences are found, to what extent are they due to differential sex roles in the free society or to dissimilarities in the physical, legal and social deprivations of prison experienced by women when compared with prisons for men?

During the study various sources of information were utilized. Demographic and background data were obtained through analysis of the record files of 832 inmates, not all of whom were confined at the same time. Over a period of sixteen months repeated interviews were conducted with 45 inmates. These individual interviews provided basic information necessary to conceptualize the process and varieties of adaptive behavior. An anonymous 69-item questionnaire was administered to 293 inmates (a 45 percent random sample of the population).

ward an Analysis of Latent Social Roles I," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 2 (December, 1957), pp. 281-306.

Toward the end of the study an anonymous questionnaire was administered to all staff members who had sustained and direct contact with inmates. Throughout this period we also attended meetings of the disciplinary committee and held private discussions with staff members.

#### IMPACT OF THE TOTAL INSTITUTION

It is a trait of Western culture to be more protective toward females and consequently to manifest a general reluctance to submit them to measures deemed appropriate for their allegedly more aggressive and dangerous male counterparts. Women are far less often arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to prison than are men.<sup>6</sup> The impact of imprisonment is, we believe, more severe for females than for males because it is more unusual. Female inmates generally have not come up through the "sandlots of crime," in that they are not as likely as men to have had experience in training schools or reformatories. Statistics on the prior commitment records of male and female prisoners in the state in 1963 indicate that 31 percent of the females had had no prior commitments compared to 11 percent for males. In our own data we found that of the 293 inmates who filled out our questionnaire, only 15 percent had been committed to a juvenile training school and 65 percent had never had a prior adult commitment to prison. While jail terms, especially for prostitution and petty theft, are fairly frequent, there are

many for whom long-term confinement in an institution for felons represents a completely new experience.

During their first weeks in the institution most inmates report two major emotions: surprise and fear. Most of the women are pleasantly surprised at the physical appearance of the institution and the demeanor of the staff and other inmates:

It's less difficult than I assumed, it's not like home but it's going to be easy compared to how I thought it would be. It's neater, cleaner, you got combs, towels, etc. If you just have patience. I got time. The girls as a whole are not rough or tough, they've got more heart than the people I associated with on the outside. We can talk to each other, knowing it will only go that far. I'll tell you what scared me—that rolled wire. I said, "Take one last look" [at the outside], but the inside looked better than the parks in the city.

Being frightened is also characteristic of most new arrivals: they fear being mistreated by staff or other inmates, the rigors of prison life, and suffer from uncertain expectations, including not knowing how long they will be locked up and how their families and friends will react to their imprisonment. In addition, there is another concern that becomes particularly serious for a woman in prison—the severing of ties with her children.<sup>7</sup> The male prisoner can serve time with the knowledge that, although the family may experience great difficulty while he is not the breadwinner, the wife can care for the children. The confined mother,

<sup>6</sup> Women account for only 3.6 percent of imprisoned adult felons in state institutions and 3.8 percent of federal prisoners. "Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions 1961," *National Prisoner Statistics*, No. 30 (August, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Sixty-eight percent of the inmates are mothers; more than half have minor children. *Women Prisoners and Their Families*, Serapio R. Zalba, Department of Welfare and of Corrections, State of California (in press), pp. 27-32.

however, loses her ability to fill what is, in our society, her most important role. Her concern is not only with separation from her children but also with how they will be cared for while the husband works; moreover, she fears that the children may be taken under official care or the husband may look for another female to take over the maternal role. The impact of separation from family is evident in response to a question asking about the aspects of prison life to which the women found it most difficult to adjust.<sup>8</sup> The frustration does not appreciably lessen over time, as may be seen in Table I. It is in regard to coping with these fears and deprivations that women are especially ill-prepared. Many of them have played the generally dependent role characteristic of women in our society and the removal of emotional support

<sup>8</sup> Some respondents could not be coded because they marked more than one answer. Of the 44 who did this, 27 selected "absence of home and family," among their other choices.

which has been provided by parents, husbands or lovers is a shattering experience. Upon arrival at the prison many inmates immediately turn to the staff for information as well as material goods.<sup>9</sup>

The reception program offered by the institution has, however, been

<sup>9</sup> The women can bring in with them or have sent in: coats, jackets, raincoats (all with "no quilting, padding or fur"), sweaters ("no turtle neck, V-neck or tight slipover"), gowns or pajamas, bathrobes ("no quilting or padding"), shoes ("low heels, bedroom, thongs, tennis"), "simple costume jewelry—earrings, necklaces, scatter pins, bracelets," non-electric clocks, dark glasses, unopened packages of cigarettes, suitcases (no larger than 18" × 26"), unfinished knitting and light hand sewing material, tooth brush, hair rollers, etc. Thus the complete stripping of all personal possessions that occurs in prisons for men does not take place. The pains of the admission experience are perhaps mitigated slightly by permitting girls to have these items. Since all inmates can have these belongings, and because so many articles are permitted, there is no evidence that we know of which suggests any organized merchandising of these goods by inmates.

TABLE I  
INMATE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "WHAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT ASPECT OF ADJUSTMENT," CORRELATED WITH TIME AT THE INSTITUTION (PER CENT)

Most Difficult Aspect of Adjustment	Less than 6 months	6 months to 1 year	1 year or more	Total
Rules and regulations	5	6	6	5
Other inmates	9	10	19	13
Lack of privacy	6	8	9	8
Custodial officials	2	3	4	3
Absence of home & family	43	42	38	42
Absence of social life and friends on the outside	11	7	6	8
Nothing, adjustment is easy	5	3	4	4
Other	4	3	6	4
More than one answer	16	17	8	13
Total	100% 29(82)	100% 31(88)	100% 40(108)	100(282)*

\* No answer to one or the other question = 14 cases.

Chi-square = 61.9, significant at more than 99.95.

unable to meet the needs of new commitments. The social distance between staff and inmate and the severe limitations on the number of professional clinical personnel make it difficult for inmates to get from the staff the kinds of information, support and guidance they especially need during the initial confinement period. These inadequacies coupled with the need to deal with the pains of separation from family, the limitations on freedom of choice and activity, the stigma resulting from the process of status degradation, the apprehension about length of confinement due to indeterminate sentencing laws, and the lack of experience in doing "big time," are the pains of imprisonment to which the inmate must adjust. Male prisoners have adjusted in characteristic ways, and in the next section we shall discuss their adaptations and those of female prisoners.

#### INMATE SOLIDARITY

In the institution we studied there is little evidence of the differentiated inmate types and degree of social solidarity reported in studies of prisons for men. In all interviews inmates reported that informing on other inmates was characteristic of almost the entire inmate population.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The prison "rat" has always been present in prisons for men, but efforts have been made by inmates to levy punitive sanctions against informers. In the women's prison the label of "snitch" was applied to almost the entire inmate population at one time or another. For some discussions of the "rat" role in prisons for men, see Elmer H. Johnson, "Sociology of Confinement: Assimilation and the Prison 'Rat,'" *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, 51 (January-February, 1961), pp. 528-533; S. Kirson Weinberg, "Aspects of the Prison's Social Structure," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 47

TABLE II  
PROPORTION OF 293 FEMALE PRISONERS APPROVING INMATE LOYALTY ITEMS

Item	%	N
1. Two inmates, who are planning an escape, ask one of their close inmate friends, Brown, to distract the supervisor's attention so that they will have a chance to get out of her sight. Brown refuses, stating that she doesn't want to get involved.		
Agree with Brown	88	258
2. Inmates Brown and Henry are planning an escape. They threaten inmate Smith with a beating unless she steals some rope for them from the maintenance shop where she works. She thinks they mean business. While she is trying to smuggle the rope out, she is caught by a supervisor and is accused of trying to escape. She may have her parole date changed unless she describes the whole situation. Smith can avoid this by blaming Brown and Henry, but she keeps quiet and takes the punishment herself.		
Agree with Smith	39	116

In the questionnaire survey, descriptions of problematic situations, in which one alternative was an affirmation of inmate solidarity,<sup>11</sup> were endorsed in this manner by only 41 and 12 percent respectively.

(March, 1942), pp. 217-226; and Gresham M. Sykes, *Society of Captives*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958, pp. 87-90.

<sup>11</sup> These items were developed by Peter Garabedian in his study, *Western Penitentiary: A Study in Social Organization*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1959, pp. 51-52, and by

Of six items measuring elements of the "inmate code,"<sup>12</sup> only two were strongly endorsed, three were endorsed by about half of the inmates and one was agreed to by only a fifth of the sample. These six items formed a Guttman Scale indicating that the items were perceived as a dimension of response in a meaningful manner. The scale is shown in Table III.

Stanton Wheeler, "Role Conflict in Correctional Communities," in Donald R. Cressey, editor, *The Prison, op. cit.*, p. 232. Wheeler found that 70 percent of the male inmates in his sample approved of the inmate keeping quiet.

<sup>12</sup> The six items were based on descriptions of the inmate code by Gresham M. Sykes and Sheldon L. Messinger, "The Inmate Social System," *op. cit.*, pp. 5-19; Lloyd E. Ohlin, "The Theory of Individualization in Treatment and Institutional Practice" (mimeo) paper presented at the

When the scale scores were cross-tabulated with time in prison, time before release and number of prior commitments and offense, no significant correlations were obtained. In studies of prisons for men, Wheeler and Glaser and Stratton found that orientation to conventional norms was highest for those who had been in prison only a short time and for those near the end of their terms. We found no evidence of either a U-shaped curve of normative orientation or a linear progression of increasing support of criminal norms as length of

11th Annual Institute of the Illinois Academy of Criminology, Chicago, Illinois (April, 1959); Peter Garabedian, *op. cit.*; and Richard R. Korn and Lloyd W. McCorkle, *Criminology and Penology*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1959, pp. 512-530.

TABLE III  
PROPORTION OF 293 FEMALE PRISONERS ENDORSING INMATE CODE

Item	%	N
1. In her dealings with the staff the inmate should stick up for what she feels is right and not let the staff set her standards or morals for her. (Positive)	92	264
2. When the inmates stick together it is a lot easier to do time. (Positive)	77	213
3. The best way to do time is to grin and bear it and not let the staff know that anything is getting you down. (Positive)	61	173
4. In some situations, it is all right to inform on another inmate. (Negative endorsement)	57	163
5. In prison, a good rule to follow is to share any extra goods with your friends. (Positive)	56	157
6. There are basically just two kinds of people in the world, those in the know and those who are suckers. (Positive)	22	63

These items constitute a Guttman Scale with a coefficient of reproducibility of .88 and a marginal reproducibility of .68. The cutting points were established as follows:

	%	N
Strong rejection	15	(44)
Moderate rejection	32	(93)
Moderate endorsement	37	(108)
Strong Endorsement	16	(48)
	100	(293)

time served increases.<sup>13</sup> The most important factor related to degree of support of the code was, in fact, a variable which took into account experience outside of prison—age at first arrest. As can be seen in Table IV, women first arrested after the age of twenty-five less often endorsed the code than women whose first officially recorded contact with the police came earlier in life.

Length of involvement in criminal activity, as measured by age at first arrest, seems to be more important in accounting for the attitudes of these female prisoners than the experience of serving time in prison—what Clemmer has referred to as *prisonization*. The importance of pre-prison experiences evident here will also be noted in the sections dealing with inmate roles to follow. To complete this brief discussion of the contrast between male and female prison communities, it should be noted that, consistent with the lack of support for the in-

mate code, few inmates were found to play the roles of *merchants* or *politicians* characteristic of prisons for men. In addition, there were virtually no women who played the role of the *tough* or *gorilla*.

That female prisoners do not endorse more strongly norms which characterize the male prison community and, in particular, that they do not feel bound to maintain group solidarity by rules prohibiting informing, may, however, indicate more than just a low degree of cohesion in the female prison community and absence of resulting role types. Lack of support of these norms does not preclude the possibility of consensus on different norms. There may be little support of this code because such maxims are not as relevant for women. The components of the code may more accurately reflect male needs for status, independence, autonomy, and masculine self-image. (It should be noted that a number of sociologists, including the authors, are now questioning the assumption that most male prison communities are characterized by even a moderate degree of group solidarity.) The culture and social structure of prisons for men seems to reflect a wider variety of pains of im-

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the view that internalization of criminal norms is related to length of time served, see Donald Clemmer, "Imprisonment as a Source of Criminality," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, 41 (September-October, 1950), pp. 311-319. For an opposing view see Garrity, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-380.

TABLE IV  
DEGREE OF ENDORSEMENT OF INMATE CODE AND AGE AT FIRST ARREST  
(PER CENT)

	Age at First Arrest		
	17 or younger	18 to 25	26 or older
Strong rejection	11	6	31
Moderate rejection	29	31	33
Moderate endorsement	39	46	24
Strong endorsement	21	17	12
	100	100	100
	(72)	(125)	(91)

Chi square = 30.25, significant at more than 99.95.



prisonment than is the case in the women's prison. There are homosexuals in male prisons and norms surrounding homosexuality, but there are other important concerns and these are articulated in the roles of *merchant*, *politician*, *tough*, *right guy*, and *square john*. Emotional deprivation and lack of experience in fending for oneself combine in the women's prison to promote one predominant compensatory response, that of homosexual involvement. Inmate roles in the female prison community are thus differentiated primarily along sexual lines. In the sections to follow we shall describe the process of *turning out*, the dynamics of prison love affairs, the principal homosexual roles and the extent to which this type of adaptation has been made.

#### THE PREVALENCE OF HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Estimates of the prevalence of homosexuality in the prison vary widely. Official records identify 19 percent of the population as homosexual. In the survey of staff members, more than half of the respondents esti-

mated between 30 and 70 percent of the inmates "have sexual affairs while in prison." Estimates were higher on the inmate questionnaire, with 69 percent of the respondents estimating that between 30 and 70 percent of the girls were having homosexual affairs and an additional 7 percent estimating as high as 90 percent or more. These data, with comparative estimates made by prisoners in a medium security prison for men located in the same state, can be seen in Table V.<sup>14</sup>

In the interviews with female inmates, guesses of the extent of homo-

<sup>14</sup> In addition to our own data estimating the incidence of homosexuality among male prisoners, Donald Clemmer's study of an institution for adult male felons indicated that "... 16 percent of the sampling admitted to homosexual activity during their present incarceration. Of these 38 men, only two were partners with each other in the abnormal acts, so it is suggested that since homosexuality cannot occur singly, that the actual percentage of men engaging in this practice is 32 percent." Donald Clemmer, "Some Aspects of Sexual Behavior in the Prison Community," *Proceedings of the Eighty-Eight Annual Congress of Correction of The American Correctional Association*, Detroit, Michigan, 1958, p. 383.

TABLE V  
ESTIMATES OF PREVALENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL HOMOSEXUALITY (PER CENT)

Replies of women's prison staff and female and male inmates to the statement:

"A rough estimate of the number of women (men) who have sexual affairs at one time or another with other women (men) while in prison would be:"

Estimate of Homosexuality	Women's Prison Staff	Female Inmates	Male Inmates
5 percent or less	12	12	29
15 percent	31	12	25
30 percent	29	25	25
50 percent	14	22	12
70 percent	9	22	6
90 percent or more	5	7	3
	100(58)	100(263)	100(744)

Note: 6 staff members, 30 female inmates, and 127 male inmates refused or were unable to make an estimate.

sexuality were never less than 50 percent, with most estimating 60 to 75 percent. Individual conversations with staff members yielded similar estimates. Overall, it can be conservatively estimated that at least 50 percent of the inmates are sexually involved at least once during their prison terms. By sexually involved we mean kissing and fondling of the breasts, manual and oral stimulation of the clitoris and simulation of intercourse. Our definition of homosexuality does not include mere emotional arousal, or kissing, hand holding and embracing, when these activities are not followed by overt sexual behavior and are not seen as being sexual in intent by the participants.<sup>15</sup>

Reliable estimates of the extent of homosexual involvement of women in other institutional settings—the military, mental hospital, schools—are non-existent. However, in the outside community, data from the Kinsey Report indicate that, of their national sample, 13 percent experienced orgasm in homosexual relations, an ad-

ditional 6 percent had had homosexual experience, and another 9 percent had experienced "psychological arousal" for a total of 28 percent of the population.<sup>16</sup> Comparatively, the incidence of overt homosexual behavior in this prison is high.

#### HOMOSEXUAL ROLES

In the prison setting the total number of women involved sexually with other inmates is less interesting sociologically than the sharp distinction between those referred to by the inmates as "true" homosexuals and those identified as "jailhouse turnouts."

The *jailhouse turnout* or *J.T.O.*, in contrast to the true homosexual, has her introduction to homosexuality in jail or prison. All inmates interviewed and 80 percent of the staff who filled out the questionnaire asserted that 90 percent or more of the homosexually involved women had their first affair in jail or prison. In addition, 84 percent of the inmates and 85 percent of the staff agreed on the questionnaires that most of the homosexually involved women return to heterosexual relationships when they leave prison.

The *true homosexual* is, as defined by the inmates, a woman who was homosexual before she arrived at the institution and will be after she leaves. Incidentally, a few of the true homosexuals remain faithful to lovers on the outside and do not become involved with other inmates. Such persons would not, therefore, be included in our estimate of institutional homosexuality.

<sup>15</sup> These figures may be compared with other data that have been gathered on homosexuality among girls in youth institutions. A study by Selling, published in 1931, estimated that two percent of the population of a girl's institution were involved in an overt homosexual existence and another 40 percent engaged in behavior which involved embracing, kissing and fondling of another inmate. Lowell S. Selling, "The Pseudo Family," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 37 (September, 1931), pp. 247-253. A more recent study by Halleck and Hersko indicates that 69 percent of the girls in a training school were homosexually involved. The majority of these cases did not, however, involve breast fondling, or direct genital contact. Seymour L. Halleck and Marvin Hersko, "Homosexual Behavior in a Correctional Institution for Adolescent Girls," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, XXXII (October, 1962), pp. 911-917.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, Paul H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, Philadelphia, Pa.: W. B. Saunders Co., 1953, pp. 452-454.

Those true homosexuals who are active in prison come to the relationship with a perspective based on experience. They believe the impact of a homosexual affair is never forgotten, and they feel that they enter such relationships more for the positive features they perceive than in reaction to the negative features of confinement. It is also likely that the labels of "criminal" and "prisoner" are less traumatic for people who already have a self-conception of being stigmatized by most of the general community. As a result of homosexual affairs many of these women appear to have made adjustments in their self-conceptions which make adjustment to the pains of imprisonment less difficult. Our data indicate that among those few inmates who can be classified as prison politicians and merchants, there are a large number of true homosexuals. Like the experienced male con, they are more concerned with alleviating the material deprivations of confinement, getting a good prison job and living quarters, and doing time without attracting attention. In the following remarks a young woman who is a true homosexual playing the masculine or *butch* role, speaks with disdain of the blatant and opportunistic behavior of the jailhouse turnouts:

. . . They want companionship, they just want to play a little game with you, you know, and they LOVE you, oh, everybody loves you, God, they're in love with you. They've seen you once, but they're in love with you. They turn out right away because they need somebody to care, someone to look up to. They're afraid, and somehow a butch is sort of a protective symbol—"She'll take care of me so nobody will hurt me." They need somebody to talk to, they're lonesome. And they've been taken away from everything they love, and they sort of project

all of this love into the butch. . . . But mostly, it's just a big game with them. They're lonesome, there's nothing else to do, and I'm the closest thing they can get to a man. . . . These other ones [butch turnouts] I can't see at all—the ones that come in here with long hair and all of a sudden they're big romping butches. . . . I can respect a person that's been that way all their life and knows what's happening, but these kids that just cut their hair and think they're really hitting on something, and then they can't wait to get out on the streets to get with a dude again—they make me sick. While they're in here you'd swear to God they'd been gay their whole life. There's nothing but women in this world for them—while they're in here. They have their hair short one week and then, God, they're just too lovely the next—I mean it. One week they're my brother and the next week they're hitting on me. They swagger and drop their belt and all of a sudden they're big stuff. When really they're not. They don't feel any of this inside, they don't go through any of the emotions that a butch [true homosexual] goes through, they're not involved in this and they're gonna forget it as soon as they're out of the institution.

Whether homosexuality is learned prior to imprisonment or is restricted to the prison experience, another distinction involves the roles played by homosexuals in their affairs. These roles are represented by a combination of appearance, behavior and personality characteristics, and are found among both true homosexuals and jailhouse turnouts. The most obvious is the *butch*, *stud*, *broad*, or *drag butch*,<sup>17</sup> the aggressive, active sexual

<sup>17</sup> Neither staff nor inmates use the term *lesbian*. Staff members use the term homosexual because it is consistent with departmental directives, rule books and references to male prisoners. Inmates use more colloquial terms such as *playing*, *being together*, *making it*, and *turning out*. The term *lesbian* apparently suggests what staff and inmates agree is usually not the case

partner. Her hair is close-cropped or worn in pixie or "D.A." style; she wears no makeup; her legs are unshaven; she usually wears pedal pushers or, if a dress, the belt is worn low on the hips. Masculine gait, manner of smoking and other gestures are adopted. A variation of this is the woman who dresses femininely, but acts aggressively and plays the dominant role in her homosexual relationship. The transition to the role of butch is a dramatic manifestation of inversion of sexual role, representing such a change that a disproportionately small number of women in prison actually make it. Our personal observation is that many of the jailhouse turnouts who are butches are singularly unattractive, according to some of the criteria used to judge feminine attractiveness in our society. Many of these women are overweight or underweight, have skin disorders or appear unusually wiry or muscular.<sup>18</sup> Some of the severely unattractive women and the women possessing aggressive personality traits and inclined toward masculine habits and demeanor express themselves in the butch role when these predisposing factors are combined with the experience of imprisonment. In prison they have found that by emphasizing dissimilarity to the female role and appearance, they can attract attention from some members of their own sex.

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—a long-term definite commitment to homosexuality.

<sup>18</sup> There is, however, no evidence of any unusual physiological or anatomical features which characterize these masculine-appearing women. Physicians at the prison reported that they had observed no constitutional differences in terms of distribution and abundance of body hair, size of the clitoris, muscle distribution or any other factor.

Here they can take the initiative in both social and sexual interaction and these women find in prison a functional role they did not find outside.<sup>19</sup> The role of the butch in the prison community seems to be an effort to solve a variety of problems and conflicts of which adjustment to imprisonment is one.

The complimentary role of the butch is the *femme*, who maintains a feminine appearance and ideally plays a more submissive, passive role. Of the two, the butch appears to have a greater commitment to homosexuality. The butch changes the love object and her behavior, thereby substituting a role. The *femme* changes only the love object. It is less difficult to describe and to understand the role of the *femme* because she often does in the homosexual affair what she did in heterosexual relationships. She continues to play the role often expected of women—to be relatively more submissive and passive in sexual relations, to be dependent, and to provide housekeeping services. The role of the *femme* provides relief from the need to fend for oneself in a strange and threatening environment. This role provides for the establish-

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<sup>19</sup> For a description of the butch role among female homosexuals living in the free world, see Jane McKinnon, "I am a Homosexual Woman," in A. M. Krich, editor, *The Homosexuals*, New York: The Citadel Press, 1954, pp. 4-5. The butch role played by call girls is described by Harold Greenwald in *The Call Girl*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1958, pp. 119-122. See also, Frank S. Caprio, *Female Homosexuality*, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954, pp. 16-18. While the author has a more general point to make, an excellent discussion of the "masculine protest" can be found in Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New York: Bantam Books, 1961, pp. 379-399.

ment of supportive relationships similar to those which characterized relationships with fathers, husbands or lovers. The femme does not have to make the radical transition to a new role that the butch has made. She often comes to view herself as bisexual and she expects to resume heterosexual relations upon release—both of which militate against homosexual self-definition.

While the butch can display her role in terms of dress, mannerisms and appearance, the femme emphasizes her role largely in behavior. She walks with her arms around the butch, embraces and kisses her in public, and allows the butch to speak in her behalf.<sup>20</sup> Recently the staff has attempted to reduce these public demonstrations of affection by making inmates liable for disciplinary action. Couples flaunting their relationship are often housed in separate cottages in an effort to prevent them from seeing one another. The staff has also required 48 butches to change their hair style to a less masculine coiffure and more effort has been devoted to preventing personal (bodily) contact on the institution grounds. While there has been less visible evidence of homosexuality, these efforts, to date, have not reduced the number of homosexual involvements.

#### THE DYNAMICS OF PRISON LOVE AFFAIRS

For many girls the pressure to *turn out* begins when they enter the

receiving unit. Two types of women in particular are the object of concerted attention by the general population. The arrival of a *butch broad* causes a stir on the campus as the femmes vie for her affection. The rush is intense, and the femme makes it clear that she is available:

It's just like the outside. I flirted, I got things for her, I did her clothes, I woke her in the morning, we went to dances—the same things you do for a man on the outside. Girls are approached in the same way a man approaches a woman. He . . . she . . . looks at her and the way she looks back gives him the clue as to further action. He . . . she . . . looks at you like she wants you, a look of desire.

The rushing process includes plying the butch with love notes, candy, coffee, cigarettes and other articles, referred to as *commissary*.

This adaptation by femmes of the usual tactics employed by males in heterosexual affairs was explained by our respondents as a matter of supply and demand because there are fewer butches than femmes in the population. (Our interviews and analysis of inmate file data indicate that about one-third of the jailhouse turnout population are butch, with a somewhat higher proportion of butches among the true homosexuals.) In addition, broken love affairs sustain a supply of femmes who express great interest in the relatively small number of new butches. A twenty-year-old true homosexual butch described her reception at the institution:

When I came into the institution I didn't go after anybody. I had a bad experience on the street that was part of what got me here, and I didn't want anything to do with any more women. So I was very bitter. But I got here and all of a sudden I was getting all these kites [notes] and

<sup>20</sup> For descriptions of the butch role in a girl's school, see Halleck and Hersko, *op. cit.*, p. 912, and for the femme role see the description of the *soft mama* by Romolo Toigo, "Illegitimate and Legitimate Cultures in a Training School for Girls," *Proceedings of the Rip Van Winkle Clinic*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Summer, 1962), pp. 9-11.

I had all these girls come to me—I never went to them. They're real aggressive with a new butch, everybody wants to snatch her up before somebody else gets her. And so I looked around at some of the people I was getting messages from—I checked them out and there wasn't too much there that I wanted. But I played the field for about six weeks, and like I said, I'd get a message from a girl to please come over and see her and she'd give me cigarettes and, you know, give me everything I needed. So I'd walk her out to the field, or to the canteen, and then I dated a few girls, I took some of them to the show, but I never saw anybody that I wanted.

In other instances butches approach new arrivals, exert special attention on young, homosexually uninitiated and attractive girls, win them over and then exploit them for contraband, commissary items, and other services.

Once the butch has secured the affection of the femme, she may then exact tribute in the form of goods and services in exchange for her assurance that she will not play around with anyone else (as one woman paraphrased the song: "I love you for commissary reasons"). In each of these cases the butch role has the advantage of material gains in addition to sexual recompense. However, many of the homosexual pairs do not involve exploitation of one lover by the other and are not dissimilar to love affairs between males and females on the outside. Exploitation, when it does occur in these relationships, comes when one of the parties is tiring of the other. There was only one report that butch broads had stables (more than one femme of her own). This case, it is our impression, involved a transitional stage at which time a butch was getting over her affair with one femme and beginning another. There were no indications

of homosexual families or clans.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in contrast to prisons for men, no inmate reported, nor was there any evidence of, any inmate using force to exact sexual favors from another.

The behavior of one partner often appears to be exploitative of the other in the actual sexual relationship. Interviews conducted with both homosexual and non-homosexual inmates indicated that in about one-third of the homosexual relationships at the institution the butch refuses to let the femme touch her or reciprocate sexually. Some butches remain completely clothed during sexual activity. This seems in part to facilitate maintaining the illusion of masculinity which would be exposed by the removal of her clothing. The role of the femme, in these cases, is one of complete passivity in which the butch *gives work* (also referred to as *giving some head*), i.e., engages in cunnilingus, manual manipulation of the

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<sup>21</sup> The building of family constellations has been reported in studies of youth institutions for females by Sheriff in Michela Robbins, "The Inside Story of a Girl's Reformatory," *Colliers*, 132 (October 30, 1953.), p. 76; Sidney Kosofsky and Albert Ellis, "Illegal Communication Among Institutionalized Female Delinquents," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 48 (August, 1958), pp. 155-160; see also Charles A. Ford, "Homosexual Practices of Institutionalized Females," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXIII (January-March, 1929), p. 446; by Selling, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-253 and by Toigo, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-29. It is not surprising to find young girls who are still oriented toward the consanguinal family establishing substitute *daddies*, *brothers* and *cousins*. The separation from parents, siblings and other relatives seems to be less a source of real stress for older women. Most of them have established their own families and the pain of separation comes from being away from conjugal rather than the consanguinal family.

clitoris, and breast fondling. While the butch gives work, the denial of sexual gratification for herself is called *giving up the work*. Such self-denial militates against becoming obligated to the femme and from developing emotional ties that would be painful to disturb or break. Participation in a relationship where only the butch gives work is functional for some femmes as well. They can receive sexual satisfaction and at the same time avoid viewing themselves as homosexual. For a number of women, homosexual self-definition only follows active participation in sexual activity.<sup>22</sup>

The following statement from a tape recorded interview describes the practice of giving up the work as seen by a femme jailhouse turnout:

Giving up the work means who's gonna do who. I mean, which one of you is going to commit the sexual act on the other one. Usually the one that's the aggressor and doing the lovemaking is the one that's giving up the work. [Note the butch is *giving* work at the same time she is giving *up* reciprocal sexual interaction.] The other one isn't giving up anything, she's receiving. It usually refers to the stud broad and usually the stud broad will be very modest and strict about who knows if she's been receiving any work or not.

I think it's that butches realize a woman is satisfied by a man, as a rule, this is the natural role, and that they want to satisfy

you as much as a man would, if not more. They want to get this certain edge over you, this certain control over you. But being aware in the back of their minds that they're a woman too, they know that it's just as possible for you to get control over them, and I think that they fight this because in their minds their main goal is to satisfy and control you, and keep you.

The butch partner of the respondent quoted above reported her reason for wishing to have a relationship where only she gave work:

In myself—the only desire I have is to make love and not have love made to me. I don't feel the need for it or the desire for it. The desire for it can be aroused and has been—I'm not saying that a girl hasn't made love to me—but it's very few and far between that I want somebody to make love to me. I want to do the work, and that's the way I get my pleasure, by making love to her, a woman. When I make love to a woman I like the power of being able to satisfy her. It gives me a good feeling to know that she responds to me and that I can satisfy her desires. And this is where I get my enjoyment.

*Q.* When you talk about satisfaction for yourself, is this satisfaction in terms of orgasm, or is satisfaction in other terms?

It's a satisfaction more or less mentally, and not really—it's a physical satisfaction but merely because I know I've done a good job, or I hope I have, and I'm satisfied with knowing that I've pleased her and I'm just relaxed through the whole act. Otherwise, no, I don't reach a climax. I have, but it's very seldom that I do. I don't lose myself that much, and I don't like to lose that much control. I like to keep my mind as clear as I can so I'm aware of exactly what I'm doing, and I'm aware of my timing, and I'm aware of the girl—if she's responsive at a certain time then I know that's what she likes, and then if she's not responding then I can do something else. Where, if I was just lost in passion I don't recognize any of these things, and I don't feel that I would satisfy her as fully as if I didn't lose myself all that much and kept concentrating on her, watching her—

<sup>22</sup> The attitude of the femme here is similar to that of the young male delinquents who permit male adults to perform fellatio on them but who do not think of themselves as homosexuals. The boys define themselves and each other not on the basis of homosexual behavior *per se*, but on the basis of non-participation in the role which is perceived as the homosexual role, that of the fellator. Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers," *Social Problems*, 9 (Fall, 1961), p. 118-119.

that's what I do. And when the act is over I'm tired and that tiredness brings on a satisfaction in itself. And it gives me a form of release, the tension sort of release, after I've made love to somebody. But I don't reach a climax—not generally.

In practice, however, giving up the work seems to characterize the early stage of a homosexual relationship. Presuming that there is some mutual attraction to begin with, it seems to be difficult to have such intimate contact without, over time, developing more intense affectional ties. It often happens that the butch comes to ask for sexual reciprocity and that the femme is then ready to reciprocate. Hence, this behavior can, in some cases, be an effective means of total seduction in which the femme who is resistant or feeling guilty is brought along slowly. Stresses accompanying attempted transitions from giving up the work to reciprocal sexuality result in the failure of some sexual affairs that are carried on satisfactorily until the femme finally refuses to reciprocate. Such refusal is interpreted by the butch as lack of affection and low degree of commitment to the homosexual role.

There is an apparent parallel between a prostitute receiving the attentions of a customer and the femme receiving a butch who gives up the work, but there is a major difference implicit in the rationale for the latter. The male customer, while an active sex partner and to some degree the aggressor, is not viewed as being in danger of becoming emotionally involved with the prostitute. The action of the active and aggressive butch is specifically directed toward preventing herself from becoming more deeply attached to her partner. For many women who have assumed the butch

role because they were unsuccessful in heterosexual affectional relationships, there is still the danger of being rejected again. For the butch then, the initial period during which the femme remains passive serves the important function of screening out femmes who are "chippy" (promiscuous). As one respondent said, "You check them out, to see if she's gonna stay." In addition, the period of giving up the work serves to more deeply involve the femme, as she may experience satisfaction with the relationship. Thus, after this trial period, the butch may ask for reciprocity if the femme has not indicated that she wants to play a more active sexual role. It is beyond this point that some femmes refuse to go, and this usually terminates the affair. Enough women stop here to confirm the fears of butches so that they must continue the same testing process.

The term jailhouse turnout indicates, and inmates confirm, that most prison love affairs are temporary and situational.<sup>23</sup> The insecurity and

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<sup>23</sup> In the male homosexual community, Hooker reports that there is a constant searching for sexual partners, and that long-enduring relationships are rare, with change not stability the rule. Evelyn Hooker, "A Preliminary Analysis of Group Behavior of Homosexuals," *The Journal of Psychology*, 42 (October, 1956), pp. 223-224. Halleck and Hersko report that homosexual relationships among the girls in the youth institution they studied were usually short-lived and characterized by jealousy and unfaithfulness. Halleck and Hersko, *op. cit.*, p. 913. The shifting of homosexual roles among girls in the youth institution is also reported by Toigo, *op. cit.*, p. 10. The ability to play both roles—active and passive—is reported by Helene Deutsch, "On Female Homosexuality," in Robert Fliess, editor, *The Psychoanalytic Reader*, New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1948, p. 243.



anxiety which is promoted by the movement of the population out of the institution results in the use of certain defense mechanisms to protect oneself from being hurt too badly. This is especially the case for butches who have made a more definite and dramatic commitment to homosexuality. They cannot count on holding the affection of the femme, not only because of separation by staff or parole, but also because femme jailhouse turnouts do not have a long-term commitment to the *gay life*. This is apparent in the high percentage of women whom the inmates believe will return to heterosexual affairs once they leave prison. The prison homosexuals who are expected to revert to heterosexuality are the femmes and not the butches.

In summary, the process of turning out seems to represent socialization of the new inmates into practices which provide support, guidance and emotional satisfactions during a period when these are lacking. This mechanism for coping with the stress of imprisonment is presented to the new inmate at a time when she is likely to be most responsive and when she is least aware of alternative courses of action. Turning out often involves a series of steps through which both partners initially seek to insulate themselves from strong involvement. Reciprocity of sexual behavior is often delayed until confidence in the stability of the union is felt. This is particularly true for those butches who have made more definite commitments to homosexuality. However, instability is not unknown for other butches who change from homosexual involvements to heterosexual involvements and back again as they are paroled, violate parole and

are returned to prison. (This role alteration prompted one inmate to remark, "There's something hypocritical about a pregnant butch.")

Inmates believe that most homosexual involvement occurs early in imprisonment, that most affairs are situational, with heterosexual relationships to be resumed upon release, and that many are "once-only" affairs.<sup>24</sup> The folklore of the female prison community provides rationalizations for homosexuality by emphasizing that women involved in prison affairs are not homosexual but bisexual, by referring to those who do not play as "prudes," by emphasizing the alleviation of loneliness that such involvements can bring, by alleging greater satisfactions than can be found in heterosexual affairs and by repeating stories about the women who return to men upon release. While the intrinsic satisfactions are described it is made clear that one may return to heterosexual relationships without any damaging effects. Such a rationale helps make homosexual involvement a more likely adaptation

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<sup>24</sup> In view of these characteristics of institutional homosexuality, Ford questions whether such involvements represent true sexual inversion. See Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 448. Deviant behavior in prison may be temporary because ties to significant others in the free world are not voluntarily severed. Their absence is forced and they remain significant others. Thus while escape into institutional deviance can be rationalized on the basis of "they aren't around" or "they won't know," long-term commitment is unlikely because it is to these others and not to those in prison that long-run loyalty is given. Loyalty to a homosexual partner in prison is fortuitous. For a discussion of deviant careers and of the important implications of membership in an organized deviant group see Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, pp. 25-39.

than other mechanisms of adjustment. There can be a number of reactions to stress and each of these may assume a variety of forms. For some of the inmates psychological withdrawal and fantasy is one adaptation.<sup>25</sup> Other inmates actively rebel and become chronic rule violators (so-called troublemakers and malcontents) who fight with staff and fellow inmates. Our analysis of the files of 832 inmates, however, indicates that this is not a frequent reaction. Eighty-two percent (668) of the sample had never violated rules pertaining to staff authority.<sup>26</sup> Sixty-two percent had never been reported for any violation of prison rules and an additional 22 percent had received only one or two such reports.

There are some inmates who are continually in trouble, but it is our impression that they fall into two principal categories—severely emotionally disturbed individuals and young homosexuals who use the violation of institutional rules and abuse of authority to demonstrate their love for partners or to react to staff interventions in their affairs.

Another adaptation is what Goffman has called "colonization," the acceptance of institutional life as a satisfactory existence. These are in-

mates who are commonly referred to as "having found a home."<sup>27</sup> Generally, they do not want to bother or be bothered by staff or inmates or by institutional programs as they perform the ritual of doing time. A small number of women, in most cases older and serving long sentences for serious offenses such as homicide, used this mode of adjustment. Their age, a number of inmates reported, precluded these women from being sought as desirable homosexual partners. Not all inmates use one or more of these adaptations. Some women play a role referred to in prisons for men as "square johns"—persons who maintain a view toward criminality consistent with that of the larger community and who tend to be more receptive to staff efforts at rehabilitation. The worst feature of confinement for these inmates is the forced association with other inmates. These women tend to accept the pains of imprisonment as justified penalties for their behavior.

For the majority of women in the prison, however, we did not observe such accommodations to deprivations and limitations of confinement. The lack of experience in doing time, the lack of criminal sophistication and the absence of conventional sources of emotional support by husbands, lovers, or families combine to make many inmates receptive to homosexuality as a mode of adjustment when it is offered to them upon arrival at the prison. Our data clearly indicate that more inmates resort to homosexuality than to psychological withdrawal, rebellion, colonization or any other type of adaptation.

<sup>25</sup> This reaction is described by Gresham M. Sykes, *The Society of Captives*, *op. cit.*, p. 80. See also, Erving Goffman, *Asylums*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1961, pp. 61-62; and Terence and Pauline Morris, "The Experience of Imprisonment," *The British Journal of Criminology*, 2 (April, 1962), pp. 351-352.

<sup>26</sup> Included as rule violations were refusal to work, destruction of state property as a protest gesture, insolence, disrespect, disobedience to staff, assault (or attempted) on staff; escape (or attempted) and rioting.

<sup>27</sup> Goffman, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63, and Terence and Pauline Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 350-351.

## CONCLUSIONS

Homosexuality exists because it serves a variety of functions for a large number of women, not because prison inmates are callous, unprincipled or basically amoral or because the institution staff is lax or "soft" on inmates. In fact, it has been suggested that the maladjustment of prison inmates may reflect demands on the behavior of the individual made by the special environment of the prison. These modes of behaving may be viewed as maladaptive outside of prison, but they are adaptive in the prison setting.<sup>28</sup>

Initially, this study considered sex-role differences in the free community, and features of male prisons, as a way of understanding the female prison. From a knowledge of differences in the backgrounds, experiences and identities of males and females in the outside world, we surmised that women prisoners would be less likely to actively rebel in prison. We did not expect and did not find elaborate operations for obtaining and distributing contraband or for conducting gambling operations. We expected and found that women require more emotional support than do male prisoners. This need, and others, are reflected in the culture of the female prison community which contains maxims dealing with the experiences and problems of women in prison and in the inmate social system composed of roles which are responses to the pains of imprisonment as women experience them. It is on these bases that male and female

prison communities can be distinguished.

Finally, a conjecture about the post-prison effects of institutional involvements. Prison homosexuality is viewed, even by many of those involved, as temporary, with heterosexual relations to be resumed upon release. We cannot answer definitely whether this actually happens. Some information was gleaned from conversations with all women parole officers in the state. While the parole agents had little knowledge of the patterns of homosexual behavior at the institution, they agreed that most of the women they knew who had had homosexual experiences in prison returned to men upon release. The parole agents noted that the women who tended to continue playing a homosexual role were those who had made a greater commitment to homosexuality—the butches. However, the majority of the homosexual population are femme jailhouse turnouts who maintain a conception of themselves as bisexual. If we are correct that homosexual involvements begun in prison do not, in fact, usually persist on release, it is reasonable to raise the question of how problematic prison homosexuality is in terms of long-run rehabilitation goals of the institution.

Our study has focused attention on deviance in an institutional setting but our findings, however tentative, raise questions for research in the society at large. Unanswered questions involve delineation of the principal homosexual roles in the free community and the procedures by which women are induced to indulge in deviant sexual behavior outside the prison.

For example, it would be important to know whether initial deviant

<sup>28</sup> Patrick J. Driscoll, "Factors Related to the Institutional Adjustment of Prison Inmates," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 47 (July, 1952), pp. 593-596.

involvement leads to membership in an organized deviant group. Any follow-up study of parolees would require knowledge of the gay life in the larger community, since it is not known whether there are short-lived homosexual periods in civilian life as there are in prison and whether or

not true homosexuals in the community need to utilize protective mechanisms such as giving up the work. Adequate description of the sexual deviance of the female prisoner awaits further inquiry into deviant behavior of women in the world outside the prison.