

Making It: A Prison Survival Guide

A survival guide for entering prison

The staff of Inside Journal, Prison Fellowship's "Hometown Newspaper of America's Prisoners" has reached throughout the prisoner and ex-prisoner communities to compile this manual. Throughout you will find practical, helpful survival tips from those who are currently in prison or have previously served time.

Introduction

It was a sultry, late-summer day in 1974. I was in an Alabama prison. I was no longer a respected lawyer, no longer an adviser to the President of the United States. Now I was C. Colson, Prisoner #23227. I was at the lowest point in my life. A prisoner has a choice to make. Will this experience "make" or "break" the individual? Each one has this choice to make.

My advice is, don't let it break you. Let it make you into a better person. Whether you're facing a long sentence or a short one, you have some choices to make. Prison can be terribly difficult. But it is possible to survive. And it is possible to begin a new, positive direction for your life. Now, while you're still in. And it can continue after you're out.

After release, I never wanted to see a prison again. But I couldn't forget the prisoners I'd left behind. And from my awful experience, under the direction and empowerment of a sovereign God, has come a movement of people that is helping all those touched by crime; Victims, families, those in the criminal justice system, and prisoners, especially prisoners.

The people of Prison Fellowship care about you. We want to be there for you. Read this little manual carefully. Feel through it the surging voices of thousands saying, "You can make it." "You're not alone." "Success is possible." May God bless you and care for you. And may He make you a better person through this experience.

Charles W. Colson
Chairman of Prison Fellowship Ministries

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1. A Shocking Experience

"Let me give you a little advice," pressing his body against my cell bars; Buster appropriated a father's character. He poked his left hand into my cell and began to count by lifting one finger at a time.

"First, don't gamble. You get in debt, and you lose your virginity, or get your brains beat out. "Second, don't mess around with punks or their daddies, jocks. Most people in here get hurt because of sex. "One more thing kid, Do your own time. Know what I mean?" "I think so." "You don't see or hear nothing. You rat on someone, you dead meat. "Gotta go," "Cell number?" echoed a turnkey's voice. "Eleven," shouted Buster. Click! My neighbor disappeared, leaving me to contemplate his jailhouse wisdom.

Marvin Dixon, That Saved a Wretch Like Me, published by Chalice Press, 1993. Used by permission.

Becoming a prisoner, especially for the first time, is a traumatic event for most people. The sights, sounds, and smells of prison unleash strong physical and emotional reactions. Physically, don't be surprised if you experience:

- † Nausea
- † Diarrhea
- † Trouble sleeping
- † Upset stomach
- † Lack of appetite

Of course, if you have been addicted or heavily used, alcohol, or other substances, you may experience additional physical discomforts. Emotionally, you may feel:

- † Afraid
- † Angry
- † Depressed
- † Anxious
- † Guilty
- † Grief-stricken
- † Out of control
- † Sad
- † Lost or abandoned

Some have suggested that those entering prison experience the same emotional stages that accompany the death of a loved one. These may include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Your thinking will be affected. Expect to be confused. Bewildered, Disoriented, Forgetful, Easily distracted. All these are normal. You're not weird or abnormal if you experience them. Recognizing this is an important first step to adjusting to prison life.

2. Be Prepared

Before You Go

Stan Jarrett, who served many years as a Prison Fellowship area director, has the following advice for those who have a little time to prepare:

1. Prior to going in, contact the nearest Prison Fellowship office or the prison chaplain and ask for a list of what you can bring in and what you can't.
2. Do not bring expensive watches or jewelry. Buy only cheap ones, or bring none at all. Gold jewelry, books, fancy clothing, or electronic devices invite theft or demands from other inmates.
3. Check on the institution's procedures regarding prisoners having money, receiving and sending mail, and making telephone calls.

For New Arrivals

1. Memorize your Department of Corrections ID number and the prison's mailing address.
2. Listen a lot and talk little.
3. Be a follower, not a leader, at least until you "learn the ropes." This is no place to be assertive.
4. Be 100-percent cooperative with guards and DOC staff. Don't bug your case worker with unnecessary complaints or frivolous questions.
5. Find out the normal provisions for toiletry items.
6. Discover how the mail and telephone system work.
7. Find out what you have to do if you become sick or get hurt.
8. Get to know the chaplains and their inmate helpers.

3. General Hints

1. **Do your own time.** Don't get immediately into discussions with others about either your conviction or theirs. Daniel, writing from a prison in Wisconsin, says, "Don't dip into other inmates' crimes or personal lifestyles. Have respect for everyone, and you will be equally respected."

Michael, who's in prison in Ohio, says, "In most cases, the first people to try to talk with new prisoners are bad news." He counsels, "Be respectful, careful, and observant!" He recommends going to the prison chapel or church to find someone who knows the ropes and will give you how-to-get-along advice. Charles, giving advice from North Carolina, says simply, "Keep your case private. Discuss it only with your attorney."

2. **Don't gamble.** It is not easy to get money in prison to repay debts, and to owe someone something can cause all kinds of trouble.
3. **Daniel also says, "Remember the D.T.A. rule - Don't Trust Anyone."** He means, choose your friends wisely. A chapel, he says, is the best place in prison to find real, decent people. Ronald, giving advice from an Illinois joint, puts it like this: "Do not associate yourself with toxic individuals." He warns against associating with "negatively charged individuals" who are determined to pull you "into their miserable little world."

4. **Never borrow.** Eugene, imprisoned in Florida, says, "If the state didn't give it to me, then I don't need it." Michael, giving advice from a prison in Ohio, says, "Do not accept any cigarettes, coffee, food, or drugs offered to you. Believe me; it will not turn out to be free, no matter what they tell you." John, imprisoned in New York, warns: "You may be getting married and not even know it. They may come for a payback. As a rule of thumb, do without rather than taking from a stranger." Charles, writing from a prison in North Carolina, says, "If you owe debts, they may demand payment from you like sex, high interest if you have money in your trust fund, or you may even be setting yourself up to get stabbed or raped."
5. **Stay away from dope and booze.** They're available in many prisons, just like on the outside. They're big trouble. Stay away! One prisoner warns, "Don't try any drugs, alcohol, or any pills that a doctor did not prescribe for you."
6. **Avoid homosexuals and gangs.** John, who's in prison in New York, says, "You never know whose husband or jailhouse wife you are talking to" they may feel you're moving in on their property."
7. **Treat guards with respect, but don't spend much time talking to them.** John, from New York, says, "Being seen talking in private with a guard may lead another inmate to call you a rat" one of the worst things in the penitentiary that can happen to you." William, who is in a prison in Michigan, says: "Don't snitch or get chummy with correctional officers."
8. **Be careful for your physical safety, at least until you learn the particulars of your institution.** Charles, in North Carolina, says, "Avoid corners where there are no guards to view you or another inmate who would assist you if you needed help."
9. **Take advantage of helpful programs and opportunities in prison.** Bible studies. Seminars. G.E.D. and college programs. Vocational training. Self-esteem and personal development courses. Charles, in a North Carolina prison, says "Keep your time moving smoothly instead of playing games. An idle mind really is the Devil's workshop."

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." *Proverbs 2:1-5*

4. Keeping Physically Fit

With time on your hands, and so much of your schedule decided for you, it's possible to maintain (or gain!) a new, higher level of physical fitness in prison. The keys are:

- † Eat right
- † Exercise properly
- † Avoid physically harmful habits
- † Get health care when needed

You may not have as many food choices as on the outside, but in most prison chow halls you can make some of these intelligent decisions:

- † Avoid saturated fats as much as possible. Go light on the butter, margarine, fatty red meats, fried foods, whole milk (skim is better) and dairy products.
- † Cut back on caffeine from coffee, tea, and soft drinks.
- † Eat fresh fruits and green vegetables whenever possible.
- † Utilize your prison library or read Inside Journal for continuing hints on "How to Eat Prison Food and Stay Healthy."

The iron pile and exercise yard are where you'll usually find the fittest prisoners. But everyone can benefit from a moderate routine of some walking or some light calisthenics (stretching, situps, pushups, jumping jacks).

Thirty minutes or so of moderate exercise three or four times a week will improve your cardiovascular system, keep your muscle tone up, and generally make you feel better all around.

Of course, avoiding tobacco, if possible, will pay some of the greatest health dividends. Maintaining some personal disciplines is especially important when so much of your environment and schedule is controlled for you.

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." *Psalms 139:13-14*

5. Spiritual Fitness: The Most Important

Giving Your Life to God

The tougher your situation gets, the more you will need strength from beyond yourself. Paying attention to your spiritual fitness is the only way to be truly "free behind the bars."

1. The Bible is God's guidebook for life and is the best ongoing source of help and guidance. If you don't have one, ask your chaplain for an easy-to-read version. Two organizations will send you a Bible if you can't obtain one any other way. Write to ***International Bible Society, Attention: Ministries Department, P.O. Box 62970, Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2970***. Or have your chaplain write a letter for you, requesting a Bible, to ***American Bible Society, Attention: National Distribution, 1865 Broadway, New York, NY 10023***.
2. Begin a personal relationship with God" the most important decision you will ever make. Not much is offered to us with no strings attached. But God's love comes that way. *"I love you with a love that will last forever," God tells us in Jeremiah 31:3. And nothing is able to separate us from that love (Romans 8:39).*

Sadly, most people never experience that love. The reason is sin. *"All people have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory," Romans 3:23* tells us. It's not a question of the good deeds weighing more than bad deeds. It's not an issue of living a better life than the guy in the next cell. Compared to God, we all fall short of what we should be. And that cuts us off from feeling His love and purpose in our lives. But God's love never quits. And out of that love He sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins through His death on the cross. Then, to prove to the world that He could break the power of sin, God raised Jesus from the dead. God loves each one of us. We can be saved from God's punishment and from the power of sin in our lives. It

requires accepting Jesus as our Savior from sin and as Lord of our lives" realizing that we can never be "good enough" without Him. Salvation is nothing we can earn. It's free to us, but costly to God. It cost the life of Jesus. But it costs us nothing, except maybe our pride. If you want to know the love and freedom that only Jesus can give, pray a prayer something like this:

"Heavenly Father, I want to experience Your love and freedom. The Bible says that if I accept Jesus as my Lord and believe in my heart that You raised Him from the dead, I will be saved. I believe that You are God and that by Your power You can forgive me and make me a whole person inside. I believe that by that same power You can give me peace. Forgive me for anything that I have done that was against Your will. Things I have thought, things I have said, things I have done. I accept Jesus as my Savior. Thank You for loving me. Thank You for forgiving me. And thank You for giving me eternal life. Now please guide me in my new Christian walk. Amen." Welcome to God's forever family! You have just made the most important decision anyone ever could make.

Follow-up Steps

1. Get a Bible and read the following verses to confirm what you have just done:

- † **John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
- † **Romans 5:8** - "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- † **John 6:37** - "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."
- † **1 John 1:8, 9** - "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
- † **1 John 1:10-13** - "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has his testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son."

2. Write and tell the staff of Inside Journal what you have done. We want to send you a brief Bible study to help you start your Christian life. Write **Inside Journal, P.O. Box 17429, Washington DC 20041-0429**.

3. Find your chaplain and share with him or her. Ask how to make contact with the nearest Prison Fellowship field office, or with any Prison Fellowship volunteers who come into your institution. Most prisons in the U.S. have some Prison Fellowship programming, whether regular Bible studies, weekend seminars, or occasional special programs.

4. Talk to God every day and read your Bible faithfully. Good books to start reading are the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament and the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. You'll find plenty to think about and apply to your life!

6. Relationships with the Outside

It's unfortunate, but many marriages do not survive when one of the partners does a prison term. Yours can be the exception, but it will be hard.

Steve and Donna Varnam had been married for only five years when Steve was sentenced to five years at Eglin Federal Prison Camp in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida. Steve and Donna realized their marriage would survive only if Christ was at the center of it. So they spent this time learning and applying biblical principles to their marriage. Here are some helpful tips from Steve and Donna.

He Said (from Steve) Steve Varnam says there are many things a husband in prison can do to maintain and even strengthen his marriage:

1. Get over your self-pity and accept responsibility for the actions that put you in prison. Only then can you get a fresh start on life and your marriage.
2. Learn to communicate with your wife honestly. By the point that you have been incarcerated, you have undoubtedly damaged her trust and confidence in you. Only by being completely honest now can you begin to reestablish your wife's trust in you.
3. Be sensitive to what your wife is going through right now. She has been forced to assume a lot of new responsibilities all by herself. She, too, feels very alone. Keep your expectations of your spouse realistic. Do not place unreasonable demands on her.
4. Use whatever opportunities you have to communicate with your wife (letters, telephone calls, and visits). Encourage and lift your wife up; don't tear her down.
5. Use this time to build a strong relationship with Christ and a firm spiritual foundation for your marriage.

She Said (from Donna) Donna Varnam says there are many things a husband in prison can do to make sure he and his wife stay and grow closer together:

1. Tell your wife you're sorry and ask for her forgiveness. It will mean so much to your wife to hear these words.
2. Don't relinquish your role as husband or father. Make it easy for your wife to tell you about the things that are happening at home. Discuss and share family decisions with her as much as possible.
3. Communicate honestly and frequently with your wife. Letters mean as much to her as they do to you.
4. Trust your wife. Do not let others plant suspicions in your mind. Do not let the disappointing experiences of other prisoners make you doubt your wife's faithfulness and commitment to you.
5. Take spiritual charge of your marriage. Ask Jesus Christ into your heart and then lead your wife to do the same. Your marriage is divorce-proof only when you are both committed to the Lord.

Additional Tips

Former Prison Fellowship Area Director Rose-Marie Armstrong offers the following advice from her many years' experience dealing with prison/family relationships:

1. When calling home collect, particularly when it's long-distance, call different members of the family rather than always calling the same person (spouse, mother, sibling).
2. Plan your calls by making a list of things you want to talk about. Otherwise, you'll forget something, call on impulse, and then feel guilty about calling again so soon.
3. When requesting books, food, money, or clothes from family members, request them from various people rather than the same person every time. This will help ease guilty feelings by those who can't respond because of lack of money.

7. Closing Thoughts

1. **Read Inside Journal regularly.** It is distributed free into nearly all U.S. state and federal prisons plus numerous county jails and youth detention centers, approximately 1,800 institutions in all. Each issue carries inspirational stories of ex-cons who are "making it," practical tips for making a success of your time in prison, and helpful information you can't get any other place.
2. **Get into a pen-pal relationship.** A good friend-by-mail, even someone of quite a different age, gender, race or station in life, can give you balance, perspective, and encouragement. Write to Prison Fellowship and ask for the Pen Pal application.
3. **Depend on God.** With dependence on God, you can make prison a life-changing experience, for the better! Remember, Prison Fellowship and Inside Journal staff members care about you and want you to succeed.

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For more information about the J29eleven Prison Ministry at NorthEast Christian Church, log on to our web site www.nccprisonministry.org or write to us at the address above.

"For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future..."

Jeremiah 29:11

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF PRISON ARGOT AND SEXUAL HIERARCHIES

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Prison argot and sexual hierarchies have consistently been found to be present in U.S. correctional facilities. However, recent years have seen very few studies that focus specifically on argot labels and sexual hierarchies that exist in prisons. Using data collected from 174 face-to-face structured interviews with male inmates in multisecurity-level correctional facilities in Oklahoma, we found many similarities and differences with previous research on the issues of argot labels and the sexual hierarchy. For example, inmates who engage in same-sex sexual activity continue to be labeled based on the sexual role they portray in the institution. However, the findings of the present study suggest that the nature of these sexual relationships is changing.

Keywords: *prison argot; prison sexual hierarchies; prison sex*

The rapid and continued growth of U.S. prison populations in the last 2 decades has brought with it increasing attention and concern about whether and how U.S. society can afford (financially, politically, and culturally) to maintain the correctional industry. However, although a great deal of attention has been directed toward these macrolevel issues, attention to microlevel issues, such as programmatic operations and inmate culture, have been largely neglected. This is clearly a shortcoming of the penological literature.

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Without a thorough understanding of how institutions operate on a day-to-day basis, it may not be possible to fully and adequately address larger scale issues, such as finances and the place of prisons in the political and social structure of society.

Understandings of the microlevel operations of correctional institutions are the world of the prison inmate. Inmates, obviously, live lives very different from their counterparts in free society; prison inmates live in a "total institution" (Goffman, 1961). Total institutions are closed, single-sex societies separated from society socially and physically. Inhabitants of total institutions have essentially all decisions about the structure and content of their daily lives made for them, and they share all aspects of their daily lives within these types of institutions. However, one area in which occupants of total institutions do retain some degree of control is in their individual and collective abilities to develop unique values, norms, and means for exercising social control over such. Central to this cultural construction is the delineation of specific social roles, which are accompanied by rigidly proscribed behavioral expectations. These distinct values and behavioral roles are referred to as the prison subculture.

Newly arriving inmates in a correctional facility who seek to ease their social transition must learn the values, attitudes, and behavioral expectations that structure the operations of the institution. According to Einat and Einat (2000), "The norms and values of the inmate code form the core of an inmate subculture, providing its members with informal means to gain power and status and, thereby, a way to mitigate their sense of social rejection and compensate for their loss of autonomy and security" (p. 309). When the new inmates have accepted the prison lifestyle and criminal values, they have been "prisonized." Any inmate whose behavior violates the values, behavioral codes, and traditions faces the likelihood of sanctions from other inmates, staff, or both. Official sanctions imposed by staff range from verbal chastisement to time in solitary confinement and loss of earned good time. However, for most inmates, the more serious forms of sanctions are those that come from other inmates. Peer-imposed sanctions range from ostracism to physical and sexual assault and occasionally death. The inmate code is one of the most important aspects of their new culture that inmates are expected to adopt, and which can indicate acceptance of institutional values as well as the ability to avoid accidental affronts to others (via incorrect use of language).

Prison researchers who have studied male prison life have found that inmates use a special type of language or slang within the prison subculture that reflects the "distorted norms, values, and mores of the offenders" (Dumond, 1992, p. 138). As such, the vocabulary and speech patterns of

prison inmates—what is known as prison argot—are largely distinct from those of noninmates. Language, as is well known, provides the parameters of understandings—and possibilities—for constructing a social and cultural milieu. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in correctional institutions, where inmates live, think, and function within the framework defined by the argot (Bondesson, 1989). Thus, the argot is centered on the functions that it serves for inmates. Einat and Einat (2000) document six functions of argot roles:

- the need to be different and unique
- alleviation of feelings or rejection and refusal
- facilitation of social interactions and relationships
- declaration of belonging to a subculture or social status
- a tool of social identification leading to a sense of belonging to a group
- secrecy (pp. 310-311)

One critical component of correctional institution culture, building on argot roles, is the prison sexual hierarchy. Sexual behavior among inmates does occur, although the sexual activities of individual inmates and with whom one engages in sex is governed by a hierarchical system of roles and relationships. Within this structure the roles, activities, and actors involved in sexual activities are assigned unique, institutionally specific labels. According to Dumond (1992), “While the terms may have changed somewhat over the decades, prison slang defines sexual habits and inmates’ status simultaneously, using homosexuality as a means of placing individuals within the inmate caste system” (p. 138). These sexual scripts define an inmate’s position within the prison society. Dumond (1992) also found that argot roles “help to define the treatment which an inmate is likely to receive from other inmates and corrections officers” (p. 138). Labels, then, are central elements in the structuring of social interactions.

Previous research has attempted to describe the inmate subculture, including sexual argot roles and the prison sex hierarchy. However, inmates in prison today face a myriad of new challenges, many of which are at least indirectly related to sexuality issues. Overcrowding, fears of contracting HIV, and widespread influence of gangs are just some of the issues inmates confront as they enter and become integrated into the prison subculture. Understanding the prison subculture is not only important but also necessary to inmates’ survival while incarcerated. Recent years, however, have seen very few studies focusing specifically on argot labels and the sexual hierarchy that exists in prisons. The purpose of this study is to describe the sexual roles and

hierarchy that exist in prison, with special emphasis on sexual argot, at the start of the 21st century and to assess how these factors have transformed prison subcultures (see also Hensley, 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1934, Joseph Fishman, a former inspector for federal prisons, conducted one of the first ethnographies on sex in male prisons. Fishman found that homosexuality was an offense in many communities, and men were arrested and sent to prison for this offense. The Penitentiary at Welfare Island in New York was a prison where men were commonly sent for offenses such as attempting to corrupt a minor, indecent exposure, and soliciting members of the same sex for money. Men convicted of these offenses who came into prison were often passive and known by other inmates as "punks," "girls," "fags," "pansies," or "fairies." These inmates had feminine characteristics and often wore makeup. Other inmates, known as "top men" or "wolves," took advantage of these homosexuals. These sexual argot roles marked the passive prisoners as appropriate targets for sexual assault.

Research in the last 40 years, built on the foundation laid by Fishman, has expanded, yet largely reiterated the basic finding of victimized and victimizing inmates in prisons. Donaldson (1993), Sagarin (1976), Kirkham (1971), and Sykes (1958) studied social roles in male prisons and found that inmates engaging in homosexual activity were divided into three categories. The first category consisted of those inmates who played an active, aggressive (i.e., masculine) role in same-sex sexual relations. Inmates referred to these men as wolves, "voluntary aggressors," or "daddies." Inmates in the second and third categories played a more passive and/or submissive (i.e., feminine) role and were referred to as punks and fags.

In large part, adoption of a wolf role may be attributed to the strong emphasis in correctional institution culture on the maintenance of masculinity. To prove their masculinity to themselves and others—and therefore avoid being sexually victimized—some men may opt to be (sexually) aggressive. In essence, to avoid being a sexual victim it may be necessary to sexually victimize others. Wolves assumed an aggressive role and often preyed on other inmates, relying on either violence or coercion as their methods of sexually displaying their masculinity. Even though wolves engaged in same-sex sexual behavior with fags (often via force), the goal for wolves in these encounters was nothing more than physical release and enhancement of a social reputation. Raping punks reinforced the wolves' masculine identity, thereby solidifying the wolves' high position in the institutional status hierarchy.

Through this aggressive behavior, wolves managed to escape the stigma of being labeled a homosexual, although they were engaged in sexual activities with other men (Donaldson, 1993; Kirkham, 1971; Sagarin, 1976; Sykes, 1958).

Fags adopted the same role in prison as they are assumed to have adopted in the free community. The fag fulfilled the stereotype of the homosexual and was viewed by other inmates as playing a natural role. Fags engaged in sex with men because they were born that way. The fag was known by his exaggerated feminine mannerisms, often wearing makeup and dressing in women's clothing. They were considered gender nonconformists and posed little threat to the masculinity of other inmates. In fact, fags provided the feminine counterpart against which wolves could construct their masculinity. Fags were defined as having "pussies," not "assholes," and wore "blouses," not "shirts" (Donaldson, 1993). Although fags, "effeminate," or "queens" were accorded significantly less respect than wolves (because of their femininity), the fact that these inmates were fulfilling their "natural role" did accord them some degree of respect. Fags occupied a status below wolves, but above that of the most despised, the punks (Donaldson, 1993; Kirkham, 1971; Sagarin, 1976; Sykes, 1958).

The label of punk or "jailhouse turnout" was assigned to those inmates who engaged in sexual activities with another inmate (almost always a wolf) because of coercion, force, or rape. Punks were viewed as cowards who were morally weak and unable to defend themselves in prison. In short, a punk was a male who did not fulfill his role as a man. Unlike the fags, punks did not display feminine characteristics. However, because of their displays of weakness (physical) punks were often targets of sexual attacks. Donaldson (1993) found that punks had some common characteristics. These included being younger in age, inexperienced first-time offenders, middle class, White, and physically smaller in size. Punks were viewed as having forfeited their masculinity as a result of submitting to a more aggressive inmate. Punks were considered slaves, and wolves used them as commodities for protection or goods and services. Kirkham (1971) expanded on this idea, identifying inmates who declined to adopt a feminine role yet traded sexual activities for goods and services (i.e., prostitutes) "canteen punks." Universally, researchers have reported that punks occupied the lowest rungs on the institutional cultural hierarchy.

The idea that there is an important distinction between true homosexuals and those who engaged in sexual activity due to situational forces (situational homosexuality) has been a common theme throughout 20th-century prison sex research. Buffman (1972) focused on this distinction, further identifying

two categories of inmates who engaged in situational homosexuality: victims and rapists. Victims were referred to as made homosexuals and were stigmatized as effeminate men. Rapists were referred to as "jockers." Jockers remained consistent with their masculine role; thus they were seen as maintaining their masculinity and therefore escaped stigmatization in prison.

Another variation on the approach to argot sexual roles emerged with Wooden and Parker's (1982) suggestion that argot roles were adopted based on the simple distinction between sexually engaged inmates based on one's role as an insertor or insertee. The group that took the role of insertee was the homosexuals and vulnerable heterosexual "kids." These inmates were perceived and defined as feminine and encouraged (or forced) to present themselves with (often exaggerated) feminine characteristics. These inmates were commonly referred to as "broads," "bitches," "queens," and "sissies." The homosexuals usually conformed to this role and adopted feminine names. However, when this role was imposed on those who were not true homosexuals, these inmates were labeled as having been "turned out."

The dominant partner (the insertor) who maintained his masculine identity was known as the jocker, "stud," or "straight who uses." The jocker's sexual behavior with another male was viewed as situational, and therefore acceptable. The jocker exploited the vulnerable homosexual or heterosexual inmate in prison and treated his sexual partner as a surrogate female. In this way, jockers were attempting to replicate normal sexual roles outside of prison.

Wooden and Parker (1982) also added to the literature arguing that inmates tolerated sissies because they maintained their natural role. Heterosexual kids were tolerated as long as they did not attempt to change the role specification and accepted the scripts of the inmate subculture. However, submissive men were not respected or seen as real men. They were strictly commodities that jockers often used to satisfy a need, whether sexual or economic.

Most recently, Fleisher (1989) reported that a wide range of terms were used to designate effeminate homosexuals at the U.S. Penitentiary at Lompoc, California, including: "skull-buster," punk, queen, fag, "homo," bitch, "faggot," "fruiter," broad, kid, and "ol' lady." However, four dominant categories and associated argot roles were found at the prison. These included fags, "fuck-boys," "straights," and turn-outs.

Fags and fuck-boys were the female sex-role players in the institution. Both groups claimed homosexuality and were described as homosexual by other inmates; however, some differences were evident between the two. Fags were effeminate homosexuals who were often distinguishable by their

gait, dress, hair, and speech. Fuck-boys, on the other hand, were not distinguishable by these traits.

Straights and turn-outs were the male sex-role players in the institution. They did not consider themselves homosexual, nor did the other inmates define them as homosexual. Straights used fags for sexual gratification, although some straights developed long-term sexual relationships with other straights. When these relationships did develop they were very carefully guarded and remained very private. On the other hand, turn-outs took a passive strategy by seducing inmates with commissary privileges or other items.

What stands as a major gap in the research on prison culture is that during the last decade there have been essentially no studies on the role of argot and the prison sex hierarchy in male correctional facilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to shed new light on an integral part of the prison subculture, argot roles and the prison sex hierarchy.

METHODOLOGY

The data for the present study were gathered between August 1998 and May 1999. A total of 300 inmates (100 inmates from a minimum, medium, and maximum security facility in Oklahoma) were randomly selected and invited to participate in the study. However, only 58% ($n = 174$) of invited inmates elected to participate. Data were gathered during face-to-face, structured interviews with inmates from all three security-level institutions (minimum = 52, medium = 61, and maximum = 61).

Inmates who agreed to participate were informed that a voluntary interview would be administered. They were informed that the nature of the research was sensitive and they might experience some emotional discomfort during the interview process. Furthermore, inmates were told not to provide their name or any identifiers during the interview to maintain confidentiality. Institutional authorities, however, did impose two important restrictions on the research process. Interviews were limited to a maximum of 30 minutes each, and audio recording of interviews was prohibited. This meant that analysis was restricted, and direct quotes from inmates were unable to be included. The purpose of these interviews was to collect data on all aspects of prison sexuality, including prison argot and sexual hierarchies.

A comparison of the general population of the prisons and the research sample reflected some differences. For example, White inmates (38.5%) were underrepresented in the sample of minimum security inmates compared to the general population of the institution (52.4%). Native Americans (19.2%) were overrepresented in the sample of minimum security inmates

compared to the general population of the facility (7.7%). White inmates (47.5%) were underrepresented in the sample of medium security inmates compared to the general population (53.9%). In addition, White inmates (45.9%) were underrepresented in the sample of maximum security inmates compared to general population (55.3%). The mean age of the sample was 39 years for minimum, 36 years for medium, and 33 years for maximum security institution. These very closely approximate the mean age for each institution (37, 36, and 33 respectively). Fully one half of the sample had never been married, with only 22.4% of the sample currently married. More than 27% of the sample was legally divorced or widowed.

RESULTS

Interviews revealed that the three traditional sexual roles outlined by previous research (i.e., wolves, fags, and punks) were still present in the prison subculture in all three security-level institutions. However, results also show some important differences from previous research, especially in the structure of the institutional sexual hierarchy and in additional refinement of the traditional roles.

One of the primary differences uncovered in this study is the identification of two subcategories within the wolf and fag roles. Whereas previous research has presented these roles as rather unified, inmates in the present study detailed two distinct subcategories of the wolf category: the "aggressive wolf" and the "nonaggressive wolf." Aggressive wolves were depicted as inmates of African American descent who were considered physically and verbally tough. These inmates entered prison with a heterosexual orientation and maintained their masculinity by sexually assaulting younger, weaker inmates (punks). Masculine identification is also reinforced by restricting sexual involvement to only active roles (i.e., receiving oral sex from punks and inserting during anal sex). However, inmates also make clear that aggressive sexual interactions—such as raping punks—although providing a sexual release, had more to do with status and power than sex. When asked about their current sexual orientation, all of the self-described aggressive wolves maintained their heterosexual identity.

Nonaggressive wolves (or "teddy bears"), on the other hand, typically did not report sexually assaulting their sex partners. Rather, these inmates sought other inmates ("fish" or "closeted gays") who were predisposed and willing to voluntarily participate in sexual activities with another male while in prison. Nonaggressive wolves more often than not were Caucasian men who entered prison with a heterosexual identity. These inmates, similar to their

aggressive counterparts, were also able to maintain their masculine role by participating in active roles during sex. However, when asked about their current sexual orientation, more than one half of the nonaggressive wolves indicated that they now identified as bisexual. Thus, many of these inmates—because of the lack of heterosexual sexual opportunities in prison—had modified their self-concepts regarding their sexual orientation.

Just as the traditional category of the wolf has been refined into two more specific categories, so too has the category of the prison fag been more closely distinguished. Fags, in the present study, have been distinguished as either fish or closet gays. Fish (a term previously reserved to refer to newly arriving inmates) is now a label for referring to (typically African American) inmates who present themselves with a feminine appearance and enacting a stereotypically feminine role. Although violating institutional rules and regulations, these inmates wore makeup, displayed female mannerisms, and took on female nicknames. Fish entered into prison life with a homosexual identity and maintained this identity by assuming a passive role during sexual activity (i.e., performing oral sex and playing the insertee role during anal sex). Some fish also sold themselves for canteen goods and cigarettes, while others sought out relationships with nonaggressive wolves.

A closet gay is an inmate, typically Caucasian, who is believed to enter prison with a hidden homosexuality identity. Closet gays are perceived as having the ability to take on either an active or passive role during sexual activity. Such inmates, however, strive to maintain masculine appearances and mannerisms. They typically sought other closet gays in hopes of forming a “true love” relationship.

As evidenced in previous studies, there is a clearly defined prison sexual hierarchy with wolves on top, fags in the middle, and punks on the bottom. However, this study suggests that this ranking system may be being replaced with a newly defined hierarchy. Inmates in the present study reported that the status of fags had progressed upward to now be relatively equal to that of the wolves. Fish and aggressive wolves were the most respected and feared groups within the prison sexual hierarchy. Many inmates feared fish because they were known for their aggressive, albeit in nonsexual ways, behavior. For example, two incidents of fish killing other inmates because the other inmates had referred to them as punks were reported by the inmates in the maximum security facility. In addition, fish were also known for their jealousy; consequently, a number of inmates reported that they were scared to engage in sexual activities with the fishes' sex partners.

Closet gays and nonaggressive wolves typically occupied positions of relatively equal status. However, both of these groups of inmates were slightly lower in the institutional ranking system than the fish and aggressive wolves.

Punks, however, remain at the bottom of the prison sexual hierarchy. All other inmates continued to view punks as cowards who were physically and morally weak. Punks often sold themselves for protection. Therefore, inmates saw them as inferior to other inmates within the correctional facility.

DISCUSSION

Inmates in correctional institutions develop an institutional subculture, with a code of conduct, roles, behavioral expectations, and an institution-specific language at the core. The code of conduct consists of norms and values that, in turn, structure the informal patterns of life among inmates. According to Einat and Einat (2000), "[This] code is directly linked to the process of socialization and adaptation to prison life" (p. 309). In other words, the inmate code has universal elements that cut across all correctional facilities because the normative society, its attributes, and its delegates are inherent opponents of prisoners. The language (argot) that characterizes institutional subcultures is one of the principal elements of prisonization, as well as the development and perpetuation of the inmate code.

Similarities between the early research regarding sexual argot roles and the present study are clear. Inmates who engage in same-sex sexual activity are labeled based on the sexual role they portray in the interaction. The findings of the present study on sexual argot roles and the prison sexual hierarchy in male facilities suggest that the nature of these sexual relationships is changing. In male facilities, wolves originally held the highest status in the prison sexual hierarchy. However, this study indicates that the status of fish is now gaining equality with the status of aggressive wolves. Nonaggressive wolves and closet gays maintain statuses of relative equality with each other, falling in the middle of the sexual hierarchy. The punks continue to remain on the bottom of the sexual hierarchy. Although the prison subculture is changing, punks continue to be the most despised inmates in the prison.

In conclusion, sexual argot roles in prison reflect and reinforce the organization, language, and status hierarchy of the prison subculture. To survive in prison, inmates must learn to reject the norms of free society and adopt the new normative order. It is also important for correctional administrators and staff to understand the organization of the prison subculture. Learning the language and normative codes help staff maximize the efficiency of the prison, as well as the safety of staff and inmates. According to Dumond (1992), "Such information may be particularly helpful in assisting prison administration . . . in defining and managing the prison ecosystem/environment" (p. 138).

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