

Homosexuality Linked to

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Homosexuality — creating its own social structure, economics, protection system and frequent explosions of violence—thrives in Washington's city prison system.

Caged men fight jealously for each other.

These aggressions form part of the seething tensions that periodically erupt in fire, vandalism and rioting at prison facilities.

Groups of up to 15 men gang rape weakling newcomers to the system.

Men sell their bodies for an average of two cartons of cigarettes. An adept man can get more. A pimp often shares the profits.

Even in the Chapel

Sex acts occur in the prison chapel when inmates are forced from their usual trysting places by guard crackdowns.

Weaker, more effeminate prisoners seek muscular "husbands" who protect them from roving rape gangs.

Sometimes homosexual partners fashion "wedding" rings out of metal and wear them.

A prisoner can escape homosexual contact or assault altogether — but he must be strong and quick-witted.

50 Pct. Involved

Experts, including local correctional authorities, say that about half of the men in the city's prisons, which usually hold about 300 men, will have engaged in homosexual acts, either voluntarily or under coercion, before they are freed.

Almost all of the 3000 will have been approached.

These aspects of prison life were described in a series of interviews with prisoners recently released from D.C. Jail, Lorton Reformatory and the Youth Center, all part of the D.C. Corrections

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Prison Violence

Department.

They are also reflected in a recent report on homosexual assaults in the teeming Philadelphia prison system. The report describes homosexuality there as "epidemic."

"After a young man has been successfully assaulted," says the report, prepared by the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, "he is marked as a sexual victim for the duration of his confinement, and this mark follows him from institution to institution until he returns to the community embittered, degraded and filled with hate."

Permanent Damage

Prison officials here and elsewhere acknowledge that institutionalized homosexuality breeds violence, tension and permanent psychological damage among inmates.

Yet there is little they can do to change the situation, they say, because of shortages in money, manpower and programming.

Little research on prison homosexuality has been done in the Nation. The Philadelphia report is one of the few efforts. No comprehensive survey has ever been made of the Washington system.

The Philadelphia report — containing pages of raw, first-person descriptions of gang rapes and bizarre sexual liaisons — is "open and

candid" on this heretofore "fairly secretive subject," says D.C. Corrections Department sociologist Stuart Adams.

Four Reasons

Adams cites four general reasons for homosexuality in the prison environment among inmates who otherwise would be "straight" in conventional society:

- It provides a substitute, or vicarious experience, for heterosexual activity.

- It is the only channel available for the expression of masculinity among criminals for whom the normal avenues of masculine achievement and identification, such as career, family and social activity, have been closed.

- It creates a vent for hatred and aggression against individuals and classes of persons, especially Negroes against whites.

- It presents a "challenge" to the prison newcomer who, although not homosexually inclined, may feel a need to conform to prison society.

A small percentage of inmates first entering prison are active homosexuals, but many "straight" prisoners become active after prolonged incarceration.

Some remain permanently homosexual or, at best, bisexual, when they return to conventional society.

"When I first came to Lorton," said a slim, handsome 24-year-old former prisoner, "a gang of about 14 or 15 guys tried to get me . . . They looked at me like Bri-

gitte Bardot or Kim Novak had been turned loose in there . . . They chased me. I ran away. They didn't catch me. I've been on a track team."

Later, when he began to "adjust," he said, "I figured I'd be better off going with just one guy than taking my chances with the crowd."

One Man

He cultivated a steady homosexual relationship with one man, a strong masculine inmate, who became identified as his "husband."

"Being with him gave me some immunity," he said, especially from gang rapes. "The other inmates respected him."

To avoid assaults, said another ex-inmate, a strapping 24-year-old man who indicated an aversion to homosexuality, "the best thing is to stay out of other people's way, try not to meddle in other people's business . . . That way, you're not seen so much, and at the same time, you're respected."

Former inmates divide the homosexual population into three general groups—the aggressors (called "bullies," "husbands" or "gorillas"), a band of active female-role partners (called "sissies" or "wives") and a number of unwilling female-role partners, known only by a venerable Anglo-Saxonism.

They are often hapless persons who, for example, are unable to pay a gambling debt. "If they can't pay in money, the bullies will demand their bodies," said one 10-year veteran of Lorton. "Then the debt is dropped."

Jealousy Common

Jealousy and vying among partners is common. "It comes to blows sometimes," an ex-inmate said, "just like two women fighting over a man."

An experienced prisoner will become a pimp, he said, by offering the use of his "wife" in exchange for cigarettes (Pall Malls are preferred).

"Nine out of ten times," he said, "the guy pimping for the fag is a gorilla. He'll give him a cut on the cigarettes, keep him happy and protect him from other people beating on him."

Individuals are not gang raped more than "about once a week," he said. "You got to let 'em have time to recuperate."

If an inmate is about to be raped, he said, "hollering ain't going to do no good. The guards will ignore him. They'll think the hollering is just horseplay."

Muslims Abstain

Ex-inmates and prison officials alike generally agree that Black Muslims—a small percentage of the total population—abstain from homo-

sexuality and the violence surrounding it.

"They are the cleanest and the best people in prison," said one former prisoner. "They kind of act like counselors. They try to keep the roughnecks out of trouble."

One Lorton veteran said, however, that a few homosexuals join the Muslims "for protection."

"The brothers keep them from being molested," he said.

Disagreeing with the Philadelphia report, a number of parolees here said they witnessed little homosexuality resulting from Negro hostility against whites. The report said a disproport-

tionately high number of assaults were by Negroes on whites.

"I don't think it's a racial thing," said one man, a Negro. "It's a sexual thing."

Asked why, he said, "A white man looks like the closest thing to a woman—he's got that long hair, that soft skin, that long nose . . . He's very feminine."

Report's Recommendations

In seeking improvement of prison life, the Philadelphia report urges that increased guard supervision be coupled with increased "programming," such as recreational and vocational activity, to syphon off energies.

It also urges improvement of diagnostic classification procedures to separate homosexual aggressors from potential victims.

The prison systems in California and Mississippi have initiated limited construction of "conjugal cottages" to allow inmates to visit privately with wives and girl friends at regular intervals.

"We sure don't have that here," said one ex-prisoner. "As long as we don't, they ought to allow homosexuality to go on. It helps blow some of the tension . . . I know it's bad now. But if they stopped sex down there, you can't believe how bad it would be."