

Prison Homosexuality and Its Effect on Post-Prison Sexual Behavior

Edward Sagarin

ALTHOUGH THERE HAS grown up a considerable literature on sex experiences in prison, little has been written on the post-prison behavioral patterns of those who, voluntarily or involuntarily, become initiated into homosexuality while incarcerated. In the light of the considerable number of prisoners and ex-prisoners in the original Kinsey sample, it is possible that the Institute for Sex Research might have in its files material that would shed light on this problem. To date, nothing has been forthcoming. In one of the few references to the subject, Kirkham (1972, p. 42) suggests that sexual experiences in prison may have permanent effects on the lives of some of the participants: "Can such men return to conventional heterosexual lives after release, or has the experience of being forced into acts of passive homosexuality been so traumatic as to preclude the resumption of sexual relations with members of the opposite sex?" In a search for an answer to his question, the present paper studies ex-prisoners whose initiation into homosexuality occurred during prison.

THE NATURE AND INCIDENCE OF THE EXPERIENCE

Opposition to prison homosexuality has usually come from one of two sources. For some, it is a matter of immorality and degradation; for others, homosexuality in male prisons has been associated with violence. However, a third consideration, the effect of such experiences on the prisoner's life following release, has generally been ignored, and to my knowledge never researched, although it may be highly significant in the evaluation of this phenomenon.

It is widely stated that for a considerable number of prisoners, homosexual contact takes place for the first time in their lives during confinement. Buffum reviews the

various estimates of the incidence of prison homosexuality among males, noting that it clusters in the range between 30 to 45 percent, although Irwin makes a lower estimate (around 15 percent). Buffum then goes on to state: "Working on the assumption that 40 to 50 percent of a penal population will have homosexual experience in prison, Gagnon has estimated that 5 to 10 percent will have had no prior homosexual experience, 25 to 30 percent will have had casual or intermittent prior experience, and 5 to 10 percent will have had extensive or nearly exclusive homosexual commitment in the free community" (p. 13).

It is difficult to translate these percentages into absolute numbers. While there are approximately a quarter of a million

Dr. Sagarin (PhD New York Univ. 66) is Professor of Sociology at City College of New York and Past President of American Society of Criminology.

The writer is indebted to Harry Allen, Simon Dinitz, and Robert J. Kelly, all of whom read earlier versions of this paper, and offered many suggestions and insights.

inmates (mostly males) in federal and state prisons at any one time in the United States, this figure becomes much larger when the inmates of local lockups and city and county jails are included. On the one hand, the incidence of homosexuality may be larger in these local jails, with their inferior security, poor recreational facilities, and other difficulties; on the other, some of the local lockup residents are present for such a short time, perhaps overnight while making bail, that they could go in and out before having an opportunity to become a victimizer or to be exposed to the latter's assaults. Nevertheless, using Gagnon's figures, one could estimate that there are probably 25,000 males (a very rough estimate, indeed) at present in jails or prisons, whose initial homosexual experience took place during incarceration, and at least that number, and perhaps more, of ex-convicts who can be placed into the same category. Further, it is the contention of Akers and his colleagues that there is considerably more homosexuality (as well as use of drugs) in custodial-type than in treatment-type institutions. The implications from this work would appear to be that prison homosexuality is indeed related to violence. The custodial institutions are more deprivational, punitive, and repressive; the treatment types are more open, nonpunitive, and imbued with some humanitarian concerns for inmates, and utilize the rhetoric, if not the means, of correction. It is not only the amount of homosexuality that differs in the two types, but the content, with brutality, rape, and gang sodomy found in the custodial institutions.

Working in the California prison system, Kirkham (1971) found that there were three categories that prisoners themselves used to describe inmates involved in homosexual relations. In the vernacular of the prison, these are called "fairies," "punks," or "jocks" (or "jockers"), with numerous synonyms available for each word. To avoid the pejorative terminology, I am going to refer to the three as "effeminates," "involuntary recruits," and "voluntary aggressors," respectively.

The effeminates are males with obviously recognizable traits and mannerisms; all of these inmates have had a considerable history of homosexuality before incarceration, make a homosexual identification, and usually seek to take advantage of their availability for sexual purposes while in prison. Although there is a prison population of males who have been convicted of homosexual offenses against adults, minors, or children, as described by Gebhard and his colleagues, it is probably the case that most effeminate prisoners have not been incarcerated for sex-related crimes.

The involuntary recruits have come into prison with a self-image of themselves as heterosexual, and are raped, cajoled, threatened, or in some other way made into the passive (or insertee) partner.¹ Once raped or seduced, these persons become known as "jailhouse turnouts" or JTOs, a term that is used even when the event takes place in a prison rather than a jail.

The voluntary participants here described as aggressors use the effeminates or the involuntary recruits for homosexual acts (anal intercourse or fellatio), and are (or claim to be) the insertors.

These categories do not exhaust the possibilities for types of prisoners involved in homosexual conduct. According to a considerable amount of popular and even scientific literature, the majority of people following an exclusive or near-exclusive homosexual pattern are not effeminate. Any such persons who find their way into prison do not fit into any of the three categories. Their relationships would be voluntary and nonaggressive, and once it becomes known, or even suspected, in the inmate community that they participate in such acts, they become classified with and treated like the effeminates and the JTOs.

There is a special type of aggressive jockey, described to me in a letter from a young white prisoner who is a nonparticipant heterosexual, and who has spent most of his adult life behind bars. There is, he writes,

¹ See Kelly for a description of one way in which such a new inmate is recruited.

PRISON HOMOSEXUALITY

what is sometimes referred to as a "Folsom jockey." To best explain it, I'll tell the usual joke that describes him perfectly. Two men are celling together—one is the prison bully, the other a poor, meek, young-looking kid who has just come in and was thrown into the cell with this bully. The guy is beating up the kid, yelling at him, threatening him, and screaming, "Look, kid, you better do this or I'm gonna . . .," and the poor kid is protesting, "But I DON'T KNOW HOW!" And the bully replies, "Well, dammit, I'll show you one more time!"²

Finally, there is the question of whether there are people in a sex-segregated institution who make sexual alliances of a more voluntary and affectionate nature, even if such persons had no previous homosexual history. Instead of rape and threat, or the promiscuity so often associated with homosexuality, might there not be stable homosexual couples, similar to those described by Ward and Kassebaum in female prisons? There is little indication that there are such couples in male institutions. This may be merely a reflection of the lesser stability of all-male as compared with all-female couples in a marital-like situation, whether in prison or in the outside world. But toughness itself is a male prison value, and affection is its reverse, having an implication of softness. The male prison atmosphere not only is not conducive to affectionate homosexuality, but might be so hostile as to make its survival impossible. Reports of females who continue their relationships after prison, whatever may be the elements of truth or exaggeration in these stories, seldom have counterparts in the male world. Nevertheless, the prisoner mentioned above writes that he has encountered affectionate sexuality in a male prison.

For an inmate to escape stigmatization for his homosexual behavior, Kirkham suggests that he must fulfill two criteria:

(1) the homosexual act or acts must represent only a situational reaction to the deprivation of heterosexual intercourse, and (2) such behavior must involve a complete absence of emotionality and effeminacy—both of which are regarded

² Personal communication, 1975.

as signs of 'weakness' and 'queerness.' An inmate who engages in homosexual activity must present a convincing façade of toughness and stereotypical 'manliness' in order to escape being defined as a homosexual. [1971, p. 331]

It is clear, then, that these conditions are not conducive to affectionate homosexual coupling.

VICTIMS AND VICTIMIZERS

Inasmuch as the present study is concerned with how prison homosexuality affects post-prison sexual adjustments and behavior, the effeminates are excluded from the sample. They had made a homosexual identification before prison, and if they continued these patterns after release (as one might conjecture), it is hardly reasonable to consider the period of confinement as a contribution to such a way of life.

The interest, then, is in the involuntary recruits and the voluntary aggressors. Kirkham (1971) notes that if the involuntary recruit has been in prison before, and had been "turned out" there, his reputation follows him, and any effort he might make to resist would be doomed from the start. He is usually among the youngest prison inmates, and after being subdued, is highly stigmatized; like the female who is a victim of rape, he has what Goffman calls a "spoiled identity."

The voluntary aggressors, on the other hand, are usually older. Sometimes they commit forcible rape and even gang rapes on others, as vividly described by Davis. They are physically bigger and stronger, and frequently part of the inmate power group, show no signs of effeminacy, and make a heterosexual identification, not only for their pre-prison life but for their incarcerated life. It is said that they sometimes work with the tacit consent or approval of corrections officers, a statement that is difficult to validate.

Although the literature on homosexuality has frequently downplayed the importance of whether one is an active or passive partner, or, more accurately, an insertor or insertee, this appears to be an important

element in the prison homosexual scene. The voluntary aggressors are invariably, or claim to be, the insertors (save for the Folsom jockey already described), and insertion is an act of masculinity, of dominance, of forcing another into submission. The adolescent hustlers described by Reiss likewise claimed to be exclusively insertors, although in their case the insertion was claimed to be oral-genital; their relationship, if their descriptions are believable and not viewed as self-serving, cannot be understood as one of dominance and submission, but perhaps as dominance and humiliation.

The involuntary recruits and the voluntary aggressors have relatively fixed statuses. They are not marked by social mobility, but have a permanence attached to them. Once recruited by force or threat, by cajolery or trickery, the recruit has little hope for escape. After a first experience, an involuntary recruit may stave off his subduers and prevent the repetition of the act, but having been defined as one who had been subdued, his chances for success in having himself redefined are minimal.

Bartollas and his colleagues, studying the homosexual scene in a juvenile institution, found a pattern in which older, tougher boys subdued, exploited, overcame, seduced, and forced into fellatio the younger and weaker youths. The latter were then defined as "scapegoats," an extremely low status inside the institution, similar to that of the involuntary recruit in adult prisons. The scapegoat status followed the individuals after release:

The institutional subculture, including the informal power and status hierarchy of the inmates, enforced the "unclean" status assigned to the inmate by isolating him in the institution. Staff, in addition, reinforced his identity by providing him with little assistance in getting "off the bottom." The anomic state he is placed in, with his norms and values threatened, results in identity confusion and generally makes the time he is in this institution a living hell. Furthermore, his institutional "career" is likely to evolve into his community "occupa-

tion" as he continues to be a social outcast committing serious personal and property crimes. *He probably also will remain a sexual scapegoat in the community.* [Bartollas et al., p. 95; italics added]

Body build seems to be an important factor in determining whether one will be a successful aggressor or be successfully subdued. Davis writes that

virtually every slightly-built young man committed by the courts is sexually approached within a day or two after his admission to prison [in Philadelphia]. . . . Only the tougher and the more hardened young men, and those few so obviously frail that they are immediately locked up for their own protection, escape homosexual rape. [pp. 108-109]

Working with Davis' figures, which were made in a lockup (not a state or federal prison) where 81 percent of the inmates were black, Scacco notes that 85 percent of the aggressors were black. The difference between the two figures is small, but when the data on the victims are examined, one finds that 71 percent of the victims are white. This is due to the fact that 56 percent of the offenders were blacks who victimized whites, whereas the 15 percent of the offenders who were white chose only white victims. That white aggressors victimized only whites may have been due to their fear of reprisal by the larger and more powerful black inmate population. That blacks so often victimized whites may be due to the fact that the meaning of the act, as Gagnon and Simon have pointed out, may not be primarily sexual in character, but rather may be an expression of dominance needs. It is clear, as Scacco discusses in detail, that the atmosphere of racial oppression in America, particularly as seen by an inmate, would bring forth a need in blacks to lash out at whites and to express some dominance at a time of utter powerlessness. Nevertheless, Buffum suggests that some of the instances of interracial sex may not be rape, but may reflect "the desire of some overt white male homosexuals for Negro 'jockers'" (p. 23).

PRISON HOMOSEXUALITY

AFTER PRISON: NINE SUBJECTS

For a long time, I have been deeply interested in what occurs to the voluntary aggressors and the involuntary recruits after release from prison. I have been able to locate only a few people—five aggressors and four recruits—and the small number must make the findings suspect. One must challenge deductions, and be constantly aware of the possibility of unrepresentativeness. Nevertheless, such work need not be discarded outright; a major question is whether the findings can be reconciled with other data and are capable of lending themselves to convincing and parsimonious explanation.

In addition to the small sample, other difficulties arose. I met the JTOs through social circles in which homosexually inclined persons were gathering. Thus, the sample of JTOs was confined to those who had made a post-prison identification with homosexuality. None of them had succeeded in resuming their previous heterosexual life (assuming that their pre-prison pattern had indeed been heterosexual), and with one exception, had made little effort to do so. Lost to such a sample were those whose resocialization with a girlfriend or a wife was sufficiently successful so that the homosexuality had been a temporary experience, to be remembered perhaps as no more than another unpleasant reason for not wanting to return to prison. As for the five voluntary aggressors, I met them only through parole and corrections officers, who assisted me in locating persons meeting the qualifications for this study and willing to submit to an interview on the subject.

A further difficulty was in the deliberate dissembling attempted by all those studied. For the aggressors, there was an insistence that there had been no homosexual experience, or very little, before incarceration; second, there was an effort to play down the unwillingness of the partner or partners to participate in the prison sexual experience, and an assertion that nothing

more was ever used than persuasion; and third, a denial that there was any further homosexual experience following prison. The first and third of these contentions can be understood as efforts to project an image of self as heterosexual. The second—that no forcible rape had ever occurred—was more ambiguous. An important factor here was not only the projection of an image as a nonviolent person (the very reverse of the way a prisoner often wants to be seen by his convict-peers), but also the suspicion that anything said might find its way back to the parole officers. Further, if one were seeking sex with a male to the point of wanting to subdue him and force oneself upon him, this suggests the possibility of a homosexual component that an ex-prisoner might not like to make known to self or others.

In the involuntary recruits, there were two contentions that had to be accepted with caution. The first involved their pre-prison sexual lives. Were they really jailhouse turnouts, or had they been involved in voluntary homosexuality, without showing signs of effeminacy? Second, and related thereto, how unwilling had they been in their first prison homosexual experiences? Since they were now making open homosexual identifications, there did not seem to be any vested interest in claiming pre-prison heterosexuality, or prison victimization. But the possibilities for dissembling were there.

The five aggressors had been out of prison a relatively short time (averaging four months) at the time of the interviews. The four JTOs had been free a longer time (the average was more than two years, and the range was from four months to five years). Both groups were young while in prison; none of the nine had been over 25, and none had been under 18. The latter figure is particularly significant: (1) they had all had sexual experiences before prison, and (2) the events that they describe did not take place in a youth facility, as did those depicted by Bartollas and his colleagues. None had been convicted of

political crimes, draft evasion, white-collar crimes, or sexual crimes. All their convictions had been for nonsexual crimes against persons or against property, including burglary, street robbery, and automobile theft. Eight of the nine had been out on suspended sentences at the time of their arrest. None had served more than one prison term, except for local lockups pending trial, at the time of the interview. The five aggressors consisted of three blacks, one Puerto Rican who made a white identification, and one white. The four recruits consisted of three whites and one Puerto Rican who could have made a white or black identification; when asked if he thought of himself as white or as black, the latter replied, "I'm Hispanic." There may be more blacks among the subdued recruits than this would indicate (29 percent of all the recruits, according to the Davis figures), but the homosexual social circles in which these persons were located were predominantly white. The narration of the events as they took place in prison was unverifiable, and must be seen essentially as how the narrator wanted the interviewer to know about such activities. This was also true of the pre-prison sexual history, in which there may have been a tendency to show less homosexuality than actually occurred, and it could also be true of the post-prison sexuality, although I did make some effort to confirm this part of the narration whenever possible.

The Stories of the Aggressors

The five aggressors were all tall, muscular, strong, and tough-looking; two of them might well have been culled from a photographic album of the stereotypical hard criminal. They admitted (or claimed) sexual experiences in prison, and in all instances insisted with tremendous verisimilitude that they had done all the inserting. They showed no affection for anyone with whom they had had sexual contact; in fact, in all instances they displayed so much contempt that it seemed to fortify the truth of their denial of any insertee role at any

time (although one can also interpret their attitudes as an expression of a reaction formation). They talked of the recruits as homos, punks, fairies, fags, JTOs, cocksuckers, boy-girls, and in other terms that betrayed nothing but contumely.

The aggressors were particularly sensitive about the private nature of what they said. They had to be promised complete anonymity. They insisted that nothing that they said should be taped, and that there should be no hidden tape-recorders. The researcher made a commitment that no information would reach parole officers. Because the number of people was so small, it might have been possible to identify them nonetheless, but sufficient time has passed since the interviews so that this would by now be practically impossible, and, further, would have few, if any, adverse effects.

The aggressors, while denying violence, claimed to have been capable of having any boy-girl that they wanted, whenever they so desired, but at the same time they would never admit having forced themselves on "a kid." Davis gives a particularly vivid picture of a rape, but it was obtained from a victim; the victimizer tends to deny, conceal, or embellish the same occurrence. There was never an admission of a gangbang in which one aggressor held down a victim, while another performed an act of sodomy (here defined as anal intercourse) or forced fellatio. Rather, they presented the homosexuality as having resulted from persuasion or sometimes from threat or a show of potential force; but in the narration of the aggressors, when the chips were down "the kid" gave in because he really wanted it. He was "really a queer" and just had not come out yet, one aggressor insisted, and if he hadn't wanted it, he would have fought to the end against it.

This is obviously an embellished version of what had occurred, and whenever something like this was said during a discussion (all interviews were separate from one another, and to my knowledge, none of the ex-convicts was acquainted with any of the others), I made known my skepticism, with

PRISON HOMOSEXUALITY

the hope that it would not destroy whatever trust they had in me. When the question of force was raised, one former prisoner laughed and said that everybody knows that there's no real difference "between rapping and raping," that it's only a matter of the word you use and how you want to see it. The aggressors mentioned a variety of methods of advances used, in shower, recreation, and laundry rooms; some of these types of encounters are described in detail by Kirkham (1971). They claimed that with the connivance of both other inmates and corrections officers, they had arranged to be alone with the object of their interest at a particular time and place, a statement not unlike one made by a victim and reported by Sagarin and MacNamara. Three of the five aggressors volunteered the information that there was never a problem about time, place, or even privacy. One claimed that he used to ask a corrections officer to let the youth of his choice into his cell at night, to play a game of cards or checkers. It was all worked out with utmost simplicity and full cooperation. When a victim arrived, he knew what was expected of him and—according to the narration of the ex-convict—either accepted it as a matter of fate, or protested only meagerly.

The following conversation is reproduced from memory, written down soon after the interview:

RESEARCHER: If he had screamed, would anyone have come to his aid?

PAROLEE: Well, no, I guess not.

R: So he'd have screamed, and wouldn't give in, and nobody would come to help him. What would you have done? The next step would be up to you, wouldn't it?

P: Well, like I say, this did happen, this kid screamed, and I said to him that if he hollered again I'd have to hit him, and I told him that I didn't want to do that. You know, I wouldn't have wanted to hurt the kid.

R: So you told him that, and what happened then?

P: He just looked at me, and I told him to pull down his pants and lay down on my bed, and he said, "Take it easy, just don't hurt me," and that is what happened.

R: That's all?

P: Well, I told him I wouldn't hurt him, so I put on a lot of grease, and I just went in slow, and he didn't scream any more, so I figured he must have liked it.

R: You wouldn't say you were forcing him to do it?

P: No, I wouldn't call that forcing him. I sure as hell didn't rape him.

R: But you said to him that if he hollered again, you'd have to hit him. That's threatening him, isn't it? You're a pretty big and strong guy. Maybe he was just afraid that you'd kill him, or knock the shit out of him?

P: No, he didn't even try to fight with me. The first time that I told him to stop hollering, he just gave in. Like a girl—first she's got to say no, and then she says yes, or she just lets you without saying anything. So I figure he must have really liked it.

The interview went on to other matters, and about an hour later, without questioning or provocation, the parolee returned to the previous conversation.

P: You know this kid I was telling you about, the one who hollered and then I told him he better not do it again?

R: Sure, what about him?

P: You still think I forced him, because I told him he better not holler or I'd hit him? You think I forced him, don't you?

R: I'm not sure. If you say you didn't, then you didn't. Or at least that's your way of looking at it.

P: You know, I told you he liked it. Well, I had him two-three times a week, and then there was another kid I had my eyes on, and I just played it cool, and then nothing happened for a week or so. Then Sandy comes up to me in the yard, and he says, "What's the matter, Joe? I ain't heard from you for a while." So I says, "I thought you said you're not a fairy, that you didn't like it, so I figure I'd give you a break. If you don't want it, you don't have to have it." And he says, "Well, you get used to things, Joe. I'm not saying I like it, but it's better than having nothing."

R: Why are you telling me this, all of a sudden? We weren't even talking about it anymore.

P: Well, I just want you to know, nobody forces a punk. Maybe the first time you get him scared, and he thinks it's going to hurt, but if he didn't really want it, he'd fight like hell. This

punk was like all the rest. You break them in, and the first thing you know they're dying for it. You give them up and you find somebody else, and if they can't get back with you, they start chasing every prick they can get. They're not innocent like you think. They want it, I tell you, they want it, but they just don't like to admit it at first. They got to come out, just like any other fairy.

R: I still want to know why you're telling me this.

P: Because I want you to know, I never raped, and I never knew anybody else who raped. We find a kid that's a nice piece of ass, and we just fool around and see if he's going to fight us off, and if he don't, then he wants it, even if he can't realize it himself yet.

The aggressors all said that at times they had had a single inmate as sex partner, using the same person over and over, and not permitting him to be touched by any other inmate. But these exclusive arrangements are short-lived. In one instance, an aggressor insisted that he was taking care of three younger inmates over the same period of time, that he did not allow any of them other experiences; but he appeared to be exaggerating, perhaps fantasizing with regard to power and sexual prowess. When there were new arrivals in prison, or someone tired of an old "lover," partners were frequently exchanged (sometimes without the prior consent or knowledge of the recruits), and new bedmates acquired. One aggressor claimed to have had a homosexual pimping operation going in the prison for a time, in which he was "renting out" to others a group that he called "his boys." Claims of this sort are not only unverifiable, but carry an air of bragadocio; despite the damaging nature of the admissions (but made to someone pledged to secrecy), they may indeed be false confessions. Yet, as such, they are not to be ignored, for they shed a great deal of light on those who make these apparently untrue statements.

The Stories of the Involuntary Recruits

The four subdued tell another story, which in large measure is complementary

to that of their subduers. They insist that they were either physically raped, or so completely threatened that they were afraid to resist. They told of being slapped on the face, punched in the stomach, and given other brutal treatment until they were willing to be passive and accept sodomy, or be the receptor in fellatio. With their first experience of sodomy, they could recall the pain and the humiliation; with fellatio, a tremendous amount of disgust, retching, unwillingness or inability to pursue the sucking even when hit, and a meager attempt to perform. When the first such event was over, they were told by the subduers that they were punks, "which is worse than being a fairy, because it's a fairy that won't admit it." When they protested that they had been forced into the act, the aggressors laughed, saying, "That's an old story, nobody could force you if you really didn't want it," and said that the "punks" would learn to like it so much that they would be coming around begging for it. Reports of this sort are all the more remarkable because they are being recalled by people who later made a homosexual identification and who at the time of the interview found pleasurable something that they nevertheless were recalling with extreme disgust.

The predictions made by the aggressors about these men turned out to be true. Everyone thought of them as punks, and they began to suspect that that was what they were. The experience began to lose its displeasure, and they found themselves even liking it a little, especially if not accompanied by physical pain. They had all heard about latent homosexuals, and they began to suspect that that was their fate.

One may ask why there is no complaint from the victim, if indeed he is the unwilling recruit. Buffum writes:

Today, if one who is the victim of a prison sexual attack has the temerity to complain, the likely result will be (1) retaliation by other prisoners, (2) segregation and attendant loss of privileges within the prison, (3) ridicule and embarrassment and (4) possible prosecution of

PRISON HOMOSEXUALITY

the offender, which in fact provides the prisoners with no tangible relief. [p. 33]

Further, Scacco emphasizes the role of the correction officer in not aiding the victim, whether because of a desire to keep the peace by not antagonizing the most powerful groups in the inmate society, or because of corruption. Gibbons puts the issue of staff involvement very strongly:

This kind of violence has usually been covertly encouraged by the institutional staff. It is not the work of disturbed youths, or mess-ups; instead, it must be seen as a basic feature of the social organization of correctional institutions. [p. 8]

It is a story of accommodation and of self-identification, in which one sees himself as he thinks he is seen by others. The recruits thought that they had no alternative but to submit—that this was the only path to survival, very much like the method of survival in concentration camps described by Bettelheim. They discovered that almost immediately after the first event, which became known throughout the prison with great rapidity, they were labeled, not as victims, but with the pejorative terms used for those who had sought and enjoyed the experience. Everyone looked upon them as homosexuals and talked about them as if they were, and they were approached as if they were open territory for anyone who wanted them, unless the consent of a specific aggressor was required. Two brief excerpts:

You get used to anything. You got to live. And I suppose getting used to it, you get to like it. Liking it is your way of getting used to it.

Maybe they were right. Maybe I was one of them all along. I don't know. But I came out in prison, I know that.

SEXUAL PATTERNS AFTER PRISON

What happens to men whose first homosexual experiences are as prisoners? What occurs to them upon release and resocialization into the two-sexed society?

The five aggressors all claimed, and with a great deal of convincing evidence, that

they were living exclusively heterosexual lives—"normal" is the word that most of them used. They were in some instances with a girlfriend or a wife—in one case, the same wife as before prison. Two of them were "playing the field." In the words of one man, "You know sex ain't hard to get. I get as much as I want of it." All categorically denied any interest in males.

R: How about the kind of sex you had in prison?

P: Punks?

R: Boys, young men, kids.

P: Why would I want a fairy, when I can get a broad?

This last remark was expressed with such astonishment at the question, that to disbelieve the ex-convict was hardly possible. It is a spontaneous reply of this sort, with the quizzical look of someone who cannot understand why he has been asked something incredibly stupid, that imparts credibility to the answer of a respondent.

Inquiries with girlfriends and with a wife did elicit some verification that there is heterosexual activity, but with a new element: some sexual violence, some tendency toward brutality during and preceding sexuality, an overlording and demanding attitude that might be interpreted as a continuation of the violent sex of prison. Some would argue, as do Rosenberg and Bensman, that a good deal of lower-class non-marital and even marital sex is accompanied by crudity and brusqueness, bordering on or deeply involved with violence. The problem of determining whether these people had become more violent in their sexual lives is complex, and an answer can only be conjectural; further, if the violent component of their sexuality had increased, was it prison itself that brutalized them, or was it the manner in which they obtained sex while in prison? I would not argue that the people I met had displayed a violence typical of lower-class persons; they seemed to me to represent the small proportion of the lower class that engages in violent crimes, and who are hence very likely to continue their violent patterns, criminal or noncriminal, following prison.

As for the four who had been the reluctant and subdued partners in prison, as I indicated, it is difficult to generalize on their post-prison homosexuality because they were encountered through homosexual social circles. Efforts to locate jailhouse turnouts who had returned to the heterosexual life, through legal circles, parole officers, counselors, therapists, and others, were unsuccessful, but this may not be because they do not exist (they probably do, in large numbers), but because those who have relinquished homosexuality seem to regard it as especially stigmatizing and seem to avoid admitting it.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

If one were to take these nine persons as representative of the aggressors and their victims, the outcome of their lives is ironic, but the irony is not beyond explanation. Of those who had actively sought a homosexual experience and not only had willingly entered into it but also had inflicted it on others, all returned to heterosexuality. On the contrary, all of those who had been forced and subdued into homosexuality, who insisted that it had hurt and disgusted them and that they had entered it most unwillingly, continued the pattern and pursued it in their post-prison years.

For an explanation of the plausibility of the first finding, the work of Gagnon and Simon, both on prison homosexuality and on sexual conduct generally, is most valuable. For the actors, the manner in which they define an event is significant. The meaning that they impute to it and find in it, especially when reinforced by similar definitions by significant others, will influence the consequences of the event for their life patterns. For the aggressors, the subduing of another was not primarily a search for sexual outlet, affection, or even release from tension. It was a means for the reaffirmation of masculinity in a subculture in which few other methods were available for such expression; the fact that the same event, the sodomizing of another

male, would have been defined in their own outside world as a flight from masculinity was irrelevant. In prison, sexuality was a means for the expression of dominance over another.

That the act itself was homosexual is indisputable from the viewpoint of a behavioral scientist. But this is not quite so clear to the participants. They were concerned not with the definition of the act, but only with the labeling of the actors, including themselves. They did not see themselves as homosexual, and this definition of self was reinforced by the acceptance of it by their peers. The boy-girl was the one who received the phallus, whether orally or anally, and a boy-girl was (for them) a punk, a fairy, a homosexual.

For themselves, the aggressors knew that the person with whom they were having sexual contact was a male, but they conceived of him as a substitute for a female (not the same as fantasizing that he was female, which might also have been the case). Hence, they saw the act as one that they were performing as normal or straight persons on another who was "queer."

During their stay in prison, there was no pressure to define themselves as homosexual. They placed temporal limits on the sodomistic acts, in much the same way that young males in a primitive society, as described by Money and Ehrhardt, become fellators for a short time and then mature into heterosexuality along lines of normative expectations and culturally approved socialization processes. For the aggressors, the prison homosexuality was a temporary expedient, and because they always thought of it in that fashion, they could emerge with their heterosexuality untouched, their masculinity undiminished, their normalcy unquestioned, their self-image untarnished. Similarly, Buffum refers to the active participants in a homosexual gang rape as defining it as a heterosexual experience.

When one understands inmate homosexuality as an expression of masculinity and of the need for dominance in a prison atmosphere in which dominance is almost

PRISON HOMOSEXUALITY

completely crushed by the very fact of incarceration, one can grasp the reason for the interracial character of prison homosexual patterns. Many of the prisoners are black, and they see themselves in large measure as having been victimized by a white society, imprisoned by white judges, and kept in cages by white wardens and corrections officers. To subdue another is an affirmation of strength and power; when that other is a white man, and when he is humiliated by being reduced to the status of punk, the act may be particularly gratifying.

As for the subdued, it is unfortunate that many who note that people accommodate to the homosexual pattern interpret this as an indication of latent homosexuality (Kirkham, 1971). The concept of latent homosexuality is at best ambiguous, as pointed out by Salzman, and because it is applied *ex post facto* and with near-universality, I have contended elsewhere (1974) that it has little or no explanatory value. There is nothing in the previous life histories of people converted to homosexuality for the first time in prison, or in a sex-segregated school, that indicates that they had strong "tendencies" in that direction before such experiences. The connection of lack of resistance with latency is similar to the belief in the old saw that if a woman did not unconsciously want to be raped, she would be able to resist. The prison surrender can much more readily be explained by the size of the aggressor and his apparent strength, and by fear, degree of demoralization, nature of the institution, number of persons present, methods used by the aggressor, and other factors.

Assuming that there must be many of the subdued who do return to a life of heterosexuality, one is still confronted by the fact that others do not. Perhaps length of sentence, or anticipated length of incarceration, may have been a factor affecting the post-prison behavior. Nonetheless, it is true that some persons with a previous heterosexual history did become jailhouse turnouts, and then continued a homosexual pattern that they had entered

reluctantly and under protest. For these persons, it appears that prison homosexuality was an experience to which they had to adjust if they were to survive. The choice was acceptance or suicide, and after the first painful experience with homosexual aggression, it is possible that even accommodation to prison may have been facilitated by acceptance of their new role, deeply denigrating but nonetheless offering some advantages. Acceptance of this role meant that they had to learn to struggle less, and success in it meant that they had to learn to enjoy it and to adjust to it as a form of sexuality. Surrounded by people who knew of their activities and who defined them as "queer," they might very well have found it easier to accept this pejorative appellation than to fight it. The belief in the concepts of latency and of coming out, and the language surrounding these reified ideas, perhaps served as self-fulfilling prophecies. Writing of those who take a passive role, Buffum calls attention to "the possibility of the distortion of their self-conceptions" (p. 28). A distortion (or a change, to use a more neutral term) in self-conception seems to take place in some instances.

All four of the involuntary recruits claim to have had regular pre-prison heterosexual experience. Two had wives (one was separated at the time of the arrest) and one had a girlfriend with whom he had had regular sexual relations at the time of arrest. The fourth was "playing the field." The man with the girlfriend made an unsuccessful effort to resume the relationship with her, and he drifted into homosexual circles, including some occasional "hustling" (male prostitution); the others made little effort to return to their former heterosexual lives. The man who had been married and living with his wife when arrested was bitter because the wife had disappeared, had never visited him, and had started divorce proceedings; he blamed his subsequent homosexuality as much on this as on the occurrences in prison.

The experiences of these four are congruent with what is often reported in the

literature about adolescents. Humphreys describes a man who protested that he had disliked certain physical acts when he first participated in the homosexual scene:

Well, I started off as the straight young thing. Everyone wanted to suck my cock. I wouldn't have been caught dead with one of the things in my mouth! . . . So, here I am at forty—with grown kids—and the biggest cocksucker in [the city]! [p. 109; ellipses and bracketed material in the original]

This, however, is by no means the same situation as that being described in this paper, since Humphreys is talking about someone who did participate in homosexual acts, but exclusively as an insertor until he changed his role and became an insertee. "Such preferences, however, are learned" (p. 109), he writes, referring to the preference for one type of physical act over another, "and sexual repertoires tend to expand with time and experience." The experiences of these ex-prisoners would suggest that preferences for a same-sex or other-sex partner can also be learned, and that sexual repertoires may contract with time and lack of experience, just as they can expand with time and experience.

Male prostitutes have frequently been interviewed, particularly on television, and one of the most common refrains is that they had engaged in their first homosexual experiences for financial gain or some other nonsexual reason, that they had initially reacted with apathy or even disgust, and that they had almost without exception learned to like the experiences. Again, this is true only of those who, in their late teens or early twenties, were still in prostitution; it does not include those who, after one or two experiences, recoiled from it, or after many more, relinquished it. In the novel *City of Night*, Rechy describes how male

prostitutes adapt to and learn to enjoy the process, although in the early part of their career, they are emotionally uninvolved.

It would appear, then, from these few interviews, that homosexuality can be a learned way of life, but that the learning need not take the form that has so often been described in the literature of deviance. It may not be a matter of initiation into a form of conduct toward which one is relatively neutral and that one learns to enjoy through repetition. Rather, the learning may take place even under conditions of active unpleasantness. It takes place through adaptation and accommodation, through an effort to suppress fear and disgust in order to make the act less repugnant, and it is reinforced by the definitions of others and by the concepts of latency that are today widely known even in relatively less educated groups. Furthermore, the experience of going from heterosexual to homosexual identification and life pattern can take place after the onset of maturity; it need not be during adolescence, as has frequently been suggested.

The question of whether repeated homosexual experiences lead to fixed or exclusive homosexuality, or are time-limited in a one-sex setting, does not depend primarily on whether the experiences are actively sought, nor on the amount of sexual pleasure obtained, but on the meanings imputed to the experience by the actor.

The post-prison experiences of these nine persons, when compared with their pre-prison and prison sexual behavior, would suggest not a theory of latency, but a theory of the malleability of human sexual orientation.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10031

REFERENCES

- AKERS, R. L., et al. "Homosexual and Drug Behavior in Different Types of Prisons," in E. Sagarin and D. E. J. MacNamara (Eds.), *Corrections: Problems of Punishment and Rehabilitation*; Praeger, 1973.
- BARTOLLAS, C., et al. "Becoming a Scapegoat: Study of a Deviant Career," *Sociol. Symposium* (1974) 11(Spring):84-97.
- BETTELHEIM, B. "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," *J. Abnormal and Social Psychol.* (1943) 38:417-452.

PRISON HOMOSEXUALITY

- BUFFUM, P. C. *Homosexuality in Prison*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Admin., Natl. Inst. Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice; Govt. Printing Office, 1972.
- A. J. DAVIS. "Sexual Assaults in the Philadelphia Prison System," in J. H. Gagnon and W. Simon (Eds.), *The Sexual Scene*; Aldine, 1970.
- GAGNON, J. H. Working paper presented to Conference on Prison Homosexuality, 1971; reported in Buffum, 1972.
- GAGNON, J. H., and SIMON, W. *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*; Aldine, 1973.
- GEHARD, P. H., et al. *Sex Offenders: An Analysis of Types*; Harper & Row, 1965.
- GIBBONS, D. C. "Violence in American Society: The Challenge to Corrections," *Amer. J. Correction*, March-April, 1969.
- GOFFMAN, E. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*; Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- HUMPHREYS, L. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*; Aldine, 1970.
- IRWIN, J. "Some Research Questions on Homosexuality in Jails and Prisons," working paper presented to Conference on Prison Homosexuality, 1971; reported in Buffum, 1972.
- KELLY, R. J. "Commentary on Gene Kassebaum, 'Sex in Prison,'" *Sexual Behav.*, Jan. 1972, p. 41.
- KINSEY, A. C., et al. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*; Saunders, 1948.
- KIRKHAM, G. L. "Homosexuality in Prison," in J. M. Henslin (Ed.), *Studies in the Sociology of Sex*; Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971.
- KIRKHAM, G. L. "Commentary on Gene Kassebaum, 'Sex in Prison,'" *Sexual Behav.*, Jan. 1972, p. 42.
- MONEY, J., and EHRHARDT, A. A. *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*; Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972.
- RECHY, J. *City of Night*; Grove Press, 1963.
- REISS, A. J., JR. "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers," *Soc. Problems* (1961) 9:102-120.
- ROSENBERG, B., and BENSMAN, J. "Sexual Patterns in Three Ethnic Subcultures of an American Underclass," *Annals Amer. Acad. Polit. and Soc. Science* (1968) 376:61-75.
- SAGARIN, E. "Homosexuality and the Homosexual: An Overview of the Former and a Denial of the Reality of the Latter," presented to Amer. Sociol. Assn. and Society for Study of Soc. Problems, Montreal, Aug. 26, 1974.
- SAGARIN, E., and MACNAMARA, D. E. J. "The Homosexual as a Crime Victim," *Int. J. Criminol. and Penol.* (1975) 3:13-25.
- SALZMAN, L. "The Concept of Latent Homosexuality," *Amer. J. Psychoanal.* (1957) 17:161-69.
- SCACCO, A. M., JR. *Rape in Prison*; Charles C Thomas, 1975.
- WARD, D., and KASSEBAUM, G. *Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure*; Aldine, 1965.

