

Coping with Separation: Adaptive Responses of Women Prisoners

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ABSTRACT. This study is a descriptive analysis of the adaptation responses of inmates at a correctional institution for women located in the midwest of the United States. Data for the study were collected and analyzed using a qualitative methodological approach. This investigation extends the literature on women prisoners by examining the inmates' perceptions of the deprivations of incarceration; how inmates respond to the deprivations of incarceration; and the impact that relationships outside of prison has on the inmates' response to incarceration.

Numerous studies have focused on the impact of prison on the inmate. Among the earliest and most influential was Clemmer's (1940) *The Prison Community*. In this study, Clemmer identified the concept of prison socialization, or prisonization, which is a process operating over time whereby the inmate is first initiated into and then becomes a part of the inmate social and cultural system. Following the research of Clemmer, two general theoretical models were developed to account for how inmates adapt to imprisonment, the "deprivation model" and the "importation model."

According to the deprivation model (Sykes 1958), prisoners

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The author is grateful to Kathleen A. Rehbein, James A. Holstein, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

Women & Criminal Justice, Vol. 5(1) 1993
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e-2561

construct a set of roles and a supporting inmate code in response to the painful conditions of confinement. In contrast, the importation model (Thomas 1975) asserts that inmate adaptations are based on factors external to the prison, including pre-prison socialization and various dimensions of contact with the outside world. Tests of the models on women in prison by Jensen and Jones (1976) and Hartnagel and Gillan (1980) provide partial support for both models. A more recent study by Larson and Nelson (1984) lends support to the deprivation model by identifying the prison specific variables of time served, time remaining, and feelings of powerlessness as providing greater insights into the adaptive process of women in prison.

The early studies by Ward and Kassebaum (1965) and Giallombardo (1966) found that although women experience the same deprivations of incarceration as do men, the social structure that develops in women's prisons differs substantially from that found in men's prisons. In contrast to the males, female inmates tend to organize into relatively enduring primary relationships, often involving dyadic homosexual attachments and extensive "quasi-family" relationships. Even though most studies of women prisoners have found that female inmates tend to organize into enduring primary relationships, the specific form the relationship takes varies from study to study (Heffernan (1972); LaShanna (1969); Leger (1987); Mawby (1982); Moyer (1980); and Van Wormer (1987)).

THE LITERATURE ON WOMEN IN PRISON

As previously mentioned, early studies by Ward and Kassebaum (1965) and Giallombardo found that women experience the same deprivations of incarceration as do men. In addition, most studies of women prisoners have found that female inmates tend to organize into enduring primary relationships (Heffernan (1972); LaShanna (1969); Leger (1987); Mawby (1982); MacKenzie, Robinson and Campbell (1989); and Van Wormer (1987)). However, there is significant disagreement in this literature as to the structural form of the relationships. What follows in this section is a brief historical presentation of the major works on the adaptation of inmates in prisons for women.

In one of the earliest studies of women in prison, Ward and Kassebaum (1965:28-29) compare the women's response to the "pains of imprisonment" with male inmates. The authors conclude that the painful conditions of confinement which male prisoners must bear apply to female prisoners as well, although in different degrees. Ward and Kassebaum went on to say that the central mode of adaptation for women is the homosexual alliance.

The findings of Giallombardo (1966) are consistent with those reported by Ward and Kassebaum. She maintains that women in prison attempt to create a "substitute universe" wherein they are able to preserve an identity relevant to free society (1966:129). This identity revolves around prescribed societal sex roles. The focal point of inmate adaptation is the creation of "fictive" family structures in order to preserve a female identity.

The research of Heffernan (1972) and Giallombardo (1966) support the hypothesis that prison fictive kinship structures arise, in part, out of the deprivations of imprisonment and that they fulfill important functions for the female inmate. Both Heffernan and Giallombardo emphasize the concept of latent cultural identity as a factor in the formation of the fictive family, referring to the pre-institutional identity which the female offender brings with her into the prison setting. The reason that women construct the kinship structures in response to the deprivations of imprisonment, while the men do not, is because females are socialized to conceive of themselves, their peer relations and their need-satisfactions, primarily in terms of family roles and situations.

LeShanna's (1969) investigation at Marysville also discovered the presence of the fictive family, but unlike Giallombardo, most of the families were matricentric, meaning that they did not center around a mother and father united in a homosexual marriage. LeShanna also observed that the most frequently reported and influential role at the reformatory was that of mother in the fictive family.

Mawby's (1982) study of a prison for women in Britain compares the findings with those reported for American prisons for women. The British prison included a higher proportion of first offenders and more offenders whose crimes are relatively minor than American prisons. Also, the inmate's contacts with family and friends outside the prison appear to be more frequent than the

United States. Mawby found that familial structures and lesbian relationships play a less significant role in the British prison than has been revealed in American prisons. Mawby speculates that the utility of the responses to imprisonment vary according to both the types of women sent to prison and the contact that the women have with the outside world.

Additional studies of women prisoners do little to clear up the confusion in the literature regarding the precise nature of the female response to incarceration. Moyer's (1980) study of leadership in a women's prison found that the women who are identified as leaders tend to be outspoken, are able to defend themselves physically, and play the dominant male role in homosexual relationships. However, she cautions that not all aggressive behavior is defined as positive for women, since leaders must also demonstrate an ability to survive and improve the institution. MacKenzie's et al. (1989) study of long-term incarceration of female offenders found that the length of incarceration influences adjustment and coping. Newly entered inmates are more apt to participate in "play" families and are more concerned about safety issues. Newly entered short-term inmates express less control over their immediate environment while inmates serving longer terms in prison report more situational problems such as boredom, missing luxuries, and lack of opportunities.

In summary, it can be concluded from prior research that the painful conditions of confinement which male prisoners must bear apply to female prisoners. What differs is the structural form of the response of male and female prisoners to the deprivations of incarceration. Also, more research is needed to identify the precise nature of the female response to incarceration, as is indicated in differences found in the structure of fictive families and the broad range of estimates of participation in fictive families. This paper adds to the literature on women in prison by focusing on the adaptation responses of women to incarceration. The central issues that shape this paper are: (1) What do inmates perceive as the primary deprivations they face as a result of incarceration? (2) How do inmates respond or adapt to the deprivations of incarceration? and (3) What impact does contact with the outside (or lack thereof) have on the inmate's prison experience?

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study were collected at a Midwestern Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW) during 1984-1986. MCIW is the only adult correctional facility for women in the state. The institution is designated minimum security with one building serving as a medium security unit. The population of the institution fluctuates between 65-105 in three general living units, one honor unit, and a medium security unit. The variability in population may be explained by the use of shock incarceration which tends to deplete the inmate numbers and a court imposed state-wide prison population cap.

A qualitative methodological approach was chosen for this study because of the type of information that was sought and the size of the prison population when the study began (Glaser and Strauss (1967)). A random sample could not be conducted for this study because of the limited number of inmates at MCIW when the study began and the prison's constantly fluctuating population. Ideally, it would have been best to interview all 68 inmates at MCIW, but that was not feasible for a variety of reasons. First, the inmates, representing a disenfranchised group, may have seen no personal benefit from participating in the proposed research. Second, there was very little financial incentive for the inmates to participate, since I was allowed to pay them only \$.41/hour (the rate of state pay). Lastly, many of the inmates who were tested and evaluated intensely during their orientation period may have viewed a sociological study such as this one as a continuation of this distasteful orientation process.

The project began when the inmates at MCIW were informed that a sociologist would be at the prison and would like to meet with them to discuss a research project. Their attendance at this meeting would be voluntary. I met with the inmates in their respective cottages. During the meetings, I introduced myself, discussed the study, and answered any questions they had. Following this initial contact, twelve inmates agreed to participate in the study. Over the course of the project, a total of thirty-one inmates were interviewed and an additional five inmates participated in separate two-hour follow-up interviews.

The primary source of data comes from ninety minute interviews with thirty-one inmates. The interviews were conducted in private and were tape recorded. An interview guide was developed based on prior research on female prisoners. Included in this guide were open and close ended questions designed to gain information on the following features of prison life:

1. The early phase of incarceration, including the inmate's orientation to incarceration and deprivations that they faced.
2. The informal social organization of inmates, including groups that developed and inmate role types.
3. The relationships that inmates maintain with the outside world.
4. The relationships that develop among the inmates at MCIW.

Other supplementary sources of data were also used. I participated as a group leader in a parenting skills course that was taught at MCIW. This class met two nights per week for three months. Eighteen inmates were enrolled in this course. Since the class was part lecture, I was able to record some of my observations on the spot, and then I would add to these notes after the class ended.

Another source of data were observations that I made in the cafeteria during the lunch period. On the days that I interviewed at the prison, I would spend approximately 90 minutes in the cafeteria having lunch with the inmates. I was able to observe territoriality in the cafeteria and would ask general questions of the group of inmates I would be eating with at the time. These observations were then recorded after the lunch period ended. In addition, I attended a variety of educational, recreational, and social programs for inmates at MCIW that were held during the course of the study. Not only did my participation in the parenting class, the cafeteria, and various programs provide valuable data, it also allowed the inmates to ask me questions about myself and the study in a non-threatening environment. As a result, a number of inmates asked if they could participate in the study.

Despite problems of sample size and recruitment of subjects, the sample population for the present study compares favorably with a general profile of the inmates at MCIW (from official documents). The sample population averaged 30 years of age, were predomi-

nantly single, separated or divorced, were predominantly Caucasian (74%), had an eleventh grade education, and were generally convicted of a property offense (68%).

The constant-comparative method was used to analyze the data (Glaser and Strauss (1967)). This involved joint coding and analysis aimed at producing theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible and close to the data. Initially, a list of emerging themes developed during the interview process and from early observations. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and additional themes were developed during the process. The responses from the tapes were coded to identify major topics and clusters of responses. Categories were continually clarified and refined according to the emerging themes. The transcripts and field notes were re-read again and again to assure a close correspondence between the data and the developing themes.

THE DEPRIVATIONS OF IMPRISONMENT

On their entry into prison, inmates are exposed to a set of experiences which tend to reaffirm their status as rejected members of the larger society. "They are stripped of personal possessions, individual decision-making prerogatives, many legal rights, and in short, deprived of their identity as individuals" (Thomas 1975:485). By virtue of their status as inmates, they must face what Sykes (1958:63-83) has termed the "pains of imprisonment: (1) the loss of liberty; (2) loss of goods and services; (3) denial of heterosexual relationships; (4) loss of autonomy; and (5) loss of security." The rigors imposed on the inmate by the prison officials do not represent relatively minor irritants which she can somehow endure; instead, the conditions of custody involve profound attacks on the prisoner's self-image or sense of personal worth, and these psychological pains may be far more threatening than physical maltreatment (Maslow 1941).

Studies of women prisoners have identified separation from family and friends as the most severe deprivation encountered (Ward and Kassebaum (1965); McGowan and Blumenthal (1976)). This is also true for women imprisoned at Midwestern. It should be noted

that 80% of the women interviewed were mothers (but, of that 80%, only 68% of the inmate-mothers had their children living with them prior to incarceration). Imprisonment of a mother creates additional problems for the inmate-mother on top of those problems faced by the inmates in general. The primary problem confronting the inmate-mother is what to do with her children during incarceration. Rarely can the father be counted on to take care of the children. Most of the inmate-mothers at Midwestern typically relied on parents, siblings, in-laws, cousins or friends to care for their children during their absence. Also, one third of the respondents reported that their children had to be separated, because they were unable to find someone able to accommodate all of their children.

The frustration experienced by inmate-mothers does not lessen over time (See Sobol (1980); Lundberg et al. (1975)). For example, over 50% of the inmate-mothers had received no visits from their children during their incarceration. One mother, who has been incarcerated for over four years, has had only one visit from one of her children during her incarceration. Most mothers, especially those with infant children, expressed concern about their children becoming attached to their temporary caretakers, as is shown in the following response:

I'm real concerned about my daughter, because she was only four months old when I was arrested. And, I found out from my son that she calls my sister Mom and my sister's kids her brother and sister. I'm not really worried about my son, because he was five when I was arrested and he is ready for me to come home right now. So, I told him, you have pictures of me and you show them to her and you tell her that this is her Mom and that I love her very much, and give her a kiss and a hug. He really liked that idea, so I am hoping that he can kind of teach her who I am. But I don't know.

A second deprivation encountered by the inmates is the inability of prisoners to predict, or make sense of what is going to happen to them, which Galtung (1961) referred to as "institutionalized uncertainty." At MCIW, the second most frequently cited response in terms of difficulties of adjustment concerns the rules that the inmates are expected to follow. At one time or another throughout the

interviews, nearly all of the inmates mentioned the pettiness of the rules. For example, talking in the hallway outside their rooms in the cottages as well as failing to go to the evening meal can result in a disciplinary report. Many of the women at Midwestern have a difficult time understanding the rationale behind many of the rules, as is expressed by the following inmate:

For instance, the petty rules. I thought prison was going to be that you're locked up and it's enough to be locked up, and they put you in your cell and you do what you want in there. But, they can put you in your cell here, and you still can't do what you want. They've got control of every little personal thing that you do, which is really hard to accept.

Another concern registered by the inmates is being locked up with a group of people you cannot trust. There are two important areas of distrust. First, there is a concern for physical safety:

Realizing the people I was going to be in here with, you know, murderers and people like that. I've never been around people like that before.

Being around people you can't trust. You know, they're young and temperamental; You never know what's going to happen. They are like a live fuse waiting to go off.

But, an even more frequently cited problem is what many of the inmates refer to as "he say, she say," or the "telling of tales":

Women are just different. For instance, men will fight at the drop of a hat, whereas a woman will try to turn and get others involved in it and say stuff behind people's back. They will not come out with it. They'll try to get the whole campus involved. You know, women like to gossip a lot, and in doing so, they're out to see people hurt, and in that way they can be in charge.

The involvement in "he say, she say" is said to be widespread and second only to the rules and staff as a primary source of trouble for the inmates. This raises an important dilemma for inmates at MCIW. The rules are considered to be petty and childlike and

enforcement by staff is discretionary and inconsistent, which in turn increases the uncertainty for the inmates. But, turning to other inmates to clear up some of the uncertainty is problematic, at least during the early stages of the prison sentence, because of this general distrust of other inmates. Inmates may resolve this dilemma by adopting the attitude of "expecting the unexpected."

TENUOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

As previously mentioned, separation from family and friends is a severe deprivation faced by the inmates at Midwestern. Upon entry to prison, one of the inmate's primary concerns is how to maintain a relationship with the outside world. Contact with the outside world is possible through three different avenues: visits, letters, and the telephone.

Contact with the outside serves a number of important functions. First, it provides an opportunity to demonstrate love and caring, as is expressed by the following inmate responses:

Contact with the outside is pretty important because no contact would mean that they didn't care.

When you get to prison and stuff, you really know where you stand with the family. You know how much they really care, and their concern and love and all that, you know. Because they have stuck by you.

Secondly, contact with the outside also provides a sense of support and encouragement for the inmates, as is demonstrated in the following responses:

It is very important for my self-esteem. If I didn't have these people out there caring for me, I probably wouldn't care about myself.

It's like they've done my time with me. They've stuck by me through the hell, they come up every chance they get. They've just encouraged me to keep my [s. . . t] together.

But, an inmate's relationship with the outside world can prove to be one of continuous frustration. One reason for this frustration is that the outsiders may not realize how important contact with the outside world is to the inmate:

People out there still love and care about you, but they don't realize what it is about in here. So, consequently, they don't give you the attention that they should give you.

A lack of contact with the outside world leads inmates to believe that they have been cast away by their family and friends, as is described in the following inmate responses:

Sometimes I am almost frightened that I have grown cold while I've been in prison, because sometimes it is like I don't feel. And that bothers me. And I know that deep down I care about these people, but it's like I don't feel. I have been here for three years and I have not seen one of my sisters Prison is really hard on improving family ties. I wonder sometimes if I have been dumped by my family.

It is clear, though, that the prison sentence provides a valuable learning experience for the inmate.

You really do learn who your friends are, because you lose the good-time friends.

Inmates sometimes look at how much contact they receive from outsiders as an indicator of how much the outsiders care for them. For the inmates, visits are the most important type of contact because it requires the most effort from the outsiders. Families are the most frequent visitors, with nearly 50% of the participating residents receiving one or more visits a month from a family member. Only 15% of these residents received monthly visits from friends, and just one of the twenty-four residents who were married or in a serious relationship prior to incarceration received a visit from her husband or boyfriend. Of course, there are many reasons why the outsiders do not visit more frequently. First, 46% of the husbands and boyfriends are in prison or on parole, as are many of the friends.

Other factors include visiting hours conflicting with work schedules, lack of transportation and the cost associated with a trip to the prison.

Use of the telephone is an alternative means of contact for the residents. Calls at MCIW must be initiated by the residents, and all calls must be made collect. Approximately 58% of the residents maintained at least monthly contact with family members, while contact with husband/boyfriends (46%) and friends (35%) was significantly less frequent. Again, cost was a major reason given for the limits they placed on their phone use.

Contact by mail was the most likely means of maintaining a relationship with the outside world. This is especially true for friends, from whom 65% of the residents received at least one letter per month. But again, residents continued to receive the most contact from family members (68%), while husband/boyfriends (50%) lag somewhat behind the others.

So, as can be seen, families are the greatest source of contact with the outside world for the inmates. With this in mind, most inmates state that their relationships with parents and siblings are more likely to improve during incarceration than with husbands, boyfriends, or other friends. But, at the same time, few residents are happy with the amount of contact that they have with the outside world.

While contact with family and friends provides a sense of support for inmates, this can be diminished by the inmate's unwillingness to open up to the "outsiders." The inmates attempt to ease the fears that the outsiders may have by controlling information to them, as is demonstrated in the following:

You don't tell them the mind games that go on. I would never tell my mother the things that go on in here, because you don't want to see your mother hurt, and you want her to come up and see that this place looks like a college campus.

But, outsiders also attempt to shield the inmate from news that might upset her or cause her to worry.

I've had so much torment over that. My grandmother died and they didn't want to tell me. I can tell by my Dad's voice that

something went wrong. Yes, anything that he thinks is going to hurt me.

I know they don't tell me until they have to. That is a very frustrating feeling. It's like being treated like a kid, and that's a double whammy because that's how we are treated in here by the staff.

So, outsiders and inmates control the flow of information in order to protect each other from information that might scare them or situations in which they are unable to do anything. This reciprocal control of information results from both the inmates' and outsiders' fears and expectations of prison life. Both are attempting to put the other at ease, alleviating in part, their fears and expectations. But, this controlling of information and the relative infrequency of contact also emphasizes the grief of both parties and potentially operates to increase the social distance between the inmate and the outside world.

These findings on the difficulty of maintaining relationships with the outside world are consistent with the existing literature (Brodsky 1975; Fishman 1990; Holt and Miller 1972; and Carlson and Cervera 1992). The stigma accompanying incarceration affects the whole family, leading some members to distance themselves overtly or covertly from the offender by not visiting or communicating in other ways. In addition, the conditions and constraints of prison life make it extremely difficult to maintain close ties with the outside world. It should be noted that this topic has been a severely neglected area of research (Baker et al. 1978) and focuses primarily on the family (parents and spouses) of male prisoners. The existing literature supports the current study's contention that frequency of contacts diminish over time, that relationship with the inmate's mother improves while other outside relationships tend to disintegrate, and that self-disclosure by the inmate tends to be limited in scope.

ADAPTATION TO SOCIAL ISOLATION

Faced with the problems and dilemmas of a tenuous relationship with the outside world, inmates search inside the prison to find

someone out of this pool of untrustworthy candidates on whom they can count to provide the support that they need and desire. In general, inmates will find this support in one of the following types of relationships: the "quasi-family," the "couple" or the "rap-partner."

The Quasi-Family

Nearly all studies on the informal inmate social structures of women have examined the dimensions of the prison family, using a variety of terms to represent this relationship (Selling 1931; Foster 1975; Ball 1972; Brown 1977). Regardless of what term is used, these researchers refer to forms of quasi-kinship in women's prisons whereby inmates use kinship terminology to express their wish for stable and durable bonds represented by our ideal of the family and to reinforce and maintain existing close relationships (Propper 1982). At Midwestern, the quasi-family is a term used to describe a relationship that develops among the inmates, although the term may be somewhat misleading. Many of the inmates feel that the relationships that develop among the inmates are similar to families on the outside, as is shown in the following response:

Sometimes you get close enough to a resident that she feels like a sister, or you look up to a resident as you would a mother. You just feel close enough to them that you feel like they are part of your family. A lot of times I feel that most of the residents are one big family.

But, some of the inmates do not believe that the quasi-family resembles family relationships in the outside world at all. Rather, the "Mom" is more like a counselor or advisor. The term "quasi-family" has been adopted here primarily because the inmates use the words "Mom" and "kid" to describe the different roles that the inmate plays in the relationship.

The quasi-family is a relationship between one more experienced inmate and anywhere from one to fifteen other inmates. Persons who fulfill the "mother" role are described as generally older, more experienced, and are the most respected inmates in the institution.

They are usually older and have longer sentences, and they have more of the real life experiences. They kind of keep you in line and out of trouble. And if you don't stay out of trouble, then you have them breathing down your neck.

They are active in things around here. They help the younger girls adjust, they give advice, and they are someone that you can be open with since there is such a lack of trust around here. They are the most respected of the inmates.

There are usually about two mothers in each housing unit, and that number remains fairly stable. When one mom leaves, someone just fills in that position. There really isn't any competition between the "Moms," and the "kids" will sometimes seek advice from more than one "Mom."

The "Mom" sees her role in much the same way as the kids describe it. It's being patient with them. Offering advice and constructive criticism. We help them sort through their problems. It's a thing called trust, a feeling that you have found someone in here that you can really trust.

_____ tells me her problems and I give her good, sound advice. I listen to what she has to say, even when things bother her, upset and hurt her. And if she is doing something that is not right, then I tell her so.

The most frequently cited reasons for the inmates performing the role of mother are the respect they receive from the other inmates and an opportunity to express their nurturant feelings.

There are some people in here who are really into motherhood, or that have lost their kids or had them taken away, and they need somebody to be like their child. When I first came in, there were several who wanted to mother me. Some people can take this and some can't. You can walk around these grounds on any given day and hear somebody say, "Mom, mom, look what I did today." It's something you can understand . . . The people that are portraying the mother need to be able to give that nurturing feeling.

The inmates who adopt the role of child generally are younger, somewhat insecure, and do not have much of a relationship with outside family members.

The kids are younger, less experienced residents. They are girls that haven't had a family or they are missing out on having a mom. They are just girls who are needing something. They are needing a helping hand or a stronger person than they are to lean on.

The kids are real insecure, scared, weak, and don't know how to defend themselves. They generally have very little contact with their family, and that's why they cling to this inside the prison.

According to inmate estimates, approximately 50% of the inmates participate in quasi-family relationships. What the kids receive from this relationship is a great deal of emotional support and assistance in dealing with the everyday problems associated with incarceration.

She shows concern for me, gives me time, and if it's my birthday, she remembers it. I go to her for advice when I need it. And, she sticks by me. Sometimes, though, they will just out and out tell you you're messing up. Like I was floating down the hallway one day and she told me she wanted me to meet her in the shower so we can talk. When I got there, she told me to sober up and turned on the shower, and then she told me how that wasn't good for me and stuff.

Whether or not an inmate has a good relationship with an outside family member is not the crucial point. What is important is the inability of the outsiders to understand what the inmates are experiencing and their unavailability to assist the inmate at that moment she needs help.

The ties are there but at the choice of the family. So the resident doesn't have any control. The feelings are there, the love is there. Doing time is something that is hard for people out there to comprehend. Therefore, a lot of the problems she is

dealing with right now, she needs someone to talk it over with right now . . . She needs somebody to listen to her and to understand her.

There are other differences between "Moms" and "kids" other than age and experience. For example, "Moms" interviewed for this study are more likely to be serving sentences of 10-25 years while nearly all of the "kids" are serving sentences of 5 years or less. "Moms" are less likely to receive disciplinary reports (2 or less per year) than are the "kids" (4 or more per year, with most receiving 1-2 per month). Also, contrary to the perception of some inmates, all of the "Moms" interviewed have retained custody of their natural children while this is true for only 36% of the "kids."

The quasi-family represents one type of relationship that develops as a response to incarceration. This relationship is similar to the other types of relationships in that it provides emotional support for the inmates, but it differs from the couple relationship in that an incest taboo does operate at Midwestern. As the inmates strongly maintain, homosexuality and families are not the same. One mom put it best when she said: "It's not a sexual thing. If I'm a mom, I don't have sex with my kids. That's unheard of."

Couples

In almost any book or movie that focuses on the prison experience of women, there will be some mention of homosexuality. Thus, anyone entering prison will come to the prison with some preconceived idea that homosexual relationships are quite prevalent.

They come in here with these ideas and think that everybody is laying with somebody else. And that's not so.

It is important that we distinguish between an isolated homosexual experience and a homosexual relationship. At Midwestern, inmates' estimates of how many inmates participate in a sexual affair while incarcerated ranges from 5-100%, with the average being approximately 45%. The highest estimations (75-100%) of inmate participation in a sexual affair are given by inmates who

have served less than three months in prison. These higher estimates appear to reflect the new inmate's pre-prison fear of homosexuality and their lack of knowledge of the prison social world. This lack of knowledge may influence the inmate's definition of a homosexual affair. It could be defined as hugging, kissing, spending most of your time together, or, as one inmate referred to it, "doing the business."

For instance, some gestures I did once were interpreted as me making a homosexual overture. And I looked at these people and said you're nuts, because there is one thing that I'm not, and that is gay. This is me, this is the way I am. It just lets me know and keeps me in check, but it's my way of letting you know that I care about you as a human being.

When asked what percentage of the residents are in a couple relationship, the range of estimates decreased slightly from 5-75%. But, more importantly, 41% of the estimates fell in the range of 5-15%. The inmates involved in these relationships maintain that they are very open about them.

The majority of the people on campus know about it, and I don't think they look at me any differently.

In every cottage there is about 2-3 couples. There was three in unit one, two in unit four, and two in unit three.

There does not seem to be any active recruiting or any pressure placed on inmates to participate in these relationships. Instead, it appears to be more like a courtship.

There is no physical pressure, it's more like being courted. It's just like on the streets. If you want somebody, you wine and dine them.

It develops out of loneliness, not pressure—by somebody taking that extra little, like if you were a woman and I came up to you and I made a point of asking how your day is going or bring you a candy bar, or saying, hey, that's a beautiful blouse you are wearing. Mainly showing her attention. It is like a courtship.

Although many of the inmates had a difficult time understanding why a person would become involved in this type of relationship, the majority saw the relationship as arising out of a basic need in a less than normal situation.

Anytime you take something away from a person that is supposed to be normal, and they still have normal feelings, then you have people trying to be normal in an unnatural [sic] situation. Consequently, you have unnatural [sic] sex.

I know that it's because many normal, natural relationships and feelings are denied in prison that people get into those situations. They need someone.

Although the inmates state that sex is a basic need that we all have, they believe that sex is the least important aspect of these relationships. The primary need met by the couple relationship is emotional.

I don't really believe that it's a whole lot more—now granted, there is probably a lot of physical contact, but I think a lot of it is just emotional. It is nice to know that somebody in here gives a [f .. k] about them.

Another important need met by the relationship is having someone to share things with.

It's much easier to do my time having someone to share things with, to tell my problems to. For instance, my daughter is going to have a baby. Nobody else out here cares if my daughter is going to have a baby, but she does, she does. She cares if a tear comes out of my eye, she cares if I don't have a visit on Wednesday that I was promised Before, I had to handle things on my own, but now I have someone to share with, or to take half of the hurt off me.

Other needs met by the couple relationship are a sense of belonging and trust.

It's having someone who belongs to you, and for you to belong to. You know, it's a good feeling that somebody cares. It

also helps getting some of your self back, or your identity. Plus, it's something that is yours, something my counselor doesn't know anything about, or the warden. Therefore, I can be honest with this person. I can have one person in this place I can be completely honest with. You really can't trust the other residents, cause I don't know what's going to make them flip funny. This is the only person I can tell that I like the color blue, I like spaghetti. I can be totally honest with this person and I am.

As can be seen, many needs are fulfilled by the couple relationship. While these needs that are met are similar to that of the quasi-family, there still exists one major difference, and that is the element of romance.

They need something to hold on to, somebody to love them in a way that a mother can't. It has to be a romantic love. They really love each other.

And for many people, love and sex mean essentially the same thing.

I do know that it's because they are lonely, and it's because you need someone in here. And for some people, they need sex as a part of their life. That may be the only way that they have shown their love in their whole life, through having sex.

The couple relationships described by the inmates at MCIW seem to differ markedly from those described in the literature. For example, Ward and Kassebaum (1965) stated that the central mode of adaptation to prison for women was the homosexual alliance. This is certainly not confirmed by the present study. In addition, Giallombardo (1966; 1974) noted that the focal point of the female adaptation is the creation of make-believe family structures in order to preserve a female identity. In turn, this family system provides the structural conduciveness for the creation of, and participation in, female homosexual alliances. This is also not confirmed by the present study, since participation in couple relationships is an adaptive response of a small percentage of the inmate population and operates independent of the quasi-family.

Propper (1982) acknowledges the confusion that exists in the literature between homosexuality and make-believe family relationships. One reason given for this confusion is that the argot terms are often identical for both types of relationships. Also, the terms fail to distinguish between overt sexual activity, erotic crushes, make-believe family relationships, and asexual friendships. Estimates of participation in make-believe family roles range from 0% (Ward and Kassebaum 1965) to 71% (Wentz 1965), and estimates of homosexuality range from 0% (Feld 1977) to 94% (Giallombardo 1974). These estimates could indicate real differences among institutions or spurious variations because researchers used alternate methods of collecting data or different definitions of the behaviors.

In the present study, the couple relationships were separate and distinct from the quasi-family. In addition, contrary to existing literature, the women at MCIW who were involved in couple relationships described their relationships in egalitarian terms, rather than in the traditional male-female dichotomy (Van Wormer 1981). Although this could represent changes in sex role relationships in the outside world that have been imported to the prison, further research is needed to document this finding.

Rap Partners

The final type of relationship to be discussed is that of the rap partners, or good friends. It is very difficult to distinguish between the couples and the rap partners, because they essentially meet the same needs of the inmate, except the sexual needs. This confusion is demonstrated by the following response:

I think there is a lot less sex going on around here then people think, because if you're in a friendship, some people think you are lovers.

It's just having a good buddy. We have a lot of that and there is no sexual business going on. It's just straight up friends. This is the most common type of situation.

One of the primary needs that a rap partner meets is that of companionship.

It's important to have a good, solid friendship because we are people, we are social beings. We weren't meant to be alone.

Like the quasi-family and the couple relationship, the rap partners fulfill the needs of sharing, trust and emotional support.

They are someone to share things with. Like ____ and I, we do it just for the emotional support. She needs someone to talk to and I need someone to talk to. There's nothing sexual there. It's just being good friends, and knowing that you've got somebody that you can have their shoulder to cry on, to have somebody to talk to. You know, you really can't trust many people around here, and once somebody finds that special someone that they can talk to and tell them how they are feeling and getting some positive feedback, I think that helps.

It is clear that the friendships that develop at MCIW meet many of the same needs as do the couple relationship (Larson and Nelson, 1984). What is important to note is that the difference between the two relationships is virtually indistinguishable to the casual observer. It raises the issue of staff and researcher bias in terms of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you believe that a large percentage of the inmates are participating in homosexual relationships, isn't it likely that one might use selective perception and interpretation of routine behavior to confirm that belief. The fact that inmates who have served less than three months in prison have significantly higher estimations of inmate participation in a sexual affair than do long term inmates is informative. It suggests that people who have pre-prison expectations and concerns about prison homosexuality and lack direct knowledge about the inmate social world may interpret behavior in different ways than full members of that social world.

Going It Alone

A fourth type of adaptive response to imprisonment is "going it alone." Those inmates who had prior expectations of prison violence and were concerned about being around others they couldn't trust are likely to consider doing their time on their own by isolating

themselves from others. While many inmates agree that this is a possible way of doing time, they also feel that it would be very difficult.

Yes, but it would be hard and really long. I planned to do that but found out that everyone wasn't out for blood.

It's possible to do it alone. I mean, the others would leave you alone. If they don't know anything about you, they tend to shy away from you. It's hard; it makes it awful hard, but that's her choice.

About half of the inmates in this study believe that it is not possible to go it alone. Relating to other inmates serves too many important functions for the inmates. First, it aids in the inmate's understanding of the prison:

There is just too much uncertainty around here; you just would never know what to expect without talking to others.

More than anything, the inmates need the emotional support and companionship that is provided by forming a relationship of some type with another inmate.

It would be real tough; there's so much to put up with and misery loves company. No, I think you need someone to talk to. You have your bad days; it's somebody to tell it to, and on your good days, it's someone to share it with. I like to be around people and I think most people are like that.

The prospect of facing a prison sentence without the affective support of any kind, although a possible response to incarceration, is not considered a viable solution to imprisonment. Of the thirty-one respondents in this study, only one person felt that the best way to do time is to "stay to yourself." Because of the variety of needs met through affective relationships, the remaining respondents do participate in at least one of the three types of relationships that develop inside the prison.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this paper shed some light on the major debates that exist in the literature on women in prison (Giallombardo 1966; Heffernan 1972; Leger 1987; Mawby 1982; Moyer 1980; Van Wormer 1981; and Ward and Kassebaum 1965). The first debate focuses on the role of affective relationships, especially fictive families, on the adaptation process of women prisoners. Ward and Kassebaum (1965) observed that homosexual dyads took place but found no relationship between these relationships and the appearance of any form of extended kinship structure. Like Ward and Kassebaum, Giallombardo (1966) found homosexual marriages but she also found that these relationships formed the basic nucleus around which the inmate social structure of the prison revolved. In contrast, LeShanna's (1969) study disclosed that most families were matricentric, that is, did not center around a father and mother who were united in a homosexual marriage. And finally, Mawby (1982) reported that the inmate subculture in a British prison was not as strong as that reported in American prisons and that familial structures and lesbian relationships play a less significant role.

The findings in the present study are similar to Mawby's (1982). Midwestern contains a large number of inmates who are incarcerated for the first time and who have been convicted of relatively minor offenses (MCIW annual reports). Seventy-five percent of the inmates in this study have no prior prison commitments and fifty percent were convicted of offenses such as false use of a financial instrument or prostitution. This could be one reason why the couple relationship is not as prevalent at Midwestern as it has been reported at other U.S. prisons. Because many inmates will be serving shorter sentences at Midwestern than at other prisons, the inmates may have less of a need to establish the couple relationship as an adaptive response to incarceration. But, being incarcerated for even a short period of time does create hardships, and these hardships may be eased through participation in partnerships or the quasi-family.

A second debate in the literature concerns which theoretical, the "deprivation" or "importation" model, provides the greatest explanatory power. Both Heffernan and Giallombardo emphasize the

concept of latent cultural identity as a factor in the formation of the fictive family. But, in the present study, separation from family and friends is one of the primary deprivations experienced by the inmates and when combined with infrequent and controlled contact with family and friends from the outside world, this may encourage inmates to search for companionship and emotional support from within the institution. This task is made more difficult when we consider that the inmates are very much concerned about being around people they cannot trust. With this in mind, inmates at Midwestern search for that someone special with whom they may form a sincere and trusting relationship. In addition, the quasi-family is matri-centric, and the other affective relationships are described in egalitarian forms, which is counter to depiction of these relationships resembling traditional husband/wife roles in the outside world.

The three types of relationships that exist at Midwestern—quasi-families, couples, and rap-partners—meet many of the needs of the inmates, including companionship, emotional support and trust, which are needs that cannot be met by isolating oneself or are not being met through existing relationships with the outside world. Because affective relationships play such a significant role at MCIW and other prisons for women, it is up to correctional administrators to decide which course of action to take regarding these relationships. But it is evident that future research is necessary to determine how participation in quasi-families, couples, and rap partnerships affects both the institutional adjustment of inmates and the ex-offender's chances for parole success and for a satisfactory adjustment to the free world (Van Wormer 1987). Until these questions are resolved, correctional administrators will not possess scientific guidelines upon which to base rational policy formulations towards these relationships.

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