

CHAPTER 12

Prison Life

Teaching Outline

I. Introduction (p.349)

A. Research on Prison Life: Total Institutions (p.349)

- Early research into prison life focused primarily on male maximum security facilities.
- Goffman's study of prisons and mental hospitals led to the concept of total institutions.

Total Institution: An enclosed facility separated from society both socially and physically, where the inhabitants share all aspects of their daily lives. (p.349)

II. The Male Inmate's World (p.350)

- The two social realities in prison are the official structure of rules and procedures and the more informal and more powerful inmate world, which is controlled by prison subculture.
- Different prisons share aspects of a common inmate culture.

Prison Subculture: The values and behavioral patterns characteristic of prison inmates. Prison subculture has been found to be surprisingly consistent across the country. (p.350)

Prisonization: The process whereby newly institutionalized offenders come to accept prison lifestyles and criminal values. Although many inmates begin their prison experience with only a few values that support criminal behavior, the socialization experience they undergo while incarcerated leads to a much wider acceptance of such values. (p.350)

Prison Argot: The slang characteristic of prison subculture and prison life. (p.350)

A. The Evolution of Prison Subcultures (p.350)

- Prison subcultures change constantly

Instructional Cue

Discuss subcultures, including the fact that they can be found in many occupations and different human environments. For example, when discussing law enforcement, the text describes the police subculture. Similarly, many cultures and subcultures, such as the fraternity and sorority subcultures, exist on college campuses. Have students try to identify different subcultures in a class discussion.

B. The Functions of Prison Subcultures (p.351)

- Sykes's deprivation model states that prisoners are deprived of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and personal security; this leads to the development of subcultures intended to ameliorate the personal pains accompanying deprivation.

- The importation model of prison culture states that inmates bring their values, roles and behavior patterns with them.

C. Prison Lifestyles and Inmate Types (p.352)

- Prisoners have some choice in prison lifestyle
- Researchers have described types of prisoners:
 - The mean dude
 - The hedonist
 - The opportunist
 - The retreatist
 - The legalist
 - The radical
 - The colonizer
 - The religious
 - The gangbanger
 - The realist

Instructional Cue

The text describes nine inmate types. Ask students to develop a hierarchy based on the descriptions of these inmate types. What inmate types have the most power in prison society? Who would have the least amount of power? Through this exercise, students will develop an appreciation for the different types. It will also help them understand various aspects of inmate society.

D. Homosexuality and Sexual Victimization in Prison (p.354)

- Sexual behavior is constrained and encouraged by prison subculture.
- Argot terms that explain homosexuality include wolf (a male inmate who assumes the masculine role in homosexual relations), punk (an inmate forced into submitting to the female role), and fag (an inmate who has a proclivity toward homosexual activity and effeminate mannerisms).
- Wolves and punks are committed to heterosexuality but participate in homosexual activity due to their situation.
- Prison rape is a special category of sexual victimization behind bars; reports of sexual violence vary significantly between prisons and across states.
- Victims of prison rape are often reluctant to report incidents due to fear of reprisal, an inmate code of silence, personal embarrassment, and lack of trust in staff.

E. The Female Inmate's World (p.355)

- Women account for less than 7% of prison inmates but the number of female inmates is growing at a rate greater than that of male inmates.
- Female offenders differ significantly from male offenders in terms of personal histories and pathways to crime.
- Women's most common pathways to crime involve survival strategies resulting from physical and sexual abuse, poverty, and substance abuse.

F. Parents in Prison (p. 356)

- 80% of women entering prison are mothers and 85% of these women had custody of their children at the time of admission.
- About 70% of women under correctional supervision have at least one child under age 18.
- Many children of imprisoned mothers are placed into foster care or put up for adoption; more than half never visit their mothers during the period of incarceration.
- Prisons for women in 36 states provide parenting programs that deal with caretaking, reduction of violence toward children, visitation problems, and related issues.

G. Gender Responsiveness (p.357)

- Critics charge that female inmates are faced with a system designed for male inmates and run by men, so that meaningful prison programs for women are often lacking and programs in place are based on models adapted from men's prisons or on traditional views of female roles that leave little room for employment opportunities in the contemporary world.
- A NIC report identified effective gender responsive approaches for managing female inmates that may improve the outcome for women offenders.

Gender-Responsiveness: The process of understanding and taking into account the differences in characteristics and life experiences that women and men bring to the criminal justice system, and adjusting strategies and practices in ways that appropriately respond to those conditions. (p.358)

H. Institutions for Women (p.358)

- There is no typical women's prison, but most are centralized state facilities that house only women.

I. Social Structure in Women's Prisons (p.359)

- Female inmates tend to create organized pseudofamilies; research suggests that as many as 75% of female inmates are involved in these families.
- Kinship systems can be elaborate and intricate.
- Incarcerated women often suffer intensely from the loss of affectional relationships in prison and form homosexual liaisons to compensate; these liaisons become the foundation of prison social organization.
- Sexual misconduct between staff and inmates is more commonly found in women's prisons than in prisons for men.

J. Types of Female Inmates (p.360)

- Three terms used by female inmates are the square (inmates with little experience with the criminal lifestyle who identifies with the values and attitudes of conventional society), the cool (more likely to be a career criminal), and the life (familiar with lives of crime).

- Crack kids, who highlight the generational differences, are streetwise young women with little respect for traditional prison values, for their elders, or for their own children.

K. Violence in Women's Prisons (p.361)

- Violence in women's prisons appears to be less frequent than in institutions for men, and is mainly used to settle questions of dominance and subordination when other manipulative strategies fail.
- One study found the use of sexual violence as a form of revenge against inmates who are overly vocal in condemning lesbian practices among inmates.

III. The Staff World (p.361)

A. Facts and Figures (p.361)

- Approximately 748,000 people are employed in corrections, with the majority performing direct custodial tasks in state institutions.
- Like inmates, correctional officers undergo a socialization process.
- The primary concern among officers is custody and control.

B. The Professionalization of Correctional Officers (p.362)

- Corrections officers generally have been accorded low occupational status.
- Some states now use psychological screening but all use training programs to prepare applicants for prison work.

IV. Prison Riots (p.363)

- 1970-1980 was the "explosive decade" of prison riots, beginning with the Attica Prison uprising in New York in 1971 that resulted in 43 deaths and over 80 injured inmates, and ending with a riot at the New Mexico Penitentiary in 1980 in which 33 inmates died, over 200 were beaten and sexually assaulted, and the prison was virtually destroyed.
- The number of prison riots decreased after the 1980s but did continue.

Instructional Cue

One of the interesting aspects of the Attica prison riot was that inmates requested, and were granted permission, to have the news media present during negotiations with correctional administrators. A substantial amount of riot footage exists because television cameras were present. For example, some very powerful footage can be seen in the Eyes on the Prize video series.

A. Causes of Riots (p.365)

- Causes of prison riots include:
 - Insensitive prison administration and neglect of inmates' demands.
 - Previous lifestyles of most inmates.
 - Dehumanizing prison conditions.

- Regulation of inmate society and redistribution of power balances among inmate groups.
- Power vacuums.
- The real reasons for any riot are probably specific to the institution and may not allow for easy generalization.
- The explosive decade of prison riots coincided with the growth of a revolutionary prison subculture.

Security Threat Group (STG): An inmate group, gang, or organization whose members act together to pose a threat to the safety of correctional staff or the public, who prey on other inmates, or who threaten the secure and orderly operation of a correctional institution. (p.366)

V. Prisoners' Rights (p.366)

Hands-Off Doctrine: A policy of nonintervention with regard to prison management that U.S. courts tended to follow until the late 1960s. For 30 years, the doctrine languished as judicial intervention in prison administration dramatically increased, although there is now evidence that a new hands-off era is beginning. (p.367)

Civil Death: The legal status of prisoners in some jurisdictions who are denied the opportunity to vote, hold public office, marry, or enter into contracts by virtue of their status as incarcerated felons. Although civil death is primarily of historical interest, some jurisdictions still limit the contractual opportunities available to inmates. (p.367)

A. The Legal Basis of Prisoners' Rights (p.367)

- In *Pell v. Procunier*, the Supreme Court established a balancing test to guide prison authorities in determining what rights an inmate should have. Inmates should have the same rights as nonincarcerated citizens, provided that the legitimate needs of the prison for security, custody, and safety are not compromised.
- The Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) of 1980 applies to all adult and juvenile state and local care facilities and further enforces the legal rights of prisoners.
- Prisoners' rights are conditional rather than absolute, because they are constrained by the legitimate needs of imprisonment, and bear a strong resemblance to privileges, although unlike conditional rights, privileges can be revoked at any time for any reason.
- The past few decades have seen many lawsuits brought by prisoners challenging the constitutionality of some aspect of confinement.

Balancing Test: A principle developed by the courts and applied to the corrections arena by *Pell v. Procunier* (1974), that attempts to weigh the rights of an individual, as guaranteed by the Constitution, against the authority of states to make laws or otherwise restrict a person's freedom in order to protect the state's interests and its citizens. (p.367)

B. Grievance Procedures (p.369)

- All sizable prisons have grievance procedures through which inmates can file complaints with local authorities and receive a mandated response.
- Disciplinary actions by prison authorities may also require a formalized hearing process.
- *Wolff v. McDonnell* found that sanctions cannot be levied against inmates without appropriate due process, which was the beginning of the concept of “state-created liberty interests.”

Grievance Procedure: A formalized arrangement, usually involving a neutral hearing board, whereby institutionalized individuals have the opportunity to register complaints about the conditions of their confinement. (p.369)

C. A Return to the Hands-Off Doctrine? (p.373)

- In June, 1991, an increasing conservative Supreme Court signaled the beginning of what appears to be a partial return to the hands-off doctrine in *Wilson v. Seiter*.

Deliberate Indifference: A wanton disregard by correctional personnel for the well-being of inmates. Deliberate indifference requires both actual knowledge that a harm is occurring and disregard of the risk of harm that is occurring. A prison official may be held liable under the Eighth Amendment for acting with deliberate indifference to inmate health or safety only if he or she knows that inmates face a substantial risk of serious harm and disregards that risk by failing to take reasonable measures to abate it. (p.373)

1. The Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996 (p.375)

- This act represents an effort to restrict inmate filings of civil suits to worthwhile cases and to reduce the number of suits brought by state prisoners in federal courts.

VI. Issues Facing Prisons Today (p.376)

A. AIDS (p.376)

- The incidence of HIV infection stands at 140 cases per 100,000, but best estimates put the reported HIV infection rate among inmates at 510 cases per 100,000.
- Most infected inmates brought HIV into prison with them but the virus can be spread in prison through homosexual activity, intravenous drug use, and the sharing of tainted tattoo and hypodermic needles.
- Strategies to reduce the transmission of AIDS include segregation, and prevention through education.

B. Geriatric Offenders (p.377)

- The graying of America’s prison population has a number of causes
 - The general aging of the American population.
 - New sentencing laws sending more criminals to prison for longer terms.

- A massing prison-building boom in the 1980s and 1990s that provided more space and reduced the need to release prisoners to alleviate overcrowding.
- Significant changes in parole philosophies and practices.
- Few prisons are equipped to deal adequately with the medical needs of aging offenders.

C. Inmates with Mental Illness and Intellectual Disabilities (p.378)

- Inmates with significant mental illnesses account for a substantial number of those imprisoned.
- 51% of state prisons provide 24 hour mental health care and 71% provide therapy and counseling by trained mental health professionals as needed.
- Mentally deficient inmates, those with low IQs, are less likely to complete training and rehabilitation programs successfully and also have difficulty adjusting to the routines of prison life.

D. Terrorism (p.379)

- Corrections officers can help in the fight against terrorism through effective intelligence gathering and sharing.
- The threat of a terrorist act being undertaken by inmates is an important consideration in facility planning and management.
- The incarceration of convicted terrorists presents new challenges for corrections administrators at state and federal levels.

Learning Activities Utilizing the World Wide Web

The following are presented as instructor led activities, to be used in a classroom with online access.

Search the World Wide Web for stories about life in prison from the perspective of a correctional officer or an inmate. After displaying an overview of this information, lead a discussion on the different prison life perspectives.

Other websites for organizations and agencies related to the material in Chapter 12 include:

Prison Legal News

<http://www.prisonlegalnews.org>

Attica Prison Riot

<http://video.pbs.org/video/2112801229>

Weight Lifting In Prisons & Correctional Recreation

<http://www.strengthtech.com/index.htm>

15 Years to Life

<http://www.15yearstolife.com>

National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women

<http://cjinvolvedwomen.org/>

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

<http://www.cor.state.pa.us>

Prison Policy Initiative

<http://www.prisonpolicy.org/>

Discover Corrections

<http://discovercorrections.com/>

ACLU Prisoners' Rights

<http://www.aclu.org/prisoners-rights/>