Inmate-to-Inmate:

Socialization, Relationships, and Community Amongst Incarcerated Men

Christine Chong
Advisor: Michael Musheno

April 17, 2013

Legal Studies Undergraduate Honors Seminar
University of California, Berkeley

Submitted to the Department of Legal Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

To Professor Selbin, thank you for helping me contact individuals working for incarcerated people. I would not have met these individuals if it weren't for your help.

To Christina Stevens, Nicole Lindahl, and Chase Burton; graduate students in the Law and Jurisprudence program at the University of California, Berkeley; thank you for your warm openness and willingness to talk with me.

To those who interviewed and talked with me, thank you for your willingness to help me learn and for your willingness to share your stories.

To Mr. Rideau, thank you for your kind words and support in helping me learn about incarcerated men. Your support helped strengthen my desire to learn about the incarcerated community. For taking the time to talk with a student who still has much to learn, thank you.

To my advisor, mentor, and supporter, Professor Musheno; I cannot thank you enough. Your questions pushed me to think in new ways and challenged me to stretch my ability in understanding the incarcerated community. This research and writing process would not have been the same without your support and guidance.

<u>Abstract</u>

Prison's walls keep prisoners in, but in many ways, they simultaneously keep the public out. Although researchers have studied and investigated different aspects of prisons, an area with particularly little notice has been the interactions between and amongst incarcerated men. With all of the concerted efforts and discussions attempting to create more stable inmate communities, the importance of understanding the social relationships is critical and significant for policy makers and the general public. I focus on California's male prison institutions where, due to sentencing procedures and isolated geographical locations of prisons, men are often sent to prisons far from hometowns, making it particularly difficult for friends and family to visit. Given the difficulty accessing home community relationships, inmate-to-inmate relations often form the basis of social interaction during an individual's sentence, and the inmate community forms a significant aspect of the prison experience.

In attempting to understand the social environment of inmates, the previous discourse has highlighted and emphasized negative occurrences to explain the community and the interactions of its members in its entirety. The mystery of this community by lack of research, combined with hyped news and misconstrued popular media portrayals, has led to suppositions and theories about the relational dynamics amongst incarcerated men that remain simplistic and shallow. In particular, accounts of gang organization and rapes in prison have received exceptional attention. While striking and noteworthy, these types of incidences have overpowered the literature on inmate-to-inmate relationships.

In this thesis, social relations between incarcerated men are given context by recognizing effects of both the institutional structural setting and informal social organization, including oft left-out positive inmate interactions of non-violent, non-criminal relations. By examining inmate-to-inmate relationships from the incarcerated men's perspectives, utilizing documented verification, and placing violent actions into the institutional framework, understandings of inmate-to-inmate relationships are further developed for a truer comprehension of the community, and ultimately of the incarcerated individuals.

<u>Introduction</u>

My thesis looks into inmate-to-inmate relations in California prisons in an exploratory manner to contribute to the understanding of relationships between incarcerated men in the inmate community. My research focus arose as a reaction to the current understandings of inmate-to-inmate relationships in academic literature and popular media. Previous academic work on prison culture has done much to highlight some of the most grievous aspects of living in the inmate community, such as inmate-to-inmate victimization, rape, tense race relations, and gang activity. I have tremendous respect for these researchers' focuses on the incarcerated men living inside, not only the prison institution, but also in a particular population; especially because many of these authors researched and wrote in order to show the struggles of living in prison. I am not attempting to apprehend or replace previous work, nor do I necessarily argue against previous findings. Rather, I use this thesis to point out that the accumulated emphasis on violent and deviant aspects of the inmate community has led to stereotypes and assumptions, producing limited understandings of the interactions in and amongst incarcerated men.

With news focuses on stabbings and deaths between inmates, popular media and news outlets have contributed to the often hysterical and violent view of the inmate community. As Wilbert Rideau says, "if it bleeds, it leads"[1] is a common saying in television and news. With these negative stories overwhelming the depiction of inmate communities, it has led to associations of inmate-to-inmate relationships with criminal activity or violence, insinuating that inmate relationships mainly focus on illicit activity and other harmful associations. Correlating inmate communities with illicit activity has even created the image of prison as a crime school, where released inmates are assumed to be more criminal-like post-incarceration due to their

---

[1] Wilbert Rideau in discussion with Christine Chong, February 2013

interactions with other inmates (Dyer, 28). Moreover, the emphasis and focus on violence has perpetuated an image of simplistic occupations of positions of either victims or issuers of harassment. Perhaps most dangerously, the overwhelming violent gang and rape discourse easily leads to stereotypes about inmates and their social capability.

Although my data and findings include some positive stories and experiences of relationships built within prison, I do not argue for a positive portrayal of prison or a positive portrayal of every incarcerated individual within the institution. My data comes from particular instances, letters, and other sources of data that may not be generalizable to every individual. Prison remains a brutal place, particularly with the tough-on-crime policies from the 1980's. The inmate community is *not* composed of "handholding and singing kumbi-ya around a campfire" for many reasons that I do not have the space to discuss, but should nonetheless be remembered (Butler, online). Also, this paper does not seek a portrayal of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) as administrators with immoral intentions or the like. This thesis only seeks to contribute to and help communication by seeing how the CDCR's actions are perceived, interpreted, and understood by incarcerated men.

Ultimately, I use my findings to argue that the theories and focus on gangs, racial tensions, and rape in prison fail to account for the diversity of interactions between and amongst incarcerated men. It presents too simplistic an understanding because it narrows the possibilities of inmates' social understandings and the relationships they create. By contributing perspectives from incarcerated men and chronicles of non-violent, non-criminal behavior in their inmate communities, I hope to create complexities and subtleties to the relationships formed during incarceration living under extreme institutional control and surveillance.

Research Questions:

In California male prisons...

1. What types of social organization and relational dynamics exist in the inmate population? How strongly do individuals associate with these communities? How do the communities associate with each other?

2. Does an individual's association with a group affect how he interacts with an individual from another group?

3. How do inmates perceive the violence amongst themselves?

4. What types of interactions exist between inmates on an individual-to-individual basis? What are the levels of confidence or friendship? What are some characteristics of the interactions?

Literature Review

As one of the first writers who researched inmate culture, Clemmer found that the interaction amongst incarcerated men had more significance to the prison experience than many had previously believed. The interactions and social life of the informal and unseen environment of inmates had a "much greater influence... than all the rules, official admonishments, sermons, or other factors" (Clemmer, 295). Whilst Clemmer's work made important contributions to the understanding of the prison community, the prison experience and inmate community still remain largely misunderstood. Kenneth Hartman, an inmate who has spent the past 33 years in various prisons across California, says that even the "well meaning" psychology books published about inmates "usually [have] numerous glaring errors and misperceptions presented as facts" (Hartman, 8 online). Even worse than psychologists' mistakes are those of criminologists whose books are "worse, penning long, dense tomes that have little to do with my reality" (*ibid*). These

books written by experts from outside perspectives have mislead policy writers who "tend to prescribe impossible solutions to intractable problems that make perfect sense only to someone who's never served a minute inside a cell" (*ibid).*

A few major theories and perspectives underlie current literature on inmate-to-inmate relationships and communities within prison systems: Prisonization Theory, the Theory of Differential Association, recidivism rates, and victimization of the inmate. These perspectives combined with the notion of limited emotional development and decision-making skills of inmates, has resulted in views that harassment and survival constitute the main tenants of living in the incarcerated population. The prison environment has been described as a "barely controlled jungle where the aggressive and the strong will[ed] exploit the weak and the weak are dreadfully aware of it" (Bowker, 19). While incidences along these lines may exist, if this is all that is presented about incarcerated people, it creates the danger of over generalization, failing to notice and account for the diverse relationships and interactions that exist inside.

Prisonization Theory:

Prisonization Theory, one of the dominant theories used for understanding inmate communities, recognizes a distinct culture and says incarcerated men internalize the "attitudes and values" found in this culture (Roxell, 368). The degree of voluntary acceptance differs, but the acceptance is most often described as forced upon by other incarcerated men. The men impose the inmate culture through strict enforcement of the "inmate code" where loyalty to the inmate community and "inmate solidarity [is the] basic theme" (Tewksbury, 75). Not only is obedience enforced, but the individual's status in the inmate community hierarchy also hinges on the degree of his adherence to the code. Thus, Prisonization argues that the inmate culture and community is influential to the development of an incarcerated individual's attitudes and values.

Most, if not all, current academic and popular literature use Prisonization to explain various negative effects on the inmate and the adaption of negative elements of the community to the individual psyche. The eventual adaption is viewed as producing a harmful individual, and the process itself is viewed as an aggressive and forceful one where the threat, or actual use, of violence is constantly at play.

Theory of Differential Association:

Prisonization Theory was further developed and specified into another theory: the Theory of Differential Association. This criminological theory takes the Prisonization concept that a "person's attitudes and motivations are affected by those of the people with whom he associates" and applies it to illicit behavior (Waller, 105). Presuming that inmates adopt other inmates' values, and thus other inmates' criminal behavior, this concept explains criminal activity as a socially learned endeavor. This draws attention away from other elements that could lead to deviance like little job opportunities, a bad economy, etc.

The Theory of Differential Association goes further than Prisonization and insinuates that prison culture heavily revolves around criminal behavior, learned and adopted from other "deviant" persons (Edwin, online). By associating and spending time with "deviant" people, the incarcerated individual learns techniques, specific rationale, and motives for committing crime. These ideas have even spread to common rhetoric and nicknames, and many have started calling prisons "schools of crime"(Roxell, 35). Prisons thus become schools where individuals "learn sophisticated criminal techniques" from other inmates (Waller, 66). Even in describing incidents in prison between groups of inmates, writers emphasize that every incidence "is about criminal activities" (Schevitz, online).

By an individual internalizing methods, and even more importantly, moral validations about criminal activity from other inmates, it places the blame for deviant behavior on the inmate, in contradiction to the institution's goals. The Theory of Differential Association argues that due to the inmates' interactions and influences on one another, the prison becomes a community of deviance, rather than an institution deterring future crime. It points to inmates and their associations with one another to explain criminal activity, inherently placing the blame of criminal activity into the hands of inmates and away from larger sociological issues like poverty or abuse, which can lead to deviant behavior.

Recidivism:

Prisonization Theory and the Theory of Differential Association both speak to peer relationships constituting a part of "identity transformation," and an example of the application of the logic of these theories is the explanations some give for California's high rate of recidivism (Butzin, 355). A study by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation found that an astonishing 65.1% of released people returned to prison three years after release (Recidivism, online). The assumption that relationships amongst incarcerated men has negative effects and applying it as causation for recividism stems from an overwhelming focus on characteristics implied by Prisonization and the Theory of Differential Association.

For example, current rhetoric on recidivism talks about gang organization and how gang association in prison will lead to gang activity after release, accompanied by an eventual return to prison when caught. This dialogue concerning recidivism and social interaction reinforces the theories of Prisonization and the Theory of Differential Association by saying that those who return to prison often do so from remaining "linked and loyal to a fault" to their old associations (Lee, online). As will be discussed below, while some interactions and social organization in

prison can promote the possibility of criminal activity and return to prison, it does not explain the totality of all associations and interactions amongst inmates and released people.

Victimization:

In addition, another negative understanding of inmate association focuses on victimization, suggesting that individuals experience distress from the harsh environment of the legal institution but also from harassment from other inmates. Victimization is most often described in the form of occurrence from a group of inmates to an individual. This literature argues that individuals respond to this aggression with limited means of defense and consequently face continual fear and uncertainty unless they join with protective gangs.

In Prison Victimization (1980), Bowker describes prison as a "barely controlled jungle" where aggressive and strong inmates "exploit" the weak, physically and mentally (8). This perspective posits inmates as aggressors and victims, with little institutional oversight to prevent acts of aggression because many of these acts are visible only to "the most experienced jungle traveler," in other words, inmates who understand and participate in this community (Bowker, 19).

To highlight the severity of aggressions, Bowker references the real physical dangers that may ultimately result in the process of victimization. Violent assaults and deaths are not rarities in inmate communities, and at least one in every 23 California prisoners suffered from a violent assault from another inmate in 1974 (Bowker, 24). These rates have risen even higher to 34,000 inmates physically attacked by another inmate per year (Stewart, online). As news articles have said, inmates are forced to follow the unwritten rules of prison, otherwise "you could get stabbed or worse" (Schevitz, online).

Other forms of physical danger include prison rape. A flurry of academic literature has attempted to explain prison rape, and many describe it as a form of extreme harassment to pressure individuals to alliance with a group for protection. The literature also describes prison rape as a form of reinforcing or creating hierarchy amongst inmates. Prison rape is just one of the methods used by other inmates to "demand... absolute loyalty to an inmate's fellow prisoners" (Dyer, 46). A book focusing on victimization from other inmates, and even titled of <u>Prison Victimization,</u> describes an individual's entry to prison with a sexual assault and rape from other inmates. Detailing the fear, violence, and horror of how these inmates treat one another, the book accounts for this harmful experience explaining the occurrence as victimization and demand for allegiance in prison, again focusing on gang group organization and gang assertions of power. Many papers suggest the individual does not have the power to resist facilitation with gangs if one wants to resist victimization like rape. And violence is described in group-language by talking about racial divide of gangs. Lt. Rudy Luna, assistant to the warden at San Quentin has said, "Violence is based around racial gangs" (Schevitz, online). And joining a gangs entails "forced participat[ion] in violence" by the social organization of incarcerated men (Stewart, online).

Media:

Not only academic literature but also media portrayals of inmate community mostly speak only of violent and otherwise brutal inmate interactions. As Hartman says, "the mass media's fixation with the bloody lead has served to push the prisoner/gangster mythos" to represent the incarcerated community in popular understanding (Hartman, Prison online). This exaggerates and portrays the community as one of "prison thuggery, of racial dominance

struggles, of riots and stabbings," leading many to use this instances to define characteristics of the individuals involved (*ibid*).

Further Analysis of Literature:

The inmate culture amongst incarcerated men, most often described as a barely controlled "jungle" or the like, suggests that socialization is tempestuous with little similarity to more regular social interaction in general society (Bowker, 19). The literature on gangs and victimization has yet to account for the diversity of individuals in prison and the agency that individuals may have in interacting in or with gang groupings. How are we to understand the social groups and organizations in prison? How may the prison setting have influence on informal interaction amongst incarcerated men?

Underlying the current theories is at least some degree of assumption that inmates have certain characteristics that produce a particular culture and community. For example, many argue that inmates are "insensitive to others" and "misread social situations"(Coylewright, 400). Additionally, inmates are thought to be "impulsive, act before they think," and have simplistic understandings of human interaction and treatment of others (*ibid*).

Thus, it is assumed that relationships between inmates are unlike or different from those existing between or amongst non-inmate civilians. For example, a sociological study found that the degree of social integration consistently correlates to mental well being among the general population, but the correlation differs in the inmate population (Lindquist, 435). Rather than increasing the mental health of individuals, close relationships caused higher levels of hostility amongst incarcerated men. [2] While the difference in social integration has been noted, there has yet to be research as to *why* this difference may exist. Perhaps it is due to the unique

---

[2] This was a sociological study done in California jails, not prisons, but has been one of the few studies that made observations onto the social maturity of incarcerated people.

characteristics of regulated oversight, stress, social organization, etc. in the incarceration institution. Instead, many assume that the difference in social integration amongst inmates differs from relationships outside prison because of inherent characteristics of the inmates themselves.

One indication of the influence of the environmental setting is acknowledged in that individuals suffering from stressors are more likely to have aggravation and tension in their interactions and relationships. Mental health stressors in the prison environment include elevated levels of depression, loneliness, nervousness, and anxiety amongst the individuals (Lindquist, 450). However, there are many more stressors unique to the prison environment that exist and have not yet been fully explored. The limited literature on the prison as a sociological environment and unique community has particularly little insight from, or including, the perspective of inmates. Additionally, the literature has little commentary on the agency that individuals may have to create relationships not focused on violence or criminal activity. Literature on prisonization has not addressed how an individual's own character and personality may interact with the culture and create a unique adoption of values or attitudes from the inmate community. Victimization literature does little to address how one may resist or act within this community. It also presents relational dynamics as ones between offensive and defensive parties in a linear and simplistic manner that may be missing important factors. Inmate relationships fostering recidivism have been documented, however little research has been qualitatively conducted to make sense of the raw data. Additionally, to my knowledge, no research has examined how incarcerated men may possibly offer any form of support to one another in the critical moments leading up to and after release. By further investigating inmate-to-inmate relationships, I want to challenge the tendency to view inmates as creating merely one-

dimensional relationships due to certain inherent, fixed characteristics or capabilities. Most importantly, I want to shed light on the positive interactions and associations that have been overlooked by emphasis on activity that constitutes some, but most definitely not all, the interactions that happen amongst incarcerated men whilst in prison.

Methodology

To investigate and explore relationships between men during incarceration, I used historical and qualitative research methods. Methodology involving a systematic analysis of primary sources and interviews with released peoples was relevant and appropriate for my research. Both these methods produce data from the voices of those who have experienced incarceration and have lived in the prison community through first-hand experience. This type of research was critical to my goal to present a clarified understanding of socialization from the viewpoints of the subjects. Since outsiders have difficulty truly appreciating and comprehending the subtleties and unspoken communal understandings within a community, I ultimately relied on documents and data authored directly from incarcerated individuals free of any prior analysis by other researchers. This methodology required necessary precautions to prevent researcher bias, however I took care in my research methods to incorporate precautions and note possible bias and improvement.

I chose documents by narrowing in on Californian authors, with the exception of one autobiography, a decision I explain under the "Historical Research" section. Along with the focus on California state prisons, I also narrowed my time frame to documents from the 1960's to the present. Although many institutional changes have occurred during this time frame, the past fifty years of inmate community remain relevant to the modern inmate community. Much of inmate writing comes from either the 1960's or within the past few years, since both time periods

are eras of a Prisoners Rights Movement.[3] I do not have as much data from the 1970's to 1990's

period since those years were identified as tough-on-crime eras, which moved from a general

outlook of prison rehabilitation to prison as a institution of punishment. Comparatively, not as

many opportunities were available during this period for literacy programs and writing

opportunities. In contrast, the current renewed attention to incarcerated communities has aligned

with a generation of technology implementation, so I will utilize some letters published to the

Internet through blogs and social media sites like Quora[4].

<u>In-Depth Interviewing</u>

Interview Preparation:

Stories and accounts I collected from intensive depth interviewing with individuals who

spent time in prison and spoke retrospectively about their experiences constituted an important

source of data. My desired end goal was to create a "thick description of the setting" and to

understand the experience from the "standpoint of the natural actor in that setting" (Schutt, 283).

The opportunity to speak with these individuals allowed me to directly ask about informal

organizational structures within the inmate community, and gave me the opportunity to have a

deeper understanding of the emotional contexts of interacting within this community. I did my

best to take advantage of the opportunity in face-to-face interviewing to notice "social cues like

voice, intonation, body language, etc.," helping me grasp particularly sensitive data where

explicit description may be difficult (Opdenakker, online).

Schutt, an expert in sociological research, has noted that interviews are particularly

helpful for theory generating and exploratory research, because interviews are not meant for the

---

[3] My assertion of a current Prisoners Rights Movement is explained in the "Future Research"
section at the end of the thesis.
[4] Quora is a social media question-and-answer website with a section where individuals ask
questions to inmates and inmates' response letters are posted.

purpose of explicitly testing existing theories. This makes interviews relevant and appropriate because I am attempting to introduce a holistic perception, incorporating and encompassing the full diversity of relationships in order to have a clearer understanding of the subtleties and complexities often overlooked in present observations.

Despite the variety of benefits from in-depth-interviewing, I took precaution in my planning to prevent interference since I would directly interact with the source of my data. Just as I utilize and note social cues, interviewees are also able to pick up on my body language and unspoken signals. Thus, I did my best to not guide the behavior of the interviewee in a certain direction (Opdenakker, online). In preparation for the interviews, I noted and reflected on my personal relationship to and views on incarceration, and its possible effects on my interpretations. For example, would I be able to understand the situations and circumstances that the interviewees attempt to relay? I would be limited in this aspect since I have never been under direct, extreme institutional control. In terms of my history and background affecting my perception and comprehension, I was also conscious of being open to different communication styles.

Other preparation involved studying the process of review from the International Review Board (IRB), which was helpful and important to shaping my interview methodology. Particularly since IRB considers prisoners a "vulnerable population," the specific points of concern provided necessary guidelines ("IRB Special Classes," online). There could easily be feelings of invasion of privacy, or questioning of self-esteem in interview questions about self and social order. By asking about social acceptance and social standing, my interview questions could cause feelings of insecurity and defensiveness. I strove to be sensitive to these points by speaking generally and listening attentively when the interviewees voluntarily shared personal

stories and examples. IRB notes that interviews could possibly end with debriefing to offer support for any distress caused by the research. However, IRB also notes that debriefing itself could cause distress. For my interviews, debriefing was not appropriate.

Another aspect of interviewing that IRB makes sure to cover is potential breaches of confidentiality, which may lead to criminal prosecution, embarrassment, or awkwardness in one's current business or social group. To protect confidentiality, I replaced interviewees' names with generic ones and only included information on the approximate number of years of incarceration and the names of some of the prisons where the individuals spent time. I do not note what years the individuals were released, will erase the recorded interviews after final submission of this thesis, and will include as little physical description as possible.

Lastly, consent is an integral aspect of research interviewing, and despite confirmation of consent before beginning any interview, consent is "not a single event but a continuing process" ("IRB Basic," online). I let my interviewees know that they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering and that they could decline the interview at any time.

In summary, I did my best to conduct my interviews with awareness of the ethical concerns of voluntary participation, subject well-being, identity disclosure, and confidentiality.

Recruitment:

One of the few reservations I had with pursuing in-depth-interviewing was the difficulty I expected, and confronted, in finding individuals willing to talk with me and share their stories. It is difficult to imagine a prison experience that does not involve trauma and other extreme emotion. As these are extremely personal experiences, there would need to be great trust between the interviewee and myself. I had only one personal contact with individuals that had been

incarcerated in California, but because I knew them through a mutual contact, I was requested to refrain from asking the individual for a possible interview.

I contacted various local legal clinics in the Bay Area to find potential interviewees. It was through consistent emailing, contacting, and meeting incredible individuals involved with working for prisoners' rights that I was able to eventually speak with three individuals. The interviews happened slightly differently for all three. James sat down with me and generously shared his stories in one sitting. I had a more informal interview with Tim where he spoke with multiple people about his experiences, and I was fortunate enough to be one of the few. The third interviewee, Wilbert Rideau, gave me permission to identify himself and graciously talked with me, as well as wrote out answers to questions that I wrote to him after our initial meeting.

The three respondents represent a range of perspectives and backgrounds as they all spent the majority of their times incarcerated in different prisons and were incarcerated in various security levels.

Interviewing:

Those who have analyzed research interview methods advise that the interview should "enhance the freedom of the participants more than it enhances the author's career" (DiCicco-Bloom, online). To do this, I tried to maintain a somewhat informal and approachable persona to help the comfort of the interviewee. I also provided ample time and space for the interviewee to reflect. I used a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions requiring more than a yes-or-no response. By using grand tour questions, the interviewee had an opportunity to tell me lengthy narratives. As an interviewer, I tried to be as "out of the way" as possible (Schutt, 285).

In terms of structure, I began with questions that the interviewee could answer more easily and then preceded to more difficult or sensitive questions. This helped both the

interviewee and myself by putting us at ease and building up confidence and rapport (Schutt, 285). Towards the end of my interview, I provided a chance for the interviewee to unwind and relax by engaging in small talk or the like. Alexa Koenig, an experienced interviewer of Guantanamo detainees, suggests that the interview end with broader questions concerning the whole inmate population, taking the attention away from the individual. To do this I asked at the end of the interview, "If there is one thing you could tell the public about inmate associations and interactions in prison, what would you want them to know?"

Despite the structure, I remained flexible throughout by using creative interviewing, which involves interactive formation of follow-up questions to the responses given at the moment. Opdenakker describes this as "double attention," because I must do two things at once: simultaneously understand what I am being told and formulate questions in response (online).

During the interviews, I took careful notes during my time with Tim, James, and Mr. Rideau. However, in James' interview, I also recorded the interview on a portable recorder, with permission, and transcribed the interview verbatim. With all three interviews, I compiled the notes into a template, where I tagged segments of the transcribed interviews with codes and sorted these codes to find major themes. I manually grouped topics based on observations of parallels and divergences in the stories from the interviewees.

Historical Research

Along with interviewing, I also draw on historical research and data analysis of primary sources collected form autobiographies and letters. Some letters are personal and authored by an individual for a specific person, and others are products of group authorship written for the public. All documents are written by inmates who served time in California, with the exception of one author of a memoir I used for this thesis. Whilst the letters present some level of bias, I

want to point out that the autobiographies I utilized may not represent the average inmate experience due to a variety of reasons. Different from letters, which are written by many, far fewer incarcerated men publish autobiographies. The writers of published autobiographies often have unique resources, circumstances, and access to books and literacy programs. More specifically, inmates who write autobiographies sometimes have a degree of celebrity and fame in media for various reasons. Lastly, the autobiographies I utilize come from respectable, highly esteemed, and greatly intelligent individuals who were able to overcome tremendous obstacles with personal strengths. Lastly, autobiographers frequently have access to editors, some degree (though limited) of financial support, and a level of education that may be unique in the inmate population.

As mentioned above, one of the autobiographies I use is from an out-of-state author, Wilbert Rideau, called "In the Place of Justice." I decided to incorporate this autobiography into my thesis because of the unique insight the author was able to give of both the administration and inmate community. As an individual who served forty-four years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, Rideau writes about the world of prison and describes the inmate culture in great detail through explanations of distinct occurrences and includes context to the circumstances. I found that Rideau's distinctive status as a journalist, long-time inmate, and his perceptive character gave insights that were translatable, appropriate, and related to Californian prison communities, in ways difficult to find in the other memoirs I found. This author has been described as "probably the best prison journalist ever, anywhere" (Rideau, i). Although, Rideau's autobiography describes a prison community in Louisiana, I apply his astute insights to Californian prisons to fill in gaps in the available data.

After accounting for these biases, I reviewed and analyzed the primary sources by noting parallels and points of repetition in the documents. I also noted the formal elements of the organization, thinking of how the institution may have encouraged or discouraged certain inmate interaction and socialization, which is important for seeing how informal relationships are shaped by the formal confines of the setting.

These documents relay data about the setting and complexity of the broad array of relationships: ranging from relationships between individuals, to relationships in groups, and relationships between groups. The documents show formal proof of an inmate social organization that stretches beyond simplistic gang relationships, racial tensions, and illicit behavior, contradicting the limitations of interaction asserted by media and current understanding.

Findings:

THE PRISON SETTING:

In describing prison administration below, many of the stories recount incidences that structure the inmate community and create the setting in which the community operates. It suggests that some negative inmate interactions can be the product of structural conditions created by the policy, administration, and guards. However, I do *not* argue that negative inmate interactions are the results of a few corrupt people's actions. These issues are more complex than the actions of a few individuals and if it were the case, it would only be necessary to pinpoint those individuals to solve the multipart construction of the environmental setting.

Just as the inmates operate within an institution and power structure that may influence behavior, so do the administrators and guards. A famous study by Zimbardo at Stanford

University conducted a prison simulation experiment where "even psychologically normal college students" developed certain "victimization-related" behaviors in their social roles when placed as guards over their fellow students who posed as "inmates" (Bowker, 55). In fact, the mere placement into these extreme power structures resulted in such harmful treatment of the inmate subjects that the study had to be stopped in six days.

Regardless, my findings below recount structural policies and incidences by the official guards and administration of the prison to show how the background setting on which the inmate community operates may have effects or more direct interference with the informal community.

Administrative Effects:

Black, White, Brown, and Other: Ethno-Racial Division:

One of the most significant ways that the prison institution affects the inmate community is through racial division of the incarcerated men. Although it is not technically legal and the courts have ordered de-segregation in California prisons, racial integration is an extremely recent development and has yet to be implemented. As of April 12, 2013 at least five California state prisons used a color-coding system to segregate inmates for rooming. The prisons use cards with different colors for different racial groups: blue for Black inmates; white for White; red, green, or pink for Latino; and yellow for Other (California, online). In the state response, the documents say race is used for labels and prisoner blocks to "provide visual cues that allow prison officials to prevent race-based victimization, reduce race-based violence, and prevent thefts and assaults" (California, online). Officials use racial division for social stability reasons, but this action may possibly aggravate and have effects on social stability.

James gives more details to this categorizing and recounts his categorization:

"The state categorizes people... asking what race you are. I said ____,[5] so automatically I was an

Other. You have Black, White, Mexican, and if you aren't either three, you were Other. They clumped

you together into a group, and that's important because that ends up creating the (formal and

informal) groups in there. So Pacific Islanders, Asians, and Europeans that didn't identify themselves

as Whites, like Armenians who some would say would put themselves down as other. So they as a

group would clump together..."

The "clumping together" from the ethno-racial division signifies that this organization is

important for the administration's understanding of social stability of incarcerated men. When I

asked if the guards knew which individuals were close with whom, racial association continued

to be mentioned as a factor that guards look for. James says,

"Depending on how long that person has been there, they would be very suspicious if there were

groups of different races or people of different races sort of meeting or talking."

The reason that guards and administration may be hesitant and wary of ethno-racial

identities might stem from the racial tensions that have long been noted in California state

prisons where racial diversity exists in the form of 41% Latino, 29% African-American, 24%

White, and 6% Other (Hayes, online). The diversity in ethnic composition and the tensions

between races has been utilized to examine inmate-to-inmate violence. Much of the violence has

been simplified and described as "race wars" and the racial tensions across "color lines" have

been described as significant to the "unwritten inmate rules of prison life" (Schevitz, online). It

could be that administrative racial division of inmates is a response to pre-existing racial

tensions, but the fact that housing policies presumes racial tendencies immediately when the

individual enters the facility, can essentially perpetuate racial tension by so visibly segregating

---

[5] James' ethnicity is purposefully left out here for confidentiality.

inmates. What may be more significant than the division is how the division is used for other policies that perpetuate and aggravate racial division, including punishment.

Even if I Don't Know Him: Group Punishment

Punishment of various incidences encourages or discourages certain behaviors, and the systematic use of ethno-racially divided groups to punish, not individuals, but groups of men can encourage defensiveness of one's racial group, and consequently raise tensions between different ethno-racial clusters of individuals.

James recalls how group punishment perpetuated racial division by describing how punishment related strangers to one another based on racial identity:

"If a Black and a White inmate got into an altercation, they would mark down both Black and White group (to be punished). So automatically, they begin to create common groups. And so Other is the same way. Others would get punished as a group, no matter if they knew the person or hung out with the person that may have gotten into an altercation with another race."

Why would the prison administration perpetuate any pre-existing racial tension by housing, grouping, and punishing by racial grouping? A previous researcher has noted, and I find reason to agree, that political issues, not purely sustaining stability, may be a reason at play.

"'Divide and conquer' has always been good advice for prison administrators. If the prisoner population can be divided into factions that are then set upon each other, they are less likely to unite in their opposition to the polices of the prison administration. This is a delicate line to walk, for if the strategy is overused; it can result in intergroup violence of such severity that it tears the prison apart. California State Senator Mervyn Demally investigated Soledad Prison and concluded that prison guards were able to 'divert hostility from themselves by encouraging the racist tendencies of the White and Chicano inmates and playing them off against the Blacks'" (Bowker, 98).

Part of the official reasoning for racial group punishment arose from attempting to target gang members and gang activity. The prison administration thus unofficially uses race for identification of gangs. However, many have found reason to question this type of punishment based on the assumptions of gang identification. An attorney with the Prison Law Office, Rebekah Evenson, says, "Rather than targeting actual gang members, they assume every person is a gang member based on the color of their skin."[6] Besides the ethical concerns, the pure logistical reasons are said to not work, as this type of punishment is ultimately an "ineffective way to maintain order" (California, online).

In Kenneth Hartman's memoir he describes an instance of punishment where "in the illogic of prison managers, all six hundred of us [Whites were] punished for the handful that wanted a cell phone" (Hartman, *Mother* 196). Not only does group punishment seem to work on an assumption of gang membership but it also seems to rely on inmates to self-regulate by controlling the actions of other inmates of the same race.

There is not just racial punishment for altercations between racial groups, but even non-dispute acts within a group can be utilized for group punishment. Hartman, a White inmate, talks about a case of laughter leading to group punishment. If he, a White inmate, had been in the vicinity, he too would have been searched, and regardless of his distance from the White men, would have been punished with them.

> "One afternoon, as I'm lifting weights with a couple of young Mexican homeboys, the guards swarm the grass area of the yard, ordering all of the white guys up against the wall. Apparently, too much laughter has convinced them everyone is drunk. While the men on the wall are being searched, a couple of guards are picking up water containers, sniffing for the presence of alcohol. No one is

---

[6] http://www.thedailydigest.org/2013/04/12/california-prisons-punish-inmates-by-racial-bloc-not-offense/

drunk, and there is no booze on the yard... My homeboys tell me to be careful; they're after the White boys for a change" (Hartman, *Mother* 110).

His words show clear assumption that when the guards order a group of inmates against the wall, it's the "white guys," showing the homogeneity of the group, as well as the adoption of the identification guards use. Further, even though Hartman is not with the laughing men, he too must be cautious because of his racial identity.

James identified security level as an important element to remember in the effects, procedure, and form of punishment. There is a difference between level four and level two security levels and the possibilities of interaction between the inmates in each. Level four inmates are a higher security level, and level two inmates have minimal security and are a population serving lesser time. There's much more opportunity in level two for inmates of different races to interact with one another than in level four.

Secure Housing Unit

Although punishment by group can create pressure, punishment for interaction amongst incarcerated men culminates to the most extreme form in putting individuals into Secure Housing Units (SHU). These SHU's were created for the purpose that:

> "certain prisoners had to be permanently separated from the general population due to their supposed influence over other prisoners. In essence, they were now... subjugated to prolonged isolation for indefinite periods... being relegated to the status of incorrigible specimens who can only be governed, controlled, conditioned, and suppressed to dehumanizing submission. In simple terms, to break a man's spirit" (Arteaga, online).

This removal of influential individuals has been practiced for over 25 years in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, which identified individuals for SHU's as "prison gang members or associates... and the supposed menace of these prison gangs, and the

difficulties and dangers of dealing with them" encouraged less public attention to what prisoners were going through on the inside (*ibid*). The gang rhetoric has been so pervasive and of such concern that the majority of California prisoners in indeterminate SHU terms are sent there for sentences of "pseudo-gang validations" (*ibid*). A problem is that the question of whether or not the individual is really involved in gang activity is "whatever the alleged gang intelligence experts choose to deem as gang related, without [the inmates] being afforded a meaningful opportunity of contesting them"(*ibid*). Thus the SHU has done little to curb violence, nonetheless gang violence, since many argue that prison violence in the general population is more violent now than it has been in the past 25 years (*ibid*).

This fear of being put into the SHU affects the inmate community and inmate interactions by limiting the possibility of communication. James says that the informal communication amongst inmates is complicated because people selected for the SHU are detected "for communication things. So that's one fear, from the formal side... [fear of the police]." This SHU punishment also leads to fear and tensions informally amongst inmates because on the "informal side, you're worried that the other groups will identify you as a leader too, and you'll be at the top of the target lists..." This wariness of identification leads to interaction strategies, which will be described below under the Leadership segment, that make it difficult for incarcerated men to have clear communication with one another.

"You're a Race Agitator": Perpetuating Characteristic Traits

By going over administrative interactions and utilizations of racial group division, it helps put informal relationships and community into context by giving a broader picture of the structure in which inmates communicate, interact, and relate. In this segment, I examine how

guards may influence the behavior and interaction on a smaller scale on individual social tendencies.

The ways that inmates interact with one another is perpetuated by certain personality tendencies that may be rewarded. For example, an inmate writes about the material benefits that guards may use to lure some inmates into certain behaviors.

> "I have found prison staff reward aggressive inmates by giving them TVs that don't belong to them - or giving them two trays at meal time and giving them property they are not allowed to have... There are some cops that give dope, cigarettes, lighters, and even stabbing devices to those that will get their hands dirty - and usually these cops are found not guilty when prosecuted" (Collins, online).

The aggressive behavior rewarded above does not pertain to aggressive behavior towards staff; the writer is talking about informal aggressive behavior towards other inmates. This type of rewarding and explicit aid would encourage aggressive behavior on the yard, perhaps even in the absence of direct staff oversight, especially in an institution of limited resources with limited means to procure goods.

Just as there are encouragements for certain behaviors on an individual scale, there are also negative ways to show disparagement of individual relationships. For example, a White inmate writes about his experience with guards who discouraged his cross-racial associations:

> "I had close associations and affiliations with Black inmates. The [guards] started referring to me as 'that nigger-lover' and a race agitator... Several times blacks have come up to me and explained how the [guards] pulled them aside and ran down that I was an agitator and that my race would be better off without me and that it would save blacks a lot of trouble if I were eliminated..." (Pell, 122).

The guards discouraged these cross-racial associations through name-calling and accusations of intentions to agitate race relations. When the inmate was not dissuaded by the name-calling and accusations, the Black inmates were approached and encouraged to enact

violence in "eliminating" the White inmate. Although the circumstance shows an instance of non-conformance to administrative pressure, it also reveals un-documented, non-policy actions that also influence aggression or conformance to administrative social organization.

Other instances of influence from the administration on the actions of incarcerated men may not be perceived until after the fact. James reflected on the effects of the administration on his own self-perception as an "anti-social" person. The view on his social maturity in interactions and relationships with others had already been lowered before entering prison because of his label as an "anti-social" by the courts for why he committed his crime. He began to accept this idea that he was antisocial, until he realized that the institution reinforced anti-social behavior.

"Definitely one of the things that I realized [was that] the institution itself reinforces anti-social behavior. I didn't realize this until having more contact with outside people, there's all these rules about contact... you can get locked up for... communication [when] it's a level of communication with someone that they feel... is over-familiar. If you're talking about your daily activities, family members, you know small talk... in [prison] small talk becomes [something] you can get locked up for. You know, I saw how, wait a minute. They are doing all these programs preparing me for re-entry but one of the main factors of re-entry is actually coming out and functioning within society, [but they are] working in reverse. They're reinforcing all of these punishments [for] ways that normal people would interact with each other."

James saw how the institution could affect his own self-perceptions and behaviors and he also observed other inmates being affected as well. He worked in Receiving and Release, the area every inmate comes through when they first enter prison. The administrative interaction with the inmates would discourage behavior like verbal requests by responding with mixed signals. Inmates would be told one thing but given a different outcome. These individuals would arrive from county jails and as James says, "county jail is the worst place you could be. So

everyone (who comes) is all hungry, angry, and tired. There's things all around in R and R... like lunch, food... apples" for the incoming inmates, but the guards would get mad at the inmates when they tried to take things without asking.

The confusion came from the mixed signals when guards would say, "All you had to do was ask." Then, they would proceed to "throw them against the wall, strip them down, throw them... in the cage or something" when men were caught taking goods without asking. James realized these actions created confusion since the guards consistently say to the inmates that they would receive goods if they just asked, but in contradiction, twenty other inmates would come through and ask, and the guards would always respond with the automatic reply, "No, keep walking. No, keep walking. No, keep walking." James explains this as a reason why an inmate will transition to "Forget trying to get on your good side... I'm just going to figure out how to manipulate you to get you to turn around and steal that from you" for goods that would be his if he had only "asked" for it.

Summary

The inmate community is composed of groups and individuals operating under surveillance and interference from a strict governing body that takes part to encourage or discourage certain relationships and character traits. These accounts and experiences from incarcerated men show how interactions with one another are heightened in some part due to administrative interference encouraging and discouraging certain behaviors. While the violence amongst inmates creates tension, Rideau says the official response to violence amongst inmates affects individuals to a greater degree. The official response to violence amongst inmates consisted of "shakedowns, in which security searched an inmate's body, housing or work area for weapons or other contraband, or new policies that interfered with our mobility and daily life"

(Rideau, 105). The confusion, secrecy, and arbitrariness of some of the punishments "sowed distrust and paranoia among both employees and convicts" (Rideau, 112). In attempts to maintain control, the authorities have also "depended on the use of informants, snitches, rats, to maintain control... Informants are cultivated and rewarded with plum job assignments, material perks, and, occasionally, early release from incarceration" (Hartman, Prison online). Thus, however frightening the accounts of inner-inmate-community violence may seem, the serious repercussions that come from the after-fact of violence amongst inmates is even more feared than violence from other incarcerated men. This suggests that with all the talk about inmates harassing and victimizing other inmates, the greater fear is still of the administrative response.

THE INFORMAL INMATE COMMUNITY:

While formal and oppressive aspects of prison might create an appearance that inmates are limited in their interactions, the following instances and stories are of individuals working within (and even overcoming) divisions and boundaries to have a complex social community with basic actions of goodwill like those on the outside of prison walls.

Mirrored Society

The extreme nature of the prison environment compared to free society can insinuate and lead to characteristics of the incarcerated men inside this setting, but despite the institutional oversight, Rideau describes the inmate community as a mirrored society with a diversity of individuals. Though limiting in many ways, incarceration does not prohibit or restrict the relationships in complete absoluteness. Rideau has said people are complex and contradictory, and diversity amongst the inmate population parallels the diversity in general society.

"Inmates didn't come from Mars. And being an 'inmate' doesn't make them all identical. Some are innocent, others are victims of circumstances, and others criminal (not to mention yet others who are

rehabilitated criminals), but they are products of the same basic culture that created non-inmates - except for some factors peculiar to each that made them criminal. They want and aspire to basically the same things in life that you do."

The idea that prison is similar to society outside the prison walls is similarly reiterated in many other accounts, including the following description from a letter of life in prison. When asked on Quora, "Do emotions like empathy, love, and compassion exist in prisons?" Nelson Butler, an inmate at San Quentin State Prison, answered:

"Yes, emotions of empathy, love, and compassion exist in prison. Understand, prisons are nothing more than a tightly controlled microcosm of society at large. We have good people, bad people, industrious people, slackers, young, old, middle age... So, think of it like this - whatever goes on in your community is generally the same thing that goes on in ours" (Butler, online).

The tendency to think that the inmate community is defined by violence and composed of inherently violent individuals means that people going into prison for the first time are sometimes surprised by those they meet. Hartman says, "I had expected to come against seriously hard men, to see things no one should see" (Hartman, *Mother* 32). Instead, he found a community of diverse men living their daily lives in a tightly controlled environment. Just as society outside is not composed of constant violence, the community inside is also not composed of one-dimensionally "hard" men. Rather than concerned with criminal behavior, Hartman notes that daily rituals go on, as "most of the prisoners I meet are more concerned with staying out of trouble and getting out" (Hartman, *Mother* 33).

The number of older men in the population also affects the demographics and atmosphere of the community. The Folsom prison of the past fifty years consists of "mostly older convicts serving life terms, worn out by the battles of Tracy and Soledad (prisons), they appreciate continuity and regularity. The prison is a community, fractured, but a community nonetheless"

(Hartman, *Mother* 45). Here, Hartman alludes to "battles" and tensions in other prisons, but also notes that the community in prison includes the presence of older individuals who generally oppose clashes, valuing a calmer sense of regularity.

Concerning another similarity to outside society, James talks about how the inmate community is affected by trust or normality built over years of living together and the cumulative atmosphere created by others. In describing the more relaxed nature at San Quentin, he relates his experience post-release to his time inside.

> "I've seen situations... with regular people [in free society] when everyone is just sitting around, but if someone got up and started yelling and angry... that affects everyone... So that's kind of like how, in prison... Everyone kind of catches it... a place like San Quentin, it's different from [others]... everyone's relaxed and has been together for a few years so everyone knows each other... Everyone is like, 'I don't care about you' and 'I don't care about you neither' so everyone is kind of doing their own thing... If some people let down their guard, other people let down their guard. But if you put your guard up, then it gets infectious. It's like everyone does the same."

These examples contribute incarcerated men's perceptions of the similarities between prison and free society. An example of two types of extreme situations that is often employed as a great difference between society inside and outside prison is corrected by Hartman: rape and taunts for newcomers to prison. These two are often described as the initial greeting between a newcomer and the inmate community, as well as the first oppressive acts from the inmate community that signify to the inmate that he has entered a new world. Hartman talks about how these two stereotypes were not true of his many years throughout various California prisons.

> "In all my 30 years incarcerated, I've never seen a jeering mob of prisoners catcalling new arrivals, not even once. Sure, there's interest, and the guys on the yard do pay attention, but this most persistent trope of Hollywood just doesn't happen."

And just as rape does happen in society, it doesn't happen with the pervasiveness or crude blatancy that people may assume from the overpowering rape literature.

"No one leaves candy on your bed to blackmail you into sexual favors, either... Like everywhere else in the world, there are gay men in here, and they become involved in relationships with other men. In some of the rougher places, more likely in the county jails, gay and effeminate men are too often forced to perform sex acts against their will. But the idea that being raped in the shower is a normal part of the prison experience simply isn't true" (Hartman, Prison online).

This does not insinuate that one does not find the "rapacious nature of selfish individuals" inside the prison community, but points to show that prison is a mirrored society where a diversity of interactions means "inside the same barriers can also be found examples of decency so heartwarming as to be almost beyond belief" (*ibid*).

Chicken or the Egg?: Ethno-Racial Relations

Race was discussed above in describing the formal setting as a way to institutionally divide inmates. This division continues to be a factor in informal social organization as well. James talks about racial segregation as a combination of the formal division noted above and inmate community's informal adoption of the division.

"Still amongst the prisoners [racial division] is enforced... Was it the State that began this policy that then the inmates took it on because they began to identify with themselves as a racial group? Or is it like society in the microcosm of the prison, and it becomes magnified and race differences become magnified? I definitely don't know... but I definitely *know* that race is an important factor in how relationships are shaped in prison."

I asked if perhaps it was like a chicken-and-egg phenomena where it becomes difficult to identify whether race relations were born out of the administration or within the community itself, and James agreed. Although discussion of gang membership focuses on race, James did

not necessarily attribute gangs as one of the only reasons for racial division. In fact, James and his best friend were gang members when they entered prison but quit gang membership while inside prison. There are non-gang members and ex-gang members inside prison who would not contribute to gang racial division; division is much more complex for the inmate community than solely based on gang partitions.

The importance of institutional division can be seen in how the Other group is a construct of the institution with different ethnicities that may not have had any previous affiliations with one another, yet still group together in prison. Although the relationships between individuals in the Other group were less strong than in the Black, White, and Mexican; the Other members of different racial and ethnic identities still gravitated towards each other and tended to come together, for example sitting and eating their meals together at lunch.

Another possible reason for informal race division is the resemblance to, rather than the difference from, general society. As James mentioned that the prison is a "microcosm" of society, another inmate used this concept to explain informal racial division as a general tendency that is more apparent inside the institution. He says, "We segregate amongst ourselves because I'd rather hang out with white people, and blacks would rather hang out with people of their own race. Look at suburbia. Look at Oakland. Look at Beverly Hills. People in society self-segregate" (Schevitz, online). The quote points to the undeniable reality that racial segregation still exists outside of prison walls, and perhaps it is just more visible and apparent to outside observers because prison is such a compact community.

I do not use these accounts of racial inclinations in inmate social organization to suggest that racial boundaries remain strictly rigid. Although race is a factor in social relationships and organization, we will describe unifying across racial boundaries under the "Unity" section below.

Trying to get A's: Influence of Programs

Just as the administrative formal control influenced the creation and after-the-fact relationships between individuals, formal organized programs affected how individuals would get to know someone in the duration of the program and create relationships outside of it. James attributes the unique San Quentin characteristic of more programs compared to other prisons as having a tremendous impact on the inmate community.

> "One of the main factors why... people are able to have that interaction at San Quentin is because there are so many different programs, and people took them. Especially like the college program where I met people I would never really interact with outside... so it was a learning experience... learning about racism and prejudice and learning about these things, you begin to look at how you enforce or re-enforce your own relationships with each other."

Attributing formal programs as a large reason for how James met his best friend, a person of Mexican ethnicity in prison, he explains the program as creating a crucial setting for interaction. Without the program, "my best friend, a Mexican, he and I would have never come into a space where we would interact." Formal programs are different from other formal types of contact, such as interaction while working.

> "The major difference is you're not just going to work. You know when you go to work and they set it up as an assembly line, you're independent from the next person. So they have their job, you have your job, and there's little interaction. Once you go to school, there's more interaction. There's a lot of dialogue, sort of um, competition too... all of a sudden you're competing for grades. And A's became... a kind of gratification, reward right? So that, I'm smarter than you, in some sense. And if we all got A's we were all the same, as opposed to violence, where one person would just lose. In this sense it's like there's more ability for more winners and it sort of encouraged other people to compete in the same ways. [You] try to sort of get into the [academic/study] group, right? But the group became much more mixed in a lot of ways."

The academic program James describes influenced informal relationships and the informal community in a unique way by creating relationships and interactions around a competition and gratification that all could share. It created a space for individuals to encourage one another and create relationships with individuals they would not have met outside it.

Further, it's not just the breadth of relationships that are built in programs, but the depth of relationships as well. Kenneth Hartman talks about his experience with group therapy with a lifers' group. In his group therapy with four other men:

"We are able to develop a level of trust, to delve more deeply into ourselves, than I could have ever imagined possible. I have lived with my fears of abandonment and ostracism all my conscious life, but I could never label and own these feelings. The other men in the group are as profoundly affected as I am. At different times, we all cry, we all reveal parts of ourselves not usually opened in the... world of prison" (Hartman, *Mother* 106).

The relationships and emotional support built inside these programs and in the community suggest that far from the Theory of Differential Association, which says deviant behavior is learned from deviant people inside the inmate population, this community has broader capabilities like identifying and sharing grievances with one another to become more self-aware. Far from only creating more deviant behavior through interaction with one another, incarcerated men can find out more about themselves and develop more awareness of others through more interaction with other incarcerated men, especially given an appropriate setting.

I will now discuss and elaborate on contexts for specific elements of the community that further suggest a complexity and reveal a diversity of relationships.

Leadership

Just as leaders emerge in every social setting, whether it is readily apparent or not, leaders exist in the inmate community as well. The inmate community regularly has leaders representing their respective groups and there is a tremendous amount of communication at the level of leadership that affects the inmate community and determines many social occurrences. Below, I discuss leadership by describing its effects on two basic social occurrences: violence and peace. By looking more into the context and actions of leadership affecting social interactions, we can go further than mere recognition of leadership phenomena and start to understand leadership's interaction and relationship with social atmosphere and occurrences.

It's Politics: Violence and Peace

Leaders of groups are recognized for various reasons including personal qualities, length of time incarcerated, and age. Once chosen, they have influence on decisions on the yard, and there is much communication between the various leaders. However, the methods of communication itself are complex and can easily become convoluted. James says that most of the communication is done informally but through third or fourth persons, which creates great potential for miscommunication. This method involving third or fourth persons is used, not out of choice but, because "if police identify you as a 'shot-caller,' and you're negotiating, you're automatically labeled and locked up." The miscommunication that can easily happen from incorrectly exchanged information can lead to violence. In describing a specific person who was chosen as a person to communicate, James says the visible figure was an individual chosen for his willingness to negotiate.

"[He was] more willing to negotiate then try to put up resistance... he was also an ex-gang member and he communicated amongst different races so it was easier for him to fix things... Otherwise people misunderstand things and they feel as if they have to attack first so they don't get attacked... so

it's always trying to make sure the other group knows, look, we're not going to attack anyone... We

can discuss this, fix it."

Violence is not the end-goal of communication but exists as a complicated element and

piece of communication, social interaction, and politics. James says that violence was:

"just a political tool, and if you used it correctly, then you wouldn't have to use it at all. Which means

that sometimes the threat of violence is much more effective... or not just the threat, but the potential

to put up resistance, is much more effective than actually committing violence."

Violence is thus understood in more practical terms than the hysterical friction that many

often think. Rather than inevitable or lurking around every corner, violence has a context, which

many of the inmates understand and know. Although violence can result from

miscommunication or in surprise, Rideau says that the violence amongst inmates still isn't the

most feared type of violence in prison.

"Oddly, it wasn't the violence (amongst prisoners) itself that affected most prisoners, because with

some exceptions... it was targeted at a specific person for a specific reason. Most inmates did not

engage in behavior that would put them at risk, so we did not feel personally threatened by it"

(Rideau, 105).

Violence in prisons does exist, and the statistics of violence in California prisons show

that it is not a rare occurrence. However, the instances of stabbings and even deaths do not

involve just the few individuals directly engaged in the physical acts, but oftentimes have a place

in larger community politics. Arising from either miscommunication or present in conversations

as a possibility or tool, violence has a greater implication to group dynamics than may appear. In

terms of gang violence, it too happens for specific reasons. An anonymous incarcerated writer

comments on gang violence and says, "Gangs don't just attack each other. There's usually

something going wrong" (Prison, online). With a few exceptions, violence usually occurs for specific reasons and aims at specific individuals in a political group dynamic.

The interplay between leadership and violence shows that miscommunication (or realized purposeful communication too) can create violence, but leadership simultaneously prevents violence from happening as well.

Leadership and Peace:

The inmate leaders and broader inmate community can actively work to prevent violence on the yard. Rideau describes an incidence where "several of us were trying to broker a peace between two feuding black families" (Rideau, 98). In this case, the representatives of the groups came to Rideau's office and "both leaders readily agreed to a truce" guaranteeing peace, after the Black Muslims group became involved (*ibid*). The feuding groups understood "that whoever breaks the peace will have to fight not only the other family but the Muslims as well" (*ibid*). When Russell, the leader of the Black Muslims, saw the potential of his group to prevent violence, he joined Rideau and others advocating and creating peace in future instances as well. In this example, the politics of aligning with groups was done through leadership.

While actively stopping looming violence, incarcerated men also sometimes work together through group leaders' communication to maintain programs, which would be threatened by violence or instability on the yard. Leaders communicate about a variety of issues and in one instance the leaders worked to keep gains like a visiting program, which had "allowed us to visit at small tables in a large cafeteria" (Rideau, 106).

> "With the cooperation of about thirty club leaders, we took the message to [a] meeting, telling... of the coming crackdown [from the administration] and educating them on what we stood to lose in terms of the quality of our lives. Those involved in activities that fomented violence were warned that unless they immediately became model prisoners, they could expect their enemies to snitch them out" (*ibid*).

The result was a period of peace generated by this conversation and cooperation through leaders who organized and communicated in order to maintain the visiting program. Yet, the leaders did not do this by themselves, but with the combined actions of every incarcerated individual in the community.

Unity

Despite leadership representing different groups, there are more apparent and active acts of reaching across group boundaries, including relationships crossing racial divisions, which I note in both the formal and informal discussions of social organization.

Wake Up!!!: Reaching Across Racial Division

Letters comment upon racial division in order to work against and overcome division. Inmate-to-inmate violence is described in a letter directed towards other inmates, describing division from an incarcerated individual's perspective:

> "Some of us cons don't seem to know what side we're on. We're obsessed with near-sighted disputes based on race, ideology, group identity, and so on. We expend our energies despising and distrusting each other. All of this is helping the CDC[7]. We permit them to keep us at each others' throats. A handful of us are calling for UNITY... We call for 4,000 united convicts. Wake up!!! Put your prejudices, biases, and class distinctions aside for the purposes of our fight with CDC... We are going to have our UNITY DAY in August... Unity, Black, Brown, White, Unity!!!" (Cummins, 118).

Outside of letters, events are staged by and for inmates, to observe peace and recognition across racial boundaries. For example, the Annual Day of Peace was started at San Quentin six years ago by several inmates who came together to create this event on the yard. It was a new

---

[7] CDC and CDRC are two names for the same organization. The "R" for rehabilitation was added later on.

experience for hundreds of prisoners who came from other California prisons that do not have this day of observance. Kevin Carr, an inmate at San Quentin says, "The new people I saw were excited because all races are getting along. People aren't stand-offish at San Quentin. We like to interact with each other." Here, Carr mentions that San Quentin is distinctive in the amount of interaction across racial-boundaries. However, I believe it suggests a difference in institutional environment and setting more than a unique composition of the inmate population at San Quentin. Another instance of reference to ethno-racial identification and persuasion to unity involves recognition of ethno-racial divide as a form of manipulation.

"Interracially, individually, and collectively and in the same terms as ethnic groups, Black, Brown, and Caucasian, and after years of racial conflict, we wish to officially and formally serve notice on you that no longer will we allow you to manipulate us and exploit our mutual suffering from the conditions imposed on us and by your individual and concerted efforts to dehumanize us and perpetrate against us every crime conceivable" (Cummins, 166).

More visible to administration than rhetoric, sometimes groups would incorporate and interact in response to administrative control by sharing resources. In this example, a Latin-American group works with a Black Muslim group for a memorial service.

"The Chicanos here wanted to honor our brothers [but were] denied a service... In any event, our black brothers, the Black Muslims, offered to let us honor our brother at their service. We gladly accepted this opportunity. Two Chicanos spoke at said service to a chapel (Mosque) filled with both Blacks and Chicanos. You can imagine what the administration thought about this. That Blacks and Chicanos got together has perplexed the administration, and they apparently take this as constituting a threat to the status quo and their way of operating. ... The Black Muslims then invited the Chicanos to attend service on Saturday for Mexican Independence Day with two Chicano speakers" (Pell, 216).

More recently, a letter entitled "End to Hostilities" began circulating across California prisons and has asserted language across all group boundaries.

"Therefore, beginning on October 10, 2012, all hostilities between our racial groups... will officially cease. This means that from this date on, all racial group hostilities need to be at an end... and if personal issues arise between individuals, people need to do all they can to exhaust all diplomatic means to settle such disputes; do not allow personal, individual issues to escalate into racial group issues!" (PBSP-SHU)

As much as racial and group division has effects on social organization, it is recognized and critiqued as a form of manipulation in numerous events, cases, and letters written by incarcerated men.

Harmony and a Bowl of Soup: Hunger Strikes

As a form of non-violent protest, the hunger strikes conducted amongst inmates form one of the actions showing greatest solidarity; involving inmates across institutions, races, and security levels. They were actively conducted in the 1960's and have been a part of Californian inmate mass organization history. Recent hunger strikes have started again with formal points of address on policies that impact the relationships and interactions between inmates, including the group punishment policy discussed above. In this quote, an inmate describes the impact it has on individuals in the inmate community:

"Outwardly and materially our food strike was a dismal failure, we only gained a bowl of soup. But the harmony, unity, and greater understanding that evolved between the races was a tremendous gain" (Pell, 170).

As one of the few ways to stage peaceful protest within the confines of prison, participation in hunger strikes represents a dedicated sign of social solidarity. Some analyses of these strikes have emphasized the anti-administration passion of the participants. However, with

the significance and presence of division noted throughout this thesis, the organization and communication required for these hunger strikes has greater significance. As an action of group dedication and alliance across racial boundaries, there is more involved in orchestrating these strikes than sole reliance on anti-administration sentiments.

Individuals to Individual

Having talked about the inmate community with descriptions and occurrences amongst groups, I conclude this thesis by focusing on individual occurrences defying commonly assumed types of limited interactions. In Hartman's memoir he describes multiple relationships developed with individuals of different backgrounds and races, as well as a variety of types of relationships, including acquaintances, religious relationships, and deeper friendships. Hartman describes the unique way that he developed a relationship with a Black inmate on the yard.

> "Running has never been my thing... Petee Wheatstraw, a black guy from Watts, powers by... I pull in behind him and try to pace him... I'm back about ten yards. White and blacks don't run together, ever. He notices me and slows down enough for me to stay with him. I last a couple of laps longer than usual... For the next month, I regularly pull in behind him and he slows enough for me to keep up... He slows a little more and we're side by side. For the next three years that I'm on this yard, we run together... [sending] a powerful message... The two of us would never have spoken to one another or crossed the barrier if we had waited for a peace treaty or an invitation" (Hartman, *Mother* 100).

For Hartman, the prison yard was a place where he met, worked with, and created a lasting relationship with a person of another race. Even within all the formal and informal restrictions that exist on the yard, relationships are formed in the inmate community that are built on productive, but also just simple aspects of living daily life. The sensational picture of inmate

community that is propelled to the public often misses the reality that within the prison walls are men living their lives in close proximity to other men in a community of a mirrored society.

<u>Possible Changes</u>

To reduce violence and maintain more stable yards, inmate input and insight would be valuable for the process of developing prison policy. Kenneth Hartman says this is a "revolutionary concept to the current crop of administrators who continue to mismanage the system" (Hartman, Prison online). The collaboration between policymakers, administrators, wardens, and inmates has been done in the past, and here I point to two distinct incidences. One, Wilbert Rideau was consulted and made relationships with administrators at Attica Prison, which was known to be one of the most violent prisons in the nation. The violence dramatically decreased, and although the decrease resulted from various causes, it is important to note how Rideau's insights were useful to many of its wardens. Second, in an experience James recounts where an administrator worked with a lieutenant to keep peace in a prison yard, he says:

> "There's only one yard I've been to where the lieutenant on the yard actually worked with one of the leaders of the group that was out there and he kept that yard very peaceful, even [when] all of the other yards were riots every other week... But when that lieutenant left, they took the [leader] to the hole."

While the lieutenant's collaboration with the group leader created stability in the duration of the cooperation, the group leader was taken to the SHU after the installment of a new lieutenant; another example of the alarming targeting of influential incarcerated men.

Another possible change is encouraging more programs in prison, not all of which must be funded through the state but can simply involve the process of letting non-profits and volunteers inside the prison walls. As can be seen from the section on formal programs in the

body of this paper, the programs have a big impact on informal relations between individuals. Oftentimes, these programs not only change the relationships for the duration of the program but also can become the source of best-friend relationships. James attributes the geographical location of San Quentin for making the numerous programs and volunteers more prevalent.

"The geographical location is the main factor, because it's right in the middle of a major city...San Francisco, Marin, Oakland, Alameda County. And they're fairly liberal cities and affluent so you get a lot of volunteers that get out there and start programs. You end up at Pelican Bay and Eureka is right outside but you can't describe that little town as being liberal or supportive... And then you have prisons like Calapatria that's right in the middle of the dessert, and all you see are desserts and mountains around you..."

San Quentin has been known for its distinct character of having more programs than other Californian prisons, but an underlying and less apparent cause is the geographical location that James has noted. Of the many hardships of the prison experience, the location and resulting isolation from, not just family and friends but any major community is one of the current policies requiring the most attention.

Limitations and Future Research

Social media's effects in easier access to documents have somewhat helped my access to documents written by incarcerated men, but there were still many limitations. I had expected that there would be many more autobiographies from Californian inmates, but I found that most of the ones written by Californian inmates focused on different aspects of incarceration or criminal justice other than inmate community, particularly on legal experiences. While important, these autobiographies did not have much content on insights to prison community. In contrast, I found many autobiographies written by out-of-state individuals who had been incarcerated, out of

which I did choose to use an exceptional one for this paper. For some reason, or maybe just by chance, many of the out-of-state memoirs did explicitly comment on the inmate community.

I was also limited in the number of people I was able to interview. It would be great to have interviewed more people after their release, but for future study, it would be beneficial to interview men during the actual time of incarceration and afterwards to see how their perspectives on the inmate community and social ties may have changed.

As can be noted, I covered a breadth of different aspects of informal inmate community, as well as the formal structures that influence and create the setting. Due to time and resource limitations, I was not able to go into greater depth on each issue, but rather covered as much breadth and depth as possible within my time and resource constraints. Each element and aspect of the community should be further researched, namely: hunger strikes, the leadership phenomena, and race. The complexity of each issue across the different prisons within California would be another point of future research, as inmates have noted each institution's distinct characteristics and differences that create different social atmospheres.

Multiple events suggest that a modern day Prisoner Rights Movement revival is beginning. The passage of Prop 36 in November 2012 revising the California Three Strikes law, re-introduction of a proposition to rid of the death penalty, a Supreme Court ruling on the human rights violations of the overcrowding of California prisons, and more and more attention to the alarming recidivism rates shows the beginnings of an ideological shift back to the rehabilitative focus of previous generations, as opposed to the tough-on-crime rhetoric that dominated criminal justice in the 1980's and 1990's. Particularly since the renewals of a concerted orchestration of hunger strikes in the past few years, human rights organizations and prisoner rights groups have begun to have collaboration. The publishing of The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander in

2010 is another example of a movement to view current imprisonment as a civil rights issue, with some calling it the "secular bible for a new social movement in the early twenty-first-century America" (West, online). It will be interesting to see how these changes affect the inmate community inside the prison walls.

Works Cited

Allen, Harry E., and Nancy J. Beran. *Reform in Corrections: Problems and Issues*. New York: Praeger, 1977. Print

Academia.edu | Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups | Paul Gill." *Academia.edu | Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups | Paul Gill*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Nov. 2012. <http://www.academia.edu/746649/Methods_of_data_collection_in_qualitative_research _interviews_and_focus_groups>.

Arteaga, Anthony. "Essay: Solitary Confinement In California | Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity." *Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity*. N.p., 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 20 Dec. 2012. <http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/essay->.

Bowker, Lee H. *Prison Victimization*. New York: Elsevier, 1980. Print.

Butler, Nelson. "Do Emotions Like Empathy, Love, and Compassion Exist in Prisons?" *Quora*. Quora, 28 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Mar. 2013. <https://www.quora.com/Prisons/Do-emotions-like-empathy-love-and-compassion-exist-in-prisons>.

Butzin, C., S. Martin, and J. Inciardi. "Treatment during Transition from Prison to Community and Subsequent Illicit Drug Use." *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 28.4 (2005): 351-58. Print.

"California Prisons Punish Inmates by Racial Bloc, Not Offense - RT USA." *California Prisons Punish Inmates by Racial Bloc, Not Offense - RT USA*. RT, 13 Apr. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2013. <http://rt.com/usa/race-california-prison-punish-801/>.

Collins, James. "Rejuvinated Gangs on SNY Prison Yards." *Between the Bars*. N.p., 26 June 2012. Web. 07 Nov. 2013. <http://betweenthebars.org/posts/5667/rejuvinated-gangs-on-sny-prison-yards>.

Coylewright, Jeremy. "New Strategies for Prisoner Rehabilitation in the American Criminal Justice System: Prisoner Facilitated Mediation." *Journal of Helath Care Law & Policy* 395th ser. 7.2 (2004): 395-422. Print.

Cummins, Eric. *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994. Print.

DiCicco-Bloom, Barbara. "The Qualitative Research Interview." *Making Sense of Qualitative Research*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2012. <http://www.hu.liu.se/cf/larc/utbildning-

information/scientific-methodology/course-literature-and-
links/1.253566/qual20interview.pdf>.

Dyer, Joel. *The Perpetual Prisoner Machine: How America Profits from Crime*. Boulder, Colo:
Westview, 2000. Print.

"Edwin H. Sutherland: Differential Association Theory." *Edwin H. Sutherland*. Florida State
University, n.d. Web. 1 Nov. 2012.   <http://criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/sutherland.html>.

Greer, K. R. "The Changing Nature of Interpersonal Relationships in a Women's Prison." *The
Prison Journal* 80.4 (2000): 442-68. Print.

Hartman, Kenneth E. "8 Accurate Books To Read About Life In Prison (PHOTOS)." *The
Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 30 Nov. 2010. Web. 07 Mar. 2013.
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kenneth-hartman/books-on-life-in-
prison_b_789128.html>.

Hartman, Kenneth E. *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*. New York: Atlas
&, 2009. Print.

Hartman, Kenneth E. "Prison as a Metaphor for Modern Society." *Kenneth E. Hartman*. N.p.,
n.d. Web. 20 Jan. 2013. <http://kennethehartman.com/prisonasamataphor.htm>.

Hayes, Joseph M. "California's Changing Prison Population (PPIC Publication)." *California's
Changing Prison Population (PPIC Publication)*. Public Policy Institute of California,
Apr. 2012. Web. 07 Feb. 2013.
<http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=702>.

Jacobs, James B. *New Perspectives on Prisons and Imprisonment*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983.
Print

Keve, Paul W. *Prison Life and Human Worth*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
1974. Print.

"Institutional Review Board for Human Participants." *Institutional Review Board*. N.p., n.d.
Web. 03 Nov. 2012. <http://www.irb.cornell.edu/forms/sample.htm>.

"IRB Guidebook Chapter III: Basic IRB Review." *IRB Guidebook Chapter III: Basic IRB
Review*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Nov. 2012.
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_chapter3.htm>.

"IRB Guidebook: Chapter VIii Special Classes of Subjects." *IRB Guidebook: Chapter VIii Special Classes of Subjects*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2012. <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_chapter6ii.htm>.

Lee, Trymaine. "Recidivism Hard To Shake For Ex-Offenders Returning Home To Dim Prospects." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 09 June 2012. Web. 25 Nov. 2012.

Lindquist, Christine H. "Social Integration and Mental Well-Being Among Jail Inmates." *Sociological Forum* 15.3 (200): 431-55. Print.

Moore, Billy N. *I shall Not Die: Seventy-Two Hours on Death Watch.* Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2005. Print.

Opdenakker, Raymond. "Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. N.p., Sept. 2006. Web. 1 Nov. 2012. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/175/391>.

PBSP-SHU. "Agreement To End Hostilities." Letter to To Whom It May Concern and All California Prisoners. 12 Aug. 2012. MS. San Quentin Prison, San Quentin, California.

Pell, Eve, and Fay Stender. *Maximum Security; Letters from California's Prisons.* New York: Dutton, 1972. Print.

"Prison Life: 5 Things Men Should Know." *Prison Life*. AskMen, n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2013. <http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/special_feature_3800/3808_life-in-prison.html>.

"Recidivism Report." California Department of Corrections, 23 Nov. 2011. Web. 1 Nov. 2012. <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/adult_research_branch/Research_Documents/ARB_FY_0607_Recidivism_Report_(11-23-11).pdf>.

Rideau, Wilbert. *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance.* New York: Alfred. A Knopf.

Roxell, L. "Co-Offending Among Prison Inmates." *The Prison Journal* 91.3 (2011): 366-89. Print.

"San Quentin Agricultural Society Announcements." *The Bulletin* 3 (April 1928): 1-20. Print.

Schevitz, Tanya. "Prisons Prepare to Integrate Cellmates." *SFGate*. San Francisco Chronicle, 27 May 2009. Web. 07 Jan. 2013. <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Prisons-prepare-to-integrate-cellmates-3211830.php>.

Schutt, Russell K. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012. Print.

Severance, T. A. ""You Know Who You Can Go To": Cooperation and Exchange Between Incarcerated Women." *The Prison Journal* 85.3 (2005): 343-67. Print.

Stewart, Hannah. "Violence in Prisons." *Yahoo! Contributor Network*. Yahoo, 30 Sept. 2010. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <http://voices.yahoo.com/violence-prisons-6886176.html?cat=5>.

Sudnow, David. *Studies in Social Interaction*. New York: Free, 1971. Print.

Tewksbury, Richard A. *Behind Bars: Readings on Prison Culture*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006. Print.

Waller, Irvin. *Men Released from Prison*. [Toronto]: University of Toronto in Association with the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, 1974. Print.

West, Cornel. "Foreword by Cornel West." *The New Jim Crow*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Wexler, H. K., G. Melnick, L. Lowe, and J. Peters. "Three-Year Reincarceration Outcomes for Amity In-Prison Therapeutic Community and Aftercare in California." *The Prison Journal* 79.3 (1999): 321-36. Print.