



**REVISITING
'INVOLUNTARY CELIBACY' AND
'LATENT HOMOSEXUALITY':
SEXUAL RELATIONS IN PRISON**

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INTRODUCTION: SYKES AND PRISON SEX

Deprivation of heterosexual relationships

- Few 'conjugal visits' and absence of women
- → Masturbation, consensual same-sex relations, and non-consensual sexual activity including rape

Argot roles

- 'Wolves, punks and fags'
- → Indicates both sexual role and sexual hierarchy

- Prison sex research much developed since 1970s
 - STDs and BBVs research
 - US: Focus on sexual coercion; PREA 2003
 - UK: Howard League Commission on Sex in Prison 2012-15



‘FIGURATIVELY CASTRATED BY HIS INVOLUNTARY CELIBACY’ (SYKES, 1974:70)

- Libido (mostly) endures, so sexual frustration and emotional and psychological pain at wider loss of intimate relationship keenly felt (*Hulley et al., 2016*)

I led a very relationship-oriented life, you know? There was always a woman in my life [...] and so actually to have that removed feels very unnatural [...] [It] feels very unhealthy for any male, or any human really, to be deprived of that basic human intimacy.

(Dan, cited in Wright, 2015)

I'd go through periods where I tried not to think about sex *at all* because it was so painful to think about something that, basically, wasn't a possibility and wouldn't be for years.

(Archie, Sex in Prison interviewee)



‘FIGURATIVELY CASTRATED BY HIS INVOLUNTARY CELIBACY’ (SYKES, 1974:70)

- Male (heterosexual) identity threatened, so compensate through hypermasculine behaviours:
 - Physical violence: ‘toughness’ as ‘secondary proof of manhood’ (Sykes, 1974:98)
 - Use of pornography and media content for masturbation (*Hensley et al., 2001; Stevens, 2017*)
 - Female staff as ‘an outlet for fantasies of sexual contact and conquest’ (*Crewe, 2006:403*) or as ‘target practice’ (*Stevens, 2013a:487*)



‘LATENT HOMOSEXUAL TENDENCIES MAY BE ACTIVATED’ (SYKES, 1974:71): *CONSENSUAL*

- Mixed research findings on concept of ‘situational homosexuality’ among men (*Ibrahim, 1974*)

I’d rather kill myself
than go gay.

(*Samuel, cited in Wright,
2015*)

You don’t become institutional gay. In
general, it’s because you’re gay.

(*Phillip, cited in Sit and Ricciardelli, 2013:345*)

I wasn’t friends with them ... I fucked them purely out of
necessity ... I’m completely straight; what happened then was
just about having my sexual needs met, in a particular time and
place, where I couldn’t get normal sex.

(*former prisoner, cited in Stevens, 2017:1386*)

- Little evidence that men who consensually have sex with men (MSM) experience ‘psychological onslaughts on [their] ego image’ (Sykes, 1974:72) (*Ricciardelli et al., 2016*)



‘LATENT HOMOSEXUAL TENDENCIES MAY BE ACTIVATED’ (SYKES, 1974:71): *CONSENSUAL*

- Prison as opportunity for discovery or confirmation of same-sex attraction

How ironic that I had to go to prison to discover my sexuality ...
Being around other gay or bi men made it easier for me to explore my sexuality and find out what I liked and wanted. So actually, prison was very beneficial to my sexual development.

(Jock, Sex in Prison interviewee)

- But some prisons more conducive to ‘coming out’ than others *(Stevens, 2013b)*



‘LATENT HOMOSEXUAL TENDENCIES MAY BE ACTIVATED’ (SYKES, 1974:71): *COERCIVE*

- Later research not fully support depiction of rapists as ‘aggressive prisoners who have turned to homosexuality as a temporary means of relieving their frustration’ (Sykes, 1974:71) (*Hensley et al., 2003; Banbury et al., 2016*)

I had raped and assaulted at least five men during my five year sentence. I worked with two other blokes, sometimes using violence, other times just threats. The more you could get it to look like a friendship, the more the authorities and cons wouldn't notice, and if they did they wouldn't do anything. The relationship ones involved someone who'd fuck all experience in prison, relatively good looking. The others was when I was desperate or getting a debt paid.

(former prisoner, cited in Banbury et al., 2016:376)



‘LATENT HOMOSEXUAL TENDENCIES MAY BE ACTIVATED’ (SYKES, 1974:71): *COERCIVE*

- Survival driven (*Donaldson 2001*) and transactional sex more concerning than prison rape, certainly in UK (*Banbury, 2004; Stevens, 2017*)

I belonged to this guy ... He protected me and kept me safe ... I've no doubt I would not have survived without him.

(*William, cited in Stevens, 2015: 9*)

This one guy, he would basically prostitute himself for heroin. He'd got a habit and no other way to pay for it.

(*Donald, cited in Stevens, 2017:1390*)

- Continuation of sexual hierarchies and argots in US (*Wooden and Parker, 1982; Hensley et al., 2003*)
- Gay and transgender prisoners remain more vulnerable to (repeat) victimization (*Banbury 2004; Hensley et al., 2005*)

CONCLUSIONS

- Importance of (non-)sexual activity in prisons for Sykes lies in effects on conceptions of masculinity
 - Sublimated sexual frustration reemerges in hypermasculine physical aggression
 - Emotional and psychological consequences of sexual assault as ‘sacrifice of manhood’ (1974:96)
 - But MSM consensually appear untroubled by situational ‘heteroflexibility’
- Pain of involuntary celibacy may have increased

Of course people have sex in prison. Why wouldn't they?
We're still human beings. Those feelings don't go away
just because you're banged up.
(Ryan, cited in Stevens, 2017:1382)



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