

## SEX IN PRISON: EXPLORING THE MYTHS AND REALITIES

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*Prison narratives, mass media, and conclusions drawn from institutional research have fostered a perception of widespread "homosexual rape" in male penitentiaries. However, studies of sexual contact in prison have shown inmate involvement to vary greatly. To explore the nature and frequency of sexual contact between male inmates in a Delaware prison, the authors administered a survey of sexual behavior. Respondents were questioned extensively about sexual activities that they engaged in, directly observed, and heard about "through the grapevine" prior to their entry into a prison treatment program. Findings indicate that (a) although sexual contact is not widespread, it nevertheless occurs; (b) the preponderance of the activity is consensual rather than rape; and (c) inmates themselves perceive the myth of pervasive sex in prison, contradicting their own realities.*

There is an unspoken ridicule of inmates who engage in sex today more than in the '70s and '80s.

Sex still goes on in here. People I know don't use protection because it's not available. People are knowledgeable [about HIV] but still have sex.

Years ago it was normal to have sex, blow jobs, with other inmates even if you were not homosexual. Today if you do this, others consider you a fag.

Most people that do it are lifers 'cause they don't care.

No rapes without a condom.

Just like on the streets; you can get sex anytime if you have money.

—Delaware prison inmates commenting  
on sex in prison, 1994

Anecdotal accounts of prison life have invariably depicted the routine occurrence of rape and consensual sex behind prison walls. Several investigations of these allegations have revealed that sex in prison, although prohibited, is a reality (Siegel, 1992). What is unclear, however, is the nature and frequency of inmate sexual activity. Our perceptions of sex in prison may be assimilated through media stories. Recall the sex scandal in a Georgia prison where 14 employees, including a deputy warden, were indicted for having sex with female inmates—an episode of prison misconduct where force of a psychological rather than a physical nature powered the abuse (Curriden, 1993). Another report accused Marion Barry, mayor of Washington, DC, of engaging in oral sex in a crowded prison visiting room while serving time for possession of cocaine. It was alleged that Barry's visitor was a prostitute (Nichols, 1992). More often than not, incidents of sexual aggression such as these are regarded as indicators of widespread rape throughout jail and prison systems. For example, in 1993 the *New York Times* ran an article titled "The Rape Crisis Behind Bars" that discussed the entrenched tradition of rape in prison and went on to characterize prisons as training sites for rapists (Donaldson, 1993, p. A11). These assumptions, for the most part, have not been challenged.

Nonetheless, examinations of the actual incidence of sex in prison have shown frequent occurrences of prisoner involvement to vary greatly. Some document the frequent occurrence of sex in prisons, concluding that rape in prison is "rampant" (Weiss & Friar, 1974) and that sexual assaults are "epidemic" (Davis, 1968, p. 9). On the other hand, some researchers have found consensual sex in prison to be relatively infrequent, and sexual assaults are purported to be extremely rare. Studies report proportions of males admitting to being raped in prison to range from less than 1% (Lockwood, 1980, p. 87; Tewksbury, 1989b, p. 38) to 41% (Wooden & Parker, 1982, p. 134). Accounts of overall sexual contact between male inmates, which can include consensual activity and/or acts of aggression, have been found to fluctuate from 19.4% (Tewksbury, 1989b, p. 35) to more than 90% (Barnes & Teeters, 1959, p. 373<sup>1</sup>; Wooden & Parker, 1982, p. 126).

Charges of sexual brutality have at times prompted investigations of rape in men's penitentiaries and jails. Sex is forbidden in prison so that correctional officials can fulfill their objective of a safe and secure environment. However, sex may become an important commodity in prison, where there is material deprivation, sex can fuel an underground economy (Silberman, 1994). As

such, the potential for violence surrounding these activities is vast. Additionally, rape and the threat of rape increase fear about masculinity and lead to compensatory aggressive displays of manhood (Irwin, 1980). General studies of sexual assault appear to conclude that most male victims of rape are indeed inmates rather than their nonincarcerated counterparts (Lipscomb, Muram, Speck, & Mercer, 1992), further justifying investigations of sex within prisons. Consensual sexual activity among inmates has been examined less frequently than has coerced sex. Studies of sex between "homosexuals" in prison have taken the perspective that this type of sex is either a social problem or a consequence of being institutionalized. Prisoners have been said to "improvise" while in prison, as it is likely that there is no possibility of heterosexual contact (Irwin, 1980). However, few researchers have probed male-to-male sexual relationships between caring sexual partners, perhaps because there is thought to be little to no violence in this type of sexual contact; consensual sex is seen as less of a threat to inmate or institutional security than is rape and thus does not demand the attention of more violent behavior.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, some examinations have found consensual sex to be a more routine occurrence in prisons than are acts of rape, qualifying consensual sex as a topic worthy of greater regard.

Now, well into the 1990s and surrounded by the reality of HIV and AIDS in addition to the myriad of sexually transmitted diseases, the study of sex in prison takes on a further significance. Thus the importance of investigating prison sexual contact is to gain a better awareness of the nature and frequency of sex in prison so that we are more thoroughly prepared to safeguard prisoners from rape, other forms of coercion, and disease and so that we can better deal with the issues of consensual sex and condom distribution.

An early inquiry of sexual activities within prisons was accomplished as part of the research for the well-known volume *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948). Inmates from penal institutions were included in the study but were excluded in calculations of sex frequency rates because the researchers felt inmates were in a "special situation" with regard to their unusual state of deprivation. However, the researchers did make several deductions with regard to sex in prison. They inferred that although there is opportunity in prison for outlets such as masturbation, nocturnal emission, and homosexuality, "the sum total of sexual activity is very much below that found in similar groups outside of an institution" (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 210). Going further, they explained,

While it is in actuality a fact that a high percentage of them do become involved in such activity after they have been in a penal institution for some length of time, neither the homosexual nor masturbation ever provides any frequent outlet for more than a small proportion of a prison population. (p. 529)

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assumption that much underreporting is occurring. On the other hand, when high rates of sexual activity are reported, one must be cognizant of the methodological dilemmas that accompany sex in prison research.

#### METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

To a great extent, the reason for the inconclusive nature of prison sex studies is due to the many methodological difficulties of researching sex in prison. The major drawback is one of accuracy in reporting. Prisoners may underestimate the incidence of sex because they are concerned with possible repercussions from inmates and correctional officers. They may be embarrassed to admit engaging in sex with other males for fear of being labeled as weak or gay, and they may fear the possibility of punitive measures. Even worse, admitting to having been raped in prison goes against the inmate code whereby status and power are based on domination and gratification (Wooden & Parker, 1982).

To eliminate the potentially negative consequences of self-reporting, official prison records can be reviewed for prior institutional sex offenses. These reports can also be used to validate or compare self-reported information. However, most sexual incidents are not officially recorded, limiting the accuracy of prison records. For example, Davis (1968) reported that of 2,000 sexual incidents that were estimated to have taken place in the Philadelphia prison system, only 40 resulted in internal discipline. Cooley (1993) noted that merely 9% of all 107 criminal victimization occurrences (which included only 1 sexual assault) had been reported to prison officials.

Possibly the most perplexing methodological issue in examining sex frequency and sex type among inmates involves the definitions of the sex-related incidents one is trying to measure. A large majority of studies do not make any effort to define the sexual terminology either to the inmates who are being interviewed or to the readers who must interpret the researchers' findings. Some analyses have measured rape in the broadest sense, as any act of coercion. Other studies break down these acts of coercion into categories such as forcible rape, sexual assault, sexual aggression, sexual solicitation, and attempted sexual acts. Perhaps even more damaging, researchers have failed to distinguish between consensual acts and acts of rape (Eigenberg, 1989). However, consensual sex is difficult to measure and consequently is difficult to define. The problem is that some sexual activity may appear consensual although an inmate may actually be coerced into participating only because he feels that there are no other alternatives. As a result, these two dissimilar types of sex, consensual and nonconsensual, have often been grouped together for analyses. This has no doubt added to the difficulty of assessing the true nature and incidence of sex in prisons.

Definitional ambiguity of sexual terminology has indeed been found to be a problem for inmates as well. In one study, 10% of the prisoners who were interviewed about their sexual experiences in prison were *unsure* whether they had ever been forced to have sex during their periods of incarceration (Wooden & Parker, 1982). Although it proves difficult to define the various sexual measures, an attempt must be made to clarify the terminology so that the research can become more accurate.

Great variability in population and sample selection has also hindered the comparability and generalizability of rates of sexual activity in prisons. Many researchers have interviewed only known homosexuals or inmates identified by correctional officers or other inmates as having been previously victimized. Unfortunately, these samples may incorrectly assess the occurrence of sexual activity, which in most cases would result in overestimating sexual frequency. For example, Wooden and Parker (1982) reported a very high sexual incidence rate, finding that 65% of their sample had experienced sexual contact while in prison. However, the prison from which the sample was chosen housed what the California Department of Corrections determined to be the state's "effeminate homosexuals" and "vulnerable heterosexual youngsters" (p. 9).<sup>4</sup>

The present study attempts to improve on these methodological obstacles. Moreover, it is the first look at the nature and frequency of sexual activity in a sample of Delaware prisoners. For this examination, we were in the unique situation of interviewing the male inmates in a prison-based therapeutic community (TC) with whom our interviewing staff had established excellent rapport.<sup>5</sup> This likely promoted greater honesty in responses. Further, these prisoners were asked not about sexual activities in their current TC but about sexual activities that they may have heard about, seen, or participated in when they were part of the general prison population.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the respondents were separated from and had no further contact with the vast majority of the inmates about whom they were reporting. This should improve on some of the previous reporting problems researchers have had with prisoners who feared that other inmates or correctional officers would have access to their interviews.

#### METHODOLOGY

In March and April 1994, voluntary interviews were conducted with male inmates in a medium-security Delaware prison who were part of the facility's treatment program for drug abusers. All of the 106 TC inmates who had been in the program longer than 30 days were eligible for this study and were

contacted for interviews. A total of 101 inmates were willing participants and were ultimately interviewed. All inmate accounts were credited with \$5 approximately 3 weeks after the interviews. Respondents were guaranteed of the confidential nature of the interviews and were assured that their status in the TC program would not be affected by either participation or nonparticipation in this project.

Respondents' mean number of times having been incarcerated was 3.6, and they had spent an average of 69.6 months (lifetime) incarcerated. Inmates had been living in the prison TC an average of 10.8 months. The average age at the time of the interview was 29.6 years. The vast majority (92%) of the respondents were African American, 5% were White-Anglo, and 3% were Hispanic.<sup>7</sup>

Data were also gathered on the respondents' sexual histories. The age at which respondents reported their first voluntary sexual experiences was at a mean of 12.3 years. Almost 11% of the respondents reported having been forced to have sex as children. The average number of lifetime sexual partners was 53, with a median of 25. Although all of the respondents classified themselves as heterosexual, 5% did admit to having at least one sexual experience with another man during their lifetimes.

Survey questions were conceived primarily to assess sexual activities among inmates and the respondents' personal sexual experiences while in prison. Again, respondents were asked not about sexual activities within their current environment but about sexual activities that they may have heard about, seen, or participated in while living within the general prison population during the year before entering the TC. Secondary topics included respondents' incarceration histories, early sexual experiences, and previous drug treatment experiences.

Sexual terms were defined for the respondents as follows.

*Rape:* oral or anal sex that is forced on somebody.

*Attempted rape:* a failed effort at forcing somebody to have oral or anal sex.

*Consensual sex:* oral or anal sex that is agreed on before the act takes place.

The benefit of defining the sex terms for the respondents was to maintain consistency in their responses. As discussed previously, delineating consensual sex from forced sex can be a complicated endeavor. Sexual alliances between inmates that appear to be of a consenting nature—as there are no signs of physical force and/or it is an ongoing relationship—may prove to be coerced. Our definitions attempt to help the respondents differentiate between consensual and coerced acts. Still, inmates may be unaware that some of the seemingly consensual acts are actually committed out of fear, threat of

**TABLE 1:** Number of Times Inmates Heard of Consensual Sex Occurring During Previous Year of Incarceration ( $N = 101$ )

Frequency	Percentage
Never	35.6
1 time	5.9
2-5 times	13.8
6-10 times	9.9
11-20 times	9.9
21-60 times	4.0
61-150 times	2.0
151+ times	6.0
Don't know/no data	12.9

NOTE: Mean number of times = 29.51, median = 3.0,  $SD = 82.83$ .

repercussion, or for gain. And this may be common. Bowker (1980) explains, "One must wonder how many so-called consensual homosexuals would never have engaged in this behavior were it not for having been raped or threatened with rape and exposed to the examples of other rape victims" (p. 15). We do acknowledge that the consensual sex reported by our respondents may instead be situations of sexual exploitation. However, to better ascertain the nature of the complex sexual interactions that occur between inmates, a qualitative or an ethnographic methodology involving detailed interviewing techniques (which were beyond the scope of this examination) would be required. As an exploratory study, we were concerned essentially with separating forced acts from consensual acts as so discerned by the respondents.

One further note on the methodology is with regard to the prison population to which our subjects refer in their responses. Respondents are in most cases referring to personal observations or sexual activities that they heard about from inmates with whom they were previously housed. This general area of the prison, where the majority of the respondents were housed prior to entering the TC program, had a population of approximately 1,250 inmates. The racial composition of this population was 67% African American, 27% White, and 6% other (primarily Hispanic).

## FINDINGS

### CONSENSUAL SEX

Just over half (51.5%) of respondents reported ever having heard, by word of mouth from other inmates or from correctional officers, of consensual sex

**TABLE 2: Number of Times Inmates Saw Consensual Sex Occurring During Previous Year of Incarceration (*N* = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	66.3
1 time	8.9
2-5 times	7.9
6+ times	8.0
Don't know/no data	8.9

NOTE: Mean number of times = 1.15, *SD* = 2.84.

taking place during their previous year of imprisonment prior to entering the TC (see Table 1). We had anticipated that consensual sex would have occurred on a more regular basis, but a substantial percentage (35.6%) had *never* heard of consensual sex occurring during that previous year. We had expected sex-related gossip and rumors to abound in a prison setting, resulting in a greater percentage of inmates having at least been aware of consensual sex. Nevertheless, as made apparent by the large mean of 29.51, there were a number of inmates who reported hearing about consensual sex more than 20 times—some even hundreds of times.

Table 2 demonstrates how many times the respondents had actually *seen* acts of consensual sex taking place throughout their previous year in prison prior to entering the TC. Only 24.8% had in fact witnessed consensual sex. Therefore, although approximately half of the inmates reported *hearing* about consensual acts transpiring, only about one quarter of the inmates had actually *seen* consensual sex taking place. An inmate offered one possible explanation for the lower than expected incidence of consensual sex: "There's less sex today because inmates are younger; they don't want to have sex. It's not OK like it used to be; people would think they were gay."

Respondents were asked how often they think consensual sex occurs; these data are presented in Table 3. Inmates were given several response options ranging from *every day* to *never*.<sup>8</sup> The majority (69.3%) believed that consensual sex occurs *every day*, whereas only 1.0% thought that it *never* happens. In comparing Tables 1, 2, and 3, we can see that although most inmates feel consensual sex is occurring *every day*, fewer inmates had heard other inmates or correctional officers talking about such acts and still fewer had actually seen consensual sex occur. The inmates appear to be under the impression that sex in their prison is widespread despite concrete evidence.

## RAPE

Table 4 reveals that almost 60% of respondents had not heard of any rapes occurring during their previous year of incarceration prior to entering the TC.

**TABLE 3: Estimated Frequency of the Occurrence of Consensual Sex (*N* = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	1.0
Once a year	0.0
Twice a year	0.0
Every few months	0.0
Once a month	5.0
Once a week	7.8
Few times a week	10.9
Every day	69.3
Don't know/no data	6.0

**TABLE 4: Number of Times Inmates Heard of a Rape Taking Place During Previous Year of Incarceration (*N* = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	59.4
1 time	16.8
2-4 times	12.9
5+ times	4.0
Don't know/no data	6.9

NOTE: Mean number of times = 0.947, *SD* = 2.01.

This is surprising because it is commonly thought that discussing the topic of sex, especially rape, in prison is a daily occurrence. As Srivastava (1974) explains, at least in his experience examining prison sexual behavior, "The rumor of rape runs wild like a storm in the prison, and everybody starts believing it" (p. 30).

When inmates were asked how many times they had actually seen a rape take place during the previous year, 88.1% responded that they had never witnessed a rape, 3.0% had seen one rape, and 1.0% had seen two rapes (see Table 5). Along these lines, in their study of inmates' sexual victimization and social interaction, Smith and Batink (1989) were told by inmates they interviewed that not as many rapes occur in prisons as the public may think. These researchers concluded that the constant fear and threat of rape is, however, extensive.

We also asked inmates to estimate the frequency with which they believed rape to occur. Looking at Table 6, it becomes apparent that the most common response was once a month (29.7%). Almost two fifths (38.7%) thought that rape takes place once a week or more, whereas 15.9% believed rape to be a daily occurrence. Recall that during the previous year, 59.4% of inmates had *never heard* about a rape taking place and 88.1% had never actually *seen* a

**TABLE 5: Number of Times Inmates Saw a Rape Take Place During Previous Year of Incarceration (N = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	88.1
1 time	3.0
2 times	1.0
Don't know/no data	7.9

NOTE: Mean number of times = 0.054, SD = 0.270.

**TABLE 6: Estimated Frequency of the Occurrence of Rape (N = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	0.0
Once a year	2.0
Twice a year	6.9
Every few months	9.9
Once a month	29.7
Once a week	9.9
Few times a week	12.9
Every day	15.9
Don't know/no data	12.8

**TABLE 7: Number of Times Inmates Heard of an Attempted Rape Occurring During Previous Year of Incarceration (N = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	71.3
1 time	15.8
2+ times	6.0
Don't know/no data	6.9

NOTE: Mean number of times = 0.511, SD = 1.48.

rape take place. Notice the discrepancies between the myth of epidemic rape and the relative absence of its occurrence in this prison.

#### ATTEMPTED RAPE

Questions making reference to attempted rape seemed confusing to many inmates. For example, one inmate explained, "Attempted rapes in prison are rare. It either happens or it doesn't." Several respondents remarked that this was the case because most rapes are carefully planned out over a period of weeks to months; thus most attacks are successful. In addition, inmates are

**TABLE 8: Number of Times Inmates Saw an Attempted Rape Occur During Previous Year of Incarceration (N = 101)**

Frequency	Percentage
Never	89.1
1 time	2.0
2-3 times	2.0
Don't know/no data	6.9

NOTE: Mean number of times = 0.074, SD = 0.395.

not likely to talk about a rape attempt that failed. Referring to Table 7, responses from more than 70% of the inmates indicate that they never *heard* of an attempted rape occurring during the previous year. In Table 8, the percentage of inmates who have never actually *seen* an attempted rape reaches nearly 90%. As was the case in Tables 3 and 6, respondents estimated the frequency of sexual activity, in this case attempted rape, to be greater than what they had in reality seen or heard (see Table 9). Fully 59.5% felt that attempted rapes occur at least once a month, and 13.9% maintained that attempted rapes occur every day.

#### RESPONDENTS' SEXUAL EXPERIENCES IN PRISON

The final part of the questionnaire related to the respondents' personal sexual experiences while incarcerated. Rape was reported by only one inmate and attempted rape by five inmates through their lifetime incarceration histories. No inmates admitted to being raped during the year before entering the TC, but two of the five just mentioned did reveal that others had attempted to rape them during this 1-year period. Similarly low self-reported rape rates have been found in other studies of sex in prison (see Power et al., 1991; Tewksbury, 1989a, 1989b). Our respondents informed us that today correctional officers are enforcing penalties for rape, and so now there are much fewer rapes than there were years ago. Other inmates felt that fear of contracting HIV has curtailed rape or at least made it a less spontaneous act.

Overall, only 2% of the respondents reported that they had engaged in sex with other men during the previous year of incarceration. Note that this finding greatly contradicts the respondents' opinions of the frequency of consensual sex, rape, and attempted rape in prison during this same time period. This coincides with Tewksbury's (1989b) findings that estimations of prison sexual activity by inmates are much higher than personal accounts.

Additionally, some interesting information was reported with regard to a topic from which we did not expect much response. Surprisingly, during the



**TABLE 9: Estimated Frequency of the Occurrence of Attempted Rape (N = 101)**

<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Never	5.0
Once a year	4.0
Twice a year	5.9
Every few months	6.8
Once a month	19.8
Once a week	12.9
Few times a week	12.9
Every day	13.9
Don't know/no data	18.8

previous year of imprisonment, 11.2% of the inmates claimed to have had sex with females. The women involved were either correctional officers, visitors, or female inmates attending classes at the male prison. All respondents indicated that there was no coercion involved in their sexual interactions with women.

#### PRISON SEX DURING THE AGE OF AIDS

Traditionally, more attention has been given to the study of sexual violence within prisons than has been given to consensual sexual activity. However, because our findings indicate that consensual sex is more prevalent, perhaps this is where we should focus more of our research energies. The potential threat of transmitting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases through unprotected sexual activity underscores the need for investigation in this area. Additionally, it is feasible to educate consenting partners on preventative measures such as condom usage. Although this would not appear to be a seemingly plausible tactic for would-be rapists, one of our respondents did suggest that even rapists now plan ahead by supplying themselves with condoms.

Our respondents were asked about their knowledge of condom accessibility in prison. More than 45% said that they were not available, 27.3% believed that they were available, and 26.3% were uncertain. According to the inmates, condoms could be obtained from a number of people including correctional officers (21.2%), visitors (12.1%), HIV demonstrators (21.2%), and others (6.1%) including counselors and medical professionals. However, more than one third of respondents were unsure how to obtain condoms.

The open-ended question, "Do you think that knowledge about HIV and fear of AIDS has changed sexual behavior in prison?" was asked of respondents to see what effect, if any, this disease has had on sex in prison. The majority of inmates (59%) felt that knowledge of HIV and AIDS has indeed

**TABLE 10: Ways in Which Knowledge of HIV/AIDS Has Changed Sexual Activity in Prison (N = 101)**

<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No change in sexual activity	38.6
Less sex	18.8
More protected sex	18.8
More requests for condoms	2.0
More masturbation	2.0
Less rape	1.0
Rape is not spontaneous	1.0
More sex with women	1.0
If HIV-positive, sex with HIV-positive only	1.0
Don't know/no data	15.8

changed sex in prison. Table 10 describes indicators of these changes. Less sex and more protected sex were the two most common practices inmates reported to have been modified due to HIV/AIDS.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While in prison, an inmate forfeits many rights and liberties. These deprivations include loss of mobility, loss of privacy, prohibition from alcohol and other drugs, and a ban on sexual activity. The sex restriction is thought to be necessary so that prison officials can satisfy the correctional goals of a safe and secure environment for those incarcerated. However, rules against these prohibited activities are violated and such behaviors do take place behind prison walls.

The results of this study on sexual activity in a Delaware prison indicate that (a) although sexual contact may not be widespread, it occurs nevertheless; (b) the preponderance of the activity is consensual sex rather than rape; and (c) inmates themselves perceive the myth of pervasive sex in prison, contradicting their own realities. These findings are evidenced by the small percentages of inmates who had ever heard of rapes taking place or seen rapes take place compared to the greater proportions of respondents who had heard about consensual sex occurring or seen consensual sex occur over a 1-year period. Only two inmates reported attempted rapes and no inmate reported being raped during the 1-year period about which they were questioned. When questioned about lifetime incidence, only three additional inmates reported attempted rapes and one inmate reported rape. However, respondents believed rape and consensual sex to be widespread, disputing their observations of others as well as their own self-reports.

The finding that consensual sex is not uncommon underscores the need to distribute condoms in prison. However, how do we get around the contradiction of supplying condoms when sex is prohibited? One way is to make sex permissible between consenting partners. The Expert Committee on AIDS and Prisons (ECAP), formed by the Correctional Service of Canada to assist that country's federal government in reducing the spread of HIV in federal correctional facilities, has recommended just that. After studying consensual sex in correctional facilities, ECAP advocated that consensual sex be withdrawn from the category of institutional offenses to discourage unsafe sex practices (Correctional Service of Canada, 1994). However, it is unlikely that many correctional systems in the United States will make any similar "radical" recommendations in the near future. Nevertheless, although the main route of HIV transmission among Delaware prison inmates would appear to be through injecting drugs (Inciardi, Lockwood, Martin, Portteger, & Scarpitti, 1994), the potential still exists for transmission through male-to-male anal intercourse.

Measuring the nature and frequency of sex in prison proves to be a difficult endeavor. Sex is still a taboo topic both inside and outside of prison. In fact, prison rape has been reported to be "the most closely guarded secret activity of American prisons" (Weiss & Friar, 1974, p. x). Because inmates fear divulging information about sexual activity, there is the strong possibility of underreporting. In the previously mentioned study by Power and his colleagues (1991), in which less than 1% of inmates admitted to having sex, 7.7% did admit to using intravenous drugs while imprisoned. These data indicate that it may not be the fear of being disciplined for an illegal prison activity that causes underreporting but rather the stigma associated with being raped by a man or engaging in male-to-male consensual sex. Additionally, confusion over sexual terminology often results in uninterpretable and ungeneralizable findings. We hope that the good rapport and trust we had with our respondents, along with the fact that they were in a TC where they had learned to value honesty, reduced some of the potential difficulties associated with discussing prison sex. And, by providing these respondents with definitions of the terms we were trying to measure, we attempted to gain a better understanding of what was transpiring behind bars.

There are a myriad of factors in a prison environment that work to either facilitate or discourage sexual activity. Each particular prison can differ with regard to its security level, type of population, number of inmates, single-versus multiple-occupancy cells, structured versus unstructured free time, and many other variables. All of these factors play a crucial role in the nature and frequency of sexual activity in a prison system. Thus sex in prison is likely to vary according to the conditions encompassing a specific prison.

This study was limited to male inmates in a prison-based TC and their recollections of the sexual activities of inmates with whom they were previously housed. It was the initial look at the nature and frequency of sexual contact within one Delaware prison. Admittedly, a series of examinations need to be performed to acquire a generalizable understanding of sexual behavior in American prisons. This was but one attempt toward these goals. If we continue to challenge the myths by improving our research and methodologies, we will be better prepared to deal with the realities of sex in our correctional systems.

## NOTES

1. Alfred C. Kinsey reported this information in a letter written to H. E. Barnes and N. K. Teeters dated November 20, 1950.
2. Of course, even a healthy sexual relationship between two consenting inmates can develop into a harmful situation where, for example, jealousy may lead to violence—which can include coercive sex.
3. Although being forced to perform an undesired sex act may well be interpreted as rape, bear in mind that we are using the authors' terminology.
4. Please note that this medium-security institution did not exclusively incarcerate "homosexual" inmates. Additionally housed were inmates who were categorized as felons serving relatively short terms as well as those who were designated as being less prone to violence.
5. The TC is a total treatment environment isolated from the rest of the prison population—separated from the drugs, the violence, and the norms and values that rebutt attempts at rehabilitation. The primary clinical staff of the TC are typically former substance abusers—"recovering addicts"—who themselves were rehabilitated in TCs. The treatment perspective of the TC is that drug abuse is a disorder of the whole person—that the problem is the *person* and not the drug, that addiction is a *symptom* and not the essence of the disorder. In the TC's view of recovery, the primary goal is to change the negative patterns of behavior, thinking, and feeling that predispose drug use. As such, the overall goal is a responsible drug-free lifestyle (see De Leon & Ziegenfuss, 1986).
6. During the year before entering the TC, the majority of respondents were previously housed in the general area of the prison where the interviews had taken place. However, they may have been incarcerated in one of several prisons within the Delaware correctional system.
7. The respondents were primarily African American due to the fact that the treatment program from which they were drawn evolved into a predominantly African American program. This occurred because the majority of the initial staff and recruits were African American.
8. If respondents believed that consensual sex was occurring more than once a day, we still coded this response as *every day*. This is also true in the coding of responses in Tables 6 and 9.

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