

# Male Prison Rape: A Search for Causation and Prevention

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*Abstract: This research utilises a content analysis methodology to examine the issue of male rape among prison populations within the United States. The physical and psychological aspects of rape are described by professionals, victims, and aggressors. The inmate terminology related to prison rape such as Punk and Jocker are defined to show the social structure of the prison sexual subculture. Previous theories of prison rape concerning racism, power, and sexual deprivation are discussed and analysed. Racism perpetrated against white inmates by black inmates is indicated to be the single causal factor in prison rape. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicate a prevalence of predominantly black rapists and white victims nationwide for the last 40 years. The controversial issues of conjugal visits, home furlough release, or allowing homosexual behaviour in prisons are debated as possible solutions to remedy prison sexual assault. The debate concerning the issuance of condoms in prison to prevent the transmission of the AIDS or HIV virus during rape attacks is discussed. The inmate classification system is presented as one viable solution to reduce the number of prison rapes. The scheme of inmate classification is to identify violent sexual aggressors and separate them from the general non-violent prison population. The author also considers separation by racial and ethnic categories since literary evidence shows 'black racism' to be the common denominator in most prison sexual assaults and rapes of predominantly white inmates.<sup>1</sup>*

Rape is interpreted as sexual relations with another person obtained through physical force, threats, or intimidation (Scacco 1982, p. 231). Although the statutes differ among the states regarding its legal definition, rape usually refers to sexual intercourse against the will of the victim. Some states have broadened the definition to include any form of penetration: oral, anal, or vaginal. Rape is forcible sexual assault. Being non-consenting and forced makes it an offence. Further, it is illegal behaviour described in the criminal codes of every state as a felony and punishable by varying degrees of penalties (Scacco 1982, p. 231).

Feminists have presented convincing arguments that heterosexual rape symbolises the condition of women in American society more than any other act. Similarly, homosexual rape symbolises the condition of men in America's prisons (Bowker 1980, p. 1). However, Rideau and Wikberg (1992, p. 77) contend that few female rape victims in society must repay their rapist for the violence inflicted upon them. However, male rape victims must unwillingly devote their existence to servicing their rapists for years after the violation in the prison environment.

Some sociologists have argued that inequality has existed in America for

centuries. They further argue that these inequalities are manifested in race, class, and gender oppression, mainly perpetrated by white males (Messerschmidt 1986; Ritzer 1992, p. 331). However, the fact remains that blacks continually and almost exclusively rape whites in prison. The evidence is based on studies conducted over the last 40 years (Davis 1968; Nacci 1978; Lookwood 1980; Starchild 1990). Why does this white victim preference prevail? Whites continue to be raped more severely and frequently and at a disproportionate rate than any other racial or ethnic group (Jones 1976; Bowker 1980; Lookwood 1980). This racial inequality may be the largest in any violent crime committed in the United States. A current and more sociological focus for discussion and analysis concerning prison rape is: 'What are the social forces that drive blacks to repeatedly and exclusively rape whites?'

### **Purpose of Study**

This research utilises a content analysis methodology to examine the issues raised in the literature to gain a sociological understanding of male prison rape; but more importantly to focus on why whites are raped by blacks more than any other racial or ethnic group. Further, from this content analysis examination can recommendations be made to help prevent male prison rape for all racial categories of inmates in the future. The first area examined is the prevalence and frequency of prison rape. This discussion will establish that male prison rape is an existent and highly present phenomenon that warrants social concern.

### **Prevalence of Prison Rape**

Throughout the United States, for a considerable period of time, sexual aggression has been reported as being a major problem in male prisons (Lookwood 1980, p. 5). Fleisher (1989, p. 157) argues that sex in prison is a sensitive issue because inmates do not easily divulge details of their own sexual behaviour, nor will they snitch on others. The first attempt to estimate a sexual assault rate in correctional institutions was made by Davis (1968, pp. 8–16) in his study of sexual assaults in the Philadelphia prison system and sheriff's vans. Davis and his staff worked with the Police Commissioner in an investigation (1966 to 1968) of sexual assault in the Philadelphia correctional system.

A total of 3,304 prisoners were interviewed during the investigation, and 156 sexual assaults were documented and substantiated through these interviews (Bowker 1980, p. 2). Single reports of the sexual assaults were not accepted as true. Instead, all testimony had to be corroborated through institutional records, and polygraph examinations of the testimony of witnesses (Bowker 1980, p. 2). Since 4.7% of the men who were interviewed unquestionably were victims of sexual assaults during their incarceration in Philadelphia, Davis felt justified in generalising this rate to the entire population of prisoners who had passed through the system between June 1966 and July 1968 – the period of his study. In doing so, Davis concluded that

the true number of sexual assaults in the 26-month period was in the neighbourhood of 2,000 (Bowker 1980, p. 2).

Another early study conducted in the Tennessee State Penitentiary by Jones (1976), included questions about how many homosexual rapes prisoners had recently known about in the institution. Jones (1976, p. 45) noted approximately three-quarters of the prisoners recalled at least one rape per month; more than one-third recalled at least one rape a week; and 30% reported that such acts occurred more often than once a week in the institution. Jones (1976), however, did not ask how often each prisoner personally underwent sexual assaults and, therefore, could not construct a rape victimisation rate for the entire prison. However, his data established that there was 'a continuous commission of homosexual rapes at the Tennessee State Penitentiary' (Bowker 1980, p. 3).

Other investigators have offered less precise estimates of the prevalence of homosexual rape in correctional institutions. For example, a technical report by Nacci (1978, p. 30) states that approximately three out of every ten prisoners released from the Federal Correctional Institution at Tallahassee in the early 1970s had been propositioned for sexual activity. Not all of these propositions led to a forced sexual encounter, but the data gave some idea of the widespread nature of 'sexual pressure' in prison (Bowker 1980, p. 3). This 'sexual pressure' is also supported by Lookwood's survey of a random sample of approximately 80 men in New York State prisons. Lookwood found that only one inmate in the random sample had been sexually assaulted, however 28% experienced some form of sexual aggression such as physical abuse, threats or insults, or threatening propositions (Propper 1981, p. 10).

### Effects of Rape

Currently there are no sure ways to assess the damage done to individuals who have been sexually victimised in prison (Woode and Parker 1982, p. 115). However, there is a body of research reported on the crisis response by the victim to the act of rape. Scacco (1982, p. 236) cites that research on male rape victimisation indicates that the assault triggers an acute disruption of the person's physiological, psychological, social, and sexual life. This was evidenced by somatic problems, and interrupted sleeping and eating patterns, and the development of minor mood swings and fears specific to the circumstances of the assault. Victims may experience difficulties in telling family, friends, and employees about the rape, and there is often interruption in male-female relationships (Walker and Brodsky 1976, p. 45). Some victims turn to suicide to escape the trauma or fear of rape (Tucker 1982, p. 71; Haycock 1991; Roberts *et al.* 1991; Bland *et al.* 1990; Dooley 1990). Rape, in this context, represents an external or situational crisis inflicted on the victim. The physical and psychological effects of rape have also been shown to be devastating. Additionally, the threat and reality of AIDS or HIV has also added a new physical and psychological terror for victims of prison rape.

## **Prison Rape and AIDS**

Starchild (1990, p. 146) notes that AIDS has reduced the incidence of rape in American prisons considerably, but not completely, since many prisoners believe that by being the aggressor or using a homemade condom reduces the risk of contracting the disease. Homemade condoms are used because in the majority of state and federal prisons homosexual behaviour is not permitted and condoms are not issued or allowed to be purchased by inmates. In some states like Hawaii, condoms are considered contraband and subject to punitive actions if possessed by an inmate. However, even if condoms were issued the concept is still problematic. First, condoms are not designed for anal intercourse. Most manufacturers of this type of contraceptive even specifically state on the packaging that condoms are not intended for anal intercourse. Also, it is unlikely that an attacker will stop in the process of a rape to put on a condom. The courts have also made bizarre rulings defining an attack as *not* 'bona fide rape' if a condom is used. Specifically, the rulings suggest that if a victim can persuade an attacker to use a condom, it may be interpreted as a vague form of consent on the part of the victim. Attempting to prevent rape in the first place appears to be a more viable objective. The next focus will be on the psychological factors associated with prison rape.

## **Psychological Effects of Prison Rape**

In psychological victimisation, the aggressor manipulates other prisoners into giving up material goods, sex or some other desired commodity without actually having to fight for it (Bowker 1980, p. 59). As we have seen, prison sexual victimisation has important ramifications for both the perpetrator and the victim. For the jocker [inmate slang for the sexual aggressor], these sexual 'conquests' serve to establish his status and dominance within the convict hierarchy, as well as continuing to validate his manhood (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 115). Homosexual behaviour is therefore 'rewritten' by men in prison so that men manage to convince others that their homosexual interests are transient, highly physical and unemotional, enabling them to retain power and status. Those who are victims are assigned the label 'homosexual' (Richmond 1978, p. 51). The use of force becomes conditioned with the sexual act itself (an example of 'stimulus generalisation').

The men's prison environment allows for, and even sanctions sexual aggression. However, it does not approve of sexual affection or love except in rare instances; and very seldom does this positive element occur between the 'straights' who merely use their punks or sissies (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 115). Some aggressors deviate from the general pattern in that they perpetrate psychological victimisation purely for the pleasure they gain from seeing the suffering of the victim (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 115). Therefore, aggression is more commonly used by the jocker to keep the inmate in line.

For some, the challenge of 'turning out' a heterosexual white youngster is much more exciting than engaging in sex with a wilful homosexual sissy who readily appears to have conformed to the feminised role (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 115). Further, since the effeminate homosexual does not resist, opportunities for displacing the jocker's sexual aggression are lessened and thereby the sexual dynamics and release are less satisfying (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 115).

## The Culture

Scacco (1982, p. 9) argues the deprivation of basic human needs existent in the state of imprisonment and the need to find substitute gratification are the forces that shape the world of the prison, its culture, its life way, its values and the roles of those trapped within it. Homosexual rapes are carried out within the boundaries of prisoner roles. Homosexuals and punks are a fact of prison life and are tolerated as long as they keep their place and fit the feminised stereotypes (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 18). A variety of sexual scripts or patterns of sexual behaviour is evident in men's prisons. Wooden and Parker (1982) describe and define the following scripts:

*Kid or Punk*: heterosexual and bisexual men who have been 'turned out' or forced to assume a sexually submissive role.

*Jocker or Stud*: men who have sex with homosexuals or punks. Since these men only assume the *masculine role* in the sexual encounter (active in anal intercourse and passive in fellatio) they do not define themselves as homosexual, nor as engaging in a homosexual act. Some of these *jockers*, however define themselves as bisexual. It is the partner who assumes, or is forced into, the submissive role and who is defined as weak and inferior. The partner violates the masculine image, and is therefore a *broad* or *sissy*. The distinction is between the strong and the weak, the dominant and the dominated, and ultimately between men and women.

*Queen or Sissy*: homosexual (or transsexual) males who adopt stereotyped effeminate mannerisms and play predominantly the submissive sex role.

*Homosexual or Gay*: men who are more diverse in their sexual activity, and who assume both active and passive roles, and who display few if any effeminate mannerisms.

Homosexuals are classified as 'active' and 'passive'. The passive being divided into effeminate 'fags' who deliberately seek to provoke sexual tension, and 'punks' who accept the passive role for the sake of protection and material rewards (Srivastave 1974, p. 21). Srivastave (1974) stated that the passive homosexuals are usually younger than their active partners (p. 313). The 'wolf' is the aggressor and the 'punk' is the victim. Bowker (1980, p. 13) cites that these terms are nearly universal, although there are additional terms that are found from institution to institution.

The Srivastava (1974, p. 21) study of prisons in India noted a significant sense of mutual loyalty that developed between the 'punk' and his 'wolf'. However, the victims in homosexual assaults in male prisons have low status because they are servicing the aggressor (Propper 1981, p. 56). Knowing the

prevalence of prison rape, the results of sexual victimisation, and the prison subculture: the question remains as to how and why these rapes occur.

### **Why do Prison Rapes Occur?**

Most social psychologists and sociologists react negatively to researchers who claim that various behaviours are genetically determined. Social psychologists are more likely to emphasise the importance of individual predispositions like personality traits and needs, whereas sociologists/criminologists emphasise group pre-prison characteristics like race and socio-economic status (Propper 1981, p. 12). There are many theories concerning prison rape, however, many are still unclear as causal to prison rape.

The theory of overcrowding in prison does not appear to be a clear causal factor. Although, overcrowding has risen to new heights in the 80s and 90s (Adams 1992; Bonta and Gendreau 1990), the issue of blacks exclusively raping whites has been substantially documented since the 1960s, well prior to the overcrowding dilemma of today. Both quantitative and qualitative data show that blacks exclusively raping whites has been constant (Davis 1968; Jones 1976; Nacci 1978; Nacci and Kane 1984; Bowker 1980; Lookwood 1980; Starchild 1990).

Further, the extent to which the phenomenon of prison gangs has contributed to prison rape is also not clear. Prison gangs have risen to power within the prison walls in the recent decade. However, the issue of blacks exclusively raping whites was documented long before the emergence of prison gangs (Nacci and Kane 1984; Ekland 1986). Further, the US Department of Justice (1991, p. 20) noted that only 6% of inmates belonged to a gang before entering prison, and only half of them were current prison gang members.

Some argue that the very structure of the prison is the cause of rape. Ibrahim (1974, p. 38) argues there are several factors in the social structure of the prison community which may be functional in producing deviant sexual behaviour which include: (i) the prison is a one-sex, closed society that stops heterosexual activity; (ii) deviant sexual behaviour is tolerated among prisoners, wardens, and administrators; (iii) insufficient work opportunities and recreation programmes leave prisoners with too much idle time; (iv) privacy is often impossible due to shared cells and dormitories, showers and rest rooms; (v) provision is usually not made for separation of sex offenders and homosexuals; (vi) decreased communication from the world outside the prison reduces identification with the sexual norms of society.

Some incidents of rape may occur because proper custodial supervision is lacking. But other assaults occur in closely supervised surroundings. Here, the aggressors work out careful plans to lure the victim to a spot where the rape can take place. The victim is a 'mark' in a con game. He must be induced to co-operate to a certain point in the incident. In these types of assaults the location where the victim is lured lacks security, so that the incident can take place (Lookwood 1980, p. 90).

Efforts have been made in modern prisons and jails to protect inmates

from each other and allow for constant custodial supervision. Nonetheless, aggressors can find ways to circumvent (on rare occasions) the most rigid custodial routines. Lookwood (1980, p. 90) describes one case in which the victim was told he could purchase marijuana if he accompanied an aggressor to a certain area. The aggressor and the victim then walked together through a steel door, which was open for a few minutes to allow a group of inmates to pass through it. Once in the cell block area, other aggressors appeared and dragged the victim under a bed in one of the aggressor's cells and repeatedly raped him (Lookwood 1980, p. 90).

One sociological theory views homosexuality and other forms of deviance as methods of coping with the harsh, depriving atmosphere of prison life (Adams 1992; Money and Bohmer 1980; Propper 1981, p. 12). Another theory argues that prisoners are really different sorts of people than the general population and that knowing more about their previous lives would enable better predictions of the prisoner's future behaviour. In essence they import these deviant behaviours with them from the outside world into the prison like a disease. Sociologists have long known that rape is not so much about sex, as it is about power.

### **Power and Control**

The pursuit of power via sexual violence and the enslavement of weaker prisoners is an integral feature of imprisonment throughout the United States in both jails and prisons, and even in the juvenile justice system (Rideau and Wikberg 1992, p. 75). It is widely stated that for a considerable number of prisoners, homosexual contact takes place for the first time in their lives during confinement (Sagarin 1976, p. 245).

Rape in prison is rarely a sexual act, but one of violence, politics, and acting out power roles (Rideau and Wikberg 1992, p. 75). The act of rape in the ultra masculine world of prison constitutes the ultimate humiliation visited upon a male by forcing him to assume the role of a woman. Rideau and Wikberg (1992, p. 75) argue that sex assault in prison is not considered 'sexual' and not really regarded as 'rape' in the same sense that society regards the term. In the Louisiana penal system, both prisoners and personnel generally refer to male rape as 'turning out', a non-sexual description that reveals the non-sexual ritualistic nature of what is really an act of conquest and emasculation, humiliating and stripping the male victim of his status as a 'man'. The rape redefines him as a 'female' in this perverse subculture and he must assume that role as the 'property' of his conqueror or whoever claimed him and arranged his emasculation. He becomes a slave in the fullest sense of the term (Rideau and Wikberg 1992, p. 75).

One of the perverse mores in the world of prison is that victims of sexual violence are rarely regarded as 'victims'. A key element of the prisoners' belief system is that a 'man' cannot be forced to do anything that he does not want to do – a 'real man' cannot be exploited. Those unable to meet the stringent demands of that standard are regarded as not being 'men', but rather as being weak and unworthy of respect from those who *are* 'men'.

Their weakness both invites and justifies exploitation (Rideau and Wikberg 1992, p. 84).

In prison, where moral or humanistic concerns have little relevance, status and power are based on domination and gratification. This leads to an emphasis on violence and exploitation and a de-emphasis on mutual caring and reciprocal fulfilment (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 14). At the top of the prison power structure is the class of Men. Scacco (1982, p. 68) explains that in order to participate directly in the power structure, to be a decision maker, a leader, a plotter, a hustler, you must be a man. Propper (1981, p. 143) notes most accounts of homosexuality among male inmates acknowledges the important role of desires for power, dominance, and masculine identification in prison.

For many convicts who have been socialised into this system, eroticism has come to be associated with aggression. The degree of satisfaction derived from the sex act is often in direct proportion to the degree of force and humiliation to which the partner is subjected (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 14). A similar element of humiliation is also seen in the homosexual rapes of women in female prisons (Scacco 1982; Propper 1981).

In its most extreme form this sexualised aggression is manifested in outright acts of violence such as prison rape. In less severe cases, it appears in the form of sexual intimidations, sexual domination, sexual manipulation, and sexual extortion (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 14). Prison rape is, undoubtedly, as the academics state, a vehicle for the expression of a power relationship, dominance, and control. So, too, are 'voluntary' sexual relationships in jail. In fact, the power/control element is never absent from the Man-Punk relationship; indeed it defines the relationship: the Man controls the Punk (Scacco 1982, p. 71).

Tucker (1982, p. 71) contends that it is not power and control that distinguishes prison rape, it is the violent means by which power and control are expressed. A further characteristic of this pattern is the distinction drawn between the dominant partner (the 'insertor') and the submissive partner (the 'insertee'). As long as a participant maintains a dominant role by either performing anal penetration on another inmate or by being orally copulated by another inmate, there is no social sanction against the dominant partner who engages in the sexual act (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 15).

Scacco (1982, p. 79) argues the most serious cost of prison rape to society is that it takes non-violent offenders and turns them into people with a high potential for violence, full of rage and eager to take vengeance on the society which they hold responsible for their utter humiliation and loss of manhood. The value structure of the lower-class subcultures found in prison, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, places extreme emphasis on maintaining and safeguarding the inmate's manhood and manliness – his machismo (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 15).

Tucker suspects that a majority of jail suicides are rape victims, however, he contends that if they do not turn their frustrated feelings of being raped against themselves – they may turn it on the world outside, perhaps becoming rapists themselves in a desperate attempt to 'regain their manhood' (Scacco 1982, p. 71).

Sexual release for these attackers is also a definite factor in their behaviour, but it appears that the need for sexual release is not the primary motive for the sexual aggression. In a sexually segregated population, auto-eroticism would seem a much easier and more 'normal' method of release than homosexual rape (Scacco 1975, p. 68).

Rape exists and will continue to exist in confinement institutions because it serves the interests of too many powerful elements of jail and prison societies, including administration. Officials use the fear of rape by prison inmates to divert prison aggression, destroy potential leaders, and intimidate prisoners into becoming informers (as noted in the New Mexico Prison riot). Scacco (1982, p. 78) argues that men at the top of the prison power structure benefit sexually, psychologically, and financially, from the Punks who are turned out by this male rape process.

The victims of rape, like most prisoners, leave confinement a good deal more 'antisocial' than when they enter it. The practice of rape is but one mechanism in a system that takes non-violent people and efficiently processes them into men who rape, rob, assault and kill (Scacco 1982, p. 78). Rape has been shown as an act of violence, power, and control. The issue of who are the victims and who are the aggressors now remains.

### **Rape and Racism: Black Rapists, White Victims**

A special complicating problem for American prisons is that they are racially integrated institutions (Buffum 1982, p. 104). The oppressive characteristics of race relations in the society as a whole penetrates the relationships between whites and blacks inside prisons (Buffum 1982, p. 104). Scacco (1982, p. 91) argues that the issue of racism predominates as a central point in sexual victimisation within correctional institutions. It has even been cited as being the single most important socio-demographic characteristic associated with victimisation. These statistics may be due to the over-representation of minorities in prisons. However, rapes are not randomly distributed within the prison population, especially with respect to race (Bowker 1980, p. 7).

Many rapists in prison *may* not be homosexual at all, but heterosexuals raping for power and revenge (Scacco 1975, p. 4). In American prisons, studies by sociologists suggest that more than 90% of rapes are inter-racial and *may* be motivated more by a need for sexual dominance over another race than by sexual passions (Starchild 1990, p. 145). Many rapes are by blacks on whites, *suggesting* that it gives the lower-class black, who has felt trod upon all his life, his one chance to dominate a white person (Starchild 1990, p. 145). Consequently, the victims are almost always young white prisoners.

Scacco (1982, p. 91) has also noted a disproportionate number of black aggressors and white victims in studies of sexual assaults in jails and prisons. Even if the minority of prisoners are black, the majority of victims are white (Scacco 1982, p. 91). When Lookwood (1980, p. 28), asked 'targets' to identify their aggressors at the time of their rape, most were black (80%), some were Hispanic (14%), and a few were white (6%). When Jones asked prisoners at

the Tennessee State Penitentiary about the races of the aggressors and victims in rape incidents, nearly all whites agreed that the aggressors were black and the victims were white (Bowker 1980, p. 8). However, Bowker (1980, p. 8) did note that most black respondents claimed that both blacks and whites raped whites frequently, and there were occasions when blacks raped blacks.

As discussed, it is unusual for either black or Chicano youngsters to be turned out. The blacks and Mexicans-Americans tend to look out for their own and will not turn out one of their own race (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 106). In the Tennessee Prison study, not one black prisoner was able to recall a single occurrence in which a white prisoner had raped or attempted to rape a black (Bowker 1980, p. 8). Scacco (1982, p. 68) also noted that men in prison will take advantage of opportunities to rape whites, however with a minority – they will most likely abstain.

When some of the black aggressors were questioned as to the reasons for making whites submit to sexual acts, their answers were usually 'now it's their turn'; a statement leading one to believe that there are definite socio-racial overtones to the act of sexual victimisation (Scacco 1982, p. 91). Scacco (1975) more frankly speaking, argues that blacks appear to be taking out their frustrations and feelings of exploitation on other inmates in the form of sexual attack and domination, as 'the oppressive characteristics of race relations in the society as a whole penetrate the relationships between whites and blacks inside prisons' (p. 5).

One study indicated that white respondents did not follow the habit of blacks who raped members of the other race when they wanted to get back at them, rather they would stab blacks or burn them out of their cells in retaliation for having molested white prisoners (Bowker 1980, p. 8). Other interview data suggested that whites become targets because they are perceived to be weak and sexually attractive (Lookwood 1980, p. 28). However, if a white youngster is being pressured by either blacks or Chicanos, the other white inmates will use it to their advantage to 'turn him out' (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 91). The terror resulting from the rapes by black inmates enables older white inmates to seduce young white victims into more permanent and less violent homosexual relationships:

I wait until it looks like they're done with him, then I come on like a knight in shining armour, I take him under my wing and promise to keep the others away. After what he's been through it ain't nothing for him to take care of me and maybe a couple of others. (Carroll 1977, p. 433)

Differences in sexual identity in particular have been found to condition the way in which prisoners adapt collectively to the loss of heterosexual contact (Ward and Kassebaum 1965; Giallombardo 1966). Scattered observations have long suggested that cross-racial sexual attraction is an important dimension of the dyadic homosexual relations commonly reported in institutions for women (Giallombardo 1966, p. 183). However, Carroll (1977, p. 417) noted that racial hostility may be an important element in the generally more coercive forms of homosexuality found in prison for men.

The Davis (1968) study also revealed race as a factor in sexual violence

in the Philadelphia jails. He found 'a disproportionate number of black aggressors and white victims' upon examination of the 129 documented assaults. Fifty-six per cent of the rapes were black-on-white; only 29% were black-on-black and only 15% were white-on-white (p. 15). There were no recorded incidents involving white aggressors and black victims (Carroll 1977, p. 418). Irwin (1971) reached similar conclusions based upon 115 interviews with newly released prisoners: 'many of the groups rapes . . . in jails and prisons are much an artifact of class and racial hostilities as they are an expression of aggressive sexual drives' (p. 2).

Carroll (1977) noted that his subjects estimated that there were 40 or more sexual assaults per year. All agreed that 75% or more of the assaults involve black aggressors and white victims, and that rarely, if ever, is a black prisoner sexually assaulted (Carroll 1977, p. 420). As noted, sexual assaults create and maintain a class of 'punks', and white prisoners often tacitly co-operate in the process (Carroll 1977, p. 432). In essence, homosexual assaults of white prisoners by black prisoners create a symbiotic bond between black prisoners and older, established white prisoners (Carroll 1977, p. 432).

In the experience of the prisoners, this pattern of raping whites is similar:

I don't know why it's that way, but it is. I've been in four different cans [slang for prisons] and it's been the same in each one. That's something I can't understand about these white kids. They turn one hundred percent quicker than a black dude. They come into the can and the next day there's brothers waiting in line to hit 'em in the seat. (Carroll 1977, p. 420).

A variety of tactics are employed by the black aggressors to manipulate a prospective white victim. Levy and Miller (1971, pp. 143-4) classify these tactics into three patterns: (i) the 'soft sell'; (ii) the 'hard sell'; and (iii) a combination of the 'hard and soft sell'. The 'soft sell' is in reality a form of seduction in which the victim is first offered friendship and material goods, then exposed to 'married' couples to demonstrate the normality of prison homosexuality. He may also be provided with pornography and gradually drawn into a sexual relationship through physical contact such as back rubs and less objectionable forms of sexual contact such as 'leggings' (inter-femoral intercourse). In contrast, the 'hard sell' is when the unsuspecting white victim is suddenly confronted by one or more black aggressors and challenged to 'fuck or fight'. In the combination 'hard and soft sell' the victim is alternately terrorised and befriended prior to the assault.

Carroll (1977) notes despite the inter-racial character of prison rape, it is obvious that the pattern is not explainable solely in the terms of conditions immediately associated with imprisonment. Further, the motivational force behind the prison sex assaults roots deep within the socio-cultural context of race relations within the United States, rather prison is merely an arena in which blacks vent rage at whites perceived to be representatives of their oppressors (Carroll 1977, p. 422).

Imprisonment exacerbates black rage, for in the prison they are surrounded and contained by highly visible symbols of white oppression, subordinated to the power of a predominantly white custodial staff, and denied the opportunity to affirm their masculinity through heterosexual

contact (Carroll 1977, p. 422). Carroll notes this anger articulated by black prisoners when describing their motives for raping white prisoners:

It's getting even I guess . . . You guys (whites) been cutting our balls off ever since we been in this country. Punking [slang for raping] whites is just one way of getting even. (p. 422)

Anything white, even a defenseless punk, is part of what the blackman hates. It's a part of what he's had to fight all his life just to survive, just to have a hole to sleep in and some garbage to eat . . . It's a new ego thing. He can show he's a man by making a white guy into a girl. (p. 422)

This corresponds with Scacco's conclusion in his study of Connecticut's reformatories that homosexual rapes occurring there were usually blacks raping white boys for power and revenge. Further, Scacco noted that blacks saw more social prestige in having sex with whites over other ethnic groups. Rideau and Wikberg (1992, p. 93) confirm the racial factor: 'It does happen that blacks often have a preference for white slaves, and that gets into the whole business of racial subjugation and revenge – the same way it does in society. There are a lot of blacks who prefer white women and it has to do sometimes with a conscious kind of revenge and a conscious status which it confers upon them in the eyes of other blacks'. However, they point out that the racial factor 'really depends on the atmosphere of the prison. For example, in Soledad prison blacks and whites stayed strictly apart and there was a constant power struggle. If any white associated with or consorted with a black in any way, he was in trouble with the white group'. Inter-racial rape under those circumstances would 'precipitate in large scale racial clashes' (Rideau and Wikberg 1992, p. 93).

Although many causation factors have been suggested for prison rape, they are all overshadowed by the racial categories of the victims and the rapists. Prison rape has been shown throughout this study to be racially motivated by predominantly black inmates specifically against white inmates who in turn are the victims. Although more studies need to be conducted to confirm this theory, racial hatred of whites by blacks appears to be the main force driving prison rape. In fact, the US Department of Justice (1991, p. 15) noted that black (57%) and Hispanic (51%) violent inmates were at least four times more likely than white (11%) violent inmates to have victimised someone of a different race or ethnic group. In reality, black inmates do have the power and control to have consensual sex with overtly homosexual whites and blacks, but they prefer to rape non-homosexual whites in order to humiliate them. In essence, prison rape in the United States may not be an issue of power, sex, or even homosexuality, but rather an issue to humiliation targeted against whites by raping them. This persistent victimisation of whites over any other ethnic or racial group is why conditions need to be implemented to protect whites from rape or future rapes in prison.

### **Solutions and Conclusions**

Some argue that to deal with the problem of prison rape the prison structure must be changed. Huff (1983) notes that both management systems

and conflict resolution techniques must be improved to avoid or minimise prison violence. Ibrahim (1974, p. 38) argues several ways to decrease prison violence: (i) conjugal visits or home furlough release programmes; ((ii)) isolation of consenting homosexuals; or (iii) develop and implement a classification system to group inmates into separate cellblocks.

Lookwood (1980) contends that conjugal visits would not help most sexual aggressors, because very few are legally married or have common-law wives. Others, are too young to have wives or too violent to have formed lasting relationships (p. 148). Finally, most offenders would be ineligible for home furlough because they are too violent and would put communities at risk if released. Scacco (1975) argues an 'immediate' solution to prison rape is to permit it between homosexuality between consenting individuals (p. 107). However, Starchild (1990, p. 150) notes that while not all sex in prison involves rape, probably the majority of it does involve heavy intimidation.

One viable solution that seems to be rational is the inmate classification system. The main element of the programme is to place inmates at the lowest practical security level of housing commensurate with housing availability and individual programme needs. These levels are: *Level I*, which is the lowest security level and includes non-secure housing consisting of either dormitories or individual rooms/cells surrounded by an indirectly supervised perimeter or without a secure perimeter; *Level II*, is a slightly more restrictive form of *Level I* housing with a more secure and constantly supervised perimeter; *Level III* requires secure single-person-cell housing, an armed perimeter, and controlled inmate movement; and *Level IV* is the most restrictive of the four security levels in which housing configurations are single-person-cells with armed capability inside, the perimeter is armed, and inmate movement is restricted (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 206).

Additionally, in this placement system, those 'known' homosexuals and vulnerable youngsters are usually placed in *Level III*, although quite often, their crime and demeanour *do not* warrant such a secure level of housing (Wooden and Parker 1982, p. 207). However, this security level is needed since placing these 'inmates' in lower security levels or dormitory settings tended to promote sexual coercion.

Alternatives such as conjugal visits do not appear to be a satisfactory solution because prison rapes have been shown to be the result of 'power gratification', rather than 'sexual gratification'. Deep undertones of power and black racism are overtly present in America's prisons, therefore, permitted homosexual relationships is not a viable solution, because the deprivation of sex or emotional attachment is not the problem. The main solution discussed is the inmate classification system. Basically, the classification system would identify potential 'rapists' or more importantly the potential 'victims' and separate them.

The analysis of the literature illustrates that the act of male prison rape is an act of violence fuelled by black racism targeted with the sole intention of racially humiliating the white victim. Separating inmates by type of offence, violent from non-violent, and possibly by race is needed since the US Department of Justice (1990, p. 7) noted that 50% of black inmates under 18 years old were admitted for a violent offence, compared to 32% for white

offenders. Separation by race is crucial, since most black inmates feel that they are justified to rape whites since they perceive whites as contributing to their oppression. Further, separation by sexual category of homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, and transsexual is also needed to protect the weaker and feminine inmates from attack. The inmate classification system is already in place in many prisons throughout the United States. However, these classification systems do not separate by race and is probably why the majority of prison rapes still occur. Black racism driven with the intention of humiliating whites is a critical element in understanding the social structure and dynamics of the raping of white victims by black aggressors.

In closing, the focus of this article is to understand why the majority of prison rape victims are white and the rapists are black and to suggest an effective solution to prevent this type of racial hate crime. This analysis suggests the majority of prison rapes in the United States are in essence hate crimes perpetuated by black racism against white victims. Black racism is more overtly present in the sexual assault of white victims than the issues of gender, masculinity, sexual preference, or power.<sup>2</sup> The act of male rape is targeted against white victims for the sole intention of humiliating them.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Earlier versions of this research were presented on three occasions: (i) at the *American Sociological Association's* 1996 annual meeting held at the New York Hilton, New York City for the regular session panel of *Violence: Specific Forms, Settings, and Methodological Approaches* on 17 August 1996; (ii) at the *Pacific Sociological Association's* 1996 annual meeting held at the Westin Hotel in Seattle, Washington for the regular session panel of *Evaluating Crime and Corrections Policy* on 23 March 1996; (iii) at the *Society for Police and Criminal Psychology's* 1995 annual meeting held at the Ocean Resort Hotel in Waikiki, Hawaii for the regular session panel of *Aggression, Deception, and Confidentiality* on 24 October 1995.
- 2 **Definition:** *power* [*potere* to be able] 1. Ability to do 2. Strength, vigor 3. Rule or authority 4. Ability to command or control || SYN: force, might, authority (*Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary*, 1991, p. 708).
- 3 **Definition:** *humiliation* [< *humilis* low] the act of mortifying, putting to shame || SYN humbling, disgracing, degrading, embarrassing (*Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary*, 1991, p. 442).

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