INMATE-TO-INMATE

Socialization, Relationships, and Community Among Incarcerated Men

By Christine Chong

Prison walls keep prisoners in, but in many ways, they simultaneously keep the public out. Although researchers have studied and investigated different aspects of prisons, the interactions between and among incarcerated men have been given particularly little attention. With all of the concerted efforts and discussions attempting to create more stable inmate communities, 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 serve time far from their hometowns. This distance makes it difficult for friends and family to visit, especially for those with limited financial means. Given the difficulty accessing prior relationships, inmate-to-inmate relations often constitute the majority of social interaction during an individual's sentence, forming a significant aspect of the prison experience.

In attempting to understand the inmate social environment, previous literature highlights and emphasizes negative incidences to explain the entirety of the interactions of its members. In particular, accounts of gang organization and rapes in prison have received exceptional attention. The lack of research, combined with hyped news and misconstrued popular media portrayals, has led to simplistic and shallow suppositions and theories about the relational dynamics among the incarcerated. While striking and noteworthy, these types of incidences have overpowered the literature on inmate-to-inmate relationships.

This thesis gives context to social relations between incarcerated men by exploring the informal[1] social organization and examining the possible effects of the institutional setting. This thesis intentionally includes overlooked non-violent, non-criminal interactions. Observing inmate-to-inmate relationships from the incarcerated men's perspectives, utilizing inmate authored documents, and placing violent actions within an institutional framework develops our understandings of inmate communities, and ultimately of the incarcerated individuals.

1 In this paper, I use "formal" to describe official administrative actions that are publicly acknowledged. I use "informal" to describe non-official events and actions of either the administration or the inmates.

FIGURE 1

"California Prisons Punish Inmates by Racial Bloc, Not Offense."



I. Introduction

My thesis looks into inmate-to-inmate relations in California prisons through exploratory research to contribute to the understanding of relationships between incarcerated men in the inmate community. My research focus arose in reaction to the current approach to 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 difficult 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' focus on the men living in prison because many of these researchers wrote to show the struggles of incarcerated living. 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 that have produced limited understandings of the interactions between incarcerated men.

For example, the focus on stabbings and deaths among inmates in popular media and news outlets has contributed to an often-hysterical view of the inmate community. According to award-winning and formerly incarcerated journalist, Wilbert Rideau, "if it bleeds, it leads" is a common phrase in general news media that affects coverage on inmates and prisons.[1] The resulting negative stories overwhelm the depictions of inmate communities and have led to associating inmate relationships with criminal activity or violence, insinuating that inmate relationships mainly revolve around illicit and injurious activities. This has even led some to call prison "crime schools" with the assumption that released inmates are more inclined to criminal activity post-incarceration due to interactions with other inmates.[2] Moreover, the emphasis and focus on violence in prison communities perpetuates a perception of two positions for inmates:

1 Wilbert Rideau, interview by Christine Chong, Berkeley, CA, February 11, 2013.

2 Joel Dyer, *The Perpetual Prisoner Machine: How America Profits from Crime (Boulder: Westview, 2000)*, 28.

the harassers and the harassed. Perhaps most dangerously, the overwhelming violent gang and rape discourse easily leads to stereotypes about inmates' social capabilities.

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. My data comes from particular instances, letters, and other sources of data that may not be generalizable to every individual. The inmate community is *not* composed of "handholding and singing kumbi-ya around a campfire" for too many reasons for me to discuss in this paper.[3] Prison remains a brutal place, particularly with the "tough-on-crime" policies from the 1980s.[4] The term "tough-on-crime" refers to policies that respond to crime with punishment, in contrast to policies emphasizing rehabilitation.[5] Lastly, this paper does not seek to portray the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) as administrators with immoral intentions. This thesis only seeks to contribute to and help communication between administrators and the incarcerated by observing how the CDCR's actions are perceived, interpreted, and understood by incarcerated men.

A. Research Questions

In California male prisons…

1. What types of social organization and relational dynamics exist? How strongly do individuals associate with sub-groups? How do sub-groups associate with one another?

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

3. 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?

4. How do inmates perceive the violence among themselves?

II. Literature Review

As one of the first writers who researched inmate culture, Donald Clemmer found that social interactions among incarcerated men were more significant to the prison experience than many had previously believed. Inmates' social life in the informal environment has a "greater influence... than all the rules, official admonishments, sermons, or other factors."[6] While Clemmer contributed to highlighting the importance of the prison community, the prison experience and inmate community itself still remain largely misunderstood. Kenneth Hartman, who has spent the last

3 Nelson Butler, "Do Emotions Like Empathy, Love, and Compassion Exist in Prisons?," *Quora*, last modified September 28, 2012, https://www.quora.com/Prisons/Do-emotions-like-empathy-love-and-compassion-exist-in-prisons.

4 Brian Joseph and Tony Saavedra, "Tough-on-Crime Stance Emptied California's Pocketbook," *Orange County Register*, last modified August 21, 2013, http://www.ocregister.com/articles/-222473--.html.

5 Defending Justice, accessed November 15, 2013, http://www.publiceye.org/defendingjustice/pdfs/chapters/toughcrime.pdf.

6 Donald Clemmer, *The Prison Community* (New York: Holt, 1966), 295.

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."[7] Even worse than psychologists' mistakes, states Hartman, are those of criminologists whose books are "worse, penning long, dense tomes that have little to do with my reality."[8] This misunderstanding leads to problematic policy decisions offering "impossible solutions [that make] perfect sense only to someone who's never served a minute inside a cell."[9]

A few major theories underlie current literature on inmate-to-inmate relationships and communities: Prisonization Theory, the Theory of Differential Association, recidivism rates, and victimization of the inmate. Combined with the notion of inmates' limited emotional development and decision-making skills, these conceptual frameworks have resulted in the view that harassment and survival constitute the main tenets 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."[10] While incidences along these lines may occur, these perspectives fail to notice and account for the diversity of relationships and interactions that exist inside.

A. Prisonization Theory

One of the dominant theories used for understanding inmate communities is Prisonization Theory. This theory says that prison has a distinct culture and incarcerated men begin to internalize the "attitudes and values" from this culture.[11] The inmate culture is internalized regardless of voluntary acceptance, because incarcerated men impose the culture onto newcomers and one another through strict enforcement of the "inmate code."[12] The main theme of the "inmate code" is loyalty to the inmate community. Other inmates demand obedience to this code and an inmate's status in the inmate community hierarchy hinges on the degree of his compliance and dedication to it.

From my readings, current academic and popular literatures utilize Prisonization Theory to describe various negative effects on the inmate and adaption of negative elements of the community. The eventual adoption of prison culture produces a harmful individual, and the process itself is viewed as an aggressive and forceful one where threat, or actual use, of violence is constantly at play.

B. The Theory of Differential Association

The Theory of Differential Association further develops Prisonization Theory. Prisonization Theory notices a prison culture, but the Theory of Differential Association goes further to identify the values itself. It says that the inmates' culture revolves around illicit behavior, leading one

7 Kenneth E. Hartman, "8 Accurate Books To Read About Life In Prison," *The Huffington Post*, last modified November 30, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kenneth-hartman/books-on-life-in-prison_b_789128.html.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Lee H. Bowker, *Prison Victimization* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 19.

11 L. Roxell, "Co-Offending Among Prison Inmates," *The Prison Journal* 91.3 (2011), 367.

12 Richard A. Tewksbury, *Behind Bars: Readings on Prison Culture* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006), 75.

another to even further illicit behavior.[13] Presuming that inmates adopt other inmates' values, and thus other inmates' criminal behavior, this concept explains criminal activity as a socially learned endeavor.

The Theory of Differential Association insinuates that prison culture heavily revolves around criminal behavior, learned and adopted from other "deviant" persons.[14] By associating and spending time with "deviant" people, the incarcerated individual learns techniques, specific rationale, and motives for committing crime. It has influenced common rhetoric and started new terms for discussing issues about incarceration and criminal behavior. For example, many have started calling prisons "schools of crime."[15] This term describes prisons as instructive establishments where individuals "learn sophisticated criminal techniques" from other inmates.[16] And in describing inmate tensions, criminal associations continue to be mentioned. Terry Thornton, a representative of the CDCR, says tensions have to do with control over "criminal activities."[17]

By claiming that individuals internalize methods, and even more importantly, moral validations for criminal activity from other inmates, this theory places the blame for deviant behavior on the inmate, counter-productive from the institution's goals. Alarmingly, this draws attention away from other elements that could lead to deviance after release. The Theory of Differential Association argues that due to the inmates' interactions with and influence 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 for criminal activity into the hands of inmates and away from larger sociological issues that can lead to deviant behavior, like poverty, few job opportunities, or abuse.

C. Recidivism

Prisonization Theory and the Theory of Differential Association both argue that peer relationships constitute a part of "identity transformation." Many cite this character change as an explanation for California's high rate of recidivism, which is a return to prison after release.[18] A study by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation found that an astonishing 65.1% of released people return to prison three years after release.[19] The overwhelming focus on characteristics implied by both Prisonization and the Theory of Differential Association has negative effects on our perceptions of incarcerated individuals when used to justify the recidivism rate.

For example, current discussions on recidivism talk about gang organization and how gang associations in prison will lead to gang activity after release. This rationale reinforces the

13 Irvin Waller, *Men Released from Prison* (Toronto: University of Toronto in Association with the Centre of Criminology, 1974), 105.

14 "Edwin H. Sutherland: Differential Association Theory," *Florida State University,* accessed November 1, 2012, http://criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/sutherland.html.

15 Roxell, "Co-Offending Among Prison Inmates," 367.

16 Waller, *Men Released from Prison,* 66.

17 Tanya Schevitz, "Prisons Prepare to Integrate Cellmates," *SF Gate*, last modified May 27, 2009, http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Prisons-prepare-to-integrate-cellmates-3211830.php.

18 C. Butzin, 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), 355.

19 *California Department of Corrections,* "Recidivism Report," last modified November 23, 2011, http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/adult_research_branch/Research_Documents/ARB_FY_0607_Recidivism_Report_(11-23-11).pdf.

Prisonization and Differential Association theories by arguing men often return to prison as a result of their decision to remain "linked and loyal to a fault" to old prison associations.[20] As will be discussed below, while some interactions and social organization in prison may increase the possibility of criminal activity and return to prison, it does not explain the totality of all associations and interactions among inmates and released people.

D. Victimization

Another perception of negative inmate association focuses on victimization, arguing that inmates experience distress from harassment from other inmates. Frequently, victimization is described in terms of a group of inmates victimizing an individual inmate. The literature argues that victimized individuals respond to this aggression with only a limited means of defense and consequently face continual fear and uncertainty unless they join protective gangs.

In *Prison Victimization*, Bowker describes prison as a "barely controlled jungle" where aggressive and strong inmates "exploit" the weak, both physically and mentally.[21] This narrative posits inmates as aggressors and victims, with little institutional oversight to prevent acts of aggression. Since many of these aggressive actions are visible only to "the most experienced jungle traveler," supervision and intervention is difficult.[22] The comparison of inmate social organization to a jungle-like environment implies that inexperienced outsiders have difficulty navigating and surviving in this setting. Only the experienced inmates in this environment have awareness and knowledge of the forceful, victimizing actions.

To highlight the severity of aggressive behaviors, Bowker references the real physical dangers that may ultimately result from victimization. Violent assaults and deaths are not rarities in inmate communities. This violence has been reflected in news articles that write inmates are forced to follow the unwritten rules of prison, otherwise "you could get stabbed or worse."[23] At least one in every twenty-three California prisoners suffered from a violent assault from another inmate in 1974.[24] These rates have risen even higher to 34,000 inmates physically attacked by another inmate in 2006 alone.[25] Since the total prison population in 2006 was 163,000 inmates, this means that the rate of violence from 1974 to 2006 has risen roughly 4 to 21 percent in the past thirty-two years.[26]

Another physical danger is prison rape. A great deal of academic literature has attempted to explain prison rape, and many describe it as a method of extreme harassment to pressure individuals to ally with a group for protection. The literature also describes prison rape as a method to reinforce or create hierarchy among inmates. It states that prison rape is just one of the methods used by other inmates to "demand…absolute loyalty to an inmate's fellow prisoners."[27]

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20 Trymaine Lee, "Recidivism Hard To Shake For Ex-Offenders Returning Home To Dim Prospects," *The Huffington Post*, last modified June 10, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/09/recidivism-harlem-convicts_n_1578935.html.

21 Lee H. Bowker, *Prison Victimization* (New York: Elsevier, 1980), 8.

22 Bowker, *Prison Victimization*, 19.

23 Schevitz, "Prisons Prepare to Integrate Cellmates."

24 Bowker, *Prison Victimization*, 24.

25 Hannah Stewart, "Violence in Prisons," *Yahoo! Contributor Network*, last modified September 30, 2010, http://voices.yahoo.com/violence-prisons-6886176.html?cat=5.

26 Joseph M. Hayes, Public Policy Institute of California, "California's Changing Prison Population," last modified April 2012, http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=702.

27 Dyer, *The Perpetual Prisoner Machine* , 46.

Prison Victimization gives an example by describing an individual's entry to prison with sexual assault and rape by other inmates. Detailing the fear, violence, and horror of how these inmates treat one another, the book accounts for this harmful experience by explaining the occurrence as victimization and demand for allegiance, again focusing on gang organizations and assertions of power.

Many papers and popular media accounts suggest that in order to resist violence and methods of victimization like rape, an individual must facilitate with gangs. Violence is described in terms of gang sub-groups and racial dynamics dividing different gangs. For example Lt. Rudy Luna, assistant to the warden at San Quentin, describes violence as "based around racial gangs."[28] And joining a gang entails "forced participat[ion] in violence" by the men as they are socially organized.[29] This creates a cycle of victimization where one is either a victim or producer of violence, never truly avoiding violence with other inmates.

E. Media

Media portrayals of the inmate community mostly speak to violent and otherwise brutal inmate interactions. As Hartman states, "the mass media's fixation with the bloody lead[30] has [pushed] the prisoner/gangster mythos" to represent the incarcerated community.[31] This misunderstanding exaggerates and portrays the community as one "of prison thuggery, of racial dominance struggles, of riots and stabbings." [32] This leads many to use these instances when defining the characteristics of the individuals involved.

F. Literature Analysis

As noted above, the inmate culture is often described as a barely controlled "jungle," suggesting that inmate socialization is tempestuous and bears little similarity to regular social interaction in general society.[33] 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 gangs. How are we to understand the social groups and organizations in prison? How may the prison setting have influence on informal interaction among incarcerated men?

Underlying the current theories are varying degrees of assumption that inmates have certain character traits, which produce distinct cultures and communities. For example, many argue that inmates are "insensitive to others" and "misread social situations."[34] Additionally, inmates are thought to be "impulsive, act before they think," and have simplistic understandings of human interaction and treatment of others.[35] Consequently, many assume that relationships between these individuals with these characteristics are different from those between non-inmate

28 Schevitz, "Prisons Prepare to Integrate Cellmates."

29 Stewart, "Violence in Prisons."

30 The bloody lead is a common phrase to describe the frequent use of violent aka "bloody" stories in the front pages of newspapers.

31 Kenneth E. Hartman, "Prison as a Metaphor for Modern Society," accessed January 20, 2013, http://kennethehartman.com/prisonasamataphor.htm.

32 Ibid.

33 Bowker, *Prison Victimization*, 19.

34 Jeremy Coylewright, "New Strategies for Prisoner Rehabilitation in the American Criminal Justice System: Prisoner Facilitated Mediation," *Journal of Health Care Law & Policy* 395th ser. 7.2 (2004), 400.

35 Ibid.

civilians with supposedly more standard character traits. A sociological study researching social integration's relationship to an individual's well being found a difference in incarcerated versus non-incarcerated people. The study found that more social integration consistently correlates with better mental well being in the general population, but found a reverse correlation in the incarcerated community.[36] Rather than increasing the mental health of individuals, close relationships cause higher levels of hostility among incarcerated men.[37]

Many can assume from studies like these that social interaction among inmates differs from the relationships outside prison due to inherent characteristics of the inmates themselves. However, while there is research showing a difference in social integration's effect on the incarcerated community, there has yet to be research as to *why* this difference may exist. Perhaps it is due to the combination of regulated oversight, stress, and social organization in prisons, rather than particular characteristics of the inmates.

One indication of the environmental setting's influence is acknowledged: individuals suffering from stressors are more likely to have aggravated and tense interactions and relationships. Mental health stressors in the prison environment include elevated levels of depression, loneliness, nervousness, and anxiety.[38] There are additional 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 includes very little insight from the perspective of inmates. Additionally, the literature has little commentary on an individual's agency to create relationships not based on violence or criminal activity. Prisonization Theory literature has not addressed how an individual's own character and personality can create a unique adoption of values or attitudes from the inmate community. I do not argue for a reverse generalization to suggest all inmates' behaviors depend on individuals' characteristics. Institutional constraints and larger sociological issues beyond an individual's agency affect behavior in prison. I overview inmate social relationships but also recognize that individuals' agencies should be remembered.

Lastly, 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 I argue miss important factors. Inmate relationships that foster recidivism have been documented, but little qualitative research has been conducted to make sense of the raw data. Additionally, to my knowledge, no research has examined how incarcerated men may 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 one-dimensional relationships due to certain inherent, fixed characteristics or capabilities.

III. Methodology

To investigate and explore relationships between men in prison, I used historical and qualitative research methods. Methodology involving a systematic analysis of primary sources and interviews with released peoples was relevant and appropriate. Both these methods produce data from the

36 Christine H. Lindquist, "Social Integration and Mental Well-Being Among Jail Inmates," *Sociological Forum* 15.3 (2000), 435.

37 I do want to point out that although this was a sociological study done in California jails, not prisons, it is one of the few studies that made observations onto the social maturity of incarcerated people.

38 Lindquist, "Social Integration and Mental Well-Being Among Jail Inmates," 450.

voices of those who have experienced incarceration and have lived in the prison community through first-hand experience. This is critical to my goal of presenting a clearer understanding of socialization from the viewpoints of the subjects. Since outsiders have difficulty appreciating and comprehending the subtleties and unspoken understandings within a community, I relied on documents and data authored by incarcerated individuals free of prior analysis by other researchers. This methodology required necessary precautions to prevent my own bias as well, so I took care in my research methods to incorporate precautions and note possible areas of 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 limited my time frame to the period from the 1960s to the present. Although many institutional changes have occurred during this time frame, the past 50 years remain relevant to the modern inmate community. Additionally, much inmate authored writing comes from either the 1960s or the past few years, since both are Prisoners Rights Movement eras.[39] Although the 1970s to 1990s are relevant to my paper, I could not find as many inmate authored materials from this time. The 1970s to 1990s is recognized as a "tough-on-crime" era, which moved from a general outlook of prison rehabilitation to prison as an institution of punishment. Consequently, not as many writing programs and opportunities were available during this period. In contrast, the renewed attention to incarcerated communities in the past few years, combined with limited technology implementations, made it possible for me to access inmate authored documents on the Internet. For this thesis, I chose to utilize some letters published through blogs and social media sites like Quora.[40]

A. In-Depth Interviewing

i. Interview Preparation

I collected stories and accounts from in-depth interviews with individuals who spent time in prison and spoke retrospectively about their experiences. My desired end goal was to create a "thick description" of the setting, which is a term used by Clifford Geertz for trying to understand experiences from the "standpoint of the natural actor in that setting."[41] 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 face-to-face interviewing to notice "social cues like voice, intonation, [and] body language" in order to grasp particularly sensitive data where explicit description may be difficult.[42]

Schutt, an expert in sociological research, has noted that interviews are particularly helpful in exploratory research and generating theory. Since interviews are not meant to explicitly test

39 My assertion of a current Prisoners Rights Movement is explained in the "Future Research" section at the end of the thesis.

40 Quora is a social media question-and-answer website where individuals can ask questions and others post responses.

41 Russell K. Schutt, *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012), 283.

42 Raymond Opdenakker, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Social Research,* last modified September 2006, http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/175/391.

existing theories, they can provide data in new areas of study. This makes interviews relevant and appropriate for gathering understandings of the subtleties and complexities unexplored in current inmate observations.

Despite the variety of benefits of in-depth-interviewing, I took precaution in my planning to prevent interference from direct interaction 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.[43] In preparation for the interviews, I noted and reflected on my personal relationship to and views on incarceration, and their possible effects on my interpretations. For example, would I be able to understand the situations and circumstances that the interviewees were attempting 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.[44] 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 in general terms and listening attentively when the interviewees voluntarily shared personal stories and examples. Potential breaches of confidentiality are another crucial aspect of interviewing covered by the IRB. Breaches of confidentiality can 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 document 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 an interview, consent is "not a single event but a continuing process."[45] 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.

ii. 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 nearly impossible to imagine a prison experience that does not involve trauma and extreme

43 Ibid.

44 "IRB Guidebook Chapter VIII: Special Classes of Subjects," accessed November 2, 2012, http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_chapter6ii.htm.

45 "IRB Guidebook Chapter III: Basic IRB Review," accessed November 7, 2012, http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_chapter3.htm.

emotions. As these are extremely personal experiences, there would need to be great trust between the interviewee and myself.

I contacted various local legal clinics in the Bay Area to find potential interviewees. It was through consistent emailing, contacting, and meeting individuals involved with prisoners' rights that I was able to eventually speak with three formally incarcerated individuals. The method of interview was slightly different for each one. 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 him and graciously spoke with me, and wrote out answers to questions that I sent 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 security levels.

iii. Interviewing

Researchers who have analyzed interview methods advise that the interview should "enhance the freedom of the participants more than it enhances the author's career."[46] To do this, I tried to maintain a somewhat informal and approachable persona to make the interviewee as comfortable as possible. 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. Specifically, I used grand tour questions, where the interviewee has an opportunity to tell lengthy narratives. Schutt describes grand tour questions as broad questions which attempt to "engage the respondent in the topic of interest" and draw out stories.[47]

As an interviewer, I also tried to be as "out of the way" as possible.[48] 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 simultaneously understand what I am being told and formulate questions in response.[49]

In terms of structure, I began with questions that the interviewee could answer more easily and then proceeded to more difficult or sensitive questions. This helped both the interviewee and myself by putting us at ease and building up confidence and rapport.[50] Towards the end of my interview, I provided a chance for the interviewee to unwind and relax by engaging in small talk. Alexa Koenig, an experienced interviewer of Guantanamo detainees, suggests that the interview end with broad 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?"

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

46 DiCicco-Bloom, Barbara, "The Qualitative Research Interview," *Making Sense of Qualitative Research*, accessed October 30, 2012, http://www.hu.liu.se/cf/larc/utbildning-information/scientific-methodology/course-literature-and inks/1.253566/qual20interview.pdf.

47 Schutt, *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, 305.

48 Schutt, *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, 285.

49 Opdenakker, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research."

50 Schutt, *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, 285.

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.

B. 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. With the exception of one author of an autobiography, all documents are written by inmates who served time in California. While the letters present some level of bias, I want to point out that the autobiographies I utilize 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 respected, highly esteemed, and intelligent individuals who were able to overcome tremendous obstacles with personal strengths.

As mentioned above, one of the autobiographies I use is from an out-of-state author, Wilbert Rideau, titled *In the Place of Justice*. I decided to incorporate this autobiography into my thesis because of the unique insight the author gives of both the administration and inmate community. Rideau has been described as "probably the best prison journalist ever, anywhere."[51] As an individual who served forty-four years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, Rideau describes the inmate culture with great detail through explanations of distinct occurrences. Although Rideau's autobiography describes a prison community in Louisiana, I apply his astute insights to California's prisons to fill in gaps in the available data. He provides context to the circumstances by noticing the interplay between the inmate community and the prison administration. I found that Rideau's distinctive status as a journalist, condition as a long-time inmate, and his perceptive character gave insights that were translatable, appropriate, and relatable to California's prison communities, in ways difficult to find in other memoirs.

After accounting for these biases, I reviewed and analyzed the primary sources by noting parallels and points of repetition. I examined the descriptions of how the prison institution would encourage or discourage certain inmate interaction and socialization. This is important for seeing how the formal confines of the setting shape informal relationships.

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

51 Wilbert Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance (*New York: Knopf, 2010), i.

IV. Findings

A. 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. They suggest that some negative inmate interactions can be the product of structural conditions created by policies, 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.

The power structures that operate in the prison institution influence the behavior of inmates, administrators, and guards. Professor Zimbardo, a psychology professor at Stanford University, conducted a well-known prison simulation experiment placing college students as guards and other fellow students as inmates. He found that "even psychologically normal" college students developed "victimization-related" behaviors when placed into social roles of guards and inmates. The placement into these extreme power structures resulted in such harmful treatment of the inmate subjects that the study had to be stopped after only six days when it was originally scheduled to last two weeks.

My findings below recount actual structural policies and incidences by official guards and prison administrations. It shows how the background setting on which the inmate community operates may have effects, or may directly interfere, with the inmate informal community.

i. Administrative Effects

a. 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 use a color-coding system to segregate inmates for rooming assignments. The prisons use colored cards to represent and identify racial groups: blue for Black inmates; white for White; red, green, or pink for Latino; and yellow for Others.[52] California state documents say race is used for labels and organizing prisoner blocks to "provide visual cues that allow prison officials to prevent [inmate] race-based victimization, reduce race-based violence, and prevent thefts and assaults."[53] Officials claim to use racial division for social stability reasons, but I find that this racial division may actually aggravate and negatively affect social stability.

James, one of the former inmates that I interviewed, gives more details and accounts of racial categorization in prisons:

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

53 Ibid.

> The state categorizes people... asking what race you are. I said _____,[54] 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 white, like Armenians who some would say would put themselves down as Other. So they as a group would clump together...[55]

The "clumping together" from the ethno-racial division shows that this subgroup organization is important for the administration's understanding of social stability of incarcerated men. When I asked if the guards knew which prisoners had close relationships with each other, racial association continued to be mentioned as a factor that guards would 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 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.[56] The diversity in ethnic composition and the tension 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."[57] It could be that administrative racial division of inmates is a response to pre-existing racial tensions, but the fact that housing policies presume racial tendencies can perpetuate racial tension by segregating inmates so visibly and immediately. What may be more significant than the racial division itself is how the prison officials further utilize the division for perpetuating and aggravating racial partitions.

b. Even if I Don't Know Him: Group Punishment

Punishment of various incidences in prison encourages or discourages certain behaviors. The systematic punishment of ethno-racially divided groups, instead of individuals, can encourage pro-active defense of one's racial group. Thus, any pro-active defense consequently raises tensions between different ethno-racially divided subgroups.

James recalls how group punishment perpetuated racial division by describing how the administration's punishment would relate 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.

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54 James' ethnicity is purposefully left out here for confidentiality.

55 James, interview by Christine Chong, Berkeley, CA, April 5, 2013.

56 Hayes, "California's Changing Prison Population."

57 Schevitz, "Prisons Prepare to Integrate Cellmates."$

Why would the prison administration perpetuate any pre-existing racial tension by housing, grouping, and punishing by racial group? A previous researcher has noted that political issues, not purely objectives to sustain stability, may be a reason:

> '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 policies 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.[58]

Gang identification is the official rationale used to justify racial group punishment. The prison administration uses race as its unofficial, undisclosed method for targeting gang members and gang activity. Ultimately race is utilized for the administration's public statements regarding gangs.

Many have begun to question this type of punishment based on presupposed gang identification. Rebekah Evenson, an attorney with the Prison Law Office, says, "Rather than targeting actual gang members, they assume every person is a gang member based on the color of their skin."[59] Besides the ethical concerns, the logistics of this racial organization is ultimately an "ineffective way to maintain order."[60]

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."[61] Not only does group punishment 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.

Racial punishment is not only used in response to serious altercations between racial groups. Sometimes even casual actions within a racial group can be used to identify inmates for punishment. Hartman, a white inmate, talks about how a bout of laughter from a cluster of people lead to group punishment. If he, a white inmate, had been in the vicinity, he too would have been searched regardless of his distance from other white men:

> 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 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.[62]

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58 Bowker, *Prison Victimization*, 98

59 "California Prisons Punish Inmates by Racial Bloc, Not Offense."

60 Ibid.

61 Kenneth E. Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*, 196.

62 Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars,* 110.

His words assume that when the guards order a group of inmates against the wall, it's the "white guys." This wording shows the homogeneity of the group, as well as the inmates' adoption of the identification that guards use. Further, even though Hartman is not with the laughing men, he too must be cautious because of his racial identity. If inmates are the same race, they have to necessarily be cautious with one another if they do not want to be punished.

James also identified security level as an important element to remember when thinking about the effects, procedure, and form of punishment. There are four security levels: Level I, Level II, Level III, and Level IV. The possibilities for interaction between inmates in each level decrease as the levels go up. Level I is the lowest security with open dorms and minimal security. Level II facilities are similar to Level I but have perimeter security with armed guards. Level III facilities have armed coverage on the perimeter of the facility and individualized cells. Level IV is highest security with armed guards inside and outside the facility. Additionally, Level IV inmates are housed in the individual cells non-adjacent to any exterior walls.[63] Thus, Level I and II inmates have more opportunity for interaction than Levels III and IV.

Secure Housing Unit Although group punishment creates pressures, individualized punishment culminates in the most extreme form of putting individuals into Secure Housing Units (SHU). These SHUs 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.[64]

The removal of influential individuals described above has been practiced for over twenty-five years in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. It identifies potential gang members or gang associates for the SHUs. The supposed "menace" of prison gangs diverted public attention to what prisoners were going through on the inside, and focused instead on the difficulties and dangers of handling prison gangs.[65] The gang rhetoric has been so pervasive and of such concern that the majority of California prisoners sent to SHUs are there for "pseudo-gang" reasons.[66]

A major problem is that the question of an individual's involvement 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."[67] Thus the SHUs have done little to curb violence, not to mention gang violence, since many argue that prisons are more violent now than they have been the past twenty-five years.[68]

The fear of being put into the SHU affects the inmate community and inmate interactions by limiting the possibility of inmate-to-inmate communications. James says informal

63 "Entering a California State Prison," California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, accessed November 15, 2013, http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Ombuds/Entering_a_Prison_FAQs.html.

64 Anthony Arteaga, Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity, "Essay: Solitary Confinement In California," last modified December 12, 2012, http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/essay-.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

communication across ethnic and racial boundaries among inmates is complicated, because administrators select people for the SHU for communication reasons. The fear of being detected by the "formal side," the prison police and guards, heightens tensions between inmates.

The SHU punishment also leads to fear and tensions among inmates on the informal side. James says 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…" The wariness of possible identification from both formal and informal parties makes it difficult for leaders of subgroups to have clear communication. What could be a simple discussion turns into a complicated procedure. Attempts to converse without being caught often create blunders and miscommunication.

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

By describing 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. The title of this segment, "You're a Race Agitator," is a quoted response from a guard to an inmate with friends of another race. In this segment, I examine how guards' interactions with inmates can influence behavior, interaction, and individual social tendencies.

Inmates' interactions with one another are affected because certain behaviors may be rewarded. For example, an inmate writes about the material benefits that guards use to lure some inmates into aggressive 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 mealtime 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.[69]

Aggressive behavior that is rewarded does not pertain to aggressive behavior towards staff. The writer talks about informal aggressive behavior towards other inmates outside public view. This explicit rewarding encourages aggressive behavior on the yard, perhaps even in the absence of direct staff oversight. Particularly in an institution of limited resources and means to procure goods, rewards of any size have great impact.

Just as certain behaviors are encouraged on an individual scale, there are other ways to guide behavior. 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…[70]

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69 James Collins, Between the Bars, "Rejuvinated Gangs on SNY Prison Yards," last modified June 26, 2012, http://betweenthebars.org/posts/5667/rejuvinated-gangs-on-sny-prison-yards.

70 Eve Pell and Fay Stender, *Maximum Security; Letters from California's Prisons, (*New York: Dutton, 1972), 122.

The guards discouraged these cross-racial associations with derisive comments 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 "eliminat[e]" the white inmate. The circumstance above shows an instance of non-conformance to administrative pressure. However, it also reveals un-documented, non-policy actions that can create aggressive behavior among inmates and coerce conformance to administrative social organization.

Other instances of deeper psychological administration influence on the actions of incarcerated men may not be perceived until after the fact. James reflects on the effects of the administration on his own self-perception as an "antisocial" person. His perception of his social maturity had already been altered before entering prison because the courts labeled him as an "anti-social" when reviewing his background and case. He began to accept his anti-social label, 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 [if] 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 notes how the institution can affect the self-perceptions and behaviors of other inmates as well. While incarcerated, he worked in Receiving and Release, the area every inmate comes through when they first enter prison. Administrators responded to verbal requests with mixed signals. Inmates would be told one thing but then experience a different outcome. These individuals would be arriving from county jails and as James says:

> County jail is the worst place you could be. So everyone (who comes) is hungry, angry, and tired. There's things all around in R and R... like lunch, food... apples for the incoming inmates, yet the guards would get angry when the inmates tried to take things without asking. When men were caught taking goods without asking, they would proceed to "throw them against the wall, strip them down, and throw them... in the cage or something.

Mixed signals created much confusion. Guards would say, "All you had to do was ask," but twenty other inmates would proceed to ask, and the guards would automatically respond, "No, keep walking. No, keep walking. No, keep walking." James explains this frustration is why an inmate will forego communication with guards. He says inmates will transition to thinking, "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."

ii. Summary

The inmate community is composed of subgroups and individuals operating under surveillance from a strict governing body politic that interferes by encouraging or discouraging certain relationships and character traits. These accounts of experiences from incarcerated men show how interactions with one another are heightened in some part due to administrative interference. The violence among inmates creates tension, but Rideau says the administrative response affects individuals to a greater degree. An example of administrative response is "shake downs" where "security searche[s] an inmate's body, housing or work area for weapons or other contraband. [71] Administrative responses also include non-physical interventions like the creation of new policies that interfere with mobility and daily life. The regulations can be harmful because the "confusion, secrecy, and arbitrariness of some of the punishments sowed distrust and paranoia among both employees and convicts."[72] In attempts to maintain control, the authorities use inmates for gathering information. Authorities reward informants with "job assignments, material perks, and, occasionally, early release from incarceration."[73]

However frightening the accounts of inmate-to-inmate violence may seem, the serious repercussions from the administration are even more feared than violence from other incarcerated men. This suggests that with all the discussion of inmates harassing and victimizing other inmates, the administrative response still provokes the greater fear.

B. The Informal Inmate Community

The restrictive prison setting might make it appear that inmates are limited in their interactions. The following instances and stories show individuals work within institutional boundaries to have a complex social community.

i. Mirrored Society

The extreme nature of the prison environment can insinuate particular relationships between incarcerated men. 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 entirely prohibit or restrict relationships. Though the relationships created during an inmate's sentence may have logistical limitations and administrative interferences, they exist in a wide variety of forms. Not only is there a diversity of relationships but there is also a diversity of personalities, characteristics, and individualistic tendencies that parallel the wide range 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

71 Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance*, 105.
72 Ibid., 112.
73 Hartman, "Prison as a Metaphor for Modern Society."

> 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 prison walls is reiterated in many other accounts, including the following description from an online post describing 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.[74]

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 writes, "I had expected to come against seriously hard men, to see things no one should see."[75] 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 being 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."[76]

The demographics of the population also affect the atmosphere of the community. A greater number of older men in a population can lower tensions. Over the past fifty years, Folsom prison has had "mostly older convicts serving life terms, worn out by the battles of Tracy and Soledad (prisons), who appreciate continuity and regularity. The prison is a community, fractured, but a community nonetheless."[77] Hartman alludes to battles and tensions in other prisons, but also notes that older individuals generally oppose clashes and value a calmer sense of regularity.

Yet another similarity to outside society, James talks about how the inmate community is affected by trust or normality built over years of living together. The atmosphere and culture of the community is similarly affected in free society. In describing the more relaxed nature at San Quentin, he relates his post-release experience 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.

74 Butler, "Do Emotions Like Empathy, Love, and Compassion Exist in Prisons?"
75 Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*, 32.
76 Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*, 33.
77 Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*, 45.

A few volatile personalities can easily affect others in the general population. Similarly, a few volatile personalities or situations can affect the atmosphere of the prison population. Thus, atmosphere and culture is affected in like ways between the inmate community and general population.

Hartman also corrects the notion that a vast difference exists between the general population and the inmate community by correcting two stereotyped situations that are often employed to differentiate society inside and outside prison: rape and taunts of newcomers to prison. These two events 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 discusses how these two stereotypes were not true to his many years of experience in 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.

Rape happens in prison as it does in society, but without the pervasiveness or crude blatancy that people may assume from the its representations in current 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.[78]

This does not mean that one does not find the "rapacious nature of selfish individuals" inside the prison community. Rather, it shows that prison mirrors society. The diversity of interactions still includes "examples of decency so heartwarming as to be almost beyond belief."[79]

a. Chicken or the Egg?: Ethno-Racial Relations

In the formal setting, as discussed above, race was a way to institutionally divide inmates. This racial division continues to be a factor in informal social organization. James describes racial segregation as a combination of the formal division with the inmate community's informal adoption of that division:

> Still among 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.

78 Hartman, "Prison as a Metaphor for Modern Society."
79 Ibid.

I inquired whether racial tension could perhaps be considered a "chicken-and-egg" phenomenon, where it becomes difficult to identify the beginning of a trend. Were race relations born out of the administration or within the community itself? James agreed with the "chicken-and-egg" comparison. The power of institutional division can be seen in the institution's construct of the Other group, which is composed of different ethnicities that may not have had any previous affiliations with one another. James says the relationships between individuals in the Other group were less strong than in the Black, White, and Mexican groups. However, the diverse racial and ethnic members of the Other group still gravitated towards each other and tended to group together. For example, during mealtime inmates can sit wherever they like, but automatically the Other group would sit together and eat meals together.

Although race is at the center of discussions about gang membership, for James gangs are not necessary to understand racial division in prison. There are non-gang members and ex-gang members inside prison who do not directly engage in gang racial divisions. Taking himself as an example, James explains that both he and his best friend were gang members when they entered prison but quit gang membership while in prison.

As seen above, another aspect of race division is the resemblance to, rather than the difference from, general society. Earlier James mentioned that prison is a "microcosm" of society. Another inmate similarly used this concept to explain informal racial division as a general tendency that is simply 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."[80] 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 a highly 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, I describe relationships between individuals across racial boundaries under the "Unity" section below.

b. Trying to get A's: Influence of Programs

Just as the administrative formal control influences the creation and nature of relationships between individuals, formally organized programs affect how individuals get to know someone in the duration of the program and create relationships outside of it. For James the fact that San Quentin has more programs than other prisons tremendously impacts 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.

80 Schevitz, "Prisons Prepare to Integrate Cellmates."

Identifying formal programs as a key reason for how he met his best friend, a person of Mexican ethnicity in prison, James describes the program as 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 more reserved interactions 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, such that they could all share in gratification. It created a space where individuals can encourage each other and create relationships with individuals they would not have met outside the program.

Further, it is not just the breadth of relationships that are formed in programs, but the depth of relationships as well. Kenneth Hartman talks about his experience with therapy in a lifers' group. This group was composed of inmates serving life sentences. In this 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.[81]

The relationships and emotional support built inside these programs and in the community suggest far from the Theory of Differential Association, which holds that deviant behavior is learned from deviant people inside the inmate population. Instead, this community has broader capabilities, like identifying and sharing grievances with one another in order to become more self-aware. Instead of creating more deviant behavior through interaction with one another, incarcerated men can learn more about themselves and develop more awareness of others through increased interaction with one another, 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.

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81 Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*, 106.

ii. Leadership

Like in most social settings, 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 determines many social occurrences for the community. Below, I discuss leadership by describing its effects on two basic social occurrences: violence and peace. By looking closely into the context and actions of how leadership affects social interactions, we go further than mere recognition of leadership phenomena and can start to understand leadership's relationship with the atmosphere of the inmate community.

a. It's Politics: Violence and Peace

Leaders of groups are picked for various reasons, including personal qualities, length of time incarcerated, and age.[82] Once chosen they have influence on decisions in 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 through third or fourth persons instead of directly from one leader to another. This creates great potential for miscommunication. This method involving third or fourth persons is not used out of choice. It is a necessary precaution because "if police identify you as a 'shot-caller,'[83] you're automatically labeled and locked up."[84]

The resulting miscommunication from incorrectly exchanged information can lead to violence. In describing a specific person who was chosen to be a communicative medium, James says the public representative was 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 among 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 [and] fix it.

Violence is not the end-goal of communication but exists as a complicated element of communication, social interaction, and politics. James says:

> 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 understood in practical terms. Rather than being inevitable or lurking around every corner, violence has a context, which many of the inmates understand. Although violence can result from miscommunication or spontaneity, Rideau says that violence among inmates is, nevertheless, not the most feared type of violence in prison:

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82 James, interview by Christine Chong, Berkeley, CA, April 5, 2013.

83 A shot caller is an individual with authority, a leader, the person with others' respect.

84 James, interview by Christine Chong, Berkeley, CA, April 5, 2013.

> Oddly, it wasn't the violence (among 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.[85]

Violence in prisons does exist, and the statistics of violence in California prisons show that it is not a rare occurrence.[86] Violence arises from either miscommunication or is used in conversations as a possibility or tool. Mostly, violence is understood in functional terms.

Gang violence also occurs 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."[87] With a few exceptions, violence usually occurs for specific reasons and is aimed at specific individuals in a political group dynamic.

The interplay between leadership and violence shows that miscommunication (or sometimes realized purposeful communication too) can create violence. However, leadership can also simultaneously prevent violence from happening. The inmate leaders and broader inmate community may actively work to prevent violence on the yard. Rideau describes an incidence where "several of us [inmates] were trying to broker a peace between two feuding black families."[88] In this case, the representatives of the groups came to Rideau's office and "both leaders readily agreed to a truce."[89] After the Black Muslims group became involved, the feuding groups understood "that whoever breaks the peace will have to fight not only the other family but the Muslims as well."[90] When Russell, the leader of the Black Muslims, saw the potential of his group to prevent violence, he joined Rideau and others to advocate and create peace in future instances. In this example, the politics of aligning with groups was done through the leaders of inmate subgroups.

Further than simply stopping looming violence, incarcerated men can also sometimes work together through subgroup leaders to maintain programs. Certain programs for incarcerated men are threatened when there is violence or instability on the yard. Leaders communicate about a variety of issues, including these types of privileges and resources. In one instance the leaders worked to keep a policy that allows inmates to meet with visitors at small tables in a cafeteria, instead of under higher security:

> 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.[91]

This collaboration and communication through leaders who organized and communicated resulted in peace on the yard, which persuaded administrators to keep the visiting program. The

85 Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance*, 105.

86 Hayes, "California's Changing Prison Population."

87 AskMen, "Prison Life: 5 Things Men Should Know," accessed January 7, 2013, http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/special_feature_3800/3808_life-in- prison.html.

88 Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance*, 98.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance*, 106.

leaders did not do this by themselves, but rather with the combined actions of every incarcerated individual in the community as seen below.

iii. Unity

Despite communication between several leaderships representing different groups, group boundaries are crossed by more apparent, active acts and written commentary, which I describe below.

a. Wake Up!!!: Reaching Across Racial Division

Many inmate-authored letters comment on racial division for the purpose of working against and overcoming it. In a letter directed towards other inmates, this inmate writer describes the division from his 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[92]. 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!!![93]

In addition to letters, events are staged by and for inmates, to observe peace and recognition of one another across racial boundaries. For example, several inmates started an Annual Day of Peace years ago at San Quentin. For hundreds of prisoners who came from other California prisons without this day of observance, it is a surprise and new experience. 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, not necessarily a unique inmate population at San Quentin.

Another letter calls for improved unity across racial divisions by recognizing 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.[94]

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92 CDC and CDRC are two names for the same organization. CDC is the original and the "R" in CDCR, which stands for rehabilitation, was added later on.

93 Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 118.

94 Ibid., 166.

Sometimes groups interact by sharing resources to respond to administrative control. 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.[95]

More recently, a letter entitled "End to Hostilities" began circulating across California prisons and has argued for greater communication 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![96]

Although racial and group division has effects on social organization, the incarcerated community recognizes the negative effects of racial tension and many take actions to find alternatives to violence.

b. Harmony and a Bowl of Soup: Hunger Strikes

As a form of non-violent protest, the hunger strikes conducted among inmates are one of the actions showing greatest solidarity, involving inmates across institutions, races, and security levels. They were actively conducted in the 1960s and have since been a part of California's inmate mass organization history. Recent hunger strikes have started again with written formal points of address on policies that impact the relationships and interactions between inmates. These points of address include the group punishment policy discussed above. An inmate describes the impact hunger strikes have 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 were a tremendous gain.[97]

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 feelings of the participants. However, with the presence of

95 Pell and Stender, *Maximum Security*, 216.

96 PBSP-SHU, Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity, "Agreement To End Hostilities," last modified October 10, 2012, http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/2012/10/10/agreement-to-end-hostilities-starts-today/.

97 Pell and Stender, *Maximum Security*, 170.

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.

iv. Individual-to-Individual

Having discussed the inmate community with descriptions of occurrences that span group boundaries, this thesis will conclude by focusing on individual relationships defying commonly assumed limitations. Hartman's memoir describes multiple relationships that developed between himself and other individuals of different backgrounds and races. 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.[98]

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 with all the formal and informal restrictions that exist on the yard, relationships are formed in the inmate community that are built on productive, simple aspects of daily living. The sensational picture of the inmate community that is shown to the public often ignores the reality that within the prison walls are men living their lives in close proximity to each other, forming a community that mirrors society.

V. Possible Policy Changes

To reduce violence and maintain more stable yards, inmate input and insight would be valuable for developing prison policy. Kenneth Hartman says this is a "revolutionary concept to the current crop of administrators who continue to mismanage the system."[99] I point to two distinct incidences of past collaboration between policymakers, administrators, wardens, and inmates. One, Wilbert Rideau was consulted and made relationships with administrators at Angola Prison. This infamous prison was known to be one of the most violent prisons in the nation. The violence dramatically decreased during Rideau's time at this prison. Although the decrease in violence resulted from many efforts and causes, it is important to note how Rideau's insights of the inmate community were incredibly useful to multiple wardens. Second, James recounts an experience where an administrator worked with a lieutenant to keep peace in a prison yard, he says:

98 Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption behind Bars*, 100.
99 Hartman, "Prison as a Metaphor for Modern Society."

> 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.[100]

The lieutenant's collaboration with the group leader created stability for the duration of the cooperation. However, the group leader was taken to the SHU after the installment of a new lieutenant. This is another example of administrators targeting influential inmates and the uncertainty their actions can create with inconsistent interactions with incarcerated men.

Another possible change is to encourage more programs in prison. By creating policy that allows more non-profits and volunteers inside the prison walls, these programs do not have to be funded by the state. 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 can also become the source of future close relationships in prison. James attributes the geographical location of San Quentin for making the numerous programs and volunteers more prevalent:

> The geographical location [of San Quentin] 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 desert, and all you see are deserts and mountains around you…

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

VI. Limitations and Future Research

Social media has improved access to documents written by incarcerated men, but there are still many limitations. I had expected that there would be many more autobiographies from inmates in California, but I found that most of the autobiographies written by inmates focused on aspects of incarceration or criminal justice other than the inmate community. In particular, many of the autobiographies focused on experiences with the legal system. While important, these autobiographies did not have many insights into prison community.

In contrast, I found that many autobiographies written by out-of-state individuals who have been incarcerated did directly comment on inmate community. Out of these, I chose to use a particularly exceptional, insightful autobiography for this paper.

100 The "hole" is another term used to describe the Secure Housing Units (SHUs).

I was also limited in the number of people I was able to interview. It would have been helpful to interview more people for a more thorough understanding from different perspectives. For future study, I would also suggest interviewing men both during and after the time of incarceration. This would give perspectives on how the men's views on the inmate community and social ties therein may change during and after incarceration.

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 that create different social atmospheres.

Multiple recent events suggest that a present day Prisoner Rights Movement revival is beginning. The events suggest the beginnings of an ideological shift back to the rehabilitative focus of previous generations: the passage of Proposition 36 in 2012 revising the California Three Strikes law, the near passing of Proposition 34 in 2012 to end the death penalty practice, 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.

Particularly since the renewal of a concerted orchestration of hunger strikes in the past few years, there has been greater collaboration between human rights organizations and prisoner rights groups. The publishing of *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander in 2010 is another example of a movement that views 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."[101] The book sees the prison's function of punishment as a legal tool similar to Jim Crow laws, used for discrimination and repression of African-American males.

Moving forward, it will be interesting to see how the evolving perception of California prisons will affect prison policies and inmate communities.

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