

XG

men
sex
politics

Spring 1994

\$4.50

Produced quarterly in Australia • Volume 4 Number 3 • NBH 3340 • ISSN 1036-7209



behind bars men in prison

What about the boys?
Young man and the baker's daughter
Helping your partner survive sexual assault
Black in a white man's world
How not to be a man

behind bars

men in prison

OVER 95 percent of prisoners in Australia are men and prison is a male environment stripped bare. This makes prisons a fascinating subject for men interested in how masculinity works.

The history of white Australia is the history of a prison. Over the last two centuries this has inevitably influenced our male identity. Clearly there is something about being a man that results in 19 times as many men as women committing crimes and being imprisoned.

What does being locked up do to all those men? How does their experience of prison affect the rest of us and the society we inhabit? It is easy to say "If you do the crime then you do the time" but what about the longer term? Prisoners are usually released. Their time inside changes how they relate to the outside world.

Imprisonment may deal with the criminal in some superficial manner but it does little or nothing about the crime and its myriad causes. The effort being made to develop masculinity to new heights of caring and sharing needs to be spread into the way we treat men who land on the wrong side of the law. The effects of prison reach further than the long arm of the law.

Inside/outside

What happens with class, masculinity, sexuality and race in the prison system? Is prison any sort of solution to crime? David Denborough has the story.

THIS article seeks to explore some of the ways in which prison systems interact with the dynamics of race, gender and particularly class. It is not intended to criticise departments in charge of prisons for I realise that they are only one player in far broader cultural systems. It is instead directed particularly at those middle-class and ruling-class Australians who are all too easily convinced to negate their responsibilities to create a society where crime needs no longer exist, and instead opt to punish harder, and for longer, the most disadvantaged of society.

Prison is a world with its own language, culture and ways of being. In one short article I have had to ignore the dedication of individual staff, the innovation of various new programs, and the absolute magic of humour that cuts across all boundaries. I have had to oversimplify what is a complex and contradictory world.

Squarehead

I HAVE been working in a maximum security institution for 18 months. When I first

entered the prison system, as a 22-year-old, middle-class, private school-educated gubba (white man), I discovered for the first time that I was a "squarehead". I was intrigued to find out what it meant. I was told, "It means a stuck-up poof who can't fuck."

The ways that class, gender and sexuality issues intertwine never cease to amaze me. "Squarehead" was the inmates' way of pointing out that I have benefited from class relations in this society while they have been exploited. It was notice to me that I needed to develop principles and ways of working across a class divide that would be respectful to their experiences. Well, at least that's how I interpreted it.

My first task was to try to understand what role prison plays in terms of class conflict.

Yes there's a class war

WORKING-CLASS people traditionally have been vastly over represented within Australian prisons. Indeed Australia itself was once England's dumping ground for an entire under-class. In many ways this

dynamic continues today as unemployed people are over represented in jail by five times. This is due to at least six factors. (The first two are the suggestions of Australian academic Bob Connell.)

(i) A substantial amount of crime is actually resistance to social inequalities. These inequalities affect the working class who resist often in highly visible ways, which are subsequently policed and result in incarceration.

(ii) Related to this resistance, working-class men, denied access to economic and cultural resources, may develop ways of being men in which violent and/or criminal activity is accepted and even viewed as honourable.

(iii) A good deal of crime, including much drug-related crime, is prompted by poverty.

(iv) The discriminatory policing of Aboriginal populations and the social dislocation caused by over 200 years of white oppression lead to high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

(v) The wealthy are less likely to be sentenced to prison for the same offences, because of their better access to resources, support and references and because of simple judicial prejudice.

(vi) The wealthy commit crimes that are less often detected and less harshly punished such as price fixing, insider trading,

environmental pollution, fraudulent bankruptcies, drug-trafficking, breaches of occupational health and safety regulations and tax avoidance.

(vii) More particularly, the legal system only really punishes physical interpersonal violence, which is only one behaviour that men use to control and dominate. It is working-class men who are commonly policed for using interpersonal violence while wealthier men have access to other methods of domination and control through the power of industry, finances, media, bureaucracies and indeed the armed forces.

As a result of all these factors, when I walk into the prison system I often feel as if I am walking into a key site of class warfare. The fronts move and change depending upon the political climate. When political establishments resort to "law and order" platforms to win votes, this invariably leads to increased policing and incarceration of the disadvantaged, often in times of greater-than-usual economic hardship.

It is crucial to understand crime in terms of class conflict: to politicise crime. It is also crucial to acknowledge that in working class men's violent crimes they are not only the victims of social injustice but they are also contributing to a system in which force and domination are seen as legitimate ways of life. Particularly in cases of violence against women, working-class men are playing out power dynamics upon others just as these have been played out on them.

In the trenches

THE battle front of this class war within the prison system historically has been between inmates and "screws" (prison officers) as this is the point where the working-class 'crims' meet the system face to face. There was once a powerful solidarity between inmates and a recognition of such a struggle which would at times culminate in violence and riots. The lines were clearly drawn—between the working class crims and the system.

Both officers and inmates are from extremely similar backgrounds, making the situation more complex. The policing of the working class is done by other members of the working class who are in turn hated like no others. Screws and the police are seen as class traitors who cannot be forgiven. In reality, of course, officers are relatively powerless, simply one step up the rung of a hierarchical, military-like structure. Indeed, some inmates point out that prison officers seem to have even less op-

portunity for personal and professional development than inmates.

There have been enormous changes over the past decade. The antagonism between 'screw' and 'crim' is still there but it is no longer the battle front that it once was. Improvements to officer training and recruitment and improvements to prison life including new programs, more flexible property rules, more activities for inmates and less violence have all contributed to a lessening of tension. But there are two further important factors.

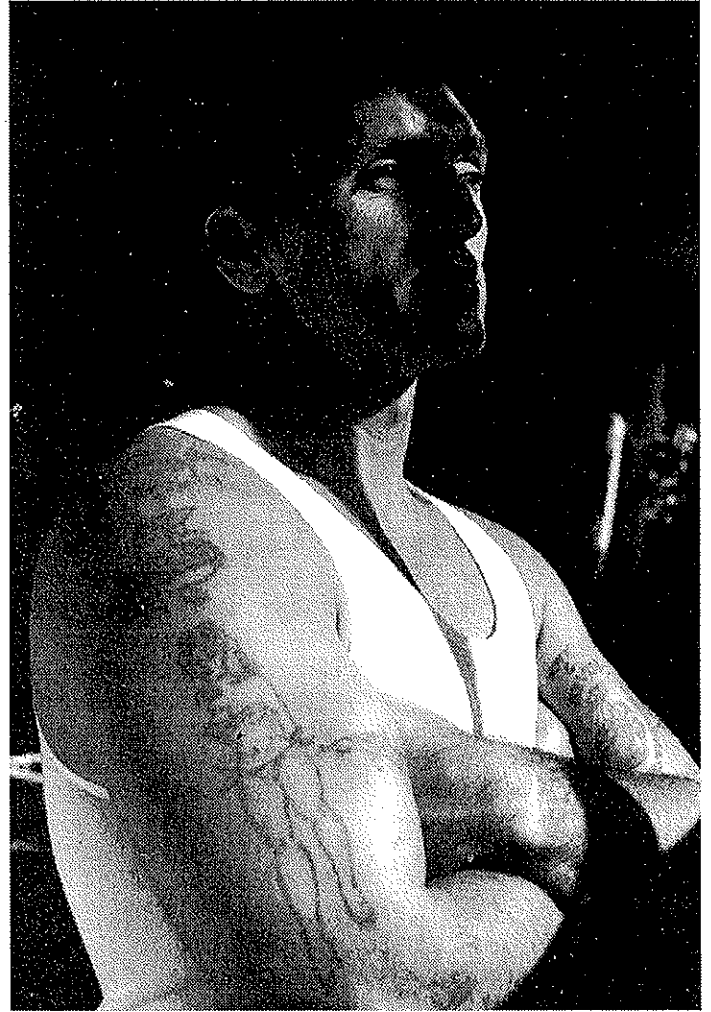
Inmates' attempts to maintain a degree of solidarity have received two crucial challenges. Firstly, a dramatic change in the prison population has occurred with many inmates now in on drug-related crimes. There is a perception among inmates that drugs have eroded their solidarity and trust.

Other inmates argue that an increased and more formalised use of prison inform-

I am walking into a key site of class warfare.

ers has had a similar effect. To some extent inmates are now policed by other inmates and must always be careful about who they trust in case they are "dogs" (informers). Dogs are seen as traitors and punished at any opportunity.

For some inmates improved relations between inmate and officer have been experienced as disempowering. Older inmates will tell you they preferred it how it used to be when at least there was a sense of identity and an avenue for resistance. On the other hand, watching officers and inmates share stories of their experiences and rela-



tionships in a group is inspiring, and would never have happened ten years ago.

A gendered world

HIERARCHIES of men and masculinities form within prisons, as everywhere else, with the stronger gaining better access to extremely scarce resources. A dominant masculinity emerges—usually one which revolves around one's crime, propensity to violence, ethnicity and sexuality. A prison "heavy" might be a lifer—someone in for murder, known to be able to defend himself, indeed to have killed before, who is identified as heterosexual.

Contradictions are rife however, with issues such as educational standard, outside contacts, wealth and friendships all offering challenges to the picture above. It is also interesting to note that it is often the lifers who are a calming influence on younger prisoners and who often initiate programs and keep the peace.

The men and masculinities that are most at risk within these hierarchies are young men, gay men, transsexuals and the ➤

➤ physically weak. An inmate at risk from other inmates is in an extraordinarily powerless position with little recourse to outside authorities for fear of being branded a "dog". Attempts to gain inmate group or class solidarity are at the expense of the least powerful within the group.

Prison is also in many ways a homoerotic world. One is constantly surrounded by men with astonishingly fit and muscular bodies, many of which are shaved for "better muscle definition". Sexuality in prison is rife with contradiction. Consensual homosexual sex (often involving men who identify as heterosexual) coexists with vehement homophobia. Many men inside will testify to being "poofster bashers". It's also important to consider issues of sexual assault both within prison and in childhood (especially in boys' homes) and for both survivors and perpetrators.

Attitudes to women play themselves out in relation to transsexuals and also through phone calls and visits with women partners and interactions with female staff. Many men use pornography in prison and some are concerned as to how this, and impulsive, furtive, desperate sexual contact on visits impacts not only on their relationships but also on the way they view women in general. With the advent of female officers and professional staff, the gender dynamics of prisons are gradually changing. Let us hope the opportunity that this presents for challenging misogynistic attitudes is realised.

Race relations

THE issue of race further complicates power relations within prisons. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up only two percent of the general Australian population but 10 percent of the prison population. As Aboriginal inmates support one another and maintain a large degree of solidarity, this offers some power and a challenge to white inmates.

It is a strange and limited power however, for it is located within white man's racist prisons, within white man's laws and within a civilisation that is described by one Aboriginal inmate as "one big prison". Prisons play a large part in the ongoing injustice perpetrated towards the indigenous peoples of this country. Nothing shows this more clearly than the disappointingly slow implementation of the recommendations

The prison system is a symbol of the message that individuals are solely responsible for social problems such as crime.

of the Black Deaths in Custody Royal Commission.

Crime as individual

THE prison system is a symbol of the wider societal message that individuals are solely responsible for social problems such as crime. Such a message manages to move any responsibility away from those groups that collectively have power onto relatively powerless individuals. As a result, people who have benefited from current economic systems need take no responsibility for the poverty and economic exploitation which encourage crime and drug use; men collectively don't need to take responsibility for moving masculinity away from notions of domination, sexism and violence which benefit all men while at the same time lead to male violence; and white Australians don't need to take responsibility for ending racist practices that lead to the over-policing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In the prison system psychology is at times used to rationalise and deny economic, race and gender injustice as factors in crime. This is quite an achievement as they are the most obvious of factors!

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault describes how prisons are not really intended to be any more humane than the "primitive" wheel or gallows. He argues instead that they in fact "punish better... to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body." What could be a more powerful method of punishment than firstly turning inmate upon inmate, and secondly, convincing someone that their crime is solely their fault and that they are psychologically dysfunctional as a consequence, when in reality their crime is a reaction to, and at times a form of resistance against, social inequalities?

Moving forward

I AM not so naive as to ignore the fact that many men in prison are a danger to themselves and others. But to place men who are used to using force and domination to

control others into a situation where they will have no control over their own lives, in an institutional system with domination and control as its very essence, seems a little counter-productive.

There is no doubt that we must ensure the safety of the community

and this may necessitate jail-like structures for limited periods of time where men who are violent undergo programs for reducing violence. Such approaches ought to locate individuals' controlling and dominating ways of relating within a societal context, considering class, race, gender and sexuality differentials, while still encouraging the individual to take responsibility for his actions and the parts he plays in replicating systems of social injustice. The work of Alan Jenkins and Michael White offers an ideal starting point.

Such approaches will work far more effectively in humane settings. One cannot expect people to become more respectful after participating in programs that are disrespectful to their experiences, meanings and lives.

On a broader societal level all men need to take responsibility for ending men's violence—both its interpersonal expressions and those forms of domination and control exercised through institutions.

It is imperative that the injustices of our present economic system are acknowledged and that we develop alternatives. At the same time we must ensure that our legal system does not criminalise legitimate resistance to poverty and disadvantage. This includes the criminalisation of drug use which punishes the poor as they resort to crime to fuel their habits. Incidentally, such habits have often been formed in the context of child abuse, homelessness and poverty, which are themselves expressions of power relations.

As an absolute priority gubbas such as myself must ensure that the over-policing and incarceration of the indigenous people of this country ceases and that culturally appropriate means of addressing crime are developed.

It is time the issue of people in prison was taken seriously, particularly by middle-class gubbas such as myself. At this very moment behind razor wire and thick stone walls life goes on. I invite you to get to know this other world, take responsibility for it and develop alternatives. ●

How not to be a man

YOU'RE taught all your life to be violent, to deny your problems and show no emotions. Your parents start the first lessons in how to be a man. "Don't cry. Don't talk about emotions. Don't get close to other men. You're not hurt. You're a poofter, wuss, fairy, faggot, homo. Get up and fight, you sissy."

Then your next lesson in how to be a man is held by your friends and peers. "If your girl gets out of hand give her a head butt. Women are there so we can root as many as possible. Women are evil. They ask for our abuse. They like it. She asked for it."

This handbook that no one has ever seen is pretty helpful as it teaches you 101 ways to abuse yourself and teaches you to abuse women. The book is great as it says it's all right to abuse women and it's even got a section on excuses to justify ourselves. So we hold no responsibility and no guilt and no need to change as the information passes from person to person saying that it's acceptable behaviour.

Drugs

THE lesson about suppressing what you feel has a direct link to the high percentage of drug users in the prison system. A huge number of men in the prison system are there for drug-related crimes. If you're taught to suppress everything then drugs deal with all that is undealt with. Everyday problems are made numb by drugs which is easier than dealing with them because if you get hurt or annoyed by your problems you are a wuss, a faggot, an outsider.

Media

LET us not forget about society in general and the role it plays in this infamous and unwritten book on how to be violent and look upon women as (meat) sex objects. The media barons pump hundreds of murders, fights and other forms of violence into our lives everyday through the thought control box. We and our children must be controlled. We're told that it's acceptable to be violent but also that if you're violent you'll be locked up. Sounds like a conflicting message but it's all right, someone is making money.

Now for the way men see women. When a man meets a women his eyes go to her breasts sometime in their meeting or interaction. This is taught to be normal by

Jack Hoyles is 25. He is serving a 17-year sentence in a maximum security institution with 10 years to go.

the same people teaching us to be violent. Nearly every ad or movie has a woman half-dressed selling something that hasn't anything to do with women. I believe that the media sells women short. They abuse them more than anyone and they pass on their knowledge which is bullshit and unacceptable in my eyes.

Relationships with women

THERE'S more confusion. On one hand we're told it's all right to be shut down, violent and showing no emotions while on the other hand I have my relationship with my partner, Chrissie. She says, "Talk more, don't be so rough and express what you're feeling." It's like a tug of war with two strong messages pounding on both sides of your heart.

If you see and hear women as people you lose your peers and gain loneliness. Just as if you were emotional and cried you lost the love of your parents. You end up losing yourself in these two confusions. I know I am in there somewhere underneath all that I was forced to learn in exchange for acceptance and love.

The system does nothing but reinforce all those false messages of how to be a man.

The effect of prison on the whole women's race is yet to be truly felt. The effect of being starved of the opposite sex used to be a taboo subject. I am seeing how jail is affecting my views on women and it's all bad. I am a chronic masturbator and this alone reinforces that women are sex objects. If I wasn't putting challenges to my views on women where would I be? Already it's affecting my relationship with my partner—the way I see her and treat her on visits. What would women mean to me if I just kept going and didn't think about my masturbation? Thirteen and a half years of picturing women having sex with me...what would I be like? How would I see women? What role would they play in my life?

Taking a stand

ONE must take a stand and open his eyes to this insane book with its insane rules and excuses and search for his true self under all that bullshit one is forced to learn. His true self will lead him out of the darkness he was steered into. His true self will bring the light if only he steps out and makes his own path. It is then he can truly call himself a man. ●

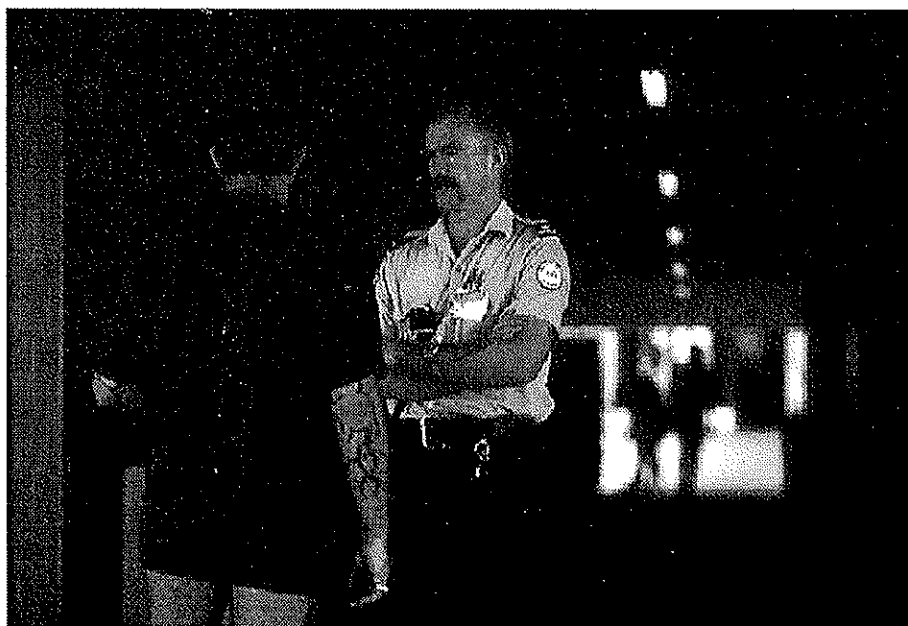


Photo: Peter O'Halloran

Black in a white man's world

Billy, Fred and Eddie, three Aboriginal men doing time in a maximum security institution, speak to a prison worker about being black in a white man's jail.

SINCE working in the prison I have had to wrestle with my skin colour, being white, being a gubba. Up until then my skin had never been problematic. It's been a learning process and I have a long way to go.

I have been privileged that over this year these men have chosen to trust me enough to share pieces of their past, their culture and their humour, be it often at my expense! They have taught me a great deal and I am grateful for it.

Being black in prison

Billy: There's support with the kooris. As soon as I came in it was like I'd known them for years. They took me in, talking about family, different things, what not. In the outcome we were all sort of related. We've left our family outside so this is our family in here. We stand by each other whatever the cost, whether it means getting tipped to other jails.

Fred: When I first came to jail I had relations here. The kooris have all got a bond. White fellas ain't got that. Everyone's there for each other. Because of that kooris have more power in jail than on the outside and some Kooris get more respect in prison than when they're out.

Racism

Billy: There's no trust within the system because of colour. Gubbas have a better chance. "You blackfellas—why should I trust you?"—everybody thinks this way. There's less trust. We're all going through the same stages

in here but we get looked down on. If there's trouble in the prison they listen to white stories. "You're black, you're a trouble maker, on your bike."

Eddie: Whenever Aboriginal people get together they always see it as a threat. They

don't see a group of Lebanese people or Chinese people or European people as a threat—just us and we all end up—bang, bang, bang in different jails.

Relations with whites

Billy: When I first came in here I was dirty on the world. I wanted to belt all the white fellas because of the colour of his skin. I learnt how to be very violent. It's very difficult to associate with others. Kooris tend to think you're favouritism to whites, if not

then you're a "gubba lover". Some do understand. Sometimes it's difficult between Kooris in here too. Bush and coast Kooris don't get on—for unknown reasons.

It took me four years of my lag in [sentence] to start trusting people. I was dirty on the world because I had a big lag in. I hated the white man. He judged me with a bit of paper. He didn't know me or what I'd been through. He didn't want to listen. So I thought, "You're a gub. That's all there is to it, stay out of my way."

Fred: Some people don't speak to white fellas. I speak to them. I've got good friends that are white. It's no big deal to talk to them. Sometimes there's pressure not to, it depends what jail you're in and what crews [inmates' groups] are there. Some people are filthy on white people and some people

have good reason to be. And if you're mixing with them and then talking to white people there's going to be tensions.

Eddie: I would have to say that it's us versus them. We're not saying that we discriminate—we find strength in each others' company and that's a fact. We're just saying that we're not going to be fucked

around. We don't go out of our way to confront people although some prisoners will say that we do and some officers will say that we do.

Discrimination can take a lot of forms from unfair classifications to when an Aboriginal inmate goes up to an officer and asks a reasonable request and is refused when he would have granted it to another inmate. The recommendations of Black Deaths in Custody say to keep Aboriginal inmates close to their families and they say that this is given consideration but in reality we are still sent to prisons away from our families.

But every prisoner in this jail has something in common. The enemy. The man in

blue. The police officer or prison officer. Why should we fight against ourselves?

Kooris have more power in jail than on the outside.

Aboriginal men don't lock up European prisoners up. European prisoners don't lock Aboriginal prisoners up. The man in blue does that. That's the enemy.

Being black in Australia

Fred: When I was younger I lived with my father and his wife who are both white. I used to get gifts from my mother but they'd always take them off me. They didn't like me walking around with shirts with koori designs on it so they'd take them and blatantly burn them in front of my face.

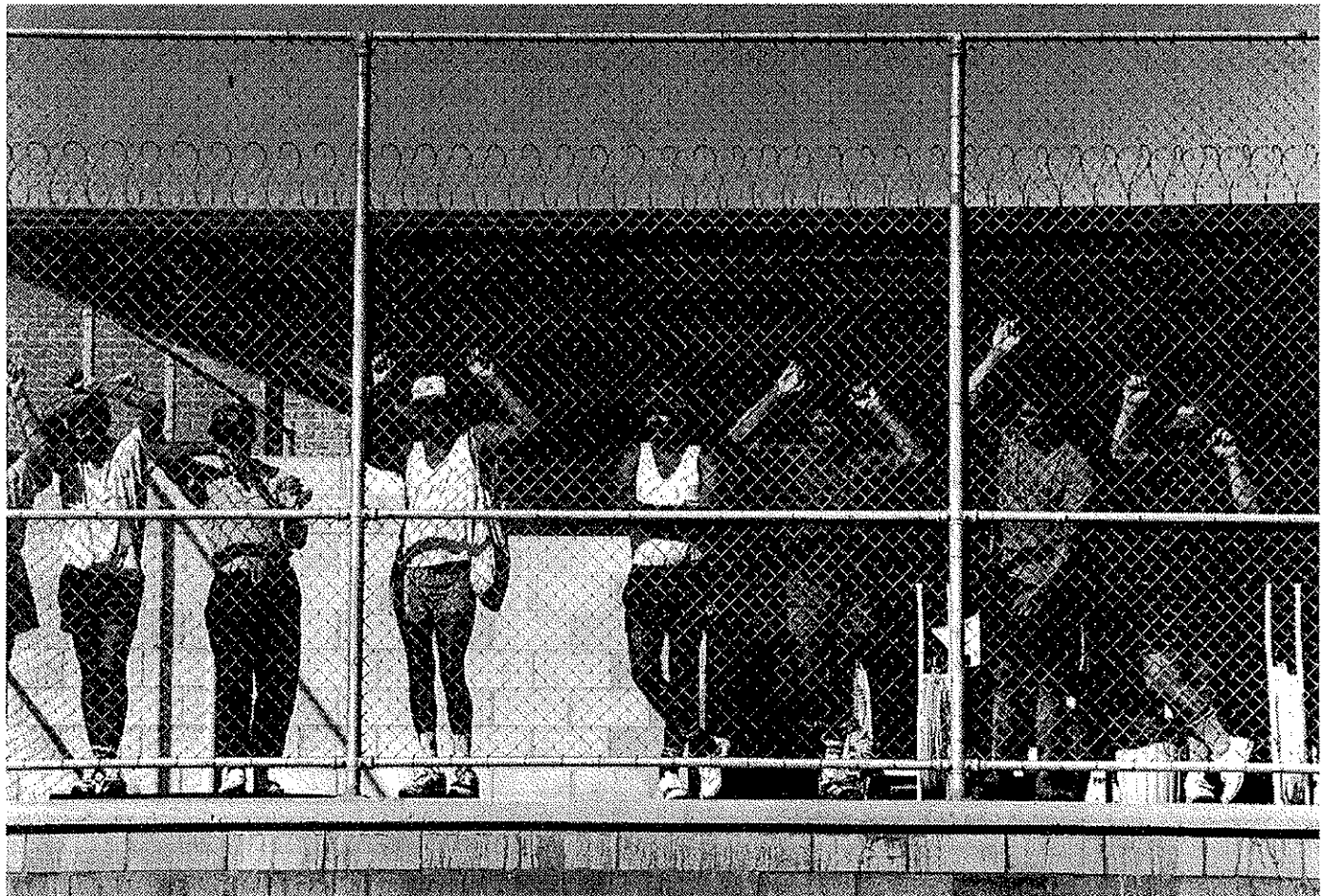
At school some kooris would say to me "you're a koori" and I didn't know what to say. I sort of knew to say yes but I couldn't say that because they'd ask "Who's your family?" or "Where are ya from?" and I wouldn't know the answers. At the school I was at, I had relations and I didn't even know.

When I was fourteen I moved in with my mum. I learnt, as time went on, living with koori people, meeting my new relations. It was like I'd got out of jail. Everyone was more caring.

Billy: I grew up with hatred in a racist town and I carried it around with me for so long. I was scared to associate with whites. If I did that at home I got belted. I took my chances with an Indian chick, a

We've left our family outside so this is our family in here.

Photo: Sue Paull 1994



teacher, tutoring me on English. After so many talks I dropped my barrier. We heard about each other's cultures. I realised I couldn't blame anyone else for what had been done, just had to take people on who they are now not 200 years ago. She changed my life. She gave me spirit even though I'd been beaten by poverty. I miss her.

She showed me what the British had done in India, they kept on taking and taking and taking. It was the same thing as here. You can never change the past, it's always there with you. She just went on with life, a day at a time. She taught me to be myself. Made me realise there are good people in the world even if they are not Aboriginal.

I got bashed eight days a week and twice on Sundays back then. You drink on one side of the bar, we drink on ours. There were no white men on the streets after 11:30. They'd come in the mornings, and then get out. White and black totally segregated.

Whites have no trust in kooris, why should we trust them? There were at least four street blues [fights] a day. From the mission on the bus to school there were only four white kids on the bus. The rest of us were black. As soon as we got out of the bus the whites scattered. We didn't

know any better. They didn't know any better. It was our parents getting in our ears.

They thought we were animals, so we started acting like animals. Just took and took and didn't give a fuck who got hurt. I stayed out of trouble until I was 18 and a half. Then got busted for attempting to steal a motor vehicle. My sisters were pugs, street fighters, and did alright for themselves.

I have to take people on who they are now not 200 years ago.

They had to stand their ground otherwise they'd get the cunt kicked out of them. My third sister had a foster parent, went overseas, has everything made for her.

My old man went to jail for 18 months. He came home for six months and then went his own way. I left school then at 13 and worked to try and support my seven brothers and sisters but it got too stressful. I came to Sydney to go to school and got kicked out—"uncontrollable". I lived on the streets from 15 to 17. Robbery, drinking and that. I'd start drinking with someone early on in the night, make their company so that I could spend the night at their place.

You can tell when someone is looking down at you. Your boss and that. They only

keep certain people on. So I ended up shovelling shit from horses. I felt proud that I was doing a job that a gub wouldn't do. I felt that I had a little bit of support from my boss. If I'd been white I might have got trustworthy jobs. The sad thing is half the Kooris don't even know anything about our culture. They were brought up in the city, up-town kooris, city blacks. I just take things one day at a time.

Eddie: This is white man's civilisation to me—one big prison. They tell us to obey their laws no questions asked when their laws are fiction—like terra nullius. The undeclared war of whites on Aboriginal people still goes on today. They're still killing us by removing the young man from his people and incarcerating him in a place like this. It's castration, it's another way of killing a nation. Are we a nation dying in silence?

I was taken off my parents at eight years old. I came out at 16 and then went to prison. I'm not saying that I like jail but it's just become a way of life for me. Can you explain your laws to me that allow a child to be taken away for no reason for an indefinite time? And you expect me to obey your fucking laws today and if I don't I'm here in this place.

Aboriginal people just want to be free. ●

Gay behind bars

Peter Outlook is 24 years old. He is doing three years and eight months in a maximum security prison.

WHEN I first came to jail it was a nightmare—I used to get hassled out about sex. People coming into my cell: “We’ve rocked in for a cuppa.” It’s like when guys go out to pick up girls. “I’ll buy you a drink and the dinner,” and then the next thing you know—does dinner constitute the cock? I spun out badly at first. Some of them tried to pressure me physically.

There was one incident when I was in my cell talking to a guy and then seven other guys rocked in and I was horrified. One of them had a roll of box-tape: “We’re going to get you now.” The door had

You’ve got to swear to the gods that you’re not going to say anything.

been closed and bolted from the outside. There was no way out... I just talked and talked and talked and talked... I went into survival mode. I managed to persuade a couple of them to be on my side after half an hour or so. I was keeping everyone entertained. As soon as I heard the bolt go across on the door I ran for the door and down the stairs and started crying.

Gaining power

THAT was really the only incident I had and I realised, hey I’m pretty vulnerable on my own—I better start getting cliquy with the crews [inmates’ groups] and start getting some power. If I’m seen talking to a lot of people then I’ll be well known and they’ll think all the people I know are potential enemies.

People who came in new to the wing and didn’t know me would start on me and then they’d soon realise that to touch me was to touch a lot of people. I’m two-out [sharing a cell] with a lifer now. Anything that happens to me happens to my cell mate. That’s the way it works—plus they’d be fucking with all the other lifers that my friend knows.

I got support from the heavies just by talking to them and being real. A lot of people in the jail are not themselves. I’ve never pretended to be anything that I’m not. People respect that, even in prison.

Standing your ground

AT TIMES I’ve had to fight. I kicked a volleyball into some guy’s gut once. He came

after me with his fists up. I took three or four steps away, turned and started to run and then something happened in my head and I turned around and gave it to him. And people realised that I wasn’t going to get pushed around. You have to stand up for

yourself. That was my second revelation. Not only did I have to find support, but I had to stand up for myself and then the

respect is reinforced.

Relationships and trust

THERE are heaps of people that are emotionally dependent on other people in jail—stacks of them. If you get attached to someone you go through a period when you think, “Fuck, what am I doing?” You start pushing them away: “Leave me alone,” “Don’t touch me.” It’s just strange. You

turn on each other: “You’re just playing games,” “You’re just using me.”

There’s absolutely no trust and without trust there’s no relationship. There’s no trust because it’s jail and everyone’s in for being untrustworthy! That’s why 98 percent of relations in jail fail.

You go through periods of no trust and you smash the cell and chop into your cell mate. You end up sitting there cut up on the floor—bleeding, punched and beaten up—both of you. And it’s just like, “What are we doing?” It goes on all the time. Then you give each other a hug and kiss. It just releases all the anger and frustration out of the view of everyone else.

Jealousy

JEALOUSY is the worst nightmare. When people see a relationship they just turn green. They go out of their way to take it away from you if they can’t have it too.

People interfere—they say things that aren’t true. Betrayal is so brilliant. People who were my partner’s friends were coming on to me left, right and centre.

But we made a pact that we’d build trust first—before we did anything—and it worked. We stayed together for three years.

“Straight” men

OH THEY’RE all straight in here! They’re all straight as right angles in a geometry class! They all scream with a straight mouth—“This is my first time”—and I just sit there and think “liar”! I don’t know how they kid themselves. They might be straight on the outside but each time they’ve come to jail they’ve been up to no good, let me tell you.

They just have casual sex and then you’ve got to swear to the gods that you’re not going to say anything because their egos would deflate. That gives me a bit of power too. You use everything you can. Why keep punching to the head when you can kick to

the balls? I use psychic weapons—start pulling down people’s egos without having any contact at all. I’m really

stealthy like that. But I only do it to defend myself. Just because I’m gay, people think I’m an easy target but I’m not because I move to the left and to the right.

Loving sex

I MEAN if the whole jail system was gay and had access to condoms there’d be very little problems. But you get these so-called American experts coming in and saying, “You can’t let them have sex.” It’s bullshit.

Men in prison do have gentle, loving sex. You are talking about men who’ve been locked up for years and are very lonely people. They’ve been so hard and cold and horrible and nasty that to find someone that they can be intimate and emotional with is good for them. That’s what they usually use women for—the tenderness. They ➤

Hell and home

Prisons mean many things, as David Denborough shows in this collection.

Loss of freedom

"1.16 am. I lie awake on my bed, listening to the sounds of the night. I cannot sleep, even though I want to. This is the worst time in the day for me. This is the time when I realise just where I really am. It is the silence that does it. No-one else is awake, or if they are, they make no sound. That's when the noises come. The worst torture imaginable, the sounds of freedom. A dog barking somewhere outside the walls, the sound of buses and cars driving along the main road, right past the jail walls, and off in the distance the sharp, shrill sound of a car alarm as someone seeks cheap room and board in the cell next door. I lie here in the darkness, surrounded by stone walls, listening to the sounds of freedom. Still awake. 1.19 am."

Hell

"WHEN I die,
I'll go to heaven,
As I've done
my time in hell."
(Jail tattoo)

Class war

"YOU only rob the rich—make sure they're insured. They're ripping us off. We're ruled by the rich. The workers are fucked over."

Luxury: the Long Bay Hilton

"WHAT a joke this is. The image that TV stations and politicians have given over the years since I've been coming to prison. Sure we have TVs and radios in our cells, and a few family photos of our loved ones, but just close your eyes for a few minutes and

picture this... Imagine taking your TV and radio and electric jug, a couple of cups into your bathroom and having to spend a few years in there. Eating, sleeping and shitting in there. Would you think that you're living in a motel room? Oh, I forgot to mention the concrete walls, the metal door, the smallest of windows high up in the wall—no view. No breeze in summer, no insulation in winter. Oh, I forgot to mention,

you'll be sharing the room. Bunk beds with metal grids for a base."

Destination for Real Men

"NO WONDER so many men end up in prison when we're taught that in order to be a real man you have to be violent."

Resistance

"WE ARE 'classified', 'mustered', ➤



Illustration: Tony Nairn

➤ try to find it with people of the same sex. Most of the time they can't find it but they keep looking. I think it's cruel. They should have conjugal visits.

But guys in jail in relationships are intimate and tender. Not much is said, it's all quiet and intimate. Lots of guys won't admit it but it's something special to them—it is. It's something that they wouldn't get

to experience out in the real world if they were out there. They've only been able to experience it in jail. But a lot of guys get down on themselves thinking, "I'm a sick unit."

As therapist

I HAD a screw come up to me the other day and say, "Hey Peter, I had a dream the other

day and it really worried me. It was with another guy." And I said, "Don't worry about it. It's normal—everyone's attracted to someone of the same sex sooner or later in their life. It's just the way it is. Enjoy it for what it is and let it go."

He seemed happy with that. ●

➤ 'numbered' and 'uniformed' but we are still all individuals. We wear slightly different shades of green, find different ways of wearing the same clothes and get tattoos."

Place of learning

"I NEVER knew who I was until I went to Special Care. In there, my life opened up before me like a picture book. I learned who I was. I started to understand my anger and learned coping skills. I learnt to communicate and talk to people. Inmates as well as officers. The experience was awesome." (*Inmates handbook*)

"I have learnt so much in prison. There are so many people to learn from in here, from all walks of life and all different countries. I have also learnt to read and write in here and how to use computers."

Claustrophobia

"WHEN something goes wrong, say you have an argument, you have nowhere to go. You can't step outside of it."

Visit mum or dad

"WHEN are you coming home daddy?"

Part of the rules

"YOU do the crime you do the time."

Boredom

"BEFORE I came to jail I heard a story of a relative of mine who told me that to maintain his sanity he used to flick a button up in the air of a night and crawl around in the dark trying to find it. At the time I thought he was exaggerating but it didn't take me too long to realise when I came to jail that he wasn't too far off the mark."

Place of rest

"JAIL is a time to regroup, to get your head together."

Prison as roort

"WE DON'T have to do fucking anything. They cook for us, wash for us, we've got a roof over our heads. We don't have to pay the bills, the rent. We don't have to do anything."

Industry

"THE first private prison opened in Australia in 1990. In just three years Australia has the highest percentage of prisoners in private prisons in the world. Private security is one of the fastest growing industries in

Australia: there is a long history of privatisation in prisons that seems to be going full circle. Private contractors were removed from corrections (in the nineteenth century) because of the high rate of deaths and abuses." (*Green Left Weekly*, 1993)

Self-serving system

"I'M CONVINCED that prisons actually feed their own future. That is, they create the very people from whom they purport to protect society. The recidivism rates show this to be true..." (Chris Tchaikovsky, *New Internationalist*, December 1985)

Home

"I'VE been in and out of prison for 31 years. I've spent a total of 26 years inside. This is a way of life for me, my home. I feel more scared outside than in. I know this place."

Community

"ONE of the hardest things out there (in society) is that you feel like a nobody. No one says hello. There were all grumpy faces. At least in here everyone says hello and knows your name."

Enforced celibacy

"WE DON'T get conjugal visits and it is still illegal for two consenting adult males to have sex together in prison."

Place of success

PRISON Officer: "I was working in the Protection area and a young guy came in scared to death—first time in prison. I thought he was at greater risk being there. I sat with him talking for three days when he finally realised that this was the case. About two months later he came up to me and said "thank you". Maybe it was only a little thing but it's very rare to get the feedback to know you were effective on a certain day. I thought yep, there was some point to everything I'm doing."

Failed system

"FINALLY, the key element of imprisonment remains as always. That is, imprisonment involves placing human beings in cages with other persons who have violated the law, keeping them apart from their families and communities, and hoping that somehow this experience will turn them into more productive citizens. We have experimented with this model for 200 years. Perhaps it is time to try another model." (Marc Mauer, *Men's Studies Review*, 1992) ●

Prison facts

By Greg Marston

THE Australian Institute of Criminology conducts an annual census on the nation's prison population. The most recently compiled data on the demographics of Australia's prison population reveals some interesting statistics. Of the 15,559 prisoners in the 1992 census, over 14,500 were men! The most heavily represented age group among these men were 20–24 year-olds. Men are also more likely to be imprisoned for sex offences than they are for homicide or assault.

A ten year comparison between 1982 and 1992 reveals that the composition of prison populations by offence-types has not changed very much over the years. Just over 40% of prisoners are in for violent offences and around a third are in for property offences. In terms of employment status, between half and two-thirds of all prisoners each year were unemployed at the time of arrest.

The daily average prison population has increased from just under 10,000 in 1982 to well over 15,000 in 1992. The Aboriginal percentage has changed little over the ten-year period. However, an analysis comparing rates of detention between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians exposes massive over representation. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal people are 27 times more likely to be detained in custody than non-Aboriginal Australians. A gender breakdown reveals that for every Aboriginal woman imprisoned there are 20 Aboriginal men held in Australian prisons.

This short snapshot highlights, among other things, gender, class and racial features of Australia's prison population. It also goes beyond an insight into the walls of Australian prisons. This picture is a sad indictment of the society in which we all live. ●

Give a man a gift

Why not give great writing on men to your mate, your brother, your son, your dad?
Give him a gift subscription to XY.

Three minutes in the life of society's reject

By David Pike

7:06 AM. The clanging and crashing of metal on metal, as locks are unlocked, bolts are drawn back and doors are opened, wakes me up to a cold reality. No more pleasant dreams of fantasy, only the harsh truth. It is time to start a new day. A new day on the inside.

I get out of bed fast, because now I'm in a race against other inmates. Why am I in a race? Because if I'm not fast enough, I get no fruit or jam for the day. I pull on my tracksuit bottoms and jacket. Now I'm ready, ready for the race.

The door opens and I'm off. I don't run, because if I run, I lose face and face is important. I just walk very fast. I see other inmates converging on the fruit and grab six pieces. Today it is apples. Yesterday it was pears but today it is apples. I put two pieces each in my jacket

pockets and the other two go into my tracksuit pants.

Now I go for the jam: it is apricot. There are only four packets left, I take them all. The inmate behind me says nothing, he realises that today he has lost the race. Tomorrow he will not be so slow.

I relax now; the race is over, for me anyway. I walk back to the cell slowly, saying good morning to the other people around me. I have the time now.

I watch, with a knowing smile, the new inmates arrive for fruit and jam. They start swearing profusely when they find that there is nothing left, either fruit or jam. I feel no pity for them, even though I was once in their situation; they must learn to survive as I did. If they don't survive then they are weak and in jail the weak are victims. Prey for the taking.

I walk back into the cell and empty my pockets. I place the fruit and jam into my cupboard, behind my clothes. Why do I do this? I do this because I trust no one. It is easier to remove the temptation of "borrowing" my fruit and jam by hiding it.

The clanging and crashing starts once more, as doors are closed, the bolts drawn back and the locks relocked. Slowly I remove my jacket and tracksuit bottoms and get back into bed. I don't eat my breakfast. The fruit and jam, which I have just raced to get, is more valuable as a commodity than as a food source. In a couple of hours, I will sell it to the new inmates for something. I don't know what they will pay, but it will be more than the price that I paid.

Slowly the noise fades, as I fall into the dreamworlds of fantasy. 7.09 am. ●



Photo: Tony Nairn

Suggested further reading on men in prison

Martha Albertson and Nancy Thomadsen (eds) *At the boundaries of law: feminism and legal theory*.

Christine Alder "Explaining violence: socioeconomics and masculinity", in *Australian violence: contemporary perspectives*.

Judith Allen "Men, crime and criminology", *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 1989

Tim Anderson *Inside outlaws*.

Stanley Cohen *Visions of social control*.

Chris Cunneen "Working class boys and crime: theorising the class/gender mix", in *War/masculinity*.

R. Greycar and J. Morgan *The hidden gender of law*.

Stuart Hall *Drifting into a law and order society*.

Blanch Hampton *Prisons and women*.

Men's Studies Review special issue: "Men in prison", Spring 1992.

Ngairé Naffine *Law between the sexes: explorations in feminist jurisprudence*.

New Internationalist special issue: "Blind justice: the creation of criminals", December 1985.

H.E. Pepinsky and R. Quinney (eds) *Criminology as peacemaking*.

Jocelyne Scutt *Women and the law*.

Carol Smart *Feminism and the power of law*.

George Zdenkowski and David Brown *The prison struggle*.

Prisons activism

IF YOU would like to be involved in activism about prisons, the criminal justice system, the law and state repression, contact Justice Action. PO Box K365, Haymarket, NSW 2000. Ph [02] 281 5100.