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The Novelist Portent

AMERICAN PIELESS (Part One):

On the Mental and Physiological Damages Imposed Upon
Incarcerated Men When Refused Access to Women Within a
Total Institution and Isolated from Societal Norms

A Three Part Essay

by

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Boys and men alike, sometimes find themselves in similar situations--such as being taken in front of a court, and facing time behind the bars of a detention center: a place where he will have no access to females, physical, virtual, or print; a place where homosexuality is further promoted by pre-existing prisoners--the "cons" and "old timers"--looking to influence newcomers with deceptive camaraderie; a place where, even those too smart to fall for the convicts' moral clowning, still have to deal with the sexual misguidings of institutional making. Raising the question: exactly what kinds of men are prisons molding (purposely or inadvertently) to be released back into society? This question merits attention, because it is the prisons themselves who are morally tasked to provide a rehabilitative environment conducive with sexual maturity. To ignore the issue, and leave prisoners (especially the youthful) isolated from the opposite sex, promotes impropriety

and sexual deviation. Upon release, these irregularities in sexual nature, can manifest themselves as various societal maladjustments once the prisoner is thrust back into society, finding himself submerged within females, physically, virtually, and in print--everywhere he turns.

HOW TO APPROACH SUCH AN ISSUE?

A set of questions were presented to me a few months back:

1. What are ways that some men deal with missing women in prison?
2. Do you think men change [by] NOT being around women? (If so, in what ways?)
3. How do you think this AFFECTS men when they are released?
4. How do men deal with their "needs"?
5. Do you think men become more-reserved or don't know how to deal with a woman's "touch" when released?

Sharing these questions with other prisoners, allowed me to better gauge the general consensus among those around me--some raised here since their teens, some here as I have been (around a decade), and some newly arrived. This not only served to confirm my own thoughts on the subject; but, also

build a better sourced argument against the dogmatic (and feministic) governing that is taking place in Southern prisons. In addition, I presented the list to my creative writing students as extra-credit prompts--and a few stepped up, producing personal essays now submitted to:

<http://www.dhinitiative.org/projects/apwa/>

The American Prison Writing Archive, APWA, C/O Hamilton College. Most of my students tag their work with "The Correctional Writer's Initiative" in the upper-right corner of their title page. I've been given permission to use excerpts, and critique, for didactic reasons within this essay to help expose the egregious attacks against our heterosexual well-being.

THE MOLDING OF DEVIANCE

The DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual), covers many psychosexual disorders, and two common factors found are feelings of shame and/or guilt, or the perceived lack of shame and/or guilt. "Society's understanding of normal sexual behavior and deviations from it has been changing gradually." (Sifers, p.219) We are continually shaped and reshaped, every decade bringing with it new norms, or slants on the existing ones.

Some changes come from the evolution of taboos. Examining the literature, media, and entertainment of any given transitional period, reveals how majority rules. Challenging ideas and ideologies start off as mere seeds, hidden away in our daily exchange, usually right under our noses--things we become a part of sometimes, without even realizing it. Societal evolution is an unstoppable fact of civilization, and it's not limited to the "western world".

While all of this societal evolution occurs, other adaptations are taking place behind the scenes with those removed from society, placed within prisons in a sort of social parallelism. Those incarcerated are each left to their own devices, facing a shared dilemma--how to remain "normal", or, at least, some acceptable semblance of it. There is a level of arrested development that threatens to take place: if a prisoner came in at the age of, say, 20, in 1998--his whole world froze in '98--and then, when he gets out (finally) in 2028, the world he knew is long gone, and the world he thinks exists may not coincide with the one he finds. And in addition to this arrested development, he may carry with him symptoms of being institutionalized¹.

Not all prisoners are created equal. Each can be found to have their own assortment of mental issues (e.g., traumas, disorders, predispositions, delusions, etc.), and we all have various coping strategies (or non-coping strategies) in accordance to our rearing, genetics, and circumstance. And avoiding stressors is not optional--the process of incarceration is traumatic in itself. By the time someone arrives in prison, it is usually after months (possibly years) of psychological melodrama at the hands of a county jail, and its related courts. The prisons then exacerbate these mental shocks by demanding immediate behavioral modification, but the system is corrupted by the fact that it is out-moded, and unsustainable as a viable institution. Resulting in a situation where everyone (staff and prisoners alike) are simply along for the ride (or, "riding the wave" as a business professor once told me), waiting for what was to come next, not in control of it. Prisoners that arrive with pre-existing mental shortcomings and/or low IQs have very little to no hope of avoiding the stereotypical "institutionalized"--because the prison consumes them. Chews them up to never be spit out.

I've met many such individuals over the years. I've even had the

unfortunate occasion of having to share a cell with a few over the years, though, I try to avoid them; because most are very dangerous, if not physical, the threat they pose is psychological. At the least, an Old School can be a counterproductive influence to a newbie, or anyone trying to do the right thing. I know this from experience.

"You aints never toos SMARRRT to learns," one Old School claimed, after I'd basically told him--in a slightly colorful language--to stop trying to pass his backwards ideology to me. Having to share a cell with someone that's institutionalized mentally, is challenging--because they seem to want constant attention, to be in some way vindicated--as if, all their years (decades) of sitting there accomplishing nothing whatsoever, are in some way justified. Societal re-integration is a long shot for these guys....

There's that whole aphorism: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." I've heard that my whole life, but never quite understood it until I met some of the people here in prison. The Old Schools, or the Cons, are in many cases the exemplification of it! The Old Schools before them, passed on their versions of reality, and now they unwittingly perpetuate, or try to perpetuate it on to the next batch of up-and-coming Old Schools. I, for one, don't plan to join their ranks of confusion. I'd choose death over such an existence. I want to be able to have a productive life when released; but, I have to be ready myself--the prison is of no help. What I would call Sudden Societal Re-immersion, SSR, will shock a prisoner that has been incarcerated for a long period of time. Especially those past the Institutional Tipping Point, ITP: the year (or day) that they pass, marking for them, more time behind bars, than outside of them. Example: I started my incarceration at the age of 27 years, 10 months, and 13 days; I have now been incarcerated for a total of 11 years, 1 month, and 8 days? So, that means my own ITP will be at about

(approximately): July, 2034, give or take a few days; and, I'd prefer to be released from prison before crossing that particular threshold.

The less I spend in prison--the better I'll succeed in society.

Imprisonment, legal or otherwise, is a form of being held hostage, and it is the exemplification of a stressful environment--in the extreme. During the interim between this essay's handwritten first draft, and this version you now read, I have witnessed a multitude of nefarious acts. Bloodbaths akin to something out of a Vietnam War documentary (e.g., a few days back, during feeding, a gang war broke out that left three prisoners dead; and I witnessed them trying to get through all of the locked fences, towards medical--one guy having to literally hold in his guts from where he'd been cut open like a fish, falling, and then being carried by others ... that were dying too.).

The DSM gives, "four principal reactions to stress: problem-focused coping; emotion-focused coping; meaning-focused coping; and decompensation." (Sifers, p.116) (Search these topics individually for further study) Which reaction, or combination of, that we exhibit, depends on our rearing and genetics; but the reaction I see around me, and within myself, is called decompensation.

The most seriously disruptive reaction to stress is decompensation. When the stressor situation is extremely demanding or prolonged--a siege of combat duty or being held captive as a hostage or in a concentration camp, for example--any adaptive capacities of the individual may be overwhelmed. Efficiency is lost, vulnerability to other stressors is increased, disorders develop, and

complete exhaustion makes any self-sustaining effort impossible. Decompensation usually is both biological and psychological. (Sifers, p.116-117)

Prisoners are kept on the verge of starvation, with food being used as a control device--and, unfortunately, suffers first in the priorities of budget cuts when staff paychecks are endangered; with meals reduced to a bare minimum, questionably skirting Federal mandates, and it's given rise to a violent response.

Hunger, physical violence, psychological attacks, sexual repression, and constant dehumanization--forms a breeding ground for deviations and personality disorders: with decompensation at its center, setting the stage for increased risks of recidivism.

ELEMENTS IN SEXUAL SUFFERANCE

I find myself in a dogmatic environment. Most know South Carolina as being part of--if NOT the heart of--the so-called Bible Belt. And coincidentally, it's ranked 47th in education, or somewhere down there at the bottom, where it always seems to be content.

Here in these prisons--it shows.

Around me, most guys have an educational scoring that puts them at (or around) 7th grade! With many having vices that drive their daily actions, no family support, no available jobs within the prison to earn a living, and in most cases--no available classes to take. They merely sit for years, decades even, with no intellectual or vocational advancement. I see a lot of impressionable personalities, in accordance with their life's path, and sadly they fall victim to dogmatic influence.

Influences that aim to turn them into docile sheep.

Followers; not leaders.

And in addition to this more ... submissive mannerism, in accordance to chosen dogma(s), and/or political leanings: feministic influences work in tandem to dominate the behaviors and thoughts of male prisoners. Many acquiring key positions throughout the administration, finding themselves tempted to enforce--and interpret--policies and procedures as they see fit. Some biased; some neutral; some in between.

It's hard enough, dealing with the circumstances and anxieties that come with incarceration--let alone the physical dangers; and effects on health--without the chastening inclinations of prejudiced prison staff (be that bias based as--sexual, age, IQ, or class related; yes, IQ, because, I have encountered some who act and give pejorative remarks towards those that they may perceive to be smarter than they are), imposing castigations that may not exist within reasonable interpretations of laws, policies, and procedures. It's an inexcusable form of bigotry, that has no place in the rehabilitative agenda expected of prisons. Bigotry is:

The disease of ignorance, of morbid minds.

--Thomas Jefferson

Snobbery towards those incarcerated will only serve to impede efforts at rehabilitation, and attacks on sexuality can further convolute a torturous situation. Yet, we're still dehumanized, and our sexual urges (and desires) are forced into repression as staff and guards alike unwittingly propagate a complex system to accomplish this--operant conditioning.

Although, I suspect, that those that created the system, from the start

of it all--say 1996, or so--were aware of what they were building, and what problems they were leaving for the next generation to deal with.

Operant conditioning (also instrumental conditioning) is based on a contingency (causal connection) between a response and the consequence that follows the response.

(Johnson, p.110)

Prisoners are bombarded with punishments for expressing any type of heterosexual interests. There are no conjugal visits, no visits in which a male may properly hug and kiss his wife (or girlfriend). There are no pornographic, or "elicit" materials allowed (not so much as a bikini, tight-clothed, or cleavage exposing photo is allowed). Any acts of masturbation, or a hand in the pants at all (i.e., to scratch, readjust, etc.)--leads to a disciplinary charge, and the prisoner faces the possibility of being put on the sex-offender registry, for life, along with the child-molesters and rapists. This supreme form of suppression, can be damaging to male prisoners, as it creates an unnatural environment, and leads--for some--to feelings of sexual confusion, frustration, and anger; that may come to be expressed in unhealthy ways once the prisoner is released.

Human sexual behavior is motivated by learned and individual factors, in addition to physiological mechanisms....

(Johnson, p.162)

The detrimental sexual affects of incarceration influence those with the least sexual experiences prior to incarceration at a higher scale, with

it being these individuals that have no base of comparison for a healthy sexual lifestyle. While, those with adequate (or mediocre) sexual experience prior to incarceration, undergo a different dilemma: coping with the removal of sexual experience, and having to face a system that punishes any form of gratification--with the enforcement of indefinite repression. The lesser-experienced can sense the unnatural situation, but the experienced can easily identify what is wrong--and, both, are powerless to do anything about it. This leads to pent-up sexual frustration, that can pressurize for decades ... and in some cases become expressed as violent aggression.

A ... recent theory of aggression posits its cause as frustration, failure of one's efforts to reach a goal.... According to frustration-aggression theory, frustration always results in the impulse to aggress, and aggression can always be traced to the experience of frustration. If the target of intended aggression is unavailable or retaliatory, or may displace aggression by harming an object or person other than the original target. In a revision of the original theory, frustration is theorized to lead not directly to aggression but to anger, a readiness to behave aggressively. (Johnson, p.164)

Whatever a prisoner's sexual orientation, incarceration contradicts the inborn genetic programming with its unnatural, nonsexual environment. This prison-fostered frustration, sets the building blocks for unhealthy sexual expressions and activities. Various fetishes and/or deviations arise that otherwise may not have existed in the individual under any other

circumstances, because the prisons (whether intentionally or not) can rewrite a prisoner's worldview, including sexual preferences, and modes of expressing those particular ... inclinations.

A common psychological characteristic shared by people who develop exhibitionism, voyeurism, pedophilia, and frotteurism is social isolation, low self-esteem, and particularly feelings of sexual inadequacy. (Sifers, p.227)

Total societal isolation is counterproductive to the rehabilitational efforts tasked to prisons, producing ex-convicts that are ill equipped to function within any society. They are removed from a societal era in which they were apparently maladjusted in as it was--held in total isolation--and then thrust back into that society's evolved future rendition.

Sexual feelings are typically not enacted raw. Rather, in every society, they are filtered through learned cultural guidelines that shape desire, arousal, fantasies, and our most intimate interpersonal behavior. As a result, we each carry a set of "sexual scripts" that more or less dictate what we allow ourselves to do, and what those behaviors mean. Because they are heavily cultural, sexual scripts change over time, and, along with them, behavior in the bedroom. (Rutter, p.86)

With each new year, old ways of the past, many dogmatically influenced ideologies, make new twists and turns within our increasingly scientifically

literate culture. But, here in prison, many things are dangerously frozen in place. The "sexual scripts" of prisoners are not evolving healthily, and in tandem with the free-world; instead, prisoners find themselves facing dark turns in accordance to the sexual sufferance imposed by societal isolation *in extremis*. And without proper acknowledgment (and adjustment) of prison policies and procedures--we're facing disaster. We cannot expect ALL rules, policies, and procedures (birthed in the 1980s, '90s, or even the 2000s), to hold moral ground indefinitely, many without ground to start with ... born from political (or monetary) agendas.

What's inside the fences must evolve accordingly with what's outside, if those locked within are ever expected to successfully reintegrate. There will always be a barrier, but it can--and should--be lessened (within bounds of safety), easing transition into, and out of, prison. The "kinds of behavior that work in a specialized environment, such as a prison, can fail to work and in fact become harmful when used outside such an environment." (Gaimen, p.14) Each special environment--or total institution or prison--has the opportunity to revamp itself in ways that can require less extreme "kinds of behavior" for prisoners to survive; thus, reducing the harmful habits that follow ex-convicts as they reintegrate into society.