

Prison culture

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Prison Culture Prison Culture This essay will discuss the inmate subculture and how it is developed, the norms and values, social structure and the prison argot that exists in prisons. Inmate subculture Inmate subculture is defined by criminologists as “ the informal organization among inmates comprising of a peculiar language and a distinctive set of informal norms, attitudes, beliefs, values, statuses, and roles that give prisoners a different perspective from people on the outside (or as prisoners say, those of us in the freeworld)” (Net Industries, n. d.). The inmate subculture shows the lives of inmates but it varies from one prison institution to another (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). Being deviants in society, the inmate subculture is often not in accordance with the values of society and is opposed to institutional rules. What may be regarded as deviant behavior and unacceptable in the free world is encouraged and rewarded inside prison walls (Clemmer, 1940) There are two theories that explain the formation of an inmate subculture (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). The first is the deprivation theory which states that the inmate culture is formed in response to the deprivations in prison life. The deprivations experienced by inmates are those of deprivation of liberty, autonomy and security, deprivation from the use of goods and services, and deprivation of heterosexual relationships (Sykes, 1958). The other theory is the importation theory which maintains that the inmates bring with them their subculture from the outside world. There are different types of inmate subculture as discussed by Irwin and Cressey (1962). The first type is the thief subculture where the norms and values adapted by the inmates are those that exist in the criminal world. The second type is the convict subculture where the inmates adhere to the prison code which is mostly based on the deprivations of the inmates. The other type of the

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inmate subculture is the straight subculture which is characterized by the one-time offenders. These are the inmates who are likely to be rehabilitated and they stick to the rules of the institution; thus, posing less threat to the prison system. Norms and values The norms and values in prison society are dictated by the prison code which is prevalent in the male inmate subculture. The prison code is the set of norms on how inmates should behave (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). Schmallegger and Smykla further state that the main aspects of the prison code are counter to the policies of the prison institution and it centers on the concept of loyalty to the inmate society, control of anger, toughness, and distrust of prison officials. They go on further to give examples of the prison code such as 1) don't interfere with the interests of other inmates; 2) don't lose your head; 3) don't exploit other inmates; 4) don't whine; and 5) don't be a sucker. Social structure The social structure in men's prison differs from those of the women's prison. The two distinguishing features between the men's and women's prison is that in women's prison homosexual relationships is a means of adapting to prison life (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). Moreover, usually the manner of adaptation of the female inmate is based on her experiences prior to incarceration. There are fewer roles defined in the women's prison as compared to the men's prison. Women roles include the cool inmate, the square inmate and the life inmate (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). In the men's prison, the social roles are sometimes imposed on the inmates and are often reflections of their social accommodation inside the prison. There is a hierarchy being followed in the men's prison which is mirrored in their roles which include the real man, the mean dude, the bully, the agitator, the hedonist, the opportunist, the retreatist, the legalist, the radical, the colonist,

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the religious inmate and the punk (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). Prison argot Language is a part of any organization's culture. Even in the prison society, a unique language is developed among inmates called " argot". This argot was developed by inmates to communicate with each other in privately and has contributed in reinforcing inmate identity (Wittenberg, 1996).

Wittenberg cites Cardozo-Freeman (1984) stating that this special language marked by coded communication was important for self-preservation and protected the privacy of prisoners especially during intense surveillance (1996). Prison argot is a symbol of a prison community (Sykes, 1958). Prison argot uses words that describe the individualities of prisoners as " inmates, convicts, outlaws, or outcasts from society" (Wittenberg, 1996). " Examples of prison argot are " fish" (a new inmate), " cellie" (cellmate), and " homeboy" (a prisoner from one's hometown)" (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2009). In conclusion, one can say that prison culture like any other culture is unique in itself. The norms, values and language in the prison society vary according to the individual characteristics of the inmates. An understanding of this culture is imperative so that government can find ways to educate and rehabilitate prisoners and make them adhere to the policies of the institution while incarcerated. Works Cited Clemmer, D. (1940). *The Prison Community*. Boston: The Christopher Publishing House. Irwin, J., & Cressey, D. (1962). Thieves, convicts and the inmate subculture. *Social Problems* , 54, 590-603. Net Industries. (n. d.). *Prisons: Prisoners - inmate subcultures and informal organizations*. Retrieved October 3, 2011, from law. jrank. org Web site: <http://law.jrank.org/pages/1796/Prisons-Prisoners-Inmate-subcultures-informal-organizations.html> (2009). Chapter 10 - The inmate world: Living behind bars. In F. Schmallegger, & J. O. Smykla, *Correction in the 21st* <https://assignbuster.com/prison-culture/>

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