

Inmate Public Autoerotism Uncovered: Exploring the Dynamics of Masturbatory Behavior Within Correctional Facilities

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In correctional settings, some offenders engage in a specific type of sex offense, namely *public autoerotism*, an aggressive form of masturbatory behavior designed to harass, antagonize, or unsettle employees. This article examines interview data with male inmates who admitted to intentionally exposing themselves to female correctional employees. Using a subcultural sociological framework, specifically Sykes and Matza's (1957) "techniques of neutralization," we explain why some inmates persist in public autoerotism, despite the presence of institutional rules that prohibit this type of behavior. We discuss the implications of this research for the contemporary development and theoretical significance of neutralization theory. Also, suggestions are provided as to how correctional administrators can reduce or eliminate this form of deviant behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the presence of institutional rules that forbid prisoners from engaging in acts that are overtly sexual, inmates are seldom deterred from finding a means to express themselves sexually. This is consistent with a classic study of inmate sexual behavior, in which sexologists John Money and Carol Bohmer (1980) argue that correctional officials are incapable of preventing prisoners from being consumed with sex and masturbation. In repressive, ultra-masculine environments, such as prisons, it should come as little surprise that inmates also engage in voluntary

Received 8 August 2011; accepted 15 December 2011.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance, support, and wonderful hospitality of countless Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) employees in Human Resources and Internal Affairs for making this research possible. The authors also acknowledge the valuable input of staff on local prison units. Finally, we deeply appreciate all the staff in Executive Services for facilitating this research project in countless ways from beginning to end. The TDCJ furnished the database for the activity described in this article. This does not imply the Department's endorsement or concurrence with statements or conclusions contained therein.

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risk-taking for the sensory experience of pleasure. Examples of high-risk pursuits that inmates partake in have been well-documented and include engaging in sexual activities with other inmates (Blackburn et al. 2011; Fleisher and Krienert 2009) or staff members (Marquart et al. 2001; Worley and Cheeseman 2006; Worley et al. 2010), joining prison gangs (DeLisi et al. 2004; Winterdyk and Ruddell, 2010), assaulting prisoners or staff (Franklin et al. 2006; Lahm 2008), and receiving tattoos from unsterile needles (Bonnycastle 2011; Krebs 2006).

While several studies have examined prisoner misconduct (Camp et al. 2003; French and Gendreau 2006; Steiner and Wooldredge 2009), very little literature examines rule infractions of a sexual nature from the inmate perspective. This article provides a micro-level analysis of *inmate public autoerotism*, an offense where prisoners expose their genitalia in a sexually provocative manner or masturbate in the presence of staff or inmates. Using Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization theory, we shall explain how some actors are able to engage in acts of inmate public autoerotism with little remorse or shame. This theoretical perspective will be employed to illustrate the various ways that inmate masturbators lessen controls imposed by both the prison agency and larger society in order to engage in this deviant form of behavior. As this article will illustrate, female staff members often tend to fall prey to this form of sexual abuse. When male security officers, who may already view female staff with contempt or suspicion, blame the victims or characterize them as either "asking for it," this problem is compounded (Beckford v. Department of Corrections 2010; Smith 2005; Willmott 1997).

MASTURBATION FROM BEHIND THE PRISON WALLS

Most prisoners within the United States are deprived of legitimate opportunities of sexual gratification by virtue of their incarceration. These actors experience what Sykes (1958:70) refers to as the "pains of imprisonment," in that they are "figuratively castrated by [their] involuntary celibacy." Not surprisingly, prisoners seek relief by way of alternative outlets, and autoerotism is often seen as a viable solution to this dilemma. While only a few studies have investigated autoeroticism in prison, virtually every account suggests that this activity is generally accepted by the inmate population. In one of the earliest analyses, a male inmate frankly described masturbation to researchers in the following manner:

A lot of kidding, serious joking, and innuendo is bantered back and forth in prison about masturbation. I quite frankly tell my cellmates not to be disturbed if the bed shakes at night. Now that my present cellmate knows at night when I freely masturbate, the bed above also starts shaking. (Money and Bohmer 1980:261)

In an additional study, Wooden and Parker (1982) collected 200 surveys from male inmates in a California correctional facility. The researchers found that every inmate in the sample reported masturbating while incarcerated, with 14% masturbating daily, 46% masturbating three to five instances per week, 30% masturbating one to two times weekly, 5.5% masturbating one to three times per month, and 4% reported masturbating less than once a month. Other prison sex researchers have uncovered similar high rates of masturbation in male facilities. For example, Hensley et al. (2001b) found that 99.3% of a sample of 142 prisoners had masturbated during

their incarceration. The researchers also discovered that an inmate's level of education proved to be an important variable in predicting masturbatory behavior.

Inmates with some college or more [were] more likely to be frequent masturbators than inmates with a high school education or less. In other words, more educated inmates were more likely to be frequent masturbators than less educated inmates while in prison. (Hensley et al. 2001b:68)

Although classic accounts of sexuality within female prisons tend to focus on the establishment of pseudo-families within the prison subculture (Ward and Kassebaum 1965; Giallombardo 1966; Heffernan 1972), there is at least one study that examines autoerotism in female penitentiaries. Hensley et al. (2001a) found that 66.5% of female inmates housed within a Southern correctional facility admitted to masturbating during their incarceration. In this same study, female inmates who engaged in homosexual behaviors were also more likely than other respondents to admit to masturbating while in prison. Also, Protestant inmates were less likely to masturbate than prisoners who were non-Protestants (Hensley et al. 2001a). Finally, inmates with longer sentences were statistically more likely to masturbate than those with shorter sentences. It is possible that the "pains of imprisonment" described by Sykes (1958) were more likely to be felt by respondents in the former group.

PUBLIC AUTOEROTISM

In a recent self-report study, administered across four male prisons in Texas ($N = 367$), Dial and Worley (2008) found that inmate boundary violators who successfully established inappropriate relationships with correctional employees were more likely than other prisoners to masturbate in the presence of female staff. Inappropriate relationships have been defined as:

personal relationships between employees and inmates/clients or with family members of inmates/clients. This behavior is usually sexual or economic in nature and has the potential to jeopardize the security of a prison institution or compromise the integrity of a correctional employee. (Worley et al. 2003:179)

Dial and Worley (2008) contend that it is highly likely inmate boundary violators use masturbation as a strategy to ascertain whether or not a staff member is open to having an inappropriate relationship. If an employee ignores this behavior, the inmate may perceive this as a green light and attempt to establish a relationship. On the other hand, if a staff member does not condone acts of public autoerotism, the inmate will often try to retreat and may pretend that the behavior was an "accident."

Most correctional facilities have rules proscribing public autoerotism; however, this behavior may still be an unfortunate aspect of prison life. Recently, a federal appellate court ruled that officials in the Florida Department of Corrections failed to remedy a hostile work environment created by maximum-security male inmates who masturbated in the presence of fourteen female employees over a three-year period (*Beckford v. Department of Corrections* 2010). In the *Beckford* case, inmates repeatedly indulged in sexually offensive conduct toward the plaintiff, twelve other female healthcare workers, and a female classification employee.

In the above case, inmates engaged in *gunning*, a practice where they would begin openly masturbating in the presence of female employees. The inmates instructed one another to “lock and load” whenever female staff approached the dorms. They would then stand on their toilets or rolled up mattresses to ensure that victims could see the gunning through the cell windows. The inmates would end the show by ejaculating through the food slot on their cell doors or on the windows of their cells. Female employees were made to endure this, and some of these staff members resorted to wearing sunglasses and headphones to avoid eye contact and verbal harassment while they were making rounds. According to court records, prisoners would also simulate medical emergencies in order to have female nurses respond. As one former nurse testified, “99.9 percent of the time, the emergencies were bogus. It was just for me to get down there for [the inmates] to have their entertainment for the evening” (Beckford v. Department of Corrections 2010:954).

While casual observers may believe that the facts of the above case are highly irregular, we contend that inmate public autoeroticism is not an unusual occurrence. It is a phenomenon that is especially likely to victimize female employees. In spite of this, there has yet to be a definitive study that addresses why some offenders persist in engaging in this deviant form of sexual abuse. This may be partially due to the fact that there is often a stigma attached to prison sex research, which has historically been discouraged by prison administrators, as well as the academic community (Hensley et al. 2001; Tewksbury and Koscheski 2001; Tewksbury and Mustaine 2001). Also, in the wake of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA), prison sex researchers may be primarily concerned with investigating inmate-on-inmate sexual assaults, as well as other types of presumed coerced sexual behaviors. Nevertheless, inmate public autoeroticism is an important issue and warrants further investigation.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In prison settings, there are norms and formal rules designed to discourage inmates from engaging in acts of indecent exposure and sexual misconduct. Still, some inmates engage in public autoeroticism, despite the fact that it can result in disciplinary sanctions, such as solitary confinement and the loss of privileges or “good-time” credits.

Sykes and Matza’s (1957) neutralization theory provides insights into why male inmates engage in this high-risk endeavor. Neutralization theory, known for its versatility, has been used in order to explain behaviors, such as, shoplifting (Cromwell and Thurman 2003), white-collar crime (Kieffer and Sloan III 2009; Piquero et al. 2005), digital piracy (Morris and Higgins 2009), deer poaching (Eliason and Dodder 2001), topless dancing (Thompson et al. 2003), pedophilia (DeYoung 1989; Durkin and Bryant 2001), sex trafficking (Antonopoulos and Winterdyk 2005), and even murder (Levi 1981).

According to Sykes and Matza (1957), there are five justifications that comprise neutralization theory. When applied successfully, these techniques allow actors to engage in unconventional behaviors with a minimal amount of guilt. The five neutralization techniques are: the denial of injury; condemnation of the condemners; denial of responsibility; denial of the victim; and appeal to higher loyalties. The denial of injury is a technique where an actor refuses to acknowledge that his misdeed has consequences that negatively affect other people. By denying that an injury takes place, an actor is able to reduce or eliminate any feelings of wrong-doing.

The condemnation of condemners is a neutralization strategy where the actor believes that authority figures are either corrupt or responsible for their own victimization. In essence an actor asserts that his behavior is no worse than the behavior of those who sit in judgment of him. Denial of responsibility, the third technique, occurs when an actor asserts that he was compelled to engage in unconventional behavior due to forces beyond his control.

According to Sykes and Matza (1957), the denial of the victim is a neutralization strategy where an actor asserts that it is acceptable to victimize certain types of people. The actor who employs this technique of neutralization believes his behavior is justified because he is taking action against a wrongdoer. Finally, the fifth neutralization technique is the appeal to higher loyalties. This refers to when an actor justifies an unconventional act out of a sense of obligation for other people. In essence, he is sacrificing the demands of larger society out of loyalty for a smaller group.

The above neutralization techniques are often informal and peripheral to the inmate subculture and are seldom (if ever) recognized as legitimate by prison administrators or employees. Nevertheless, the prisoner subculture is often capable of providing inmates with a set of rationalizations, which allow actors to engage in a variety of inappropriate acts, such as exposing themselves and masturbating in the presence of correctional employees, most of who are female. This article uses Sykes and Matza's theory (1957) as a framework to examine why some prisoners engage in public autoerotism.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected by the first author as part of a larger project on staff–inmate boundary violations within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). During the interviews, fifteen male inmate boundary violators candidly discussed how they had masturbated in the presence of female correctional employees.

This project went through human subjects reviews by Sam Houston State University and TDCJ. Both review boards had an inmate advocate, which according to Maxfield and Babbie (2011), is a federal guideline.

THE SAMPLE

All inmates in this sample had been investigated for having an inappropriate relationship with a prison staff member during a four-year period (1995–1998). Of 225 inmates still incarcerated within TDCJ at the time of data collection, 82 (36%) respondents affirmatively replied to a written invitation to take part in the study. Due to scheduling and budget limitations, 32 offenders who resided at prison facilities within a 100-mile radius of Huntsville, Texas were interviewed. During the interviews, fifteen of these inmates admitted to having masturbated, at least once, in the presence of a female correctional employee. Dial and Worley's (2008) data showing that inmate boundary violators are statistically more likely to masturbate in the presence of female staff than non-boundary violators support our finding that nearly half of the original sample admitted to engaging in this behavior. Of these respondents, 7 were African American, 5 were Caucasian, and 3 were Hispanic. The interviews were conducted at various prison facilities in Southeast, Texas and averaged 30–45 minutes, with many lasting up to 90 minutes.

FINDINGS

A review of the completed interviews indicates that male inmates who masturbate in the presence of female correctional staff employ neutralization techniques identified by Sykes and Matza (1957). In this study, all fifteen respondents employed at least one of the above neutralization techniques, with seven inmates offering more than one rationalization for the same behavior. Although much of what is described below may be known to those working in the correctional facilities, until now such information has yet to be disseminated to a wider audience in a scientific manner. The following section provides accounts of inmate public autoerotism from prisoners who engaged in this activity during the course of their incarceration.

Denial of Injury

In this study, one of the most common ways that inmate masturbators justified their behavior was by denying that an injury actually took place. During the interviews, several inmate respondents reported that female staff members were not harmed because they actually enjoyed witnessing this behavior. For example, one male offender, who claimed to have married a former female correctional officer following her termination from the agency, made the following statement: "Before I married my wife, I used to jack off for her and do a little show whenever she walked her runs. She used to love it too."

It was also not uncommon for some inmates to suggest that women who work in prisons pursue corrections as a career merely as a way to be around male inmates. One respondent spoke specifically about female healthcare employees, when he stated: "Why would a nurse want to work in a penitentiary when she could get a job anywhere? The answer is simple; she wants to be around men. This is one of the main reasons why they come here."

A similar perspective was offered by another inmate who insisted that females in both security and non-security positions enjoyed watching male prisoners masturbate: "Women guards work here, so they can look at a bunch of dicks. That's one of the main reasons why they come here. That and the fact that they can't get welfare."

The above respondents' statements reflect Sykes and Matza's (1957) notion that an actor is able to reduce or eliminate feelings of guilt or wrong-doing by denying that an injury even occurred. This finding is consistent with other accounts of sexual offending, where assailants have justified their behavior by claiming that the victim consented or "wanted it" (Delong et al. 2010; Pollock and Hashmall 1991; Scully and Marolla 1984; Vandiver et al. 2008).

Denial of the Victim

Based on the inmate interviews, we contend another way inmates who engage in public autoerotism rationalize this behavior is by denying the rights of the victim. Sykes and Matza (1957) contend that this occurs whenever an actor justifies illegal behaviors by believing that a victim simply deserves to be punished. In one of the interviews, a respondent stated that he was disciplined for having a sexual relationship with a female staff member in a prison maintenance room. According to this inmate, while the female employee was transferred and permitted to keep her job, he lost over 300 days of "good-time" [time subtracted from a sentence for good

behavior or other reasons]. Given the punishment disparity and the exorbitant amount of “good-time” lost, the inmate decided to engage in a unique form of psychological warfare on all female employees. He said:

Now, I don’t give a shit! I’m discharging, so I jack off all the time on all the females that work here. I did it to a female captain [supervisor of correctional officers] the other day, and she didn’t do a thing. I was a model inmate for seven years. I was a trustee and had been on four furloughs. Now, I’m a seg-inmate and haven’t been in general population in 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years.

Another respondent described how he masturbated in order to retaliate against a specific female officer. For example:

I had this one boss lady who used to chew me out all the time for no good reason. I didn’t forget about this. I waited until she was working my cellblock. Then when she was doing her last count, I pulled out my junk and went to town [masturbated]. She was so shook up. The best part is I didn’t even catch a case. I had to stand in the hallway in my boxers for a while, but that was it. It was worth it!

After being disciplined, both of the above respondents began to view all female employees as captors who were depriving them of freedom. These “rebels with a cause” or “ballbusters” in Sykes’ (1958) terminology, made it their personal mission to create havoc and trouble for female employees. Both inmates stated emphatically that women did not belong in the prison system and subsequently used masturbation as a weapon to victimize female correctional employees. Four additional inmates articulated a similar sentiment and justified masturbating in the presence of female staff members by suggesting that females had no business in the penitentiary and therefore got what they deserved.

Condemning the Condemners

In the present study, it was not uncommon for inmates to cast blame on prison employees and correctional administrators. They shifted the focus from themselves to those who disapproved of their acts. Many of these respondents viewed the entire prison system as corrupt and argued that staff members working within this system do not have the moral authority to impose judgment, when they themselves are likely to be “crooked” or “dirty.” For example, one inmate, who admitted to masturbating in the presence of female staff members, attempted to justify his behavior in the following way:

Some of the people that work here are in free-world gangs. These folks don’t give a damn and know it’s only a matter of time before they quit or get fired anyway. There are even some boss ladies that come to work here just to sell pussy. I was at one unit where for \$100 a convict could “take care of his business” [have sexual relations] with this one boss lady.

We contend the above respondent was bitter on account of the fact that he perceived many of the correctional employees who were supervising him were most likely engaging in deviant behavior themselves. In his mind, he could behave as he wanted, since he viewed many of his captors

as immoral and hypocritical. Another inmate described how he masturbated in the presence of a female employee who he perceived to be sexually promiscuous.

She was a big girl, but she was a freak! She told me she kept a journal of all the guys she slept with in the free world. I asked her if any inmates' names were in that journal, and she said "maybe." One day I asked her straight up if she wanted to watch me masturbate, and she said, "only if you cum in my mouth." I said, "hell yeah!" She even gave me her panties!

Throughout this study, several inmates condemned certain aspects of the prison system and its employees. Respondents described staff members using terms, such as, "lazy," "young," and "stupid." One offender even stated, "We got some bosses here that belong in a psych unit." Respondents dissociated from their inappropriate acts of public autoerotism by focusing on the real or imagined deviant acts or attributes of correctional employees. By condemning their condemners, inmates in this study engaged in sexual offenses with no feelings of remorse or shame.

Denial of Responsibility

Another frequently used technique of neutralization among inmate masturbators in the present study was the denial of responsibility. This occurred whenever an inmate maintained that he was not at fault, since the deviant act in question was either an accident or misunderstanding. For example: "I was in my cell touching myself, and all of a sudden some big ole nurse creeps up on me. I didn't mean for her to see me. I begged her not to write me a case, but she didn't want to hear it."

Another inmate told a similar story when he stated:

I've jacked off on a lot of female boss ladies. But, the one time I got a ticket [disciplinary write-up] for it, I was actually innocent. I had just woken up, and my piece was hard [erection]. I only wanted to take a piss, but the boss lady thought I was playing with my thang. She wrote me up, and the case stuck.

Respondents who used this technique often deflected the blame onto the prison system, which deprived them of privacy and legitimate opportunities to have normal sexual relations. Several inmates in this study complained that the prison afforded them with very little space to sleep, work, and live. In fact, this was often presented as an excuse as to why they were caught masturbating. Respondents portrayed themselves as being merely products of their environment. Using the language of Sykes and Matza (1957), they viewed themselves as "billiard balls" influenced by forces beyond their control.

Appeal to Higher Loyalties

The appeal to higher loyalties rationalization was identified by three respondents who suggested that the norms and mores of conventional society were disregarded in favor of an inmate subculture. When inmates engaged in acts of public autoerotism, it was apparent that they did

not view their female victims as daughters, wives, or mothers. Instead, respondents adhered to an inmate code, which discouraged them from having supportive or friendly relations with correctional employees. One respondent even suggested that inmates use the act of masturbation to gauge whether an employee is “weak” or “down for other things,” like “having sex” or “bringing in cigarettes.” Another interviewee supported this statement, when he said: “If a female is walking her runs and she lets an inmate jack-off on her, then I guarantee you she’s gonna be fucking somebody [an inmate] within six weeks.”

Finally, one respondent maintained that it is “almost guaranteed” that new female employees will be tested by inmate masturbators during their first few weeks on the job. If this behavior goes unchecked, it is likely to escalate. The inmate subculture, which confers high status on prisoners who oppose the administration (Irwin and Cressey 1962; Bronson 2006; Jacobs 1977; Ohlin 1956; Sykes 1958; Trammell 2008), encourages offenders to flagrantly violate prison rules by masturbating in the presence of female employees. Respondents suggested that inmates watch closely to see how staff members, especially females, react to this deliberate rule infraction. One interviewee even suggested that while some inmates may appear to be outraged by such behavior, this may merely be an attempt for them to gain rapport and win trust with female victims. This same respondent also suggested it is likely that many offenders revel in hearing tales of inmate public autoerotism and are specifically curious as to which female employees permit this type of behavior. In this respect, inmates who defer to an inmate code are appealing to “appealing to higher loyalties.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While this research presents insights into why some inmates masturbate in the presence of correctional employees, it also has important implications for the contemporary development and theoretical significance of Sykes and Matza’s (1957) framework. The present study provides one of the first attempts to apply neutralization theory in order to understand the behaviors of incarcerated persons. This is significant because inmates, unlike most other would-be offenders, must employ rationalizations and justifications in order to overcome *two* dominant normative systems, rather than only one. These actors must utilize neutralization techniques to subvert the norms imposed by not only the prison administration but also larger society, or what prisoners refer to as “the free world.” In essence, inmates must neutralize two sets of controls, if they are to engage in acts of public autoerotism.

Some scholars may argue that inmates do not recognize the dominant normative systems imposed by both the prison agency and outside world. We contend, however, that this is not the case. First, it is apparent that the vast majority of inmates acknowledge and accept the authority of their captors, albeit somewhat reluctantly. Sykes (1958) recognized this in his classic study and describes in detail how correctional officials go to great lengths to formally indoctrinate inmates into a bureaucratic system from the moment they enter the prison facility. Today, persons in *total institutions* are still given numbers and are made to comply with a massive body of rules and regulations (Goffman 1961). They are periodically searched, counted and recounted, and virtually stripped of their identities (Irwin 2005). Additionally, most inmates learn fairly quickly that there are incentives for following the rules and are often coopted with promises of good-time credits, vocational and educational programs, and commissary and television

privileges, among other *creature comforts*. Even the Stanford Prison Experiment illustrates that actors in controlled environments tend to conform with the norms and expectations imposed by their captors (Haney et al. 1973; Zimbardo, 2007). We maintain that inmate masturbators lessen the powerful controls of the prison administration by employing techniques of neutralization.

Even though inmates are incarcerated, they are much less isolated from society today than they were when Sykes (1958) published *Society of Captives*. Most inmates have virtually unlimited access to the court system, as well as popular culture. Additionally, face-to-face visits, telephone calls, and correspondence with friends and loved ones are likely to keep prisoners vested in the outside world. Ninety-three percent of all inmates will be eventually released, and most institutions have programs designed to reintegrate inmates back into society (Cole and Smith 2010). Given this, we contend that prisoners do not overtly reject the norms of the larger conventional culture. In spite of their imprisonment, these actors are influenced by norms which govern society as a whole. Outside of the prison environment, many incarcerated persons are also fathers, brothers, or husbands; these are roles which often require one to act as a nurturer or protector (Clear 2007; Murray 2005). Still, despite the presence of prosocial, societal norms, which are capable of penetrating the prison walls, some inmates neutralize these controls to engage in what would undoubtedly be considered a sex offense outside of a correctional environment. Since actors who engage in this behavior must employ rationalizations and justifications to overcome two, rather than one normative system, we contend that these neutralizations are likely to be especially strong. In fact, similar neutralization studies can be conducted in order to examine situations where individuals justify their indiscretions in other situations involving two normative “worlds.” For example, researchers could explore deviant Internet actions that are governed by both virtual and real world norms. In such instances, persons may utilize neutralization techniques to justify infractions committed in either or both realms. This is a new development that furthers Sykes and Matza’s (1957) theory and is worthy of more research and consideration.

This article provides one of the first scientific documentations of inmate public autoerotism. There was a high level of consistency in response patterns among the interviewees, and the subjects appeared to be forthcoming. For example, their facial expressions, nonverbal gestures, and responses did not indicate any degree of deception. Also, in some cases, we cross referenced inmate responses with agency records in order to assess the accuracy of the data. Given this, we are confident that this study has a high degree of validity and reliability (Maxfield and Babbie 2011). Also, while a modest-sized, non-random sample was employed, these caveats do not necessarily invalidate the results of this research. In exploratory studies, such as this, it is not uncommon for researchers to make inductive observations by interacting with only a limited number of respondents. In fact, when examining topics which are particularly sensitive in nature, this may be the only viable research strategy (Maxfield and Babbie 2011; Tewksbury, 2009).

Recently, researchers have conducted interviews with similarly sized convenience samples to examine phenomena ranging from female-perpetuated childhood abuse (Deering and Mellor 2011) to drug dealer retaliation (Jacques 2010) to needle and syringe cleaning among intravenous drug users (Nathani et al. 2010). While a small sample size may limit a study’s generalizability, this approach nevertheless permits researchers to develop “sensitizing concepts,” which reflects Max Weber’s (1949) concept of “*verstehen*,” or as Tewksbury (2009:54) suggests, facilitates “understandings of experiences, perceptions, and processes, in context and

from the perspective of those being studied.” Nevertheless, it would still be beneficial to conduct similar investigations, particularly those of a quantitative nature with larger samples. It would also be worthwhile to interview correctional employees, especially those who have been victims of inmate public autoerotism, in order to examine this phenomenon from the staff point-of-view. Finally, it is unclear as to whether or not neutralizations occur before or after an act of inmate public autoerotism; therefore, further research is needed in this area.

While this study has limitations, we feel comfortable making recommendations, which will likely prevent acts of inmate public autoerotism in correctional facilities. First, under no circumstances should victims of this behavior be blamed or made to feel as though they are somehow responsible for their victimization. If coworkers persist in taunting victims of inmate public autoerotism, this constitutes a form of harassment and must be reported to upper management. We contend that the victim does not need to be the one who reports this behavior. Also, in cases where a staff member fears retaliation, he or she should be permitted to provide a written complaint to unit wardens or other upper-echelon administrators. In short, a culture of zero tolerance must be established. Coworkers must learn to avoid making insensitive comments and instead show support and empathy for one another. It is particularly important that male staff members take the lead in this effort, as inmates might look to these individuals for subtle hints as to what types of behaviors are acceptable, regardless of the official rules.

Based on the inmate interviews, we also believe that prison administrators must make good faith efforts in order to prevent inmates from masturbating in the presence of staff members. Taking deliberate action to change certain aspects of the institutional culture will go a long way toward ending the cycle of abuse. Extra efforts could also be made to accommodate non-security employees. For example, one step in the right direction might be for penal executives to institute policies which require correctional officers to escort non-security employees as they make their rounds throughout the prison. This would be highly likely to deter inmates from engaging in acts of public autoerotism.

In addition to the above suggestions, inmates who are caught engaging in acts of public autoerotism must be taught to empathize with their victims. At the same time, these individuals should not be made to feel shamed or embarrassed, as some research in the sex offender field suggests that feelings of shame may paradoxically increase sexually acting out (Marshall et al. 2009; Vandiver et al. 2008). Nevertheless, these offenders must be made to understand that their actions constitute a form of sexual abuse. Besides applying standard punishments, such as the withholding of privileges, it would be most beneficial to require these offenders to take sensitivity courses from within the prison. While it is likely that inmate public autoerotism is a behavior that will continue to persist in prisons, we are hopeful this study has shed light on an important issue, which is rarely discussed or even acknowledged by prison officials.

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