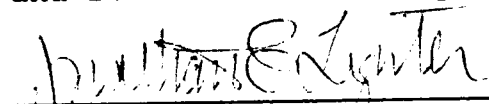


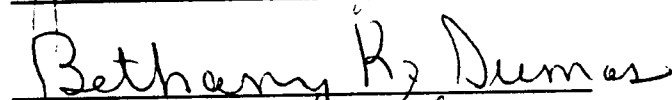
To the Graduate Council:

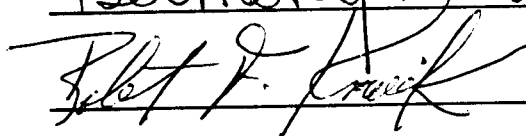
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Walton Thomas Beckner entitled: "Pulling Time in Appalachia: A Comparative Study of Prison Argot." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Dr. Thomas J. Heffernan, Major Professor

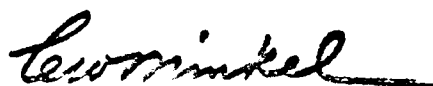
We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

PULLING TIME IN APPALACHIA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRISON ARGOT

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Walton Thomas Beckner

August, 1994

Copyright 1994 by Walton Thomas Beckner
All rights reserved

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife

Beverly Beckner

Not only were her transcription and proofing skills

crucial to this project,

but her continual words of encouragement

kept me moving towards its completion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my committee chairman, Dr. Thomas J. Heffernan. His initial enthusiasm for this project, his unfailing support of me throughout the research and writing processes, and his scholarly analyses have served to undergird all that is presented here. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Bethany K. Dumas, Dr. Robert Kronick and Dr. J.E. Lighter, each with diverse intellectual gifts which they freely shared and which helped shape this work. I am appreciative, too, of the Committee on Research Participation of the University of Tennessee who believed in the merits of the research design and allowed me to proceed with only minor adjustments to it. Like most doctoral students, I owe a special debt to a skilled reference librarian; in this case her name is Marie Garrett. In addition, the staff of the Interlibrary Loan Department of the John C. Hodges Library, the University of Tennessee were tremendously helpful. Thanks, too, to Dr. Elizabeth Smith of Milligan College who shared her knowledge of controlled substances. The Research divisions of the Departments of Corrections in each state permitted this research under essentially the conditions I proposed; to them I am indebted. At each prison I visited, there were staff liaison people who made the interviews run smoothly; thanks to Cpl. Andy Bolin, Mr. Dan Hittepole,

Warden Howard Carlton, John Massey, Chaplain Leonard Payne, Chaplain Frank Shirley, Chaplain David Tucker. Finally, my sincere thanks to the incarcerated men who gave so freely of their time and were so willing to trust a stranger to their turf with some of the intimacies of their institutional lives.

I am indebted to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Faculty Scholars program for a fellowship which allowed me a release from teaching duties during the 1992-93 academic year. It was during this period that much of the preliminary research for this dissertation was completed.

ABSTRACT

This study accepts the notion that the isolated environment of the American prison is a powerful conditioner of language and examines how extended incarceration shapes the argot of its user, thus reflecting the shared cultural perceptions and values of prisoners. Specifically, it reports on data gathered in a four state Appalachian region--Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

Using an interview guide designed by the author to evoke argot surrounding prison cultural concerns, the author interviewed twenty-six inmates who had served protracted sentences in prisons within their respective states. From 950 pages of transcripts covering 35 hours of taped interviews, an argot lexicon of 1216 items is presented, with each term coded as to the state where it was heard.

Next, an analysis based on quantitative principles identifies the semantic fields in which the terms are grouped and suggests how concentrations of terms within those fields reflect central characteristics of prison life as well as individual perceptions of the argot user. Central to the analysis is a principle posited by the author for interpreting group cultural expressions: the greater the percentage of total argot terms appearing in any semantic field, the more important are the experiences, perceptions

and values expressed by that field in the life of the group. These interpretive principles are applied to several recognizable clusters of terms appearing in the lexicon: Explanations are also offered for the absence of large numbers of terms within certain semantic fields.

A quantitative approach is also used to demonstrate that significant concordance exists between the argot of the four states investigated. Concerned with functional correspondence rather than precise linguistic duplication, the study defines conceptual linkages--labeled as "associatives"--and discusses the presence of unique terms confined to a single state--called "isolates." The study identifies a bi-directional process at work in the development of argot within the areas which dominate the conceptual frame of the user: functional synonyms increase, but so does the development of unique terms within an individual location.

The consistency of argot development within the four states argues for the existence of a regionalized prison argot.

PREFACE

For several years prior to teaching at the college level, the author of this study worked with prisoners in a statewide correctional system. It was here that he first heard some of those unique and wonderfully creative expressions which men who are "pulling time" use to describe the tightly restricted world they inhabit. It was here, too, that he first began to question the nature of the relationship between language and behavior and to wonder how the words of those prisoners worked to help shape, define, and determine their behavior. The investigation described in the pages that follow has allowed the author, finally, the opportunity to explore questions about these matters in a systematic fashion.

Chapter One provides an extended review of previous scholarly studies which have focused on American prison argot. Linguists, criminologists and prisoners themselves have contributed to a corpus of investigations which, while useful, nonetheless demonstrate the need for an integrated sociolinguistic approach to this area of study.

Chapter Two describes the methodology of the present study. Twenty-six men who have undergone extended incarcerations in prisons within a four-state Appalachian region were interviewed to obtain argot data. The selection

processes, interviewing procedures, and the development of an interview guide are discussed.

Chapter Three consists primarily of the lexicon produced from the data gathered--950 pages of transcripts from 35 hours of taped interviews--preceded by an explanation of the lexical apparatus utilized. The lexicon contains 1030 entries, identifying 1216 separate terms, each of which is coded as to the state(s) where it was heard.

Chapter Four identifies the semantic fields in which the terms appear and offers an analysis based on quantitative principles to determine the areas of concentration within those fields where the terms occur. Principles are posited to suggest how these concentrations of argot provide insight into the worldview of the prisoner. Significant portions of interviews are reproduced as well, in order to present the argot in context.

Chapter Five explores the degree of concordance between individual linguistic items in the four states of the study, demonstrating with quantitative principles that significant concordance does exist. Hypotheses offered in this chapter suggest how the emotional intensity levels surrounding argot items may work to stimulate or reduce argot development and thus interact with the creation of functional synonyms.

Chapter Six summarizes the study, identifies its major theses, and offers an agenda for future research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. A REVIEW OF SCHOLARLY INVESTIGATIONS OF PRISON LANGUAGE	1
2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY	50
3. AN ARGOT LEXICON OF FOUR APPALACHIAN STATES . .	71
4. AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEMANTIC FIELDS SUGGESTED BY THE LEXICON	153
5. AN ANALYSIS OF INTER-STATE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE ARGOT TERMS	215
6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	246
NOTES AND LIST OF REFERENCES	
NOTES	270
LIST OF REFERENCES	273
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE	282
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT	285
VITA	287

CHAPTER ONE

A REVIEW OF SCHOLARLY INVESTIGATIONS OF PRISON LANGUAGE

Students of language have long been intrigued by the vocabulary of society's criminal element, although their collective observations of that language demonstrate little agreement about its various characteristics. Scholars tracing the development of language in American prisons have had to sift through the growing corpus of the "hard-boiled" school of crime fiction, as well as a long series of Hollywood B-movies. In addition, the convicts themselves, fascinated by their own unique argot and stimulated by the interest of outsiders in such a colorful output, have offered anecdotal commentary which is not always reliable. Yet, from the body of scholarly literature, a synthesis of premises emerges which the present study has verified, and from which further explorations can evolve. First of all, there is a language peculiar to prisons, although its multiple sources may be difficult to identify or precisely describe. Secondly, that language differs from other language varieties primarily in its lexical processes; usage and grammatical functions do not change. Thirdly, use of a unique prison language seems to be a deliberate strategy, invoked in response to the speaker's specific social position. It functions both as an antithetical response to the dominant free-world society, and as an inclusive bonding activity within the prison subculture. Finally, prison

language is part of an ongoing, but dynamic acculturation process.

The present study is an effort to incorporate past scholarly research into an integrated sociolinguistic approach to the study of prison language. It will report the results of interviews conducted in a four-state Appalachian area with inmates who have undergone lengthy incarceration in state prison facilities. The study will then:

- 1) Produce an annotated lexicon of argot terms used by those inmates, identified by states in which the terms appear.
- 2) Analyze the data to identify terms which reflect either institutional idiosyncracies, regional homogeneity, or a broader cultural expression correlated with other prison language studies.
- 3) Suggest emergent cultural domains which reflect particular value indices and examine the expression of these values through use of discrete argot terms.
- 4) Offer preliminary observations about the nature of the external reality and the internal ethical values as perceived and structured by the users of prison language.

In addition, this report is intended as the initial step towards establishing a national data base from which to launch a comprehensive study of prison language.

Scholarly investigation of the language of American prisoners parallels the growth of penal institutions within the nation. Like the language itself, though, with its sources in medieval culture, the course of that scholarship is traceable along a steady, if somewhat ambiguous stream of inquiry emerging quite early in linguistic studies. As Eric Partridge indicates, the history of European slang begins in the thirteenth century with the occurrence of *rotwalsh*, a term for the slang of vagabonds, for which a glossary appeared as early as 1490 (Slang: Today and Yesterday 41). In France, the language of the community of swindlers and beggars in the "kingdom of Argot" was designated *le jargon de l'Argot*, later abbreviated to *argot*, from which we derive our current usage. An argot glossary for this group, a collection of trade names of different categories of thieves and swindlers, dates from 1455 (Bondeson 73). A similar language of the underworld appears in English at least as early as the Reformation, and was sometimes referred to as "pedlar's French," and later as "Thieves' Latin." According to London Police official Alexander Black,

[a]t the time of the Reformation many thousands of priests lost their livings, and being unqualified or disinclined for ordinary work they drifted into the bands of robbers and highwaymen that infested every country at the time. These ex-priests taught Latin (the language with which they were

most familiar) to their confederates so that they could communicate with each other with very little danger of having their plans discovered by the ordinary public. (66)

While there is little evidence to support this etymology, Partridge accepts Black's essential argument, though he insists that the origins of cant antedate the Reformation, and that it owes some debt to the coming of Gypsies into Eastern Europe in the fourteenth century (Here, There and Everywhere 100).

The language of the underworld was but one tributary of a rapidly widening stream of emerging slang. Curiously, while the origins of the word slang itself are somewhat obscure, nearly every study alludes to some connection with the underworld element. Lighter traces such studies of slang, along with the suggestive early variants of the word, before concluding that

[t]he earliest unequivocal application of slang to a kind of diction occurs . . . in a minor satirical pamphlet by the pseudonymous "Henry Humbug." In a Swiftian attack upon the thoroughly corrupt London thief-takers, "Humbug" advises that their orphaned brats be fully instructed in the "Slang Patter" of malefactors so as better to prepare them for their own lives of crime ["A Plan," 1758, rpt. in Fielding, p. lxxix]. "Humbug's" referent is quite specific: the slang patter means the obscure, exclusionary, and socially restricted jargon of a mostly itinerant criminal class. First noted in extenso by Copland in the mid sixteenth century, and believed by him to be of recent introduction to England, this mystifying jargon was often known as pedlar's French and, later, as cant, the designation favored throughout most of the eighteenth century by both the canters and the commentators . . .

"Humbug's" slang patter literally means
 "hoodwinking talk," i.e. underworld lingo.
 (19-20)

The first celebrations of canting appear in Tudor and early Stuart tracts and ballads, the most notable of which may be Thomas Harman's "A Caveat, or Warening for Common Cursetors," 1566, which, along with other similar publications, has been collected by Judges (1965, 61-118). Probably the first extensive cant dictionary was A New Dictionary Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew, by the otherwise unidentified, "B.E., Gent.," which appeared ca. 1699. Drawing heavily on "B.E." was Captain Francis Grose, whose Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 1785, incited charges of obscenities against its author. It went into several editions and reprints, and was the primary source for many later lexicographers. But the work of John Camden Hotten, entitled A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words, published in 1859, "remains the foundation of every later book of the kind" (Chandler 122). Hotten's work attempted to draw distinctions between slang and cant: slang is either substandard, figurative, or colloquial English; while cant is considered "thieves' jargon", a secret vocabulary which Hotten believed had corollaries in all languages. The work also attempts to trace the origins of many words to a variety of Continental languages, as well as to the vocabulary of Gypsies. Included, too, was a set

of hieroglyphic signs supposedly understood by the entire fraternity of the underworld.

In America, an early reviewer of Hotten's book, writing in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, allowed that few of his readers would suspect the presence of such a lexicon in their country as well as in England ("Thieves' Jargon" 601), but in point of fact soon after the republic was born, a list of criminal cant appeared as an appendix to William Smith's The Confession of Thomas Mount (1791). Mount was a "highway-man" who, along with one James Williams, was executed for his crimes May 20, 1791, at Newport, RI. The book contains the confession of Mount, as told to Smith, the last speech and dying words of the criminal, as well as a partial glossary--116 items--of terms utilized by a federation of villains, "having a language (and books printed in that language) peculiar to themselves, called the Flash Company. . ." (18). Another early list surfaces in the 1807 criminal autobiography of Henry Tufts (316-17), again referring to words learned from "flashmen" who Tufts encountered in a Massachusetts prison in 1794. Forty years later, a more lengthy collection of flash terms was gathered at Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh and published in the middle-class periodical, The Ladies Repository ("The Flash Language"). Again, this author stresses the fact that

". . . rogues have a language of their own, by which they can converse freely with each other, without risk of being detected by listeners unacquainted with its terms" (315).

This initial identification of secrecy as the primary motive for the creation of underworld lexicons has persisted, even to the present day, despite attempts to place this characteristic in proper perspective. Bradley's article on slang for the 1911 edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica acknowledges the secret nature of cant, but emphasizes that its words are invented for the purpose of being different, and are used as "intentionally undignified substitutes" for those words of the dominant class. He points to the sense of corporate unity which quite naturally developed among such a group, creating a tendency towards development of a "class language." Eric Partridge offers another crucial insight into the matter: "[c]ant, in fact, is largely a 'secret' language; that is, it has a number of terms for its own private use . . ." (Slang: Today and Yesterday 267). In other words, "secret" connotes the idea of "private" rather than "unknown."

Partridge locates cant within the broad channel of slang language. He delineates five senses of general slang use, of which cant--which he labels "thieves' slang"--is one, and "jargon," the language of trades or professions, as another (Slang: Today and Yesterday 1-2). He also makes an additional discrimination between the language of criminals

and that of tramps, who had been lumped together--unfairly says Partridge--since Harman's early reporting. John Farmer attempted to separate cant from slang along similar lines. "Slang is universal, whilst Cant is restricted in usage to certain classes of the community: thieves, vagrom men, and . . . their associates . . ." (qtd. in Slang: Today and Yesterday 140).

But it was H.L. Mencken, in his 1936 edition of The American Language, who articulated even more discrete categorizations of the subject matter, based primarily on the principle of secrecy, and incorporating the concept of occupational classification. He also reintroduces the term argot into the scholarly dialogue.

When it [slang] first appeared in English, about the middle of the Eighteenth Century, it was employed as a synonym of cant, and so designated "the special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character"; and half a century later it began to be used interchangeably with argot, which means the vocabulary special to any group, trade or profession. But during the past fifty years the three terms have tended to be more or less clearly distinguished. The jargon of criminals is both a kind of slang and a kind of argot, but is best described as cant . . . One of the principal aims of cant is to make what is said unintelligible to persons outside the group, a purpose that is absent from most forms of argot and slang. (555-56)

Notable here is Mencken's specific use of the term jargon, a usage Stuart Berg Flexner incorporates into his preface to the Dictionary of American Slang, a discussion which confusingly reverses Mencken's arrangement.

Cant is the conversational, familiar idiom used and generally understood only by members of a specific occupation, trade, profession, sect, class, age group, interest group, or other sub-group of our culture. Jargon is the technical or even secret vocabulary of such a sub-group; jargon is "shop talk." Argot is both the cant and the jargon of any professional criminal group. (Wentworth and Flexner vi)

Flexner's understanding of "criminal" appears to be substantially different than Mencken's as well. While Mencken acknowledged a "special prison argot, grounded in large part, of course, on thieves' cant, but with some special terms of its own" (The American Language 580), he subscribed to a theory of an international criminal cant and accepted the traditional fusion of underworld types, specifically including tramps, hoboes, and carnival workers. For him, there was a common cant understood to some degree by all underworld "classes" (The American Language 575-84). Conversely, Flexner's, Dictionary of American Slang identifies forty-five separate sub-groups which the author claims contribute half of all the book's entries, and which places, for instance, criminals, gamblers, carnival workers, and tramps in separate categories (596).

This notion of sub-groups was first articulated by Flexner's mentor, David Maurer, who most cogently directed the scholarly flow into a channel of fruitful inquiry, while initiating a new approach to the subject--conducting field work among the users of the language, the criminals themselves. From the 1930's on, Maurer's work dominates the

study of the spoken languages of criminal groups, clearly defining the parameters of such investigations. First of all, he selects argot as his operative term, identifying it as "specialized language used by organized groups operating outside the law" (Whiz Mob 4). Crucial to Maurer's schema is his notion of crime as a cluster of subcultures, each comprised of distinct, parasitic "professional" criminals with differing specialties--pickpockets, confidence men, etc.

It is helpful if we visualize the dominant culture as bounded by a large circle, with these subcultures, projected in small circles, clustering about the rim of the large one.

Thus some of these small circles will be largely within the dominant culture, some encysted wholly within it, some only slightly within it, and others barely touching the periphery so that for all practical purposes they are outside it. We might then think of the position of these circles as indicative of the degree to which the criminal cultures are absorbed and accepted by the dominant culture. (Whiz Mob 10-11)

For Maurer, the underworld is "only a romantic name for this cluster of subcultures" (Whiz Mob 12). Each group retains its individual identity, but has peculiarly defined mores, behavior patterns, and a language--an argot--which both reflects and reinforces the behavior of the group, while transmitting its unique vocational specializations (Whiz Mob 11-13).

Then, although agreeing that the language of criminal groups was usually "secret or semisecret" (Whiz Mob 4), Maurer emphasized that argot was not used to deceive

outsiders but was instead an aspect of group identity. He reported on the code-switching tendency among criminal groups as they moved from one social role or situation to another. When conversing with a member of the dominant culture, the professional criminal shifted into a social dialect consistent with the appropriate social frame (Language of the Underworld 11). As Flexner notes in his Forward to Language of the Underworld, Maurer "saw that argot was not an isolated lexical phenomenon but a major facet, force, and expression of all subcultures" (xi).

Most important to the study of prison language is Maurer's delineation of the terms "professional" and "criminal." By "criminal," he does not mean a deviant member of the dominant culture; indeed, he goes to great lengths to point out how different subcultures overlap with the dominant culture as well as with each other. A "professional" criminal is one who works at crime as his primary means of support, is recognized and accepted by his fellow-professionals, knows and uses the argot of the group, lives by their agreed-upon code, has antithetical attitudes toward the dominant culture, and feels no sense of shame for his acts (Whiz Mob 9-10). Nor is a "criminal" merely a convicted felon. Maurer clearly excludes a group he labels as "non professional" who may commit criminal acts and may even serve time in prison, but whose attitudes, ethics, and morals are really that of the dominant class. Thus when

caught or imprisoned, he or she feels guilt, shame, or loss of status, but does not integrate himself or herself into the subcultural ethic, nor assimilate the argot of the subculture (Whiz Mob 10). This occasional criminal is an amateur, and only a criminal in the legal sense of the word; his values remain with the dominant culture, of which he is a part.

By these definitions, the vast majority of prison inmates are not professional criminals, a fact which Maurer readily acknowledged. In a private communication with Mencken, Maurer states that, "[r]elatively few successful professionals ever do time, and when they do they tend to hold themselves somewhat apart from the general run of prisoners. . . The great bulk of prisoners is composed of amateurs or failures . . ." (Mencken, The American Language. Supplement II 673). He also believed that their incarceration made professional criminals reluctant to talk about their work for personal or legal reasons. In describing Maurer's research techniques, one of his assistants and a later editor of his work, Allan W. Futrell, explains why Maurer confined his research nearly exclusively to "the native habitat" of the criminal. "It cannot be overemphasized that being in prison does not necessarily qualify a person as a professional criminal, and nonprofessionals are, as much as possible, sifted out of Maurer's list of informants" (Language of the Underworld 7).

Language of the Underworld offers a selection from among David Maurer's numerous scholarly writings and affords the reader a historical perspective, not only of the subject matter itself, and of Maurer's evolving theories, but also the changing behavior patterns of the criminal subcultures, each of whom possess individual argots. It also demonstrates that, whether focusing on confidence men, pickpockets, dice gamblers, or any of the numerous other professional criminal groups he researched, the prolific Maurer's studies of underworld argot deliberately avoided the prison environment.

Even so, a cursory review seems to suggest a considerable body of literature that concentrates specifically on the language of the prison community. However, a more thorough examination reveals some important limitations of the aggregate, whose output has more breadth than depth. A few early works are first-person accounts, following the tradition of Thomas Mount or Henry Tufts, but which emphasize Americanisms rather than the British-origin terms of those precursors. Such is Life in Sing Sing, 1904, an anonymous work whose author is identified as Number 1500 on the title page, and referred to as "Black" in the text. The writer, who served six and one-half years in the New York prison, claims to "have had the common experience of a convict" and narrates his tale in "an honest effort to tell the story of my years in Sing Sing prison" (23). In a

chapter entitled "Slang Among Convicts," the articulate author and editor of the prison newspaper offers an insider's view of argot usage.

The use of slang by convicts . . . is usually for decorative effect rather than for the purpose of concealing from those who may overhear it the meaning of their conversation. It would in fact be valueless for them to use it for that purpose as the guards are as apt to use it as the convicts themselves. The possession and management of a large vocabulary of slang is, however, an acquirement of which its possessor is very proud. It is his one literary accomplishment, and he never fails to display and cultivate it at all times. (244)

Number 1500 seems to treat convict jargon and "thieves' slang" as one entity. He asserts that, among thieves, slang will not be observed by the uninitiated. Moreover, efficient usage of the slang "gives the passwords of the profession and are the hailing and recognition signs of its membership" (245). The two-page introductory essay is followed by a listing of nearly 450 terms, with brief definitions, as well as sample sentences and paragraphs with accompanying translations.

Lockstep and Corridor, 1927, is another first-person account of prison life. Its author, Charles L. Clark, spent more than thirty-five years in reformatories and prisons in three different states. The book is intended as an indictment of the societal processes that destined Clark for a life of imprisonment. There are no discussions of language, but the volume does contain an appendix which lists 74 "Terms used by Criminals, as found in this

narrative" (173-75). The accompanying definitions, offered without commentary, are quite brief.

An extremely poetic version of the incarceration experience is offered by A.J. Barr in Let Tomorrow Come, 1929. It is difficult to determine to what degree this is a work of fiction or a recounting of actual experience. No specific locations are given, and most of the characters are referred to by nickname or generic classification--"Mexican Tom," "The Southerner," "The Banker," etc. And yet this episodic first-person narrative accurately depicts life inside jails and prisons, and the psychological scars such a life leaves on the individual. A moving final chapter paints a picture of the ex-convict, now "on the street," yet still haunted by sleepless nights filled with the specters of past prison realities. A glossary containing 67 items is included, once again without critical commentary (265-69).

Perhaps the earliest prison lexicon to be published by an American scholarly journal appeared in American Speech in 1927. "Prison Lingo," by Herbert Yenne, added little to the academic discussion of prison argot, but it did offer a list of more than 100 terms and phrases--unalphabetized--many of which are still current in one form or another sixty-five years later. Yenne's brief introduction does claim that this argot "is unintelligible to anyone not connected with the institution. It is made up, for the most part, of common slang combined with general prison terms" (280). The

author then produces two fictional conversations between inmates to illustrate this point. Unfortunately, while the dialogue may support his thesis, it is so overloaded with argot terms as to be totally implausible. The most notable aspect of this article is that it antedates the earliest of Maurer's underworld language studies.

Four years later, and again some months in advance of Maurer's initial underworld lexicon, George Milburn made another contribution to this developing field of inquiry. This listing was essentially gathered by a New York inmate and forwarded to Milburn, whose minuscule introduction does suggest corollaries for a half-dozen of the terms with argot of other subcultural groups. He further acknowledges that many of the terms are not exclusive to prisons, being found in the argot of a variety of criminal groups. Milburn also declares the usage of these terms wide-spread, based on a "check" of this list with letters from convicts in other distant locations (437).

"A Prison Dictionary (Expurgated)," 1933, provides a cogent, if limited analysis of a peculiar prison population --that of the United States Disciplinary Barracks at the military prison at Fort Leavenworth during the World War I era. The lexicon was compiled by Hi Simons, who was imprisoned for eighteen months in that institution. Simons identifies three distinct groups, each of whom interacted with the prison argot in a different way. First were the

"criminals" who, prior to the mobilization of the National Army, commonly enlisted ". . . when they thought they were about to be apprehended. Such men frequently failed to serve their first terms of enlistment without doing something punishable by Court Martial" (22). Joining them was a second group of "cast-offs of the National Army," whose pre-army lifestyle and individualistic attitudes made them unsuited for military discipline, but a likely candidate for rule infractions and subsequent incarceration. The third group was comprised of "political prisoners," mostly conscientious objectors, but a few German sympathizers who had for some reason enlisted before their allegiances surfaced. The first group, Simons avers, "certainly made the most picturesque contributions to the prison lingo" (22); the second group supplied only a few terms, none of which they originated; and the third group--the politicals--added nothing. "But it [the language] fascinated us politicals because it was full of swagger and laughter, because of the vivid if often violent and vile poetry that streaked through it, and for a reason similar to the motive that leads many timid genteel persons to read crime stories--to use it made us feel bold and free" (23). The objector group also compiled the terms, with the author bringing out of prison an original draft that formed the basis of this report. Definitions are lengthy, with helpful commentary and etymological notes on most words. The

author's surmise, that every prison has a particular vernacular, seems to be borne out by the military character of this list. Significantly, only four of the 242 items are adjectives; the rest are nouns or verbs (24). As the title of the article underscores, the list of terms does not include several which the author sacrificed "to the taboo of print" (24).

One further offering from American Speech appeared in 1934, "Prison Parlance." This collection, submitted by J. Louis Kuethe, was gathered by the writer at a prison near Baltimore where he was an instructor. The greater part of the compilation was handled by two inmates, one of whom was black, and who, the author says, has included terms which are not confined exclusively to prison. Only one of these terms--the verb signify--is discussed, but each is identified in the lexicon. Approximately 160 items are given short, cursory definitions.

The 1930's, with the increasing presence of supposedly romantic gangsters populating the American landscape, produced several articles written for the popular magazines of the day. Convict 12627 supplied two such pieces for Detective Fiction Weekly, "Criminal Slang" (1934) and "They Talk Like This" (1938). Both present their prison terms primarily within the context of narrative rather than a glossary, and neither cites any research to support some rather definitive statements, some of which are

contradictory. For instance, the first article negates the principle of localized lexicons, the author claiming " . . . twenty years' association with criminals has convinced me that the criminal from the Pacific Coast would have no difficulty in understanding the lingo of his New York brethren" (108). In the second article, the supposedly same author refers to the pride which criminals maintain in their ability to speak an understandable lingo, and asserts ". . . but those who make their headquarters in eastern and mid-western cities probably would find it difficult to understand the habits of the underworld of the West Coast. In California cities and even up as far as Seattle and Portland the criminal element converse in a jargon which to the uninitiated must sound rather silly. This is known as 'Australian Slang'. . . " (75). That there is nothing original in either of these articles is not surprising.

Similar are two offerings designed for composers of prison fiction appearing in Writer's Digest. John Caldwell's "Patter of the Prisons" (1930), although not a scholarly treatise, does present some of the psychological and sociological contexts of the argot usages in an effort to instruct its readers. Its most helpful section, however, is that portion written by an anonymous inmate of the Ohio Penitentiary--"No. 57419"--whose contributions were apparently produced as a corrective addendum to an original draft by Caldwell. With it, the convict also delivers a

crucial critical insight that one hears echoed elsewhere in the developing literature of prison argot. "To be frank, some of these expressions I have read time and time again in newspapers and articles are made up by authors. The greater part of this article, it seems to me, and to several others who read it, was in print before" (26). Such an appraisal could easily apply to the article in the same periodical, "Prison Jargon" (1932), although its purported author, "No. 90613-A," is presumably another convict. Nothing about this article is remarkable, nor are its terms original.

Two rather early studies examine prison language on the basis of its use of grammatical and poetical devices. One, "The Psychology of Prison Language" (1935), is an effort by prison psychologist James Hargan to categorize the inner motivations of speakers of argot. First of all, Hargan claims, prisoners achieve emotional satisfaction through linguistic rebellion against the conventional vocabulary. Secondly, his jargon occasions a certain amount of envy from others, providing the inmate with status. Most importantly,

. . . through the formation, with its appropriate shibboleths and pass words, of this linguistic fraternity, he quiets his herd impulses, neutralizes his feelings of inferiority and perhaps guilt, and evades recognition of the fact that he is essentially a lone wolf hunted down by society. Through cryptic conversations he may acquire a sense of class solidarity; henceforth he may be comfortable in his membership in a "mob" who share his speech and presumably his problems and destiny. (359)

Hargan demonstrates how prison argot makes use of the poetic devices of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, and litotes as strategies for escaping the unpleasant realities of prison life (360-61). This study presents only cursory evidence for what might be a potentially fruitful area of investigation. Appended is a list of 162 terms used in Sing Sing, where the author was employed.

V. Erle Leichty begins "An Analysis of Prison Jargon" (1944), with a concise statement on prison argot that expresses a sophisticated sociolinguistic premise for its operation. He asserts that argot, which he christens "joint gab," differs from the language of the underworld outside the prison, although it makes use of a variety of argot terms from various criminal occupational groups. It is subject to localisms which develop within each institution, and among inmates as well, yet the separate and dissimilar individual terms might have some locutions common with the occupational argot of criminals from widely separated geographic areas. Leichty then promptly abandons that discussion, partially attributing its origin to one of two inmate informants, and proceeds to develop his article around the ways in which prison language "appears to make use of many of the grammatical and rhetorical devices current in ordinary English" (589-60). The narrative merely illustrates the processes, without providing interpretive

appraisal. Most curious is Leichty's use of extensive footnotes tracing etymologies, nearly all of which cite British rather than American references, a process which negates much of the validity of his opening statement concerning localisms.

The publication of full-length dictionaries has been the main source of scholarly compilation and transmission of terminology. In England, "B.E.," Grose, and Hotten gathered underworld terms; in America, Godfrey Irwin published the extensive American Tramp and Underworld Slang in 1931. But it was Noel Ersine who composed the first American dictionary based, in large part, on prison sources. Published in 1933, Underworld and Prison Slang identifies 1500 terms. Although the definitions are brief, the scholarly apparatus is helpful, and the size of the list impressive, particularly since the author claims no obsolete terms are included (13). Ersine, too, aims at an audience of fiction writers, as his introductory remarks make clear. They also present a simplistic, as well as condescending, assessment of the speakers of prison language. Referring to that language, the author proclaims, "[i]ts idiom is strictly its own, and is unknown in other divisions of the language. It breaks every rule of grammar as nonchalantly as its speakers violate the laws of society" (7). This is a statement contradicted by most other observers who generally assert that any distinctions between prison language and

that of the non-prisoner are based solely on vocabulary items. He further says that the most important reason for slang use among prisoners and members of the underworld is lack of education.

He employs a slang term because he knows no better word with which to replace it; in fact, he is usually unaware that the term is slang. . . . Because of his lack of education, his field of thought is necessarily limited and his conversation must deal with very few topics. This is a strong inducement to the use of slang; he tries by the variety of his language to make up for the monotony of his thought. (8-9)

Such observations, though, were not inconsistent with much of the criminological theory of Ersine's era. Though Ersine acknowledges that a familiarity with the lingo among non-underworld figures makes secrecy difficult, he maintains that criminals still accomplish some sort of secrecy through use of terms peculiar to their particular "racket" (8). Ersine also correctly identifies the influx of jargon from other classes and occupations, and surmises that the influence of newspapers is responsible for the creation of 75 per cent of the criminal's vocabulary (9).

While the title of Ersine's work discriminates between underworld and prison language, the monumental Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo, 1950, though written entirely within the walls of a major prison, attempts a comprehensive compilation of the language of the criminal world. Its collaborative authors, Hyman E. Goldin, Frank O'Leary, and Morris Lipsius--an institutional chaplain and two inmates--

produced what H. L. Mencken called "the best thing of its kind I have ever seen" (qtd. in "Introduction" n.p.). They acknowledge the importance of the variety of argots developing around specific illegal trades, but point out the importance of linguistic items which express a set of moral standards that are at variance with the dominant portion of society. Thus, the language "constitutes an explicit criticism of traditional mores, particularly with respect to those aspects of the social code which most concern the criminal population--the legal system, standards of group loyalty, and standards of sexual morality." It is "the picture of a whole society seen through its back door" ("Introduction" n.p.). The three editors utilized several other prisoners as a board of expert advisors, and the introductory essay claims that this fact makes the volume unique among similar dictionaries of the modern era, which are most often composed by scholars without authentic underworld experiences. While the authors claim that each penal institution has certain terms peculiar to it, the 5000 items included here represent those believed to be in nationwide usage. The final section of the dictionary is in the form of a thesaurus which indexes and repeats the primary glossary.

Somewhat of a curiosity is the Dictionary of Desperation (1976). Published by the National Alliance of Businessmen as a part of its supportive strategy to

encourage employment of ex-offenders, this text includes no critical evaluations, but announces its intention to reveal the degradation and desperation of prisoners as represented by the words they choose and invent. Its sources are identified only as prisoners "from a variety of geographically disparate institutions," as well as ex-offenders, volunteers, case workers, and journalists (12). Nearly 500 terms or phrases are included, some with rather complete definitions that indeed offer insights into the desperate feelings of their users.

The most recent, and perhaps the best dictionary of prison language is Prison Slang, 1992, a compilation by William K. Bentley and James M. Corbett, two recently released offenders who completed most of the work while they were still incarcerated. Unlike the alphabetization of previous lexicons, this one is arranged by categories which represent major aspects of prison experience, e.g. "Serving Time," "Sexuality," "Violence." An index provides an alphabetical listing of all the words. The "Introduction" offers only superficial observations about the language--that it reflects the conditions of prison life; that it may include "street" terms as well as those confined to prisons; that it is not static (1-2). However, the definitions are usually quite extensive, accurately and often poignantly describing the social milieu from which the terms emerge. Bentley says the terms were compiled with the idea of

providing a widespread geographic representation; his sources included inmates who had served time in several states, as well as Canada, and he included terms printed in at least one newspaper article.¹

But it has been sociologists and criminologists who have initiated the most important critical studies of prison language and, in the process, rechanneled the course of scholarly investigation. Responding to the development of the prison as an important social institution in America, they composed intricate theories of the social structure of penitentiaries based on argot usage. Donald Clemmer's The Prison Community (1958), a study of a 2300-man major midwestern prison during the years 1931-34, attempts to describe the culture of the prison and the degree to which that culture determines the philosophy of its residents. Believing that language was the primary medium by which that culture was transferred, Clemmer formed a dictionary of 1063 slang words and terms which he elicited through written autobiographies, as well as direct conversations. In classifying the lexical items according to reference, Clemmer constructs the following schema:

<u>Total %</u>	<u>Category</u>
32.44%	Prison (equipment, authorities, articles of daily commerce, mental status, punishment, sentence)
30.08%	Crime (technique, police, loot, escape, guns)

- 10.90% Sex (homosexual, 6.02%; heterosexual, 4.88%)
- 26.58% Various topics (body parts, description of individuals, alcohol, gambling, drugs and narcotics, and vagabondage) (89)

He argues that the terms, and the culture they reflect, were the result of a learning process whereby the language was handed down from prisoner to prisoner (90). This language, Clemmer says, comprises the most significant part of the total communication between inmates and is therefore instrumental in the formation of several distinct social classes within the prison community. The resultant cultural stratification is underscored and reinforced by the argot lexicon (107-110). Clemmer further explains the process of acculturation that takes place among new entries into the prison.

So as we use the term Americanization to describe a greater or less degree of the immigrant's integration into the American scheme of life, we may use the term prisonization to indicate the taking on in greater or less degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary. (299)

This assimilation is accomplished largely through language.

And whether he [prisoner] uses the prison slang and argot or not, he comes to know its meanings. Even though a new man may hold himself aloof from other inmates and remain a solitary figure, he finds himself within a few months referring to or thinking of keepers as "screws," to the physician as the "croaker" and using the local nicknames to designate persons. (299)

A second extensive study of prison environments was conducted by Gresham Sykes in a New Jersey prison during the

mid-1950's. In the seminal work which resulted from that research, The Society of Captives (1958), Sykes devoted a chapter to a discussion of argot roles (84-108). For him, argot "provides a map of the inmate social system" (108). Dismissing the secrecy element posited by previous scholars, Sykes instead believes that ". . . the more critical function of prison argot would appear to be its utility in ordering and classifying experience within the walls in terms which deal specifically with the major problems of prison life" (85). Argot is a "sort of shorthand" by which the group compresses and labels its institutional experiences (86). Sykes then summarizes five "argot roles" based on a group of distinctive tags used by the inmates to identify specific social roles within the prison. There are "Rats and Center Men," "Gorillas and Merchants," "Wolves, Punks, and Fags," "Ball Busters and Real Men," and "Toughs and Hipsters," all of which Sykes classifies as language-generated behavioral responses to a variety of deprivations of prison life (86).

The notion of argot roles, though not designated as such, had first been introduced by Clarence Clyde Schrag, whose University of Washington Master's thesis, "Social Types in a Prison Community" (1944), is continually cited in the criminal justice literature. Schrag's social types are in fact argot roles, the subjective aspect of which involves, in part, value judgements of the group that are

"internalized through the individual's use of verbal signals" (37). This verbalization includes recitation of stories, myths, and legends as a means of passing along the prison culture to new initiates (37), but it also includes certain identifying terms assigned to individuals which express "value-dimensions" around which the behavior of the differing groups is organized (43). Schrag identifies five such social types by which inmates become known within the prison: "outlaw," "right guy," "square john," "politician," and "ding" (43-44).

But it was Sykes' findings that generated considerable debate within criminological circles--a debate which continues to some degree even today--and the nature of that debate has ongoing implications for prison language studies. While Sykes argued that argot roles and the values they express are situational, arising from the deprivations of imprisonment, John Irwin and Donald R. Cressey disagree. They make a distinction between "prison culture" and "criminal subculture," claiming that criminals import into the prison a "ready made set of patterns which they apply to their new situation" (145). This argument echoes that of Maurer earlier, and anticipates much of the later discussions of prison argot. Irwin's later volume, The Felon (1970), offers a new set of argot labels, but never actually claims that criminals verbalize these terms. The closest he comes to this is the statement that,

. . . there is a group or collectivity of persons who sometimes think of themselves as "thieves," "dope fiends," "hustlers," or "heads," and who during these times share, interact upon, and negotiate a set of understandings, meanings, values, beliefs, and symbols relative to an explicit thief's, dope fiend's, hustler's or head's life style. (3)

In subsequent studies which discuss the concept of argot role, it is sometimes unclear whether this designation refers to actual lexical items in the inmate vocabulary, or solely to the theoretical construct of the social scientist which describes something akin to social role or type.

Rose Giallambardo's study of the female prisoner's experiences devotes considerable discussion to social roles, which she too connects to language behavior.

In order to cope with the major problems of institutional living, the Alderson inmates have also labeled the reactions of prisoners according to the mode of responses exhibited by the inmate to the prison situation and the quality of the inmate's interaction with inmates and staff. These roles form the basic social structure of the prison community as a system of action. (105)

This labeling is the assignment by the prisoners of argot terms which vividly express their institutional experiences; the "social roles" identified by Giallambardo are her peculiar groupings of such terms which she posits as an acknowledged social hierarchy within the prison. Her groups are: "snitchers and inmate cops or lieutenants;" "squares and jive bitches;" "rap buddies and homeys;" "connects and boosters;" "pinners;" and a collection of terms she calls "the homosexual cluster" (106-29). The author makes

comparisons with the argot terms identified by Sykes and Schrag, but on the basis of social typology rather than language, and she offers no linguistic evaluations. A glossary is appended which represents, says the author, "an inmate's working vocabulary" (200). And while she further claims "a few" of the terms are also used in male prisons (200), the fact is that, as the present study illustrates, almost none are restricted to female usage.

Attaching glossaries to texts not otherwise concerned with language has become commonplace in the criminal justice arena. Inside the World's Toughest Prison (1962), written by Joseph E. Ragen, the long-time warden of the Joliet-Stateville (IL) Prisons, and Charles Finston is primarily a text about administration issues of a maximum security institution. Still, the authors demonstrate an uncharacteristic awareness of the broad sociological concerns that bridge the inmate and free-world cultures. An appendix entitled "Penitentiary and Underworld Glossary" offers an extensive list of generic terms with very brief definitions, and no introductory remarks (789-823). A series of letters from California inmates, written primarily to attorneys defending one of their fellow prisoners accused of the murder of a prison guard, is collected in Maximum Security: Letters From California Prisoners (Bell 1972). Included is a single page listing of seventeen items, "Glossary of Life in 'The Pit'," with no accompanying

commentary (25). Another book containing primary material from an inmate population is Chang and Armstrong's, The Prison: Voices from the Inside (1972). Each chapter is the contribution of a separate inmate in an Illinois state penitentiary expressing his views about the correctional system, penology theory, his life behind bars, etc. The writers were all former members of one of Dr. Chang's sociology classes taught inside the prison. Appended is a 66-item glossary, compiled by a single inmate, whose three-sentence introduction identifies prison language as "a distinctly different form of verbal communication than is found in free society" (325). Similar is Kathryn Watterson Burkhart's, Women in Prison (1973), a montage of the author's personal observations, institutional research, and sketches of incarcerated females across America which are interwoven with first-person narratives and poetry of the inmates themselves. It contains, too, a short glossary, "Prison and Prison-related terms," accompanied by an authorial qualification: "[t]hese words and definitions are not used in the same manner throughout the country; they only express the way they are used in the various places I have found them" (443). The definitions are very complete, however, and thus quite useful. Another short list appears in W. Reason Campbell's anecdotal account of his two-year teaching career in a California prison (5-13). For many of the items listed, Campbell includes not only a definition,

but explanatory comments about the related inmate subculture as well. The body of the text contains an abundant supply of additional terms for some reason not included in the glossary. Most recently, Mark Fleisher has included a glossary in his Warehousing Violence, 1989 (241-45). His definitions are complete, but those terms that are unlisted elsewhere are probably unique to the federal prison facility in Lompoc, California, where they were collected (e.g. place names and terms for specific institutional locations).

Two other glossaries surface in books which are devoted primarily to photographs, rather than text. The first is in Hoffman and McCoy's, Concrete Mama: Prison Profiles from Walla Walla (1981), where a glossary appears without comment (195-96). Probably no item included here could not be located in some other listing. A second glossary can be found in Camhi's, The Prison Experience (1989), and is notable for its extended definitions that offer cultural nuances representing broad prison usage, as well as the denotative attributes of a single institution (27-41). This list was compiled at the state prison in Vacaville, CA, and included a review process by a number of informants under the supervision of an inmate editor, James Harris. The author-photographer, Morrie Camhi, also adds a thorough list of antiquated rhyming slang (42), a category which has interested several scholars in the field, including Maurer and Mencken (see too, Cardozo-Freeman, below).

An exception to this glossary-as-appendage model is Bruce Jackson's A Thief's Primer (1969), a book composed of "statements made by a moderately successful thief" (15) that describe the criminal world in which he operated and the roles which he assumed within that world. The glossary (55-61) itemizes terms used by Sam, the thief who "tells" the story, and as such informs the text that follows it. Jackson cautions: "[t]he meanings given are those current in Texas character and convict vocabularies only. It should be kept in mind that not only do slang and argot words change frequently with time, but they also vary considerably with place" (51). "Character" is a term Sam uses to describe the professional thief, like Maurer's, who earns his living through his illegal vocation, but which, along with "convicts" and "squares," assumes the equivalent of an argot role in Jackson's hierarchy of social types (143-83).

Jackson, a folklorist and criminologist, has a sophisticated understanding of language, and his introductory chapter makes observations which connect crucially with previous scholarship. Argot vocabularies, he feels, are traceable to three sources: the criminal profession, the criminal role, and the prison experience (49). This delineation not only echoes Maurer's distinctions, but Jackson's word "role" is identical to Irwin and Cressey's "criminal subculture" (see above). For another thing, he notes that not only do different people,

assuming different roles, perceive identical situations differently, but they may also use the same words about those situations with entirely different meanings.

This is especially the case when the group in question is an isolated, deviant, or stigmatized one, which develops such words and word usages both as convenience (to express things the larger society has no need to express) and comfort (to give a sense of groupness that might otherwise be difficult to acquire). (48)

More importantly, Jackson makes a linkage between this group cohesiveness, reinforced through its isolation, and the ever present notion of secrecy. Noting that slang is far more connotative than denotative, he claims that it is a lack of connotative understandings that separate insiders from outsiders.

It is not that members of an in-group plot so their words will be unknown to an outsider, but these words obtain currency specifically because they express a particular aspect of reality not adequately handled by the more quotidian vocabulary. It is the situation that is incomprehensible to the outsider (which is of course what makes him and outsider), not the definition. (49)

Thus Jackson describes argot as a functional response to a social context, whether that context be a group of professionals sharing a common trade, members of a deviant subculture, or felons adjusting to a prison environment. His study, while not primarily an investigation of language, does provide key illumination of the topic, as well as anticipating several studies that followed.

There remains, then, only a small body of literature produced in the modern era of an expansive American prison system, which focuses solely on the analysis of lexical items collected within that prison setting. On the whole, the research is diffuse and disparate, although some individual studies offer important insights about selected language behaviors. A lone study predating much of the recent criminological discussions, but perhaps stimulated by Clemmer's work, is David Boroff's "A Study of Reformatory Argot" (1951). Boroff, a caseworker and teacher, reports on the argot of a youthful population, 16 to 25 years of age, the vast majority of whom are delinquents from New York City. Commenting on the tendency of groups which have an underlying sense of social rejection to develop a coterie-language, Boroff says,

[t]his tendency is intensified in a reformatory where bravado and exhibitionism are the norm. The unsophisticated reformatory inmate between sixteen and eighteen will quickly assimilate the local jargon in order to "belong." The argot, moreover, enables him to project his feelings of rebellion and estrangement from society. (190)

The author had previously worked with adult prisoners, and notes a "more temperate use" of slang among the older offenders than among their adolescent counterparts (193). The body of the article examines selected terms and relates them to the institutional setting; the short glossary provides additional definitions.

A study of singular importance, and one quite dissimilar to others in the field, is Nathan Kantrowitz's "The Vocabulary of Race Relations in a Prison" (1969), an extensive examination of terms used by black and white inmates at Stateville (IL) prison to characterize each other. Though he refers to a collection of more than 1000 terms gathered during his 1959-62 fieldwork, Kantrowitz actually lists less than forty, all of which are names used to identify individuals, and which depict the range of black-white social relations within the prison. Of critical importance, though, are two principles Kantrowitz posits that have application outside his specific study. First, Kantrowitz states that merely "the presence or absence of a name (and synonyms) within any specific group of convicts indicates the presence or absence of perceived behavior" (25). In other words, if there is a term for it, it exists; or at least the perception does. Secondly, the larger the quantity of terms one possesses for another group, the greater the intensity of the feelings toward that group (24). Though these principles refer directly to race relations and specifically to abuse terms, by extension the principles are applicable to any cluster of argot terms concentrated around a conceptual domain. Unfortunately for argot studies, Kantrowitz's complete collection of terms has never appeared, nor has he contributed any follow-up reports.

"Prison Jargon" (1975), by William T. Gaughan, is another unique article which discusses the ways in which words are deliberately manipulated within the prison setting by their users in an effort to disguise the connotations of the labels. The author points to changes inspired by prison administration, for instance from "guard" to "correctional officer" or from "inmate" to "correctional client;" as well as to euphonious labels created by the prisoners, such as "house" instead of "cell." The author's premise is succinctly stated in his first sentence: "[t]he pressures from the sociocultural environment on the penitentiary systems throughout our country have brought about many changes in labels but few resocialization results" (459).

Inez Cardozo-Freeman reported briefly on "Rhyming Slang in a Western Prison" (1978). Responding primarily to earlier studies of rhyming slang conducted by David Maurer and Sidney J. Baker, Cardozo-Freeman provides a brief history of this narrow segment of prison language, and reports several terms identified in a contemporary collection of terms at the Washington State Penitentiary. Her conclusions, consistent with the earlier work of other scholars, is that new rhyming slang items are emerging, but that they are underreported because the slang has gone "underground," and thus doesn't appear in more conventional collections (301-02). Since this article appeared, there

have been no further studies to either confirm or deny this premise.

The only study to focus on incarcerated women is the contribution of Constance Pritchard, "Getting Acclimated: Language in a Women's Prison" (1978). Her observations, recorded over a seven-month period while she served as a teacher and activities coordinator in a minimum security institution in South Carolina, are descriptive rather than analytic, and the paper presents no broad theses about prison language. It does, however, add to the limited data collected among female prisoners, and it offers some commentary on how the language interacts with prison culture.

Similar is Hugh Morgan's, "By its Slang, Ye Shall Know it: The Pessimism of Prison Life" (1981). Morgan discusses some ninety words, gathered at a minimum security facility in Illinois, which he asserts demonstrates the preponderance of negative, pessimistic items in the typical inmate vocabulary.

No words appear for family, for religious beliefs, or for a contribution toward helping society. The slang illustrates the concern with the self and how to gain the best advantage in prison. The overwhelming pessimism and vileness in these words indicate that the prisoners help create their own shabby environment where altruism has no place.
(268)

Such conclusions, while reinforced by the examples he offers, are sweeping generalizations that remain far from proven. Their merits must be considered in the light of

Morgan's experience, an instructor in one journalism class offered through a local college extension service. The terms were collected by a single inmate (263).

Extremely untrustworthy is a 1982 study, "Prison Lingo: A Style of American English Slang," by Bert Little. Poorly written, with grammatical mistakes and usage errors, it presents convoluted arguments, supported by statistical charts for which the methodology of acquisition is completely unexplained. Inexcusably, in his appended word list, Little misidentifies WRAP PARTNER for the well-established "rap partner," and seems not to understand that his recorded CONSTANTINE WIRE may also appear as "concertina wire."

"'Mushfaking'": A Compensatory Behavior of Prisoners" (1982), by Thomas W. Foster, focuses on a single argot term which describes the process of producing contraband items from available materials within the prison, and which appears to be confined to usage by residents in Ohio correctional facilities. The term, says Foster, represents a complex series of behaviors exhibited by inmates in an effort to adjust to the deprivations of prison society (115). This study offers a useful model for exploring the relationship between language and the informal social organization of prisons, though its concentration on a single lexical item precludes any extended contribution to prison argot studies.

A major contribution to the scholarly investigations of prison argot is that of Greg Lyons, which discusses terms in use in a California state prison facility located in Soledad. His "Inmates and Convicts: The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion" (1984) includes material he collected over a two year period through informal conversations, responses to a questionnaire, and an inmate-generated list of terms. The result is a profile evaluating how the newly incarcerated inmate uses language to establish his identity within the prison. "When a man enters prison, he enters a distinct social system as an outsider. Unless he is to remain isolated, he must learn a new language" (166). Lyons discusses several spheres of social membership, each of which is characterized by certain lexical items, pointing out that there are internal social pressures to "perform a coded dialogue" in order to gain acceptance (173). Lyons conceives of prison language, on one level at least, as a conscious response to the officials in charge of his or her fate.

In response to a bureaucracy whose words label but do not describe, the prisoner feels a frustration that finds expression in three impulses: toward identification with others belonging to a group; towards fierce rejection of outsiders; and toward finding a language that makes a place for the individual where official identity has been reduced to a number and a spatial unit. In other words, through language the prisoner attempts to establish his own hierarchy and to challenge the anonymity built into the system. (168)

By creating his or her own language, the prisoner creates a more palatable substitute reality. Lyons' study effectively combines concrete linguistic data with well-conceived philosophical insights to demonstrate how prison language functions as a survival tool, as well as a means of individual and group identity.

Carolyn Karhu has provided an excellent description of the argot of adult male offenders in Tennessee: "Tennessee Prison Talk" (1988). A teacher, Karhu gathered her data through casual contact and interviews with her students. This study is one of the few in the literature which attempts some sort of comparisons with other scholarly research; Karhu refers to Cardozo-Freeman's major study of Washington prisoners, The Joint (see below), and demonstrates some differentiation between the argot of inmates in the two locations. Many of the items included are peculiar to Tennessee, referring to specific sentencing procedures or departmental classifications, but there are sufficient numbers of generic items to make this study valuable. The single broad statement regarding argot usage explains argot formation as an attempt by prisoners to diminish the seriousness of their situations through ameliorating language (132). An accompanying glossary includes some terms not treated in the body of the essay.

"Catheads, Coalburners, and Cho-Cho Sticks: Folk Speech in Texas Prisons", by Charles Shafer, appears in a

collection of essays devoted to the study of Texas folklore (Abernethy 1990). The author gathered his material through conversations with both inmates and guards, over a period of several months, while teaching college English courses at four different prison units during the early 1970's. Importantly, Shafer observes a declining usage of argot, and posits that this is the result of an increase in educational emphases in Texas' rehabilitation processes (196). More than 500 terms are listed, with brief but precise definitions, although many of the items listed are not unique to prisons. Some attempt is made to identify archaic terms.

Of minor significance is a 28-item list of terms collected by David Stuart Schofield (1991), a Texas inmate. The short introductory and closing narrative has no analytical value, though it claims some of the terms were composed during riots at the Huntsville facility.

The only full-length treatment, and unquestionably the most important scholarly inquiry into the language of American prisons, is Inez Cardozo-Freeman's The Joint (In Collaboration with Eugene Delorme, 1984). Any attempt at a brief summary of this work is futile. This folk-ethnography of life behind the walls of a maximum security institution--the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla--provides an extensive description of prison culture as seen through the eyes, and told through the words of the prisoners

themselves. It focuses on how, in the process of that description, the prisoners reveal their unique worldview, and is premised on Whorfian theories of how language shapes and in turn is shaped by culture (xi). Cardozo-Freeman is herself a folklorist who attempts to "present a corpus as free from outside interpretation as possible. To the best of my ability I have tried to set down what the prisoners mean, not what I think they mean" (xii).

Assisted by a Native-American inmate who conducted most of the inmate interviews--Eugene Delorme--the study is drawn from 152 hours of taped conversations collected over a thirty month period, from 1978-80. Structurally, each chapter focuses on a different aspect of prison life, the titles of which, with two exceptions, are slang terms (e.g. "The Joint," "The Bulls"). After the manuscript was completed, it was read by ten randomly selected inmates, who agreed that the story of life in the prison accurately reflected the majority view of the inmates (xvii).

A comparison of the prison language in this study with that collected at the same institution in the 1950's revealed several differences (471). Commenting on the linguistic changes at work within the prison community, Cardozo-Freeman notes the parallels between these changes and the cultural evolution in any folk community.

Like all folk groups, it experiences changes that gradually bring about alterations in its folkways and beliefs. Traditions that no longer serve a purpose disappear and new ones arise to fill the

needs of the group. The changes in the language between 1950 and 1980 is a prime example of this . . .

A major change has undergone prisons today because a new kind of prisoner has invaded this once highly traditional folk culture, bringing with him his own folkways, values, and beliefs. (24-25)

This changing milieu emerges in the pages of this book, and it is also the subject of further critical commentary by Cardozo-Freeman in her excellent final chapter which discusses the state of prison language at Walla Walla, and by analogy, the nation. The title of this chapter, "Con-Lingo," reflects the author's rejection of past labels given to this language. Tracing those definitions, Cardozo-Freeman concludes,

[t]he cant and jargon spoken by prisoners includes the argot of professional criminals but is not wholly composed of it; therefore, it cannot rightly be identified as such. It is, instead, a close relative or argot, containing in addition to criminal cant and jargon other aspects that grow out of the unique and particular environment that is the prison. Prisoners readily identify their language as con-lingo, recognizing that their speech is unique to them. (471)

This lingo is an amalgam of several sources: the criminal argot of Maurer's professionals, imported street slang, as well as terms that are unique to institutional life.

There are problems with this work. Cardozo-Freeman unabashedly admits to violating two methodological axioms of in-prison research: failure to control for potential biasing of the data by inmates seeking personal advantage, and the development of a partisan attitude on the part of the

researcher. Her explanations (xiii-xvi) may be less than satisfactory to some scholars (see pages 59-62 below). Secondly, the deliberate attempt to refrain from commentary results in a oversized volume of largely first-person narrative accounts, with relatively little analysis. The book is valuable for what it is, a folk-ethnography, but the serious student of language wishes for something additional. More puzzling are the flaws within the Glossary (479-543). Though it cites appearances of the included terms in several other standard slang dictionaries, the glossary contains neither all of the 1950's collection at Walla Walla nor the complete list collected during the current study. Quite a number of terms discussed in the text are not listed in the glossary, though Cardozo-Freeman doesn't say why or, for that matter, provide a rationale for her inclusion of any of the items. Still, this work is the most ambitious in the literature of prison language study.

American prison language appears to have as its ultimate source, sixteenth century British cant, which is recognizable in the flash language of Thomas Mount and his contemporaries early in the nation's history. From those headwaters, its course flows mainly underground, surfacing in the twentieth century in the idiom of the American underworld. In the first half of the century, it defied several scholarly attempts to neatly classify it as some

subcategory of the rapidly evolving American slang. Thus the terms "argot" or "cant" or even "jargon" were used interchangeably, a practice that continues even today. With the tremendous post-war growth of the country's prison system, the language used by the inmates within those institutions has stimulated considerable interest. Yet even when identified, by whatever label, within the prison walls, scholars still failed to agree upon the source of that language behavior; whether it arises as a response to the deprivations of the prison or is imported from the urban culture outside. More recent studies have focused on the cultural milieus within which prison language functions, yet the language continues to evade concise, definitive explanations.

Some patterns do emerge, however, from the stream of academic inquiry. First of all, a language peculiar to prisons does exist, although it may display some characteristics of a number of subcultural groups which are active both inside and outside the institution. Some of those groups can be distinguished through a mutually possessed criminal technique or skill; others by some shared life style which is unacceptable to the dominant culture. A set of common in-prison experiences becomes the point of intersection from which the unique prison language emerges.

Secondly, it is language identifiable primarily through its unique lexical processes; usage and grammatical

functions are essentially identical with other language varieties. Both overlexicalization--the creation of large numbers of synonyms--and partial relexicalization--the assignment of new meanings to existing terms--appear to be adaptive techniques of the language. Euphemisms and taboo items abound, both of which might be viewed as ameliorating functions of the language.

Thirdly, use of prison language seems to be a deliberate behavior, adapted in some recognition of the user's distinctive social position. Its function is bi-directional. On the one hand, it is projected outward towards the dominant oppressive culture, which may be either society-at-large or the criminal justice system which exercises immediate control over the inmate. On the other hand, the language is pointed inward to the society confined behind prison walls, bound together through their common deprivations. The first response is antithetical; the second an expression of group identity.

Finally, prison language is a tool of acculturation. As such, it is impregnated with the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a particular society, and passes them along to succeeding generations. That society, like any society, has local traditions and mores, as well as those that transcend the local context to merge with all communities sharing similar experiences. Furthermore, the process is dynamic,

and the language never static. Any analysis of prison language must chart this movement.

What is evident is that the scholarly study of prison language has proceeded along several divergent tributaries of exploration, with too little interlinkage of ideas. There has been no comprehensive or systematic approach, and no efforts to synthesize the collective findings of various researchers. Much of what has been reported consists primarily of word lists, without any extensive accompanying analysis. At other times, individual articles appear, describing certain observable characteristics of prison language behavior, with little or no reference to other scholarly reports. In every case, the language data has been collected at a single institution. Furthermore, with the exception of Cardozo-Freeman, no reporter since Maurer has published a second article on the subject. The aggregate lacks either cohesion or direction. While no single investigation can incorporate all the diversities within the prison language literature, the present study is an effort to begin an integrated sociolinguistic approach to this discipline.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Though past studies of prison language have offered intriguing glimpses into the cultural milieu of what Ervin Goffman labels "total institutions,"² they nonetheless demonstrate some obvious limitations. With the notable exception of Cardozo-Freeman's ethnography, The Joint (1984), published studies are seldom more than compilations of lexical items with a brief accompanying narrative that tends to be descriptive rather than analytical. The most thorough investigations have been those of criminologists, yet their focus is on group social interaction, rather than individual language behaviors. Furthermore, every study to date has been confined to a single institution; no multiple compilations, even intra-state, have been attempted. What may be more telling is that the research has been conducted primarily in either the "big house" type of maximum-security facility or a minimum-security prison. Either of these may present skewed data since it reports language from prisoners located at one of the extreme ends of a security classification continuum. A related problem concerns the unsystematic approach to data gathering. The norm, at least as reported in the individual studies, is for the researcher to informally collect terms while going about a normal work routine within the institution. Such a methodology is neither replicable nor verifiable. More importantly, in

several cases, the authors of such reports identify only one or two inmates as sources of data. Finally, though Karhu (1988) briefly identifies some differences between her data and that of Cardozo-Freeman, and while other researchers allude to Maurer's work in general terms, no extended comparative analysis of lexical items from separate locations has ever been made.

The present study attempts to overcome some of these deficiencies through an integrated sociolinguistic approach to the study of prison language in a four-state Appalachian region--Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The prison setting constitutes one kind of speech community, defined by John J. Gumperz as "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage" (381). Yet previous investigations that center on a single prison, particularly if that institution houses nearly all of the felons within a given state, limit the speech community to those prisoners at that specific location. They describe the language behavior of that confined setting more than the behaviors of the typical inmate serving his or her sentence who might share a "body of verbal signs" with other prisoners in prisons elsewhere. Institutions tend to take on a life of their own, characterized sometimes by the nature of their unique

physical design, and at other times by the inertia of long established functional routines. In this setting, the language may become isolated from its corollaries in other locations, and thus the speech community of Gumperz becomes the individual prison itself.

In an effort to delineate the macro linguistic environment of prisons, the present study was designed to collect data only in facilities that are classified as "regional prisons," a goal achieved in three of the four states identified for inclusion. Regional prisons are defined as those which house male inmates convicted of a variety of offenses and identified within a broad range of security classifications, and which have a large turnover of their population in any given year. Those states with regional prisons (Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee) also have what is known as a "progressive" system, one in which inmates are transferred to different institutions within the state as they progress through their rehabilitative programs. The institutions selected thus have an inmate population which reflects the prison culture of that state, but not of any specific institution within the state. Further, the Departments of Corrections in the progressive systems tend to house inmates, whenever security considerations warrant, relatively close to their families. In West Virginia, the other state chosen for its Appalachian setting, the institution selected was the West Virginia

Penitentiary, the primary institution within a state that has a relatively small prison population. The prisons selected were:

Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex
West Liberty, KY

Craggy Correctional Center
Asheville, NC

Northeast Correctional Center
Mountain City, TN

West Virginia Penitentiary
Moundsville, WV

Central to this investigation is its goal of systematic collection of lexical items from prisoners within this Appalachian area, so as to present a comparative inter-state study of that data.³ Since language is the primary transmitter of culture, encoding much of the culture in linguistic form, the development of an accurate lexicon for the region is crucial to any subsequent analysis of how such terms express the values of its users and their perceptions of prison culture. Inherent to the data collection is the difficulty of the *Observer's Paradox*: "the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation" (Labov 209). Given this dilemma, many proponents of ethnographic semantics might argue for the necessity of daily observation of language behavior over an extended period of time. Some of the studies cited in Chapter One report data gathered in

this manner. Those same ethnographers, however, would stress the necessity of asking certain critical questions of the informants which generate linguistic data descriptive of the informant's culture.⁴ None of the previous prison language studies claim to have employed such questioning techniques. Other sociologists, such as Ned Polsky, would maintain that any systematic questioning controls or any use of recording apparatus--either electronic or written--severely contaminates "the very thing we want to study, the reactions of people in their natural environment" (132). But such an attitude is in opposition to the vast weight of acceptable sociolinguistic methodology.⁵ The pioneering sociolinguistic scholarship of William Labov, as well as David Maurer's extensive work in descriptive lexicography, discussed above, clearly show the limitations of both these premises.⁶ Nor have any of the researchers cited claimed to have gathered their data covertly, or to approach their work with a bias such as Polsky's.

This study uses the tape-recorded, controlled interview process as the preferred technique for obtaining accurate lexical information. For data collection purposes, the study employed an interview guide focusing on several areas of prison life identified by the author and conforming with Edward Hall's well-known indices of culture stated in his The Silent Language (1973). Culture, as Hall sees it, is a form of communication which consists of shared information

or knowledge encoded in the system of symbols. Language is the primary way the culture is transmitted to its members. Hall's ten separate kinds of human activity, which he calls "primary message systems," are forms of the communication process and include the following:

- 1) "Interaction:" the most highly elaborated of which is speech.
- 2) "Association:" the various ways in which societies are organized and structured.
- 3) "Subsistence:" food, working, economy, etc.
- 4) "Bisexuality:" differentiation along sex lines.
- 5) "Territoriality:" the taking possession, use, and defense of a territory.
- 6) "Temporality:" time and the enumerable ways it is tied to life itself.
- 7) "Learning:" an adaptive mechanism, allowing for superior survival skills.
- 8) "Play:" interwoven into all other primary message systems.
- 9) "Defense:" specialized activities to protect against potentially hostile forces (included are religion, medicine, and law enforcement as well as war).
- 10) "Exploitation:" adaptations to meet specialized environmental conditions, creating such extensions of the self as weapons, clothes, money, etc. (34-59)

The initial interview guide for this study, however, grew partly out of the author's personal work experiences in prisons. He first identified several broad areas of prison culture, from which he developed a list of potential discussion topics relating to those areas. These topics were then matched to Hall's paradigm to ensure that they met his established criteria. To determine whether the interview guide was capable of evoking sufficient data, a pre-test was then arranged in one of the Tennessee prisons

being considered for participation in the research project, and two prisoners who met the demographic criteria for the study (see below) were interviewed. While the initial interviewing instrument proved adequate to elicit a large quantity of argot, the author followed this test with a visit to Professor Inez Cardozo-Freeman whose work in the area of prison language is well established (see above). She graciously supplied details of her interviewing process, some of which this author incorporated into his final strategies.

Still, the interview guide was an evolving entity. Early interviews helped shape it, and it was not solidified until somewhere near the middle of the entire series of in-prison interviews. Certain topics were expanded as their relative importance in the inmate's ideations became apparent (see discussions in Chapter Four). The final version of the guide (see Appendix A) represents the culmination of this developmental process. Though Hall's ten indices are undoubtedly applicable to any culture, and the guide was correlated with them, it is more useful to conceive of the prison environment structured within the following six categories which then served as primary question modules.

- 1) Physical Locations and Objects
- 2) Institutional Rules
- 3) People Within the Institution

- 4) Institutional Activities
- 5) "Free-World" Concerns
- 6) Trial and Legal Issues

While the modules served as an organizing principle for conversations between the author and individual inmates, they were seldom discussed in the order listed. Usually, the author was able to initiate informal dialogue at the beginning of the interview and then pursued the course of conversation along whatever tributary it followed. The discussions were allowed to range freely, with the interviewer focusing on specific questions from the modules as they entered the narrative. As terms were elicited, the author would ask for expansion of the concepts involved, explore feelings and emotions attached to them, and try to elicit synonyms of the lexical items without leading the informant. This strategy allowed the terms themselves to determine the structure of the interview. When objects, people, processes, etc., were described, the author often asked, "Do you have a slang term for _____?" or "What do you call _____?" Only when the conversation lagged, did the author select the specific topics to discuss. Yet, while the order of the modules varied, the author guided the interviews to ensure that identical ground was covered with each inmate. The depth of discussion about specific items from the modules varied; the breadth of the discussions was constant.

Crucial to the collection of accurate lexical items was the ability to develop rapport between the researcher and the inmate. Here the author's experience as a former prison chaplain was a significant factor, providing him with some understanding of institutional culture and equipping him to easily converse with prisoners without being intimidated. But that alone was insufficient. Another factor was the degree of confidentiality assured by the research proposal, and agreed to by the Departments of Corrections in each state. Though the sessions were tape recorded, both the tapes and the complete transcripts prepared from them are identified only by arbitrary code numbers. Most importantly, no representative of the prison systems involved has access to either tapes or transcripts, although a copy of this study, with provision made for strict anonymity, will be provided to those departments as part of the research proposal agreement. Given this measure of confidentiality, prisoners seemed for the most part eager to talk with the researcher about their language and culture.

A final factor which contributed to the effectiveness of the interviews had to do with the selection process of the inmate respondents. The research design required all informants to have served ten or more consecutive years in the prison systems of their respective states. In addition, the subjects were chosen to reflect approximate racial demographics of the institution in which they were housed.

These criteria were created in order to recruit inmates who had most likely been incarcerated in several institutions and who represented the breadth of the inmate population, thus ensuring that the data gathered from them represented a distillation of core terms used by Appalachian inmates. Once approved for research, the author made an advance visit to the prison, and met with the designated staff liaison to discuss possible inmate interviewees. In determining potential candidates for the interviews, the author suggested that the inmates themselves be asked to make recommendations. In three of the locations, he was able to meet with prospective respondents, briefly explain the goals of the project, and enlist their assistance in identifying appropriate candidates. These inmates in turn recruited others who met the criteria and promoted their involvement with the project. In this way, the prisoners became co-researchers, committed to the success of the project and thus approached the interviews strongly predisposed to contribute to the data.

Gresham Sykes, in his illuminating study, The Society of Captives (1958), comments on two methodological difficulties in studying prisons and their inhabitants. First, he says, "the observer is constantly in peril of being 'conned' by highly articulate, glib prisoners who seek some personal advantage" (135), and secondly, "in the polarized society of the prison it is extremely difficult

not to become partisan, consciously or unconsciously" (136). For these reasons, Sykes believes that "participant observation" is a defective technique for gathering data. ". . . it is only by remaining firmly neutral in one's sympathies," he declares, "that a valid picture of prison life can be uncovered" (136). Inez Cardozo-Freeman, author of The Joint (1984), which is clearly the most ambitious study of prison language yet produced, disagrees. In discussing these comments by Sykes, she admits to deliberately disregarding both warnings: ". . . indeed, I believe that being partisan was not only the key to not being conned but also the reason I was able to uncover a valid picture of prison life" (xiii). In order to collect the folk speech in its natural context, she felt it necessary to find articulate users of the language seeking the personal advantage offered in telling their side of a story usually related only by outsiders. She equates her admitted partisanship with the sympathetic interest towards her subjects that any fieldworker in folklore must possess, and openly acknowledges a trusted friendship with her inmate collaborator, Eugene Delorme (xiii-xvi).

Throughout the introductory chapter to her book, Cardozo-Freeman stresses that her goal is to present the inmates' viewpoint in their own words. The book is in fact a folk ethnography, composed largely of extended, carefully edited transcripts of conversations and monologues recorded

by the prisoners of the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla. Cardozo-Freeman functions primarily as an editor, structuring the ethnography and only periodically intruding into it to provide commentary and analysis. There can be little doubt that she has achieved her goal of presenting the inmate's "side." Nor does the reader fail to perceive her biases in their regard. So, while one might not challenge Cardozo-Freeman's sympathies as a folklorist, two serious questions remain: 1) To what degree have her acknowledged prejudices influenced her commentary and analysis on inmate language and her selection and editing of the data? 2) How have her prejudices contaminated the data collected through the framing of her questions and the discussions of specific issues within the interviews she supervised? The answer to the first question is perhaps discernable through a careful study of her text; the answer to the second is more difficult, since she tells us little about this process. What is clear is that Delorme was the primary interviewer, selecting the inmate respondents and determining the range of topics to be discussed. As a folk ethnography and a revealing view of prison culture from "insiders," The Joint is unsurpassed. However, it provides something less than a systematic approach to a study of prison language, and Cardozo-Freeman may have crossed the line between observation and advocacy. As Charles Frankel has observed,

[s]ympathetic identification, in short, is neither sufficient nor essential to guarantee the discovery of truth in the human studies. It is not sufficient because the mistakes that people make when they think they have identified with others are notorious; it is not essential because it is possible to explain another's behavior without identifying with him. It would be something of a nuisance if we tried to be schizophrenic while we studied schizophrenia.
(99)

The present study attempts to offer an accurate view of prison culture reflected through a lexicon of argot terms expressive of that milieu, and includes an objective analysis of those terms. Having worked in prisons for more than ten years and observed the potential pitfalls Sykes articulates, the author of this study agrees with his conclusions. He is further convinced that the inmates' participation in the interviews outlined above suggests that they felt free to describe their world in their own unique ways. The author's oral explanations underscored the academic nature of the investigation and identified the goals of the research with efforts to better understand what prisoners experience and feel within the context of their restricted environment. He also omitted mention of his work experiences in the prison setting, thus maintaining a neutral posture towards the system and its inhabitants. Indeed, at times the author perceived that his informants were trying to educate him. Concentrating on task rather than agenda, they seemed to examine their language and world more analytically and achieve more objectivity about

themselves and the prison culture than they were accustomed to doing. Furthermore, the informed consent document each inmate signed made it clear that he could secure no favors or preferential treatment through their participation in the project (see Appendix B). For the most part, the motivation for involvement was sincere interest in the investigation. The inmates told their stories to someone who wanted to listen, but who had nothing but understanding to offer in return.

Six inmates from each institution were selected for tape-recorded interviews that ranged between 60 and 90 minutes. Initial interviews were conducted in three of the states during July, and the fourth state during November, 1993. Demographics of the inmate pool are as follows:

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Yrs Served</u>	<u>Race/Ethnic</u>
<u>Kentucky</u>			
	35	11	White
	44	10	African-American
	50	21	White
	42	15	White
	42	11	White
	50	11	African-American
<u>North Carolina</u>			
	37	14	African-American
	42	14	African-American
	39	12	White
	40	11	White
	43	18	Native-American
	51	21	White
<u>Tennessee</u>			
	36	19	African-American
	41	16	White

47	25	White
36	16	White
35	14	African-American
37	11	White

West Virginia

42	14	White
55	17	White
43	17	White
30	11	African-American
42	22	White
58	12	White

Full transcripts of each interview were produced, and carefully edited for accuracy. Then the transcripts were reviewed several times for possible argot, with a list of these potential terms and phrases compiled for each interviewee, as well as a master list for each state. The total number of potential distinct terms ranged from a low of 558 in one state, to a high of 724 in another. One measure of the reliability of the interview guide can be seen in the fact that interviews in three states produced very similar totals of potential terms--between 558 and 595 (the larger number elicited in the fourth state, Tennessee, can be attributed to the two additional interviews conducted during the pretest). The initial composite list consisted of 1849 terms or phrases, many of which were duplicates and others which appeared to be unique expressions of the individual prisoner rather than belonging to a corpus of argot.

In January, 1994, the author conducted follow-up sessions with all but three of the 24 inmates. In West

Virginia, one inmate was undergoing medical treatment and was unavailable, while another had been placed in Punitive Segregation and refused to meet with the researcher. In Kentucky, one inmate had been transferred to another state and was unavailable for a second meeting. The follow-up sessions were designed to, first of all, correct any misunderstandings or typographical errors which might be present, and to verify spellings where appropriate. The tape-recorded sessions were not always held in noiseless surroundings, so not all utterances were comprehensible. Where possible, these areas of the transcript were clarified. For instance, a word heard as "bub" was really "bulb," a term describing a man serving a life sentence. On another occasion, what was heard as "fido," even after several replays, was explained as "fire dope," a particularly good grade of marijuana. There were occasions when an apparently illogical expression could not be deciphered, even when the surrounding section of the transcript was read back to the inmate.

A second goal of the follow up interviews was to effectively discern whether an identified term or phrase was a nonce term or one which was idiosyncratic to the user, or whether it was fixed in a corpus of prison argot. One inmate referred to prisoners being placed on a "pay me no mind list" and being subsequently dismissed as a non-person by prison authorities. The author suspected that this was a

nonce term. In fact, the prisoner claimed that others in his circle of associates used the phrase, so it was included in the lexicon of Chapter Three. Usually, the author simply asked whether the identified term was used by others, or whether, if the inmate himself used the term in the context of his daily speech, others would understand to whom or what he was referring. Final authority was always the inmate; if he said the term was used by others or would be understood by them, the term was accepted as being in general use.

On very rare occasions during the initial interviews, in an effort to stimulate discussion, the author introduced a term. At the follow-up sessions, the author retraced some of the conversational territory to see if the inmate would use the term. If the term was not elicited at this point, it was eliminated from the list of that particular inmate. "Fish" was such a term, appearing in some states as a word for an inmate new to the prison system. When introduced by the author in one particular interview, the inmate claimed it was also a term in his state, though it surfaced in no other interview conducted there. On rechecking this during the follow-up session, the author concluded that the inmate recognized the term--perhaps having heard it from some other source--but that the term is not active in that state.

Considerable time was also spent expanding and clarifying the meanings of the various terms and checking the accuracy of cultural understandings. This served not

only to evoke additional narrative about prison culture, but also produced a small quantity of additional terms not used during the initial interview. For instance, the author thought he perceived a three-tiered schema of interpersonal relationships within the institutions that consisted of "friends," "associates" and "partners." The exploration of this during follow up sessions provided additional information about the nature of interpersonal relationships within the prison environment.

Since a major goal of this study was to determine to what degree argot items are either localized (confined within their particular state) or regionalized (appearing in other Appalachian states), a critical feature of the follow-up interviews was a test for recognition of those words that appeared to be idiosyncratic to a particular state. Each state composite list was cross-checked to identify such items, and these terms were then reviewed to eliminate: 1) terms which might qualify as synonyms of items appearing elsewhere ("hack" and "screw," both identifying correctional officers); 2) terms that were clearly representative of other common conceptual domains, e.g. a unique descriptive term for homosexual behavior identified in all states; 3) terms or phrases unquestionably confined to a single state ("going North" is used in West Virginia to denote the process of being sent to segregation purely because "North Hall" is the location of that unit); 4) terms

where only slight variations exist between states, e.g. an inmate who requests segregation is classified as a "check-in" in three states, but a "check-off" in the other. After eliminating these items, there still remained a substantial list of terms in each state which appeared nowhere else.

But given the nature of the interview process, their uniqueness does not argue that those terms are necessarily idiosyncratic. It is one thing to invoke a term in a brief structured interview, and quite another to possess it as an item of one's linguistic repertoire. Therefore, the author selected from the remaining list a group of unique terms from each state which nonetheless appeared to arise from concerns and interactions common to all respondents. The three or four inmates in each state who had produced the larger corpus of terms were then questioned about a selection of these items. They were asked not to conjecture what the term probably meant, but to respond only if they had heard the term used in their particular state. Many of the items were thus identified. Moreover, when the interviewee heard a definition of items he couldn't identify, he often responded with a synonym which had not been elicited before. For instance, when asked to identify "lightning rod," a term describing an inmate who gets in trouble so often no one wants to be around him, both "heat wave," and "heat stick" were prompted from separate states. An alternative to providing the term and asking for a

definition was to ask, for instance, "What do you call someone who gets in trouble so often you stay away from him?"

One variation to these procedures was introduced in the Tennessee follow-up interviews. This was the single state where any past argot research had been reported, that of Carolyn Karhu (1988). So in addition to the processes outlined here, the author also tested for recognition of any lexical items from her study that had not been elicited in the initial interviews. Details of that comparison are the subject for another report, but this altered interview process did effect the present study by increasing the number of Tennessee argot items, as well as expanding the breadth of understandings about the prison subculture in which they operate. Also, terms collected from the two Tennessee inmates during the pretest of the interview guide are included in the lexicon that follows, the author being convinced he should never exclude any serendipitous data.

In analyzing the lexicon that follows, one should understand the following points: First, questions regarding the ultimate sources of prison argot have been debated by criminologists and social scientists with differing conclusions (see Chapter One). Cardozo-Freeman (1984) found in her study that some of the terms have been imported into the prisons from the urban subcultures where crime thrives; some reflect the jargon of a variety of criminal

professions; others should be seen as a response to the pathology of the prison setting; while still others relate to a particular prison (471). The present study found very few terms that might be considered professional jargon and, in an attempt to identify the generic argot of the Appalachian prison "speech community," consciously omits any proper names of physical locations within a particular institution. Thus, most of the items collected in the present study appear to be either internally-generated responses to the prison environment or expressions common to certain street subcultures associated with criminal behavior. Second, if even a single interviewee used a term, we must assume that the term exists in that particular state. A variety of separate subcultures function even within the walls of the institutions visited, so somewhere within the radius of the individual inmate's relationships and activities, that particular term is operative. Thirdly, there are often contradictions and inconsistencies within this corpus. It was not unusual to have one respondent describe an activity or person in ways that another inmate would negate. Such instances will be noted where they occur, and will inform much of the analytic commentary that follows.

CHAPTER THREE
AN ARGOT LEXICON OF FOUR APPALACHIAN STATES

The lexicon below consists of 1030 entries, identifying 1216 items extracted from the interviews discussed above in Chapter Two (the total number of items exceeds the number of entries since separate entries often incorporate additional variants of the head term). Excluded are terms referring to objects, experiences or activities within the prison, but which might have a parallel free-world definition that a general reader might be expected to readily identify, e.g. "chapel," "chow hall," or "rec building." Also eliminated are those technical terms which are a part of the official prison jargon, but which are not incorporated into free usage by the inmates themselves, e.g. "Administrative Segregation," "Close Custody," or "transient." Finally, deleted are expressions which have no unique currency within the confines of an institution--words such as "big wheel," "flimflam story," and "gopher."

No attempt has been made to declare any item archaic. In the first place, the fact that a prisoner knows a particular term demonstrates that it still exists, at least in his passive vocabulary. Secondly, there were many instances where an individual informant asserted that an item was no longer used, and yet another prisoner in the same institution would use it. Therefore, the premise adopted for purposes of this lexicon is that if the term is

known, it exists, and denotes a perceived behavior. What is evident is that many separate subcultural groups inhabit any institution, the members of which possess vocabulary items common to all the residents as well as those which are unique to their particular group. Items most often mentioned as outdated--terms for correctional officers and names for new prisoners--proved to be among those with the highest intra-state concordance.

The final list is the product of several close readings of each of the 26 transcripts, which total 950 pages. In the initial reading, the author listed any item he considered as a possible argot term; with each successive reading, he refined the list, finally adopting the lexicon that follows. In determining whether to include any item, the first consideration was whether the term had been lexicalized by the prisoners and existed in a state of generalized usage (see Chapter Two). The next consideration was to decide if the usage was unique to the prison environment. In some cases, this was not an easy task. Words such as "punk" and "convict" presented clearly discernable institutional contexts, but others were less distinct. For instance, the term "dope fiend," describing one who is addicted to drugs, was eliminated, though "dope man"--one who has drugs for sale--was retained. The methodological premise applied was that in the former case, the term is generic, designating a person who would be

identically identified whether he were a prisoner or not, while the latter case describes a specific individual behaving in ways peculiar to the prison culture. Other terms are included not because they are unique to prison culture, but because their usage is quite revealing of the institutional environment. For instance, "house" would have a denotative value--a physical space serving as living quarters--that might serve both prison and free world contexts, but the connotative texture of its prison usage is certainly quite distinct, revealing the relationship between the prisoner and the physically restricted environment which has been imposed upon him. Items with similar distinctions would include "man," "store," and "school."

Adding to the difficulty of identifying a unique prison lexicon is the fact that many of the terms presented here, particularly drug-related items and those having to do with policing activities, are also common in street usage. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter One, there is debate regarding the degree to which language and culture are imported from outside the institution and to what degree that language is a product of the pathology of the prison itself. Lexical items are constantly moving in and out of the institutions, and between them as well, carried by individuals who live and work there.⁷ The object of this study, however, is to determine which items have currency

within prisons, not which are found only there, and some overlap is to be expected.

Stylistically, the lexicon essentially conforms to "Style Sheet for Glossaries" used by the journal American Speech (45, 1970: 141-51). The entries are organized as follows:

- 1) Alphabetization is letter-by-letter, as in most dictionaries, rather than word-by-word.
- 2) The headword or phrase appears in boldface lower case. Phrasal headwords are alphabetized under the term least likely to vary, or under the first word of a unified phrasal construction (e.g. "put down a game" or "take a tour" where the phrase is always heard as a unit).
- 3) The part of speech appears next, italicized.
- 4) In all but a few cases, the definitions are written so as to be grammatically substitutable for the term defined. Some items, however, seemed to be more clearly rendered by varying this principle (e.g. "man down").
- 5) The first definition given is the primary one, but additional definitions are not necessarily listed in descending order of usage, since such a hierarchy is difficult to determine.
- 6) Synonyms are cross-referenced. The definition appears with the item judged to be most common,

although in some cases, this was difficult to determine. For instance, terms for exceptionally fine grades of marijuana were highly idiosyncratic, and no single term appeared with great frequency. Thus, the author's use of "rocket fuel" as the operative term to which other items are referenced is a subjective judgment at best. At times, the decision about such terms was made on the basis of the number of recurrences within interviews, rather than on breadth of usage between states. Definitions which include use of another main entry are referred to that entry in small capitals.

- 7) Definitions are used in sentences which illustrate usages when clarification seemed appropriate. These sentences are introduced by "as in" and appear within quotation marks.
- 8) Supplementary information appears within parentheses after the definition. Here, etymological speculations, anecdotal information, and editorial commentary is provided.
- 9) Related forms--derived words, idioms, and related words--follow next, with or without additional glossarial information. These items either consist of near-identical phraseology

with the headword or demonstrate a unique usage of the term while maintaining an identical definition.

- 10) Brackets enclose the abbreviations for states where the term appears. These are listed alphabetically, and no attempt is made to indicate the number of times the term was used.
- 11) Cross-references are used to compare nonsynonomous, but closely related items. These use the phrase, "see also" followed by the related item listed in small capitals.

Obviously, the accuracy of the lexicon is a reflex of the credibility of the interviewees. The author has carefully reported the items as they emerge from the recorded interviews, accepting the authority of his informants, and confining his observations to the parenthetical commentary mentioned in 8) above. Definitions are based strictly on the usages of the individual prisoners, and not on the biases of the author, except to the extent that any interpretation of such data necessarily has a subjective aspect.

Lexicon

ace n 1: See BROTHER [NC] 2: See HOME BOY [TN]

ace brother n See BROTHER [KY]

acid hitting n Ingestion of LSD, commonly called "acid"
[KY]

adjust-us committee *adj* Pun depicting the perfunctory and inevitable judgement of guilt resulting from a disciplinary hearing, as in "The adjust us committee gave me another thirty days." (derived from "adjustment committee," the official name for the prison court. Note the obvious pun on "justice.")
[KY]

alamo *n* See HOLE (3) [WV]

all *adj* See FOREVER, as in "How much time does he have?"
"He's got it all!" [NC,TN,WV] -all of it, -all day
[WV]

ambulance *n* Inmate who cuts into line in front of others (so called because this behavior is likely to create the need for such a vehicle) [KY]

apartment *n* See CELL [KY,WV]

ape *v* Forcefully take money or possessions from another inmate though threat of force, as in "Mike just aped him and took his radio." [KY,TN,WV]

apple jack *n* See JULEP [TN]

arm up *v* Carry one's weapon in anticipation of armed conflict [KY,TN,WV] -armed *adj* [TN]

ass bumper *n* See BOY (2) [TN]

asshole buddy *n* Homosexual partner [WV]

associate *n* 1: One with whom a prisoner carries on casual interaction; acquaintance, as opposed to FRIEND, PARTNER [KY,NC] 2: One with whom a prisoner associates beyond mere casual verbal interaction, e.g. extended conversations or sitting with in a public area [WV]

attitude adjustment *n* Change of heart emerging from a violent assault on one's person by other inmates, as in "We slapped him around some and he got a little attitude adjustment." [NC,TN]

baby killer *n* See BABY RAPER [KY,TN,WV] -baby
murderer (The labels are used whether a homicide occurred or not.) [WV]

baby raper *n* Inmate incarcerated for a sexual offense involving a minor [KY,NC,TN,WV] -child raper [TN]

- baby sit** v 1: Protect (a new, inexperienced inmate) from intimidation or exploitation by other inmates, as in "If you start baby sitting that kid, he'll never be able to stand up for himself." [KY,NC,WV] 2: Take care of (an item of contraband) for another inmate, as in "I'm baby sitting the dope for Ralph." [NC]
- back door parole** n 1: Release from the institution through one's death, as in "Bill finally beat the system; he got a back door parole." [TN] 2: See RUN [TN]
- back of a sentence** n Latter months of a sentence [NC]
- back-to-back** adv Consecutively served sentences, as in "I've got two ten-year sentences, running back-to-back." [NC,TN]
- bad time** n See HARD TIME (1) (2) [WV]
- bag** n Measure of marijuana [KY,TN,WV] **-nickel bag, -dime bag** n Quantities of marijuana based on their costs, a nickel or dime referring to five or ten dollars, or in some prison economies, five or ten packs of cigarettes respectively (A nickel bag is the equivalent of a very small JOINT.) [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- ballfield** n Recreation area of the prison, sometimes referred to as the YARD [KY,NC,TN]
- ball ticket** n Document with listing of sporting events, point spreads, etc., and utilized for betting purposes [NC,TN,WV] **-ballboard** [TN] (see also TICKET MAN)
- b and e** n Offense of breaking and entering, i.e. burglary [WV]
- banger** n See PIECE (3) [WV]
- bark hands** n See TREE JUMPER [TN]
- barn trading** n Buying and selling of various used items, a HUSTLE that is technically illegal, but usually tolerated by prison administration (a practice that parallels modern flea markets, and a term which sounds very much like the official title of the rule infraction it represents--"bartering and trading") [NC]
- barnyard pimp** n Chicken prepared in prison chow hall [NC]

Bart Simpson *n* Butterfinger candy bar (a reference to the cartoon character whose image appears on the candy's current wrapper) [NC]

battery operator *n* See GAS BURNER [KY]

beat *v* 1: Take advantage of (another inmate) in a business arrangement, often by "checking in" (see CHECK IN), or outmaneuver for benefit [KY,NC] 2: Take another's belongings or intimidate sexually, as in "You don't have to worry much any more about somebody beating you--taking your stuff or raping you." [NC,WV] 3: Avoid the consequences (of a violation of prison rules), as in "I beat the ticket in court." [TN] **-beat the man** See RUN [TN] **-beat the system** Die, thereby cheating the correctional system of its full sentence [TN]

beat one's chest *v* 1: Pass oneself off as something other than what one really is [NC] 2: Act in a masculine manner in an effort to convince others of one's heterosexuality (This may in fact disguise homosexual activities, as in "He was always going around beating his chest, and then we found out he had a boy all the time.") [NC]

be-cool medicine *n* Thorazine, as in "John ain't even in the same room with me since they started giving him that be-cool medicine." [TN]

beef *n* Complaint; disagreement, as in "I had a beef with him over not paying me, but he got transferred so we didn't settle it." [NC,TN,WV]

beer *n* See HOME BREW [NC]

behind the box *adv* Position of ownership of a card game, as in "I'm behind the box, but I don't always play in the game." [NC]

behind the glass *adv* Non-contact visits, usually imposed as sanctions because of excessive displays of affection during previous visits [KY]

belly bomb *n* Prison main course consisting of hamburger balls served with rice [KY]

be one's back *v* Support in a violent confrontation, as in "Don't worry, I'll be your back if anyone else jumps in." [KY,NC] **-back** [TN]

- bible thumper** n Zealous Christian inmate (usually with a connotation of insincerity) [KY,TN,WV]
- bible toter** n See BIBLE THUMPER [TN]
- big house** n See JOINT (1) [NC,TN,WV]
- biker** n Inmate whose life prior to incarceration revolved around motorcycle activities and who, while incarcerated, groups with other inmates who share his cycling enthusiasm [KY,NC] -biker type [TN]
- bird cage** n See PC (with reference to those "chickens" who are so fearful that they place themselves in this unit) [TN]
- bit** n Sentence, as in "I did a five-year bit at The Walls once before." [TN]
- bit** v Serve time, as in "Ronald has been biting a long time." [NC]
- bitch** n 1: See sissy [KY,TN] 2: Visiting girlfriend [KY] 3: Multiple recidivist whose continued return to prison means that functionally at least, he is serving THE BITCH [TN]
- bitch, the** n Sentence served, usually life, under a habitual offender or persistent felony statute, as in "This was my third offense, so I caught the bitch." [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- bitch slap** v Strike with an open hand, anticipating no blow will be returned, the ultimate sign of contempt [KY,NC] -pimp slap [KY]
- black beauty** n Pharmaceutical stimulant, an amphetamine (in general, the designation of color with any drug item refers to the color of its encapsulated jacket) [KY,WV]
- Black Disciples** n In-prison gang which takes its name from a street gang outside the prison walls. [TN]
- black widow** n Pharmaceutical depressant; often refers to capsules that have been cut with other drugs [TN]
- blade** n See SHANK [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- blank on** v See GO OFF ON [NC]

blind spot *n* Position hidden from direct view of any correctional staff (This refers not only to locations on the prison YARD, but within the visiting room as well, where prisoners may take advantage of such a spot to share intimacies not permitted under institutional rules.) [NC,TN]

blister *n* See ROCKET FUEL [TN]

"blood on my shank or shit on my dick" *n* Ultimate threat of sexual intimidation declaring that recipient of the threat must either allow himself to be raped or die [TN]

Bloods *n* In-prison gang which takes its name from a street gang that originated in California [TN,WV]

blow *n* See CRACK [TN]

blow away *v* Kill with a firearm [WV]

blue belly *n* See GUARD [WV]

blue goose *n* Transport bus that brings new arrivals to an institution, as in "He just came in on the blue goose today." [KY] **-grey goose** [NC,WV]
-bluebird [TN] **-bird** [TN] (named after its manufacturer, Bluebird)

blues *n* Encapsulated form of Ritalin, functions as a stimulant [TN]

blunt *n* Cigar, slit and loaded with cocaine and marijuana [TN]

board *n* 1: Parole board (One "meets" the board even if his case is only reviewed, and no actual interview takes place.) [KY,TN] 2: See COURT [TN]

bogart *n* Tough, aggressive inmate, one who takes what he wants from others by force (a reference, of course, to Humphrey Bogart, known for his portrayal of men exhibiting these characteristics) [NC]

bogart *v* See APE [KY,WV]

bolter *n* Prisoner assigned to assist an officer with opening cells on each tier by pulling a lever that frees the locking mechanism for the row of cells (seldom heard in modern prison facilities where individual rooms have key controls) [TN]

- boo game** *n* Forceful intimidation of another inmate intended to force the weaker to place himself in Protective Custody, as in "We ran a boo game on him; told him if he was here when we got back we would cut his head off." (Most often, this tactic is used to frighten an undesirable such as a BABY RAPER.) [TN]
- book** *n* See SHEET (1) (2) [KY,NC]
- book** *v* See BEAT (1) [WV]
- bookie** *n* Prisoner who writes BALL TICKETS for those who want to gamble on sporting events [WV]
- book man** *n* Correctional officer who enforces every rule or procedure, exactly as it is written in the official guidelines (Such an officer may or may not actively look for violations of these rules.) [KY]
- boost** *v* See CHARGE UP (1) [NC]
- booster** *n* See GAS BURNER [NC]
- boot camp** *n* Institution characterized by highly-structured routine and rigidly enforced rules modeled after military models and usually reserved for first-time offenders [NC]
- boot hill** *n* Cemetery for indigent inmates, usually near the institution [KY]
- bootlegger** *n* Inmate supplier of alcohol [WV]
- booty bandit** *n* 1: Any individual engaging in homosexual activity who assumes the dominant role (may apply to a single incident as well as an ongoing activity) [NC,TN] 2: Individual who uses aggressive tactics to obtain homosexual liaisons [NC,TN] (see also PUNK (1))
- bounty** *n* Reward offered by a prisoner who has been the victim of a theft in exchange for the name of the guilty party [KY,NC] (see also BOUNTY HUNTER)
- bounty hunter** *n* See SEND OUT (1) [WV]
- box** *n* 1: Carton of cigarettes [KY,TN] 2: See MATCH BOX [TN,WV]
- boxcars** *n* Two or more sentences that must be served consecutively [KY,NC,TN,WV]

- box piece** *n* Large marijuana JOINT which sells for the equivalent of one carton of cigarettes, a BOX [KY]
- boy** *an* 1: See PUNK [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Covert homosexual [TN] 3: One who serves as an errand boy, etc for another; flunky [WV]
- boy scout camp** *n* See KINDERGARTEN [NC] -boys' school [KY] -boys' camp [KY]
- bracelet** *n* Chains fastened around one's wrists, as in "When I went to my mother's funeral, they made me wear those bracelets." [NC]
- break in** *v* Initiate (a new correctional officer) into the routine of prison life, especially regarding the degree to which he enforces certain prison rules [KY] (see also FISH (2))
- break off** *v* Begin (fighting), as in "I've seen a lot of things break off in the chow hall because everybody sees everything there and your reputation is on the line." [NC]
- break one down** *v* See TURN SOMEONE OUT [NC,TN]
- break out** *v* See RUN [WV]
- break the law down** *v* Explain to a new prisoner how one should handle oneself to survive in the institution, avoid conflict, etc., as in "I broke the law down to that fish from my home town so he can stay out of trouble with these wolves around here." [WV]
- brew** *n* See HOME BREW [KY,NC]
- bricks, the** *n* See FREE WORLD, as in "I'm getting ready to hit the bricks, man." [KY,TN]
- brother** *n* Closest friend, one who is like a family member [KY,NC,WV]
- buck** *n* See JULEP [NC]
- bud** *n* See SMOKE [KY]
- bug** *n* Mentally unbalanced prisoner [NC]
- bull** *n* See GUARD [KY,TN,WV]
- bulldoze** *v* Physically intimidate (another inmate) either for sexual favors or for possessions [KY,WV]

bullhead *n* See WATERHEAD (1) [KY]

bullpen *n* Small enclosed exercise yard attached to a housing unit and separated from the prison YARD (This may afford limited protection for a prisoner who fears being among the POPULATION.) [KY]

Bundy *n* Inmate with voyeuristic tendencies, as in "All that pervert wants to do is look at girlie pictures and jack." (This may be a reference to Ted Bundy, who confessed to such behaviors during his escapades) [KY]

bunkie *n* Bed partner [NC] (see also BUNK WITH)

bunk with *v* Share a cell with (may or may not have homosexual connotation) [KY]

burlington *n* See SOCK SUCKER (after the hosiery manufacturer) [TN]

burn *v* Take advantage of, particularly in the sense of cheating or refusing to pay a debt [NC,WV]

bury *v* Place for an extended time in isolation units as a result of continuing behavioral problems, as in "These guys that don't adjust, that stay full of hate and keep on killing each other, they bury them over in the hole." [KY,NC,WV]

busgetti *n* Spaghetti [NC]

bush parole *n* Successful escape, as in "Harry took a bush parole last night." [NC]

bust *v* 1: Apprehend (an inmate) in the act of violating a rule and issue a WRITE UP, as in "He busted me for running a game." [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Place under arrest (by police) while conducting one's FREE WORLD criminal activities [TN] (also used to refer to the apprehension and dismissal of a correctional officer who has assisted in bringing CONTRABAND into the institution) [WV]

bust bills *v* Collect and change money for the inmate controlling gambling ticket action (a type of RUNNER who works for a percentage of the total collected) [NC]

bust the doors *v* Unlock and open outer doors to the cell units, allowing prisoners access to areas outside their immediate housing units, as in "When they bust

the doors for breakfast, I'm going to get that snitch!"
 (refers to a procedure, seldom practiced in today's
 institutions, where officers are usually stationed
 inside housing units, and the prisoners are no longer
 simply locked in and abandoned to their own devices
 overnight) [NC] -kick the doors [WV]

button pusher n 1: Person with a network of connections
 who is capable of getting things done for another, such
 as assistance with an escape or delivery of a message
 outside the prison [KY] 2: See GAS BURNER [WV]

cadillac n Name brand cigarette, i.e. Winston, Marlboro,
 etc., as opposed to hand-rolled ones [TN]

cadillac gold n Lacquer which produces an exceptional
 euphoric state when inhaled [WV] (see also HUFF A
 BAG)

cage n 1: See CELL [WV] 2: See HOLE (1) (2) [WV]

camp n Any regional prison facility enclosed by
 perimeter fences rather than walls, as in "How is that
 camp over at Caledonia?" (One is always said to come
 "on" camp.) [NC,TN]

can n See JOINT (1) [KY]

canteen n 1: Prison-operated store where inmates may
 purchase personal hygiene items or snack foods
 [KY,NC,WV] -cantina [NC,WV] 2: See STORE (1)
 [KY,NC]

canteen baby n One who is willing to exchange homosexual
 favors for a steady supply of snack items from the
 CANTEEN [KY,NC,WV]

canteen card n Credit card given to prisoners with funds
 in their account for use in the prison-managed CANTEEN
 [WV]

canteen man n 1: Inmate who works in prison-operated
 CANTEEN [NC] 2: See STORE MAN [NC]

cap n Bullet [TN]

car n Radio, as in "I'm going to go drive the car for a
 while" (where "drive" equals "listen") [NC]

carry v See HOLD [NC]

carrier n See MULE (1) [WV]

carrying adj Armed in anticipation of conflict [TN]
(see also ARM UP)

carry oneself v Manner in which (a prisoner) goes about his daily activities--particularly interpersonal involvements--which signals whether he will be able to be intimidated and used, as well as whether he will adhere to the CONVICT CODE [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also CASE OUT)

case n Criminal indictment that led to one's incarceration, as well as the ongoing legal activities and sentencing considerations surrounding it, as in "I'm trying to get a hearing on my case and get this time cut." (One usually "catches" a case.) [NC,TN]
(see also CHARGE (1))

case out v Survey new arrivals to the prison, looking for potential strengths or weaknesses displayed through their mannerisms or interpersonal actions [KY]

cash n Cigarettes (so designated because in an economy where cash is prohibited, cigarettes are the medium of exchange) [KY]

cash money n See GREEN MONEY [KY,TN,WV]

casino n Card game strategically placed on the YARD during recreation periods [NC]

cat n Best friend (perhaps parallel to ROAD DOG) [WV]

"catch the man" v Meaning, "Watch for any correctional officers who may enter the area." [TN] (See also FIRE IN THE HOLE, MAN DOWN)

cat man n Burglar who steals by stealth [TN]

catwalk n Narrow walking area in front of cells located on upper TIERS [NC]

cave n See CELL [TN]

cell n Separate room used as living quarters for one or more inmates [KY,NC,TN,WV]

cell, single n Housing arrangement where one inmate has a private room; in most current prisons, a luxury granted to prisoners as a reward for good behavior [TN]

- cell block** *n* 1: See DORM (1) [KY,NC,WV] **-cell house**
 [KY] **-block** [NC,WV]
- celling, double** *n* Placement of additional prisoners in housing space originally designed for only one person
 [KY,TN,WV] **-double up** *v* [TN,WV]
- cell partner** *n* 1: Person who shares a cell with another person [KY,NC,TN] **-cell mate** [KY] **-cellie**
 [KY,TN] **-cell buddy** [WV] 2: See BUNKIE [NC]
- cell time** *n* Time served as much as possible confined in one's cell, sometimes out of physical fear, sometimes as a psychological strategy for coping with the incarceration experience [WV] (see also HOUSE RAT)
- cell with** *v* 1: See SETTLE DOWN [KY] 2: Share housing area with another [TN,WV] (see also CELLING, DOUBLE)
- chain** *n* Group of inmates being transported between institutions, so called because the prisoners are usually chained, as in "They're running a chain up from the main prison today." [TN,WV]
- chain car/bus** *n* See BLUE GOOSE [TN]
- chain gang** *n* See JOINT (1) [NC,WV]
- chain gang guard** *n* See GUARD (This is a term of particular disrespect, an allusion to what prisoners consider the most humiliating of prison experiences--the chain gang.) [NC]
- chair, the** *n* Electric chair [KY]
- chalk it** *v* Forget a debt instead of resorting to violence to reclaim it, as in "It doesn't pay to get too worked up, you know, I just chalk it and forget it." [TN]
- charge** *n* 1: Criminal indictment that results in incarceration [KY,NC,TN] 2: Indictment stemming from an in-prison incident such as a stabbing or killing [KY]
- charge up** *v* 1: Verbally encourage (an inmate) to stand up for himself against his intimidators [KY]
 2: Provoke through teasing [KY]
- check** *n* Withdrawal form written on an inmate's account and therefore a liquid asset, sometimes usable as cash within the prison economy, as in "Write me a check for

the dope if you don't have the cigarettes." (The amount is then sent to someone on the streets, and a STREET-TO-STREET arrangement made.) [TN]

check v See JUG AT #2) [TN]

check-in n 1: Inmate who places himself in Protective Custody, a special isolated housing unit which offers protection from inmates, either because he fears for his own safety or because he has outstanding debts he wants to avoid paying [KY,TN,WV] 2: Segregation area which houses Protective Custody inmates [TN]

check in v Place oneself in Protective Custody, an area segregated from the rest of the inmate POPULATION which offers safety from perceived threats (One also is said to check other people in through intimidation, as in "I got tired of that baby raper being around so I checked him in.") [KY,TN,WV]

check-in artist n One who is particularly adept at realistic and timely CHECK IN moves which allow him to avoid repayment of his debts until he builds his funds up, or until his creditor is transferred, etc., as in "Whatever you do, don't lend that check in artist any money; you won't see it again." [WV] (see also PROFESSIONAL CHECK-OFF)

check-off n See CHECK-IN (1) [NC] -check-cff block
See CHECK-IN (2) [NC]

check off v 1: See CHECK IN [NC] 2: Return to inmate POPULATION after having been in Protective Custody, as in "Some people make a career of this, they check off and then check on; check off, check on." [WV]

check on v See CHECK OFF (2) [NC]

check out v Die, as in "They thought I was a goner, but I wasn't ready to check out yet." [WV]

cheese eater n See SNITCH (a term which parallels the usage of RAT) [KY]

cherry n See FISH (1) [TN]

Chester; Chester the molester; Chester molester n See BABY RAPER (a reference to a cartoon character by this name appearing in Hustler magazine) [KY,NC,TN]

chicken coop n See PC (with reference to the fear of those inmates who request protection) [TN,WV]

- chicken head** *n* See ROCKET FUEL [TN]
- chicken shit** *n* See SNITCH; CHICKEN COOP [WV]
- chicken slick** *n* Prison-prepared chicken a-la-king [NC]
- child molester** *n* See BABY RAPER [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- chill; chill out** *v* 1: Quiet down, especially with respect to potentially violent action, as in "I've been chilling it and staying out of trouble." [NC] (see also MELLOW OUT) 2: Exercise caution so as not to precipitate any trouble [NC]
- chronic** *n* See SMOKE (reported to be primarily a west coast term) [WV]
- clean record** *n* In-prison history free of any disciplinary actions, an essential factor in decrease of security classification, opportunity for parole, and other benefits, as in "I've kept a clean record, so they let me work outside the institution." [WV]
- clean up** *v* Parcel out one's excessive store items to other individuals, thereby avoiding a rule violation in the event of a SHAKEDOWN, as in, "We knew the shakedown was coming, so I had time to clean my house up." [NC,WV] -clean house [KY] (see also HOLDER)
- clear** *adj* Successful COUNT, where all inmates are present, as in "The count is clear." [KY,WV]
- click** *n* Group of inmates who share particular interests and who subsequently associate with each other inside the institution, sometimes to the point of protecting each other or intimidating other individuals or groups [KY,TN,WV]
- click up** *v* Group; form alliances for protection (usually with reference to aggressive gang-like behaviors) [TN]
- clig** *n* See GOON SQUAD (1) [NC]
- clock on** *v* Punch, as in "He clocked on Harry when he found him in his locker." [KY]
- closet playing** *v* Engaging in covert homosexual activity (the norm in past days before prison officials began relaxing enforcement of anti-homosexuality restrictions) [KY]

- coal miner** *n* See MOLE [WV]
- cock boy** *n* See BOY (1) [NC]
- coke** *n* Cocaine, in powder form, that is sniffed
[NC,TN,WV]
- collector** *n* Inmate who will collect debts for another,
using force if necessary [KY] (see also SEND OUT (1))
- come at** *v* Attack with weapon, as in "He keeps talking
about coming at me, well I'm ready for him; I got my
shank." [NC]
- come down on** *v* Increase pressure (on inmates) through
more rigid enforcement of rules, particularly by
issuing WRITE UPS, as in "He came down on me for being
in an unauthorized area." [KY]
- come out of one's mouth wrong** *v* Speak with a lack of
respect towards another [WV]
- come out of the side of one's neck** *v* Reveal one's true,
and to that point hidden, character, as in "He came out
of the side of his neck when he tried to explain that."
[NC]
- coming and going** *v* See PASSING THROUGH [NC]
- commissary** *n* 1: See CANTEEN (1) [KY,TN] 2: See STORE
(1) [TN] 3: Items purchased at CANTEEN--snacks,
personal hygiene items, etc. [TN]
- commissary man** *n* See STORE MAN [TN]
- company man** *n* 1: One who expresses concerns that are
parallel with the prison system rather than with his
fellow prisoners, as in "Hey, don't tear up that
equipment like that." "Oh, you're the company man, I
see." [NC,WV] 2: See SNITCH [KY]
- compound** *n* 1: See YARD (1) (One is said to "run" on
the COMPOUND, though a BABY RAPER might be unable to "make
it" on the COMPOUND.) [KY,TN] 2: See POPULATION [TN]
- concertina wire** *n* See CONSTANTINE WIRE (This is the
correct, though seldom heard expression.) [KY]
- concrete jungle** *n* See JOINT (1) [KY]
- concrete hilton** *n* See JOINT (1) [KY]

connection *n* Outside supplier of contraband (most often used in the sense of a business arrangement where the articles are resold inside the prison, rather than used for personal consumption, as in "His connection can get anything you want, from jewelry to coffee.")
[NC]

constantine wire *n* Sharpened wire, coiled and placed at the top of perimeter fences of prisons to inhibit escape attempts (a mispronunciation of "concertina" wire, so called because the rolled form resembles the accordion-like musical instrument) [KY,NC,TN]

contraband *n* Any item not specifically authorized by prison administration--cash, drugs, alcohol, certain clothing items--or excessive quantities of permitted items such as snack foods or cigarettes (This is an official term used by prison administration, but has continuing currency among prisoners, as well.)
[KY,NC,TN,WV]

controlled movement *n* Institutional supervision strategy which restricts inmate movement within the prison to specified time frames throughout the day [KY]

convict *n* Trustworthy prisoner, one who never sides with or cooperates with the administration and who will never SNITCH, as opposed to INMATE [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also CONVICT CODE; HEART, SOLID)

convict code *n* Implicit set of guidelines practiced by the most admired inmates, and consisting of the following tenets: DO ONE'S OWN TIME, mind one's own business, do not cooperate with prison authorities, always act in the interests of fellow-prisoners, never steal from a fellow-prisoners, never SNITCH
[KY,NC,TN]; **-convict law** [NC]

convict heart *n* See HEART [KY,TN]

convict pride *n* Quality of self esteem based on one's adherence to the CONVICT CODE (a quality many claim they have, while bemoaning its rarity among their fellow-prisoners) [WV]

convict that needs a badge *n* Inmate who thinks and acts like an officer and who is therefore prone to SNITCH
[KY]

convict with a badge *n* Officer who will deliberately ignore infractions of prison rules [KY]

cookie jar, in the *n* Ingesting drugs, as in "You've been in the cookie jar again, haven't you?" [TN]

cookoff *n* See MOONSHINE (1) [TN]

cop *n* 1: See GUARD [KY,NC,WV] 2: See SNITCH (It is common practice to designate informants by names normally associated with prison authorities.) [KY]

cop any way *v* Behave bisexually, as in "A lot of guys will cop any way, even if they're not homosexuals." [TN]

count; count time *n* Designated time, one of several throughout the day, when all inmates are physically counted [KY,NC,WV] (see also CLEAR)

court *n* Internal disciplinary hearing to decide guilt and designate punishment for rule infractions [NC,TN]
-court call [KY] (see also WRITE UP)

crack *n* Form of cocaine that is smoked [KY,NC,TN,WV]

crack baby *n* Young inmate whose lack of mental acuity and erratic behavior is attributed to long-term drug addiction [KY,TN,WV]

crank *n* 1: See COKE [NC] 2: See UPPER [TN,WV]

crazy-man medicine *n* See BE-COOL MEDICINE [TN]

cream puff *n* See FISH (1) [TN]

creeper *n* See CAT MAN [TN]

crib *n* See CELL [KY,NC,TN,WV]

crime stopper *n* See SNITCH [KY,NC,WV]

Crips *n* An in-prison gang, which takes its name from an active street gang that originated in Southern California [TN]

cut one loose *v* Release by decision of the parole board [KY]

cut someone's head off *v* Kill, by any method, as in "If you ever snitch on me, I'll cut your head off."
 [KY,TN] **-take someone's head off** [NC]

cutie *n* See FISH (1) [TN]

- dad** *n* Dominant partner in a homosexual relationship, often bisexual (with the connotation of being a protector) [KY]; **-daddy** [NC,TN,WV] **-sugar daddy** [TN] (see also BOOTY BANDIT)
- dagger** *n* See SHANK [NC]
- dangerous guard** *n* 1: Officer who intentionally provokes people, unaware of the volatility of the prison environment or the personal stress under which inmates exist [NC] 2: Officer who will set an inmate up in order to BUST him [WV]
- day care center** *n* See KINDERGARTEN [KY,NC]
- day-for-day** *adv* Fulfillment of a sentence by serving every day of it [TN] (see also MAX OUT)
- days** *n* Additional time to serve due to disciplinary infractions, as in "That write-up cost me some days." [NC,TN] (see also DEAD TIME)
- d-board** *n* See COURT (shortened from "disciplinary board") [TN]
- deadbeat** *n* 1: Prisoner who won't pay his debts [KY,WV] 2: One who hangs around the prison YARD, and does little else with his time [WV]
- dead man** *n* Inmate serving a life sentence without hope for parole [KY]
- dead time** *n* 1: Any time for which one does not earn credit for serving (e.g. HOLE TIME) [KY,NC] 2: Time spent aimlessly, as in "These guys that just lay up on the yard all day are pulling dead time." [WV]
- death row** *n* Housing area that holds prisoners awaiting execution [NC]
- death trap** *n* See JOINT (1) [KY]
- d-four** *n* See FOUR [TN]
- dick dodging** *n* Attempting to use church attendance and Bible carrying as a method of avoiding conflict with other inmates who would rape (a person) (considered primarily a strategy of BABY RAPERS) [TN]
- Dilotta** *n* Dilaudid, a synthetic morphine derivative used as a pain medication [NC,TN] (see also DOWNER)

- dorm** n 1: Building or wing of a building consisting of several individual cells [KY,NC,WV] 2: Large room housing several inmates, with no partitions between individual beds [KY,NC,WV]
- down** adj Incarcerated, as in "I've been down three years." [KY,NC,TN]
- downer** n Any drug that acts as a depressant to the central nervous system [KY,NC,WV]
- drag** v 1: See GOUGE [NC] 2: Experience bad luck, as in "I was really dragging in that game today; I lost twenty dollars." [NC]
- draw** n Withdrawal from inmate account, usually identical with receipt of wages paid for work assignments, as in "He always owes somebody something; he can't seem to make it from draw to draw." [NC] (see also STATE PAY)
- draw** v Withdraw money or credit from one's account in the inmate trust fund [NC]
- draw day** n Official pay day for those prisoners receiving state wages [NC] (see also DRAW)
- dress out** v Wear clothing and if possible, makeup, to distinguish oneself as a willing homosexual, as in "You don't have to force nobody anymore, there's sissies dressing out all over the place" [TN]
- drink** v Perform oral copulation [KY]
- driving the cadillac/mercedes/lexus** v Possessing drugs for sale, as in "Who's driving the Cadillac today?" (one using these drugs is then said to be riding in the same vehicle) [TN,WV]
- drop a dime** v See DROP A NOTE [KY,NC]
- drop a kite** v See DROP A NOTE [KY]
- drop a note** v Send a written communication to prison authorities about illegal activities of other prisoners, as in "Somebody dropped a note on me and they busted me." [KY,TN,WV] (see also SNITCH KITE)
- drop one's drawers** v Become frightened and allow oneself to be intimidated and used by another prisoner, as in "They started loud-talking him and he dropped his drawers." [KY]

drop shot *n* Inmate lacking intelligence, who is incapable of carrying on more than the simplest conversations [NC]

drunk sentence *n* See SHORT TIME, as in "You ain't got no time; you're only serving a drunk sentence!" [NC]

dry cell *n* 1: Isolation cell consisting of a metal shelf to sleep on and an open pit in the floor to collect body waste [NC,TN] 2: Isolation cell without toilet facilities used when authorities suspect the prisoner of secreting drugs in his rectum, in which case a 72-hour stay will either verify or disprove the fact [TN]

dry run *n* Ruse whereby a suspected SNITCH is given false information which, if relayed to authorities, will offer evidence of his guilt, as in "We got the word to Robert that my old lady was going to be bringing in some dope when she visited Saturday and sure enough, the cops strip searched her. I'm going to cut his head off when I get the chance!" [TN]

dry snitch *v* Indirect provision of information, accomplished either by saying something about a fellow-prisoner's illegal activities within the hearing of prison authorities, or by deliberately dropping clues which lead authorities to the violator (The former could be either deliberate or accidental, though it has the same effect.) [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also LOUD TALK (2))

ducats *n* See GREEN MONEY (1) (2) [KY]

dungeon *n* 1: See HOLE (1) (2) [TN] 2: See CELL [WV]

dunk *v* See SLAM [TN]

early parole *n* 1: Release from prison through one's death, as in "Jim's finally free; he got an early parole." [WV] 2: See BUSH PAROLE [TN]

easy time *n* 1: Time served without stress due to a) ability to make the mental adjustment to prison life, b) family support and stability, c) absence of conflict with prison administration [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Time served in either a) an institution relatively free of violence, b) a prison with a relaxed approach towards rule violations, and c) a place free from harassment by authorities [KY,NC,TN,WV]

El Segundo *n* See HOLE (1) (2) [KY]

exercise pen **n** Enclosed cage in maximum security facility where one inmate at a given time may exercise
[TN]

fag n Masculine appearing homosexual who will use physical force to accomplish his goal, and who may adopt either the dominant or passive role in the sexual encounter [KY] 2: See HOMOSEXUAL (2) [NC,TN,WV]
-faggot [NC,TN,WV] (see also PITCHING AND CATCHING)

fake cheese n Imitation FDA cheese, supplied in bulk to
prison chow halls [NC]

family n Prisoners who are so close to each other that they assume the relationship the term describes [KY]

farm n Institution whose primary function is to produce food for other prisons, and which is characterized by hard labor conditions imposed upon an often violent and assaultive POPULATION [NC]

fifty-cent piece n Quantity of marijuana selling for
fifty boxes of cigarettes (In reality, this large a
purchase would be handled by cash or money order.)
[KY]

finger *n* Quantity of marijuana roughly equal to the length and breadth of two fingers touching end to end, and sold in a sandwich bag for \$100 in 1994's economy
[WV]

fire dope *n* See ROCKET FUEL [TN]

"fire in the hole" n See MAN DOWN [TN,WV]

first timer n Prisoner doing his first sentence
[KY,WV]

fish n 1: Inmate who is a new entrant in the
correctional system [KY,TN,WV] 2: New officer who
is unindoctrinated into the way prisons function [KY]

fish line *n* See **LINE** [KY]

fish tank *n* 1: Holding facility where new arrivals spend several weeks in processing prior to being permanently assigned within the prison system [KY] 2: Separate area within an institution where new FISH spend most of their time, perhaps appearing on the main prison YARD only when going to eat [TN]

- five-0** *n* See GUARD (This term, often called out to indicate that an officer is in the vicinity, undoubtedly emerged from the television show, Hawaii Five-0) [KY]
- flash** *n* See BUNDY [KY]
- flat** *n* 1: Parole denial, as in "They gave me a flat." (This means the prisoner was given no date for future release, although he will be reviewed again annually.) [WV] 2: See ROCK (2) [WV]
- flat** *adj* See STRAIGHT [KY]
- flat** *adv* Without parole restrictions, as in "When I get out, I want to go out flat." [TN] (see also MAX OUT)
- flat; flatten** *v* 1: Serve a prescribed amount of time that a jurisdiction considers to satisfy a sentence, as in "The board flatted me." (Some states, for instance, automatically credit a convicted felon with a certain amount of GOOD TIME which is subtracted from the amount he must serve prior to release--a release free from parole restrictions.) [TN,WV] 2: See MAX OUT, as in "The Parole Board told me I was going to have to flatten this sentence." [TN]
- flat date** *n* Date on which one would complete his sentence as prescribed by law [TN] -flat year [WV] (see also DAY-FOR-DAY, FLAT, MAX OUT)
- flat top** *n* See HOLE (1) (2) [WV]
- flip** *v* Change one's sexual orientation from heterosexual to homosexual during incarceration [NC] (see also TURN OUT, FLIPPING AND FLOPPING)
- flipping and flopping** *n* See PITCHING AND CATCHING [NC,TN,WV]
- flop** *n* Denial of parole, but with future reconsideration, as in "The board gave me a one year flop." [KY]
- fly the coop** *v* Escape [TN,WV]
- fly trap** *n* See JOINT (1) [KY]
- foo foo** *n* See ROCKET FUEL [KY]
- forever** *n* Amount of time being served by a LIFER, as in "How much time does Joe have?" "He's got forever." [KY,TN]

forgotten land *n* See FREE WORLD [TN]

four *n* Quantity of DILOTTA, the number referring to the size of the dosages, where four would equal 400 mg, as in "I got some fours in yesterday if you're interested." (also -three, -two) [NC] -k-4/3/2, -deuce [TN]

free world *n* Territory and objects located outside the walls of the prison (used attributively, it distinguishes that object from its in-prison corollary, as in "This joint has more free world people running around it than convicts.") [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also STREETS)

friend *n* Person closest to another prisoner, one for whom he will kill [KY,NC,TN,WV]

front *n* False projection of toughness used to manipulate the less educated newcomers [KY]

front *v* Extend on credit, as in "He's going to front the dope for me until draw day." [NC]

front of a sentence *n* Beginning months of incarceration (Often used with reference to GOOD TIME, which is awarded to an inmate at the beginning of his sentence under stipulations of certain behaviors, as opposed to some sort of earned sentence reduction, which would be said to come off the BACK OF A SENTENCE.) [KY,NC,TN]

front man *n* See SEND OUT (1) [KY]

front street *n* Precarious position where one is subject to conflict with either prison authorities or other inmates due to someone publicizing facts about one's personal life or business operations, as in "You put me on front street when you told them I had a connection." [KY,NC,TN,WV] -out front [NC]

frosting *n* See JUICE (1) [WV]

funk *n* See ROCKET FUEL [KY]

gainesburger *n* Prison-prepared hamburger, as in "We're having gainesburgers for supper again." [KY]

gain time *n* Sentence reduction awarded for work activities after incarceration (thus, calculated on the BACK OF A SENTENCE) [NC]

- gang bang** v Assault of another inmate by more than one person [KY]
- gangster** n Convict with criminal record connected with mafioso activities or large scale operations (usually self-proclaimed) [KY]
- gangster** v 1: See MACK [KY] 2: See APE, as in "These guys tried to gangster my partner." [KY]
- gas burner** n Prisoner who instigates violence by agitating one or more of the parties involved and encouraging confrontation, as in "This whole thing would have blown over if these gas feeders around here would have kept quiet." [NC,TN] (see also THROW GAS)
- gas feeder** n See GAS BURNER [TN]
- gas up** v See CHARGE UP (1) [TN]
- general population** n See POPULATION [KY,TN,WV]
- get big; get swoll** v See GO GROW [KY]
- get down first** v 1: See SNITCH (based on the belief that everyone will SNITCH, so one should give evidence on another before they, themselves are on the receiving end) [KY,TN] 2: Make a deal with prosecuting attorneys before one of your crime partners can make a better one [TN]
- get down with it** v Fight, as in "He and John got down with it on the yard" [NC]
- get over on** v See RUN A GAME, as in "You don't ever have to worry about a convict trying to get over on you." [KY,NC]
- get paid** v See HUSTLE [NC]
- get-up** n One's last morning in prison, the actual day of release, as in "I've got three days and a get up before I go home." [NC,TN]
- G-I Joe** n See ROBO COP [KY]
- girl** n See SISSY [KY,NC,TN] -gal [TN]
- girl-boy** n See SISSY [NC] -gal-boy [TN]

- give up** v See SNITCH (used in connection with initial arrest and trial, in the context of making a deal with the prosecuting attorney) [WV]
- give it up** v Capitulate to demands of an intimidator (giving up either sex or money) [NC,TN]
- gladiator school** n Violent and dangerous institution (perhaps suggested by the movie Spartacus) [KY]
- glue bag** n Plastic bag used to place glue or other liquid one wishes to inhale [WV] (see also HUFF A BAG)
- go down; come down** v Take place (usually with reference to illegal or violent action, as in "I knew something was going down when everybody cleared off the yard.") [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- go-getter** n See RUNNER (1) [TN]
- go for paper** v See UP [KY]
- go-juice** n See JULEP [TN]
- good people** n 1: Correctional officer who exercises discretion in his enforcement of institutional rules, as in "He's good people." [KY] 2: Trustworthy prisoner, one who models the CONVICT CODE [NC,TN]
- good stuff** n See ROCKET FUEL [TN]
- good time** n 1: Legally prescribed amount of time that can be earned by good behavior, and thus subtracted from a prisoner's sentence (As such, this is given on the FRONT OF A SENTENCE.) [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See EASY TIME (1) (2) [KY,WV]
- go off on** v Violently assault, as in "If you keep messing with me, I'm going to go off on you." [KY,NC]
- goon squad** n 1: See YARD DOG (1) (2) [NC,TN,WV] 2: Group of officers whose specific task is to physically assault a prisoner [KY,NC]
- go out in a box; go out in a pine box** v See GO OUT THE BACK [TN]
- go out the back** v Die while incarcerated, as in "How's Frank doing?" "He went out the back last night." (This reference reflects the practice in times past of

positioning the prison's cemetery outside its rear wall.) [TN]

go out the gate v See RUN [NC]

go over the fence v See RUN [NC] -go over the wall [WV]

go shopping v Receive packages from someone outside the prison, as in "Where'd you get the goodies, man?" "I went shopping today!" [TN]

go to God v Die (most often used as a threat as in "Get off the yard or go to God!") [KY]

go to someone's ass v Attack, as in "If a guy rips me off, I'm going to his ass before he gets out of the block." [NC]

go to war v See ARM UP [KY,TN,WV]

gouge v Harass (prisoners) by overenforcement of minor infractions, repeated shakedowns, etc., as in "This is the worst place I've ever done time; they're always gouging at you!" [NC]

grapevine n Informal prisoner-to-prisoner network which passes gossip and information along, not just within a particular institution, but inter-prison as well [KY,NC,TN]

grass n See SMOKE [KY,NC,TN]

grasshopper n Inmate housed in Protective Custody, so called because of his green uniform which distinguishes him from other prisoners [KY]

grays n Pharmaceutical depressants, perhaps Darvon [TN]

green n 1: See GREEN MONEY (1) [KY,TN] 2: Protective Custody unit, as in "He never could get any money from home to pay his debts, so he put himself in the green." (so labeled because the men housed there wear green uniforms which distinguish them from other prisoners) [KY]

green adj Inexperienced [TN] (see also FISH (1))

greenhorn n See FISH (1) [KY]

green lizzie n Pharmaceutical depressant, usually Librium or Librax [TN]

green money n 1: Cash, as opposed to prison SCRIPT or another medium of exchange such as cigarettes, as in "That deal was so big the dope man would only take green money." [KY,TN] 2: Money orders which can be illegally transferred between prisoners, thus functioning as cash [KY]

green up v Advance to minimum custody (and a green uniform) [NC]

grow v Work out with weights [KY]

guard n 1: Correctional officer [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See SNITCH (A SNITCH might also be called "Lieutenant," "Captain," "Sergeant," etc..) [WV]

guillotine n See COURT (with obvious connotation) [KY]

gump n 1: Idiot; without common sense, as in "That guy is such a gump he wouldn't know what you were talking about." [TN] 2: See HOMOSEXUAL (1) [KY]

gungi n See ROCKET FUEL (more correctly, Black Gungi, from Africa) [KY]

gunning for v Seeking opportunity to injure or kill, as in "He's been gunning for me ever since I got here." [NC]

gunpowder n See ROCKET FUEL (so called because it will "set your head off") [KY]

gun up v See ARM UP [KY]

hack n See GUARD [KY,NC,TN,WV]

hair between one's toes adv See RABBIT IN ONE, HAVE THE [KY]

half-stepper n 1: Prisoner who attempts to display CONVICT traits, but who has yet to prove himself with older, more seasoned prisoners, as in "He wants to be a convict, but to me he's just a half-stepper." [KY,NC,WV] 2: One whose efforts indicate he is not serious about whatever task he is undertaking [KY,NC] 3: One who never fully completes an undertaking [WV]

- hall captain** *n* Officer in charge within a particular housing unit [WV]
- hammer** *n* 1: See RUNNING PARTNER (2) [TN] 2: Weapon fashioned from a prefabricated mallet, with sharpened edges so that it cuts as well as bludgeons its victim [TN]
- hanger-oner** *n* See WANNA BE (2) [KY,TN]
- hanging** *n* See COURT (another obvious allusion) [TN]
- hang together; hang with** *v* Congregate with; spend time with [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- hard case** *n* Incorrigible prisoner, a loner who positions himself against everyone--prison officials, other inmates, outside contacts--and who seems determined to do HARD TIME [NC]
- hard core** *n* 1: See HARD CASE [KY] 2: See CONVICT [TN]
- hard guy** *n* See HARD CASE [KY]
- hard liner** *n* Prison supervisory personnel such as wardens who worked their way up through the ranks and whom long term prisoners respect, as in "Warden Jones was a hard liner, you know, but he treated us like men." [TN]
- hard time** *n* 1: Time served under difficult or stressful conditions due to a) inability to adjust mentally to prison life, b) family problems, c) continual disciplinary problems [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Time served in either a) a dangerous institution, b) a prison where rules are rigidly enforced, or c) one where there is continued harassment by authorities [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- harm** *n* See GUARD (claimed by the informant to be used by one prisoner he had once known and to his knowledge, by no other) [NC]
- have something going/in the works** *v* Involved in an illegal transaction [TN]
- hawk** *n* Lookout whose job it is to warn those in a gambling activity of any approaching officers [NC]

- hawk** v Watch for approaching correctional officer and warn prisoners engaged in illegal gambling activities [NC]
- head doctor** n Prison psychiatrist [WV]
- head on the block** n Placed in a position of vulnerability, as in "He's got his head on the block in this drug deal; too many people know what's coming down." [TN]
- heart** n Character and courage, as evidence by standing up for oneself, by refusing to be intimidated regardless of the circumstances, and a willingness to retaliate when abused (often associated with CONVICT, as in "Mike has a convict heart.") [KY,NC]
- heat** n Attention from guards or administrative officials, usually in the form of write ups or searches, as in "They're really putting heat on us lately." [KY] -bring heat down v Attract attention to an illegal activity either by complaining about it to prison officials or by excessive or obvious rule infractions which force officers to intervene, as in "If you don't watch your step, you're going to bring heat down on all of us." (Either case creates hardships for fellow prisoners.) [KY] -catch heat [TN,WV] -draw heat [NC,TN] -take heat v Accept punishment for an action without attempting to deflect attention to another prisoner [NC] -ride the heat [TN]
- heater** n See PIECE (3) [WV]
- heat stick** n 1: Prisoner whose behavior continually attracts attention of correctional officers--drawing HEAT--and who should therefore be avoided [NC] -heat wave [TN,WV] 2: Homemade electrical device used to heat water for coffee, etc. [KY]
- herb** n See SMOKE [KY]
- he-she** n See Sissy [KY,TN]
- hidden room** n See STASH (1) [WV]
- hip hop generation** n See PEPSI GENERATION (this term is included for the first time in the 10th edition of Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1994) [KY]
- hit** n Contracted killing [KY]

- hit** v 1: Attempt to borrow from [KY,TN] 2: Secure drugs for personal usage; SCORE [KY] 3: Kill [KY] 4: Ingest alcohol [NC]
- "hit a hole"** v Meaning "Get into your cells," a command issued by a correctional officer [WV]
- hit and git** v Engage in promiscuous homosexual activity, as in "Some of these fags turn tricks; they just hit and git." [KY] -hit and run [NC]
- hit on** v 1: Proposition sexually [NC,TN] 2: See APE [TN]
- hit the bush** v See RUN [NC]
- hit the fence** v See RUN [KY,NC] -hit the wall [KY]
- hit the high ground** v See RUN [KY]
- hog leg** n Large marijuana cigarette [TN]
- hold** v Possess contraband items belonging to someone else, as in "Man, hold these five boxes for me; my house is already full." [KY,NC,TN] (see also HOLDER (1), HOLDING (1))
- holder** n 1: Individual who keeps drugs for an inmate drug dealer, or store items for the STORE MAN, thereby allowing the dealer or store man to remain CLEAN in the event of a search [KY,NC] (see also HOLD, HOLDING) 2: Inmate who is in physical possession of money from the table of a card game, who stays in the vicinity of it, and by whose efforts the players remain free from a BUST [WV]
- holding** adj 1: Maintaining contraband such as drugs or a weapon on one's person or in one's cell, as in "They caught me holding a few joints." [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also HOLD, HOLDER (1)) 2: Keeping store items, cash, or drugs for those individuals in business, allowing them to technically avoid rule violations, as in "His stock is so large he has thirteen dudes holding for him." [KY,NC]
- hole** n 1: Segregation unit where a prisoner is sometimes placed for punishment [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Individual CELL where prisoner is placed for punishment purposes [KY,NC,TN,WV] 3: Control unit housing individual prisoners who are considered a threat to the order of the institution, usually due to their assaultive tendencies [KY,WV] 4: Passive homosexual partner

[KY]; **-real hole** (as opposed to a TURN-OUT) [NC]
 5: CELL (as in HIT A HOLE) [WV]

hole time *n* Time spent in segregation, normally not
 credited to a prisoner's sentence requirement [NC,TN]

holy roller *n* See BIBLE THUMPER [KY,WV]

home *n* See CELL [KY,NC,TN,WV]

home boy; home; homie *n* Person from the same geographic
 area as another, as in "Charlie's my home boy." or
 "What's up, home?" (used with great variance,
 sometimes identifying one from the same town or even
 neighborhood, at other times merely the same state)
 [KY,NC,TN,WV]

home brew *n* Homemade alcoholic beverage (This lexicon
 draws a distinction between a term such as this, which
 indicates any alcoholic beverage, and a fermented
 beverage made with fruits, though many prisoners do not
 use the terms with such discrimination.) [KY,NC]
 (see also JULEP)

home grown *n* See SMOKE [WV]

home plan *n* Projected FREE WORLD living arrangements
 submitted to Parole Board for approval as part of their
 considerations [NC]

homework *n* Prisoner who doesn't pay his debts and is
 subsequently assaulted, offering a lesson for other
 delinquent debtors, as in "When he refused to pay, he
 just set himself up as homework, you know?" [KY]

homo *n* See HOMOSEXUAL (1) (2) (shortened form) [WV]

homosexual *n* 1: Anyone engaging in homosexual activities
 [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Prisoner who is homosexual by
 choice, and was so prior to his incarceration, rather
 than one who was forced or coerced into such a sexual
 liaison [KY,NC,TN]; **-real homosexual** [NC,TN]

honor dorm *n* Separate housing unit whose inmate
 inhabitants receive special privileges based on their
 model behavior [KY,TN] **-honor unit, -honor pod**
 [TN] **-Honor Hall** [WV]

hooch *n* See HOME BREW [WV] **-hoochie cooch** [KY]

- hood** *n* Neighborhood on the STREETS, as in "Some of my home boys are just from my home town, but he's from my hood." [TN]
- hook up with** *v* 1: See SETTLE DOWN [KY,NC,WV]
 2: Develop business arrangement with a prison employee who agrees to bring CONTRABAND into the institution [KY,NC,WV] 3: See BE ONE'S BACK [KY] 4: Cooperate in a HUSTLE [NC]
- horse** *n* See SMACK [WV]
- hot** *adj* 1: Susceptible to being busted because one is HOLDING, as in "Jack is hot, he just collected from half a dozen dudes that owed him." [NC,WV] (see also HEAT STICK) 2: Stolen from another inmate, as in "Joe can probably get me a radio that's not hot." [TN]
- hot spot** *n* See BLIND SPOT [TN]
- house** *n* 1: See CELL, as in "I'm going to the house and get some sleep." [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See FREE WORLD [KY]
- house of pain** *n* See JOINT (1) [WV]
- house man** *n* 1: Prisoner who operates the gambling action in a particular housing area (In North Carolina, this right is purchased from the previous owner or received by him as a gift; in other states, anyone with capital may PUT DOWN A GAME) [KY,NC,WV] 2: Player who is physically in a game, but who works for the owner of it [NC]
- house rat** *n* Prisoner who spends most of his leisure time in his housing area rather than on the YARD (often because he does not trust himself among the temptations present in the latter environment) [TN]
- huff a bag** *v* Inhale glue, lacquer, gasoline, etc. fumes by placing their liquid form in a plastic bag and pressing it around the nasal cavity, as in "Let's go back to the house and huff that bag." [WV] (see also GLUE BAG)
- hulk** *n* Weightlifter [NC]
- human world** *n* See FREE WORLD [KY]
- husband-in-law** *n* See JODY, as in "I wish my husband-in-law would send me some money!" (probably a reference to the new husband of an ex-wife, rather than to one

who has moved in with the prisoner's present wife)
[NC]

hustle *n* Any of a series of profitable business operations operated by prisoners, as in "If you don't get any help from your family, you've got to have some kind of hustle to survive." [KY,NC,TN,WV]

hustle *v* Make money or obtain a needed commodity through an exchange of some service or product [KY,NC,WV]

hustle, honest *n* 1: Profitable venture that violates prison rules but is considered morally acceptable and non-harmful by the inmates, and will not draw the attention of prison authorities (e.g. selling an item to another inmate) [KY,TN] (See also HUSTLE, LEGAL)
2: See HUSTLE, LEGAL [TN]

hustle, legal *n* Profit-making operation that is authorized by prison authorities, e.g. arts and crafts [TN] (see also HUSTLE, HONEST)

hustler *n* 1: One who engages in business activities above and beyond supplying his minimal personal needs [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See RUNNER (1) [TN]

hype *n* Cigar sold in CANTEEN (the brand name is Black and Mild) [NC]

ice *n* See COKE [TN]

ice *v* 1: Stop an action, as in "Ice that shit and relax." [KY] 2: Kill, as in "If he doesn't watch his mouth, someone is going to ice him." [NC]

ice pick *n* Any weapon sharpened to a point and used to stick rather than cut [KY,TN,WV]

indian *n* Clear liquors, e.g. vodka, gin (so called, according to my informant, because "it makes you want to fight") [WV]

informant; informer *n* See SNITCH [KY,NC,TN,WV]

in someone's face *adv* 1: Violating a prison rule carelessly or in such an obvious fashion that it is impossible for a correctional officer to ignore it, as in "Officer Jones is cool, as long as you don't do something in his face." [KY,TN] 2: "Snitching" (see SNITCH) in the presence of the inmate being reported (an action most prisoners insist is increasingly prevalent) [TN] -in front of [KY]

inmate *n* 1: Resident of a prison [KY,NC,TN,WV]
 2: Prisoner who, though not actively opposing his
 fellow-prisoners, is overly cooperative with
 institutional authorities, trying to make his own
 incarceration as easy as possible (as opposed to
 CONVICT) [KY,NC,TN,WV]

inmate lawyer *n* See JAILHOUSE LAWYER [TN]

inside, the *n* See JOINT (While technically, anything
 inside the perimeter fences of an institution might be
 called "inside," this term refers to the process of the
 incarceration experience, as in "Almost everyone
 hustles because you've got to make it the best way you
 can on the inside.") [NC]

instigator *n* See GAS BURNER [KY]

institutionalized *adv* See STATE RAISED (1) (2) (Though a
 technical term, this is used freely by prisoners.)
 [KY,TN]

iron *n* See PIECE (3) [WV]

iron pile *n* Weightlifting equipment [KY]

item, the *n* State weapon, so identified in verbal
 communication by prison correctional staff, as in "The
 hallway is secure, you can transport the item now."
 (used, too, in jest by inmates) [WV]

Jabbo *n* See JODY [NC]

jacket *n* Label attached to someone describing a
 particular characteristic of their behavior, but which
 may or may not be accurate; reputation (e.g One may
 put a "snitch jacket" on someone, but if the jacket
 doesn't fit, a confrontation is likely; however, if the
 inmate continues to wear the jacket, it is assumed to
 be accurate. The term also refers to a prisoner's
 institutional file, often called a "jacket," which
 contains a history of his incarceration.) [KY,WV]

jail *n* See HOLE (1) (2) [NC,TN]

jailhouse lawyer *n* Prisoner who assists other inmates
 with legal matters, some of whom serve as official
 legal aides and may have considerable knowledge, while
 others are self-acclaimed experts who may even use this
 arrangement as their HUSTLE, as in "He got him a
 jailhouse lawyer and thinks he's going to get his case
 overturned." [TN]

- jailhouse religion** *n* Commitment to faith that is adopted after incarceration and ends upon release; insincere faith, as in "He's got jailhouse religion; he'll lay that Bible down outside the gate." [NC]
- jake** *n* See JOINT (1) [KY]
- jason** *n* See JOINT (2) [KY]
- jigger** *n* See HAWK [TN]
- Jimmy** *n* JOINT that is loaded with cocaine [TN]
- Jody** *n* Man who has moved in with a prisoner's wife or girlfriend while he is incarcerated [KY,NC,TN,WV]
-Jody the grinder [TN]
- Joe College kid** *n* See ROBO COP [KY]
- John** *n* See JODY [TN]
- joint** *n* 1: Prison, either a specific institution, or the incarceration experience itself, as "I did ten years in the joint." [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Marijuana cigarette [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- jug at** *v* 1: See GOUGE [NC] 2: Verbally ridicule as a way of testing another's response, as in "He kept on jugging at me about my old lady." [TN]
- juice** *n* 1: Interest charged, either cash or in the commodity borrowed, as in "What's the juice for a box until payday?" [KY,NC] 2: Influence, as in "Jimmy thinks his old man has enough juice to get a resentencing hearing set up." [WV]
- julep** *n* Homemade prison wine, using yeast and available fruit [TN,WV]
- jump it off** *v* Ignite conflict, especially large scale rioting, as in "There's so much tension here, if something jumps it off, it'll be a nice one." [KY,NC,WV]
- jump street** *n* Initial starting point of something; the very beginning, as in "I've got no excuses, I knew what the odds on this deal were from jump street." [KY,TN,WV]
- just fell off the truck** *adv* Newly assigned to the prison system, as in "He acts like he just fell off the truck." [TN] (see also FISH (1))

- kangaroo court** *n* See COURT (so called because prisoners are convinced they have little chance of avoiding conviction) [KY,NC] -kangaroo [TN]
-kangaroo city [KY]
- keep low** *v* Maintain a low profile to keep from calling attention to one's illegal activities, as in "I'm always keeping low instead of ripping and running like the rest of these guys on the yard." [TN]
- keister** *n* Rectum, as in "He used the old keister stash to hide his dope." [KY,NC,TN] -keister stash [KY]
(see also SUITCASE, PUT IT IN THE VAULT)
- kick** *v* 1: Talk casually, particularly in a joking manner, as in "We were just shooting around, you know, but he got pissed." [NC,TN] 2: See BUST THE DOORS [WV]
- kick off** *v* See JUMP OFF [KY]
- kid** *n* 1: Any young prisoner [KY,TN] 2: Young, soft looking and unaggressive prisoner who is coerced into a homosexual relationship and protected by a DADDY [KY,WV] 3: Unreasonable youth, one who refuses to learn from older convicts [NC,TN,WV] (see also PEPSI GENERATION)
- kiddie school** *n* See KINDERGARTEN [KY] -kiddie camp [TN]
- kill a sentence** *v* Serve the required amount of time to complete a sentence, as in "Under that new law, I have to serve a minimum of ten years to kill this sentence." [KY]
- killer** *n* 1: Dangerous prisoner who is accepted as one willing to take the life of another, even his fellow-prisoner, if it suits his purposes, as in "Watch him, he's got a reputation as a real killer." [KY,WV] 2: See ROCKET FUEL [TN]
- kindergarten** *n* Institution where one serves EASY TIME [KY,NC,TN]
- kitchen man** *n* Inmate who works in the kitchen and whose HUSTLE is to provide food items to other prisoners for a price [TN] -sandwich man [TN]

- kite** *n* Written communication, either within the institution, or to someone on the OUTSIDE, as in "I sent a kite to the Warden, but he ignored it."
[KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also SNITCH KITE)
- knife** *n* See SHANK [KY,NC,TN,WV] **-pocket knife** [TN]
- lady** *n* See WIFE [TN]
- lame write up** *n* 1: Disciplinary report issued for a petty infraction of rules [KY,NC] 2: Disciplinary report issued by officer who dislikes one and wants to cause him difficulty [WV] 3: Disciplinary report that is weak on evidence and thus will probably not stand up, but was written primarily as a hassling technique [WV]
- land** *n* See FREE WORLD, as in "I'm going back out to that land." [NC]
- laundry man** *n* Inmate who will do laundry for other prisoners for a price [TN]
- lay up** *v* 1: Live in Protective Custody housing or stay in the immediate vicinity of one's cell as a means of protection from other inmates [TN] (see also SLICK CHECK) 2: Serve time aimlessly, as in "I used to just lay up, I wasn't in no programs or nothing." [TN]
- l.d.** *n* See JODY (The initials stand for "long dick.")
[NC]
- lean on** *v* Apply pressure, particularly to a prisoner of unknown reputation, as a way of calculating his potential responses to other situations, as in "I had a friend lean in him a little in chow hall each day, and I watched and figured I could get him." [NC]
- legal drunk; legal high** *n* State of drug euphoria achieved through prescribed medication, as in "He don't need to make a buy, he's already on a legal high from what the doctor's giving him." [TN]
- legal whiskey** *n* Alcoholic beverage sold in stores on the STREET, some of which is smuggled into the prison [KY]
- lesson violence** *n* Assault on a prisoner who refuses to pay, intended to communicate an instructive message to the rest of the POPULATION about the way the loaner handles his business, as in "Jumping on this guy is just lesson violence--something I got to do or

everybody will decide they don't have to pay me."
[KY]

let oneself out v Allow oneself to have a manipulative game run on them, as in "I let myself out to get beat by that dude when I fronted that dope to him." [TN]

license to kill n Sentence of life without parole, or a sentence where a prisoner has so many years before parole consideration that he feels he has nothing to lose by acting violently, as in "What are they going to do, give me another life without? I got a license to kill." [WV]

life, double n Two life sentences to be served consecutively, offering the prisoner little hope of ever being released, as in "I'm doing double life, but I can't even serve out the first one!" [KY,TN]
-triple life [KY]

life on the installment plan n Perpetual recidivism, where a prisoner continues to return to prison throughout his lifetime, as in "Jack is doing life on the installment plan." [KY] (see also STATE RAISED (2))

lifer n Prisoner serving a life sentence [KY,NC,TN,WV]

life with n Life sentence with annual parole consideration after an initial number of years are served [WV]

life without; life without mercy n Life sentence with no parole consideration [KY,TN,WV]

light bulb; bulb n Life sentence, as in "When he went to court, they gave him a light bulb." [NC]

light adj See MELLOW (1) [TN] **-lightweight** [WV]

line n Collection of new inmates, whether in transit, or at a temporary holding facility, as in "Eight new ones came in on the fish line yesterday." [KY] (see also FISH TANK (1) (2) v **-riding the line** Traveling from an initial holding facility, such as a county jail, to a state correctional facilities [KY]

list n See SHEET (1) [NC]

live off the streets v Receive one's entire support--money and necessary hygiene items--from friends or relatives on the OUTSIDE [NC]

- live with** v See SETTLE DOWN [KY,TN]
- loan shark** n Prisoner who loans cash or cigarettes at interest, a practice which violates institutional rules [KY,NC]
- loan sharking** v Practice of loaning cash or commodities at interest in violation of institutional rules [KY,NC]
- lock down** v 1: Secure a certain area of the institution as part of the normal routine, such as during evening hours [KY,NC,WV] 2: Secure an entire institution due to some emergency or for purposes of a search, as in "They locked down this place for three weeks after the riot." [KY,WV] adj -on lock down, -locked down (expresses the condition, as in "We have been on lock down for three weeks.") [KY,TN,WV]
- locked up** adj 1: See DOWN [KY,NC,TN] 2: See HOLE (1) (2) [NC,TN] -locked back [NC]
- lock in a sock** n Padlock or any other hard object, placed in a sock, and swung as a weapon [KY]
- lock-up** n 1: See HOLE (1) (2) [NC,TN,WV] 2: See HOLE (3) [WV] -lock up unit [WV]
- long line** n Work detail whose job consists of cleanup and maintenance of public roads, parks, etc., and who do their work under the supervision of an officer armed with a shotgun or rifle, as in "Being on the long line ain't no fun in July and August." [TN] (see also SHORT LINE)
- long timer** n 1: Inmate with many years to serve [KY,NC,TN] 2: Inmate who has served many years [TN] -long termers [NC]
- look behind one's back** v Living in perpetual fear of assault, as in "You know you're going to be here a long time, and you don't want to have to be looking behind your back all the time." [WV]
- look for/grab a reputation** v Displaying aggressive behavior and portraying toughness to establish oneself as a prisoner to fear, as in "If he keeps trying to grab a reputation, he may scare someone enough to kill him." [TN]

- looking; looking to go** v Anticipating release in near future, as in "My case was just overturned, so I'm looking to go any time now." [TN]
- looking for some help** v Hoping for positive response from Parole Board, as in "I know I can make it this time, I'm just looking for some help now." [NC]
- looking over one's shoulder** v Abiding by parole restrictions after discharge from prison, as in "When I get on the outside, I want go out flat and not have to be looking over my shoulder." [TN]
- look the other way** v Deliberately ignore a violation of prison rules, as in "Officer Rogers will look the other way as long as you don't cause no major problem." (Perhaps the violation most overlooked is that regarding inmate-ran STORES; it is not unusual for an officer, himself, to make a purchase from the STORE MAN.) [TN]
- loony tunes** n Prisoner exhibiting aberrant behavior [TN]
- loose-lip** n See SNITCH [KY]
- loud-talk** v 1: Attempt to impress or intimidate another through aggressive or boastful verbalizations, as in "They tried to loud talk that fish, but he stood up to them." [KY,WV] 2: Deliberately speaking louder than necessary so as to be heard by an officer or other prison authority standing nearby; DRY SNITCH [KY,TN]
- lude** n Quaalude, a depressant, often prescribed for anxiety (see DOWNER) [TN,WV]
- lynch mob** n See COURT [TN]
- m-30/60/90** n Morphine capsule (the numerical suffix describes the quantity of grams of the dosage) [TN]
- mack** v Commit armed robberies (in relation to one's incarcerating offense) [KY]
- Maggie's** n See HOLE (1) (2) [KY]
- main squeeze** n Primary, or dearest girlfriend, as in "My main squeeze is coming to visit this weekend." [KY]
- mainstream prisoners** n Those men involved in normal routines about the prison; POPULATION [KY]

-mainline, -mainline population, -main population
[WV]

make a motion picture v Spend time in the HOLE [TN]

make it v Successfully reintegrate into society outside the prison walls, as in "If the let me out again, I know I can make it this time." [KY,NC,TN]

make paper v Be granted a parole, as in "He just made paper." [KY] **-get paper** [NC]

man n 1: Dominant partner in a homosexual relationship [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also LIVE WITH) 2: Mature, behaving according to the tenets of the CONVICT CODE, as in "He came in here and acted like a man; he did his own time and didn't whine about it." [KY,NC,TN,WV]

man, the n 1: Any prison authority figure, either individual correctional officers or a line supervisor in charge of some aspect of institutional life, as in "Somebody better watch out for the man." [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See DOPE MAN [TN] 3: See LOAN SHARK [TN]

"man down" adj Meaning, "Officer in the vicinity," a warning given by a fellow-prisoner so that others know to halt any illegal activities, dispose of evidence, etc. [NC] (In an effort to stifle this warning cry, at least one North Carolina institution made it a rule infraction to utter these words, at which point the prisoners began saying, "powder puff down," and the institution soon rescinded its policy.) **-"keys down", -"guard down"** [NC] (see also CATCH THE MAN)

Marion clone n Prison characterized by rigid enforcement of rules and controlled movement of inmates, taking its name from the maximum security facility in Marion, IL [KY]

mark n Inmate identified as one who will be easily manipulated [KY]

married to the institution adj Serving a life sentence, as in "Bert there is married to the institution." (a cruel jest) [WV]

marry v See SETTLE DOWN [KY,NC,TN]

Mary Jane n See SMOKE [TN,WV]

master sheet n Listing of prisoner names with team selections for a gambling pool [KY]

match box *n* Quantity of marijuana (a term which indicates its size and packaging) [TN,WV] **-box**
 [TN,WV] **-nickel box** (so-called, although it currently costs \$20) [WV]

Matlock *n* See JAILHOUSE LAWYER (with reference, of course, to the television character) [KY]

max *n* Maximum security area within a particular institution [KY,NC,TN] **-max lock up** [TN,WV]
-max joint Prison containing primarily maximum security rated inmates [KY]

max *v* See CUT SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [NC]

max out *v* Serve a complete sentence, day-for-day, and thus to have no parole obligation when released, as in "I maxed out a ten year sentence for robbery."
 [KY,NC]

McGruff *n* See CRIME STOPPER (after the dog seen in the crime stopper commercial message) [NC]

meat wagon *n* See BLUE GOOSE [TN] (see also NEW MEAT)

meet me on the yard *v* See SEE YOU IN THE MORNING, I'LL (often followed by "... and bring your shank.")
 [NC,WV]

mellow *adj* 1: Relaxed and unstressful nature characteristic of certain institutions (as opposed to TIGHT) [KY,WV] 2: Relaxed and calm attitude of prisoner who doesn't respond to the angers and frustrations of his environment and who stays away from activities which invite trouble [KY,TN];
 3: Euphoric state of one under drug influence [WV]

mellow liquors *n* Brown, dark liquors, so called because they "mellow you out" (as reported by informant)
 [WV]

mellow out *v* 1: Successfully adjust to prison environment, as in "I had a hard time being locked up at first, but I have mellowed out now and can do this time." [NC,TN] 2: See CHILL OUT (1) [NC]

men of the eighties *n* See PEPSI GENERATION [NC]

mental dummy *n* See HULK, as in "Those mental dummies go out there and lift all day, but it all goes to the head." [WV]

mess another's house up v Act in a way that makes the institution a more difficult place for anyone to live in, as in "If we let these guys go around gang banging someone, they'll do it to me, too and that messes up my house, because I've got to live here." [KY]

metal n See SHANK [WV]

milkweed n See THOR [WV]

mole n Prisoner who escapes by digging his way beneath a wall [WV]

money order n See CHECK [TN]

moonshine n 1: Homemade whiskey, prepared by steaming JULEP and then running it off and cooling it down, a process identical to that of making corn whiskey (often used in a generic sense, thus applying to any homemade alcohol) [TN] -shine [KY] 2: See JULEP [TN]

move sheet n 1: Official transfer list showing which inmates will be moved to other institutions [KY]
2: Form on which prisoners make request for change of housing assignments [KY]

Mr. Haney n Middleman who handles a wide range of inventory for other inmate entrepreneurs and whose primary activities center around WHEELING AND DEALING (named for the enterprising character on television's Green Acres) [TN]

mud n Prison-prepared coffee [NC]

mule n 1: One who carries contraband for a prisoner, either a) prison staff who smuggle items in or out of the institution, or b) an inmate who transports the item from one location in the prison to another, as in "They're always searching me, but my mule's carrying my dope." [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: String, with a heavy object attached to one end and an item intended for delivery to the other. The weighted end is then thrown to a location where a second person is able to get it and reel in the string with along with the desired item [NC]

muscle v See APE [WV]

musclehead n See HULK [TN]

mush n Meat loaf prepared in prison chow hall [NC]

- nail** v Assault (another inmate) [KY]
- new breed** n See PEPSI GENERATION [NC,TN]
- new buddy, newbie** n See FISH (1) [TN] -new cock
[NC] -newcomer [WV]
- new man/boy on the street/block** n See FISH (1) [NC]
-new kid on the block [TN] -new kid [WV]
- new meat** n See FISH (1) [NC,TN,WV] -fresh meat
[WV] -fresh meat/chicken on the block [TN]
- nickel** n 1: Five dollars [WV] (see also DIME (1),
QUARTER (1)) 2: Five year sentence, as in "Willie's a
short timer! He's only got a nickel." [WV] (see
also DIME (2), QUARTER (2))
- nickel it out** v Apportion marijuana into five dollar
units for resale (an activity no longer profitable, so
now one splits it into "dime bags") (See BAG) [TN]
- nine-one-one** n See SNITCH (a reference to the emergency
phone number) [KY,NC,WV]
- ninety-day wonder** n Inmate serving a very short sentence
[WV]
- Norman Bates** n Child molester with psychotic tendencies
(with reference to Hitchcock's character in Psycho)
[KY]
- numb chuck** n Sock, loaded with bricks or padlocks and
used as a weapon (This is not the standard definition
of the Japanese weapon--nunchaku--from which this term
originates, but this is the way it was described by my
informant.) [KY]
- number** n See JOINT (2) [WV]
- nut doctor** n Prison psychiatrist [KY]
- nut ward** n Unit reserved for psychotic prisoners [WV]
- old con; old convict** n See OLD HEAD (1) [NC,TN,WV]
- old head** n 1: Prisoner who has been incarcerated for a
long time and who adheres to the CONVICT CODE [NC,TN]
2: Prison administrator who has had many years of
service and who allows certain aspects of the CONVICT
CODE to flourish [NC]

- old lady** *n* See WIFE [TN]
- old number** *n* See OLD HEAD (1) (with reference to the prisoner's identification number which easily identifies his long length of time served [WV]
- old son** *n* See OLD HEAD (1) [TN]
- old timer** *n* 1: Inmate who has been incarcerated for a long period of time [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See OLD HEAD (2) [NC]
- on account** *adj* In a bookkeeping account of prisoner's funds from which he may make transactions that are accredited to the balance, as in "I've got plenty of money on account this week; my old lady sent me a money order on Friday." (Few states allow possession of actual cash.) [NC,TN,WV]
- one foot over the line** *adv* See WALKING BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET [TN]
- one-ninety** *n* One-hundred ninety proof liquor, brought into the prison from outside, and much preferred to homemade alcohol [WV]
- one thirty-eight** *n* See WRITE UP (While this is the official form number, it is also used by prisoners as a synonym for WRITE UP.) [NC]
- on the books** *adj* 1: See ON ACCOUNT [TN,WV] 2: Carried as a creditor by another inmate [TN]
- on the countdown** *adj* Anticipating release in the near future, as in "He got a six month set-up, so he's on the countdown." [WV]
- on the pad** *adj* See ON THE PAYROLL [KY]
- on the payroll** *adj* Financially rewarded for assistance with illegal activities (especially refers to prison employees who bring restricted items into the institution) [KY]
- on the waiting list** *adj* See SLEEPING IN A MATCH BOX [WV]
- on the wire** *adj* See ON THE PAYROLL [KY]
- ooh-wee bumps** *n* Lumps on the head, the result of being beaten by a GOON SQUAD [KY]
- open** *adj* See MELLOW (1) [WV]

open heart surgery *n* Process whereby one is deeply slashed, i.e. opened up, with a knife, as in "They did open heart surgery on me with a ten-inch dagger."
[WV]

outside; outside world *n* See FREE WORLD [KY,NC,TN,WV]

outside court *n* Criminal courts outside the institution, where inmates may be tried for felonies, as opposed to disciplinary boards held inside the prison which prosecute institutional rule infractions [KY]

package *n,v* See SUITCASE [NC]

pad *n* See CELL [KY,TN]

palace *n* See CELL [WV]

paper *n* 1: See GREEN MONEY (1) (2) [TN,WV] 2: See WRITE UP, as in "The way they use paper around here, you can't do nothing!" [TN]

paper hanger *n* Prisoner whose conviction is for forgery
[KY] -wallpaper hanger [NC]

parole dust *n* Fog (which would allow for a BUSH PAROLE) [NC]

"Parole officer hasn't been born yet, one's" *n* Humorous remark signifying the extensive amount of time a prisoner must yet serve [NC]

partner *n* 1: Close associate, one with which another might share food or pool resources, as opposed to ASSOCIATE, FRIEND [KY,NC,WV] (see also ROAD DOG)
2: See BROTHER [NC,WV] 3: Co-participant in criminal act [WV]

passing through *v* Serving a very short sentence, as in "These guys that are just passing through don't give damn about the fact that this home for us old timers."
[NC,WV]

pay me no mind list *n* Mental catalogue (by prison staff) of inmates whose verbalizations of their condition as well as their attempts to resist their subjugation are to be ignored [KY]

PC *n* Protective Custody unit, characterized by single cells, where an inmate is placed when it is determined that he is unable to live safely in the POPULATION (usually, either because he is unable to pay his debts

or because he is considered a SNITCH) [KY,NC,WV]
(see also CHECK IN (2), CHECK-OFF BLOCK)

pearl handles n 1: See CADILLAC [TN] 2: Filter tipped
cigarettes [TN]

peeper n Prisoner who attempts to overhear as many
conversations as possible, carefully gleaning any
information which could prove useful for illegal
activities. manipulation of staff, etc., as in "We've
got peepers out to try and find who the rat is." [WV]

pencil n Officer's primary tool for rule enforcement,
used to issue a WRITE UP, as in "Let's see how this
rookie is going to act with a pencil." [KY]

people n 1: Relatives, as in "My people can't afford to
send me anything." [KY,TN] 2: Close friends from
among prisoners [KY] 3: Homosexual partner, as in
"She's my people." [TN]

Pepsi generation n Younger inmates, characterized by
drug addictions, aggressive behavior, and a willingness
to ignore the rights of other prisoners ; considered by
older convicts to be totally unpredictable and
untrustworthy [KY,NC,TN,WV]

Perry Mason n See JAILHOUSE LAWYER (allusion is to the
fictional/television character) [KY]

petty thief n Prisoner who steals from his fellow-inmate
[KY,WV]

PFO n Persistent Felony Offender, a designation which
adds time to be served in addition to the standard
sentence, and which extends the period that must be
served prior to any parole consideration [KY] (see
also WALKING TEN)

phoney baloney n Turkey bologna [NC]

pick n See ICE PICK [KY,NC]

piece n 1: Firearm [KY,TN] 2: See JOINT (2) [KY]
3: Quantity of marijuana equal to three match boxes and
selling for fifty dollars [WV] -twenty-cent piece
Quantity of marijuana selling for twenty dollars [TN]
-five-pack piece Marijuana cigarette that sells for
five packs of cigarettes [KY] -quarter piece
Quantity of marijuana selling for twenty-five boxes of
cigarettes [KY] 4: See SHANK [NC,TN,WV]

- pig** *n* See GUARD [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- pigeon** *n* See HOLDER (2) [WV]
- pig meat** *n* See FISH (1) [WV]
- pig-sticker** *n* See SHANK [WV]
- pillhead** *n* Prisoner noted for excessive and continual use of pharmaceuticals [KY]
- pimp slap** *n* See BITCH SLAP [KY]
- pinhead** *n* See PIN JOINT [KY]
- pin joint** *n* Extremely small marijuana cigarette, with a hairline of marijuana across the bottom of the paper [KY,WV] (see also PIECE)
- pipe** *n* Any club-like weapon used as a blunt instrument [KY,WV]
- pipe** *v* Hit someone with a blunt instrument, as in "Somebody piped Joe last night." [KY]
- pisshead** *n* See JULEP [TN]
- piss test** *n* Urinalysis used to determine whether a prisoner has recently ingested drugs [WV]
- pistol** *n* See SHANK [KY]
- pitching and catching** *v* Engaging in both the active (pitching) and passive (catching) roles in a homosexual relationship, as in "As far as I'm concerned, if you're pitching, you're catching." [KY,NC,TN,WV] **-pitching and receiving** [TN]
- plantation** *n* See JOINT (1) (especially used by African-American prisoners [KY]
- play another man's game** *v* Adjust to the wishes or leading of another, a tactic to be avoided since it places one under another's control [WV]
- play for the door** *v* Attempt to obtain release by any means--parole, legal action, even escape [WV]
- play stud** *v* Enact the male role in homosexual activity [WV]

- plea bargain** *n* Agreement where a defendant and the prosecuting attorney agree to a specified sentence for an offense in exchange for entering a guilty plea [KY]
- pod** *n* Housing unit featuring a central control area opening onto multiple wings of individual CELLS [TN]
- point system** *n* Administrative structure which assigns numerical values to any rule infractions. An excessive total within certain time frames will adversely affect a prisoner's security classification, placement within the SYSTEM, and even parole considerations [NC]
- po'lice** *n* 1: Correctional officer(s) or other ny prison security official who might issue a write up [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: See SNITCH [NC,TN] 3: Law enforcement officer outside the institution [WV] (as indicated, this word is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable; not a single respondent gave the more standard pronunciation with accent on the second syllable)
- police court** *n* See COURT [WV]
- pop** *v* 1: Ingest drugs orally, as in "He's been popping v's all day." [TN] 2: Inject drugs subcutaneously [TN] -skin pop [TN]
- pop gun, popper** *n* Pistol, manufactured rather than prison-made [TN]
- population** *n* Large majority of all prisoners, those allowed to move freely about within the prison, working, attending school, participating in recreational activities, as in "In the old days, a snitch couldn't stay out in population." [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- pot** *n* See SMOKE [KY,NC,TN]
- pothead** *n* See CRACK BABY [WV]
- powder** *n* See COKE [NC,TN]
- prisoner** *n* Inmate incarcerated, in his opinion, due to political and social conditions, as in "I consider myself a prisoner because I'm here, really, as a result of oppressive forces in society." [WV]

professional check-off n Prisoner who consistently uses Protective Custody protection to avoid paying his debts [NC] (see also CHECK IN ARTIST)

profile stuff n Posturing toughness without substance, as in "He's always running his mouth about how bad he is, but that's all profile stuff." [NC]

pruno n See JULEP [WV]

pull one's hole card v See PULL THE COVER OFF ONE [KY,NC,WV] -pull one's ace [NC]

pull one's jacket v See PULL THE COVER OFF ONE [NC]

pull the cover off one v Publicly unmask the true nature of another prisoner, as in "He thought he had me fooled, but I pulled the cover off that snitch in front of everybody." (usually pertains either to sexual orientation or SNITCH actions) [KY,NC,WV]

pump iron v Lift weights [KY,WV]

puncher n Correctional officer stationed in the rear of a LONG LINE whose job it is to prod those prisoners who are not working satisfactorily [TN]

punk n 1: Passive partner in a homosexual encounter or relationship who has either been physically intimidated and forced into the activity, or who engages in it as a means of protecting himself in an environment which terrifies him [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: No-account, as in "He thinks he's tough, but he's nothing but a punk." [NC,WV]

punk v To sexually penetrate another male, as in "He punked him in the ass." [KY]

punk-chaser; punk-lover n See BOOTY BANDIT (1) (2) [TN]

punk city n See PC (a play on the initials and an expression of derision towards those who make up its population) [KY]

puppy n See KID (1) [KY]

push over v See DISRESPECT, as in "You can't let somebody push over you; you've got to straighten things like that." [NC]

pussy boy n See BOY (1) [NC]

put a move down v Request for transfer of to another cell, usually the result of conflict with one's current CELL PARTNER [KY]

put down a game v Operate a game of chance at a particular location (In some institutions, this right must be purchased or inherited; in other locales, anyone can operate a game.) [KY,NC]

put it in the vault v Hide CONTRABAND [NC,WV]

put on one's standing v Checking to see how another prisoner thinks and the nature of his character by involving him in situations which test these traits, as in "We put him on his standing to see what he was made of."; TRY [KY] (One who successfully passes this test is said to STAND UP)

put someone's business on the street v Supplying information about an inmate's personal life or activities to other inmates, as in "He put my business on the street where any snitch could tell the man about it." [NC]

put the word out v 1: Pass along information about an inmate which might prove helpful to other prisoners who do not know him, as in "If he don't pay, and gets shipped to another joint, we put the word out on him" [NC,TN] 2: Spread negative information about another prisoner, that he won't pursue debt collection, that he is a snitch, etc., as in "If I let him beat me, that puts the word out to others that I can be taken." [NC] 3: Make public that reprisals will be forthcoming when the party guilty of a particular offense is identified [WV]

pv n Parole violation, an offense for which an inmate may be returned to prison [KY]

quack n Prison psychiatrist [TN]

quail n See LUDS [TN]

quarter n 1: Twenty-five dollars [KY] (see also NICKEL (1), DIME (1)) 2: Twenty-five year sentence, as in "The judge gave me a quarter to do." [TN] (see also NICKEL (2), DIME (2))

queenie n See SISSY [KY]

queer n See HOMOSEXUAL (2) [KY,NC,TN]

quick stop *n* See STORE (1) [NC]

quiet block *n* Housing area where radios, televisions, and loud activities are not permitted, an assignment which always has a long waiting list and one which is granted as a privilege (a rare arrangement in prisons, where incessant noise is usually the norm)
[NC]

rabbit in one, have the *v* To have the irresistible urge to escape, as in "Looks like Bill got the rabbit in him last night; he's gone." [KY,NC,TN,WV]

rabbit in one's blood, have the *v* To have the continual urge and ability to escape, as in "He's got the rabbit in his blood, he's always running off." [KY,WV]

rabbit season *n* Abundance of young, inexperienced prisoners who are targets for sexual intimidation
[TN]

ragweed *n* Poor quality marijuana [KY,WV]

raisin jack, jack *n* See JULEP [NC,TN,WV]

Rambo *n* 1: See ROBO COP (an obvious reference to the movie of the same name) [NC,TN,WV] 2: See WANNA BE
(1) [NC]

rap *n* See BROTHER [NC]

rape-o *n* Rapist [KY,TN,WV]

rap partner; rappie *n* 1: Individual involved in and sentenced to prison for the same offense [KY,WV]
2: Close associate, one whom a prisoner has know for a long time and with whom he spends much of his time
[WV] 3: See FRIEND [WV]

rat *n, v* See SNITCH [KY,NC,TN,WV]; -rat out *v*
[KY,WV]

rat hole *n* See PC [WV] -rat row [NC,WV]

razor wire *n* See CONSTANTINE WIRE [KY,NC,TN]

real *adj* Having its origins in free society, as in "My wife brought in some real chicken on visiting day last week." [TN]

- real prison** n Violent and dangerous institution where one would serve HARD TIME, as in "In those days, the mountain was a real prison [KY] (as opposed to KINDERGARTEN)
- rear** n Past, as in "I never could go straight in the rear." [WV]
- rec** v Have a time of recreation, as in "The lock down unit only gets to rec two or three people at a time, and never at the same time as the rest of the population." [WV]
- red and white** n See HOLE (3) [WV]
- red date** n Release Eligibility Date, the first possible parole date [TN]
- red devils; devils** n Pharmaceutical depressant, probably referring to a Darvon compound [TN]
- Reds** n In-prison gang that gets its name from an organized gang outside the institution [WV]
- reefer** n See SMOKE [KY,NC,WV]
- repeater** n Prisoner who continues to return to prison, and who is generally given little respect by other convicts [NC,TN,WV]
- resident** n 1: Official designation by Department of Corrections for one serving a prison sentence (and therefore consistently used with disdain by those whom it identifies) [KY,TN,WV] 2: Any prisoner serving a long enough sentence to be considered permanent and to accept the institution as a home (as opposed to one who is merely PASSING THROUGH and, since he doesn't live there, is inconsiderate of those who do) [NC,TN] 3: Inmate who, because he has a short sentence, has no commitment to the life of the institution, and thus little respect for the rules by which more permanent inmates must abide [WV] 4: See INMATE (2) (Some prisoners would equate this behavior with that of a SNITCH.) [TN,WV]
- ride** v Transfer between prisons, as in "They're always riding us around so much that somebody always tells us what's going on at the other camp." [NC] (see also SHIP)

- ride down on** v Verbal castigation, as in "I kept asking him nicely to not play his radio so loud, but he ignored me so finally I really rode down him." [TN]
- ride one's heat** v See TAKE ONE'S BEEF [WV]
- ride out and get** v Retaliate, through force, for a perceived wrong [KY]
- ride the bible out of prison** v Attempting to use church attendance and faith proclamations as evidence of rehabilitation and worthiness for parole [TN]
- ride with** v 1: Travel together and provide mutual protection, as in "Joe and I ride with each other." [KY,NC,TN] 2: Travel with (others) with intentions of intimidation, theft, violent acts, etc. [TN]
- ripping and running** v 1: Criminal activities surrounding a lifestyle pursued outside prison which led to one's incarceration [TN] 2: Engaging in petty thievery and robbery through intimidation around the prison facility [TN]
- roach** n 1: See v (2) (homophone of the manufacturer of valium, Roche Laboratories) [TN] 2: Half of a JOINT [TN]
- road** n Walkways connecting various locations within the prison, as in "When I get out on that road, I start to get into trouble." [TN]
- road camp** n Smaller prison whose primary function is to work inmates on ROAD SQUADS to support local community interests [NC]
- road dog** n Associate (The term reflects the fact that those who refer to each other by this travel the prison together, although they are not necessarily close FRIENDS.) [KY,NC,TN,WV] -roadie [KY,TN] (see also PARTNER (1))
- road squad** n Work crew operating outside the fences of a prison on public access streets or highways [NC]
- robo cop** n Extremely zealous correctional officer, often one with an abusive attitude as well, as in "We better be careful tonight, robo cop is on duty." (with an obvious allusion to the film of the same name) [KY,NC,TN,WV]

- rock** n 1: Refined form of cocaine that is smoked, so called because of its shape [TN] 2: Bottom floor of CELL BLOCK in older institutions (so designated because of its composition) [TN] (see also ROCK MAN)
- rock; rock and roll** v Engage in combat, as in "It's coming down tonight, be ready to rock and roll." [KY]
- rocket fuel** n Particularly fine grade of marijuana [KY]
- rock man** n Inmate performing custodial duties within a housing area [TN] (see also ROCK (2))
- roll over** v See SNITCH, as in "They couldn't prove nothing, but my partner rolled over on me and I had to plead guilty." (seems to appear most often in connection with arrest and trial activities) [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- roll up on** v See RUN UP ON [WV]
- roll with** v See RIDE WITH (2) [TN]
- rookie** n See FISH (2) [KY]
- room** n Cell (In most modern prisons, this is an accurate description of inmate living quarters which have doors rather than bars, and may even be accessed by keys carried by the inmates.) [KY,NC,TN] -roomie See CELL PARTNER [TN]
- roscoe** n See PIECE (3) [KY]
- run** v 1: Escape, as in "They won't change my security classification because they say I'm a threat to run." [KY,NC,TN,WV] -run off [TN] 2: Move about freely within the prison, as in "There was a day when a snitch couldn't run on the yard; somebody'd kill him." [TN]
- run a game** v Successfully manipulate another prisoner to one's personal advantage; fool through subterfuge, as in "He tried to run a game on me for some cigarettes." [KY,WV] -shoot a game [KY]
- run a gang on** v See GANG BANG [TN]
- runner** n 1: Employee of a HUSTLER who expands that man's business operations and serves as a deliverer of goods, as in "Joe's runner has been passing out ball tickets all day." [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Employee of the HOUSE MAN whose job it is to run for snacks, coffee, etc., thus

keeping the players involved in the game [NC]
 3: See MULE [NC]

running buddy n One with whom a prisoner has some extended involvements, e.g. playing cards, lengthy conversations, etc., but who is not the closest of friends [WV]

running partner n 1: See FRIEND [NC,WV] 2: One who will provide protection in altercations [TN]

running together adv Two or more sentences being served concurrently--i.e. at the same time--rather than consecutively, as in "I got a break; I'm doing double life, but they're running together." [TN] (see also RUNNING WILD)

running wild adv See BACK-TO-BACK [NC,TN] (see also RUNNING TOGETHER)

run something through someone v Stab, as in "Sure he beat me, but I'm not going to run something through him because of it." [TN]

run up on v Encounter another prisoner in an attempt to intimidate, usually by outnumbering, as in "My buddy and I rolled up on him in line and made him buy us a box of cigarettes [KY,WV] -run in on [WV]

run with v See HANG TOGETHER [KY,TN,WV] -run together [WV]

sack n 1: Quantity of marijuana equal to a sugar packet, and selling for either ten dollars or ten packs of cigarettes [KY,WV] -fifty sack [KY] -dime sack, -twenty-cent sack [TN] -quarter sack [TN]
 2: See BAG [TN]

safe keeping n Isolated in segregation unit to avoid contact with other inmates, as in "I was kept in safe keeping for more than a year while my case was being appealed." [NC]

salad n See GREEN MONEY (1) [KY]

school v See UNDER ONE'S WING (1) [KY,TN]

scissorbill n See GUARD [NC]

score v See HIT (1) [KY]

score points v Engage in an activity that favorably impresses the Parole Board, thus leading to earlier release, as in "He's always hanging around chapel, trying to score points." (Most things are mistakenly believed to impress the board; very few do so in actual fact.) [WV]

scotty n See COKE [KY,TN]

scrap match n Minor confrontation, perhaps serious enough for punches to be thrown, but not for injuries to be inflicted [NC]

scratch n See GREEN MONEY (1) (2) [KY]

screw n See GUARD [KY,NC,TN,WV]

scribe n Letter from home [NC]

script n Prison currency and coin, issued by the institution in lieu of cash to inmates with money on their account for purchase of snacks, personal hygiene items, etc. within the institution [TN,WV] -script book [WV]

scunnion n See ROCKET FUEL [TN]

see the end of a sentence v Envision a potential future release date, as in "At least I'm not doing life without, so I can see the end of this sentence." [KY]

see you in the morning, I'll v Verbal challenge to meet the addressee in armed combat with intent to battle to the death [NC, TN] -see you when they bust/kick the doors, I'll [NC,WV] -settle it in the morning, we'll [WV]

seg n See HOLE (1) (2) (abbreviated form of "segregation") [KY,NC]

sence n See ROCKET FUEL (from "sans semilla," without seeds) [KY]

send one out in stages v Gradual process of preparation for release, characterized by security reductions, work experiences outside the prison, special classes, etc., as in "they're not just going to drop me on the street, they'll send me out in stages." [NC]

send someone to hell v See CUT SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY]

send someone to the happy hunting grounds v See CUT
SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY]

send out n 1: Prisoner who will collect debts or inflict violence at the request of another convict to whom he is attached or idolizes [TN] (see also WANNA BE, COLLECTOR) 2: See CHECK [TN]

send someone to the water tower v Declaration that one does not intend to pay a debt, as in "You want your money? Well you'll find it in the water tower." (with reference to the least accessible place in the institution where this phrase supposedly began-- Kentucky State Prison in Eddyville, KY) [KY]

sentenced beyond the grave adv Sentenced to serve more years than is reasonable to expect to fulfill in one lifetime, as in "Hell, I'm doing 235 years; I'm sentenced beyond the grave now!" [WV]

serve out n Denial of parole with the stipulation that the inmate serve all the remaining portion of his sentence, as in "The board gave me a serve-out." [KY]

serve out date n Initial discharge date of a sentence, allowing credit for statutory GOOD TIME, and assuming no loss of such time due to disciplinary infractions [KY]

set, the n See FREE WORLD [KY]

set a kid on the block v Offer the sexual services of one's KID for sale (Of course, the KID is unable or unwilling to object or defend himself.) [WV]

set back n See FLOP [KY] -set up [WV]

set someone out v 1: Place someone in a position where they are caught in an illegal activity or become the target of violence [KY,] 2: Provide false information to another prisoner in order to determine if he is a SNITCH [KY] (see also DRY RUN) 3: SNITCH [TN]

settee n Argument which may or may not lead to violence, as in "We had a little settee, and I let him know where I was coming from." (probably derived from "set-to") [WV]

settle down v Maintain a monogamous homosexual relationship as well as a housing arrangement [NC]

- seven-eleven** *n* See STORE (1) (a reference to the convenience store chain) [NC]
- sewer trout** *n* Fish, prepared in prison kitchen [NC]
- shack** *n* See CELL [TN]
- shakedown** *n* Search, either of inmate's person, living area, or personal property, as in "They do a shakedown every time you turn around any more." [KY,NC,WV]
- shake down** *v* Thorough searching of prisoner's person, living area, or personal property in an effort to find evidence of rule infractions, as in "We get shook down every time we leave the visiting room." [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- shank** *n* Sharpened weapon, normally metal, fashioned as a blade and used to stab or cut someone (Almost every blade-type weapon is called by this name.)
[KY,NC,TN,WV]
- sheet** *n* 1: Written record of creditors and amounts owed, maintained by a STORE MAN, LOAN SHARK or other inmate entrepreneur, as in "If they ever bust his sheet, he'll be bankrupt." [KY] 2: Record of winnings for a current game, utilized because stakes in plain view of a passing officer would signify a gambling operation
[KY] -score sheet [KY]
- ship** *v* Transfer a prisoner to another institution, as in "They shipped my cell partner yesterday."
[KY,NC,TN]
- shit** *n* 1: Possessions, as in "They just move in on some of these kids and take their shit." [KY,NC,WV]
2: Weapon, as in "Meet me on the yard and bring your shit." [NC,WV]
- shit on a shingle** *n* Prison meal consisting of ground beef, served in a gravy over toast [NC]
- shiv** *n* See SHANK [NC,TN,WV] -shivie [TN] -shive
[WV]
- shoot** *v* Inject drugs intravenously [NC,TN,WV]
- shoot a game** *v* See RUN A GAME [KY]
- shoot around** *v* See KICK [NC]

shoot at v Attempt to take another's possessions, either in a gambling activity or by manipulation, as in "When you're running the game, everybody knows you got money, so they're shooting at you." [NC]

shooter n See PIECE (3) [WV]

short adj Having very few days left to serve in prison, as in "He's so short he could sit on a dime and his feet not touch the ground" [NC]

short eyes n Child molester (from a 1977 movie--aka Slammer--based on Miguel Pinero's play by the same title, in which a child molester is sexually brutalized and killed by his fellow-prisoners) [WV]

short line n Outside work detail, similar to LONG LINE, but with "less gun to it" (sometimes only a revolver; and other times no weapon) [TN]

short time n Sentence requiring only a small amount of TIME to be served [NC,WV] (see also SHORT TIMER)

short timer n 1: Inmate with only a few years to serve [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also SHORT TIME) 2: One whose official release date is only days away [TN,WV] (see also SHORT)

shot down v Denied parole [NC,TN]

shot for the door n Opportunity for release, as in "Some of these old timers here are just sitting around, hoping for a shot for the door." [WV]

shucking and jiving v Pretending; phoney posturing, as in "Here's a man really sick, and trying to see the doctor, and this guy's shucking and jiving, just trying to keep from going to work, and wasting everybody's time." [NC,TN]

sick-o n Felon whose offense is considered sexually perverse [TN]

side man n Player in a card game who is working for the house, increasing the betting so that the house percentage is larger [NC]

side order n Prisoner who avoids standing in CANTEN LINE by asking someone else to purchase items for him, as in "They next time that side order pulls that, I'm going to his ass." [NC]

signify v 1: See CHARGE UP (2) [KY] (see also FRONT)

sissey n Homosexual usually characterized by effeminate actions and physical features normally identified as unmasculine--lack of body hair, "soft" looks--and who willingly participates as the passive role in the sexual relationship [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also PITCHING AND CATCHING)

sissey-punk-fag n Term of derision used to identify homosexuals who the speaker finds particularly offensive [KY]

six million n See ROCKET FUEL (an acoustic substitution for "sans semilla," without seeds) [KY]

skag n See COKE [NC]

skeeter n See SMOKE [KY]

skeeter leg n Small marijuana cigarette [TN]

skins n Rolling papers for marijuana cigarette [TN]

slam v Convict one of rule infraction at a disciplinary hearing [TN]

slam-dunk v 1: Deny parole [TN] (see also FLOP)

sleeping in a match box v Anticipating parole within a very short period of time, as in "He's so short, he's sleeping in a matchbox." [NC,WV]

slick check n Procedure whereby the prisoner deliberately gets himself confined in Protective Custody while attempting to hide his intentions. This is done in one of two ways: a) he commits a serious rule infraction IN FRONT OF an officer, who will then take the inmate to segregation; b) the inmate will stay in his cell, or at least in the BULLPEN area, where they are nearly always in view of an officer [KY] -**slick check in move, -check in on the sly** [TN] (A variation of this sort of manipulative strategy was recounted by one prisoner who discussed the state Department of Correction's attempt to "slick bring us up for parole" and "ease us out on the slick side" in order to circumvent pending lawsuits that claimed the state was in violation of some of its own statutes by continuing to incarcerate certain prisoners who were mandated release under revised sentencing directives.) (see also CHECK IN ARTIST)

- slide along/by/through** v Serve one's sentence with deliberate low profile and without conflict, biding one's time until release [TN]
- slide into** v Approach about a potential business arrangement, either an inmate approaching an officer, or vice versa (If the latter, the inmate has usually made the first approach, letting the officer know the possibility of an arrangement exists.) [KY]
- slip** n Receipt indicating amount of funds in an inmate account, as in "He can show me his slip, but before I loan him any money, I want to know if his word is good." [NC]
- slop** n Food prepared in prison cafeteria [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- slop house** n Prison dining facility [WV]
- slow walk** v 1: Pay back a debt in a tardy manner, as in "I quit loaning him anything; he'll slow walk you every time." [KY,NC,WV] 2: Deliberately slow or partial completion of a task [KY]
- slushhead** n See WATERHEAD (2) [NC]
- smack** n Heroin [KY]
- smoke** n Marijuana, as in "Who's got the smoke?" [KY,NC,TN,WV] v To smoke marijuana [WV]
- sneak on** v Surprise assault on another inmate [TN]
- sneak thief** n See PETTY THIEF [KY,TN] -sneak [WV]
- sniff out** v 1: Discern which new prisoners can be intimidated for sexual favors or a HUSTLE, as in "Some fags can really sniff out a punk." [KY] 2: Locate hiding places for illegal possessions [TN]
- snitch** n Prisoner who provides prison authorities with information about illegal activities; INFORMANT [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- snitch** v Provide information to prison authorities about illegal activities in which other prisoners are engaged [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- snitch kite** n Written communication to prison officials from an inmate detailing illegal activities of other inmates [KY,TN,WV] -snitch note [WV] (see also DROP A NOTE)

snow *n* See COKE [NC,TN]

snuff out *v* See TAKE SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY]

sock sucker *n* One who ingratiates himself with prison authorities, as in "That sock sucker thinks he's going to make parole this time." [TN]

solid *adj* Dependable, trustworthy prisoner who is well-respected, as in "Don't worry about him; he's solid."; CONVICT [KY,NC,TN,WV]

something for the head *n* Drugs, as in "I've got to get me something for the head!" [KY,NC,WV]

something wicked *n* See SHANK [KY]

s.o.s. *n* 1: "Same old shit", a meal that is served much too often [NC] 2: See SHIT ON A SHINGLE [WV]

space cadet *n* 1: Inmate who often appears to be under the influence of drugs [KY] (see also STRUNG OUT)
2: Member of the generation of prisoners who will succeed the PEPSI GENERATION, so identified by current CONVICTS [NC] 3: Inmate who is considered mentally unbalanced [TN]

spaced out *adj* See STRUNG OUT (1) [KY,NC]

spark *v* See JUMP OFF [NC,WV]

speckled bird *n* Pharmaceutical, either a stimulant or a depressant, so called because of the presence of multi-colored medicine balls visible in the encapsulated form of the drug [WV]

speed *n* Amphetamine (some usages may refer specifically to Methadrine) (see UPPER)
[KY,NC,TN,WV]

split up *v* See CLEAN UP [NC]

spread it out *v* See CLEAN UP [WV]

spud wine *n* See JULEP (using potatoes, rather than fruit, for fermenting) [WV]

square *n* Tobacco cigarette, as in "Let me have some squares until payday." [NC,TN]

square john *n* Inmate whose thoughts and actions more nearly resemble members of the free world--he is basically law-abiding and does not adhere to the CONVICT CODE [NC,TN] -john [TN]

squealer *n* See SNITCH [KY]

stacked time *n* See BOXCARS [TN,WV]

stand on one's head *v* Endure a sentence free from stress, and with minimal effort, as in "I can do this time standing on my head." [NC,TN]

stand up *v* Adapt to prison environment without being intimidated, and without violating other prisoner's rights [NC,TN] (see also STAND UP PERSON)

stand up person *n* One who has passed the test of other prisoners by proving that one will function according to the CONVICT CODE or at least will do one's time without being intimidated or without jeopardizing others [KY,WV] (see also SOLID)

stash *n* 1: Hiding place for any CONTRABAND such as drugs or weapons [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Illegal items that are hidden, but readily accessible to their owner [KY,NC,TN,WV]

state baby *n* See STATE MADE [NC]

state issue *n* Any item, from clothes to food, that is given to a prisoner for his personal use by the correctional system [WV]

state made *adj* Describes an inmate who has been coerced or forced into homosexuality during his incarceration [NC]

state pay *n* Wages earned for work assignments within an institution [KY,TN]

state raised *adj* 1: Descriptive of an inmate who has literally grown up in the prison system, having been in and out of institutions most of his life [KY] 2: So adjusted to the imposed structure and discipline of the prison that one becomes dependent on it and thus unable to live outside its walls [KY] 3: See ROBO COP [WV]

state's man *n* See COMPANY MAN (1) [NC]

step one down v Gradually reduce prisoner's security classification from maximum security to one which would allow for placement within the GENERAL POPULATION, as in "It took two years for them to step me down and I could get back on population." (This would probably be the result of conviction for a violent assault.) [TN]
-step down program n [WV]

stepping over the line v See WALKING BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET [TN]

stick v 1: Stab, as in "If he keeps loud talking me, I'm going to stick him." [TN,WV] 2: Hold up in disciplinary board proceedings, as in "They made the charge stick, so I'm going to the hole." [TN]

sticking n Stabbing incident [TN,WV]

sticker n See ICE PICK [TN,WV]

stick man n 1: Prisoner whose conviction is for armed robbery [KY] **-stick up artist** [KY] **-stick up man** [NC,TN] 2: See HAWK [WV]

stool pigeon n See SNITCH [KY,NC,WV] **-stoolie** [TN,WV]

store n 1: CANTEEN operated by inmate from his CELL in violation of prison rules (An illegal activity, but one tacitly permitted by authorities under most circumstances.) [KY,TN,WV] (see also STORE MAN)
 2: See CANTEEN (1) [WV]

store box n See CANTEEN (1) [NC]

store man n Prisoner who operates a CANTEEN from his CELL [KY,TN,WV] **-storekeeper** [NC]

straight; straight up adj 1: Honest; trustworthy in word and business dealings [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Continuous and uninterrupted period of time, as in "I've done twenty-one years straight up." [KY,NC,TN] 3: Rule-abiding, as in "Even a straight convict will have something stashed somewhere." [TN,WV]

straighten v See TAKE CARE OF BUSINESS, as in "If somebody takes something from your locker, you've got to straighten it." [NC,WV] **-straighten one's business** [TN]

straighten one up v Pay back a debt owed, as in "I'll straighten you up when I get my money order form home."
[NC]

strap down v See ARM UP [NC] -get strapped [KY,TN]

street(s) n Society that exists outside prison walls (used attributively, it distinguishes any object it from its in-prison corollary, as in "A lot of prison language is just street slang." [KY,NC,TN,WV] (see also FREE WORLD)

street-to-street n Method of purchasing drugs where the money does not pass through any hands within the institution; instead, the buyer has a money order sent from his outside source to an outside contact of the seller [TN] (see also CHECK)

stretch n Period of incarceration, as in "I did a stretch in Ohio before I caught this time." [WV]

striking matches v See CHARGE UP (1) [TN]

strip cell n See DRY CELL (2) [NC]

strip search n Thorough examination of each item of clothing and all body cavities after the individual has been made to take off all of his clothes (usually this is done to inmates, but visitors may also be forced to endure this process if prison officials have strong reason to suspect the visitor may be smuggling contraband inside the institution) [KY,TN]

strong-arm v See APE [KY,WV]

strung out adj 1: Under the influence of drugs [KY]
2: Caught in a manipulative ploy where a prisoner is suddenly asked to pay back commodities, with added interest, what he thought were gifts from a caring fellow-inmate [KY]

stumblebum n See SPACE CADET (1) [KY]

suitcase n One's rectum, when used as a hiding place for contraband, as in "Most of the dealers keep something in the suitcase." [NC]

suitcase v Hide CONTRABAND in one's rectum, as in "Officer Jones caught me by surprise, so I didn't have any choice but to suitcase the stuff." [NC,TN]

- sundown** *n* Life sentence, as in "They gave me a sundown to serve." [NC]
- super cop** *n* See ROBO COP [KY,WV]
- supermarket** *n* See STORE (1) [NC]
- swapping up** *v* See PITCHING AND CATCHING [KY]; **-swapping out** [NC]
- sweat box** *n* See CELL [WV]
- sweet** *adv* Easy; free of conflict (Usually applied to an institution, as in "That camp I came from was really sweet," although it could apply merely to the condition, as in "Officer Jordan is on today; it'll be sweet around here.") [NC]
- sweet boy** *n* See KID (2) (used primarily by African-American prisoners) [KY]
- sword** *n* Abnormally long SHANK [TN]
- system** *n* 1: Entire criminal justice system, consisting of law enforcement agencies, courts, and correctional systems, as in "The way the system works, if you got money, you can buy justice." [KY,NC,TN] 2: State Department of Corrections, as in "When I first came into the system, things were different." [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- t** *n* Talwin, a depressant [NC,TN] (see also DOWNER)
- tac team** *n* See YARD DOG (1) (shortened form of "tactical") [TN]
- tag toe** *n* Corpse, as in "The only way he's ever going to get out of here is as a tag toe." [TN] **v** **-go out with a tag** [TN]
- tail in the air** *n* See HEAD ON THE BLOCK [TN]
- take a tour** *v* Make a circuit of the prison, in the company of an established convict who will educate one about how to function with the least amount of friction--who to watch out for, what to avoid, etc. [TN]
- take care of business** *v* 1: Attend to a violent act necessary to preserve one's image or to retaliate for an abuse [KY,NC] 2: Attend to any aspect of one's HUSTLE [KY]

- take care of one's own business** v 1: Solve one's own problem, including confrontations with other prisoners, without relying on assistance from the prison administration [KY,TN] 2: See KEEP LOW [TN]
- take it all the way** v Settle an argument or retaliate for an abuse by pursuing the issue to its ultimate degree--death of one of the two prisoners involved, as in "It doesn't pay to get on the bad side of that guy unless you're willing to take it all the way." [KY]
- take one's beef** v Accept punishments or other consequences of imprisonment without complaining, whining, or resorting to behavior which violates the CONVICT CODE [KY] -take one's own time [WV] -take one's weight [KY]
- take over** v See BABY SIT (1) [KY]
- take someone out** v See CUT SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY,WV]
- take the scenic tour** v Be transferred, as in "I got to take the scenic tour from the main prison." [TN]
- talk around** v Exchange information about illegal activities in language which prison authorities don't comprehend, as in "I talked around Officer White and let Frank know I had some dope in." (While this concept is present--indeed it has often been presented as a primary feature of prison argot--there appears to be few terms with which security officials are unfamiliar.) [TN]
- tea** n See SMOKE [TN]
- teenie boppers** n See PEPSI GENERATION [WV]
- telephone** n See GUARD [KY]
- telephone's off; telephone's off the hook** n See SNITCH (with reference to the fact that someone may be listening in on what is said) [KY]
- thief** n See PETTY THIEF [KY,NC,TN]
- thing** n See SHANK [KY]
- thor** n Inmate whose trance-like demeanor signals that he is under the influence of Thorazine, a psychotropic medication often prescribed as a control for persons with psychotic symptoms [KY]

thorazine alley/city n Trance-like state conditioned by strong and continuous dosages of Thorazine (the drug of choice of prison physicians who feel the need to control aggressive behavior of certain prisoners)
[TN]

thorazine head n See THOR [WV]

three-for-two n Rate of interest charged for most small transactions, indicating the ratio of return on the initial loan, and subject to compounding if not paid on time (It appears that the TWO-FOR-ONE rate is levied only on very small transactions such as a single item.)
[KY,TN]

throw gas v Fan the flames of a potential confrontation, thus encouraging the involved parties to engage in combat, as in "Joe's going to keep throwing gas around until somebody arms up." [TN] (see also GAS BURNER)

throw one in someone v Stab [WV]

ticket n 1: See WRITE UP, as in "Officer Ward won't give you a ticket for that petty bullshit." [KY,NC,TN,WV]
2: See SHEET (1) [NC]

ticket man n Prisoner who runs BALL TICKET operation
[NC,TN,WV]

tier n Row of cells placed one on top of the other
[KY,NC,TN,WV]

tight adj Rigidly controlled institution, as in "Things around here are tight, not like the last CAMP I was at; they let us breathe there." (as opposed to MELLOW)
[TN]

till death do us part n Humorous descriptor indicating a life sentence, as in "You've got till death do us part." [WV]

time n Period of incarceration; sentence (one "gets" "catches", or "has" TIME) [KY,NC,TN,WV]
-build/do/pull/serve time v Fulfill a sentence [KY,NC,TN,WV]
-cut time v Reduce, through legal action, the length of time an inmate must serve [KY,NC,WV]
-give (more) time v Require an inmate to serve a portion of his sentence beyond his first parole eligibility [KY,NC]
-bring on (more) time [TN]
-put on more time [WV]
-do one's own time v Serve a sentence in such a manner that one doesn't complain about one's hardships, doesn't violate another

prisoner's personal space, doesn't attempt to know another inmate's personal affairs, and refrains from offering advice or passing judgments on the other's behaviors as long as one is not personally harmed by those behaviors, as in "Look, the judge sent me to prison to do time, not to be a social worker, and I can't do nobody else's time for them. I'm doing my own time and that's all." [KY,TN,WV] -pull another person's time Involving oneself in personal affairs or troubles of another prisoner [KY,WV] (If one prisoner tells another, "I'm going to do your time for you," it should be construed as a threat.)

time is kicking one in the ass v See HARD TIME (1) (2)
[KY]

toothpick n See ICE PICK [WV]

tour the system v Move about during one's period of incarceration, being housed at several different institutions over the course of one's sentence, as in "I've been in nearly every prison in the state at one time or another; kind of toured the system." [TN]

train n 1: See BLUE GOOSE [TN] 2: See BOXCARS [WV]

treat with a long handled spoon v Associate with someone while maintaining enough distance to avoid being hurt if he proves untrustworthy [NC]

tree artist n See TREE JUMPER [TN]

tree climber n See TREE JUMPER [KY]

tree jumper n Prisoner whose offense is rape, particularly one involving a surprise attack [KY,TN]

trick; trick willy n An inmate who tries to manipulate others, but is an easy MARK himself [KY]

truck v See BULLDOZE [KY]

trustee n Inmate who has achieved minimal security status and select benefits that status entails, often the privilege of being housed in a separate facility outside the main prison unit [TN,WV]

try v Test a new inmate to see how he will handle himself and to determine whether he can be manipulated, used, or intimidated [KY,NC,TN]

- turn** *n* Proclivity to engage in homosexual activities, as in "Some guys already have a homosexual turn when they come to prison." (This may be the root term for TURN-OUT.) [KY]
- turn a blind eye** *v* See LOOK THE OTHER WAY [TN]
- turn-in, state turn-in** *n* Monthly payment from state for institutional job assignment [WV]
- turnkey** *n* See GUARD [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- turn-out** *n* One whose sexual habits have been changed from heterosexual to homosexual during their incarceration (either forcibly or through coercion) [KY,NC,TN]
- turn over** *v* See ROLL OVER [TN,WV]
- turn someone out** *v* Change another prisoner's sexual habits through intimidation or coercion, as in "Somebody's always ready to turn out some new kid and make him a punk." [KY,NC,TN]
- tush hog** *n* Aggressive BOOTY BANDIT, one willing to rape other inmates [NC,WV]
- two-for-one** *n* see THREE-FOR-TWO [KY,TN]
- two story man** *n* Prisoner who escapes by going over the wall [WV]
- two-time loser** *n* Repeat offender (Other adverbial prefixes such as "three" or "four" would indicate the number of prior sentences served.) [KY,WV]
- under one's wing** *v* 1: Protect and educate a new inmate in the nuances of prison culture [KY,NC,WV]
2: Protect one with whom you have a homosexual relationship [WV]
- under the cover** *adv* Covert homosexual behavior, as in "I don't know how much goes on under the cover, of course, but there doesn't seem to be many homosexuals in this joint." (Note the bed imagery, as well as an allusion to "undercover".) [WV]
- under the gun** *adv* Supervised by an armed correctional officer, as in "At honor camps, you never go out on work detail under the gun." (Although officers in towers are usually armed, this term normally refers only to ROAD SQUAD conditions.) [NC,TN]

- unit** *n* 1: See DORM (1) [KY,TN,WV] 2: Prison facility, as in "Some work details get to work off the units, in the free world." [NC]
- up** *adv* Eligible for review or under consideration by the parole board, as in "I'm up for parole next month [KY,NC,TN,WV] -go up *v* As in, "I'm going up next month." or "They brought me up twice and turned me down both times." [KY,NC,TN,WV]
- upper** *n* Any drug that acts as a stimulant to the central nervous system [KY,WV]
- v** *n* 1: Visit [KY] 2: Valium [TN]
- vacation** *n* 1: HOLE TIME, as in "I see you've been on vacation; thirty days of rest and relaxation!" [TN] 2: See RUN, as in "Mike took him a vacation while he was out on work detail." [TN]
- valium down** *v* Ingest a quantity of valium to produce a "down", as in "I'm going to valium down this weekend." [TN]
- v.g.** *n* Visiting gallery [TN]
- Viet Nam** *n* See HOLE (1) (2) [KY]
- visitor** *n* See SHORT TIMER (1) [NC]
- wake-up** *n* See GET-UP [TN]
- walk** *n* 1: See CATWALK [TN] 2: Hallway, as in "When they brought that baby raper down the walk, everybody was yelling and cussing at him." [TN]
- walk, to** *v* Be released from prison, as in "I walk the first day of April." [KY]
- walk/take a man down** *v* Take an inmate into custody (of correctional officers) and accompany him to a segregation unit, a sometimes volatile procedure [TN]
- walk around with one's chest thrown out** *v* Acting with excessive bravado in an effort to demand respect, usually an overcompensation for feelings of inferiority [WV] (See also WANNA BE (1), WOULD BE)
- walk a straight line** *v* Prove oneself to be a CONVICT through one's actions, as in "When a new fellow comes in, he has to walk a straight line, to prove to me he's okay." [WV]

- walking both sides of the street** v Attempting to live like a CONVICT, while at the same time cooperating with prison authorities [TN]
- walking ten** n Ten years, designated under the Persistent Felony Offender statute, which must be served before a prisoner can begin earning any credit towards parole consideration, as in "I'm doing a walking ten." [KY]
- walk the river with; walk the rails with** v Said of one who is totally trustworthy and dependable in even the most hazardous situations, as in "He was a real convict, a guy you could walk the river with." [WV]
- walk the yard** v Engage in social and recreational life of the prison, as opposed to becoming a recluse in one's cell, as in "Most of the guys that walk the yard feel this place is getting ready to blow up." [WV]
- walk with** v Associate with, specifically for purposes of protection [NC] (see also HANG TOGETHER)
- walla rice saki** n See JULEP [WV]
- Walls, the** n 1: Tennessee State Prison, Nashville, TN [TN] 2: Central Prison, Raleigh, NC [NC] 3: West Virginia Penitentiary, Moundsville, WV (The recurrence of this term suggests that it might appear in any state which has a large, fortress-style prison that has traditionally housed most long-term prisoners for a significant part of their sentence; thus it appears here as an item of lexicalized argot) [WV]
- wanna-be** n 1: Prisoner who attaches himself to other stronger convicts and is willing to do menial tasks for them in return for their companionship, protection, or occasional commodity they control [NC,WV] 2: Prisoner who acts the part of a tough guy, usually to mask his own fear of the institutional environment, as in "He ain't no convict; he's nothing but a wanna-be." [KY] 3: Prisoner who wishes he were a CONVICT, but is not accepted as such by those who fit that category [WV]
- warden** n 1: See ROBO COP [KY] 2: See SNITCH (another instance of designating this behavior through reference to a prison authority figure) [TN,WV]
- warden's pet/boy** n See SNITCH [TN]
- waste** v See CUT SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY]

- waterhead** *n* 1: Anyone acting with less than what is considered common sense; slow witted; inappropriate [KY] 2: Generalized term signifying lowest possible strata of humanity--one who can be used for any purposes [NC]
- weak** *n* Inmate who allows others to intimidate him, take his possessions, etc., as in "He's got no heart at all, man, he's a weak." [WV] **-weak-o** [WV] **-weak hearted** *adj* [WV]
- weed** *n* 1: See SMOKE [KY,TN,WV] 2: Parasitic inmate, one who takes advantage of other prisoners [KY]
- weekend visitor** *n* See SHORT TIMER (1) [KY]
- weight pile** *n* See IRON PILE [NC]
- weight shed** *n* See IRON PILE [KY]
- West Virginia steak** *n* Bologna [WV]
- wet number** *n* See FISH (with reference to the freshness of official inmate number [TN] **-someone's number is still wet** [TN])
- whack** *v* See CUT SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY]
- whacky backy** *n* See SMOKE [TN]
- wham-whams and zoo-zoos** *n* 1: Snacks and soft drinks purchased from the CANTEEN, as in "My family can't even send me enough money to keep me supplied with wham-whams and zoo-zoos." (Some prisoners will differentiate between the two items with WHAM-WHAMS being cakes, cookies, etc. and zoo-zoos being soft drinks, but this is a rare distinction.) [NC,WV] 2: Snack items used as part of enticement or coercion for sexual favors (This may understood with reference to a CANTEEN BABY, but these items are also given to unsuspecting new arrivals who are later forced to participate in homosexual activities when they are unable to pay back the items on demand.) [NC,TN]
- wheeling and dealing** *v* Moving about the prison YARD, actively operating one's HUSTLE, as in "Man, I've been out wheeling and dealing all morning." (Many inmates prefer to be placed on a yard crew so they can actively work their clientele.) [KY,TN] **-dealing** [WV]
- whiskey** *n* Any homemade alcohol [TN]

- white lady** *n* See SMACK [KY]
- white lightning** *n* See JULEP [TN]
- white thing; white stuff** *n* See COKE [NC]
- whore** *n* 1: Female correctional officer [KY]
2: Promiscuous homosexual inmate [WV]
- wide** *adj* See MELLOW (1) [TN] -wide open [NC,TN]
- wife** *n* Passive partner in a monogamous homosexual relationship [KY,TN] (see also SETTLE DOWN)
- windshield therapy** *n* Any ride in a vehicle, e.g. to court or for medical treatment, which provides a welcome change of scenery, as in "Bob got himself a little windshield therapy this afternoon going to that hearing." [WV]
- wine** *n* See JULEP [NC,TN,WV] -wino [WV]
- wipe out** *v* See CUT SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF [KY]
- wolf** *n* Predatory prisoner who preys on inexperienced new inmates [TN,WV]
- wolf** *v* See WOLF TICKET, SELL [KY]
- wolf game** *n* Issuance of threats intended to intimidate, as in "They acted bad, but we ran a wolf game and they backed down." [NC] (see also WOLF)
- wolf ticket, buy** *v* Become intimidated and submit to the threats of another, as in "Mike was selling wolf tickets and the new dude bought one." (To refuse to be intimidated, or to engage in a fight with the "seller" means you have not "bought" the ticket.) [TN] (see also WOLF TICKET, SELL; WOLF GAME)
- wolf ticket, sell** *v* Issue threats in an attempt to intimidate another, as in "Mike was trying to sell him a wolf ticket." (The threat itself is the ticket; the "selling" is the verbalization of it.) [TN] (see also WOLF TICKET, BUY; WOLF GAME)
- woman** *n* See WIFE [KY,TN,WV]
- work camp** *n* Relatively small institution where all prisoners assigned to it are assigned work duties (as opposed to larger regional facilities where there are

always large numbers of men without constructive ways
to occupy much of their time) [TN]

world *n* See FREE WORLD [KY,NC,TN]

woulda be *n* See WANNA BE (1) [WV]

writer *n* See RUNNER (1) [WV]

write-up *n* Disciplinary report given to an inmate for
violation of prison rules; TICKET [KY,NC,TN]

write up *v* Issue a disciplinary report to a prisoner
[KY,NC,WV]

yard *n* 1: All open areas outside housing units to which
inmates have access [KY,NC,TN,WV] 2: Recreation
area of an institution [KY,NC,WV] 3: General
population [KY]

yard bird *n* Chicken, prepared in prison mess hall [NC]

yard dog *n* 1: One of a groups of guards who are
unassigned to specific housing areas, and whose job it
is to move from dorm to dorm looking for infractions or
conducting random searches [KY,TN] 2: Correctional
officer assigned to the YARD who are free to respond to
emergency situations at any location [KY]

yard tax *n* Money or commodity extorted from a prisoner
in exchange for protection [KY,WV]

yellow jackets; jackets *n* Pharmaceutical depressant,
usually referring to Librax, so called because one-half
of the capsule is yellow and the other half black
[TN]

zeener *n* See THOR [KY]

zip gun *n* Hand-fashioned single shot pistol [NC,TN,WV]

zombie *n* See THOR [WV]

CHAPTER FOUR
AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEMANTIC FIELDS SUGGESTED BY THE LEXICON

In the early stages of his research, the author of the present study had occasion to discuss the project with another scholar engaged in similar studies. The scholar related to the author his fascination with certain terms that seemed to be universal, appearing in prisons from Rhode Island to California, but which seemed to have an inexplicable etymology. One such term described the vehicle used to transport new prisoners to and from the prison. "I have heard it called 'bluebird,' 'blue goose,' and even 'grey goose.' It's always some form of bird, no matter where the institution is located," the scholar reported, "but I don't understand why the term transcends geographical boundaries." Months later, when the current researcher was conducting his pretest in a Tennessee institution, the following exchange occurred:

Researcher: What about the car itself, or the van.
 What is it called? Is there a name for
 that?

Prisoner: YEAH, CHAIN CAR. BUT YOU COME IN ON THE
 BUS NOW. CHAIN BUS. BLUEBIRD.

Researcher: Bluebird they call it?

Prisoner: YEAH.

Researcher: You know why they call it that?

Prisoner: I GUESS . . . IT'S WROTE UP THERE.
 BLUEBIRD, YOU KNOW? (T-1-46-12)⁸

Bluebird, of course, is a large manufacturer of buses, and the name appears prominently on these vehicles. Most often, the buses are painted grey or blue by the institutions, and the term has developed quite logically from this simple association.

This exchange underscores one obvious observation about the lexicon in Chapter 3; while the items often exhibit creative constructions by their users, few of the terms are of a particularly exotic nature. This is contradictory to many of the notions set forth by earlier chroniclers of prison argot who presented fictive sample paragraphs of intriguing, yet near indecipherable dialogue to illustrate the language in action (see e.g. Yenne 1927). Absent from the lexicon presented here are many of the colorful underworld phrases so characteristic of those early glossaries--items such as "frisk" (to search), "gunsel" (homosexual boy), "hoosier" (one unschooled in prison life), "moll" (gangster's girl), or "moxie" (nerve). Instead, the argot vocabulary collected in this study suggests a rather limited linguistic range that parallels the physically restricted parameters of the prisoner's world and focuses on the impoverished nature of his existence. The world these terms reveal bears little resemblance to the romanticized and sensationalized versions of prison experience portrayed in Hollywood gangster movies or most crime fiction.

Another prominent feature of this lexicon is that one encounters many of its items in more generalized slang vocabularies. This does not necessarily support an importation theory of prison argot, but instead may demonstrate the circular path the language follows. The prisoners themselves are aware of this movement and know that there is a steady stream of linguistic exchange flowing simultaneously into and out of modern institutions. Many noted a significant change taking place in their language, specifically connected with younger inmates recently admitted to the system. One suggested:

YOU HAVE A LOT OF GUYS THAT INVENT NEW TERMS. YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING? LIKE I SAY, I THINK YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF TRANSITION. A LOT OF NEW THINGS ARE COMING ABOUT. NEW GUYS, YOUNGER GUYS, NEW GENERATION OF GUYS COMING IN WITH NEW STUFF. WHAT YOU HAVE NOW IS, LIKE I SAID, THE DRUG CULTURE AND THE GANG CULTURE. THE YOUTH, THE YOUNG URBAN GANG CULTURE . . . I JUST SEE THAT. BUT IMITATORS, YOU GOT THESE GUYS THAT IMITATE THE GANG CULTURE OF L.A., OR NEW YORK, OR DETROIT.
(W-1-30-11)

Another interviewee's remarks reflected thoughts similar to those the author often heard suggested about the circular flow of prison lingo:

P: EVEN THE PEOPLE THAT WORK HERE . . . I GUESS, THEY PICK UP PRISON SLANG TOO, REAL QUICK. BECAUSE, WITHOUT MENTIONING THE NAME OF THE PERSON, BUT IT'S AN EMPLOYEE--A FEMALE EMPLOYEE --AND I HEARD HER, OVERHEARD HER TALKING TO THIS OTHER GUY IN HERE--AN INMATE --AND SHE TOLD HIM THAT SHE HAD HEARD THAT HIS ROADIE HAD CHECKED IN. SHE HADN'T BEEN HERE, WHAT TWO YEARS, AND SHE WAS ALREADY USING THESE WORDS. "I HEAR YOUR ROAD DOG CHECKED IN," OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, YOU

KNOW. I THINK, HERE SHE IS USING ALL THESE WORDS.

R: Well, yeah, it works both ways, because the staff starts using it too. Sure. But you're saying that overall we use much less of that?

P: YEAH. WELL, I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S LESS, MAYBE IT'S JUST CHANGE; SOME OF THE WORDS HAVE CHANGED. THE OLDER WORDS ARE NOT USED AS MUCH, YOU KNOW . . . I THINK SOME WORDS HAVE SORT OF RECYCLED. MAYBE GUYS HAVE BEEN IN AND GOT OUT, THAT THEY'VE TAKEN THOSE WORDS BACK WITH THEM AND IT'S BECOME PART OF THE LANGUAGE OUT THERE TOO. (T-2-41-16)

As noted in Chapter One, some earlier scholars (e.g. Ersine 1933) and at least one inmate respondent (see Caldwell 1930) have recognized the potential influence of outside sources such as newspapers on prison language. In a modern prison system where nearly every inmate has unlimited access to television, it is difficult to assess the extent of the impact this medium has on the lexical items in individual vocabularies. However, several prisoners noted the influence of television and cinema upon their spoken language.

P: . . . A MOVIE LIKE ALCATRAZ WILL BE ON, AND FOR A FEW DAYS THEY'RE ALL SCREWS, AND STUFF LIKE THAT.

R: But that's not a term--

P: --I HAVEN'T HEARD A WIDE USE OF THAT TERM EITHER.

R: So they pick that up out off the television, rather than . . .?

P: WELL, A LOT OF THEM, ANY MOVIE, ANY MOVIE THEY SEE, OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT, THEY ACT IT OUT FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS. (N-2-40-11)

And similarly:

P: . . . YOU NEVER HEAR SCREW. YOU KNOW, BACK IN THE OLD MOVIES, YOU KNOW, YOU'D BE CALLED A SCREW.

R: You've never heard that inside a prison?

P: NEVER.

R: Only in a film?

P: ONLY IN AN OLD MOVIE, YOU KNOW. I HAVE CALLED THEM SCREWS, BUT WHEN I DO THAT I'M BEING FACETIOUS, YOU KNOW? . . . (W-2-42-14)

Another prisoner commented on the way the cinematic images obscure the linguistic changes that are taking place:

P: . . . WELL, THAT'S LIKE US, WE CHANGED FROM CONVICTS TO INMATES TO RESIDENTS AND BACK TO INMATES, YOU KNOW.

R: Tell me about that then. How do you define that?

P: YEARS AGO, I THINK THAT TELEVISION HAD A LOT TO DO WITH IT. I THINK THAT THERE WAS . . . PEOPLE WATCHED TV AND THEY'VE PICKED UP A CERTAIN MANNERISM THAT THEY PUT PRISONERS IN. YOU'VE SEEN THE MOVIES OF ALCATRAZ AND ALL THE OTHER PRISON MOVIES? WELL THOSE TYPE OF MOVIES, THAT'S WHERE THE PRISON JARGON STARTED PICKING UP, WHAT WE USED AT THE TIME I CAME IN. AND MOST PEOPLE ON THE OUTSIDE SAW THIS. THE PEOPLE ON THE OUTSIDE, IN MY OPINION, HAVE NOT SEEN THE CHANGES, AND SO THEY STILL EQUATE US WITH WHAT WAS BACK THEN. THEY HAVE A PRECONCEIVED IDEA OF WHAT PRISONS AND PRISONERS ARE. THEY JUST THINK THAT WE'RE--WELL, I GUESS, WE'RE STEREOTYPED FROM THOSE MOVIES AND IT'S JUST NOT CHANGED, IN MY OPINION. (T-2-47-25)

The pervasive influence of media sources from outside the prison is but one of several factors that makes it reasonable to question the degree of accuracy of many earlier romanticized lexicons of "underworld" or prison

argot. As the review in Chapter One suggests, far too little data has been collected through acceptably rigorous research methods. Several studies were written expressly as sources for fiction writers (Ersine 1930, Caldwell 1933, No. 90613-A 1932), and many present rather vaguely defined compilations of past glossaries. Of those that report original research, many times the author fails to establish any collection methodology, and too often there are a limited or unknown number of informants who have contributed to the study (e.g. Milburn 1931; Kuethe 1934).

It is highly probable that many of these collections have reported an abundance of items created by newspaper reporters, fiction writers, and movie scenarists. These early errors, having once appeared in print, took on the semblance of truthful documentation and were then repeated by those who attempted comprehensive compilations. In this way, the mistakes have been compounded and the result is a hopelessly muddled record. That prisoners adopted many of the items is unquestioned; which ones they originated is less clear.

More recent and better documented lexicons have overcome this lack of methodological rigor. For instance, the studies of Bentley and Corbett (1992), Boroff (1951), Karhu (1988), and Lyons (1984) are relatively free of data which supports the romanticized fictions of the past. Thus, their lexicons report items similar to those of this study.

Cardozo-Freeman's The Joint (1984) is organized around a series of terms which she identifies as metaphors for the institutional world they describe. Most of those terms--e.g. "joint," "chain," "fish," "bulls," etc.--also appear with little variation in the present study.

But to say that the language of America's prisons is less romantic and less alien than previously assumed is not to say it lacks distinctiveness. In fact, a rather clear definition of the prison environment and the worldview of its inhabitants emerges through the argot lexicon of its users. It is a world where "booty bandits" and "tush hogs" are poised to "truck"--to rape--the new arrival. "Wanna-be's," those who are eager to be accepted by their peers, are used as "runners"--errand boys--while "mules" transport illegal substances within the prison for the "dope man." An illicit economy thrives, characterized by inmate-operated "canteens" that characteristically function on a "three-for-two" interest arrangement, a strong "loan sharking" element, and lucrative gambling operations. In an environment where most inhabitants have "blades" or "shanks" hidden ("stashed"), the prisoner must try to "do his own time" without angering his fellow-inmate enough to be challenged. What the argot lexicon presents is a rather stark, extremely limited environment dominated by struggles for power and control, violations of institutional rules, homosexual entanglements, and substance abuse. This is illustrated by

the distribution of the discrete terms collected, classified below in accordance with the Interview Guide (see Appendix A).

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Terms</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Module 1: Physical Locations and Objects		
Institution(s)	43	3.43
Areas within the institution	81	6.46
Institutional objects	<u>38</u>	<u>3.03</u>
	162	12.92
Module 2: Institutional Rules		
Disciplinary infractions/procedures	30	2.39
Illegal possessions	193	15.39
drugs (124)		
weapons (32)		
alcohol (26)		
money (11)		
Searches	4	.32
Secret locations	<u>8</u>	<u>.64</u>
	235	18.74
Module 3: People Within the Institution		
Fellow prisoners	260	20.73
relational context (69)		
primary activity (59)		
homosexual behavior (32)		
offense (23)		
illegal activity (18)		
new person in prison (18)		
friends (17)		
sentence (14)		
generic names (10)		
Prison officials	<u>46</u>	<u>3.67</u>
	306	24.40

Module 4: Institutional Activities

Serving one's sentence	52	4.15
Interpersonal/social actions	145	11.56
Imposed activities	41	3.27
Violent behaviors	83	6.62
Homosexual behaviors	35	2.79
Illegal activities	76	6.06
Intrapersonal thoughts of death	<u>10</u>	<u>.80</u>
	442	35.25

Module 5: "Free World" Concerns

Things outside prison	13	1.04
Family members and friends	4	.32
Return to society	39	3.11
Escape from prison	<u>19</u>	<u>1.51</u>
	75	5.98

Module 6: Trial and Legal Issues

Trial concerns	11	.88
Sentencing designations	<u>23</u>	<u>1.83</u>
	34	2.71
	<u>1254⁹</u>	<u>100.00</u>

This distribution chart varies slightly from the initial Interview Guide. The guide proved very effective in eliciting argot terms and adequately covered the linguistic territory it mapped but, as is sometimes the case with original field research that uses a previously untried instrument, the data produced did not fall precisely into

the projected classification pattern. Thus, the following minor modifications of the original categories contained in the Interview Guide seemed appropriate.

- 1) Names of security classifications (2.1) were eliminated from the lexicon because the author judged them to be official designations rather than argot items.
- 2) Terms identifying fellow prisoners more naturally clustered into the groupings shown here than they did into those of the guide (3.1).
- 3) A new sub-category of Module 3 labeled "relational contexts" encompasses those terms whose primary distinction lies in their expression of a relationship existing between individual prisoners or between the prisoner and his institutional environment. Included are such items as "ambulance," "convict," "gas burner," and "petty thief."
- 4) Another new sub-category of Module 3 designated "primary activity" identifies those items which label their referents by a distinctive activity or role in which they engage in the prison. Examples of terms within this group are "Bible toter," "bug," "Matlock," and "trustee."
- 5) The categorization shown above for Module 4 more clearly delineates the nuances of the data

gathered than did the original Interview Guide. Within the grouping identified as "interpersonal/social actions" are such items as "baby sit," "convict code," "disrespect," and "run with." Parts of sub-categories 4.2, 4.4, and 4.6 of the Interview Guide were merged to create this new group.

- 6) Another sub-category, 4.5, was subsumed within other groupings.

The analysis of the data that follows is based on three principles derived in part from Nathan Kantrowitz's "The Vocabulary of Race Relations in a Prison" (1969). Kantrowitz proposed two principles for examining the abusive terms used by racial or ethnic groups for other groups. First, he stated: "the presence or absence of a name (and synonyms) within any specific group of convicts indicates the presence or absence of perceived behavior" (25), and secondly, he proposes that the larger the quantity of terms existing for any particular group, the greater the intensity of feelings toward that group (24). By a slight extension, these two principles can be restated thusly: 1) the presence of an argot item in one's vocabulary is an indication that the object or experience that the term describes exists, at least in the perceptual realm of the user; and 2) the greater the number of synonyms for any particular phenomenon, the greater the intensity of feeling toward that

phenomenon. Thus, the paucity of items reported for Module 5 ("Free World" Concerns) and Module 6 (Trial and Legal Issues) is significant. It may be that these modules are somewhat underrepresented by the data primarily because the interviews focused on in-prison experiences and deliberately limited discussion of things outside the prison walls (5.1) and trial concerns (6.1). A third principle, though not stated by Kantrowitz, seems a natural derivative of his premises investigations, and is utilized here in analyzing the distribution of group argot items, namely: *the greater the percentage of total argot terms appearing within any semantic field, the more important are the experiences, perceptions and values expressed by that field in the life of the group.*

Family members and friends

The author spent considerable time in each interview attempting to elicit terms surrounding family members, particularly wives and girlfriends, but found few responses for this category. This lack of response appears to differ from Cardozo-Freeman's findings. For, while she does not specify quantities of terms collected or provide a rationale other than quantification to support her interpretations, she does stress the significance of wives and girlfriends, and devotes a chapter to the exploration of prison culture surrounding the term "ladies" (Cardozo-Freeman 1984, 327-

67). But the present study is much broader than that of Cardozo-Freeman, who focused on a single sample of inmates at one institution. The author of this study found that while the prisoners talked freely about their families, their contacts with them, and the visiting room experiences, there were almost no linguistic items used that reflected unique prisons contexts. Men spoke of their "people," and of a "main squeeze," an "old lady," or depending on the degree of respect accorded her, their "bitch," but neither these phrasings nor their contexts are confined to institutional language. Furthermore, these were the only four items elicited in this category.

Prison officials often note the significance of family issues in the lives of prisoners, stressing particularly the stabilizing and rehabilitative effects of strong interpersonal familial attachments. However, the extremely small corpus of terms gathered by this study is suggestive of a relative unimportance or lack of intensity or immediacy associated with this aspect of prisoner's lives. As startling as this conclusion may initially seem, it is not completely contradictory to other understandings about the incarceration experience. In discussing the importance the family plays in successful rehabilitation models, social scientists also recognize the criticality of the absence of strong family connectives, a condition which frequently accompanies the incarceration experience. A lack of focus

on people and events outside the prison is accompanied by a corresponding concentration on in-prison interests. At best, this renders the prisoner ill-equipped to deal with the world outside the prison; at worst, it makes him lose his desire to do so.

There are several possible explanations for the small corpus of terms attached to family members. First of all, common sense suggests that the abundance of strong influences within the constricted and all-pervasive prison community, transmitted and reinforced linguistically, simply overpowers those contradictory influences relegated to a few hours of periodic visits or a sprinkling of sentences in a letter from the free world. Secondly, there may well be a "sacredness" attached to familial matters and hence a reluctance to bring these concerns into the prison milieu. At least one interviewee believed that such was the case. When asked about terms for visiting family members, he remarked,

. . . REALLY, THERE'S NOT TOO MUCH LABELING THAT, BECAUSE THOSE THINGS HERE ARE HIGHLY SOUGHT AFTER. YOU KNOW, PEOPLE NEED THAT HERE. EVERYBODY'S LOOKING FOR A VISIT. SOME OF THEM DON'T GET IT. SO WHEN SOMEONE GET ONE, YOU KNOW, IT'S HEAVEN TO THEM. (K-1-44-10)

Thirdly, for this study, only men who had served a minimum of ten consecutive years behind bars were interviewed. The mean number of consecutive years served was 15.1, and most of those interviewed had served other sentences, as well. This fact makes it far less likely that these men maintain

substantial family linkages, and therefore possess such items in their linguistic repertoire. One man poignantly related the deterioration of his relationship with his wife:

P: WE WERE VERY CLOSE. BUT SHE WAS ALSO THE TYPE OF PERSON THAT NEEDED SOME COMFORT BEYOND HERSELF. AND SHE STUCK WITH ME FAITHFULLY FOR FIVE OR SIX YEARS. IT GOT TO WHERE WHEN SHE CAME TO VISIT, I NOTICED SHE WAS JUST LOOKING DRAINED OUT, DRUG OUT, WORRIED, AND ALL THAT STUFF. AND IT WAS PRETTY OBVIOUS THAT THINGS WERE JUST TOO MUCH FOR HER, SO I STARTED PUSHING HER AWAY FROM ME. I DIVORCED HER ABOUT A YEAR AFTER THAT. BUT SHE'S GONE ON AND REMARRIED NOW, AND THINGS ARE PRETTY GOOD FOR HER.

R: You still kind of know about her life, or you keep up with her then?

P: NO, AND I'M NOT GOING TO. IT'S NOT A THING OF JEALOUSY, OR ANYTHING PERSONAL. ANYTHING THAT DON'T AFFECT MY BABY GIRL [daughter], YOU KNOW, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT IT, AND DON'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT IT, BECAUSE IT'S HER LIFE NOW, YOU KNOW. I'M NOT GOING TO GET INVOLVED WITH IT, CAUSE HER PROBLEMS, OR CAUSE HER AN EMOTIONAL WORRY, OR WHATEVER.

R: But you pushed her away from you, you said?

P: . . . WELL, YOU SEE UP TO THIS POINT, IT LOOKED PRETTY MUCH LIKE WE WOULD BE ABLE TO GET A DECENT HEARING IN COURT, AND GET THINGS STRAIGHTENED OUT, BUT IT NEVER HAPPENED. AND THERE'S JUST SO FAR THINGS CAN GO . . . BUT I COULD TELL SHE WAS REALLY HAVING A PROBLEM WITH BEING ALONE, AND ONE THING AND ANOTHER. IT'S THE ONLY THING TO DO, JUST PUSH THEM--OR JUST PUSH HER AWAY, AND THEN HOPE THAT SHE FINDS SOMEBODY TO TAKE CARE OF HER NEEDS.
(N-2-40-11)

This intentional rejection of family and loved ones is the final and perhaps the most prominent reason for the minimal number of terms describing this conceptual domain which appear in the lexicon. Struggles to keep family

relationships intact are associated with pulling "hard time," and a common coping strategy employed by an inmate is to distance himself from his outside contacts.

R: What other things make a person do hard time, besides worrying about getting out?

P: . . . TRYING TO LIVE TWO LIVES, I THINK.

R: Trying to live two lives?

P: OH, YEAH. HAVE A GIRLFRIEND, WRITE YOUR FAMILY EVERY DAY, OR CALL THEM EVERY DAY. TRYING TO MAINTAIN FULL, COMPLETE CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. IF YOU HAVE BIG TIME, THIS IS YOUR LIFE. THIS IS YOUR LIFE RIGHT HERE. YOU CAN'T HAVE A GIRLFRIEND. . .

R: . . . Have you cut yourself off then from outside?

P: I WRITE HOME EVERY FEW MONTHS PROBABLY. IT'S A FOUR HOUR DRIVE UP HERE, ONE WAY. FOUR HOURS. I KIND OF DISCOURAGE THEM COMING UP HERE TO VISIT ME. IT'S SUCH A HASSLE. MY GRANDMOTHER'S IN HER EIGHTIES. MOTHER'S IN HER SIXTIES. BESIDES I DON'T LIKE TO SUBJECT MY FAMILY TO THIS ENVIRONMENT. THE SHAKEDOWN THEY HAVE TO GO THROUGH COMING AND GOING. SO, YEAH, I PRETTY MUCH CUT THEM OFF. YOU KNOW, NOT ENTIRELY. (W-2-42-14)

The ambivalence felt by many incarcerated men concerning these crucial relationships is illustrated by the following conversation.

R: Your family comes down once a year?

P: YEAH.

R: So that's not something you have to look forward to all the time then?

P: NO, NO. SOMETIMES IT'S GOOD, SOMETIMES IT AIN'T, YOU KNOW.

R: How's that good?

P: WELL, I AIN'T GOT TO--YOU SEE THEM GUYS ON SATURDAYS OR SUNDAYS, I MEAN THEY GET UP, AND THEY'RE TAKING THEIR SHOWER, COMBING THEIR HAIR, PUTTING THEIR BEST CLOTHES ON, AND THEY GO AND STAND IN FRONT OF THAT WINDOW FROM THE TIME THEY START, TILL THE TIME IT'S OVER--SWEATING IT. SWEATING AND SWEATING, YOU KNOW. SWEATING IT OUT, TRYING TO HOPE SOMEBODY WILL SHOW UP.

R: Not knowing whether someone's going to come?

P: YEAH, NOT KNOWING. YOU STAND THERE SWEATING IT OUT, YOU KNOW, TRYING TO HOPE THAT SOMEBODY SHOWS.

R: And guys will get dressed every week--every Saturday, and Sunday--whether they know for sure anybody's coming?

P: RIGHT. YOU CAN SEE AT THE END, IF THEY DON'T COME, YOU CAN SEE THIS, YOU KNOW, WHAT IT DO. SO, IN A WAY, I'M KIND OF GLAD I AIN'T GOT TO GO THROUGH THAT, YOU KNOW. I MEAN, I AIN'T GOT TO GO THROUGH THAT, YOU KNOW. I JUST CHILL ON OUT ON WEEKENDS, YOU KNOW? I AIN'T GOT TO WORRY ABOUT NO VISIT. AND THEN SOMETIMES THOUGH--MY BAD PART--I MISS, I WISH I COULD. I MEAN, I WOULD GET ONE ONCE A YEAR, AND THEN I'D BE SAYING TO MYSELF, "BOY, I WISH I COULD SEE THEM AGAIN NEXT WEEK."
(N-1-42-14)

Things outside the prison

There is a further apprehension surrounding a prisoner's family--the issue of the faithfulness of one's spouse.

R: You talked about worrying about your wife or something on the outside . . . is that a pretty common thing?

P: THAT'S PRETTY COMMON. A LOT OF GUYS HAVE HARDENED THEMSELVES TO THAT TO WHERE THEY SAY "WELL, IT DON'T MATTER. AS LONG AS SHE DOES WHAT I TELL HER TO DO AND HELPS ME DO WHAT I NEED TO DO, AND IT REALLY DON'T MATTER."

R: Don't matter what, if she's faithful?

- P: IF SHE'S FAITHFUL OR NOT, BECAUSE I PROBABLY WOULDN'T BE IF I WAS OUT THERE AND SHE WAS IN HERE WITH FIFTY YEARS, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
- R: So they accept that?
- P: YEAH, I THINK THEY DO, BUT I THINK WHEN THEY LAY DOWN AT NIGHT, THAT THEY STILL THINK ABOUT IT.
- R: So you say that accepting that is kind of a coping strategy or something that you just kind of tell yourself?
- P: YEAH, AND I THINK THEY DON'T WANT ANYBODY ELSE TO THINK THERE'S ANY WEAKNESS IN THEM CONCERNING A WOMAN OR WHATEVER . . .
- R: . . . What's the name of the fellow that's taking care of your wife while you're in here?
- P: JODY.
- R: Anything else?
- P: JODY COMING IN THE BACK DOOR. JODY THE GRINDER . . . I GUESS THAT ONE WILL BE HERE TILL THE WALLS FALL DOWN. (T-2-37-11)

Indeed, "Jody" was elicited from every prisoner asked to name him, and synonyms of this term account for half of the items elicited for people or objects other than a family member located outside the institution (6 of 13). Certainly such a universal response is highly significant, expressing the common fears of all prisoners who attempt to maintain loving relationships from the proximity of the prison. The author has yet to discover any etymology for this term.

People Within the Institution

Contradictory to the scarcity of terms for family members is a decided proclivity among residents of correctional institutions to create labels for their fellow-prisoners and institutional staff. One-fourth of their entire argot vocabulary--306 items--are devoted to such names (Module 3). Both Hargan (1935) and Leichty (1944) noted the frequency of poetic devices in the language of prisons, and the present study confirms those early reports, particularly with reference to these individuals who live or work behind prison walls. The corpus is rich in metaphor, with items such as "button pusher," "fish," "Rambo," and "rat," and metonymy is particularly abundant, as evidenced by such descriptive terms as "Bible thumper," "check-in," "half-stepper," and "short timer."

Prison officials

As one might expect, the largest cluster of terms used to name individuals centers on those who exercise authority over the prisoner--his keepers. Nor is it surprising that the vast majority of such items have negative connotations. Among the 46 items collected, 24 are terms of disparagement (e.g. "goon squad," "pig," "robo cop," "state raised"). Twelve items might appear neutral, since they are primarily descriptive--terms like "guard," "the man," "turnkey," or "warden"--but the very fact that they refer to a position or

function of authority is an indication of a negative valence attached to them. Two other terms, "rookie" and "fish," emphasize a lack of experience, which is consistently identified with weakness since it denotes a potential for manipulation. Three terms describe prison psychiatrists, professionals who are looked upon fearfully at best ("head doctor") and disdainfully at worst ("nut doctor" and "quack"). Only five items from the entire corpus attach positive feelings to authority figures: "convict with a badge," "good people," "hard liner," "old head," and "old timer."

New officers, like new inmates, are unknown quantities and must be tested to determine how they will adapt to the prison environments. In prison, there are rules and regulations pertaining to every aspect of the inmate's life, many of which, like those of any institution, proscribe behaviors that are pertinent only to the institution itself. Thus not all infractions are treated equally, and officers are classified according to their eagerness to enforce regulations.

P: OFFICERS CHANGE, YOU KNOW, THEY CONSTANTLY
GET JOBS AND NEW OFFICERS. IF ONE GETS BROKE
IN . . .

R: . . . If you get one who--"broke in" is a
term?

P: A NEW OFFICER--A FISH, WE CALL HIM.

R: You call him a fish, too?

P: YEAH, ANY NEW OFFICERS, WE CALL THEM FISH
TOO, AND A ROOKIE.

R: A rookie?

P: SOME OF THEM COME IN, AND THEY, MAYBE MIGHT HAVE BEEN TRAINED WRONG OR SOMETHING. MAYBE PEOPLE WILL CALL HIM ROOKIE, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE THEY BREAK THEM IN TOO--THE INMATES BREAK THEM IN TOO. YOU KNOW, THEY MESS WITH THEM, AND CALL THEM ROOKIE. AND ALL KIND OF STUFF. AND IT ALL DEPENDS ON HOW THAT TAKE EFFECT ON HIM, IS HOW HE'S GOING TO ACT WITH THE PENCIL.

R: So is there a name for an officer that writes up a lot of people then? Or is a hard officer?

P: NO, THEY AIN'T NO HARD, WE CALL HIM A ASSHOLE, MAN. PSYCHOTIC. WE'LL USE THE SAME NAMES FOR THEM . . . THERE'S A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF RESPECT THAT SHOULD BE GIVEN ON BOTH SIDES. AND IF THAT'S GIVEN, THEN YOU NEVER CAN TELL WHAT MIGHT COME OUT OF THAT. IF THERE'S RESPECT IN THERE. IF THE OFFICER KNOW YOU RESPECT HIM AS AN OFFICER, AND DON'T DO NOTHING IN FRONT OF HIM, AND YOU LET HIM KNOW THAT HE'S AN OFFICER BY NOT DOING NOTHING IN FRONT OF HIM, AND ADDRESSING HIM RIGHT. AND HE DOESN'T, YOU KNOW, HE RETURN THE SAME BY YOU, AND NOT TRY TO DOG YOU. AND YOU KNOW, ENFORCE--

R: --What's "dog you?"

P: YOU KNOW, LIKE EVERY TIME HE SEE YOU SPITTING ON THE FLOOR, YOU KNOW, HE'S GOING TO SAY SOMETHING. IF YOU'RE WALKING IN THE HALLWAY, OR SOMETHING, HE MIGHT SAY, "WELL, GET OUT THE HALLWAY!" WHICH YOU DON'T HAVE TO, YOU KNOW. CONSTANTLY NAGGING YOU, OR ACT LIKE . . . WELL, JUST BEING A ASSHOLE. THAT TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP THERE OCCURS SOMETIMES.
(K-1-44-10)

Under constant surveillance, prisoners develop procedures for signalling the approach of an officer, some of which emerge from the naming propensity.

R: . . . You talked about the man. Are there other terms you would use to refer to the him?

P: PO'LICE.

R: Po'lice.

P: PIG.

R: Pig.

P: CHAIN GANG GUARDS.

R: Chain gang guard, okay.

P: BUT MOSTLY, THE MAN.

R: The man, alright.

P: YOUR HAWKS, THAT WOULD WATCH--LIKE IN CELL BLOCKS, PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE A POKER GAME, AND WE MIGHT HAVE WHAT I CALL THE HAWK, WATCHING FOR THE MAN. HE JUST SPECIFIES, SITS AROUND, WATCHES FOR THE GATES TO OPEN OR--

R: --That's his job?

P: THAT'S HIS JOB, PURPOSE.

R: How does he let you know the man is coming?

P: HE'LL HOLLER, "MAN DOWN."

R: Man down? The officer overhears that, what's--

P: --HE CAN'T SAY NOTHING. HE CAN'T SAY NOTHING . . . THEY TRIED TO MAKE A RULE WHERE THEY COULDN'T DO IT, BUT IT DIDN'T WORK OUT. I MEAN IT WENT DOWN, MAYBE A FAIRLY--FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS--AND THEN, THEY GOT IT SO WHERE WE STARTED CALLING THEM POWDER PUFFS.

R: A powder puff was what then?

P: THE MAN. INSTEAD OF HOLLERING "MAN DOWN," WE CALLED THEM "POWDER PUFFS DOWN."

R: And they'd rather be called a man than a powder puff?

P: RIGHT.

R: So they quit trying to enforce that?

P: THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT. (N-2-39-12)

In such a highly restricted environment, with limited access to outside goods and services, special relationships between inmates and staff that can be used to circumvent the designed routine are especially valuable. In a fascinating conversation, one prisoner described how such liaisons, identified by a number of synonyms, are developed between correctional staff and individual inmate.

R: . . . Is there a term for one who will deliberately turn his head, or her head, now and then and let something happen?

P: AGAIN, IT'S INDIVIDUAL DESCRIPTION. LIKE, GUARDS LIKE THAT, YOU MIGHT HERE SOMEBODY SAY, "THAT'S A CONVICT WITH A BADGE." INSTEAD OF THE REVERSE, "CONVICT THAT NEEDS A BADGE." ONE'S POSITIVE AND ONE'S NEGATIVE.

R: Would that be the same then, about someone who not just turns their head now and then, but someone who actively works to maybe bring contraband in, or something like that?

P: OH, THAT. THEY'D SAY HE'S HOOKED UP.

R: Anything else?

P: OR HE'S ON THE WIRE.

R: On the wire?

P: ON THE PAD, OR ON THE PAYROLL.

R: How does that happen most often?

P: HYPOTHETICALLY. THE GUARD HAS PAYMENTS HE HAS TO MAKE OUT THERE. HE NEEDS MONEY. KIDS NEED NEW SHOES, WHATEVER. A PERSON WILL JUST APPROACH HIM, YOU KNOW, "I HEAR YOU'RE HAVING PROBLEMS. IF I CAN DO ANYTHING TO HELP, LET ME KNOW. WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO WORK SOMETHING OUT." A FEW DAYS MIGHT GO BY, AND THEY'D

SLIDE BACK INTO YOU, "WELL, THIS IS GOING BAD. THAT'S GOING BAD." "LOOK, YOU WANT TO MAKE SOME MONEY, WE CAN DISCUSS IT. IF YOU DON'T WANT TO MAKE NO MONEY, NO HARM, NO FOUL. JUST FORGET THAT THE CONVERSATION WAS BROUGHT UP." AND IT JUST ESCALATES, AND WE REACH AN AGREEMENT.

R: Fairly direct transaction--

P: --HYPOTHETICALLY.

R: Pardon me?

P: HYPOTHETICALLY.

R: I understand. But it's a fairly direct kind of conversation, then?

P: RIGHT, YOU'VE GOT TO--AT ONE POINT IN TIME, OR SOME POINT IN TIME--YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE THAT EXTRA STEP AND MAKE THE COMMITMENT VERBALLY. YOU'VE GOT TO LET THE OFFICER KNOW, LOOK I'M PUTTING MYSELF IN YOUR HANDS NOW.

R: That's what I was wondering, because at some point you--

P: --YOU HAVE TO TAKE THAT--

R: --you take a risk, because that guy could nail you, I guess.

P: AND IF HE WANTS TO LOCK YOU UP, OR WRITE YOU UP, THAT CARRIES NINETY DAYS IN SEGREGATION. WHICH, SOMETIMES IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT.

R: I would assume too, though, that when you get ready to take that step, hypothetically, that you--

P: --YOU PRETTY WELL KNOW--

R: --feel good about it. You've got an instinct by this time?

P: YOU EITHER KNOW THAT HE'S GOING TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSITION, OR IF HE DOESN'T ACCEPT THE PROPOSITION, HE'LL TELL YOU, "LOOK, I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU DON'T APPROACH ME WITH THIS." OR I HAD ONE GUARD ACTUALLY TELL ME,

"WELL, THAT'S YOUR STRIKE. DON'T GET ANOTHER ONE. DON'T ASK ME NO MORE." WHICH I RESPECTED HIM FOR THAT, BECAUSE HE LET ME KNOW IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT THE CONVERSATION WAS NOT TO BE BROUGHT UP AGAIN.
(K-2-42-11)

Fellow prisoners: homosexual behavior

The second largest cluster of argot terms used to name individuals in the prison environment are those which do so on the basis of homosexual activity. Thirty-two items were elicited, nearly twice that of the next highest discrete category--new prisoners--and more than twice the number for any one referent in any other naming category. There were an additional 35 items that described homosexual behaviors (Module 4), so this single conceptual domain accounts for 5.34% of the total vocabulary. This is not surprising when one considers several core conditions of the incarceration experience--lengthy sentences served without provision for conjugal visitation, overcrowded conditions accompanied by understaffing of correctional personnel, a prison economy conducive to coercive activities, and the mixing of assaultive personalities with weaker prisoners incapable of adequately defending themselves.

All informants agreed that sexual pressures are a part of the very fabric of America's prisons where predatory "wolves" dominate the landscape.

P: . . . WHEN YOU'RE IN PRISON, YOU UNDERSTAND, THAT'S--THE ENVIRONMENT IS VERY SEXUAL. I SEE IT AS VERY SEXUAL . . . AND THE ISSUE OF

HOMOSEXUALITY, YOU GOT TO DEAL WITH, YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING?.

R: I hear you . . . How do you have to deal with it?

P: HOW WOULD YOU DEAL WITH IT? YOU, I THINK THAT, YOU KNOW, THE PRISONERS OBSERVE YOU, RIGHT, OR SOMETHING. YOU COME IN, AND I THINK YOU GOT TO LET IT BE KNOWN, YOU GOT TO BE READY TO DEAL WITH ANYBODY THAT TRIES TO CONFRONT YOU RIGHT AWAY . . . I THINK THAT SOME GUYS THAT COME IN, RIGHT? THEY HAVE A SOFT LOOK, RIGHT? YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING? YOU KNOW LIKE OLD INMATES ARE VERY SEXUAL, RIGHT? LOOKING AT NEW GUYS COMING IN, RIGHT? 'CAUSE THEY REMEMBER HOW HE FELT--THE FEARS AND STRESSES THEY FELT WHEN THEY CAME HERE. AND IT'S HOW YOU'RE ABLE TO DEAL WITH IT. SOME GUYS ARE OVERWHELMED BY FEAR, YOU UNDERSTAND? OTHER PEOPLE CAN SEE IT, RIGHT?

R: So those fellows who look fearful are setting themselves up into being confronted?

P: ABSOLUTELY, ABSOLUTELY. IF YOU'RE FEARFUL, YOU BETTER LEARN HOW TO KIND OF LIKE HIDE THAT FEAR, RIGHT? YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING? OTHER PEOPLE CAN--AGAIN, FEAR IS A WEAPON.

R: So they pick up on that, and try to intimidate those people?

P: RIGHT.

R: So what do they call that process of intimidating that person?

P: WELL, YOU HAVE PREDATORS. THE WOLVES.
(W-1-30-11)

The most common homosexual involvement begins with the incurrence of a debt. A Kentucky inmate explained the process and offered a map of the linguistic territory which was, for the most part, verified in nearly all subsequent interviews.

- R: How do you take advantage of these new fish?
What's the way they do that?
- P: KEEP GIVING THEM, ONE WAY IS, KEEP GIVING THEM A PACK OF CIGARETTES HERE, A PACK OF CIGARETTES THERE, AND NEVER SAY ANYTHING ABOUT IT. AND WAIT A COUPLE WEEKS, "OH, BY THE WAY, YOU OWE ME SO MUCH!" YOU KNOW YOU ALWAYS ADD JUICE ON IT. LIKE, A CARTON OF CIGARETTES AROUND HERE, IF YOU LOAN A MAN A CARTON OF CIGARETTES, HE OWES YOU FIFTEEN PACKS BACK. HE'LL GIVE THIS GUY A CARTON OF CIGARETTES, AND THEN TELL HIM YOU WANT FIFTEEN PACKS BACK. HE ASKS AROUND, "YEAH, THAT IS THE JUICE ON IT. THAT IS COMMON PRACTICE." "HEY, I DIDN'T BORROW IT." "SO WHAT? THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM. I WANT MY CIGARETTES."
- R: . . . So now he's got the guy in debt to him.
- P: GOT HIM IN DEBT. HE'S EITHER GOT TO STEAL SOMETHING, WRITE HOME TO MAMMA AND GET SOMETHING, SELL HIS CLOTHES WHEN HE GETS THEM, OR SOME OF THEM WILL WANT TO MAKE HIM A PUNK, OR SOMETHING.
- R: A punk is a homosexual?
- P: YEAH.
- R: . . . In your reference, is punk always the passive partner, or the female partner?
- P: YEAH, THE CATCHER.
- R: The catcher. Okay.
- P: HERE THEY CALL THEM PITCHERS AND CATCHERS.
- R: Pitchers and catchers. Are there other terms for punks?
- P: YEAH. LET'S SEE. FAGS. YOU KNOW, IT'S PRETTY CONSISTENT WITH WHAT'S ON THE STREETS. YOU KNOW, THEY GET, REALLY NO MORE RESPECT IN HERE THEN THEY DO OUT THERE. AND THERE IS A SEPARATION BETWEEN A PUNK AND A HOMOSEXUAL IN HERE TOO, THOUGH.
- R: Alright, tell me that.

- P: A HOMOSEXUAL GETS A LITTLE MORE RESPECT, BECAUSE--THEY CALL THEM GIRLS IN HERE, BECAUSE THEY LOOK AT THEM AS FEMALES. A PUNK IS JUST, WHEN HE GOES HOME HE'S GOING TO TELL EVERYBODY HOW BIG A KILLER HE WAS IN THE JOINT. BUT WHILE HE'S IN HERE, HE'S WALKING AROUND WITH MAKEUP, OR WHATEVER.
- R: A punk then, you're saying, is someone who has been made a homosexual?
- P: RIGHT. HE'S BEEN TURNED OUT.
- R: Turned out is the term.
- P: HE'S DOING IT FOR PROFIT, OR HE'S DOING IT THROUGH FEAR AND INTIMIDATION. BUT IT WASN'T A VOLUNTARY PROCESS INITIALLY. AND A--
- R: --A homosexual is usually voluntary?
- P: THE HOMOSEXUAL USUALLY COMES IN THAT WAY, AND WILL GO OUT THAT WAY, AND DOES WHAT HE WANTS TO, AND WHEN HE WANTS TO, BECAUSE HE WANTS TO.
- R: . . . Is that a significant population--the homosexual population in this institution?
- P: NO, NO. THERE'S, SAY 1500 PEOPLE HERE. HOMOSEXUALS, I'D SAY THERE'S NOT FIFTY HOMOSEXUALS ON THE YARD. BUT THERE'S A COUPLE HUNDRED PUNKS ON THE YARD. THERE'S A LOT MORE THAT'S FORCED INTO IT, THEN IS INTO IT VOLUNTARILY.
- R: Which makes us 250 pitchers somewhere at, or more?
- P: PROBABLY MORE, 'CAUSE YOU GOT A LOT OF THEM --THE HOMOSEXUAL GIRLS--THEY TURN TRICKS AND EVERYTHING. SO THERE'S A LOT MORE THAT, THEY GO IN THERE AND HIT AND GET. THEY DON'T--
- R: --Hit and get's turning a trick?
- P: YEAH, AND YOU KNOW, THEY DON'T HOOK UP WITH ONE, OR CELL WITH ONE, OR MARRY ONE, OR STICK WITH HER FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME, SO . . .
(K-2-42-11)

All prisoners attested to the fact that violent rapes are much more rare than in the past, though all concurred that physical intimidation is always a tactic of the aggressive inmate seeking sexual favors.

R: . . . the perception, or at least outside, one of the givens, or one of the things about prison that most people see or hear, is that you're just automatically going to get--

P: --YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIGHT, YEAH . . . THAT'S NOT TRUE AS A, AS A RULE. SOME PEOPLE HAVE TO FIGHT. A WHOLE LOT MORE PEOPLE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN USED IF THEY HAD FOUGHT, AND I DON'T SEE THE DIFFERENCE. I MEAN TO ME, IF A MAN COMES AND TELLS ME--AND THIS IS WHAT THEY SAY--THEY SAY, "WELL, HE SAID HE'S GOING TO JUMP ON ME!" IF A MAN COMES AND TELLS ME, "YOU'RE EITHER GOING TO LET ME SCREW YOU, OR I'M GOING TO JUMP ON YOU!" I'D SAY, "DUDE, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO JUMP ON ME!" I WOULD MUCH RATHER BE WHIPPED, YOU KNOW? I MEAN HOW COME THEY FIGURE IT'S EASIER TO BE USED AS A HOMOSEXUAL, THEN TO TAKE A WHIPPING? YOU KNOW?

R: Okay, so that's where the intimidation comes?

P: YEAH.

R: It's based on your personal fear then?

P: UH HUH. (N-2-51-21)

Similarly, what one is called--who one is--depends on his response to the act rather than his engagement in it, as two separate prisoners declare:

P: NOW, THE GUY THAT GETS FORCED INTO IT, LIKE A GUY GOES AND RAPES A GUY, YOU DON'T CALL HIM A PUNK.

R: The guy that got raped is not a punk?

P: NO. BUT NOW IF HE CONTINUES TO DO IT, THEN YOU WOULD CALL HIM A PUNK. NOW, IF HE JUST GETS FORCED INTO IT ONE TIME, YOU DON'T CALL

HIM A PUNK. ACTUALLY, MOSTLY IT'S YOUNG GUYS IN HERE THAT GETS DONE LIKE THAT, AND IT'S NOT REALLY THEIR FAULT. THEY DON'T WANT IT, THEY DON'T PARTICIPATE IT IN THE FUTURE.

R: But the fellow that continues to participate in it is the punk?

P: THEN HE'S A PUNK. (W-2-55-17)

R: Is there a term for someone who is forced, who's not necessarily by choice?

P: NO, PUNK WOULD PROBABLY FALL IN THAT CATEGORY TOO, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE IF THE GUY DON'T RETALIATE FOR BEING FORCED, THEN HE'LL BE LABELED AS A PUNK.

R: So punk is one who could be physically dominated in some way and if you're raped then, the behavior should--

P: --THE BEHAVIOR OF THE RAPE, YOU KNOW, AFTER THE RAPE, WOULD REALLY DETERMINE HOW YOU'RE GOING TO BE LABELED . . . IF YOU RETALIATE, YOU'RE GOING TO BE CALLED A MAN AGAIN. AT LEAST YOU'RE SHOWING THAT YOU'RE STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF. AND YOU MAY HAVE TO DO IT MORE THAN ONCE. (T-2-36-16)

There is great variance in attitudes among the inmate population towards what sociologists identify as "institutional homosexuality." Again, terminology is fundamental to perceptual classifications.

R: . . . what I meant by an abnormal sexual environment--

P: --YEAH, IT IS. IT IS ABNORMAL--

R: --is that you don't have free choice, and you don't get to go home, and there aren't both women, and men, available. So that's seems to be abnormal.

P: YEAH.

R: . . . I mean, if a person is turned out, we would talk about that being a homosexual--

P: --STATE MADE.

R: He's what?

P: STATE MADE, YEAH.

R: State made? Do we look the same way at the fellow who turns him out though? Is he also homosexual?

P: NO.

R: He's just what then?

P: DADDY.

R: He's a daddy?

P: YEAH.

R: But there's nothing negative about that?

P: NO.

R: You don't look at him the same way?

P: NOT AT ALL.

R: Okay. So that then becomes acceptable, or then, normal?

P: RIGHT.

R: So you would say that folks who are in prison for a while, for whatever--

P: --'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOU'D WANT TO BE. YOU WANT TO BE SOMEBODY'S DADDY. YOU WANT YOU A BOY, JUST LIKE HE'S GOT. (N-3-43-18)

Far more often, however, the prisoners who contributed to this study pointed to ambivalent attitudes about the sexual behaviors of their fellow-inmates. Correlated with such attitudes are a collection of terms which apparently delineate precise behaviors, but which are used in a manner

that denies such precision. The prisoner in the following interview uses separate terms for the actions of two people engaging in a homosexual act--"pitching" and "catching"--yet at the same time insists that there is no difference between the behaviors. He also points out the contrasting opinions among the prison population.

R: Let me ask you a question, and again, I sometimes get different kinds of responses, but from your perception, is there a difference then, in a person who participates in a homosexual act and a homosexual?

P: DO I PERSONALLY SEE ANY DIFFERENCE? NO. IF YOU'RE PITCHING OR CATCHING, YOU'RE IN THE GAME. I MEAN, THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE . . . BUT GENERALLY THE CONSENSUS IS, IF YOU'RE NOT CATCHING, YOU'RE NOT A PUNK.

R: So in other words, there is generally, the perception is that there's some leeway. It's okay for you, because of the institution? Is that the feeling?

P: THEY FIGURE THAT THIS IS A REPLACEMENT FOR A FEMALE, THEREFORE, I'M STILL A MALE. MORE OR LESS A PANACEA FOR THEIR OWN CONSCIENCE, OR WHATEVER.

R: So that's kind of a mix, depending on who you are, what you feel about that? There's not any overall--

P: --NO, THERE'S NO GENERAL CONSENSUS. IT'S WHOEVER YOU'RE TALKING TO . . . (K-2-42-11)

Fellow prisoners: new persons in prison

In an environment characterized by a variety of deprivations, prisoners seek control over any element in their world which can be manipulated to ease the pains of imprisonment, a drive which includes a desire for power over

their fellow prisoner. New entrants to the system are appropriately labeled "fish," for they are released into the infested waters of the prison where they are closely observed to determine how they will position themselves in their new world, and how they might be taken advantage of by the older resident.

P: WHEN I FIRST STARTED DOING TIME, WHEN A NEW GROUP COME IN, AND WE HAD A WHOLE LOT OF OLD TIMERS--MOST OF THEM DOING THEIR LARGE PRISON SENTENCE, BEEN LOCKED UP MOST OF THEIR LIFE--THEY ALWAYS GATHERED AROUND TO SPY OUT THE NEW GROUP, THE FISH.

R: So old timer is just what? Somebody with a long sentence to do?

P: AN OLD TIMER IS SOMEBODY WHO HAS BEEN LOCKED UP FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME ALREADY.

R: Alright. Now you said spy out. Is that the term for--

P: --WELL, THE MORE PROPER TERM, OR THE TERM THAT IS USED IS CASE THEM OUT. THAT IS C-A-S-E. CASING OUT THE NEW FISH.

R: What do you do when you case out the new fish? What is it you're looking for, or what do you do?

P: WELL, IN MOST CASES, IN A LOT OF CASES, ESPECIALLY NOW, IT'S GENERAL CURIOSITY. THEY WANT TO KNOW, A LOT OF TIMES, OKAY SAY LIKE WHEN YOU COME TO WHAT THEY CALL THE FISH TANK --THAT'S FOR THE NEW ARRIVALS. BEFORE THE NEW ARRIVAL GETS OUT OF THE FISH TANK, COMES OUT TO THE YARD TO THE GENERAL POPULATION, BY THE TIME HE COMES OUT TO GENERAL POPULATION, AT LEAST NINETY PER CENT OF THE INMATES ON THE YARD ALREADY KNOWS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT YOU BEFORE YOU EVEN COME OUT. EVEN WITHOUT EVEN SPEAKING TO YOU . . . PARTIALLY BY THE WAY YOU CARRY YOURSELF, AND WORD TRAVELS FAST. INFORMATION TRAVELS FASTER THAN ANY PLACE ELSE IN THE

WORLD BY WHAT WE CALL THE GRAPEVINE.
(K-2-50-21)

The new arrival must establish himself in a predatory world where others are clearly labeled, but where his title and identity is yet to be determined.

R: A new fellow coming into the institution then . . . I assume everybody's checking these fellows out. Is there a process you go through?

P: YEAH, TWO OR THREE DIFFERENT, I GUESS YOU'D CALL THEM CLIQUES OR GROUPS, AND EACH ONE, LIKE YOU'D GET THE OLD TIMERS. WHEN YOU FIRST GET TO THE INSTITUTION, PEOPLE KEEP AN EYE ON YOU TO SEE HOW YOU CARRY YOURSELF, SEE WHO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH, SEE HOW OFTEN YOU HANG AROUND THE GUARDS, LISTEN TO YOUR CONVERSATION, SEE WHAT YOU'RE IN HERE FOR. YOU'VE GOT TO EARN TRUST FROM THE OLD TIMERS BEFORE ANYBODY'LL ASSOCIATE WITH YOU. WHEN YOU FIRST COME FROM THE FISH TANK, YOU DON'T HAVE NOTHING. YOUR MONEY'S GOING BE TWO WEEKS BEHIND. SO NONE OF THE OLD TIMERS, UNLESS THEY'RE REALLY GREEDY, WILL LOAN ANYTHING TO A FISH, CAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW IF HE'S GOING TO BE CHECKING IN, OR IF HIS MONEY'S ANY GOOD. SO YOU ALWAYS CHECK THEM OUT. YOU GOT OTHER ONES THAT'S MAYBE BEEN IN A YEAR OR TWO, STARTING TO THINK THAT THEY'RE CONS, SO THEY RUN AROUND THEM AND THROW UP A BIG FRONT. TRY TO IMPRESS THEM, BUDDY-BUDDY-THIS, AND SEE HOW MUCH MONEY THEY GOT. THEN YOU GOT YOUR JERKS, OR GEEKS, WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL THEM, THEY GO STRICTLY TO SEE WHAT THEY CAN GET OFF OF THEM, AND TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ONES THAT LOOKS WEAK. YOU GOT MORE OR LESS YOUR PECKING ORDER IN HERE

R: So, you say there are basically--you described basically three groups then, right?

P: BASICALLY, YEAH.

R: Older fellows--old timers you called them?

P: . . . THOSE ARE YOUR CONS. THEY'VE BEEN HERE A WHILE, THEY'VE BEEN THROUGH THE SYSTEM.

AND THEY DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THAT PETTY-ASS SHIT.

R: Better to lay back and wait, and see what a guy's like?

P: YEAH. UNTIL THE MAN SHOWS WHAT HE IS, WHERE HE'S COMING FROM, HE'S MORE OR LESS AN NON-ENTITY--HE'S A FISH. HE'S NOT PART OF THE SOCIAL ORDER AT ALL. HE HAS TO MAKE HISSELF A POSITION. (K-2-42-11)

However, every prisoner interviewed remarked about the younger generation of inmates who have failed to adopt the code of their older counterparts, and who have thus disrupted the social order. Their linguistic designation emphasizes their generational isolation from their counterparts.

P: . . . I MEAN, YOU GOT LIKE A PEPSI GENERATION, THEN YOU GOT SOMEBODY WHO'S BEEN WILD. YOU KNOW, HE'S BEEN DOWN A WHILE, AND THEY VIEW THINGS DIFFERENT.

R: Okay. So Pepsi generation is what you call--

P: IT'S THE YOUNG GUYS THAT COMING IN NOW, AND THEY'RE NOT USED TO--THEY DON'T HAVE THE SAME VALUES THAT I HAVE, YOU KNOW.

R: How are they different?

P: WELL, THEY'RE MORE VOCAL. THEY'RE MORE OUTGOING TOO. THEY DON'T TAKE WHAT YOU STAND FOR, WHAT YOU WANT IN CONSIDERATION TO WHAT THEY WANT. THEY'LL JUST, YOU KNOW, PUSH OVER YOU TO GET WHAT THEY WANT. THEY USE THE SYSTEM MORE, INTERACT WITH THE PO'LICE, AND THE SYSTEM--THE ADMINISTRATIVE. THEY USE THAT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE, OR SO THEY SAY IT'S TO THEIR ADVANTAGE--THEY DON'T CALL IT SNITCHING OR RATting. BUT THEY USE THAT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. THEY SAY IT'S JUST GETTING AHEAD. AND THERE'S A DIFFERENT, THE SHADE OF VALUES, THE SHADE OF WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG. (N-3-43-18)

Essentially, the "fish" of the "Pepsi generation" refuse to accept the old order, to adhere to established codes of behavior, or to acknowledge the previously ordained hierarchies.

Fellow prisoners: offense

Another area of particular intensity within the group of naming items has to do with sexual offenses perpetrated on children. Of the total of 23 names used that correspond to a particular offense committed, half (11 of 23 terms) refer specifically to offenders confined for crimes of child molestation. This abundance of synonyms certainly parallels the aversion to these offenders consistently reported by the majority of their co-prisoners. Repeatedly, prisoners recalled that in past years inmates incarcerated for such offenses were physically assaulted and forced to enter protective custody units in order to stay alive, yet all informants attest to the radical change in that atmosphere in recent years. One interview is particularly revealing about the nature of the improved conditions under which these men now live, but which underscores the way in which the terms themselves are used as weapons of estrangement.

R: . . . Do you have a slang term you use to refer to somebody if you know his offense?

P: . . . NO, NOT IN RESPECT TO A THIEF. A CHILD MOLESTER OR BABY RAPER.

R: Child molesters are baby rapers?

- P: UH HUH.
- R: Any other terms you call child molesters?
- P: CHESTER.
- R: Chester?
- P: CHESTER THE MOLESTER.
- R: . . . Alright, for instance, the offense of rape? Is there any name particularly that someone--terms for that?
- P: NO, NOT--THEY LOOK DOWN ON RAPISTS, BUT THEY'S NO SPECIFIC . . .
- R: You talk about looking down . . . I think you've said they look down on child molesters, too, right?
- P: YEAH. YEAH, VERY MUCH SO.
- R: Would child molester then be the low . . .?
- P: THE VERY BOTTOM.
- R: Alright. How are those folks treated in institutions then? . . . I mean, now days if I come in here as a child molester, how would I be treated?
- P: THERE WOULD BE SOME PEOPLE THAT WOULD GIVE YOU A HARD TIME, BUT AS A RULE THEY'RE NOT REALLY BOTHERED A WHOLE LOT. PEOPLE WILL STAY AWAY FROM THEM, YOU KNOW. PEOPLE THAT DON'T LIKE THEM STAY AWAY FROM THEM.
- R: How would some people give them a hard time? What would they do to give them a hard time?
- P: HOLLER AT THEM WHEN THEY'RE GOING DOWN THE WALKWAY--"CHILD MOLESTER," "BABY RAPER." MAKE COMMENTS AROUND THEM WHEN THEY'RE IN LINES, AND THINGS, YOU KNOW. JUST HARASS THEM IN GENERAL.
- R: Okay. Not want to be in the same dorm with them, maybe?
- P: RIGHT. RUN THEM OUT OF THE DORM. POUR THINGS IN THEIR BED.

R: Are they ever physically abused?

P: SOMETIMES. NOT OFTEN.

R: Okay. Now would that be true of this institution, or for a place like the main prison at Raleigh? Would it be different there, or not?

P: WELL, IT WOULD BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT THERE. THEY WOULD PROBABLY BE A LITTLE MORE PHYSICALLY ABUSED THERE THEN HERE.
(N-2-51-21)

The label attached to the offender has such a strongly negative charge that it may even be transferred to the physical location he frequents, making it, like him, anathema. Several prisoners suggested that child molesters attend chapel services in disproportionate numbers. This in turn discourages other prisoners from attending these events which they associate with the despised offender.

R: What about folks who come up in the church area, chapel area? Do you have a name for them?

P: WELL, AROUND HERE THEY SAY, "THE BABY RAPER SERVICE." YOU KNOW? THAT'S ABOUT ALL THAT GOES TO CHAPEL. ACCORDING TO THEM. I DON'T KNOW. ACCORDING TO WHAT THE USUAL--

R: --But you're saying, according to most people out there, they think that it's mostly baby rapers?

P: YEAH, NORMAL CONVERSATION, YEAH.

R: You're saying . . . you don't necessarily agree with that? But that's what--

P: --YEAH, I'M SUPPOSED TO HAVE MORE SENSE THAN THAT NOW, YOU KNOW, TO PREJUDGE SOMEBODY. BUT I DON'T KNOW, YOU KNOW? THERE IS A FEW, ALWAYS A FEW, THAT'S THE ONLY PLACE THEY CAN GET ANYBODY TO TALK TO THEM, OR YOU KNOW, BE

FRIENDLY WITH THEM, IS TO GO TO CHAPEL.
(K-2-35-11)

Racial terms

Within Module 3, too, the author recorded a conspicuously small group of synonyms that serve as racial epithets. With one exception, the word "nigger," there were no such terms casually introduced into the conversations. Moreover, when specifically asked to name these items, the interviewees offered very few examples--13 to be exact--none of which appears to have unique usage among prisoners.¹⁰ Clemmer's study classifies 20 terms as indicative of race (Clemmer 1958, 89). Kantrowitz's analysis (1969), which focuses specifically on the unique vocabularies of races, claimed to isolate 106 terms referring to "Negroes" or "Whites," 68 of which might be used exclusively by one race or the other to refer to members of the opposite race. Clemmer's partial lexicon lists no items identical to those gathered by the present study; Kantrowitz's research does not include a full glossary, but among those items mentioned in the notes to his report (33), six terms from the present study are matches, and three others might be implied.¹¹ Undoubtedly more terms exist and could be observed outside the context of a formal interview, but whether any of these items occur only within the prison environment is doubtful. Kantrowitz's data, the most extensive available, produces no evidence of institutional-specific items, and this author's

conclusion is that racial slurs operate independently of institutional barriers. Thus they have been omitted from the lexicon of Chapter 3.

Institutional Rules: Illegal possessions

Though the module eliciting items for institutional rules (Module 2) did not produce the largest quantity of terms, it did contain the sub-category within it which accounted for more items than any other--illegal possessions. Having been declared guilty of violating the rules of free society, the respondents have been confined in a place where adherence to rules and regulations is given singular attention. For them, disobedience of these regulations is equally important. The most prominent feature of the distribution of terms is the allocation of 124 separate items to descriptions of drugs. Slightly less than 10% of the entire lexicon is devoted to such terms and, if one includes the designations of alcohol (26 items; 2.07%) to form a category of "illegal substances," that percentage would increase to 11.96%. Clemmer, the only other scholar to report percentages for argot usages, reported only 3.48% of the terms he collected related to drugs, with another 3.19% associated with alcohol (Clemmer 1958, 89). Clearly, the substantial increase in drug-related terms collected in the present study should be considered an outstanding feature of its lexical

distribution, and is reflective of a primary perceptual organizing principle within the prison subculture.

Most men interviewed related the increased drug activity to the influx of new prisoners thoroughly entwined in drug addiction prior to their incarceration. Indeed, one prominent label, "crack baby," expresses both of the primary characteristics of the new inmate--his age and his lifelong addiction to chemical substances.

YOU KNOW MOST OF THE PEOPLE THAT ARE COMING IN NOW, WE CALL CRACK BABIES. YOU KNOW, THEY COME STRAIGHT OFF THE STREETS, AND MOST DRUG CHARGES NOW DAYS ARE COCAINE. THAT'S THE MAJORITY OF YOUR DRUG CHARGES, AND IT'S YOUNGER GUYS. IT'S YOUNGER GUYS WHO JUST STAND AROUND ON THE CORNERS OUT THERE, I GUESS, AND JUST SMOKE THAT PIPE.
(T-2-37-11)

Though correctional institutions have elaborate security measures in place, the prisoners interviewed continually assured the author that significant quantities of contraband find their way inside. One informant related a humorous tale which illustrates that fact:

THERE'S AN OLD SAYING THAT YOU CAN TIE A CONVICT ON A POLE, AND TAKE ANOTHER ONE ACROSS THE STREET, AND TIE HIM TO A POLE, AND HANDCUFF THEM. AND GIVE ONE A CIGARETTE AND ONE A MATCH. WHEN YOU COME BACK, THEY BOTH OF THEM GOING TO BE SMOKING. SO, THAT'S TRUE! I MEAN, YOU CAN GET ANYTHING YOU WANT IN PRISON. (N-1-42-14)

The breadth of the substance-related lexical items demonstrates the truth of that statement. There are terms for pharmaceuticals, marijuana, refined substances such as cocaine and its derivatives, inhalants, and both homemade and legally produced alcohol. The resourcefulness of

prisoners, isolated from normal channels of distribution for these items, is demonstrated by their ability to gain access to these illegal substances. Once inside the prison, the illegal items must be carefully distributed to avoid confiscation. Usually, this involves the assistance of several prisoners in an intricate delivery system where each participant and every process has a unique linguistic designation reflecting its function or effect.

R: Is there a term for that? I mean, they're holding--is there a name for that person?

P: NO.

R: He's not a holder? He's holding, though?

P: KIND OF LIKE A MULE, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

R: Well, I don't know, a mule is what? That's a person who's--

P: --RUNNING, HE'S A RUNNER.

R: He's bringing things in for you, or taking out? Right?

P: RIGHT.

R: Do you have a runner within the institution?

P: OH, YEAH.

R: Now what does that person do, then?

P: HE'LL CARRY THINGS FROM ONE TO ANOTHER. HE'LL GO THROUGH SHAKEDOWNS, THROUGH ELECTRICAL SEARCHES. LIKE IN THE WALLS [Central Prison, Raleigh, NC], YOU GO FROM INDUSTRIES TO POPULATION, YOU HAD TO GO THROUGH AROUND TWO SHAKEDOWNS, AND HE'D GET BY.

R: How does that guy get by?

P: THE ILLUSION. HE'S REAL FRIENDLY. HE GETS ALONG WITH ALL THE PO'LICE. HE GIVES THEM COFFEE, SANDWICHES IN THE MORNING. HE'LL BUILD UP A FRIENDSHIP, AND HE'LL HAVE IT IN ONE HAND . . . SO HE KNOWS HIS BUSINESS.

R: Where else can you hide it?

P: OH, ANYWHERE! YOU CAN SUITCASE IT, SWALLOW IT, YOU KNOW.

R: Suitcase is in your rectum?

P: YEAH, WRAP IT UP IN A PLASTIC, STICK IT YOUR ASS.

R: Swallow it?

P: YEAH . . . USUALLY DO THAT ON AN EMERGENCY. CARRY IT IN YOUR MOUTH, AND THEY'LL, "WHAT YOU GOT IN YOUR MOUTH!" ATTACK YOU, AND STRANGLE YOU. I'VE SEEN THAT HAPPEN.
(N-3-43-18)

The drug trade flourishes within prison walls, built around an economic structure that requires ingenious methods of circumventing prison authorities and transferring proceeds back outside the institution. Some of the techniques and implements used in this process are suggested by one prisoner.

P: IN TERMS OF DRUG TRAFFICKING. NOW ALL THEY WANT IS GREEN MONEY. SOME OF THEM WILL SELL FOR CIGARETTES, SOME OF THEM WILL SELL FOR MONEY ORDERS. THAT'S WHAT WE CALL OUR CHECKS --MONEY ORDERS.

R: Your check is called a money order, you say?

P: YEAH, THE WITHDRAWAL FORM.

R: The withdrawal form is called a check?

P: YEAH, "I'LL SEND YOU A MONEY ORDER," OR "I'LL SEND YOU A CHECK," EITHER ONE.

- R: Now you're allowed, then, to transfer funds to each other?
- P: NO. WE'RE ALLOWED TO TRANSFER FUNDS FROM HERE TO ANYONE ON THE STREETS.
- R: So, you would have to transfer money out to someone on the street who would transfer it back in?
- P: IF I BOUGHT A BOX OF WEED FROM YOU, THEN I COME TO YOU AND SAY, "WELL, ALL I CAN DO IS TO GIVE YOU A SEND-OUT." WHICH IS A MONEY ORDER. AND HE'LL GIVE YOU AN ADDRESS, AND WELL SAY, "I WANT IT SENT HERE." YOU KNOW, IT MIGHT BE HIS PEOPLE OR IT MIGHT BE SOMEWHERE ELSE, AND NORMALLY DRUG DEALERS DON'T LIKE DOING THAT, BECAUSE THAT DRAWS HEAT ON THEM REAL QUICK, AS FAR AS TOO MANY MONEY ORDERS GOING TO THE SAME ADDRESS, OR TOO MANY MONEY ORDERS COMING INTO THE SAME PERSON. SO YOU KNOW THERE'S DIFFERENT WAYS AROUND THAT. SOMETIMES YOU CAN, YOU KNOW, LIKE SEND IT OUT TO, LIKE TO MY LITTLE SISTER AND SHE CAN TURN AROUND AND SEND IT BACK, WHICH TAKES LONGER. IT'S JUST GOT TO WHERE EVERYBODY'S WANTING GREEN MONEY NOW. AND YOU KNOW, THERE'S PLENTY OF DRUGS, THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN DRUGS AND ALWAYS WILL BE DRUGS, AS LONG AS YOU'VE GOT CONTACT BETWEEN FREE-WORLD PEOPLE AND CONVICTS, THERE WILL BE DRUGS. THERE WILL BE FREE-WORLD MONEY.
- R: And so that free world money is transferred, you say, out through send-outs or something like that? But you said that they don't like to do that because it draws heat, so how do you wind up not--you still want green money though, right?
- P: WELL, NO. LIKE I SAY, IF I BOUGHT A BOX FROM YOU, I CAN SEND YOU A MONEY ORDER. THEN YOU JUST GET ME THE BOX AND YOU CAN EITHER GIVE IT TO ME UP FRONT OR YOU CAN GIVE IT TO ME WHEN THE MONEY ORDER GETS THERE. MOST OF THEM LIKE TO GO AHEAD AND GET THEIR POT.
- R: So the trick is to have a lot of addresses out there that I can receive--

- P: --YEAH, OR HAVE A BUSINESS. IF YOU GOT A BUSINESS OUT THERE THAT YOU CAN SEND MONEY TO.
- R: Which is legitimate. You're allowed to have this?
- P: YES, YOU'RE ALLOWED TO SEND TO ANY BUSINESS. THEY VERY SELDOM QUESTION BUSINESSES. I'VE SEEN GUYS THAT HAVE FAKE CORPORATION NAMES, AND THEY JUST SEND OUT MONEY LEFT AND RIGHT.
(T-2-36-16)

Like other terms, the substance-related items gathered by this study do not appear to be restricted to in-prison usage. After the interviews were conducted, the author of the present study scheduled a meeting with the Director of an academic Nursing program to discuss the precise referents of several items collected which had obvious reference to pharmaceuticals. The Director was able to easily identify most of the terms from her own work background in dependency-abuse clinics. What is apparent, however, is that each of these items has great currency within Appalachian prisons.

Institutional Activities: Illegal activities

The dominance of illegal notions within the linguistic repertoire of prisoners is much more pervasive than this single sub-category reveals, however. To the 193 items labeled "illegal possessions" should be added the 18 which identify inmates according to their illegal activity within the prison (Module 3), as well as another 76 terms listed in Module 4 which are used to describe those illegal activities

themselves. The total of these items--287--accounts for 22.89% of the total lexicon. Yet there is still a submerged portion of the illegal iceberg that would include the Module 2 sub-categories of "searches (4)," "secret locations (8)," and "disciplinary infractions (30)," most of which would correspond to illegal activities. To this new total of 329 terms, one must add names of homosexual prisoners (32) from Module 3, homosexual behaviors (35) and violent behaviors (83) from Module 4, and escapes (19), Module 5, all of which reflect violations of institutional regulations. This grand total of 498 items expressing illegal associations accounts for 39.71% of the prisoner's argot vocabulary, a figure that reveals the extent to which such involvement continues to absorb much of the daily routine of prison inhabitants.

It is a rare prisoner indeed who does not engage in some sort of "hustle" as a method of accommodating himself to the restrictions and deprivations of the prison environment. Some of these, for instance arts and crafts activities such as wood or leather working, are authorized by the institution as a source of income for the prisoner and are thus termed "legal hustles." Even these are highly restricted by prison authorities and often become an avenue for illegal activities, though they are justified in the mind of the prisoner by reclassifying them as "honest hustles."

P: . . . LIKE, MY CELLIE AND I ARE KIND OF LIKE PARTNERS . . . WE DON'T HUSTLE, 'CAUSE I

WANT TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE, AND SO DOES HE. SO IF YOU START LOANING CIGARETTES, AND STUFF--I DO WHITTLE AND WOOD WORK, SO ME AND HIM BOTH BUILD THE OUT-HOUSES. YOU MIGHT HAVE SEEN ONE IN A SHOW CASE OUT FRONT, ABOUT THAT BIG? [indicates size with his hand] WE BUILD THEM, AND SELL THEM ON THE YARD FOR EIGHT BUCKS. I KNOW SOMEBODY OFFERED TEN, AND SELL THEM TO THE GYM TO PUT OUT THERE FOR EIGHT.

R: Are you allowed to sell them to each other then?

P: NAH. NO.

R: That's a little bit of a hustle, then?

P: YEAH, BUT THAT'S AN HONEST HUSTLE. THAT'S A CASH DEAL, YOU KNOW. TO ME THAT'S AN HONEST HUSTLE.

R: Alright, okay. An honest hustle then is what?

P: THAT.

R: For a product you mean?

P: YEAH, YEAH. I'M NOT CHARGING NO INTEREST, OR I'M NOT STRONG-ARMING, YOU KNOW, I DON'T HAVE TO GO AND THREATEN SOMEBODY TO PAY ME MY MONEY. AND I SAY, "HERE IT IS." YOU KNOW, YOU GOT CASH MONEY, THERE IT IS.

R: But it's still technically illegal in the institution, to do that, right?

P: YEAH, IT IS HERE. AT EDDYVILLE, THEY DIDN'T REALLY CARE.

R: Do they let it go here too? If you're not--

P: --YEAH, IF IT'S NOT CAUSING ANY PROBLEMS.
(K-2-35-11)

Among the most frequent of "honest hustles," those ventures which violate institutional regulations but which are considered legitimate business ventures by the prison

population, is the inmate-operated "store." The "storeman" invests his capital in the purchase of cigarettes and food items from the prison-owned commissary, which he then resells at a profit to his fellow-prisoners. Where the prison store is open only certain hours during the day, the inmate store is open any time. More importantly, the inmate store extends credit to a population long on wants and desires but short on finances. Supply and demand drive this system just as it does its free-world counterpart. The market strategies of the inmate-operated store are thoroughly explained in the following interview excerpt which is replete with financial jargon and traditional business rationalizations.

P: . . . THIS IS HOW IT GO. 65 PER CENT OF THE INMATES IN THE PRISON INSTITUTION LIVE OFF OF NOTHING BUT THE STATE PAY. THAT'S THE MONEY THAT THEY GET FROM WORKING ON JOBS IN THE INSTITUTION. SO THEY LIVE FROM ONE MONTH TO THE NEXT. ONLY ABOUT 35 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION GETS MONEY IN FROM THE STREET EVERY WEEK OR EVERY OTHER WEEK, OR ONE LUMP SUM ONCE A MONTH FROM THEIR PEOPLE OR SOMETHING. SO, LIKE NOW, THIS IS THE 3RD OR 4TH WEEK GOING INTO STATE PAY. CIGARETTES IS GETTING SHORT, COFFEE IS GETTING SHORT, COMMISSARY GETTING SHORT. YOU HUNGRY. LIKE ME, I RUN THE LARGEST COMMISSARY ON THE COMPOUND, AND I AIN'T BRAGGING! I RUN THE LARGEST COMMISSARY ON THIS PRISON COMPOUND. THEY GET HUNGRY; A MAN MIGHT WANT A COUPLE OF COLD DRINKS, YOU SEE. I GAVE A MAN A 6-PACK OF COLD DRINKS FOR A BRAND NEW PAIR OF SUN SHADES THE SAME DAY HE GOT THEM IN. I DIDN'T GO ASK HIM, HE COME TO ME, "MAN, I'M HOT AND I'M THIRSTY, I DON'T CARE NOTHING ABOUT THESE GLASSES, GIVE ME A 6-PACK OF COLD DRINKS." I GAVE THEM TO HIM. THINGS LIKE THAT. YOU CATCH THE INMATES HARD UP, THEY'LL SELL STUFF CHEAP. WHEN IF THEY WASN'T HARD UP, THEY

MIGHT STILL SELL IT, BUT THEY'D SELL IT FOR A HIGHER PRICE, BUT BECAUSE THEY'RE HARD UP THEY SELL STUFF CHEAP. YOU GOT INMATES THAT KNOW, "WELL, NOW WAIT A MINUTE, SOMEBODY OVER HERE TOLD ME HE NEED THIS. LOOK, MAN, IF I HELP YOU SELL THAT, GIVE ME A PACK, OR TWO, OR THREE CIGARETTES OFF OF THAT." "COOL." SO YOU GO OVER HERE AND YOU HOLLER AT HIM AND HE WANT IT. "WHAT YOU WANT FOR IT, YOU WANT 4 PACKS, BUT I'LL TELL HIM YOU WANT 6 PACKS, SO I CAN MAKE ME 2. IS THAT OKAY?" "I DON'T CARE, JUST BRING ME 4 PACKS." HE GOES AND MAKES HIM 6 PACKS FOR THAT.

R: What's that guy that's going between, what's he called?

P: MR. HANEY.

R: . . . So that guy works in between, alright, that's Mr. Haney. Now what about--you deal in commissary items, right? Is there a name that you're called, or that you call yourself?

P: . . . THEY JUST CALL ME THE STORE MAN, OR THE COMMISSARY MAN.

R: . . . So they just deal directly with you, the store man. Now these guys are running short on cash then and you're extending some credit to them then?

P: I BASICALLY CARRY ON FROM ONE STATE PAY TILL THE NEXT.

R: What's the going rate? Two for one?

P: TWO OR ONE, 'CAUSE I HAVE TO CARRY ON FOR A WHOLE MONTH. SEE, THE COMMISSARY . . . IT'S A PLACE WHERE YOU COME GET SOMETHING TO EAT. ONLY THING I'M DOING IS MAKING SURE YOU BRING IT BACK, SO THAT IT CAN CONTINUE TO BE A PLACE FOR EVERYBODY TO COME AND GET SOMETHING TO EAT WHEN THEY GET HUNGRY; TO KEEP DOWN THE DUMB STUFF, THE ROBBERIES, THE BURGLARY, EXTORTION.

R: So, you're serving that purpose, and if you weren't there to do that, they're be more robbing, burglaries, extorting?

P: THERE WOULD BE, THERE WOULD BE, BELIEVE ME. BUT SEE, THE MAJORITY OF THE INMATES THEY THINK LIKE THIS, "I CAN GO OVER HERE AND GET TWO FOR ONE THE STATE PAY. I'D RATHER DO THAT BEFORE I GO OUT HERE AND START THIS DUMB SHIT--ROBBING, BURGLARING, STEALING."

R: Is that why the institution lets you operate, to some degree, because it's really against the rules, right?

P: RIGHT.

R: But they, as long as you don't get too--What could you do that would make the administration come to you and put you out of business? What would you have to do?

P: START WHIPPING THE INMATES THAT DON'T PAY ME?

R: What do you do when an inmate don't pay you? Just cut them off?

P: CUT THEM OFF.

R: You've got a way of covering your investment though?

P: UH UH, I JUST TAKE IT AS A LOSS, BECAUSE SEE, AS ME AND YOU KNOW, EVEN IN SOCIETY, THE FOOD IS THE KEY. EVERYBODY WANTS TO EAT AND GOING TO EAT . . . SO THE TWO FOR ONE ON THE COMMISSARY IS GOING TO CONTINUE ON. YOU MIGHT BEAT ME FOR \$30 OVER HERE. I'LL LET IT SLIDE, BECAUSE THE BOTTOM LINE IS, YOU NEED ME BEFORE I NEED YOU, BECAUSE I GOT IT. I CAN EAT WHEN I WANT TO AND SMOKE. YOU CAN'T. IF YOU DON'T PAY YOUR BILL ON TIME, YOU STARVE. THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM. (T-1-36-19)

Though prison authorities may tacitly permit store activities, they may also withdraw such approval at any time, a fact of prison life which forces periodic adjustments to the ebb and flow of enforcement policies.

R: Now you got a rule about how many pieces of things you can have in your locker, right?

P: YEAH. WE DON'T GO BY THAT. HA!

- R: Well, do they check them now and then?
- P: WELL, THEY DO ONCE IN A WHILE.
- R: . . . How do you know when they're coming in?
- P: WORD WILL GET AROUND. MOST OF THE TIME, OKAY, YOU MIGHT HAVE A MAJOR SHAKEDOWN. THAT PRISON GRAPEVINE IS SOMETHING, YOU KNOW. I MEAN, THEY HAVE A MAJOR SHAKEDOWN, OR SOMETHING, YOU KNOW ABOUT BEFORE THEY EVEN COME. SO WE GET PREPARED FOR IT, YOU KNOW.
- R: So do the officers there on the block, themselves, never do the shakedown just spontaneously themselves? It always comes from on high somewhere?
- P: WELL, NO, THEY DO SPONTANEOUS SHAKEDOWNS, TOO, BUT MOST TIMES A MAN HERE, YOU GOT TO BE READY, YOU KNOW. I STAY READY, YOU KNOW? I DON'T NEVER KEEP NOTHING IN MY LOCKER THAT I DON'T SUPPOSED TO HAVE IN THERE, BECAUSE THEY CAN COME AND SHAKE YOU DOWN ANYTIME. YOU KNOW. AND THEN, IF YOU KNOW, LIKE I SAY, YOU KNOW ONE OF THEM RAMBO COPS WORKING, YOU KNOW TO GO BACK THERE AND STRAIGHTEN EVERYTHING UP, GET CLEANED UP, YOU KNOW?
(N-1-42-14)

Some prisoners who were interviewed distinguished between "honest hustles" such as "stores" and those which were abusive to fellow prisoners. Others classified all "hustles" as being equally acceptable. The most controversial, and one with more serious implications for prison culture, is that of "loan sharking." One prisoner describes that operation:

- P: WELL, YOU GOT YOUR LOAN SHARKS. YOUR GAMBLERS. LOAN SHARK IS STRICTLY, SAY YOU WANT TO GET IN A CARD GAME, AND YOU NEED A CARTON OF CIGARETTES. HE'LL LOAN YOU A CARTON OF CIGARETTES FOR FIFTEEN BACK, SO YOU CAN GET IN THE CARD GAME. HE DON'T CARE WHAT YOU DO IN THE CARD GAME, YOU OWE HIM FIFTEEN PACKS.

R: . . . So it's the kind of thing that as long as, if the guy were making too much money, or charging too much juice, would they begin to try to put the heat on him?

P: WELL, JUICE IS CONSISTENT.

R: It's always fifteen for ten? Nobody goes two for one, or anything?

P: IF YOU BORROW ONE PACK, IT'S TWO FOR ONE. TWO PACKS, IS THREE FOR TWO. IT'S, IF YOU BORROW FIVE CARTONS, IT'S 75 PACKS BACK. IN OTHER WORDS, THERE'S A SET INTEREST RATE . . . THAT'S ON STORES. NOW ON CIGARETTES, LIKE I SAY, YOU BORROW A BOX OFF ME THIS WEEK, NEXT WEEK COME ALONG, YOU DON'T HAVE MY FIFTEEN PACKS, THAT'S 23 PACKS YOU OWE ME. AND THEN YOU DON'T HAVE IT NEXT WEEK, THAT'S 35 PACKS YOU OWE ME . . .

R: . . . So that's loan sharking?

P: YEAH, THAT'S DEFINITELY LOAN SHARKING.
(K-2-42-11)

There is also a significant amount of aggressive criminal action directed against fellow-prisoners. Coercion is common, especially when one indicates to other inmates that he is able to be intimidated, a message signaled through nonverbal behavior described by interviewees as the way one "carries" oneself. To avoid being victimized, one must be willing to engage in violent retributive action.

P: . . . I MEAN THERE'S A DISTANCE THAT YOU KNOW YOU CAN CARRY YOURSELF, AS FAR AS RIPPING SOMEBODY OFF. IF I'M GOING TO RIP YOU OFF, I'M GOING TO TRY TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU'RE ALL ABOUT FIRST. AND THEN I'LL BASE THAT ON WHETHER I CAN, OR CAN'T DO IT. IF I CAN DO IT, THEN I'LL TRY TO GET AWAY WITH IT, YOU KNOW . . . YOU MIGHT BE SELLING DOPE OUT HERE AND, YOU KNOW, "WELL, LET ME SEE IT." OR YOU GOT A RING. I SAY, "LET ME SEE YOUR RING." I SAY, "HELL, THAT LOOKS GOOD," AND I WALK AWAY. YOU KNOW? JUST RIP YOU OFF. AND

SEE IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO SOMETHING. IF I DON'T FIGURE YOU'RE GOING TO DO ANYTHING, WELL FUCK IT. THE ONLY THING YOU CAN DO IS GO TO THE PO'LICE, AND YOU KNOW, RAT ON ME. BY THEN, I GOT IT OFF OF ME, SO I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

R: . . . So do people get by with that then? I mean, when you get ripped off, what do you do?

P: WHO ME?

R: Well, I mean, what do some people do? I don't--

P: --WELL, I MEAN, IF A GUY RIPS ME OFF, I'M GOING TO HIS ASS--YOU KNOW? AS SIMPLE AS THAT. I'M NOT WAITING TO GET OUT THE BLOCK OR ANYTHING, I'M GOING TO HIM RIGHT THEN AND THERE. I DO WHATEVER I HAVE TO DO, AND DON'T MIND DOING IT . . . SO HE'S NOT GOING TO JUST RIP ME OFF, AND WALK AWAY. (N-3-43-18)

Such aggressive behavior is not frowned upon by the inmate population. The prison subculture places a premium on strength and power, while despising any display of weakness. There exists a hierarchy of crimes, each clearly labeled according to the varying levels of acceptability. A prisoner talks about one such delineation:

P: YOU HAD TO FIGHT THEM FOR CALLING YOU TUSH HOGS, OR GUYS TRYING TO RUN GAMES ON ME.

R: . . . What's tush hogging?

P: A TUSH HOGGER IS A GUY THAT WILL CATCH YOU WITH A CARTON OF CIGARETTES, AND GO TAKE IT OFF FROM YOU. THAT'S NOT LIKE A PETTY THIEF.

R: That's a strong arm? A tush hog?

P: A STRONG-ARM DEAL. LIKE A ROBBERY. A STRONG ARM WILL COME AND TAKE SOMETHING OFF FROM YOU

R: . . . Why is a tush hogger--you have more respect for him than a petty thief?

P: BECAUSE HE IS MAN ENOUGH TO COME AND TAKE IT OFF FROM YOU. NOW, IF A GUY'S MAN ENOUGH TO COME UP AND TAKE IT OFF FROM YOU, THEN YOU CAN BUST HIM IN THE MOUTH. IF YOU STAND UP FOR YOURSELF AGAINST A TUSH HOG, 99 TIMES OUT OF A 100, HE WON'T TAKE THE SHIT, AND LEAVE YOU ALONE. BECAUSE TUSH HOGS ONLY, ACTUALLY, THEY PREY UPON THE WEAK.

R: So the worst thing you can be in here is weak, I guess, huh?

P: THAT'S RIGHT . . . (W-2-55-17)

Institutional Activities: Violent behaviors

A final sub-category demonstrating a large concentration of linguistic items is that of "violent behaviors" (Module) 4 which numbers 83 terms. Once again, to grasp the full extent of such behavior, we must incorporate additional items from other groupings; in this case, the 32 terms identified in the "weapons" category (Module 2) and 19 of the 23 names used for prisoners identified by their incarcerating offense which express violent crimes (Module 3). The 134 total items accounts for 10.67% of the entire lexicon.

Few inhabitants of a prison can avoid involvement with the violence that engulfs the institution. In order to live free of that violence, the prisoner must first demonstrate his willingness to participate in it. In a place where strength, power, and aggressiveness are the virtues that gain respect and where any suggestion of weakness is an invitation to be victimized, the new prisoner must quickly

assert himself. He undergoes a rite of passage where he must demonstrate that, like Dorothy's lion friend, he has "heart."

R: . . . If a new fish comes in now, even if he's young, let's say if he looks a little soft, or small, or whatever--would you say to me then that he could get by in doing time without becoming a punk if he wanted to?

P: IN A LOT OF PRISON SYSTEMS, LIKE DOWN IN TEXAS, LOUISIANA, YOUR SOUTHERN PRISONS, AND EVEN UP IN THE NORTH, I WOULD SAY NO. NOT UNLESS THEY GOT A LOT OF HEART. THAT'S HOW IT'S REFERRED TO IN PRISON.

R: Heart is?

P: HEART IS REFERRING TO COURAGE. IF THEY GOT A LOT OF COURAGE, AND DEFEND THEIRSELF, EVEN IF THEY HAVE TO TAKE A WHIPPING A TIME OR TWO, OR HALF A DOZEN TIMES, IF THEY COULD SHOW COURAGE, THEY WOULD GET THE RESPECT THAT IS DUE TO THEM. BUT, IF THEY'RE NOT WILLING TO FIGHT IMMEDIATELY, THEN THERE ARE DEFINITELY THE MASCULINE HOMOSEXUALS WHO'S GOING TO BE SNIFFING THEM OUT.

R: Okay. Now you're saying that that's true of prisons in these other states?

P: WELL, IT'S EVEN TRUE IN THIS STATE. BUT, OKAY, NOW, PART OF THE REASONS WHY A YOUNG GOOD LOOKING KID WHO WOULD BE TESTED THAT WAY, HAS A WHOLE LOT TO DO WITH--NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU ARE--YOU'RE GOING TO BE TRIED. THE INMATES ARE GOING TO TRY YOU, TO PUT YOU ON YOUR STANDING.

R: Put you on your standing?

P: YEAH. CHECK YOU OUT TO SEE WHERE YOUR THINKING AND YOUR CHARACTER LIES.
(K-2-50-21)

Titles are important to the prisoner. They are conferred upon him by his peers on the basis of his adherence to those behaviors they most admire. The willingness to stand up, to

protect at all costs one's territory or possessions--in other words, to be violent if necessary--is to prove oneself to be a "convict," the most treasured of prison designations.

R: . . . What happens when somebody, when you get your cell broken into, what's your recourse?

P: THE ONLY RECOURSE YOU'VE GOT, IF YOU'RE A CONVICT, IS TO FIND OUT WHO DID IT, AND THEN GO CORRECT IT.

R: Now you correct it by what?

P: EITHER IF YOU TOOK MY STUFF, AND I FIND OUT YOU DID, YOU EITHER GIVE IT BACK, OR MEET ME ON THE YARD AND WE'LL SETTLE THIS OUT THERE. AND WE'LL MEET EACH OTHER ON THE YARD. "COME OUT IN THE YARD." I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING.

R: Is that the challenge? You tell the guy to come on the yard?

P: YEAH, TO EITHER HAVE MY STUFF BACK, OR MEET ME ON THE YARD.

R: So "meet me on the yard" is the word for the challenge then?

P: FOR THE CHALLENGE, YEAH. I'VE CHALLENGED YOU THAT I'M GOING TO STICK YOU WHEN YOU COME OUT.

R: So the guy either coughs it up or meets you?

P: MEETS ME OUT THERE WITH HIS STICKER.

R: And it's always a weapon, then, out there?

P: YEAH. I WOULD NEVER--

R: --It's never just a fist fight?

P: YEAH. I WOULD NEVER FIST FIGHT YOU IN HERE, AND I WOULD MAKE SURE THAT I HAD MY RAPPIE OR SOMEBODY BESIDE ME, 'CAUSE I KNOW HE'S GOING TO HAVE SOMEBODY. (W-2-43-17)

The verbal challenge, a primordial verbal behavior which still has great currency in modern prisons, signifies that only one of the two combatants will survive the physical altercation. One prisoner recounted how survival of such an experience was seminal to his prison-engendered manhood:

P: I HAD A MAN BY THE NAME OF _____ . . .
HE WOULD NOT LEAVE ME ALONE. THE TWO OF US
HAD AN ALTERCATION. I TOLD HIM, "I'LL SEE
YOU IN THE MORNING." AS SIMPLE AS THAT,
WE'LL SETTLE IT. WELL, I HAPPENED TO WIN. IT
COULD HAVE BEEN I'D LOST IT, BUT I DIDN'T, I
HAPPENED TO WIN THE BATTLE, BUT IT COST ME 10
YEARS . . . I HAD A CHOICE. I COULD CHECK
IN, I COULD HAVE SNITCHED ON HIM, OR I COULD
FIGHT. YOU KNOW, I HAD TO MAKE THE CHOICE OF
THOSE THREE.

R: If you'd have snitched on him, then you would
have had to check in too probably?

P: THAT'S RIGHT. IF I'D HAVE SNITCHED ON HIM,
THEN MY REPUTATION AS A MAN TRYING TO DO 300
YEARS IN THE PENITENTIARY'S SHOT. I CAN'T DO
IT. YOU KNOW, I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SURVIVE
IN THAT PERIOD OF TIME WITH THAT TITLE. IF
I'D HAVE CHECKED IN, I'D HAVE TO LAY UP FOR
SO MANY YEARS IN PRISON. I COULDN'T DO THAT.

R: By laying up you mean?

P: BY LAYING IN THE CELL. I'D HAVE TO BE
PROTECTED, AND THEN ONLY GET AN HOUR OUT, AND
EVERYWHERE I WENT I WOULD HAVE TO HAVE AN
ESCORT, AND THEY'D HAVE TO CLOSE THE YARD AND
I CANNOT SEE ME WITH MY PERSONALITY DOING
THAT, SO I DECIDED I WOULD FIGHT. WHICH COST
ME TEN YEARS. IT ALSO CHANGED THE WAY PEOPLE
CAME TO ME, HOW THEY REGARDED ME NOW. I HAD
A CERTAIN RESPECT. I DID NOT WALK AROUND
WITH MY CHEST OUT AND SAY, YOU KNOW, I'M
TOUGH AND I'M GOING TO RUN OVER THIS GUY OR
THAT'D GET YOU KILLED, TOO. YOU KNOW, YOU
GET PEOPLE SCARED OF YOU, AND THAT WILL GET
YOU KILLED. BUT, IF THEY KNOW YOU WILL
FIGHT, THAT YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE
RUN OVER, THEN YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO YOUR
TIME. (T-2-47-25)

Other violence is "lesson violence," intended to send a message to other prisoners. This type of violence revolves around the concept of "disrespect," another fundamental organizing conceptualization around which prison culture revolves.

- P: . . . SAY, IF I GO THREE WEEKS, CONSTANTLY PUTTING THE JUICE ON YOU, AND YOU STILL HAVEN'T PAID ME AT THE END OF THE WEEK, WHAT'S THE SENSE OF PUTTING MORE JUICE ON YOU. EVERYBODY ELSE THAT BORROWS OFF OF ME SAYS, "WELL, WE CAN SLOW WALK HIM TOO. HE AIN'T GOING TO DO NOTHING."
- R: Slow walking is slow pay?
- P: IT'S A SLOW PAY. SO FINANCIALLY, IT WOULD BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS IF I WENT ON AHEAD AND HIT YOU IN THE HEAD WITH SOMETHING. GO DO MY TIME IN SEGREGATION. COME OUT, MY MONEY'S RIGHT. AND YOU STILL GOT TO PAY ME WHAT YOU OWE ME, OR CHECK IN. SO IT'S A MATTER OF BUSINESS.
- R: So that kind of violence, then, still goes on?
- P: OH, YEAH, YEAH. THAT'S LESSON VIOLENCE. THAT'S--
- R: --Lesson violence? You're going to try to hurt that guy a little bit, and make him think, but you're not going to kill him?
- P: NO, WE'RE NOT TRYING TO KILL HIM. ALTHOUGH, I HAVE SEEN PEOPLE KILLED FOR FIFTEEN PACKS OF CIGARETTES . . . SO IT DOES HAPPEN, BUT IT'S AN INDIVIDUAL THING. THE MAN TOLD HIM, "I'M NOT PAYING YOU!" THEN IT'S NO LONGER A LESSON. IF YOU OWE ME MONEY, AND YOU TOLD ME, "I AM NOT PAYING YOU," YOU'RE NOT TAKING MY MONEY. WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS YOU'RE TELLING EVERYBODY ON THE YARD, "THIS GUY ISN'T WORTHY OF RESPECT. YOU CAN TAKE EVERYTHING HE OWNS." SO, THEN IT'S NO LONGER FINANCES.

- R: What other things get personal enough to kill somebody over?
- P: STEALING. IF I WALK AWAY FROM MY HOUSE, AND I LEAVE MY DOOR OPEN, AND YOU GO IN THERE AND TAKE SOMETHING OF MINE, THAT'S, YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING--"YOU'RE A PUNK, AND I WILL DO WITH YOU WHAT I WANT TO DO, AND I WILL TAKE YOUR STUFF." DISRESPECT IN SOME INSTANCES. LIKE, SAY WE'RE HAVING A DISCUSSION, AND YOU DON'T AGREE WITH WHAT I'M SAYING, OR I DON'T AGREE WITH WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, AND I COME OFF WITH, YOU KNOW, "WELL, KISS MY ASS, SON OF A BITCH. YOU AIN'T GOING TO DO NOTHING." THEN, THAT IS GROUNDS FOR A KILLING THERE. ANYMORE IT DOESN'T GENERALLY GO THAT FAR, BUT, THAT IS, WHEN YOU START TAKING A PERSON'S RESPECT, THEN ALL BETS ARE OFF. THERE'S NO MORE LESSONS, EXCEPT THE LESSON IN GENERAL, BECAUSE THIS PERSON HERE NO LONGER EXISTS. IT'S THE OTHER PEOPLE AROUND, THAT HAS TO LEARN THE LESSON. THIS PERSON HERE'S ALREADY PUT HIMSELF WHERE HE'S HOMEWORK. HE'S THE ONE YOU GOT TO USE FOR INSTRUCTIVE PURPOSES. THAT'S NOT SO MUCH THE WAY IT GOES ANYMORE, BUT SOME OF THE OLD TIMERS STILL LOOK AT IT THAT WAY. (K-2-42-11)

Without exception, all prisoners interviewees agreed that violence had significantly decreased in recent years. One man cogently expressed what most acknowledged:

- P: YEAH, YOU KNOW THEY SIT IN JAILS AND THE GUYS TELL THEM SO MANY WAR STORIES BEFORE THEY GET HERE, THEY JUST KNOW WHEN THEY GET HERE THEY'RE DEAD.
- R: But now you described that before. On one hand you're saying people have still have got to check in if they get in debt to the wrong people, so there is still some violence going on.
- P: OH YEAH. NOW THERE'S SOME THINGS THAT ARE ALWAYS GOING TO BE HERE. AS LONG AS YOU HAVE DRUGS, AS LONG AS YOU HAVE PEOPLE WHO SMOKE CIGARETTES AND DON'T HAVE THE MONEY TO GET THEM AND YET GO BORROW, AS LONG AS PEOPLE HAVE THINGS THAT OTHER PEOPLE WANT, THERE'S

GOING TO BE A NEED OF THAT, BECAUSE EVERYBODY IS NOT GOING TO CHALK IT UP JUST AS A LOSS.

R: Is that what you're supposed to do?

P: WELL, YOU KNOW, I DON'T SMOKE, BUT IF I LOAN A MAN A 6-PACK OF PEPSIS, AND HE DON'T PAY ME BACK, I'M NOT GOING TO GO BUST HIS HEAD OR RUN SOMETHING THROUGH HIM FOR THAT. BUT SOME GUYS, THEY WON'T DO THAT, THEIR PRIDE WON'T LET THEM DO THAT BECAUSE THEY MAY THINK THEIR FRIENDS MAY SAY, "MAN, YOU'RE AWFUL WEAK, LETTING THAT GUY THERE, DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT GUY'S IN HERE FOR?" YOU KNOW, AND JUST, YOU KNOW IT DON'T TAKE MUCH TO GET SOMEBODY HURT IN HERE AT ALL. (T-2-37-11)

What appears to be happening is that where violence once functioned as metaphor, serving to send messages or as an expression of an underlying code of honor, it has now been reduced to the level of personal disputes. An example has to do with the way in which "snitches" are treated. The most universally hated of institutional designees, the "snitch" endangers the very fabric of the prison by his self-serving behavior. Thus in the past, true "convicts" would respond by violently attacking him as a service to the larger community. This no longer takes place, as all the prisoners interviewed proclaimed. Self-interest, not communal concerns, now governs the prisoner's response to code violations, as the following excerpt illustrates.

P: THAT'S JUST THE WAY THAT, I MEAN IT'S, THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS NOW--THIS PRISON'S DONE CHANGED SO MUCH. USED TO, LIKE I SAY, SNITCHES COULDN'T STAY ON THE YARD. IF THEY FOUND OUT THAT I WAS SNITCHING, I COULDN'T EVEN GO IN THAT BLOCK TONIGHT.

R: What would they do to me?

P: THEY GOING TO GET ME. SOMEBODY'S GOING TO STAB UP, WHIP MY ASS, OR SOMETHING. BUT NOW, YOU COULD BE A SNITCHER, AND YOU COULD WALK AROUND HERE, AND JUST, YOU KNOW?

R: Well, let me ask you a question now. If that's changed, have some of you folks who have been here a while changed too?

P: YEAH, THAT'S VERY TRUE.

R: Because you said a guy can snitch in your face now, and gets by with it, and that means somebody's not straightening it then?

P: THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT. . . SOME OF THE OLD CONS THAT I KNOW, THAT I COME IN PRISON WITH, THEY HAVE CHANGED TOO. I DON'T KNOW WHAT DONE HAPPENED TO THEM--WHAT DONE HAPPENED TO US. I DON'T KNOW IF SOME OF THE NEW GUYS DONE COME IN, AND MOST OLD HEADS DONE GONE--THERE'S NOT BUT A FEW OF US LEFT--AND WE JUST SAYING, "WELL, IT'S TOO MANY OF THEM", YOU KNOW. JUST LET IT GO.

R: You think, maybe, that's what it is?

P: THAT'S WHAT I THINK IT IS, BECAUSE THERE WAS A TIME, LIKE I SAID, A SNITCHER WOULDN'T HAVE, WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE. BUT NOWADAYS THEY'RE ALL OVER THE PLACE, YOU KNOW.

R: And if a fellow snitches on you, you're not going to go--

P: --YEAH, I'M GOING TO STRAIGHTEN IT.

R: You are going to straighten it?

P: YEAH, I'M GOING TO STRAIGHTEN IT. BUT, I'M SAYING THAT I KNOW THIS GUY SNITCHES, THERE WAS A TIME IF I KNOWED HE WAS SNITCHING, HE WOULDN'T EVEN STAY IN THE BLOCK WITH ME. I WOULDN'T HAVE THAT. HE WOULDN'T STAY IN THAT BLOCK. BUT NOW, I KNOW HE DONE SNITCHING, BUT YET STILL I LET HIM STAY IN THAT BLOCK. IF HE TELLS SOMETHING ON ME, I'M GOING TO GET HIM THOUGH.

R: Okay, so you're saying that there was a time when, if you knew he was snitching on anybody, you'd get him?

P: YEAH, I WOULD GET HIM, OR SOMEBODY WOULD GET HIM.

R: Now you're saying it's reduced to a personal issue?

P: NOW IT'S A PERSONAL ISSUE, YEAH.

R: And you, yourself, would still get him?

P: IF HE WAS SNITCHING ON ME. (N-1-42-14)

What the distribution of terms within the argot lexicon accentuates is a prison environment dominated by issues of power and control, where aggressive behavior is the warp and woof of everyday life. It is also a sexually-charged environment, where men struggle to establish their manhood in a world of contradictory notions of how such manhood is defined. Finally and ironically, it is a place where illegal activities are the norm, as the economy revolves around a series of enterprises which violate institutional rules.

CHAPTER FIVE
AN ANALYSIS OF INTER-STATE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE ARGOT TERMS

A primary goal of this study has been to determine the extent to which concordance exists between the prison argot of the four states investigated. To date, no inquiry has attempted any multiple compilation or correlation of data from different states to demonstrate any such agreement. Indeed, as noted in Chapter One, every past report has confined itself to a single institution, and no scholar except for Cardozo-Freeman has published a second article on prison language. Earlier scholars such as Mencken (1936) had more or less accepted the notion of an international underworld cant from which prison argot developed, though they did not verify that assumption. More recent investigators, though they present data from only one location, have too often assumed that prisoners everywhere speak near-identical lingo. Some scholars such as Boroff (1951), Karhu (1988), and Cardozo-Freeman (1984) do acknowledge the limited range of their data collection. Boroff stresses that his data reflects a juvenile population "made up almost exclusively of delinquents from New York City" (190); Karhu presents only "the language of adult male offenders in the custody of the Tennessee Department of Corrections in the 1980's" (125); while Cardozo-Freeman's work claims only to be an ethnography of one institution--the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla.

But other reporters claim much more. For instance, Goldin, O'Leary, and Lipsius, two inmates and a former prison chaplain, respectively, whose incarceration and work experiences were confined to New York prisons, assert in the introduction to their Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo (1950) that all the terms they presented were in nationwide usage. Even those investigators who limit their discussions to the argot of one institution often make global statements about the social or cognitive world of all American prisoners based on the language of the their limited inmate responses. For instance, Lyons' (1984) perceptive analysis is predicated, nonetheless, entirely on terms collected from inmates enrolled in college courses. Furthermore, criminologists such as Clemmer (1958), Irwin and Cressey (1962), or Sykes (1958) present theories of prison social systems which they apply to the entire criminal justice system based in part on language samples gathered from a relatively small number of inmates.

The present study attempts to determine the degree of interstate correspondence between individual linguistic items in a four-state Appalachian region. For the purposes of this analysis, "item" may refer to an individual word, phrase, or even a sentence that is being treated as a single lexical item. After completing the compilation of terms, the author created lists of items which appeared precisely the same in each state, those which appeared precisely the

same in three states, those which were synonyms or which appeared to be semantically related, and those which were idiosyncratic to only one state. He then compared all the terms which were not identical, to determine whether groups of those terms expressed domains of thought of such similarity that they represented conceptual matches if not verbal ones. The results of this analysis demonstrate an apparently significant correspondence among the discrete terms collected within the four-state Appalachian region, as well as a concentration of those terms around certain areas of thought common to the incarceration experience.

Matches

Not all synonyms may be considered linguistic matches. For instance, "I'll see you in the morning" is certainly quite similar conceptually to "meet me on the yard," as both are challenges to engage in combat to the death. Thus they are cross-listed in the lexicon as synonyms. However, these were not considered linguistic matches, since one stresses the time of the meeting while the other emphasizes place. On the other hand, "I'll see you in the morning" and "I'll see you when they kick the doors" are matches, since both these expressions emphasize the time of meeting. The word "match" is used to introduce a correspondence that may or may not rise to exact synonymy; it includes near-synonymy as well. Many terms which are matches do not

have close syntactic or semantic contexts, but do have the same functions.

It is somewhat more difficult to express matching characteristics in terms of percentages of the lexicon than it was to use such a technique in the analysis of the categories discussed in Chapter Four. For one thing, some individual items have multiple and sometimes even contradictory meanings, and thus there may be some overlapping among these which would effect percentages. In other cases, synonyms and variant terms may amount to co-occurrences, in which case there are more than one item per state incorporated in the matches. Percentage expressions then, to be meaningful, must refer to the total number of terms included in the matches.

There are 122 matches, incorporating a total of 216¹² terms, accounting for 17.22% of the entire lexicon. More than three-fourths of these are precise matches (100 items), where the identical term--shown in the lexicon as the headword of a separate entry--was spoken in each of the four states surveyed. Some of these include: "baby raper," "carry oneself," "crack," "hole," "Jody," "mule," "population," "punk," "rat," "road dog," "shakedown," "shank," "streets," and "ticket." When a precise interstate match occurs, it is indicated in the lexicon by the presence of all four state abbreviations placed within a bracket appearing at the end of the entry for that term. But

separate lexical entries may contain, in addition to the headword, several related forms of that headword which were spoken in different states and which collectively should be considered precise matches. For each variant form, bracketed information indicates the state where it appears. Thus, one must consider all of the variants in any particular lexical entry to determine whether a precise match occurs. The following groups of terms list all those variant forms within individual lexical entries which should be considered precise matches. The first word in each group is a headword of an entry, and the number of states in which the term appears is noted in the parentheses preceding each item.

- (1) blue goose
- (1) bluebird
- (2) grey goose

- (3) cell partner
- (1) cell buddy

- (1) heat
- (1) catch heat
- (1) draw heat

- (3) lock down (1)
- (1) on lock down, locked down

- (3) max
- (1) max lock up

- (3) stool pigeon
- (1) stoolie

- (2) time, give (more)
- (1) time, bring on (more)
- (1) time, put on more

In addition to those items that are precise matches, there are items appearing as separate lexical entries which the author considers linguistic matches. These include the following pairs of terms (again, the number of states where the terms appears is noted in the parentheses preceding each item).

- (3) all
- (1) forever

- (3) arm up
- (1) strap down

- (3) beef
- (1) take one's beef

- (3) canteen (1)
- (1) commissary (1)

- (3) store (1)
- (1) canteen (2)

- (3) store man
- (1) storekeeper

- (3) check-in (noun)
- (1) check-off (noun)

- (3) check in (verb)
- (1) check off (verb)

- (3) drop a note
- (1) drop a dime

- (3) thief
- (1) petty thief

- (3) straighten, straighten one's business
- (1) take care of business (1)

There are also ten additional pairings in which an individual term or terms, though not elicited in the interviews within a particular state, seem implied as current by other items which were elicited within that

state. There are variables within the context of any interview which might account for the failure of these precise terms to appear in every state. Thus the pairings listed below are followed by a brief explanation of why they should also be considered matches (once again, the number of states in which the term appears is noted in parentheses preceding it).

- (1) **check-in artist**
- (1) **professional check-off**
- (1) **slick check**
- (1) **slick check-in move, check-in on the sly**

The actions identified in the latter two states imply persons performing those actions.

- (3) **convict code**
- (1) **convict pride**

The latter term is based on the code mentioned in the three states.

- (4) **dime, nickel, quarter** (standing for the dollar amount of drug quantities)

In this case, every state produced at least one of these items, though no state had all three present. But where one or two are present, the third may safely be implied as being current.

- (3) **hustle** (verb)

In the single state where this verb wasn't elicited, the noun version of the term was, as well as the term **hustler**. Again, there is definitely an implied match here.

- (3) **PC**

In the state where this term does not appear, the terms **check-in** and **check in** do, so the term shown here that refers to the location is also implied.

- (3) **shakedown** (noun)

Here again, the state where the noun form failed to appear did produce the verb form, thus implying that its counterpart is current.

- (2) **stand up**
- (2) **stand up person**

The verb implies the person that performs the action.

- (3) **system (1)**

Use of this term in one state was confined to references to the state criminal justice system alone. Still, the fact that the term was used there to refer to the **system** as a whole, implies a matching reference to the state's **system**.

- (3) **write up** (verb)

- (3) **write-up** (noun)

Prisoners in two states used both these terms; in the other two, they used one and not the other (one used the verb, the other the noun). Thus, it is logical to infer the other term is current as well.

There is one final match: the reference to an informant by the use of a term normally reserved for a correctional officer was elicited in every state. In this case, it is not the specific term but rather a generic substitution that appears in each state which should be considered a linguistic match. Thus, "cop," "po'lice," and "warden," used in different states to denote an informant, should be considered as a generic match.

In summary then, 17.22% of the total argot lexicon is shared by inmates in all four states. This would appear to reflect a significant degree of intra-state correspondence.

Near-Matches

In addition to precise matches, there are what we may call near-matches: terms and their variants which are present in three of the four states surveyed. This category should also be viewed as indicative of strong concordance between the states. There were 132 near-matches, accounting for 239 terms, which amounts to 19.06% of the total lexicon. All but 13 of these are precise matches, with the identical term or its variant appearing in each of the three states. These precise matches are indicated in the lexicon by the presence of three state abbreviations placed within a bracket appearing at the end of the entry for that term. Two lexical entries, containing several terms as variants of the headword, were considered precise matches (the number of states in which the term appears is noted in the parenthesis preceding the item):

- (2) cut someone's head off
- (1) take someone's head off

- (1) new man/boy on the street/block
- (1) new kid on the block
- (1) new kid

Nine additional pairs or groups of terms with their variants which are considered near-matches are as follows:

- (1) box piece
- (2) match box

- (1) boy scout camp
- (1) boy's camp
- (1) kiddie camp

- (2) canteen (2)
- (1) commissary (2)
- (2) chain
- (1) line
- (2) convict heart
- (1) heart
- (1) new buddy; newbie
- (1) new cock
- (1) newcomer
- (1) old head
- (1) old number
- (2) see you in the morning, I'll
- (1) see you when they bust/kick the doors, I'll
- (1) wolf
- (1) wolf game
- (1) wolf ticket, sell

Once again, there are pairings in which items not elicited in the interviews within a specific state seem to be implied by other terms that were. Four of these exist as near-matches:

- (1) back of a sentence

Front of a sentence appears in three states, so this term may be implied in these states also.

- (1) cell, single

This term appeared in only one state, but both the other states included cell, double, so one may assume the antithetical terms is current as well.

- (1) life with

Here, also, all three states produced life without or life without mercy, so the antithetical term is implied.

- (2) upper

In the one state where this item did not appear, the term **downer** did, which implies that **upper**, too has currency here.

Thus we discover that the collective number of terms which produce either matches or near-matches is 455, a figure that equates to 36.28% of the total lexicon. Again, this seems to demonstrate a significant interstate correspondence among argot items. To determine whether any one state was less likely to contribute matching terms, the single states not contributing to each near-match were identified and tabulated. However, the results were inconclusive, as there was a relatively even distribution among the states: West Virginia was the lone state not contributing to near-matches on 37 occasions, Tennessee appeared 35 times, North Carolina 31 times, with Kentucky not contributing on 29 occasions.

Associatives

There are other terms and phrases which, though they cannot be classified as linguistic matches, are so closely linked as to be considered conceptual matches. We might call them *associatives*. These do not simply describe broad areas of common thought, and they are more than synonyms; they are similar expressions which link a common denotation. Synonyms are expressions which have the same or nearly the same meaning; associatives are terms that share some common expressive element. It might be a linguistic element such

as a common word each shares; it might also be a connotative range associated with each expression; or it might even be the degree of specificity of the denotative word values. For example, "snitch" and "rat" are synonyms, as both mean "an informant," but they would not be associatives, since there is no inherent relationship between the two terms other than their common referent. "Weed" and "grass" on the other hand, are synonyms with the added associative element--they share a common reference to plants, as well as functioning as synonyms for marijuana. Sometimes the associatives are not purely synonymous, since they may be different parts of speech, yet they link a common cognitive element. For instance, "cell time," a noun expressing an activity, has a conceptual connection with both "lay up," a verb, and "house rat," a noun describing a prisoner who wastes time by laying around in his cell.

The presence of a significant number of these associatives strengthens the correspondence already noted. Many of these occur, as would be expected, in those categories of thought discussed in Chapter Four, where large concentrations of argot terms collect. These categories, by definition, will contain large numbers of synonyms and therefore many associatives as well. Thus we find "white lady" and "white thing," as well as "pin head" and "pin joint" in the drug and alcohol category; "hit and get" appearing with "hit and run," along with "girl-boy" and

"he-she" in the homosexual category; "banger" and "popper" in the weapons category, and "muscle" and "strong arm" in the category of violent actions.

An example of how these associatives work within a specific thought domain can be seen by examining the group of terms surrounding the notion of killing another person, which consists of 16 terms. One near-match accounts for 2 terms, 3 others are unique items which occur in only one state, and 11 should be classified as associatives--conceptual matches--which are grouped as follows:

go to God
send someone to hell
send someone to the happy hunting ground

snuff out
take someone out
wipe out
blow away

hit
whack

max
take it all the way

However, these conceptually-related associatives frequently occur outside these concentrations of synonyms as well. Forty linkages, incorporating 112 terms and accounting for slightly less than ten percent of the total vocabulary, occur in areas other than those categories where large numbers of synonyms exist. Three associatives unite all four states:

(2) gas burner
(1) battery operator
(1) button pusher

- (2) hanger oner
- (2) wanna-be (2)
- (1) ditty bopper, teenie bopper
- (1) hip hop generation
- (1) men of the eighties

The following items connect three of the four states:

- (2) dog (2)
- (1) wolf
- (1) head doctor
- (1) nut doctor
- (1) quack
- (2) hard core
- (1) hard case
- (1) open
- (1) wide
- (1) wide open
- (2) stand up
- (1) put on one's standing
- (1) beat one's chest
- (1) walk around with one's chest thrown out
- (1) front

The rest of the associatives appear in only two states.

They include, for example, such pairings as:

split up and spread out
 guillotine, lynch mob, and hanging
 tree climber and bark hands
 slushhead and waterhead
 cat man and creeper
 passing through and coming and going
 hidden room and put it in the vault
 jailhouse lawyer and Matlock

Synonyms

Though the limited size of the sample used for the present study prohibits any definitive conclusions regarding linguistic behavior inside Appalachian prisons, the study does present data which suggests certain principles at work that may be accepted as hypotheses for further research. In examining the list of terms clustering within the categories of concentration developed from the interview guide (see Chapter Four), one can observe not only many matches, near-matches and associatives, but also large numbers of unique items confined to single states. A principle derived from Kantrowitz's study (1969) and presented in Chapter Four stated that the larger the quantity of terms for any particular phenomena, the greater the intensity of feelings toward that object or action. Now, we must posit another related principle at work, namely: *as the quantity of terms for any particular phenomenon increases, the number of unique linguistic creations synonymous with that phenomenon also increases.* Thus, within the four Appalachian states investigated, there is a bi-directional tension at work in the development of argot terms within those areas of prison culture which dominate the conceptual frame of inmates. Matches and near-matches increase, but so does the development of uniquely expressive linguistic items within the individual institution. We shall refer to these unique expressions as *isolates*.

For instance, in the cluster of terms surrounding drug and alcohol usage, the matches or near-matches make up slightly more than twenty-five percent of the total lexical items (40 of 150). Yet there are another 48 terms--thirty-two percent--that do not appear to be associatives and which were elicited in only one state. The concentration of terms surrounding weapons, homosexuals, prisons, and prison officials demonstrates a similar pattern of distribution:

	<u>Matches</u>		<u>Associatives</u>		<u>Isolates</u>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Drugs/alcohol	(40)	27%	(62)	41%	(48)	32%
Weapons	(9)	28%	(13)	41%	(10)	31%
Homosexuals	(26)	34%	(31)	40%	(19)	26%
Prisons	(15)	35%	(17)	40%	(11)	25%
Prison Officials	(17)	37%	(15)	33%	(14)	30%

There is, however, a contradictory pattern at work in other areas of concentration. Three categories of individuals--"snitches," new prisoners, and close associates among fellow-prisoners--demonstrate a decided proclivity towards matches and associatives, and away from the development of unique linguistic expressions. This pattern is readily seen in the distribution of terms within these categories.

	<u>Matches</u>		<u>Associatives</u>		<u>Isolates</u>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Associates	(10)	59%	(6)	35%	(1)	6%

New prisoners	(15) 60%	(7) 28%	(3) 12%
"Snitches"	(21) 58%	(10) 28%	(5) 14%

This second pattern of distribution, also related to Kantrowitz's (1969) discussion of synonym-intensity, suggests another principle in operation within the Appalachian states investigated: *where distinctive emotional intensity exists within a cognitive domain, the number of shared argot items increases, while the number of uniquely developed items decreases.*

What these configurations suggest is a two-tiered schema whereby argot is generated in response to the intensity level of emotional experiences within the prison environment. At the first level of response, where a recognizable but moderated emotional intensity exists surrounding some element of the cultural experience, there is both an increasing number of synonyms produced and a corresponding increase in isolated linguistic expressions. As the intensity level of emotions increases however, there is a narrowing of focus upon several shared terms and a parallel reduction in new, creative expressions. So, while substance abuse, violence, homosexuality, and oppressive authority figures, for example, are key organizing principles around which prisoners structure their linguistic repertoire, so too are concepts of honor and trust and fraternity associated with "snitches," new prisoners, and fellow-prisoners. It appears that these latter

conceptualizations may be more significant to the prisoner's worldview than the former, or so the data seem to suggest.

This continuum of intensity was observable throughout the interview process. As excerpts in Chapter Four revealed, most prisoners express ambivalent attitudes regarding homosexual liaisons. Even those who insist they do not participate in such relationships, for the most part accept those who do practice such a lifestyle as a part of the prison milieu, and do not exhibit noticeably strong feelings towards the activity. Nor do prisoners often display strong emotional responses to prison authority figures. In fact, every attempt is made to peacefully coexist in an environment that continually emphasizes distinctions between the keepers and the kept. The degree to which a prisoner maintains a respectful relationship with the officers in charge of his daily routine is the degree to which that prisoner can do "easy time." Controlled substances, too, are readily accessible in institutions and thus are not items which arouse any degree of emotionalism. Most men conducted matter-of-fact discussions about a large list of available alcohol or drug items, yet even those who claimed to be non-users of these substances accept them as part of the normal fabric of prison life.

Violence, though still a reality within the walls of any institution, has been routinized to the degree that "attitude adjustments" are the norm but fear for one's life

is becoming increasingly less of a concern. One man explains:

I THINK THE SYSTEM HAS CHANGED. YOU KNOW A PRISON SUCH AS THIS ONE, WITH TREES AND FLOWERS, AND THINGS THAT . . . YOU KNOW A LOT OF MOVEMENT THAT'S ALLOWED. A BIG BALL FIELD WITH A TENNIS COURT AND THINGS LIKE THAT, THERE WAS NONE OF THAT IN THE OLD TIMES AND I THINK THAT FINALLY YOUR AVERAGE INMATE IS CHANGING WITH IT. THAT THEY'RE NOT, THAT IT'S NOT A SITUATION WHERE YOU WAKE UP IN THE MORNING AND YOU GO OUT AND YOU DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE GOING TO SEE SOMEBODY GET KILLED IN THE DINING ROOM OR SOMEBODY GET KILLED ON THE BALL FIELD. AND THERE'S A LOT OF PROGRAMS GOING ON, SELF AWARENESS PROGRAMS--WHETHER IT BE A DRUG PROGRAM OR A.A. OR WHATEVER--WHERE YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT YOURSELF. AND IT'S GETTING TO THE POINT, I THINK, TO WHERE PEOPLE DON'T FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE TO HAVE THE APPROVAL OF THE WHOLE COMPOUND OR SOMETHING. AND THAT'S GOOD. THAT'S GOOD. THERE WOULD BE A LOT OF PEOPLE ALIVE TODAY, I THINK, THAT'S DIED IN HERE, IF WE WOULD OF BEEN DOING THAT 20 YEARS AGO. (T-2-37-11)

Without exception, every prisoner interviewed remarked that institutional violence had been drastically reduced in recent years. Most often cited as reasons for this were changes in administrative policies which now allow prisoners to be tried in courts and given new charges for institutional violence instead of merely handling such events as internal matters; modern prison architecture which limits areas of accessibility by inmates and makes policing more efficient; and a high-profile criminal justice system that is the focus of citizen pressures for accountability. In any event, the violent activities that continue to contribute to the texture of prison life are events to which

those who live within institutional walls adjust to relatively easily.

Added evidence for this emerged from the author's attempts at incorporating one of William Labov's (1972) methods of overcoming the *Observer's Paradox* (see Chapter Two). The object, he says, is to "break through the constraints of the interview situation by various devices which divert attention away from speech, and allow vernacular to flow" (209). One way this can be accomplished is to

. . . involve the subject in questions and topics which recreate strong emotions he has felt in the past, or involve him in other contexts. One of the most successful questions of this type is one dealing with the "Danger of Death": "Have you ever been in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?" . . . Narratives given in answer to this question almost always show a shift of style away from careful speech towards the vernacular. (209-10)

Though an examination of speech styles was not critical to this study, the author reasoned that a style shift to the vernacular would likely produce additional argot as well as some poignant and meaningful narrative. Thus he inserted this question into early interviews. However, this methodology did not recreate strong emotions from the respondents. Some did relate "war stories" describing, for example, how they were sitting next to a particular inmate who was "whacked," and one man discussed his recent heart attack, but only two prisoners related stories about a personal close encounter with violent death. In fact, the

typical response was to state how fortunate they had been not to have experienced such a situation.

However, perceiving that the emotional baseline for prisoners was not death, but fear, the author soon altered his approach and began asking, "What things do you fear, living in prison." This question did trigger reactions among the prisoners similar to those Labov sought from his respondents. Yet the fears these men described seldom had to do with physical violence. One man feared being placed in the "hole," an environment with which he could not cope; another feared his upcoming transfer to a minimum-security unit might tempt him to "run;" still another was concerned whether he could "make it" on the outside since he had never done anything "straight." One man who had not felt endangered by other inmates during his incarceration did describe, quite poignantly, his fear of dying before being released.

R: I don't mean this question to sound negative, but are there things that you fear in prison?

P: DEATH, AND GETTING OUT. I FEEL I'M GOING TO DIE BEFORE I GET OUT. AND MY AGE--I DON'T FEAR NOBODY IN HERE. I MEAN, I REALLY DON'T FEAR NOBODY HERE. I FEAR THAT I'LL DIE HERE, 'CAUSE I'M 49. MY DAD DIED WHEN HE WAS 66, OF A HEART ATTACK . . . AND THAT'S WHAT I FEAR THE MOST, IS DYING HERE, AND NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE MY LITTLE GIRL. SEE, I DON'T EVEN KNOW, I KNOW WHERE SHE'S LIVING AT, BUT IT TOOK ME YEARS TO FIND OUT WHERE SHE WAS LIVING AT.

R: You fear the fact that you won't ever get out of here before that?

P: YEAH, THAT'S ONE OF MY BIGGEST THINGS I FEAR. YOU KNOW . . . I WANT TO SEE MY LITTLE GIRL. I MISS THE YEARS WITH MY LITTLE GIRL. I MISSED GROWING UP WITH HER. YOU KNOW, THE LAST GOOD FEELING I HAD WITH HER WAS LIKE, I WAS ON THE STREET MAN, AND LIKE SHE HAD ON THIS LITTLE WHITE DRESS OF FLOWERS. SHE WAS JUST A LITTLE BABY WALKING ALONG, HOLDING ON THE FENCE, AND LIKE, SHE WAS WALKING UP THE STREET AND SHE WAS WOBBLING. AND THAT'S THE BIGGEST MEMORY THAT I HAVE OF HER, MAN. AND I'VE GOT SOME PICTURES OF HER, AND I'M TELLING YOU THAT THAT'S THE WORST PART ABOUT DOING THIS WHOLE TIME, IS THE THING THAT I WANTED MOST, IS THE THING THAT I DON'T HAVE. AND, YEAH, I FEAR THAT . . . (K-1-50-11)

The dominant tone of the interviews suggests more intense emotional reactions to interpersonal and relational categories of experience than to objectified elements or to those people and events identified with the "system." Individual prisoners carefully establish patterns of relationships as an integral part of their survival strategy within an essentially sociopathic setting. These relationships are based on the "convict code," an idealized tradition which establishes normative behavior within the prison and to which nearly all prisoners subscribe. This concept of the code is one of the major perceptual organizing principles within the cognitive frame of the prisoner. Nearly every behavior is defined in relationship to code principles--honesty, integrity, honor, manliness, strength--and nearly every individual is judged by his or her adherence to those tenets as defined in prison. Here are some characteristic descriptions of a "convict" as opposed to other, more deficient prisoner-types.

- P: ALRIGHT. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONVICT, A INMATE AND A RESIDENT.
- R: Alright, tell me that.
- P: ALRIGHT. READ THIS RIGHT HERE [refers to magazine article he is holding]. READ IT OUT LOUD TO YOUR TAPE RECORDER.
- R: Well, you tell me in your terms. What is a convict? What do you see?
- P: ALRIGHT. A CONVICT IS A MAN THAT MINDS HIS OWN BUSINESS. TREATS PEOPLE THE WAY HE WANTS TO BE TREATED. IF HE MAKES A DEBT, HE PAYS IT. IF HE GETS CAUGHT DOING SOMETHING, HE STANDS UP AND TAKES HIS OWN TIME. THAT'S A CONVICT.
- R: When you say takes his own time, what do you mean by that?
- P: MEANS THAT IF YOU GET CAUGHT DOING SOMETHING, YOU DON'T TRY TO BLAME SOMEBODY ELSE, THAT'S A CONVICT.
- R: Alright.
- P: AND FOR 34 YEARS THAT'S WHAT I'VE TRIED TO DO . . .
- R: Okay. Number two is an inmate. What is an inmate then?
- P: AN INMATE'S A GUY THAT WILL GO ALONG WITH THE PROGRAM, OR WHATEVER OTHER PEOPLE WANTS TO DO, AND HE MAY PUT SOMEBODY ELSE IN JEOPARDY TO TRY TO PROTECT HIMSELF.
- R: So a convict will not cooperate with the administration?
- P: A CONVICT WILL COOPERATE WITH THE ADMINISTRATION. BUT HE WILL TREAT PEOPLE THE WAY HE WANTS TO BE TREATED HIMSELF. BUT, SEE, LIKE A RESIDENT, OR AN INMATE, THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE OTHER PART OF THE POPULATION . . . (W-2-55-17)
-

P: THERE'S INMATES IN HERE, OR WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL THEM--CONVICTS--MOST OF THESE GUYS ARE INMATES. THERE'S NO MORE CONVICTS, NOT HERE.

R: Tell me the difference between an inmate and a convict.

P: AN INMATE WILL DO WHAT THESE PEOPLE SAY, NO MATTER WHAT IT IS, RIGHT OR WRONG.

R: By these people you mean administration?

P: ADMINISTRATION. NO MATTER WHAT IT IS, RIGHT OR WRONG. IF IT'S GOOD OR BAD FOR YOU, OR IF IT'S GOOD OR BAD FOR THE POPULATION. A CONVICT WON'T. A CONVICT WILL WANT TO DO WHAT'S BEST FOR HIM AND THE SOCIETY HE LIVES IN. WHICH IS THE FELLOW INMATES IN PRISON, OR WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL THEM . . . (W-2-42-22)

P: WELL, YOU TAKE YOUR OLD TIMERS, THEY BECOME EXCEPTIONALLY OFFENDED AND HOSTILE, IF YOU REFER TO THEM AS AN INMATE. AND THE REASON FOR THAT IS, AN INMATE IS CONSIDERED AS A PERSON WHO IS BEING COOPERATIVE WITH THE PRISON OFFICIALS BY BEING A SNITCH--THAT'S AN INFORMER. AND A CONVICT IS ONE WHO IS CONSIDERED TO BE MORE SOLID, OF STRONG CHARACTER. A CONVICT IS A PERSON WHO IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE A STRONG CHARACTER; AN INMATE IS THE WEAKER CHARACTER . . .

R: . . . What's the line between cooperating with the administration and--in other words, what's the line where one kind of becomes an inmate class, as opposed to convict? I mean, are you cooperating with the administration if you obey the rules? Do you have to be actively working against the system somehow, or what?

P: WELL, YOU COULD BE CONVICT AND COOPERATE. OBEYING THE RULES AND STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE WOULD NOT SPECIFICALLY CLASSIFY YOU AS AN INMATE--YOU'D BE A CONVICT. BUT TO BE AN INMATE IS WHERE A LOT OF THESE NEW GUYS ARE ALWAYS KISSING--WHAT WE CALL KISSING UP TO THE OFFICIALS. ALWAYS GOING OUT OF THEIR WAY

TO SEEING THAT THE OFFICIALS ARE PLEASED.
(K-2-50-21)

P: . . . I GUESS A CONVICT IS SOMEONE WHO IS--HE RELATES TO PEOPLE STRAIGHT UP. HE DOESN'T PLAY HEAD GAMES. HE DOES WHAT HE SAYS, AND MEANS WHAT HE SAYS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT HIM GETTING OVER ON YOU, OR FUCKING YOU ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, OR PUTTING YOUR BUSINESS OUT ON THE STREET. (N-3-43-18)

New prisoners and "snitches" are both located in opposition to the "convict code," and thus are threats to the stability of the institutional environment. New prisoners are untested, and thus unknown quantities; "snitches" on the other hand, are the antithesis of "convicts," openly violating the code for their own benefit. The code may never have had many adherents in actual fact (each interviewee who discussed this term assured the author that the interviewee was one of the few remaining examples of the dying breed of convicts), but nearly all prisoners strongly assert its governing principles. Thus, as a perceptual construct, the "convict" and "convict code" are extremely influential and capable of creating the emotional charges associated with the production of synonymous terms. Items such as "brother," "friend," and "partner" emerge from this linguistic territory.

Isolates

There are also isolates to consider. Isolates are terms which a) appear in only one of the four states

investigated, b) cannot be classified as associatives, and c) have no precise synonym among other items in the lexicon. By this criteria, a word such as "finger," since it applies to a specific measurement of marijuana, would be considered an isolate while "bag," with its synonymous "sack," would not be. "Under the cover" has specific reference to homosexual activity, while "pull the cover off one" may not. Thus the former is an isolate, and the latter, with its synonym, "pull one's jacket," is not. But, "l.d.," though it is an item unique to one state and is not in any way an associative, does have a synonym--"Jody"--so it is not considered an isolate.

There are 221 isolates in the lexicon, which amounts to 17.62% of the total items. To explore whether any particular state had a tendency to contribute a disproportionate share of these terms, the author tabulated the number of isolates identified with each state. The results were inconclusive, demonstrating a roughly similar pattern of distribution. Tennessee contributed 61 terms; Kentucky, 58; North Carolina 52; and West Virginia 50.

The number of isolates supports the argument that the lexicon demonstrates substantial correspondence in argot within the four-state Appalachian region of the study when one considers two important characteristics of isolates. First of all, a significant portion of isolates have currency in the world outside prison as well as inside it,

and thus reflect the circular route which a portion of these items follow into and out of institutions. A "bookie," writing "ball tickets" inside a prison differs only slightly from his counterpart in any city in America. Stolen items may be "hot" both inside prison and out, men may classify their dearest girlfriend as a "main squeeze," whether or not those men live in an institution, and manipulative individuals "case out" others they want to use whether they do so in a business boardroom or on a prison yard. All the terms elicited do have currency within prisons and are used in special prison contexts; they are not always unique to those institutions.

Secondly, there are also significant numbers of these terms which appear to be generated within a particular state because of some idiosyncratic context there. For instance, "grasshoppers" only exist in Kentucky because inmates housed in Protective Custody there are distinguished by their green uniforms. Similarly, one would only "green up" in North Carolina or another state where advancing to minimum-custody status means changing one's uniform color to green. "Canteen cards" are only incorporated into one's linguistic repertoire when such an item is utilized in daily activities, and the unique architectural design of the West Virginia Penitentiary is probably responsible for the creation of "the item," since officials there have to transport a weapon through an area where inmates are located

and have attempted to mask its identity through use of a verbal substitution.

Prisoners are creative with their language usage, and figures of speech seem particularly to abound where terms are generated in unique, isolated contexts. A "sundown" is both a poignant and poetic description of a life sentence; fog is appropriately designated as "parole dust;" and when one has spent years behind concrete walls or fences topped with barbed wire, "windshield therapy" is wonderfully descriptive of the ride through town in a vehicle while on the way to court. Likewise, allusions to "Bart Simpson," whose figure appears on Butterfinger candy bars, "Bundy" with his perverted sexual orientation, and the entrepreneurship of television's "Mr. Haney," closely approximate objects and people from the everyday world of prison experience. "Boo games," are scary; "ooh wee bumps" hurt, and "punchers" push herds of working inmates. There are also word plays such as "adjust us" which combines official jargon--adjustment committee--with a pun on the nature of justice, and "barn trading" which phonetically emulates the official prison language that prohibits bartering and trading.

A small number of terms identified as isolates may prove on further investigation to be merely uniquely induced expressions of the individual prisoner. The careful and repeated review of interview transcripts, as well as the

review of that transcript with the prisoner, still leave a limited number of questionable items elicited from single respondents, which further research might eliminate. For instance, "dead man" may have currency as a term for one serving a life sentence without hope for parole; "mental dummy" may be an item used by a portion of prisoners to describe weight lifters; and to "get paid" may be a synonym of the widely utilized "hustle," but these three terms, and others like them, may be merely descriptive combinations, and not argot. Other items, though only uttered by one prisoner, sound as if they may indeed be in common usage. These include terms such as "drop shot," which describes a fellow-prisoner without any intelligence, and "cat," which refers to one's best friend and which closely parallels the commonly used "road dog," which often has an identical definition. Of course any creative utterance has the potential to become fixed in the lexicon if other fellow-prisoners absorb it into their personal vocabulary.

One must be careful to judge the idiosyncrasy of any item, however. Careful investigation may reveal that many of these isolates have correspondence not only within the Appalachian region, but with other regions as well. To test this premise, the author of the present study cross-checked these isolates against one small, but recent glossary assembled in a California prison, that contained in The Prison Experience (Camhi 1989). Here he found "trick,"

"gladiator school," and "weak," which are direct correspondents of Appalachian isolates, as well as "Man walking" and "talking out of the side of your neck." The former is identical with the Appalachian isolate "man down," and the latter has a definition which so closely parallel the present study's "come out of the side of one's neck" that the two must be considered synonyms. This rather cursory cross-check demonstrates that similar, more extensive research will undoubtedly produce additional correspondences, with a parallel reduction in the percentage of isolates present.

Throughout the course of this study, an operative assumption has been that if one prisoner possesses a term, even in his passive vocabulary, that term exists within the institution where he is confined and, by extension, the state in which he is incarcerated. On many occasions, an interviewee would claim a specific term was no longer in use or that it was only used in another prison system where he had previously served time, and then the author would discover the term within the active vocabulary of another prisoner in the same state. The identification of an accurate lexicon is an elusive process because language is dynamic rather than static, yet it is the basis for any understanding of how that language reflects the degree to which incarceration both shapes and alters the behavior of prisoners. What the analytical sections of this study have

attempted is to provide a starting point for further research, a point from which to launch a comprehensive and systematic sociolinguistic investigation of prison language.

CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study began with the assumption that the isolated environment of the American prison is a powerful conditioner of argot. Since language is the primary medium for transmitting shared cultural values, the study has examined how extended incarceration shapes the argot of its user and thus reflects those shared cultural perceptions and values. The primary accomplishments of this research are:

- 1) The development of an Appalachian-region argot lexicon consisting of 1216 items gathered in prisons of four states--Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia.
- 2) An analysis of the dominant semantic fields into which these terms are grouped and which reflect central characteristics of prison life as well as the individual perceptions of the argot-user.
- 3) An examination of the degree of inter-state correspondence which exists between terms gathered in four separate locations.

This study is intended as the initial step towards establishing a national data base from which to launch a comprehensive sociolinguistic study of prison argot.

Early investigations into prison language emerged from the study of slang which began as early as the fifteenth century. Though the origins of slang are somewhat obscure,

nearly every early study alludes to a connection between it and what has been called the "underworld" element in society. By 1859, Hotten, in his A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words was attempting to draw distinctions between slang, which he designated as substandard, figurative, or colloquial English and cant, which he considered a secret vocabulary of thieves and vagabonds. As Lighter (1992) has pointed out, cant was the designation favored throughout the eighteenth century by most commentators. The notion of a secret language, used by a criminal subclass to converse openly without fear of detection by listeners, continued through the nineteenth and even into the twentieth century. More recent scholars, however have rejected such explanations. Bradley (1911) first suggested that slang terms might be intentional substitutes utilized by a societal subclass to demonstrate its isolation from the dominant class. Partridge's work (1939, 1950) focused on some of those subclasses, delineating different senses of slang and discriminating between the language of criminals and tramps, which had been previously lumped together. H.L. Mencken, in his 1936 edition of The American Language, reintroduced the term argot into the scholarly dialogue, identifying it as the special vocabulary of any group, trade or profession, though he preferred using cant to describe the language of the criminal element.

However, it was David Maurer (1964, 1981) who integrated many of the ideas of past scholars into a framework for fruitful investigations, developing his understandings of language by conducting field work among the users of the language, the criminals themselves. First of all, he narrowed Mencken's definition of argot, labeling it "specialized language used by organized groups operating outside the law" (Whiz Mob 4). More importantly, he introduced the notion of crime as a cluster of subcultures, each comprised of distinct "professional" criminals with differing occupational specialties, and each possessing a unique argot which both reflects and reinforces group behavior while transmitting its vocational specializations (Whiz Mob 11-13). Furthermore, Maurer emphasized that argot was an expression of group identity rather than a tool for deception. But Maurer's interests were restricted to what he called "professional" criminals, individuals with a specific vocational specialty--pickpockets, confidence men, etc.--who worked at crime as a primary means of support. In his research, he specifically avoided prisoners since he felt that few professional criminals ever served time and that those who did generally isolated themselves from the mainstream of convicts. To Maurer, most prisoners were amateurs (Mencken 1948, 673). Whether or not this observation was correct, can no longer be challenged; what is clear is that Maurer either failed to consider or was

unconcerned with whatever argot might develop inside prisons.

Subsequent studies that built upon Maurer's work and did attempt to examine prison argot (see Chapter One) have used a variety of terms to identify the special lexical items of the prisoner's vocabulary--cant, slang, jargon, con-lingo--to name a few. The author of the present study believes argot is the appropriate designation for these items and accepts Maurer's definition of that term, but with an important modification. While argot is the specialized language of a subcultural group, the present author argues that the prison population itself constitutes such a group. It is a segregated speech community, functioning as any group that has been isolated for a specific purpose will do, by developing a language foreign in some regard to the language of the macro society of which it is a part (Lewis 48). The members of that speech community--prisoners--are the equivalent of Maurer's "professionals," and any collection of their speech will reflect the behaviors which the group endorses and desires to reinforce.

The present study sought to analyze the argot of such a community--the prisoners of Appalachia. Prior to engaging in any analysis of how argot terms express the values of its users and their perceptions of their culture however, it was necessary to develop an accurate argot lexicon for those prisoners. This study approached that task in a number of

unique ways. First of all, no prior study has attempted to record data from more than one institution, nor has there been any extended comparison of data between two or more locations. By contrast, the present study collected terms from a four-state area, and central to its design was a mechanism for inter-state comparisons. Secondly, previous studies have tended to concentrate either on the now-archaic "big house" type of maximum-security institutions or the more readily accessible minimum-security prisons, both of which produce data from prisoners at extreme ends of the security classification continuum, and which are therefore less reflective of typical prison settings. However, the present study focused on "regional prisons" that house male inmates convicted of a variety of offenses and designated with a range of security classifications and whose population is subject to substantial annual turnover. Data from this study, then, is more nearly characteristic of the total inmate population within the region. Finally, past studies have often revealed unsystematic approaches to data gathering; their methodology is seldom replicable and the data is frequently the product of a small number of informants. Once again, the present study sought to overcome deficiencies of the past through the use of tape-recorded interviews of carefully selected informants--six inmates from each state who had served ten or more consecutive years in the prison systems of their respective

states and who, as a group, reflected the approximate racial demographics of the institution in which they were housed.

Critical to the data collection process was the use of an interview guide designed to evoke argot surrounding prison cultural concerns. The guide was developed by the author who integrated his past work experiences in prisons with Hall's well-established paradigm for any culture to compose an initial draft, which was then slightly revised after discussions with an experienced researcher of prison language, Cardozo-Freeman, and the implementation of an institutional pretest. Still, the guide was just that--a guide, designed specifically to provide a framework for discussion, yet flexible enough to allow for respondents to expand on topics of their choosing. The guide channeled the conversations, ensuring consistent coverage of a range of cultural topics without unduly restricting the parameters of individual discussions. Both the past work experiences of the author, which contributed to his ability to develop rapport with the prisoner respondents, and the confidentiality of those responses that was assured through the design of the research proposal were crucial to obtaining valid data.

Equally important were the follow-up sessions conducted with the interviewees. One agenda for those sessions was the correction of typographic errors and misunderstandings that appeared on the transcripts. In addition, the author

carefully reviewed any questionable argot items with the interviewee to determine whether that item was a nonce term or one which was idiosyncratic to the user, or whether it was fixed in the corpus of prison argot. These sessions also provided clarification of certain terms and verification of the cultural understandings surrounding those items. Finally, as a partial check for correspondence of terms between states, the author tested for recognition by his respondents certain terms which had appeared in only one state.

The data collection process was designed so as to produce accurate and valid data that represented a distillation of core argot terms used by Appalachian prisoners and to be capable of replication in other investigations to produce comparable and equally valid data. No previous study of prison argot attests to a similar rigor.

The lexicon generated by these processes (see Chapter Three) appears to be consistent with the consensus among modern scholars who have investigated prison argot. First of all, there is indeed a language peculiar to prisons, one that differs from other language varieties primarily in its lexical processes. Secondly, the use of that argot appears to be a deliberate strategy on the part of the user, invoked both as an antithetical response to the free-world society and a bonding activity within the prison subculture.

Finally, prison argot is part of an evolving and dynamic acculturation process within the prison.

Though the lexicon presents unique and descriptive linguistic items that are expressive of the prison setting, those items are contradictory to many of the early studies of prison argot which stressed romanticized and sensationalized notions of convicts developed by Hollywood B-movies or the "hard-boiled" school of crime fiction. Indeed, some of those reports such as Caldwell (1930) and Ersine (1933) were designed specifically for writers of such fiction and thus they presented lexicons that were consistent with the images of popular entertainment. Later and more reliable investigators such as Boroff (1951), Karhu (1988) and Bentley and Corbett (1992) report data that is relatively free from romanticization. Similarly, few of the terms appearing here in Chapter Three are of a particularly exotic nature; rather, they depict a mundane and somewhat restricted linguistic range that parallels the limited parameters of their prison environment.

Moreover, the lexicon is consistent with another facet of argot first identified by Maurer and explored by several other researchers of prison language; the notion that use of argot is not only a sign of belonging to the subcultural group, but an expression of antithetical attitudes toward the dominant cultural group as well. Hargan (1935) had first suggested that prisoners achieve a degree of emotional

satisfaction through their linguistic rebellion, as well as acquiring a sense of class solidarity (359). Later, Goldin, O'Leary and Lipsius (1950), who lived and worked in the prison environment rather than merely studying it, point to the importance of linguistic items that express values that are in opposition to the dominant society, emphasizing the fact that language of prisoners "constitutes an explicit criticism of traditional mores" ("Introduction" n.p.). More recently, Lyons' study of a California prison (1984) stresses both the ways in which argot is used by the newly incarcerated inmate to gain acceptance with his peers, and the way that argot expresses the user's rejection of outsiders (194). The preponderance of terms in the lexicon of Chapter Three which refer to violations of prison rules, the values expressed through the usage of terms surrounding sexual mores, and the aggressive and abusive connotations inherent in many of the items are examples of the antithetical posture of much of the argot which thus supports the conclusions of these investigators.

Criminologists such as Clemmer (1958), Sykes (1958) and Irwin and Cressey (1962) recognized the significance of argot in forming and maintaining the social structure of the prison setting and attempted to explain the ultimate source of such language. Clemmer and Sykes believed that source to be the prison itself, and that the development of argot was a strategy of response to the conditions of the prison

environment. Irwin and Cressey, on the other hand, argued that most argot was imported from outside the prison walls and reflected the preinstitutional experiences of the user. The later work of Cardozo-Freeman (1984) recognized that prison language was an amalgam of several sources from both within and without the prison. Interviews conducted for the present study have led its author to conclude that not only is Cardozo-Freeman's position correct, it is understated.

Any attempt to determine either the etymology or the locus of any individual argot item is futile. For one thing, the development of more numerous, yet smaller and more easily manageable prisons has eliminated the single, isolated institution where a unique speech community could thrive unaltered for an extended time. Secondly, the current operational mode of the American prison system not only cycles individuals in and out of institutions with increasing frequency, but a deliberate administrative strategy calls for periodic transfers of prisoners between different facilities. The result is not only an admixture of street and institutional terms, but a diffusion and dissipation of any unique subcultural vocabulary. The lexicon of Chapter Three reflects these trends. While the entries contained within it express specific prison contexts and offer glimpses into the worldview of today's prisoner, there are few of the terms that operate solely within the institutional environment. The prisoners interviewed are

aware too, of the circular flow of terms into and out of the prison, as well as of a reduction in argot usage within their environment.

Still, the argot items collected in the interviews offer an intriguing glimpse into the prison environment and the worldview of its inhabitants. While the number of respondents interviewed for this study is small when one considers the total prison population, that number is far larger than those reported on in the vast majority of previous investigations, some of which have been the basis of widely-proclaimed criminological and linguistic theories. Furthermore, the interpretations of prison life presented in Chapter Four are arrived at through a systematic analysis of the argot items based on quantitative principles.¹³ Nathan Kantrowitz's seminal study of race relations in a prison (1969) proposed two principles which seem axiomatic to the present author, and which were extended by him to provide a foundation for the analytic discussion in the study. First, Kantrowitz states what seems obvious: "the presence or absence of a name (and synonyms) within any specific group of convicts indicates the presence or absence of perceived behavior" (25). Kantrowitz was speaking specifically of names and synonyms, but his postulate may be extended to any argot item. Thus, *the presence of an argot item in one's vocabulary is an indication that the object or experience that term describes exists, at least in the perceptual realm*

of the user. Secondly, Kantrowitz proposed that the larger the quantity of names for a racial group that are known by an individual, the more intense are that person's feelings toward the group (24). Here, Kantrowitz was referring specifically to pejorative terminology, but once again the present author believes an extension is valid: *the greater the number of synonyms for any particular phenomenon, the greater the intensity of feeling toward that phenomenon.*

Using these two principles, the present study examined the corpus of argot items collected on the basis of the relative concentration of terms within the semantic fields determined by the Interview Guide. Any term was indicative of some degree of cognizance within the perceptual realm of the prisoners, while the intensity with which that term was felt--and thus the degree of emotionality toward the object or experience it depicted--was determined by the number of synonymous expressions appearing. But a more important, third principle is posited in the analytical discussion of Chapter Four, one that has particular significance to interpretations of group cultural expression: *the greater the percentage of total argot terms appearing within any semantic field, the more important are the experiences, perceptions and values expressed by that field in the life of the group.*

The logical corollary of this latter principle may be applied to explain the paucity of argot surrounding the

semantic fields identified by Module 5, "Free-World Concerns." One category within this field had to do with terms referring to family members and friends. The author, having been influenced by Cardozo-Freeman's (1984) study that emphasized the importance of significant female supportive influences from outside the prison, spent considerable time in each interview trying unsuccessfully to elicit terms for these females. Based on the principle stated above, he concluded that the small number of items generated suggested, at least, a relative lack of importance or lack of intensity of feeling associated with this aspect of a prisoner's life. He then described a number of possible explanations for why this might be so: the abundance of immediate in-prison influences working to overpower the more remote, external influences; a possible "sacredness" attached to familial matters which prevented such items from entering the mainstream of the prison linguistic processes; a deliberate rejection of family by prisoners who find it easier to cope without the burden of such relationships; even a design feature of the study itself--the fact that all interviewees had served lengthy incarcerations and would thus be less likely to have maintained strong family ties. There may be other possibilities as well, but none of the potential explanations alter the observable quantitative evidence which demonstrates a lack of argot development within this

and other semantic fields. Nor does it negate the stated principle. More data may be needed before making conclusive proclamations, but the principle has nonetheless served to point the way for further research.

Similarly, the second principle stated above--that which concerns the abundance of synonyms surrounding particular phenomena--is demonstrated, for instance, by the large number of argot terms which describe prison authority figures, the great majority of which designate correctional officers. Here again, the author interprets this concentration of terms as signifying the intensity of feeling experienced by prisoners in relation to their "keepers." This conclusion seems particularly valid when it is further noted that only slightly more than ten percent of those items reflected a positive feeling towards the authority figure, a fact which correlates with everything we know about the incarceration experience. Again, interpretive conclusions about this aspect of prison culture may have limitations, but the large number of synonyms is certainly indicative of what is important in the perceptual world of the prisoner. Thus, once more the principle of analysis appears valid.

The quantitative distribution of argot items within the various semantic fields points to several other areas of intensity and importance within the perceptual frame of the prisoner. Illegal activities are at the center of much of

the personal and social interaction within the institution; homosexuality--forced, coercive or selected as life choice--occupies a position of major importance inside prison walls; issues of power and control, often played out violently, are constant concerns; substance abuse is so pervasive as to be considered near-normative behavior. Though these areas of concentration have been touched upon by previous scholars, none but Clemmer (1958) and Kantrowitz (1969) have applied any systematic analytic procedures. Clemmer had broader criminological goals, and his involvement with argot was incidental to those larger concerns; Kantrowitz's failure to follow up his brilliant initial report remains a disappointment. The present study offers an assessment strategy with which future investigations may begin.

A quantitative approach was also used to realize another goal of this study--determining the extent to which concordance exists between the argot of the four states investigated. To date, no inquiry has attempted such a multi-state compilation or for that matter, any systematic comparison of data between diverse locations. Early scholars such as Mencken (1936) subscribed to a theory of an international underworld cant; more recent investigators, though rejecting such a notion, have nonetheless often approached their topic by assuming that all American prisoners possessed identical argot. In fact, we have no data to support such an assumption, and this study set about

to test the truth of that assumption at least within a subscribed geographic area such as Appalachia. The conclusions of the present author, after an examination of the lexicon collected by this study, is that substantial concordance does exist between the four states investigated.

To examine this concordance, each term was identified in the lexicon by the state in which it appeared, and then cross-referenced to see in which of the other four states it appeared. The term "match" was used to identify an argot item or its variant which appeared in every one of the four states. Since the study was concerned primarily with the functional correspondence of the argot, matches included not only precise linguistic duplicates but pairs such as "all" and "forever" or "straighten one's business" and "take care of one's business" which express identical meanings. In a limited number of cases, the author considered a match to occur when a term, though not present, was implied by other terms in the argot vocabulary of a state's prisoners. An example of this was the word "hustle" which appeared in three states as a verb and in the fourth as a noun, along with an additional noun, "hustler." Clearly, while the verbal form of this word was not elicited in interviews in the state in which it appeared only nominally, it exists in the argot repertoire of that state. Such matches account for 17.22% of the total lexicon. "Near-matches," items or their variants which, applying the same principles, were

identified in three of the four states studied, accounted for an additional 19.06% of the total lexicon. Thus, these two categories collectively account for 36.28% of the total lexicon, an amount which would seem to demonstrate a significant degree of interstate concordance.

This study also noted additional terms and phrases which, though they are not classified as linguistic matches, are so closely linked as to be considered conceptual matches. These have been labeled *associatives*. While synonyms are expressions which have the same or nearly the same meaning, associatives are terms which share some common expressive element such as a common word each argot phrase contains, a connotative range associated with each item, or the extent of specificity of the denotative word values. For example, "snitch" and "rat" are synonyms identifying an "informant," they are not associatives because no inherent relationship exists between the two other than their common referent. On the other hand, "weed" and "grass" are not only synonyms for marijuana, but associatives as well since they share a common reference to plants. These conceptually-related entities would be expected to appear in those categories of thought where large concentrations of argot terms collect, since those categories, by definition, will contain many synonyms. However, associatives frequently occurred outside those concentrations of synonyms.

While closely examining the lists of terms clustering within the categories of concentration noted in Chapter Four, the author also observed that not only were there many synonyms and near-synonymous items, but also large numbers of unique items confined to single states. These unique terms, which the author has called *isolates*, are items which appear in only one of the four states investigated, which cannot be considered associatives, and which have no precise synonym among other items in the lexicon. Still working from his notions of the relationship between numbers of terms and their relative importance or intensity, the author then posited another principle: *as the quantity of terms for any particular phenomenon increases, the number of unique linguistic creations synonymous with that phenomenon also increases.* There is a bi-directional process at work in the development of argot within those areas which dominate the conceptual frame of the user. Matches increase, but so does the development of uniquely expressive terms within an individual institution. Furthermore, this pattern of distribution--significant percentages of matches and near-matches paralleled by similarly significant percentages of isolates--was observed in several semantic fields.

But another, contradictory pattern was also observed within these areas of concentrated terms. Certain categories demonstrated a strong proclivity towards matches and associatives, but away from the development of unique

expressions. Thus, a second principle was suggested: *where distinctive emotional intensity exists within a perceptual frame, the number of shared argot terms increases, while the number of equally uniquely developed items decreases.* These configurations suggest a two-tiered schema whereby argot is generated in responses to the intensity level of the emotional experiences of its user. At the first level, a recognizable but moderated intensity surrounds some element of the cultural experience, and there is a tendency towards both an increasing number of synonyms and a corresponding increase in isolated expressions. However, as the intensity level of emotions increases, there is a narrowing of focus upon several shared terms and a reduction in new, creative argot expressions.

The first of these patterns was observable in those areas where argot identified objectified elements and people identified with the "system" that was exerting pressures from without; the second pattern was most prevalent in argot items expressing interpersonal or relational categories ("snitches," "associates" and "new prisoners"). So, while substance abuse, violence, or homosexuality are central organizing principles around which prisoners structure their worldview, so too are concepts of honor and trust and fraternity. The paradigm suggests that the latter conceptualizations are more intensely emotional than the former.

Isolates amount to but 17.62% of the total lexical items. Several things may account for this. A significant portion of these have currency in the world outside prison, as well as inside it, a fact which reflects the circular path of argot flowing into and out of institutions. Others of these terms are generated within a particular state due to some idiosyncratic influence. A "canteen card" will only be added to one's repertoire when such an object is used, as it is in West Virginia; "grasshopper" appears in Kentucky because there, inmates housed in Protective Custody wear green uniforms. In addition, prisoners continue to show creative instincts in producing new terminology which vividly describes their world. Considering all these factors, the percentage figure for isolates would appear to support the conclusion that there is, indeed, substantial concordance between terms utilized in the four states of this study.

As a final test for concordance, the author ran two tabulations. First, in studying near-matches (where the identical terms appears in 3 of the 4 states), the single state not contributing to each near-match was identified and counted. The results indicated that no single state was any less likely than another to contribute matching terms. A second tabulation was made to determine whether any particular state had a tendency to contribute a disproportionate share of isolates. Again, the results

demonstrated that no state had such a tendency. These two tests verify a consistency of argot development within the four-state Appalachian region; none of the states is dissimilar to the others. This in turn argues for the existence of a regionalized prison argot.

Given the limited size of the sample from which the data of this study was derived, any conclusions the study presents about the nature of prison argot in Appalachia must be recognized as tentative. But those conclusions as to how argot works to define the prison environment and shape the perceptions of its inhabitants are systematically derived from the linguistic evidence the research reports. As Chapter One has shown, such attempts to understand prisons and prisoners by examining the language they speak have scholarly precedents. What is without precedent in the literature is any methodological approach to those examinations such as those initiated by this study. The set of analytical principles proposed by the author are suggested by the data. They are prototypical, offering a paradigm subject to any revisions that further research might dictate.

Several research projects might be appropriate corollaries to the present study:

- 1) Additional data, obtained by similarly rigorous collection procedures, is needed from other locations. That data could then

be systematically analyzed to determine the semantic framework into which it falls and to see how that framework compares with the one revealed by the present study. Another comparison could then determine the degree of similarity between those lexicons and the Appalachian lexicon of this study.

- 2) Though most past argot studies have demonstrated little research rigor, a compilation of all their lexical items cross-referenced to indicate in which states the individual terms appear, would provide a macro frame with which the present study could be compared. The compilation could then be subjected to the same analytical tests as a test for their viability.
- 3) In the absence of rigorously obtained data, lexicons from existing studies could still be subjected to the identical analytical procedures of the present study to explore the similarity of findings.
- 4) Tapes of the complete interviews--which total approximately 35 hours--from which the lexicon of Chapter Three was derived, will be made available to scholars. From these, any number of semantic or syntactic studies might

emerge that would contribute to broader sociolinguistic objectives.

Prison argot, this study asserts, represents a partial relexicalization of certain vocabulary items that center around norms, values and activities that are central to the prison subculture. Central to the study was the development of an accurate argot lexicon, the identification of critical areas of cultural focus, and a measurement of the degree to which Appalachian prisons might be said to constitute a speech community. Ultimately, a better understanding of these linguistic matters reaches beyond the academic environment. The present era of escalating prison populations with its accompanying financial burdens, calls for serious analysis of prison argot from an integrated sociolinguistic perspective. A society which currently incarcerates more than one million of its citizens must attempt to understand how the language of those prisoners interacts with their behavior. The author of this study hopes the findings presented here contribute in some measure to this understanding.

NOTES AND LIST OF REFERENCES

NOTES

1. William K. Bently, phone conversation with the author, 30 April, 1993.
2. See his classic essay, "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions" in his Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates, Anchor Books, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961) 3-124.
3. This study was intended to include a fifth Appalachian state--Virginia. Research requests, identical to those of the other states, were also initiated there. Early phone conversations with the Director of Research in the Virginia Department of Corrections were favorable, but necessary paperwork from that office was not forthcoming. Follow-up phone calls finally induced the appropriate forms which were promptly completed and returned. Still, when approvals had been received from other states, and interviews were being arranged, the author was told that Virginia could not be expected to process things less thoroughly than they were accustomed to, and was assured that the proposal was being given due consideration. Two months later, the author discovered that the paperwork had not yet left the director's desk. Three months after that, a follow-up letter from the director told of a lack of adequate staff to handle the numerous requests similar to this study, and included the information that the Research Committee had one unfilled position. It also offered a specific date for a final decision to be rendered. One later phone call to the Director of Research, after that date had come and gone, provided assurance that a response would be forthcoming, and gave another date for a decision. That date, too, has passed, and ten months after initial inquiries, all research has been completed in the other four states, while Virginia has yet to offer permission to conduct interviews. Reluctantly, the author has excluded that state from this comparative study.
4. For example, see James Spradley and David W. McCurdy, The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1972) 59-76.
5. An excellent study of the use of the interview in sociolinguistic research is Charles L. Briggs, Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
6. For an interesting anecdote about Maurer's use of early recording equipment, see Stuart Berg Flexner, foreword, Language of the Underworld, viii.

7. The author is convinced that during his second-stage interviews, while checking for usages from other states, he undoubtedly transferred several previously unused items to new locations.

8. Citations to the interviews that follow are to transcripts in the possession of the author. The initial letter in the citation corresponds to the first letter of the state in which the prisoner was incarcerated. The single digit number that follows indicates the ethnic origin of the inmate: 1 indicates African-American, 2 is Caucasian, and 3 represents Native American. The two-digit number that follows indicates the age of the prisoner, and the final two-digit number gives the number of consecutive years the prisoner has been incarcerated. Thus, the designation (T-1-41-12) identifies the informant as a 41 year-old African-American inmate who has been incarcerated in Tennessee for the past twelve years. Hereafter, all quotations from the transcripts will indicate researcher's comments in upper/lower case, preceded by the letter "R," with prisoner's responses in all caps, preceded by the letter "P."

9. This number exceeds the actual number of items in the lexicon due to the fact that some terms with multiple meanings were classified in more than one category. There were 17 additional terms which defied easy categorization (e.g. "jump street," "pearl handles," etc.) and thus are not included in the 1254 total.

10. Terms referring to African-Americans were: "black," "coon," "jungle bunny," "liver lip," "nappie head," "nigger," and "nigger punk." For Caucasians, "cracker," "honkey," "peckerwood," "skin head," "snowball," and "white boy" were elicited.

11. The matches are: "black," "coon," "cracker," "jungle bunny," "nigger," and "peckerwood." In addition, "nappie head" is a near-correspondent to Kantrowitz's "burr head," and both "nigger punk" and "white boy" can be implied.

12. Also included in this total are additional matched synonyms. For instance, though "baby raper" appears in all four states, "child raper," also appears in Tennessee. Similarly, "rat out" appears in two states, while "rat" appears in all four. All terms which are matches are included in the total number of matching terms.

13. Clemmer, in his The Prison Community included a table which showed the distribution of his collected argot items around several broad categories (see pg. 26 above for a condensation of that table). This served as the model for

the distribution chart contained in Chapter Four of the present study.

List of References

- Armored, John R. and Joseph D. Wolfe, comp. and eds.
Dictionary of Desperation. Washington, DC: National
 Alliance of Businessmen, 1976.
- Barr, A.J. Let Tomorrow Come New York: W.W. Norton &
 Company, Inc., 1929.
- "B.E., Gent." A Dictionary Ancient and Modern of the
 Canting Crew. London: Printed for W. Hawes, n.d.
- Bell, Eve. ed. Maximum Security: Letters From California
 Prisoners. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1972.
- Bentley, William K. and James M. Corbett. Prison Slang:
 Words and Expressions Depicting Life Behind Bars.
 Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers,
 1992.
- Black, Alexander. "Criminal Slang." The Police Journal.
 March 1943: 65-71.
- Bondeson, Ulla. "Argot Knowledge as an Indicator of
 Criminal Socialization." Scandinavian Studies in
 Criminology. 2 (1968): 73-107.
- Boroff, David. "A Study of Reformatory Argot." American
 Speech. 26 (1951): 190-95.
- Bradley, H. "Slang." Encyclopedia Britannica. 1911 ed.
- Briggs, Charles L. Learning How to Ask: A Sociological
 Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Sci-
 ence Research. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
 1986.

Burkhart, Kathryn Watterson. Women in Prison. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1973.

Caldwell, John. "Patter of Prisons." Writer's Digest. February 1930: 25-27.

Campbell, W. Reason. Dead Man Walking: Teaching in a Maximum-Security Prison. New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1978.

Cardozo-Freeman, Inez. The Joint: Language and Culture in a Maximum Security Prison. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, Publisher, 1984 (In Collaboration with Eugene P. Delorme).

---. "Rhyming Slang in a Western Prison." Western Folklore. 37 (1978): 296-305.

Chandler, Frank Wadleigh. The Literature of Roguery. vol. 1. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Press, 1907.

Chang, Dae H. and Warren B. Armstrong, eds. The Prison: Voices From the Inside. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1972.

Clark, Charles L. Lockstep and Corridor. Cincinnati: The University of Cincinnati Press, 1927.

Clemmer, Donald. The Prison Community. 1940. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958.

Concrete Mama: Prison Profiles from Walla Walla.

Photographs by Ethan Hoffman, text by John McCoy.

Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1981.

Convict 12627. "Criminal Slang." Detective Fiction Weekly.

April 21, 1934: 107-14.

---. "They Talk Like This." Detective Fiction Weekly.

April 23, 1938: 72-75.

Ersine, Noel. Underworld and Prison Slang. Upland, IN:

A.D. Freese & Son, 1933.

Fleisher, Mark S. Warehousing Violence. Newbury Park, CA:

Sage Publications, 1989.

Foster, Thomas W. "'Mushfaking': A Compensatory Behavior of

Prisoners." The Journal of Social Psychology. 117

(1982): 115-24.

Frankel, Charles. "Philosophy and the Social Sciences."

Both Human and Humane: The Humanities and Social

Sciences in Graduate Education. Ed. Charles E. Boewe

and Roy F. Nichols. Philadelphia: University of

Pennsylvania Press, 1960.

Gaughan, William T. "Prison Jargon." America. 132 (1975):

459-61.

Giallombardo, Rose. Society of Women: A Study of a Women's

Prison. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966.

Goffman, Erving. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of

Mental Patients and Other Inmates. New York: Anchor

Books/ Doubleday, 1961.

Goldin, Hyman E., Frank O'Leary, and Morris Lipsius, eds.

Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo. Twayne

Publishers, Inc., 1950.

- Grose, Francis. A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue. Ed. Eric Partridge. London: The Alcuin Press, 1931.
- Gumperz, John J. "The Speech Community." International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. vol. 9. Ed. David L. Sills. New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1968.
- Hall, Edward T. The Silent Language. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973.
- Hargan, James. "The Psychology of Prison Language." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology. 30 (1935): 359-65.
- Hotten, John Camden. A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words. London, 1859.
- Irwin, Godfrey, ed. American Tramp and Underworld Slang. London: Eric Partridge LTD. at the Scholartis Press, 1931.
- Irwin, John. The Felon. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.
- Irwin, John and Donald R. Cressey. "Thieves, Convicts and the Inmate Culture." Social Problems. 10 (1962): 142-55.
- Jackson, Bruce. A Thief's Primer. London: The Macmillan Company, 1969.
- Judges, A.V. The Elizabethan Underworld. 2nd ed. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965.

- Kantrowitz, Nathan. "The Vocabulary of Race Relations in a Prison." Publication of the American Dialect Society. 51 (1969): 23-34.
- Karhu, Carolyn. "Tennessee Prison Talk." American Speech. 63 (1988): 125-36.
- Kueth, J. Louis. "Prison Parlance." American Speech. 9 (1934): 25-28.
- Labov, William. Sociolinguistic Patterns. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.
- Leichty, V. Erle. "An Analysis of Prison Jargon." Papers of the Michigan Academy of Arts, Sciences & Letters. 30 (1944): 589-600.
- Lewis, M.M. Language in Society: The Linguistic Revolution and Social Change. New York: Social Science Publishers, 1948.
- Lighter, J.E. "American Slang." unpublished manuscript, 1992.
- Little, Bert. "Prison Lingo: A Style of American English Slang." Anthropological Linguistics. 24 (1982): 206-44.
- Lyons, Greg. "Inmates and Convicts: The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion." The SECOL Review. 8 (1984): 166-81.
- Maurer, David W. Language of the Underworld. Comp. and eds. Allen W. Futrell & Charles B. Wordell. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1981.

- . Whiz Mob: A Correlation of the Technical Argot of Pickpockets with Their Behavior. New Haven, CT: College & University Press, 1964.
- Mencken, H.L. The American Language. 4th ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936.
- . The American Language. Supplement II. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.
- Milburn, George. "Convict's Jargon." American Speech. 6 (1931): 436-42.
- Morgan, Hugh. "By Its Slang, Ye Shall Know It: The Pessimism of Prison Life." Maledicta. 5 (1981): 263-69.
- No. 90613-A. "Prison Jargon." Writer's Digest. August 1932: 46-48.
- Number 1500 (Pseud). Life in Sing Sing. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1904.
- Partridge, Eric. Here, There and Everywhere. 2nd ed. rev. London: H. Hamilton, 1950.
- . Slang Today and Yesterday. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934.
- Polsky, Ned. Hustlers, Beats, and Others. Anchor Books. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969.
- Pritchard, Constance J. "Getting Acclimated: Language in a Woman's Prison." Paper presented at: Second Annual Symposium on Language and Culture in South Carolina. 1978.

The Prison Experience. Photography by Morrie Camhi.

Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., and Inter Press Corporation, 1989.

"Thieves' Jargon." Harper's New Monthly Magazine. April 1865: 601-07.

Tufts, Henry. A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, and Travels of Henry Tufts. ed. Edmund Pearson. New York: Duffield and Company, 1930.

Wentworth, Harold and Stuart Berg Flexner. Dictionary of American Slang. 2nd Supp. ed. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975.

Yenne, Herbert. "Prison Lingo." American Speech. 2 (1927): 280-82.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Module 1: Physical Locations and Objects

- 1.1 Terms for the institution itself
 - generic
 - specific
- 1.2 Terms for specific areas within the institution
 - open areas
 - recreation areas
 - activity areas
 - where food is served
 - housing areas
 - visiting area
 - medical areas
 - segregation locations
 - solitary confinement
 - other security designations
- 1.3 Terms for institutional objects
 - vehicles
 - food
 - equipment

Module 2: Institutional Rules

- 2.1 Names of security classifications
- 2.2 Terms for disciplinary infractions
 - types
 - official reports
 - trial/convictions
- 2.3 Terms for illegal possessions
 - weapons
 - knives
 - guns
 - others
 - drugs/substances
 - marijuana
 - pills
 - alcohol
 - others
 - money
- 2.4 Terms for searches
 - living areas
 - search of person

2.5 Terms for secret locations

Module 3: People Within the Institution

3.1 Terms for fellow prisoners

- generic names
- new people in the prison
- by sentence
- social groupings
- close friends
- by lifestyle
 - homosexual behavior
 - adherence to acceptable prison code
 - violation of acceptable prison code
- ethnic/racial terms
- other typologies

3.2 Terms for prison officials

- administrative staff
- guards
 - positive types
 - negative types

Module 4: Institutional Activities

4.1 Terms for serving one's sentence

- kinds of time
- ways to serve time

4.2 Terms for physical activities

- work
- eating
- leisure
- medical
- transfers to locations outside prison
- visits
- receiving mail

4.3 Terms surrounding imposed activities

4.4 Terms for social interaction

- conversations
- groupings
- sexual activities
 - heterosexual
 - homosexual
- code adherence/violation
- violent behaviors

4.5 Terms for interaction with authorities

- 4.6 Terms involving prison economy
 - legal activities
 - food
 - crafts
 - services to other prisoners
 - illegal activities
 - possessions
 - drugs
 - alcohol
 - loaning of cash/commodities
 - interest
 - other profit-centered activities
- 4.7 Terms involving intrapersonal feelings/emotions
 - personal fears
 - aspirations
 - terms surrounding death

Module 5: "Free World" Concerns

- 5.1 Terms for things outside the prison
 - generic terms
 - people
 - places
 - items/objects
- 5.2 Terms for family members or friends
- 5.3 Terms surrounding return to society
 - termination of sentence
 - parole
 - expectations
- 5.4 Terms for escapes from prison

Module 6: Trial and Legal Issues

- 6.1 Terms for trial concerns
 - authorities
 - court procedures
 - types of offenses
- 6.2 Terms surrounding sentencing
 - types
 - length
 - terminations

APPENDIX B

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
Research Standard Consent**

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: "Prison Argot: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Argot and Behavior in Five Appalachian States"

The purpose of this study is to compose a dictionary of prison slang for a five-state Appalachian region (KY, NC, TN, VA, and WV), and to determine the ways in which use of these terms reflects the world view of men who undergo lengthy incarceration. You will meet with the researcher for a tape-recorded interview of approximately 90 minutes, to discuss different aspects of prison life you experience. The interview will follow very broad topics which you may choose to discuss as you wish. A second interview will take place with you and a small group of other inmates who have also granted interviews. This is for the purpose of clarifying and explaining previous discussions, and for getting group input on these topics.

Although this study will have no direct benefits to you at this time, it offers you an opportunity to contribute to a body of knowledge which has the potential to make the prison environment safer and more humane. Both the incarcerated, and members of the "free-world" alike, benefit from any study which leads to increased understanding of the prison environment and the ways it affects those who live within it.

Your identity will be kept confidential, and no member of the prison staff or administration will have access to any tape. Only the interviewer and one transcriber will have access to them during this project. Your tape will not be identified by name, only by number. If you wish, you may use only a number or an alias during the interview itself. Tapes will be stored in a locked file at 301 McClung Tower, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996, and any future access to tapes will be granted only to qualified educational researchers.

If you have any questions about the research, now or later, you may contact W. Thomas Beckner or Dr. Thomas J. Heffernan at the address above, or call (615) 974-5401. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and will have no effect upon parole. You may withdraw at any time during the interview process without penalty.

I have read and understand the explanation of this study and agree to participate.

Name

Date

Signature