

ACCESS TO TERRITORY AND ETIOLOGY OF PRISON RIOTS**Paul M. Sharp, Oklahoma State University****Barry Hancock, Albany State College, Georgia****Max Portrey, Henderson State University, Arkansas****INTRODUCTION**

It is the thesis of this paper that the adage: space is power, is magnified and intensified in those institutions and situations where access to space is severely limited. Before turning to the major thrust of the argument we must first briefly define and discuss the concept of territoriality. The point must be made that the focus of the paper is concerned with varying access to territory of space within prisons (Goffman, 1962). While territoriality may be placed within the general substantive area of proxemic research. Research in this area has increased tremendously in the past two decades (Ardrey 1966, 1970; Calhoun 1962; Lorenz 1966; Hall 1959, 1960, 1966, 1974, 1977; Sommer 1959, 1961, 1967, 1969). Sommer has distinguished personal space from territoriality along four major criteria: 1) personal space is portable whereas territory is relatively stationary, 2) the boundaries of personal space are invisible whereas the boundaries of territory are usually marked in some manner, 3) personal space at its center has the person's body whereas territory does not, and 4) encroachment into personal space areas usually leads to withdrawal (Hedizer's flight distance, 1961) whereas encroachment of territory usually leads to threats or fights. It must be noted that territory and territorial behavior are distinct from, and should not be construed to be equivalent of, personal space.

Territoriality, refers to the structuring and control over space deemed necessary for survival (Lyman and Scott 1971). Ardrey provides the argument that territoriality is a natural rather than a cultural phenomenon. If territoriality is a natural phenomenon, the subsequent structuring, obligation and defense of territory is a cultured phenomena, as reflected by the research of Tittle (1968).

It would appear that in those situations where such behavior and space restrictions are institutionally pronounced sociologists could gain tremendous insight into the area, especially as this form of behavior is not one in which most persons are cognitively aware in everyday situations (Portrey, 1980).

Various explanations are offered and discarded for the fluctuations in prison violence. As the potential for violence appears a constant feature of prison life, the question as to why violence is sporadic must be raised.

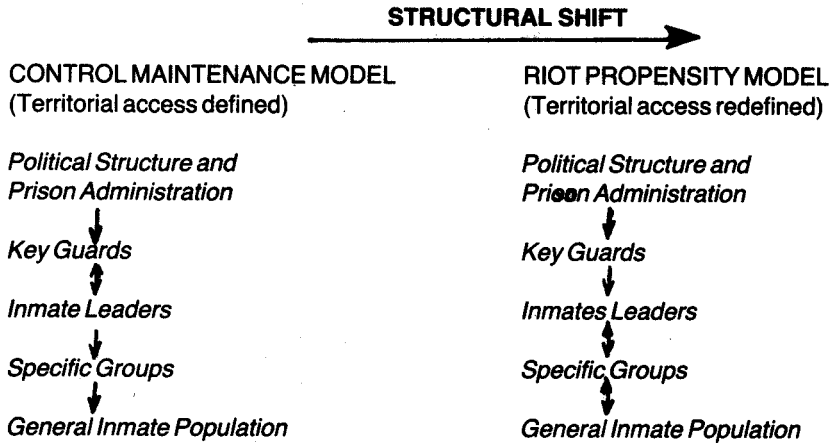
Etiologies of prison violence are offered in effort to shed light on the form and direction of prison violence. This is most continually done with recommendations as to how to thwart such disturbances before they actually manifest themselves. The major thesis of this paper is that these periodic episodes of violence are at least partially produced by subtle changes in a prison's power structure.

COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR IN TOTAL INSTITUTIONS

There are at least two salient structures that must be addressed in the consideration of the prison social system: (1) The formal administrative structure which consists of the warden, sectional administrative offices, guards and the custodial staff; (2) the informal inmate social structure consists of a hierarchical sub-structure containing key prison guards, selected inmates and sub-groups within the inmate population. The leaders of such an informal structure maintain their respective positions by acting as liaison for both the formal and informal power structures. In return for this service these persons are granted special privileges, rewards and more freedom in terms of spatial access.

Characteristics which lead to prison riots include: 1) the total institutional control which breaks down all elements of the inmate self-governing sub-structure, 2) the tendency of the administrative staff to co-mingle several different types of prisoners, 3) the failure by the institution to replace elements of inmate self-governance, and 4) the tendency to treat each inmate individually (Hartung & Flock 1954). Individual treatment of the inmates by the staff destroys inmate cohesion and sub-structure identity. Unaccustomed to these changing modes of treatment or control by the institutional staff, the leaders of the inmate sub-structure experience a loss of power, prestige,

FIGURE 1: STRUCTURAL-TERRITORIAL REDIFINITION OF SPATIAL ACCESS



and freedom. The outcome appears to manifest itself in a reciprocal loss of formal institutional control. It must be noted that power, prestige and freedom, all used as a system of rewards for key inmates, are related to spatial access and control within the inmate substructure.

McCleery (1960) observed that formal restructuring of inmate placement and spatial access effected not only the inmate population but the custodial staff as well. Both groups tended to withdraw into their own groupings and began to conspire against the formal authority. According to Clemmer (1940) riots and crowd-like behavior involves complex negotiations between and among inmates. Thus, restructuring of spatial allocation combined with the loss of spatial prestige and control gives impetus to such interactional settings where such negotiations take place.

As noted, inmate competition for authority positions which were considered to be secure emerges concomitant with a breakdown in the informal hierarchy. This breakdown appears to be precipitated by the factors mentioned above. Further, each instance of restructuring of formal control results in efforts by groups of inmates to redefine, collectively, their respective positions in the social structure (Denzin, 1968). The formal system of spatial allocation and control becomes problematic. The inmate social system as maintained through such rewards is necessarily affected by a restructuring. The formal authority is nul-

lified in these situations where specialized inmate power groups seek to manifest that power in terms of the prerogative to define spatial access and control. Following such a power default on the part of the total institution resulting in power manifestations by inmates, stability can only be understood after the inmate power groups and the administration acquiesce to the new power structure.

THE MODEL

The administration and their words are at odds in the ideal-type legal structure defined at the formal rational level. However, at the operational rational level the administration and key inmates must co-operate in an intense manner to maintain a stable system. Encompassed within the practical rational level is the ongoing interactions among and between these two groups. It is at this level where the power default can occur through the disruption of interaction channels. The model shown in Figure 1 indicates that order can only be perpetuated through the efforts of inmate population representatives. This thesis has been presented by Mattick (1979) and Wilds (1973). Carrying the model to the logical conclusion of prison riots, the manifestation of inmate power groups, we note that extraneous political influences demand changes in formal administrative policy. As discussed such changes precipitate violent power struggles within the institution. Negotiated aspects of access to spa-

tial areas become problematic as guards and inmates must re-establish interaction patterns and re-negotiate spatial access. Violence often erupts at this stage due to the severely limited spatial areas available. The competition for such areas is fierce perhaps because the stakes are so small.

A power default occurs as the limited reward system becomes problematic. Prior to any power default, the administration maintains power through a network of informal agreements with key inmate groups and representatives which specifically delineated spatial access and control. As spatial access becomes ambiguous, a power struggle is necessarily produced. This struggle need not be between the administration and the inmates. It may be manifested between those inmates who have been denied spatial access and spatial control and those currently ensconced in those positions. Goffman's (1961) treatment of total institutions suggests that status and a sense of self are difficult to maintain. Any attempt by the administration to redefine any status within the inmate sub-structure is a challenge to the social structure but also to each inmate's precarious concept of self.

CONCLUSION

We have sought to present spatial and territorial relations as a key element in collective riot behavior. The conclusion appears viable considering the network of formal and informal sub-structures and interaction characteristic of total institutions. It is in these institutions that the research of Calhoun (1962) seems particularly applicable. The analysis of spatial structuring and re-structuring would prove to be an enlightening area of investigation for institutional research.

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