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# Escape from Death Row: A Study of “Tripping” as an Individual Adjustment Strategy Among Death Row Prisoners

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## Escape from Death Row: A Study of “Tripping” as an Individual Adjustment Strategy Among Death Row Prisoners

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The literature on stress and coping in American prisons tends to focus on the social dimensions of prison life. This literature describes a prison culture that shapes prison adjustment; such a culture entails norms, roles, and groups (including gangs) that dictate norms of adjustment. The literature also suggests that prisoners have to find a way to get along in the more public areas of the prison (such as the prison yard or mess hall) or retreat to smaller worlds within the prison while carving out “niches” that allow them to adjust in ways they find more familiar—in their jobs, educational or vocational classes, or even in a regular regimen of television in the cell.<sup>1</sup> While there is much of value in this literature, recent trends in correctional management have produced more sharply subscribed prison environments that greatly reduce social activity among prisoners and presumably reduce the salience of cultural forces in the prison world.

Most modern prisons are explicitly organized to limit social interaction. Prison housing units are divided into small, self-contained podular units simply called “pods.” Within these pods are small dayrooms, which serve as recreational areas for the prisoners who spend their time alone or in small groups, ranging in size from two to four or more inmates.<sup>2</sup> Outdoor recreation in these miniature worlds may be restricted to cells that offer fresh air only through a slot in the wall; alternatively, the prisoners may recreate in wire cages that line the outside of podular living areas, like dog runs appended to a kennel. Though regimes vary, prisoners typically spend a considerable amount of time in their cells—somewhere in the

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1. See generally JOHN IRWIN, *THE FELON* (1970); YVONNE JEWKES, *CAPTIVE AUDIENCE: MEDIA, MASCULINITY AND POWER IN PRISONS* (2002); ROBERT JOHNSON, *HARD TIME: UNDERSTANDING AND REFORMING THE PRISON* (3d ed. 2002); GRESHAM M. SYKES, *THE SOCIETY OF CAPTIVES: A STUDY OF A MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON* (1958); HANS TOCH, *LIVING IN PRISON: THE ECOLOGY OF SURVIVAL* (Am. Psychological Ass’n rev. ed. 1992) (1977).

2. JOCELYN M. POLLOCK, *PRISONS: TODAY AND TOMORROW* 302 (2005).

neighborhood of twenty hours a day in many prisons and up to twenty-three hours a day in restricted housing units.<sup>3</sup>

A prisoner today may spend his entire term in Pod B, to give a hypothetical, and rarely have contact with others in different pods. In some prisons, a tour of the facility leaves the impression that the institution is empty—libraries have only a few inmates in them, classrooms are often entirely empty, as are the hallways in what used to be treatment areas. The large yards are closed-off or partitioned into a warren of smaller recreation areas (sometimes these areas are literally cages).<sup>4</sup> The Big House, once a sprawling enterprise sometimes featuring yards that allowed thousands of inmates to mingle together and tiers that ran on for the length of a football field, has been balkanized into a series of semi-independent correctional living environments, a kind of barren congeries of low-rent convict condominiums.

Nowhere is the balkanization of modern prisons more apparent than in the SHUs (special housing units, sometimes called restricted housing units) that can be found in every prison system. Broadly defined, SHUs include punitive and administrative segregation, protection units, mental health units, supermax prison units, and, of course, death rows.<sup>5</sup> In these constrained settings, officials achieve near-total control of the body of the prisoner. A prisoner cannot physically resist high-security special housing units like death row; these and other SHU settings are obdurate and formidable. Surveillance can be virtually constant, with cameras everywhere. Critical incidents are recorded and analyzed in detail. A panoply of physical hardware is routinely used to subdue inmates—from handcuffs to leg irons to belly or waist chains.<sup>6</sup> The body of the prisoner in an SHU is fully captured—rendered docile in much the way Foucault envisioned in his classic work, *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>7</sup> Coping requires the manipulation of resources to solve problems; prisoners in these environments have little in the physical or social environment with which to work to achieve adjustment other than their own personalities. Each individual must, essentially alone, carve out a life worth living from the barren confines of the high-security cell.

Against this backdrop, this article discusses the dynamics of adjustment on death row—a special housing unit generally marked by high lev-

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3. Craig Haney, *Mental Health Issues in Long-term Solitary and "Supermax" Confinement*, 49 *CRIME & DELINQUENCY* 124, 126 (2003).

4. *Id.*

5. CHASE RIVELAND, NAT'L INST. OF CORR., *SUPERMAX PRISONS: OVERVIEW & GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS* 5–6 (1999).

6. Haney, *supra* note 3.

7. See MICHAEL FOUCAULT, *DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH: THE BIRTH OF THE PRISON* 138 (Alan Sheridan trans., Pantheon Books 1977) (1975).

els of security and social isolation. Much has been written about the stresses of living in such high-security environments, and whether human beings can survive intact,<sup>8</sup> but next to nothing has been written about specific ways specific persons cope with the stresses of death row confinement. To be sure, prior research reveals, sometimes in moving detail, the enormous pressures under which condemned prisoners live, particularly during the final hours in the death house.<sup>9</sup> These studies provide what amount to portraits of prisoners in decline but do not examine the active coping process by which prisoners attempt, with varying degrees of success, to resist the pressures of their confinement. From the perspective of coping, prior research shows outcomes, not processes. Our focus here is on how condemned prisoners attempt to cope with the isolation and pressures that mark death row confinement. In particular, we examine how prisoners find and use resources to help them get by in the limited and limiting world of death row.

## II. METHOD

This exploratory study draws on a longitudinal study conducted by McGunigall-Smith, which began in 1997 at Utah State Prison and continued on for five years.<sup>10</sup> Some research is still underway, but the main study has been completed.

Prisoner respondents were drawn from a death row population that, in 1997, comprised eleven men.<sup>11</sup> Each man was asked to take part in the study; four refused. As it happens, the men who refused to participate in the research interviews never gave interviews to anyone, under any conditions, for any purpose. These men, it would seem, wanted simply to do their own time with as little disruption as possible. Interviews with the seven willing subjects continued through 2002.<sup>12</sup> By this time, the seven interviewees had spent between three and seventeen years on death row, and their ages ranged from twenty-nine to forty-two. Four were Caucasian, two were Hispanic, and one was Native American. They were interviewed, on average, thirteen times. Two of the prisoners who refused to

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8. See ROBERT JOHNSON, *DEATH WORK: A STUDY OF THE MODERN EXECUTION PROCESS 195-96* (Wadsworth Publishing 2d ed. 1997) (1990).

9. See generally ROBERT JOHNSON, *CONDEMNED TO DIE: LIFE UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH* (1981); JOHNSON, *supra* note 8; HELEN PREJEAN, *DEAD MAN WALKING: AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UNITED STATES* (1994).

10. See generally Sandy McGunigall-Smith, *Men of a Thousand Days: Death-sentenced Inmates at Utah State Prison* (2005) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wales) (on file with author).

11. See *id.* ch. Methods.

12. See *id.*

speak with McGunigall-Smith were Caucasian, the other two were African American.

All respondents were privately interviewed on a one-to-one basis. The early interviews followed a schedule that served as a general guide or springboard for discussion of issues as they emerged. Later interviews took the form of updates to earlier interviews. To make sure respondents told their own stories in their own words, all interviews (in excess of two hundred in total) were transcribed and returned to respondents for validation. In addition, many hours were spent observing the experiences of prisoners and staff.

### III. FINDINGS

#### A. "Tripping" as a Coping Technique

How do condemned Utahan prisoners cope with the pressures of death row confinement and impending execution? After extensive interviewing, it became apparent that condemned prisoners on Utah's death row did not see themselves as agents in a prison culture, nor did they see themselves as playing any of a range of convict or inmate roles. Mostly, they saw themselves as individuals trying to deal with time. Their lives unfolded, for the most part, in the cell, which on death row is essentially an isolation cell. Some took up reading or writing, with varying degrees of success, or tried to lose themselves in radio or television programs, again with varying degrees of success (at least in part because television was a privilege that could be easily lost).<sup>13</sup>

All of the condemned prisoners, at one point or another and often regularly, turned to what they called "tripping." That is, they coped with long hours of cell time by active imaginings that allowed them to take unauthorized "trips" out of the prison and into the free world as they remembered or imagined it. They used their minds to escape from death row and from the awful prospect of death by execution. We will examine the contours of tripping as an adjustment mode and consider the implications of these findings for our understanding of adjustment on death row and in other special housing units.

In Utah, as in many states, death row is one of many special housing units located within a supermax facility. Struck by the sheer extremity of the housing conditions coupled with the likelihood that this would be the way they lived until they were put to death, one of the first questions

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13. *Id.* at 119.

McGunigall-Smith asked of death-sentenced inmates was: "How do you cope?" Her first impression of the environment and its inhabitants provided little evidence of the men coping by slotting into describable roles.<sup>14</sup> This was hardly surprising, since supermax provides extremely limited opportunities for social interaction and cohesion, but it did beg the question: if condemned prisoners do not cope like most prisoners, how do they cope? Answers to this question opened up a rich vein of information, the gist of which was that each man did his own time largely in his own mind, with little or no support or interference from other inmates or staff.

One immediate social fact was that other prisoners on the row could not easily speak with one another. As one prisoner observed, "I could talk to the others in the unit if I screamed at the top of my voice."<sup>15</sup> Screaming proved highly unsatisfactory, and as a general rule prisoners did not pursue this line of adjustment. With the exception of occasional outbursts of frustrated screaming, prisoners had "no interaction,"<sup>16</sup> to quote one man, "and nothing to occupy our time."<sup>17</sup> "There is no bonding whatsoever,"<sup>18</sup> said another prisoner, "compounded by nothing whatsoever in our cells."<sup>19</sup> A few others mentioned the radio, reading, and television, describing each as an unsatisfying diversion that offered a limited respite from monotonous confinement. The consensus was that these activities were not ways of coping so much as they were ways to pass time. Passing time, however, is not the same as coping. Passing time is merely a way of distancing oneself from the profound boredom that is the central fact of life on death row. Coping means engaging the conditions of one's confinement and finding a way to get through each day without losing one's dignity or one's mind.

When asked about coping rather than merely passing time, one prisoner casually mentioned "tripping," without explanation.<sup>20</sup> At first, McGunigall-Smith thought this prisoner had somehow managed to acquire mind altering substances or that he was, belying his youthful appearance, a refugee from the sixties. But the prisoner quickly went on to explain precisely what he meant. He tripped, he said, by "walking up and down my cell for hours—anything between two and four hours."<sup>21</sup> McGunigall-Smith replied that she thought this activity would probably help pass time

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14. See generally ERVING GOFFMAN, *ASYLUMS: ESSAYS ON THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF MENTAL PATIENTS AND OTHER INMATES* (1961).

15. McGunigall-Smith, *supra* note 10, at 119.

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.*

21. *Id.*

as well as provide a form of exercise. He explained that there was more to it than physical release:

I would go nuts if I didn't do this because it's like . . . when I do this my mind is in other places. For example I go to the mountains, lakes, go hunting—mainly places I have been to before. When I do this, I am not in prison.<sup>22</sup>

Curious about this new phenomenon, McGunigall-Smith decided to probe further. On the next round of interviews she asked all respondents if they tripped. They did—each and every one of them<sup>23</sup> (though one inmate called it visualizing, not tripping).<sup>24</sup> Said one prisoner, “I walk up and down my cell a lot day dreaming . . . I do this mostly at night when it is quiet . . . the slightest noise can bring me back. I trip on places I remember and add to it with my imagination.”<sup>25</sup>

Tripping is an inherently solitary activity but death row prisoners compared notes on this adjustment strategy during their limited time out of the cell. As one man put it:

[E]ach inmate has his own way of doing it and the amount of time varies. I do it at night when there is less noise, although I do it in the daytime sometimes. It is important just to get away. You can't ever get away from the pressure—the pressure is still there when you get back. Perhaps pressure is the wrong word—monotony might be better.<sup>26</sup>

It became evident that this was a learned technique. As one prisoner explained, “I was in prison for about two or three years before I realized this could be done—throwing your mind somewhere else. I saw someone pacing and I told them it must be boring—he said it was better than doing nothing so I tried it.”<sup>27</sup> Two other inmates told of the difficulty acquiring this learned technique. Said one prisoner:

It took me five or six years to learn how to do this; . . . it is about deliberate thoughts and channeled thoughts. Power is lost if you let your mind wander. I trip for anything between one and four hours. It is necessary for me to do this during the day.<sup>28</sup>

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22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* at 256.

24. *Id.* at 120.

25. *Id.*

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

28. *Id.*

These points were seconded by another inmate who observed: “You have to learn how to do this. It took me a couple of years.”<sup>29</sup>

Once the technique is mastered the effects are profound. The prisoner plans and prepares for his time out of prison. He chooses which friends he will be with on his trip, what type of beer he will drink, what car he will drive, and where he will go. One man made regular visits to his dad at a cabin, where they would share a beer.<sup>30</sup> Another man went on hunting trips so vividly recounted that the authenticity of experience is confirmed in the telling:

I can decide where I’m going to go. Today I wanted to go hunting in the mountains for trophy bulls in a trophy area. It probably sounds weird because it’s not really happening. I don’t like to make things perfect. Today, for instance, the truck broke. We were looking for a six-point [elk] or better and we ended up shooting a four-point. By the time we got it caped . . . cut around eyes and mouth . . . it had taken so long the bad weather had started to come in. When we got the elk to the truck we had to quarter mount it. The bad weather started and the truck got stuck in a small overflow creek . . . probably caused by a beaver dam. Instead of getting the pulley out we snapped a cable and we were there for a while. It ended there. If I’m interrupted I come back. Sometimes I don’t go back because by that time I might be in a different mood—I just leave the truck stuck in the mud. The truck was a ‘78 Ford, three quarter ton, and baby blue. I drove. We met three other friends when we got there—they went in a separate vehicle. I didn’t know two of them. I just put faces on the ones I don’t know. I go to places I have been before, or haven’t been—like the elk hunt. The gun and truck and two of the guys were familiar. The other truck and two of the guys and their equipment were just done in my mind. How intense is the tripping? I can smell smells in my mind. I can smell what it should be like—just like a campfire or coffee spilling over in the fire. The truck gets scratched, coffee gets spilt—it’s not perfect. Sometimes I come home empty-handed.<sup>31</sup>

This level of detailed imagining is most readily achieved when the prisoner faces uninterrupted solitary time. The prisoner who dropped in at the cabin for beers with his dad observed: “I didn’t do this in [general

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29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.* at 198.



prison] population.”<sup>32</sup> He explained that the distractions of daily prison life can be upsetting and this breaks his concentration. “It’s hard to trip when I’m angry,”<sup>33</sup> he continued, and he was often angry in regular population. But he can trip on death row, and it is “tripping [that] keeps me sane and keeps me happy.”<sup>34</sup> Each of the prisoners indicated that he did not trip in regular general population, where social and other distractions abound. Tripping was used and perfected while in the lockdown regime of death row or other special housing units within the prison.

Tripping appeared to be an extremely important coping mechanism that offered a way of exercising autonomy in an otherwise controlling environment. “As for tripping,” said one prisoner, “you wouldn’t survive for long if you stayed here all the time.”<sup>35</sup> The simple fact that the respondent could say “stayed here all the time” without irony indicates how profoundly effective tripping can be as an escape from prison life.

#### B. *Learning and Dissemination*

Cultivated in isolation, tripping can become a learned feature of adjustment in other, more social, settings. No prisoners were able to trip in the general prison population,<sup>36</sup> perhaps because the regular prison population conditions in the Utah system offer a wide and varying range of interactions, unlike those found in modern podular prison environments or, of course, on death row. Nevertheless, at one point in the research, conditions on Utah’s death row were liberalized and tripping persisted. Prisoners were given more time out of their cells and more access to recreation facilities. The men continued to trip, even though the conditions were, in their own estimation, less propitious. They had acquired a coping tool and had become adept at using it across a range of situations.

One prisoner, for example, had strong support from his family and regular visits; with the advent of more privileges on death row he had more ready access to his family and, moreover, developed a vigorous exercise regime. Nevertheless, he continued to trip because tripping was a valuable adjunct to his other ways of coping:

Tripping helps my running—the hour just flies by. An hour in the section is not just physically tiring—I get bummed out running on concrete all the time. It’s depressing. If I can trip while I’m doing

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32. *Id.* at 120.

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.*

35. *Id.*

36. *Id.* at 197.

it, it makes it so much easier. I have to be in a pretty good mood, but that might change in a year or two. I couldn't trip while running at one time, so maybe in a couple of years I'll be able to trip while I'm in a bad mood. Sometimes it's mentally exhausting and it's good to be able to lay [sic] down and sleep. I worry about losing the ability to do this. If I didn't trip they'd get to me.<sup>37</sup>

The statement "they'd get to me" refers both to the pressures of a now more social death row environment and, broadly speaking, the pressures of living under a death sentence.

More social freedoms on Utah's death row did not reduce tripping, it would seem, and may have facilitated tripping now that it was an established practice. Inmates talked of others showing consideration to them so that they could find the peace necessary to trip:

Sometimes I have a hard time because there are a lot of distractions in my head. I try to do it at night—after ten o'clock when it's quiet. We have a lot of respect for each other's space at this time of night—we all do our own thing. I escape from here.<sup>38</sup>

Now that there was more communication on the row, one of the results was the more efficient dissemination of this coping practice. A newcomer to death row—a newcomer to prison as well—reports being schooled in tripping:

One of the guys was trying to teach me to put my mind somewhere else . . . I pace at night. Paul told me that. He said when it's quiet to walk back and forth. I did it the first night and I thought what the heck am I doing? I'm walking and not getting anywhere. Where am I going? I sat down. The next night I caught myself doing it—walking back and forth. Last night I told myself this is stupid. But, anything to take my mind off this place.<sup>39</sup>

The increased time out of the cell in the company of others did not, as would have been expected, reduce the use of tripping as a coping technique. There was one notable exception, however, and that was when one prisoner was given permission to purchase a typewriter to assist in his in-cell studies. Consequently, he began to write more and trip less. Eventually he stopped tripping entirely, evidently because he had acquired a meaningful and engaging activity that allowed another form of escape from death row.

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37. *Id.* at 198.

38. *Id.* at 199.

39. *Id.*

## IV. DISCUSSION

Over a decade ago, James Bonta and Paul Gendreau observed that we know “little about the psychological impact of a system that houses over a million individuals.”<sup>40</sup> The number of prisoners has grown to over two million, but Bonta and Gendreau’s observation remains essentially correct. Over that decade, there was a remarkable growth in the use of supermax and other special housing facilities that expose individuals to what is essentially solitary confinement. A recent review of research on death row prisoners, many of whom spend inordinate amounts of time in isolation, shows that we have not moved much closer to an understanding of “the pattern of adjustment to prison” for these prisoners or, indeed, for other prisoners exposed to regimes of solitary confinement.<sup>41</sup>

We simply do not know how death row prisoners and other special housing unit prisoners make it through each day. This is despite the fact that the psychological trauma brought about by the effects of supermax housing have been acknowledged and well documented.<sup>42</sup> Craig Haney calls for research that goes beyond that which relies on quantitative indices and which is based on measurable pain (such as depression, suicidal tendencies, etc.). Haney points out that because prisoners have taken steps to adapt to a miserable existence, this does not mean that prison life is not painful.<sup>43</sup> What is needed is more qualitative research aimed at uncovering “extraordinary adaptations.”<sup>44</sup> It is, therefore, hardly surprising that there is no mention in the prison literature of tripping (an “extraordinary adaptation”) as a coping technique.

In extreme confinement, one would expect to see the use of meditation and other forms of relaxation, but tripping appears to be more than this. Tripping is not simply a case of daydreaming or of one’s thoughts turning to home. And although tripping involves an explicitly meditative stage—and is, like meditation, learned and perfected over time—the focus is not on escape through solitary oblivion but on the creation of a rich, interactive mental world. Tripping is an elaborate creation of an alternative existence

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40. James Bonta & Paul Gendreau, *Reexamining the Cruel and Unusual Punishment of Prison Life*, in *LONG TERM IMPRISONMENT: POLICY, SCIENCE, AND CORRECTIONAL PRACTICE* 75, 87 (Timothy J. Flanagan ed. 1995).

41. See Mark D. Cunningham & Mark P. Vigen, *Death Row Inmate Characteristics, Adjustment, and Confinement: A Critical Review of the Literature*, 20 *BEHAV. SCI. & L.* 191, 191 (2002) (noting that incidence of schizophrenia on death row is at least five percent and perhaps higher).

42. Haney, *supra* note 3, at 124.

43. *Id.* at 138.

44. See generally Craig Haney, *Psychology and the Limits to Prison Pain: Confronting the Coming Crisis in Eighth Amendment Law*, 3 *PSYCHOL. PUB. POL’Y & L.* 499 (1997), available at [http://www.patrickcrusade.org/Psychology\\_Prison\\_Pain.html](http://www.patrickcrusade.org/Psychology_Prison_Pain.html).

that allows one, at least for a time, to effect an escape from confinement that is undertaken deliberately on one's own terms. Tripping is also a learned technique that has to be mastered and indeed is only perfected after years of practice. This would suggest that the benefits of tripping are well worth the effort in the eyes of inmates, many of whom pass their learning along to others when the opportunity presents itself.

Tripping may be explained in a curiously Foucauldian sense in that death row and other SHUs are the epitome of the panoptic gaze that lay at the heart of the disciplinary society envisioned by Foucault.<sup>45</sup> As we have noted, prisoners' movements in the typical modern SHU are closely monitored; staff knows at all times that the right body is in the right place—SHUs are designed for total control, and as a matter of course they produce the docile bodies that Foucault envisioned.<sup>46</sup> However, prisoners do not totally relinquish autonomy; they do not become zombies. They struggle to resist losing identity and autonomy. Although Foucault has been criticized for not explaining resistance, our interpretation of his writings leads us to disagree. Had he studied more closely the nature of resistance, as David Garland suggests, Foucault

might have been led to describe the operation of power upon individuals as being less of an "automatic" process and more a matter of micro-political conflict in which the individual subject may draw upon alternative sources of power and subjectivity to resist that imposed by the institution.<sup>47</sup>

Under the supermax regime in Utah, there is little that death row inmates can purposefully resist. Their world is circumscribed by concrete and steel, remote-controlled sliding doors, ever-present cuffs and shackles, and the inexorable ticking of the clock toward the day of execution. Bodily resistance, in other words, has been "organized out" of the death row environment—made a virtual impossibility.<sup>48</sup> About the only physical form of resistance available to these prisoners is the use of their bodily waste as a weapon of one sort or another. This behavior is seen in some solitary units involving men who seem quite mentally ill,<sup>49</sup> but it did not emerge in this study. What we do see, however, is that Foucault's docile

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45. FOUCAULT, *supra* note 7, at 200.

46. *Id.*

47. DAVID GARLAND, *PUNISHMENT AND MODERN SOCIETY: A STUDY IN SOCIAL THEORY* 173 (1990).

48. DAVINA COOPER, *POWER IN STRUGGLE: FEMINISM, SEXUALITY AND THE STATE* 11 (1995).

49. LORNA A. RHODES, *TOTAL CONFINEMENT: MADNESS AND REASON IN THE MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON* 44 (2004).

bodies need not have docile minds. Prisoners use their minds to escape from death row at will and for extended times of their own choosing.

Tripping may be a form of mature coping,<sup>50</sup> though perhaps an unusual example since the notion of mature coping is normally applied to social adjustment. Mature coping entails “dealing with life’s problems like a responsive and responsible human being, one who seeks autonomy without violating the rights of others, security without resort to deception or violence, and relatedness to others as the finest and fullest expression of human identity.”<sup>51</sup> Prisoners who trip are addressing the problems of their daily adjustment in a direct way by using a key resource legitimately available to them: their minds. Tripping affords the prisoners the temporary but potent experience of autonomy. The technique is devoid of deception or violence. And though trips occur (literally) in isolation, they entail a heavy element of congenial socialization with loved ones and others.

That is, trips take the prisoner to the social world he has left behind and allow him to relive happy moments from the past—moments free of violence or other dysfunctional elements of their prior lives. The prisoners do not trip about their crimes or about times they abused others or were abused by others. One might think of these trips as rehearsals for constructive living, even if the prisoners never get the chance to return to the free world. This constructive social element of tripping is suggested in the fact that prisoners focused on constructive experiences from the past, happily shared details about this coping technique with others, and, furthermore, behaved in ways that showed respect for the needs of others who wished to cope in this way.

Death row and other SHU prisoners live with an extreme version of the pains of confinement, and perhaps it is not surprising that their adjustments do not follow the patterns established by regular inmates in the course of adjustment to normal prison life. That said, it must be stressed that “normal prison life” is becoming more restricted and controlled as compared to days past, when much of the literature on the prisoner subculture was developed. It may be that as prisoners spend more time in small, controlled prison settings, their ways of adjustment may come to resemble those of death row and other SHU prisoners. Prisoners of modern popular prison units may have something to learn from death row prisoners, who find life

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50. Mature coping is a heuristic concept first enunciated by Robert Johnson in a research paper, *Mature Coping and Personal Reform*, delivered at the 1983 annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology. The concept was published in the first edition of *Hard Time* and refined in subsequent editions of that book. JOHNSON, *supra* note 1, at 83. Mature coping, in turn, is an outgrowth of the notion of “coping competence” as developed by Hans Toch in the first edition of *Men in Crisis*. HANS TOCH, *MEN IN CRISIS: HUMAN BREAKDOWNS IN PRISON* 302 (1975).

51. JOHNSON, *supra* note 1, at 83.

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and even a degree of liberty in a prison regime seemingly dedicated to the death of the spirit as well as the body.