

# IMPRISONED PRIDE:

how queer and trans prisoners get written  
out of mainstream pride movements



august 1, 2008

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This booklet is a transcription of a panel organized by the Prisoner Correspondence Project held in Montreal on Friday, August 1, 2008. The opening remarks and discussion were facilitated by Josh and Liam, two members of the project's collective



It was organized as part of a festival entitled 'Pervers/cité: The Underside of Pride,' ten days of events which attempted to reintroduce the politics into Pride, to actively engage people in a discussion about issues in our communities.



Every effort was made to reprint the submissions as faithfully as possible without editing. Several of the submissions were received too late to be part of the panel, however have been included in this booklet, marked with a \*.



For more information on the Prisoner Correspondence Project, or to learn how to get involved, contact **queertrans.prisonersolidarity@gmail.com** or

Prisoner Correspondence Project  
c/o QPIRG-Concordia  
1455 de Maisonneuve O.  
Montreal, Quebec  
H3G 1M8  
Canada

## Welcome

“Good evening, and welcome to ‘Imprisoned Pride: how queer and trans prisoners get written out of mainstream pride movements.’ Thanks for coming, before we get into it, we’re going to start off with one of the submissions we received for this panel by someone who is currently in prison:”



## Denzial Tittle

I wish that I could be with you this year, or next year, or even the year after that. I am a recent recipient of the generosity and kindness of the Prisoner Correspondence Project. I haven't yet made contact with my penpal, but am looking forward to it.

I'm a 52 year-old bisexual male in a minimum security federal prison in Texarhana, Texas in the USA. I'm out to

**“We - all of us, LGBTQ and straight people in prison - are more than what we did that resulted in us being in prison...”**

two of my friends (of the one's I still have) as being bisexual. I'm definitely not out here in this prison. I'm not ashamed of being bisexual. I look forward to leading an open life as a bi man when I become a free man but here? No - I'm already the recipient

of choice names and curses and threats because of my crime ... I don't need the added hassle.

There are a few - very few openly gay men here. They are tolerated rather than accepted. LGBTQ Pride doesn't exist in this prison - it is a very homophobic place. The solidarity that I could hope might increase in visibility is the support of the LGBTQ community in the free world for / of LGBTQ prisoners. It gets to be a pretty lonely place here sometimes - it would be great if every LGBTQ prisoner who desired it could have someone to communicate with on the outside. We - all of us, LGBTQ and straight people in prison - are more than what we did that resulted in us being in prison. We are all children of God - of the spirit of life - and we all should be treated with compassion and the possibility of forgiveness. At least thats what I think.

So have fun - party it up at your Pride celebration - and remember us folk that can't be there with you.

## Some Introductory Notes

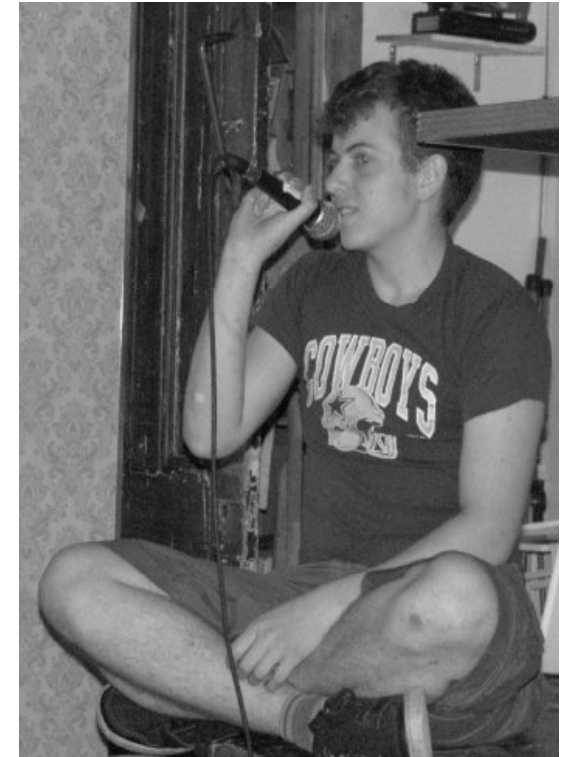
“Welcome and thanks again for coming. Before we get started, we just wanted to talk a little bit about how this panel came to be, about how it ended up looking quite a bit different from how we initially intended it to. We’re going to be taking photos, the photos are both going to be used for the Pervers/cité website. They’re also going to be sent to the incarcerated contributors to this panel once it’s over. Just to give you a sense of what the photos are going to be used for.”

“This panel’s going to be a good deal shorter than initially intended. We’re going to provide some context both for the project and for the panel before getting into all of the submitted audio statements that will be played over the speakers which will be about twenty minutes or half an hour. Then we’re going to jump into a more generalized discussion. We are both participants in the Prisoner Correspondence Project, which we will explain a little bit in a second, but we’re going to lead into a bit of a conversation about that as both participants and as penpals.”

“This panel didn’t work out as we had initially envisioned for a couple of reasons. Initially we were hoping to coordinate live phone feeds from people who are currently in prison so that they would be able to respond to questions. Not having pre-recorded statements would allow there to be a certain amount of dialogue between the audience and the panelists themselves, but for a range of kind of logistical and prison policy reasons that wasn’t going to be possible in time for this panel. There has also been a series of cancelled panelists and last minute obstacles that came up: initially PASAN (the Prisoner HIV/AIDS Support Action Network), which is a Toronto-based organization that works around issues of transmission, specifically around HIV and HepC (although their work is quite a bit broader than that as well)

was going to be here as one of our key panelists. This would have been in addition to the recorded audio statements. Though that wasn’t possible for tonight, it will definitely be an upcoming event sometime this fall. So this event is going to be a bit shorter than initially planned and the focus really will be more on the recorded audio statements as opposed to any live panelists. That is in keeping with our intention in holding this event, and in foregrounding the incarcerated participants in the Prisoner Correspondence Project and in the penpal program.”

“The Prisoner Correspondence Project started a little over a year ago, and the description we use when promoting it is “it coordinates a direct letter-writing program for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transexual, transgender, gender-variant, two-spirit, intersex, and queer inmates in Canada, linking these communities with people who identify similarly who are outside of prison.” So it coordinates a pen-pal program between queer and trans prisoners inside prison with those outside or formerly-incarcerated. We also coordinate a resource library of harm-reduction practices including safer sex, safer drug use, clean needle care, safer tattooing, safer cutting, HIV and HepC prevention, h o m o p h o b i a and transphobia resources and those sortsofthingsaswell. The project focuses on letter-writing for friendship and support rather than romantic



inclinations. We're always looking for more people to become penpals, but we'll be discussing how to go about that towards the end of the panel."

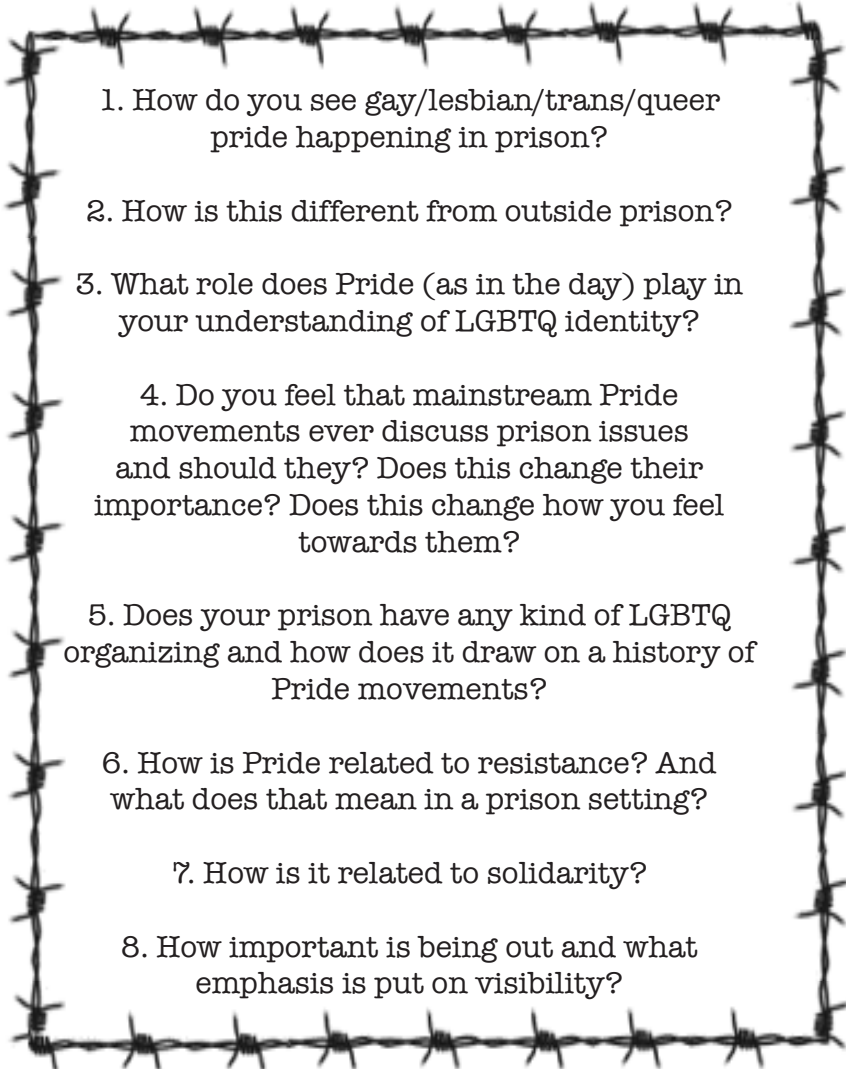
"So there were a number of motivating reasons why the Project decided to put this panel on. For a lot of us it came out of a personal correspondence with our penpals over the course of the past year and a bit. The major motivation was to organize the event and make sure that that event foregrounded the voices of the folks who are on the inside who can't be here. The second major reason, or major intention in putting this on was to begin a process of addressing why prisoners and inmates have disappeared from the landscape of gay organizing in Canada and across North America and Pride movements more generally. Especially at a time when prison infrastructures are growing in power and in scope and in size but becoming more targeted and more directed at the same time. So I guess the other, or kind of another major intention in holding this event as well was to confront the invisibility of prisons as they exist in Canada and to do that at the time of Pride when Pride festivities



are happening in this city and in a lot of cities across North America, at a time of year when visibility, sexual minority visibility, but specifically gay visibility figures central. We figured it was a necessary and appropriate time to confront the simultaneous invisibility of queer prisoners and focus on a process of remembering that people continue to exist and struggle behind bars but understanding that that process of remembering is also just the first step. So that's a bit of a background in terms of our intentions in putting together this event."

"We're going to get into a few of the details of the audio that we're going to hear over the speakers. So these are statements that were (one of them you'll see was recorded over the phone), the majority of them were written and submitted by mail. Once they were submitted, they were then spoken and recorded by penpals and participants in the project who are on the outside. So they're all going to be audio statements, but only one of the ones you'll be hearing will be the direct voice of someone who is currently behind bars. They were all recorded over the course of July, and we also have transcribed them here anticipating that folks would either like to follow along, and because the sound quality is not always completely audible. We're going to start playing them in just a second. The first one in that booklet was what you heard just at the beginning."

"So the general overriding question that we asked folks to respond to in the callout was "How do you relate to a concept of Pride?" and then below that was a series of questions to prompt ideas and further discussion:

- 
1. How do you see gay/lesbian/trans/queer pride happening in prison?
  2. How is this different from outside prison?
  3. What role does Pride (as in the day) play in your understanding of LGBTQ identity?
  4. Do you feel that mainstream Pride movements ever discuss prison issues and should they? Does this change their importance? Does this change how you feel towards them?
  5. Does your prison have any kind of LGBTQ organizing and how does it draw on a history of Pride movements?
  6. How is Pride related to resistance? And what does that mean in a prison setting?
  7. How is it related to solidarity?
  8. How important is being out and what emphasis is put on visibility?

“That’s the general structure or framework for the questions that all of these submissions we’ll be hearing are responding to.”

## Jonathan Earl

How do I relate to a concept of pride:

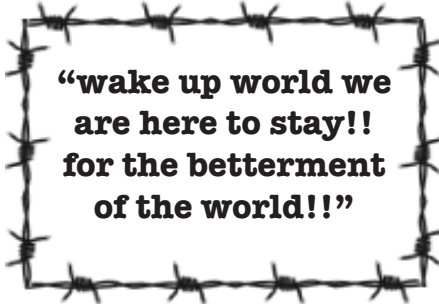
Pride is the sence of Self esteem, and Self importance, Satisfaction, and a feeling of well being. Who are you? What do you want to be as an individual. To express oneself to your highest acheivments in your life - Pride. Take it, use it to your uttermost adavantage. Being your self, true, and taking pride in your sexuality.

I my self struggle with my sexuality and are constantly being harrassed in the Pennsylvania Dept. of Corrections. We have no unity in here. They single you out. Even going as far as putting you in a single cell because of being you. Homosexuals in prison can be very scary, they are always verbally abusing you, picking on you.

This is why we need more of this solidarity in our lives. We should have our own prison, our own world. Where there is no more pain, hurt, or hatred, only love, peace, and joy. We need to stand proud and doing that maybe the only thing we need, besides each other...

## Mark Cates

gays are discriminated on the streets only if they don't live in a gay community! and then if they don't live in a gay community, than homosexuality is kept in the closet on the don't ask don't tell livelyhood!! but i was only on the outside world as a gay person four only four years!! than i came to prison at eighteen years old and have been in prison for 28 years! now in prison on the mainline or the general population it is considered a weakness and the gay person has to get off the mainline or the general population!! thats number one!! number two is that it goes against the Christian Religion of the Muslim Religion of just any Jewish Founded Religion Who Started the concept of one god!! and have brainwashed the world and even the prions threw out the worlds prison system!



now gay pride is something that usually a gay person gets as they get old in life. like when they get thirty years old 30 but some gays get gay pride at younger ages!! gay pride is the pride of UNIVERSALISM that we are all one energy life that has a freedom to do anything that we are all one energy life that has a freedom to do anything that we wish just so long as it doesn't take away the free will of an other energy life that is against that persons free will!! because when we di we all go to one UNIVERSIL ENERGY!! now if that ENERGY is NEGETIVE and that you do NEGETIVE things in life and do things that are wrong (against a persons free will and free ENERGY) that your ENERGY life force will change to dark matter!! but if you are good in this life you will change into a Bright

ENERGY light because you as an individual did not do anything against a persons free will!! or free ENERGY!! this is the common sense of Right and Wrong that the Human Race is Born with at Birth and dose not have to be taught and at a certain age in growing up they know this automatticly!!

now the gay movement threw out the world has awaken the Human mind to EVOLVE threw the process of evolution over bodys HAVE EVOLVED faster than ower minds and the gay pride concept and movement has allow the human BRAIN to EVOLVE and grow smarter because if we hide in the closets in life and under the don't ask don't tell policy we put ower BRAINS ASLEEP and live in a half conscience state of mind and ower brains can not advance to the Human Race that we were ment to be!! and by having gay pride we have pride in the love for ourselfs first and than we put are feet forward to help the world and reach true brotherhood for all!! wake up world we are here to stay!! for the betterment of the world!!

## Patrice Daniels

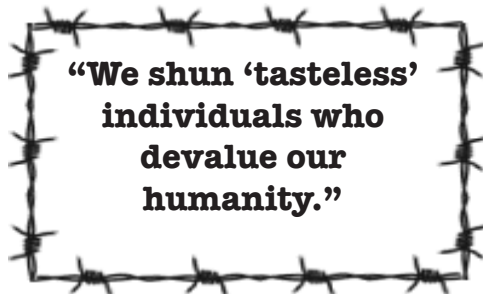
'Pride' conceptually is foreign to most of the inmate population. The bulk of us in prison are closeted individuals who have rarely, if ever, been openly gay (or LBTQ). The entire prison culture is contrary to one assuming an assertive role when dealing with the topic. Having said that, there is a sense of community within the LGBTQ population here in prison. (Those of us who are openly bi, gay, queer, or trans) Myself and others conduct ourselves in a very responsible matter and we shun 'tasteless' individuals who devalue our humanity. 'Pride' in that regard is a part of prison life in the Illinois department of corrections.

The Gay Pride parade here in Illinois was June 29th if I'm not mistaken. I am from Chicago and spent a lot of time Uptown and in Boys Town so I've seen first hand a nurturing, thriving, healthy gay community. (LBTQ as well) LGBTQ prisoners were not prioritized. (Not even residually) I do believe if more attention was paid to those of us incarcerated 'Pride' would be more a part of our realities and by extension it would make coming out much more attractive. I am 33 and I am unfortunately not as informed about the historical roots of 'Pride.' I welcome any info on the topic to share with others and also educate myself. On a surface level I get it, maybe even a little deeper. Nevertheless, I can always learn more.

Solidarity is essential to instilling Pride! There is

some solidarity. Prison rape is also extremely low here in Illinois. We will defend ourselves and each other. If you go to [www.IDOC.state.il.us](http://www.IDOC.state.il.us) and look me up you will see I'm no shrinking violet :) My sexuality is not synonymous with soft. Well - I hope some of my comments helped put a face on the whole matter. You can by all means use my name. I am not interested in being anonymous:)

I think your efforts are commendable and I am glad to be a part of this process.



## Willie McMillian

Relating to the concept of Pride:?

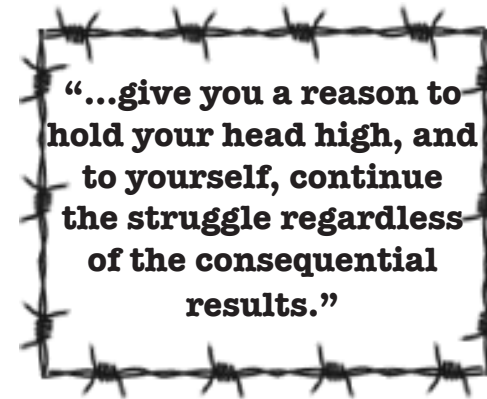
Personelly, my concept of pride tends to be, and get out of hand because of my prison situation, it tends to (prison) take the word “pride” out of its content.....

The difference between prison Gay Pride, and the outside Gay Pride, is almost like “fire and ice”. I’ve been incarcerated almost (9) years, and the discrimination i have experienced on the streets toward my “Gay Pride” is purely based on the politics of church, and state. So i just look at that sort of haterd as another form of the blind, leading the deaf. But the discrimination that i (have to) experience while incarcerated is so full of venom, that i truthfully beleave any normal person would probly kill themselves. Sad, isn’t it? What’s even sadder, is i still sometimes refer to myself as not normal.

The role pride plays in my daily function, pertaining to LGBTQ? It does play a big role, because every day its a struggle to point out to those who care to listen, that being “Gay” isn’t all about sex! It’s (to me) mainly about being proud of such groups as yours, as well as other LGBTQ groups that give you a reason to hold your head high, and to yourself, continue the struggle regardless of the consequential results.

Mainstream pride movements, and their outlook toward Gay prisoners? .....no! They certainly don’t do, or say enough for us. There are thousands of gay-lesbian-trans-queer folk in the penal system, so how is it that such a major minority group such as (Incarcerated Queer’s) not given more attention by the gay society? This does not change any LGBTQ importance, but..... aren’t all LGBTQ’s important?

I’m incarcerated in a California prison, so having any kind of organization, is conidered to be disruptive towards the mandated regulatory program. So having a LGBTQ group would have everyone who is involved with it, subjected to harrasment, and a long trip to the hole.



Relating pride to solidarity?..... being in prison, that is almost the norm, solidarity. Who wants to function with, or around Homosexuals in prison - unless their too, a part of that, “solidarity quota” having the “gay”, or “out” tag placed on you does emphasis how

the main population functions with you, and depending on your pride, solidarity can be a good thing..... or a very bad thing.

I would like to say also, that despite the stigma placed apou all prison LGBTQ’s, not all is shady and Grey. Our rainbows do shine from time to time.

## Savannah

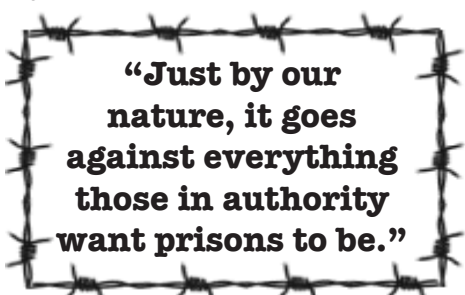
How do I relate to a concept of Pride?

When we say Gay Pride some people outside our community confuses it with arrogance and defiance. But for me Gay Pride means dignity and self-respect. It means I am satisfied with who and what I am. It means I am not ashamed of who and what I am. It means I embrace my individuality, my creativity and being unique.

Having Gay Pride is even a bigger challenge when the gay/ lesbian/ trans/ queer person become incarcerated. Just by our nature, it goes against everything those in authority want prisons to be. Prisons are run on the philosophy of institutionalization uniformity. In Prison, Homophobia is a accepted and often encouraged prejudice. In my time in prison I have never been to a camp where there is any type of institution sponsored gay/ lesbian/ trans/ queer support group. For the most part the gay man who can pass for being straight often does and their gayness goes right back in the closet. For those who can't prison life can be tough. For those people who find themselves in that my house doesn't have a closet group are often left to support each other. Every prison is different. There are some where you can find solidarity.

But what I want all the people on the outside to know is that they can make life better for those of us on the inside by supporting organizations like Prisoner Correspondence Project. It is just about making our community better but making the world a better place for everyone.

Being gay is being Happy and Joyous, Let's spread the Happiness and Joy!



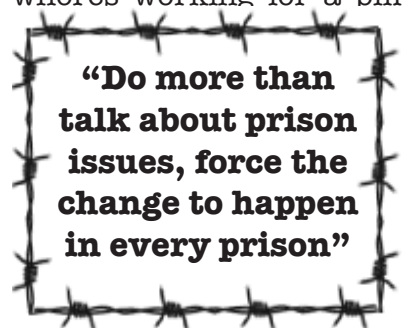
**“Just by our nature, it goes against everything those in authority want prisons to be.”**

## Dragon Fox

How do I relate to a concept of Pride? Pride, being proud of who I am inside an outside of my body; I love who I am and what I am which is a transgender male to female, Pride in what I can do to help other who are LGBTQ people that are on the outside of these fences and walls.

How do I see gay/lesbian/trans/queer “pride” happening in this prison? There is no united group of gays, trans, an queers, here there is only hatred toward most. If gays and trans and queers came together or to hang out mostly likely all could be locked up in the hole and written up on charges of gang related activity. Some gays, trans, queers, turn to being snitches in the prison system in this state.

How is this different from outside prison? Gays, trans, queers, and more than everything are forced to get into relationships to stay alive and safe from thieves, from the racist white boys, from rapists, and from becoming whores working for a pimp, most come into this system disease free, but when they leave be infected with Aids or HepC. Some come into the system with these diseases and have goal to infect as many gays as they can before they die or leave prison. This state does not provide condoms to the prisoners.



**“Do more than talk about prison issues, force the change to happen in every prison”**

What role does Pride (as in the day) play in your understanding of LGBTQ identity? Pride day is a chance for all to come out, join together, in fellowship and learn about what they are facing with the lawmakers, to stand united against people like the skinheads, neonazis, KKK, and those other white power groups.

Do you feel that mainstream Pride movements

ever discuss prison issues and should they? No; I believe that many do want to discuss what is going on in prisons; and I believe everyone should do more than talk about prison issues, force the change to happen in every prison throughout both countries.

Does this change their importance? Yes, it changes their importance as from being a small globe to a larger globe. Open your eyes and smell the damn coffee.

Does this change how you feel toward them? If they want to - truly want to - how I feel toward them if they do not want to change how the prisons treat us, I dare any small minded people to write me so I can put a hex upon them; yes thats right, I'm a witch and damn proud to be one.

Does your prison have any kind of LGBTQ organizing? No this prison and many other prisons throughout this very Redneck state called Georgia refuses to allow any LGBTQ to come together as a group within their prison system.

How is pride related to resistance and what does that mean in a prison setting? Whatever anyone in a pride movement does in Georgia causes the DOC (Department of Corrections) to set tougher rules toward anyone who is not straight.

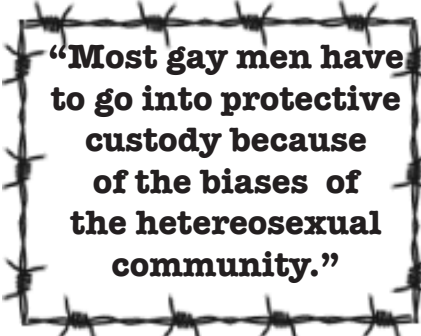
How is it related to solidarity in this state prison system? That is a funny joke. The only call I have seen to have any solidarity are Mexicans; I have not seen any gays, bisexuals, or trans come toward against the DOC and its rules yet.

How important is being "out"? What emphasis is put on visibility? To many of those who are out of the closet, "out in the open with sexuality" are harassed by the other prisoners and by many of the DOC staff, but we who are out make our single stand against the hate and every one who is LGTQ are proud of who we are, being visible about same sex relations.

## Steve

I'm incarcerated, and I would have to say speaking as a black gay male, being incarcerated I would say that we as gay men do get a hard time because of our sexuality. Most gay men have to go into protective custody because of the biases of the heterosexual community. Also being black

also gets a hard time, but being also gay gets a hard time.



**“Most gay men have to go into protective custody because of the biases of the heterosexual community.”**

I would have to say that I had an experience at Toronto Pride a few times. I would have to say that it's a very good community because it gives society a chance and the community a chance to see from the

point of view that homosexuals or lesbians - that we're human beings just like everybody else - and gives them a chance to interact with us and get a chance to know that we're all humans. Also my point with the police, which is important, is that they get a chance to interact. Because sometimes the police can be very biased against the gay community. Even in the correctional system. Even the officers have the point of view that because a person may be gay, that we're inhuman, and I disagree with that.

I'm just going to finish by saying that Toronto parade is the best I've experienced. I would have to say honestly speaking from the heart, I've experienced Toronto Pride and I'd have to say it was one of the best experiences I've had in my life - to see people come together as one human race and get along. And that is heterosexuals, homosexuals, everybody get together and spend some time together ... and get to know each other. Women and child, and whatever it

may be. I would suggest that anybody, if you have a chance, to experience pride, anywhere you may be.

As an inmate in an institution, I would strongly encourage that they have some kind of organization which would help people that are gay in prisons, give them some sort of support, and some outlet which would help. Because people go through a very hard time as a prisoner. Not only as a prisoner, but as a gay prisoner. So if there's some sort of organization which could support gays in the prison system, that would be very good. And that's it.

## Matt

Pride here in Oregon State Penitentiary is next to nothing. All of our "family" are more into harming each other. What I mean is all the fags here are untrustable, backstabbers, cheaters and a bunch of other negative things I can't think of right now.

Here we have two tranny's. Lisa and Angel. Lisa will not leave her cell except for going to work. She looks and acts like a woman, which causes her to get teased alot. She is a very angry person. She is doing life for multiple murders. So she told me that she can't control her temper so she just stays in her house. She has been in her cell for 22 yrs by choice. She won't have anything to do with the gay community here for the same reasons as me.

Now Angel on the other hand is considered the 'leader' of the gays. She also is going life for murders. She is a golden glove boxer but for the most part she is very submissive. The straight guys call her a "chicken hawk" because she only goes after the new very young boys that come here who are very scared. Everyone feels she prays on the weak because she can't get someone her own age or close to it. She is in her late 50s.

There are 6 gays who are "out" including me and none of us hangout together. I have never heard a reason why but from what I have witnessed everyone is jealous of each other. For example, none of the fags would sit down with me and conduct a conversation on the yard until I had a guy living with me and was having sex with. Now everyone wants to know who he is, how old he is, what do you guys do?, etc. Then as time goes by the questions change, how are you guys doing, are you guys having problems?. Then once we were having problems all the fags stopped talking to me and started talking to him. I moved out and the next day he moved in with the same person who seemed so concerned

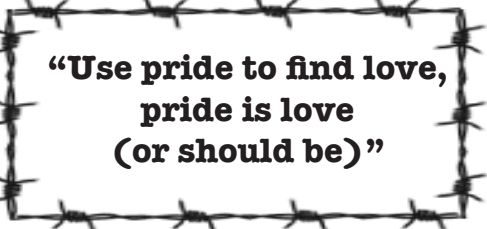
with our relationship!

On the outside I don't feel this would happen because the number of gay men out there to choose from. Not someone's man!

I've seen movies, read books, and heard stories of what it was like "back in the day". I wish we could have that again, everyone truly was concerned with each other. Would protect, help each other, now it seems like everyone is all about "me". The select few who still have a heart and truly want to help anyone (like me) become victims. Everyone is all about "me". So the use people like me use our kindness for weakness. Steal from us. Use us for what they need and then leave instead of giving back with friendship, love, etc.

I have not seen any Pride movements discuss our community in Prison. The most I see is discussions on STDs, how the DOC treats us, etc. All of these issues are very important! But no one discusses friendship, love, relationships. I myself feel these are the most important. Maybe if someone who knows something about these issues would share their knowledge with people who don't know. People who were never taught. People who were never truly loved or had love in their life. They only know hate, drugs, and getting what they can get. Instead of falling in love with someone, trusting someone or to actually help someone.

I feel too that maybe the DOC could come up with some kind of club, support group, etc. To help educate gays. Most have grown up hiding their sexuality (like me) all their life which makes them angry, depressed, scared, etc. If one gay man could get positive feedback from at least one person about their sexuality, it could change their life! I would love to help teens. Travel to schools, youth organizations, etc, and be that person to give them the positive feedback and support and show them how they can conduct themselves, handle negativity from haters in a positive way. This could



**“Use pride to find love,  
pride is love  
(or should be)”**

be life changing for a lot of kids! For example: I hid from my sexuality all my life until I got to prison. I figured that coming to prison is pretty bad according to my family so I figured what the hell. I came "out" to my whole family (aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, brothers, sisters) and the one friend I have. Not one person had anything negative to say. Everyone excepted me with open arms. I wish I had done this years ago. We are all closer now. And I feel like a new person. I know some people's family's won't be so excepting, but they will never know until they come out! Instead of living a fake life, to have people except them and then they don't end up hating themselves, they don't get into a self-destructive circle. (Doing drugs, breaking laws, risky sexual behavior).

“Pride”. Take Pride in yourself. Use other people's pride to help yourself, use pride to gain friendship. Use pride to find love, pride is love (or should be). I feel that if everyone came "out" their lives would be much healthier!

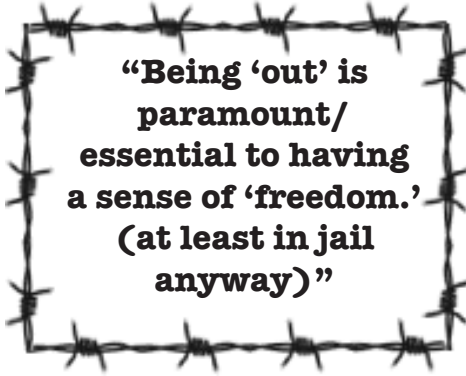
## J. Brown

Although I don't know if "pride" would be the word I'd use when relating to people who relish their sexual identities. However, of course, anyone 'should' have some sort of pride about themselves in any and every walk of life with the exception of those (exclusively) who feel they're in error.

As to the 2nd question of how any of this would be applicable to my current environment? Can't see it happening. Taboo will remain taboo (always) in the eyes of considerably righteous people, no matter how much it's broadcast in opposition - ya dig? It's just the way it is, and will always be (I believe) but I'm OK with it.

I just think it's pleasant to have such things as gay parades & etc. Because it affords people of the like to enjoy each others company and meet others for other potential venues as well (and other functions of the sort)

P.S. Being "out" is paramount/essential to having a sense of "freedom." (at least in jail anyway) anything else'll ultimately cause you more problems because no one likes being deceived unless it's by a magician of course. bye



**“Being ‘out’ is paramount/essential to having a sense of ‘freedom.’ (at least in jail anyway)”**

## C. Dunn

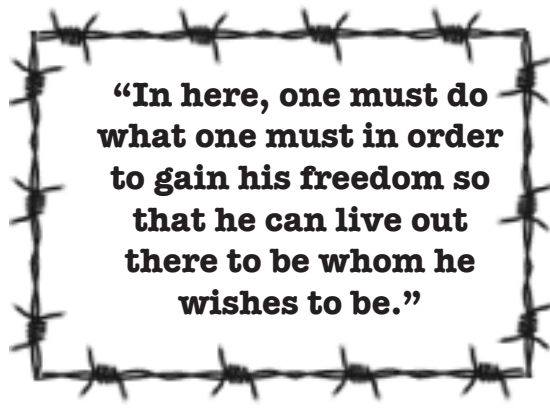
How do I relate to the concept of Pride? Well, I'm proud of who I am and I don't really mind how others look at me. For I am who I am.

How do I see gays, trans, happening in this prison? First off I don't. Picture a backwood Redneck tobacco chewing bunch of bullies who's in authority then you can sense the place I'm at. People like me have to wear a mask in here to survive. And if not, then we'd be beaten, ridiculed, and tormented for just who we are and living a different lifestyle.

As of on the streets if someone doesn't agree with whom I wish to be, then I can always avoid them or vice versa, where as in here it is such a closed environment I'm stuck

with the abuse from guards, inmates, alike and there's no way I can stand up for my rights. Gays, queers, bi's, trans' has no rights here where I'm at. The only rights we have as they see it is abuse. This is why I'm so alone in here I cannot be me. I have to live day today in a man's body with an attitude of Mr. Tough Guy. This is not who I am, nor who I wish to be, but yet I must live this way to survive.

The role that pride plays in my everyday identity is knowing, or should I say a calming force within me, because even tho I know that life is very hard onus LGBTQ. Knowing that the Pride movement is making great strides towards making life better, a little easier and tolerable for us.



**“In here, one must do what one must in order to gain his freedom so that he can live out there to be whom he wishes to be.”**

If I feel that mainstream Pride movements discuss prison issues? Yes, but they could do more as in not being discriminated against in here by not being able to get good jobs, or job changes, or cell companions whom you can get along with. We are thrust upon each other in here and cannot get a bunk change unless we are beaten, raped, or abused. And at times this doesn't even happen to get things done. So yes, I do feel a lot more can be done.

Being out is important- Because being out is everything that pride stands for. On the outside of this prison walls, it's easier to be oneself at being out. But in here, one must do what one must in order to gain his freedom so that he can live out there to be whom he wishes to be.

## To Start Discussion

“So that was all of the statements that we received. Something I forgot to mention earlier is that this callout went out about a month and a half ago, two months ago almost, and all of the submissions that you hear today were all the submissions that we received to date and none of them were edited or altered in any way. So I think we want to continue now with a few kind of more open-ended discussion points.”

“So for this next part now it's where we initially were supposed to be having panelists, but what we're going to be doing instead is just try to draw out a few of the themes that we found emerging out of the statements and that have sort of a particular resonance within the framework of working within the project over the last little bit over a year.”

“Something that came up a lot over the course of the submissions that's quite clear and that also reflects the letters and requests for penpals that we've been getting over

the past year is specifically about the segregation and isolation of queer and gender non-conforming inmates. So that includes being placed into protective custody or the hole. It goes by a lot of different words whether its solitary confinement



or administrative segregation but functionally amounts, in many kind of incarcerative situations, amounts to the same thing. The segregation of queer and gender non-conforming or gender-variant prisoners historically has always been articulated in terms of these communities being a “threat” to some kind of institutional order. Now we’re seeing it articulated in terms of offering protection to these inmates against harrassment or against abuse from other inmates. So there’s been that shift in how it’s framed, but regardless of how it’s spoken about the lived experience of it is the same. And this is reflected in some of the statements that you heard drawing reference to the explicit outlawing or the really explicit criminalization of LGBT groups in prison and the kind of explicit outlawing of self-organizing as it emerges in prisons. We also wanted to mention something about protective custody in the context of outness where this came up to some extent in the submissions but has also come up working with the project to a pretty big extent. This has been the extent to which the fear of being placed into protective custody is - in a lot of situations - a disincentive to coming out in prison as expressed by a lot of people seeking out resources and penpals. So that changes, or shifts the landscape in terms of the reasons why people choose to be out in prison or the reasons why they don’t.

So I think another one of the things that came up in a lot of these submissions was



the high significance placed on their discussions of outness and pride, and also becomes really central to a lot of the discussions we’ve had internally in the project as well.

So I think you have what could maybe be viewed as a tension, on one hand where you have some of the folks who sort of collapse an understanding of out and pride which you saw in I think Savannah’s submission and a couple of the others and see it as sort of centrally intrinsic to how they view themselves in prison. And then also other ones, like some of the earlier ones that were featured, where pride isn’t seen as contingent on being out. But I think one of the things that comes up really interesting in all of them, is the fact that in both of those cases, it’s always framed in terms of survival. So you have, on one hand, people saying oh no, outside of a discussion of pride I’m not out and I’m doing it strategically as a means of survival but you have, I think it was in Willie’s statement, where pride and being out are seen as sort of that mechanism of survival.

So these things feature fairly centrally in our discussions in the project because obviously the different ways and the different value that people place on being out matters a lot in terms of how we’re able to correspond with them. Because for some, having that sort of visibility of some sort of queer presence in prison is a remarkably important feature of the project, versus others who can’t, for any number of reasons, have any kind of mention of queer or trans or gay anything on any of the letters because it threatens to out them with really serious consequences in some cases. So there’s been a whole series of discussion around that, maybe we can talk about them more about it at the end, but I’ll pass it back to you.

Returning now for a second to some of our initial intentions and motivations for having this panel and for coordinating these audio statements; something that came up ike again and again, and has come up in more personal correspondence through the project has been an often very clear expression of the importance and centrality of pride for a lot of people, but at the same time, a clear expression that Pride movements as they exist and as we know them

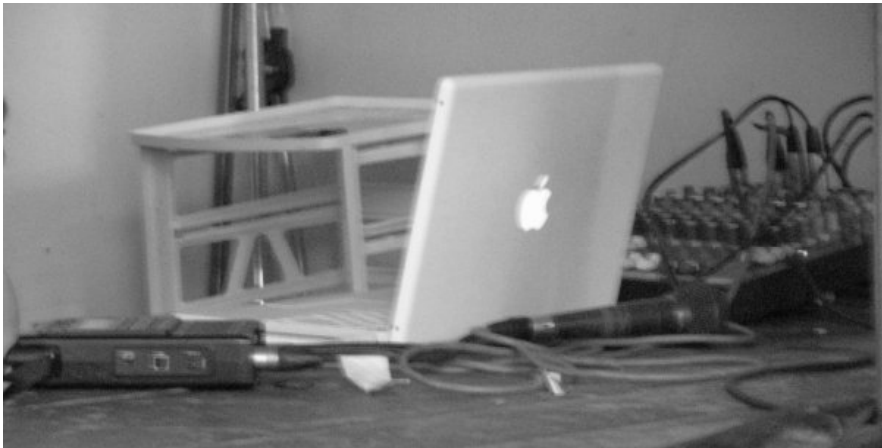
today, don't do enough for prisoners. That's articulated in any number of ways depending on how people feel about it, so that was part of the intention in organizing this event around talking about pride in prisons, and making it clear that our intention isn't to frame gay Pride as having forgotten prisoners or conveniently not included them, but that this has been a kind of long process of active removal of inmates and incarcerated communities and criminalized communities from gay pride discourses and pride movements. This active process of distancing and this active process of removing prisoners from these movements, needs to be acknowledged and was in a lot of ways the motivation for this event and is reflected in a lot of the correspondence as well.

I think at the same time though, as we've seen, there's rarely a disavowal of Pride altogether. At the same time, there isn't an articulation of wanting to access these movements as they exist currently in kind of an exclusionary way, but an articulation of figuring out ways to rewrite these movements so that they're accountable to people who are living behind bars.

I guess to sort of speak to the language of distancing that we were using, we chose that language specifically because queer and trans prisoners haven't always been completely invisible in Pride organizing and in gay liberation

organizing. The very first Pride Parade in New York City in 1970 chose its path in order to go by the Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village. And also just sort of a very early history of a lot of gay organizing was doing prison support in terms of police entrapment, in terms of bar raids. So it's been this process of active distancing from those initial roots, which is what we wanted to draw attention today.

We'd like to open up the floor to more general conversations.



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