

## Medical Criminology Notes #5:\*

### Male Homosexual Prostitution

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I became interested in the topic of male homosexual prostitution while evaluating a young man charged with murdering a man he described as "just a hustler." The patient told me of a series of attacks he had made upon male sexual partners he had picked up in bars or on the street. The lethality of the attacks progressed, and he experienced depersonalization during some of them. In the homicide for which he was charged, the victim's body was mutilated. Simultaneously with my evaluation of this patient, the local media were covering the story of a Boston psychiatrist eventually convicted of statutory rape in connection with his alleged liaisons with adolescent male prostitutes.

Despite the evident significance of the topic, I have found few quantitative data of merit on male homosexual prostitution. Descriptions abound, however, and provide a sufficient number of independent observations to justify the conclusions that those male homosexual prostitutes making themselves available to clients and researchers on the streets or in bars most frequently are age 15-25, come from low income, rejecting families, have poor educational attainment and vocational skills, prostitute themselves in order to make money, and deny a homosexual identity; the basic service provided is to permit the client to perform fellatio, but increasing experience and higher fees are associated with more varied services.<sup>1-10</sup> The most compelling descriptions of the life of a homosexual prostitute are John Rechy's novels,<sup>11-12</sup> despite the availability of self-proclaimed autobiographical accounts.<sup>13-15</sup> D. J. West's recent overview<sup>16</sup> obviates any need for a more detailed review of the descriptive literature, and information on the history of male prostitution is available elsewhere.<sup>17-19</sup>

I have located only one study that attempts to quantitatively test an hypothesis concerning male prostitution. Coombs interviewed 41 male prostitutes at a coffee house and a bar and compared them with 39 male non-prostitutes of unspecified origin; the two groups were similar in distribution by age and socioeconomic-educational level. Of the prostitutes, 64% recalled early homosexual seduction at a mean age of 9.6 years; 59% of

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the prostitutes recalled receiving a reward following the seduction. In contrast, 15% of control subjects reported early homosexual seduction at a mean age of 9.2 years; 13% remembered receiving reward. The difference between groups is statistically significant and supports the postulated association between immediately rewarded homosexual seduction in childhood and later participation in homosexual prostitution.<sup>20</sup>

Two issues concerning homosexual male prostitution seem to me to be of sufficient importance to justify an attempt to extrapolate from the bits and scraps of information available. The first is the occurrence of assaultive behavior between prostitute and client; the second is the alleviation of suffering among those unhappy with their prostitution.

### **Assaultive Behavior**

According to Ross, homosexual prostitution is regularly associated "with extortion from and robbery of the clients,"<sup>2</sup> but Ginsburg took exception to this and had noted such criminal activity on the part of only those few prostitutes characterized as "rough trade."<sup>6</sup> West noted that although con tricks and petty thefts are inevitable, robbery from customers "is less common than might be supposed," but that the frequency is unknown due to the reluctance of victims to go to the police.<sup>16</sup> MacNamara and Sagarin state that on the margins of homosexual prostitution there are those juvenile delinquents who occasionally or frequently prostitute themselves "as part of planned criminality, including extortion, 'rolling,' and sadistic assault."<sup>23</sup>

In two studies, homosexual respondents have been asked about their criminal victimization in the course of homosexual activity. Westwood noted in 1960 that of a grab bag sample of 127 homosexuals interviewed, 30% reported being robbed and 10% being assaulted without robbery by other homosexuals or by men posing as homosexuals, but he did not indicate that any of the offenders were prostitutes.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Sonenschein reported in 1968 that of 458 white male homosexual respondents, 34.7% said that they had been robbed or "rolled" in the course of their homosexual activities and 9.4% that they had been blackmailed about their homosexuality. Although over 80% of the robberies and nearly 43% of the blackmailing incidents were attributed to anonymous pickups, there was no indication that the offenders were prostitutes.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, there appears to be no evidence to suggest that homosexual prostitution is associated with higher frequencies of assaultive interaction than occur among other persons of similar age and social status who meet in bars or on the streets after dark. Certainly those young men oriented to prostitution as a career perceive that nonviolence is essential for a successful commercial enterprise, but those juvenile delinquents who are part-time prostitutes apparently are for the most part restrained from violence by peer forces. According to Reiss, this restraint is imposed by the delinquent peer groups' norms, one of which holds that "violence must not be used so long as the relationship conforms to the shared set of expectations" between the youths and their clients. If the client refuses to pay, pays too little, attempts sexual acts other than fellatio, introduces too much affect into the relationship, or approaches the youth in an inappropriate social setting, he is likely to experience violence. Violence or the threat of violence is used,

according to Reiss, to enforce the youths' entrepreneurial norms and thus "to keep adult male fellators in line with the boys' expectations in his customer role."<sup>24</sup>

### Alleviation of Suffering

Given that homosexual prostitutes infrequently suffer from major mental illness, alcoholism, or drug addiction,<sup>4,7</sup> one must ask what might be done to aid those unhappy with their prostitution as a way of life. An intervention program in Seattle was directed at vocational placement for 30 of 50 young prostitutes who expressed interest in a job. Two groups were uninterested: those described as psychopathic personalities and those very successful as prostitutes. During 15 months of effort on the part of physicians and medically supervised personnel, all of the interested youths were eventually placed in jobs.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the provision of alternative careers is the critical element in aiding those who desire help.

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