



**Experiences of Trans and
Gender Variant People in
Pennsylvania's Prison Systems**

**A Report by the Hearts on a Wire
Collective**

This is a Prison, Glitter is Not Allowed: Experiences of Trans and Gender Variant People in Pennsylvania's Prison Systems

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**Written by
Pascal Emmer, Adrian Lowe, and R. Barrett Marshall**

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INTRODUCTION

We're people too. No matter what gender... though, it seems like we get an extra sentence for who we are.

- a gender variant person in a women's state prison

The inspiration for this report grew from our own experiences and the stories our friends told us. Since 2007, Hearts on a Wire has been building a movement to address the policing and imprisonment of our trans and gender variant¹ communities across Pennsylvania. Hearts on a Wire is connected to transgender and gender variant (T/GV)

What does the name Hearts on a Wire mean? A wire, as it appears on the top of prison fences, enforces a border. It keeps friends, lovers, family members, and communities apart. But, a wire can also be an important channel for communication. Our hearts abide in the ambiguity of the wire – as an instrument of separation and connection. Therefore, the intention of our work, including this report, is to strengthen that fragile connection on the line.

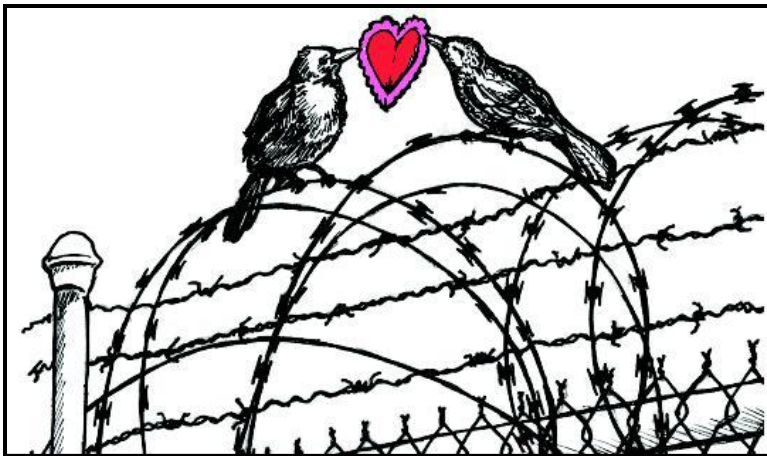
individuals who are incarcerated, detained, and recently released. Accounts of prison conditions from these contacts show the intensity of discrimination, abuse, medical neglect, and punitive isolation that our communities face on the inside. Incarcerated T/GV individuals report dismissal, intimidation, or retaliation when attempting to file grievances.

In response to these injustices, formerly incarcerated T/GV Philadelphians and their allies began a conversation about ways to address these issues. Chief among the concerns raised were the ways that prisons remove incarcerated people from their support networks and communities.² Breaking the isolation of our incarcerated community members has been a critical step in addressing health and safety issues from the outside.

¹ A note on terminology: In this report, the terms *transgender* and *trans* refer to people who have a gender identity or gender expression different from their assigned sex at birth. The terms transgender and trans are umbrella terms that encompass many different gender identities. *Gender variant* is a second umbrella term used in this report to describe people whose experience and/or expression of their gender is fluid, between, or beyond binary gender. Some communities prefer the term “gender-nonconforming,” while others prefer the term “genderqueer.” Hearts on a Wire uses “gender variant” out of respect for the preferences of the communities and individuals to whom we have personal accountability.

² This is particularly the case for low-income trans and gender variant people of color who are criminalized in Pennsylvania as in the rest of the US. The majority of trans and gender variant people of color live in cities such as Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, but are incarcerated in rural areas of Pennsylvania, often far removed from their communities. Physical distance and travel costs prohibit many prisoners from having visitors, as do punishments like isolation and denial of visiting rights.

Out of a desire to meet these needs, a network grew and became Hearts on a Wire. The group's first project was to gather community members on the outside to make and send Valentines to T/GV people incarcerated across Pennsylvania. The event was an opportunity for formerly incarcerated people and those with friends and family members inside to discuss how prisons affected our lives and the lives of our loved ones. Hearts on a Wire has held art-making and letter-



writing events to build a network with T/GV community members locked in prisons around the state. Additionally, the group tries to respond to urgent situations, such as incidents where our members have been placed in the “hole” or have endured

abuse within their institutions. In their letters, incarcerated individuals highlighted the critical health and safety issues they face. From this correspondence, incarcerated and outside Hearts on a Wire members determined the need to create this research project.

In creating a community-based research project, we drew inspiration from two reports from outside of Pennsylvania: *It's War in Here*,³ a report on the treatment of trans and intersex people in New York men's prisons, and the *Move Along* report from Washington, D.C.,⁴ which discusses the experience of policing and lock-up for trans individuals criminalized by “prostitution-free zones.” Hearts on a Wire members Pascal Emmer and Sabina Neem participated in the first Transforming Justice Conference in San Francisco, California in 2007. Formerly incarcerated T/GV people, people of color, poor people, and service providers came together at this conference to strategize ending the criminalization and imprisonment of transgender communities.⁵ Conference discussions made it clear that many issues incarcerated T/GV people face are similar cross-regionally. To get a full picture of the conditions incarcerated T/GV individuals in Pennsylvania are

³ Sylvia Rivera Law Project. (2007). *“It's War in Here”: A Report on the Treatment of Transgender and Intersex People in New York State Men's Prisons*. NY, NY. Retrieved from <http://srlp.org/files/warinhere.pdf>

⁴ Alliance for a Safe & Diverse DC. (2008). *Move Along: Policing Sex Work in Washington, D.C.*. Washington D.C.: Different Avenues.

⁵ See Appendix C.

subjected to, it was necessary to collect data on people's experiences in the state's prison systems. Relatively little information is available on general prison conditions in Pennsylvania and there is a complete lack of statistical data on the experience of incarcerated T/GV people. The *This is a Prison, Glitter is Not Allowed* report bridges the gap between community-level knowledge of our experiences of Pennsylvania's prison systems and the need for documentation and statistical representation of those experiences. Our hope is to provide the information necessary to future organizing. By giving voice to our community members we can better determine the work that is yet to be done.

We hope this report will serve as a resource for those who seek to:

- Organize community-led campaigns for transformative justice, decarceration, and prison abolition
- Imagine strategies for community safety that challenge the notion that imprisonment reduces social violence
- Bolster advocacy efforts by legal and health service providers
- Improve treatment toward incarcerated T/GV individuals
- Create effective re-entry planning and services for T/GV people exiting prison
- Employ harm reduction advocates to work with incarcerated T/GV individuals
- Inspire future participatory studies that approach research as a process of creating knowledge and relationships as part of social justice movements⁶

⁶ Recent examples of this research approach include: Young Women's Empowerment Project. (2009). *Girls Do What They Have To Do To Survive: Illuminating Methods used by Girls in the Sex Trade and Street Economy to Fight Back and Heal*. Chicago, IL. Retrieved from <http://youarepriceless.org/>; Queers for Economic Justice. (2010). *A Fabulous Attitude: Low-income LGBTGNC People Surviving & Thriving on Love, Shelter, & Knowledge*. NY, NY. Retrieved from www.q4ej.org/Documents/afabulousattitudedefinalreport.pdf

METHODOLOGY

Hearts on a Wire collective members on the outside prioritized having the input and participation of T/GV people directly affected⁷ by mass incarceration in every step of designing the survey. Formerly and currently incarcerated community and collective members offered their own knowledge of Pennsylvania's prison systems to shape the design, creation, delivery, and evaluation of the survey. We were inspired by the community-based research model of the *Move Along* report. That report involved community members affected by profiling, health workers, and academic professionals working together to conduct research and document the violence of "Prostitution-Free Zones" throughout Washington, DC.⁸ The process of completing participatory, community-based research was complex, difficult and rewarding.⁹

We began this process by interviewing formerly incarcerated T/GV community and/or collective members who identified key areas of research. Those we interviewed directed us to investigate housing, medical care, safety, support systems, and survival strategies.

Based on their knowledge of the prison mail system the survey was formatted to resemble a 'zine in order to assure delivery.¹⁰ Prison correspondence is inspected, and vital documents are often withheld from those inside and returned to senders. The 'zine format is both user friendly and enabled us to stay under the radar of prison guards.

Community advocate Jaci Adams strategically used her professional access and relationships in Philadelphia County's jail system to gather feedback on the survey from incarcerated trans women. These women took the survey and recorded their feedback in spite of possible retaliation by the prison. They let us know that the survey was too long and revised some of the questions. Based on their suggestions, for every page of questions, a blank, lined page was included for

⁷ There are multiple ways imprisonment affects our lives and the lives of people we care about. When we say "directly affected" we mean members of our communities who are currently or formerly incarcerated or with histories of detention in jails, juvenile facilities, or psychiatric hospitals, as well as those with partners, parents, or other family and community members who are incarcerated.

⁸ "Unlike some traditional academic research, [Community Based Research (CBR)] is a collective project inherently centered on the needs and perspectives of community members. CBR does not value any one particular source of knowledge, such as academic articles or government statistics, over the wisdom of those with lived experience.... CBR also promotes ongoing thinking about the findings and how the knowledge is distributed and deployed." Alliance for a Safe & Diverse DC. (2008). *Move Along: Policing Sex Work in Washington, D.C.*. Washington D.C.: Different Avenues.

⁹ See Appendix B for more details about our process.

¹⁰ A 'zine is popular publication type among prisoners. 'Zines are small, self-published magazines often created in marginalized communities.

participants to write about their experiences or highlight important information. We included several blank pages for respondents' input on issues we might have missed or other ideas for reducing the harm that prisons inflict on our communities.

Designing the survey from a community-based research model meant thinking critically about what questions to ask and how to ask them. We were aware that asking people to recall and describe their experiences of incarceration could re-traumatize participants. In developing the survey, we maintained awareness that the majority of respondents were in an inherently unsafe environment – prison – with little support, and risked retaliation by participating. We asked participants to answer the survey according to their assessment of their emotional and physical safety.

Language was a key issue in soliciting information about participants' experiences of incarceration. Formerly incarcerated community members wisely pointed out that the language of survey questions makes a difference in participants' level of trust in the researchers and in the amount of detail they provide. It was important to recognize how people cope with factors like sexual violence in an environment in which it is officially endorsed and routine.¹¹ When we drafted questions about sexual assault we used “forced sexual situation” instead of “rape” to acknowledge survivors of all types of sexual violence. In this same vein, we did not ask participants to recall the exact number of times they experienced violence and abuse. At the direction of the incarcerated people who edited the survey we asked whether the abuse occurred once, a few times, or “over and over.”

The survey was designed so participants could describe their own racial and gender identities. This was an important counter-measure to current Pennsylvania Department of Corrections population data which excludes T/GV and mixed race identities.¹²

Our philosophy for recruiting survey participants was based on the principle of gender self-determination. Gender self-determination in this context means that individuals name and express their unique identity. Applying self-determination to our recruitment approach was especially important given that Pennsylvania's prison systems do not recognize our identities except as something to be punished. The choice of the prison system to reject gender self-determination translates to

¹¹ Davis, Angela. (2003). *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Toronto. Open Media.

¹² Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. (2007). *Annual Statistical Report 2007*. Retrieved from www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/915989/anrpt07_pdf.

the placement of individuals in facilities where they are at heightened risk for violence and discrimination (e.g. trans women being required to use public showers inside men's prisons). As a consequence, many respondents shared that they strategically attempt to "pass" as non-T/GV in order to protect their safety in prison.¹³ Working from a self-determination model enabled us to identify, and therefore reach, many individuals who would have been impossible to find if we had we relied on Department of Corrections census data or impressions from prison staff about which incarcerated people are T/GV.

We turned to our social networks to recruit participants for the survey. This method was especially effective where Hearts on a Wire had pre-existing relationships with incarcerated individuals. These individuals spread the word about the survey to other T/GV people in prisons. At SCI Dallas, a men's state correctional facility, Miss Ashley enthusiastically agreed to recruit other T/GV prisoners. A total of 14 people took the survey as a result of her networking efforts.

Outside community support was also critical to our efforts. Formerly imprisoned T/GV people helped to recruit by writing letters to their friends who were locked up. In particular, the Trans-Masculine Advocacy Network (TMAN),¹⁴ a Philadelphia-based support group for trans men of color, facilitated connections with people in local trans-masculine communities who had been released from women's prisons. Najee Gibson, who was released from a men's state correctional facility and who has since become one of our lead organizers, aided in breaking through the invisibility of trans-masculine people in women's prisons by putting us in touch with her FTM/butch/stud friends at SCI Cambridge Springs.

We used informed consent in our recruitment process to ensure that participants understood the goals of the survey and responded willingly. We mailed consent forms to incarcerated T/GV people that explained the survey's purpose and that participants would be compensated for their time and effort.¹⁵ Interested individuals returned the consent form and were mailed a survey. Upon receipt of a

¹³ *Passing*, a term with a complicated history, refers to the ability to be seen as gender normative or non-transgender/gender variant. In the context of prisons, where access to body modification resources are scarce and prisoners are placed in institutions according to their birth sex, passing means not living outwardly in your chosen gender (e.g. a trans woman in a men's facility might "butch it up," or appear very masculine, in order to pass as a man).

¹⁴ For more information: tmanphilly.com

¹⁵ T/GV individuals and communities are all too often exploited as the subjects of research that does not benefit us as individuals or as communities. We believe that people's time and expertise should be compensated. It should be noted that 76% of our budget for this project went to compensating participants.

completed survey, we sent the participant a money order for \$12. People who had recently been released from prison could be paid in cash when they dropped off their survey.

Where relying on our networks was not an option, we used other recruitment methods. We tried the inmate locator database on the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections website¹⁶ to perform searches for common gender-specific names that did not “match” the sex assignment of individuals’ institutions. We found that trans women’s preferred names were often listed as an alias.¹⁷ For example, we would enter a search for the name “Maria” in men’s prison facilities. If any results appeared, we then cross-referenced that name with any other aliases someone might have on their docket in order to determine the best way to contact them.¹⁸

We also approached the administrative staff of a women’s correctional facility about visiting the prison to speak with T/GV people about the survey. Unfortunately, this method did not succeed due to bureaucratic obstacles. A sympathetic staff member informed us the administrative department did not want us “making a collection of complaints” from incarcerated T/GV individuals.

Pennsylvania’s Department of Corrections does not usually support outside organizations who wish to conduct assessments of prison conditions.¹⁹ Some prison staff were supportive of our efforts, but overall we encountered resistance to our research. In the case of a particular state men’s facility where numerous T/GV individuals are incarcerated, it became clear that the mailroom staff noticed the volume of surveys flowing in and out of the prison and intervened. We began hearing reports that some intended participants had not received their blank survey in the mail. We also had mail returned to us with the reason given by the facility being “the use of inappropriate materials.” Some participants informed us that correctional officers

¹⁶The inmate locator may be found at <http://inmatelocator.cor.state.pa.us/inmatelocatorweb//>

¹⁷ This strategy was not effective for finding T/GV individuals whose identities are not legible to prison administrators or police as “trans,” including people in women’s prisons.

¹⁸ Prison mail requires a prisoner’s legal name and an inmate number. Most respondents had not legally changed their name, so we had to address mail to their government name but included their chosen name on documents. Relying on the Department of Corrections inmate locator put us in a complicated position. Prisoners face a near-complete lack of privacy. We did not want to cause more harm by contacting people using personal information that they did not consent to releasing for public access. For this reason, we sent all prospective participants a detailed consent form explaining the purpose of the research and information about Hearts on a Wire.

¹⁹ Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. (2007). *Policy Statement: Research Activities*.

Retrieved at

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_129555_916130_0_0_18/DOC_Research_Policy.pdf.

confiscated their surveys during cell searches. The risk of retaliation prevented others from participating. Two trans women who were romantic partners and cellmates declined to take the survey, citing persistent abuse by corrections officers and fear of escalation.

While institutional barriers affected our ability to reach imprisoned T/GV people in general, we faced an additional challenge recruiting T/GV individuals in women's prisons. The information we gathered in this survey about experiences of incarceration likely under-represent the actual scope of health and safety issues facing trans people in women's prisons.²⁰ We have identified a few reasons why this might be the case. First, Hearts on a Wire has fewer relationships with people in women's prisons. Second, methods for finding T/GV people in men's prisons were ineffective for finding T/GV people in women's prisons. Prisons often list trans women's chosen names as criminal aliases on their records, but not the chosen names of trans men or other gender variant people. We recognize that both actions—ignoring someone's name or treating it as a criminal alias—are ways that prisons deliberately invalidate T/GV identities. This report builds the case for further investigation of these issues and for greater community-level advocacy in partnership with T/GV people in women's prisons.

²⁰ The specific difficulty of producing data on trans-masculine people in our report seems consistent with other research on T/GV incarceration. For example, SRLP's "*It's a War in Here*" report highlights this issue.

SURVEY RESULTS

Participation

Between April and August of 2009, we distributed the survey to over 100 transgender and gender variant individuals inside of or recently released from twelve prison facilities in Pennsylvania.²¹ In total, we received 68 completed survey responses, of which 59 were useable for the purposes of this report. Nine of the 68 surveys we received could not be used either because the participant did not identify as T/GV or they did not respond by the closing date for the survey.²²



²¹ The number of different facilities is likely higher since some of the “walk in” participants did not name the prisons from which they had been released, and most of the currently incarcerated respondents had been locked up at numerous facilities but only provided information about their current housing.

²² There was a marked difference between the experiences of incarceration between those who identified as T/GV and those who did not in our survey pool.

Gender

Among the 59 survey participants, 54 were placed in men’s prisons and five were placed in women’s prisons. Five people placed in men’s prisons answered that they were intersex, and all but one intersex person also identified as transgender. What follows are tables reflecting the variety of answers provided by participants about their gender identities.²³

Answers to “How do you see your gender now or in the future?” from T/GV people placed in men’s prisons	
Transgender	19
Transsexual	11
Transwoman	11
Femqueen	9
MTF/M2F	6
Woman	6
Genderqueer	5
Man	5
Transvestite/Crossdresser	5
Drag queen	4
Two-spirit	3
Feminine gay man	2
Aggressive	1
Butch	1
Androgyne	1
<i>“Questioning”</i>	1
<i>“I feel like a man sometimes and a woman sometimes”</i>	1
Butch queen	1

Answers to “How do you see your gender now or in the future?” from intersex people	
Femqueen	2
Transwoman	1
MTF/M2F	1
Man	1
Woman	1
Genderqueer	1

Answers to “How do you see your gender now or in the future?” from T/GV people placed in women’s prisons	
Transman	3
Butch	2
Two-spirit	1
Transgender	1
Man	1
Woman	1

²³ Numerous participants indicated more than one gender identity.

Race

Racism determines which communities bear the brunt of incarceration. Not surprisingly, the majority of survey respondents identified as people of color. A higher percentage our respondents were people of color compared to the general prison population.²⁴ This indicates that the intersection of racial profiling and gender policing places T/GV communities of color, especially black and Latina/o communities, at amplified risk of going to prison in Pennsylvania.

The intersection of racial profiling and gender policing places transgender and gender variant communities of color at amplified risk of going to prison.

While the Department of Corrections has only four racial categories (Black, White, Hispanic, and Other) that they assign to incarcerated individuals in their census data, we asked participants to self-identify their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Self-identification was key to representing the complexity of people’s racial/ethnic identities, particularly given the high percentage of participants who identified as mixed race. The table below shows the breakdown of responses as well as a comparison of our statistics with the Department of Corrections’ data.

Racial Identity			PA DOC info
Black or African American	40	68%	50.2%
*Of these, many checked off an additional race category	(8)	(13.5%)	
White/European	12	20%	38.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1.5%	Other: 0.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	3%	
Ethnic Identity			
Hispanic and/or Latino/a	8	14%	11.1%
wrote in: Jamaican	1	1.5%	
wrote in: West Indian	1	1.5%	

²⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. (2007). *Policy Statement: Research Activities*. Retrieved at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_129555_916130_0_0_18/DOC_Research_Policy.pdf

Release from Prison

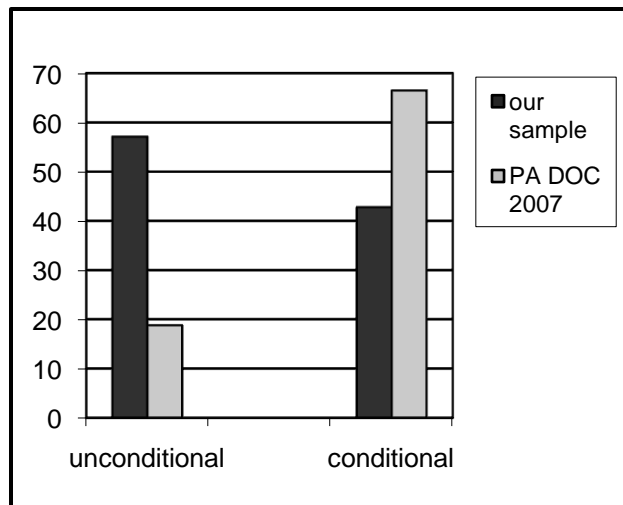
We found a striking disparity in the administrative treatment of trans and gender variant people versus that of others regarding release from prison. Twenty-one of the 69 participants took the survey after being released from prison. Of these individuals, 12 (57.1%) had left on *unconditional* release, meaning they had served their maximum sentence (“maxed out”) or, in one case, had their charges withdrawn. Conversely, nine

Trans and gender variant people are denied the same chances for parole as incarcerated non-T/GV people.

(42.8%) were given *conditional* release: parole or another form of early release. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Correction’s Annual Statistics Report from 2007, only 18.8% of the general prison population was released from prison unconditionally (maxed out or had their sentences overturned) and the majority (66.5%) was granted some form of conditional early release.²⁵ Compared to the general prison population, T/GV people are forced to spend longer periods of our lives behind bars because we are denied the same chances for parole as non-T/GV people. The chart to the right illustrates the contrast in rates of conditional versus unconditional release between our sample of participants and the general prison population.

T/GV individuals are not making parole at the same rate as the overall prison population, presumably for a combination of reasons including:

- Not having eligible housing that satisfies the requirements for parole
- Community Corrections Centers and other types of transitional housing are segregated by birth sex and are unequipped to deal with gender variance
- Not being eligible for parole because of institutional infractions²⁶



²⁵ The remaining 14.4% is listed as “death/other.” Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. (2007). *Policy Statement: Research Activities*. Retrieved at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_129555_916130_0_0_18/DOC_Research_Policy.pdf.

²⁶ T/GV people in prisons are at risk for a variety of institutional infractions. See the section on “the Hole” later in this report.

In order to be granted parole, one must have a re-entry plan that includes social services, an employment or vocational plan, and housing. Many incarcerated people meet all parole criteria except they have no housing to return to on the outside. Consequently, parole may be delayed for those who must wait for an available bed in Community Corrections housing, recovery houses or halfway houses. Sometimes this can mean being placed on a waiting list for months. For those who have a place of residence when they leave prison, this residence must meet the following criteria:

- No one in the household can be a convicted felon and background checks are run on all household members
- The household cannot be receiving housing subsidies (the US Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] excludes people with a criminal record from eligibility for subsidized housing)
- There has to be space for the parolee (an empty room)
- In addition, the parole agent who visits to interview the household and inspect the room may deem it ineligible as parole housing due to availability of drugs in the neighborhood²⁷

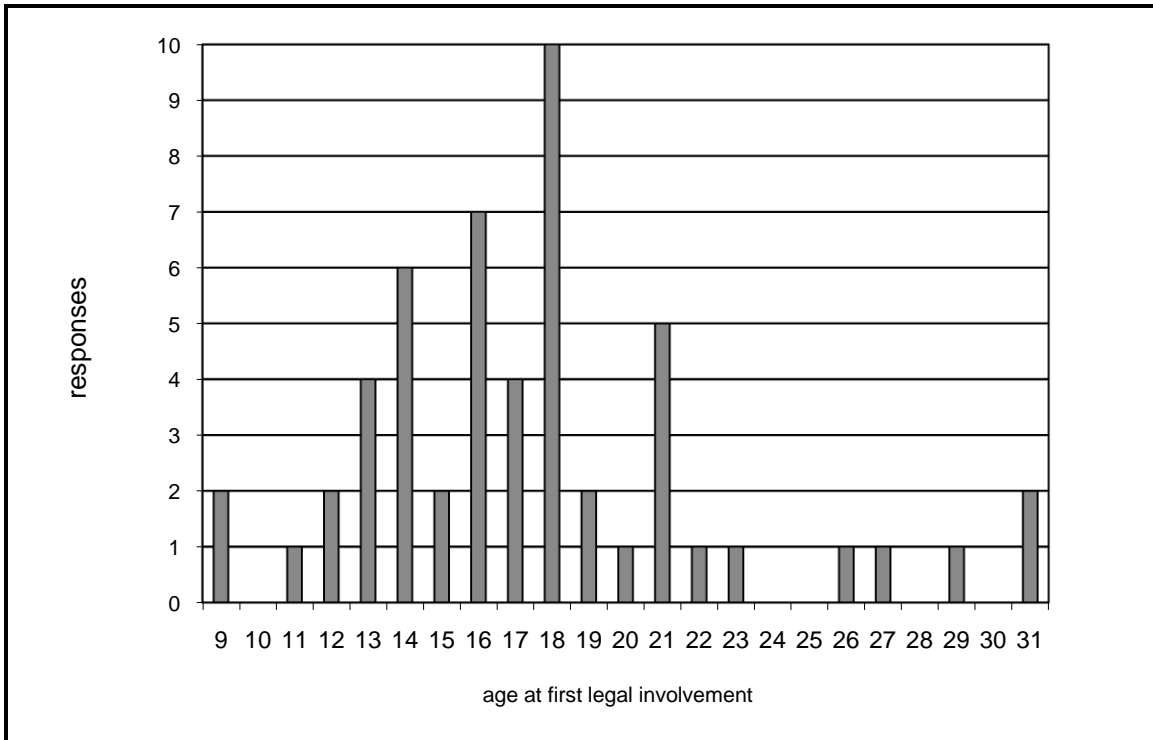
These criteria for parole-eligible housing particularly impact poor communities and communities of color where government-subsidized housing is a critical and limited resource, drug use is most criminalized by police, and rates of incarceration are highest. The combined effect of these restrictive criteria for parolee housing and the gender-based barriers associated with re-entry housing greatly impedes T/GV people from making parole and successfully navigating re-entry.

²⁷ Housing and Urban Development. (1996) *One Strike and You're Out" Screening and Eviction Policies for Public Housing Authorities*. Retrieved at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/publications/notices/96/pih96-16.pdf>.

Age & Incarceration

The average age at which respondents had their first incident with the law was 17.5.

Present age ranged widely among participants (from under 16 to over 50 years-old). However, the average age at which respondents experienced their first incident with the law was striking: 17.5-years old. This chart shows participant responses to “age of first legal involvement.”

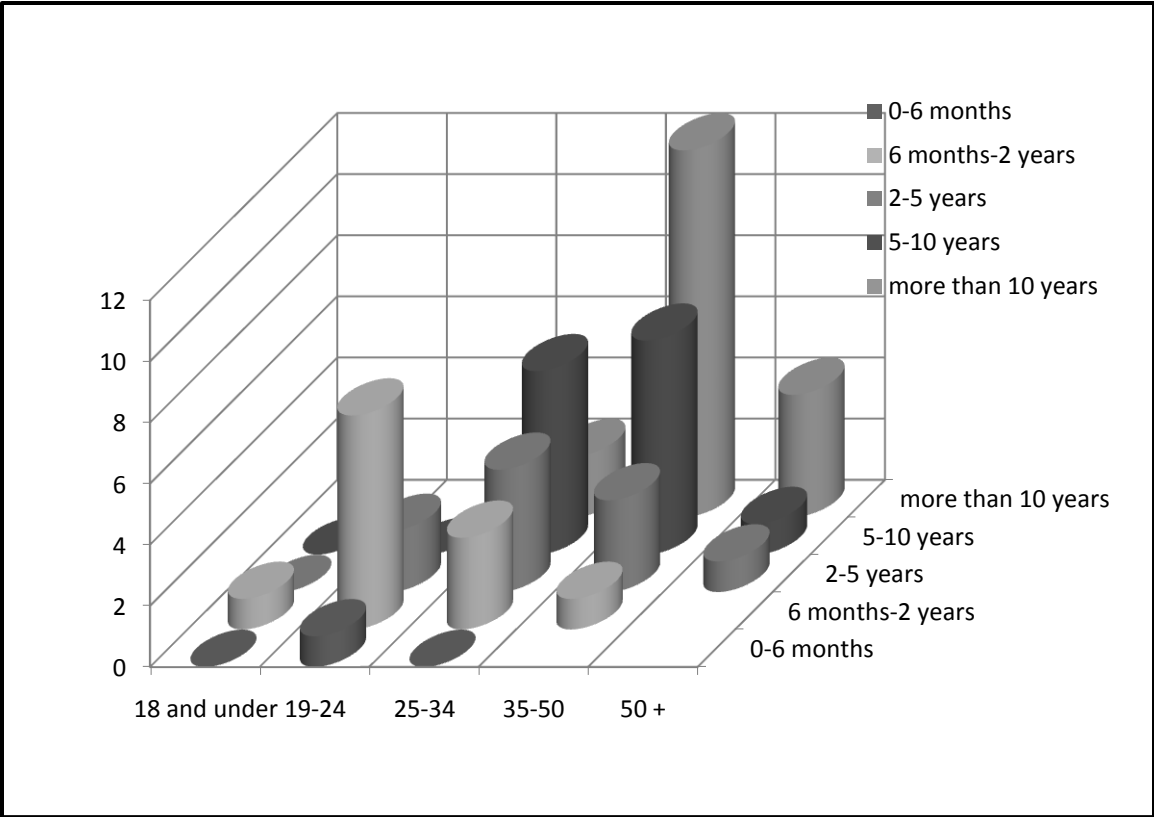


Comparison of Age to Number of Years Incarcerated										
	18 or less		19-24		25-34		35-50		50+	
0-6 months			1	10%						
6 months-2 years	1	100%	7	70%	3	20%	1	3.8%		
2-5 years			2	20%	4	26.7%	3	19.2%	1	16.7%
5-10 years					6	40%	7	26.9%	1	16.7%
More than 10 years					2	13.3%	12	45.2%	4	66.7%

The table above shows the correspondence between participant age and the total amount of time spent in prison. What emerges is a clear trend where length of incarceration correlates to age: the greatest percentage of people age 50 or older spent more than 10 years locked

up, whereas the sample pool for those 18 and under spent six months to two years in detention. In short, the longer a trans or gender variant person has been alive, the more of their life they are likely to have spent incarcerated. This pattern is visually represented in the graph below.

The longer a trans or gender variant person has been alive, the more of their life they are likely to have spent incarcerated.



Once you're in the system, it's hard to get out. While this phenomenon isn't unique to our community, it is certainly a pattern that reflects the discriminatory treatment of T/GV individuals who are eligible for release. The challenges of re-entry that lead to re-incarceration are only intensified by the absence of resources for reentering T/GV people.

Types of Prison Facilities & Rates of Incarceration

Responses to “What kinds of facilities/corrections systems have you ever been in?”		
County Prison/Jail	51	86.5%
State Correctional Institution	46	78%
Youth Detention	20	33.9%
Community Corrections Center	12	20.3%
Court Ordered to State Hospital	2	3.4%
Federal Detention Center	1	1.7%
Court Ordered to Group Home	1	1.7%
Army Stockade	1	1.7%
Immigration Detention	0	0

T/GV people have passed through every type of prison system in Pennsylvania. These two tables reflect the different facilities in which participants were currently and formerly incarcerated.

Responses to “What Kind of facility are you currently or most recently locked up in?”		
State Correctional Institution	37	62.7%
County Prison/Jail	16	27.1%
Youth detention	3	5.1%
Court Ordered to State Hospital	1	1.7%
Community Corrections Center	1	1.7%
Federal Detention Center	0	0
Immigration Detention	0	0

Given that 17.5-years old was the average age when participants first became entangled in the legal system, it follows that youth detention was the third most common type of prison facility, after state prison and county jail, in which participants reported having been locked up.

While the rate of incarceration varied widely between individuals in the survey, with the “number of times locked up” ranging from one to 60, it is clear that T/GV people are imprisoned at a staggering rate. The cumulative number of times locked up in our sample is 658, averaging 11.3 trips to a correctional facility per participant!

Trans and gender variant people are imprisoned at a staggering rate.

Although there is no data available at this time to compare the rate of incarceration of T/GV people relative to the general prison population in Pennsylvania, it can nonetheless be inferred that our communities are especially vulnerable to incarceration. The next section discusses this inference in greater detail. Therefore, the conditions facing T/GV people in prison cannot be reduced to exceptional incidents affecting a few individuals, but must be properly understood as a major health and safety issue involving whole communities.

The conditions facing trans and gender variant people in prison must be understood as a major health and safety issue involving whole communities.

Charges

The T/GV participants in our survey were charged with a variety of offenses, with the type and percentage shown in the table below.

Responses to “What are you in for most recently/now?”			
Minor infractions	6	10.2%	<i>“Driving without a license.”</i> <i>“I got a lot of citations (trespassing, open container, loitering, etc) and I didn’t go to court for them. I got picked up on a bench warrant for that.”</i> <i>“Sidewalk obstruction.”</i>
Drug offenses	10	16.9%	<i>“I violated my probation for giving a hot urine.”</i> <i>“Prescription forgery.”</i> <i>“Possession with intent to deliver.”</i>
Financial offenses	25	42.3%	<i>“Prostitution – I was propositioned by a guy who as an undercover cop.”</i> <i>“I’m most recently charged with prostitution and half the times I just be walking through an area and the cops just stops me and assume I be prostituting and I don’t, just because I’m transgender.”</i> <i>“I had 2 bench warrants from prostitution.”</i> <i>“Access device fraud.”</i> <i>“Prostitution.”</i> <i>“I’m in for prostitution.”</i> <i>“Robbed a trick.”</i>
Violent Offences	12	20.3%	<i>“Robbed a store, assaulted 2 employees.”</i> <i>“I was punched and beaten by a large man, I defended myself with a knife. I am serving a life sentence.”</i> <i>“Fighting with a family member.”</i> <i>“Murder. I defended myself against a trick who attacked me with a knife after I [disclosed my anatomy].”</i>
Systems infractions	15	25.4%	<i>“Probation violation - vice, promoting prostitution – I got caught in a city sweep.”</i> <i>“I was released 4 times and violated each time. I got out every time angry.... I put the lady in drag, tricked, got high and did me to show them (the system). In the end I only hurt myself.”</i> <i>“I’m in here now for violation of probation.”</i>
Sex offenses	4	6.8%	<i>“Statutory rape.”</i> <i>“I’m in here for statutory rape.”</i>

Nearly half (42.3%) of respondents reported being charged with an offense we classified as financially motivated. Due to multiple types of social exclusion, T/GV individuals are frequently shut out of making a living in the above ground economy. Street economies, like sex work and wealth re-distribution (theft), are life-saving sources of income for many of us.

Some survey respondents were being detained without formal charges on bench warrants for failing to appear in court for “quality of life” tickets. These summary offenses target poor and homeless communities, and criminalize such acts as “obstructing the highway.” In these instances, people could not afford to pay the fines for these infractions, and the prospect of going to court was highly intimidating.²⁸ The criminalization of poverty is another

Due to social exclusion, T/GV individuals are frequently shut out of making a living in the “above ground” economy.

The criminalization of poverty is a factor in the mass incarceration of T/GV individuals.

factor in the mass incarceration of T/GV individuals.

It is important to point out the significant number of cases in which T/GV individuals have injured or killed an attacker in self-defense and then been charged with assaulting or murdering the attacker. This appears to be true whether that person is a stranger with transphobic motives, a sex-work patron, or an intimate partner.²⁹ Inside prison, T/GV people are also typically assumed to be the perpetrators in violent incidents. A transwoman in a men’s state facility told us that her parole was revoked after another inmate entered her cell and assaulted her. She was blamed for the incident. Multiple participants said that inside women’s prisons, trans-masculine people are likely to be seen as the aggressor in any conflict and isolated accordingly. This is not to suggest that T/GV people never commit violent acts; rather, in the eyes of the law, we seem to bear most or all of the responsibility when violence occurs – including when it targets us.

In the eyes of the law, T/GV people bear most of the responsibility when violence occurs, including when it targets us.

²⁸ Delancey, Katrina and Adrian Lowe. (2009). *Oh Snap! Got a Ticket. Now What? A Choose Your Own Adventure Guide to Navigating Philly’s Summary Offense System*. Trans-health Information Project.

²⁹ Gabriel Arkles. (2009). Safety and Solidarity Across Gender Lines: Rethinking Segregation of Transgender People in Detention. *Temple Political and Civil Rights Law Review*, 18, 515-560.

Housing

Institutional placement of T/GV people is a complicated issue. Certain institutions have policies for housing T/GV people, while others seem to randomly assign placement. The fact that 54.2% of participants report having been placed in housing based on their perceived gender or sexuality suggests that some prisons recognize the issue of housing T/GV people and are grappling with ways to address it. Among the participants who were incarcerated at the time of the survey, placement in different housing units ranged considerably, with the majority of people being kept in general population. Of the 41 respondents who were in general population, 22 (53.7%) said that, given their options, they were in an adequate housing situation.

Responses to “Where are you currently or most recently housed?”		
General population	41	69.5%
Administrative Segregation	3	5.1%
Protective Custody	10	17%
Restricted Housing (The Hole)	4	6.8%
No answer	1	1.7%

I don't like to be by myself and every so often I luck up and get a celly that is cool.

-a two-spirit woman in a men's state prison

I have a cellie now but I had to fight for it.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

Of the 13 respondents in administrative segregation or “protective custody,” six (46.2%) said that, given their options, they were in an adequate housing situation compared to seven (53.8%) who said that they were not.

I've been Z code for 9 years. I don't like having a Z code.³⁰

-an MTF woman in a men's state prison

³⁰ Z-code: in Pennsylvania State Correctional Institutions, a Z code indicates the inmate must be single-celled. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Policy 11.2.1, Reception and Classification Procedures Section 5 - Single Celling (“Z” Code) and Double Celling Housing (Revised April, 2008). Retrieved from http://www.cor.state.pa.us/standards/lib/standards/11.02.01_Reception_&_Classification.pdf. Z-coding is frequently applied to trans, gender variant, intersex, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer prisoners without their consent. Thus, many people with a “z-code” are placed in administrative segregation against their will.

For at least one participant, “protective custody” offered respite from the violence they experienced while housed in general population. However, this came at the expense of having access to community.

On the one hand I'm left alone, on the other I feel isolated.

-a feminine gay man in a men's state prison

Participants' responses indicate that housing placement in prisons should be based on each individual's assessment of their needs and safety. There was no universal placement preference among T/GV people in prisons.

Housing placement in prisons should be based on each individual's assessment of their needs and safety.

On the one hand, placement in general population allowed individuals to form tight relationships and create community with other incarcerated people, especially cellmates, which multiple people said helped to reduce their sense of isolation and vulnerability. On the other hand, general population exposed some participants to gender-based violence, including physical and sexual assault, which was often overlooked by prison guards and sometimes encouraged and perpetrated by guards themselves.

T/GV people described housing in administrative segregation and protective custody with similar ambivalence. Segregation cuts individuals off from support networks of other incarcerated people,

Any institutional policy that attempts to mandate any one course of action with regard to housing T/GV individuals will fail to keep all T/GV people safe.

leaving them vulnerable to abuse from prison staff. In spite of this, administrative segregation remains a critical option for incarcerated T/GV people who suffer routine violence within institutions. Two points become

quite clear: First, we should not have to choose between our safety and our ability to have contact with others when it comes to our housing options in prisons. Second, any institutional policy that attempts to mandate any one course of action with regard to housing T/GV individuals will fail to keep all T/GV people safe. This report recommends that housing placement be determined by the individual's assessment of their needs and safety. In making this recommendation, Hearts on a Wire is in no way suggesting housing options for T/GV people that would result in an expansion of PA's prison systems.³¹

³¹ For more information on “gender responsive” prisons, see: Arkles, Gabriel. (2009). Safety and Solidarity Across Gender Lines: Rethinking the Segregation of Transgender People in Detention. *Temple Political & Civil Rights Law Review*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Braz, Rose. (2006). Kinder, Gentler, Gender Responsive Cages: Prison Expansion is Not Prison Reform.

Bathrooms/Showers

Bathroom and shower facilities were sites of particular vulnerability to harassment and abuse for respondents. Public or multi-user bathrooms and showers, in particular, posed serious problems to maintaining dignity and privacy. Forty respondents (67.8%) reported having to use public/multi-user shower and bathroom facilities, and many people described how using these facilities exposed them to mistreatment.

Reported abuse related to public bathroom facilities		
Laughed at/called names	30	50.9%
Put on display	23	39%
Groped/felt up	13	22%
Physically hurt on purpose	3	5.1%
"Push to wait to take a shower"	1	1.7%
"Peepers and stalkers"	1	1.7%

People wait for me to get in to watch me.

-an intersex woman at a men's state prison

I was raped at [facility name] in the shower.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

The CO³² called on intercom to announce I'm in the shower.

-a feminine gay man in a men's state prison

Fifteen respondents did not report any problems related to using bathroom and shower facilities. It is significant that 10 of those 15 were among the 19 respondents who reported having access to private, single occupancy bathrooms and showers. Increasing options for incarcerated T/GV individuals to use private, single occupancy bathrooms and showers would reduce the high rate of abuse. Additionally, prisons should be held accountable for meeting the basic need for safe access to these facilities regardless of whether they are public/multi-user or private/single occupancy.

Multi-user bathrooms and showers facilities are sites of particular vulnerability to harassment and abuse.

Women, Girls & Criminal Justice. Retrieved at http://www.criticalresistance.org/downloads/WG_Gender_Responsive_Cages
³² Correctional Officer

The Hole

People who are incarcerated refer to solitary confinement, punitive isolation, and the restrictive housing unit (RHU) as “the hole.” The hole is a segregated, claustrophobic cell where prisoners are held in complete isolation and often stripped of privileges such as recreation time, visitation, and communication with others. Thirty-nine respondents (66.1%) reported being sent to the hole at least once during their incarceration. Based on what participants told us about how long they were in the hole and how often they were sent there, we calculated a conservative total of 5,931 days (16.25 years) logged in the hole between the 39 respondents.³³ This averages out to about five months each.

When asked about why they had been confined in the hole, participants’ reasons revealed a few key themes: self-defense, “for your protection,” gender expression, sexual activity, and retaliation for filing grievances.

Responses to “Why were you sent to the Hole?”

Sexuality and being gay: example bra, makeup, lover

-a transgender woman about her experience in men’s state prisons

Because the facility I am in didn't know where to place me [when I first arrived].

-a transsexual woman in a men’s state prison

I was raped at [facility name] and the warden and staff said I brought it on myself because of my sexuality

-a transgender woman in a men’s state prison

A guy tried to come on to me and I wasn't into him so he got mad and attacked me so I fought him back and we both got sent to the hole.

-a transsexual woman in a Philadelphia county men’s jail

Retaliation for testifying against a prison administrator. I was in solitary until I was transferred.

-a transvestite in a men’s state prison

Fighting

-a trans man about his experience in a Philadelphia County women’s prison

Sitting with my cellie, a CO assumed we were making out.

-a femqueen in a men’s state prison

They claimed it was for my own safety.

-an MTF about her experience in Philadelphia county men’s jails

Self-defense

-a butch in a state women’s prison

³³ Some respondents did not indicate the total time they spent in the hole, instead giving a range (“30, 60, 90 days at a time” or “3-6 months at a time”) in this case we used the lowest possible total (30+60+90 or 90+180 respectively) so the actual time spent in the hole could be much higher than this estimate.

The RHU is a terrible place to get medical or other help if you're in need from a serious illness or medical problem that needs attending to.

-a transwoman about her experience in a men's prison

Treatment in Solitary Confinement		
Denied hormones	14	23.7%
Denied medical treatment	5	8.5%
Other: "denied food - I was told that lying faggots don't get to eat"	1	1.7%
Other: "denied mental health treatment"	1	1.7%

Denial of medical treatment, health maintenance services, and food were sometimes added punishments for many participants in solitary confinement.

During my stay in the RHU [...] I was not given my female hormones, nor a high caloric diet due to my [HIV]+ status. They used excuses that they couldn't find my chart. However as soon as I arrived back [on my usual unit] my treatment continued.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

Hormones

For many transgender and gender variant individuals, taking hormones is a central component of their health maintenance, physically and psychologically. Unfortunately, gender-related hormone access is not covered by most private or public healthcare systems in the U.S.³⁴ As a result, the costs associated with prescription hormones can be prohibitively high, and the process for obtaining them from a doctor can involve numerous humiliating gate-keeping steps.³⁵ For this reason, many of us opt to get hormones on black or grey markets.³⁶

Thirty-seven (62.7%) survey respondents were on hormones prior to incarceration. Of those 37 participants,

- Twenty five (67.6%) had their hormones prescribed by a doctor
- Fifteen (40.5%) obtained hormones in some other way³⁷

It appears that the majority of Pennsylvania prisons lack a specific policy or protocol for administering hormones to T/GV people.

The majority of prisons lack a specific policy or protocol for administering hormones to transgender and gender variant people.

Therefore, prison medical staff has significant discretion in determining who is allowed to access hormones. These factors leave most incarcerated T/GV people with no access or inconsistent access to hormones.

We did not specifically ask whether people were getting hormones from the prison or a black/grey market source.³⁸ An unknown number of the respondents who reported hormone access “off and on” were presumably accessing hormones from the inconsistently reliable black/grey market.

Among the 37 participants who were on hormones prior to incarceration:

- Seven (18.9%) have been able to continue their hormones while incarcerated

³⁴ Medicaid doesn't cover hormone prescriptions and most private insurance policies specifically exclude transition-related healthcare of any kind, including hormones.

³⁵ World Professional Association for Transgender Health. (2001). *Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders*. Retrieved from <http://www.wpath.org/documents2/socv6.pdf>.

³⁶ *Grey market* refers to distribution channels which are unauthorized, but not illegal, such as sharing prescription medications.

³⁷ Three respondents indicated using hormones provided by a doctor and hormones obtained in some other way.

³⁸ Based on feedback from incarcerated people who edited the survey, we removed a question about where people were getting hormones because it exposed respondents to punishment for contraband if the survey was intercepted by prison staff. All outgoing prison mail is inspected.

- Fourteen (37.8%) have gotten their hormones off and on
- Sixteen (43.2%) have not been able to receive hormones at all while incarcerated

The issue of hormone access highlights how healthcare exclusion on the outside is reinforced within prisons. Participants, who prior to incarceration had relied on informal channels to get hormones without needing to have a prescription, found themselves facing familiar barriers to care in prison.

Upon my intake the nurse told me that I needed a doctor's name and number to verify my hormones - so being as though I was buying them from someone off the street I was not gonna receive any hormones.

-a transsexual woman in a men's Philadelphia County jail

Having a prescription did not guarantee being allowed to continue hormones in prison. There was no significant difference in gaining access to hormones while incarcerated between those who had a prescription and those who did not. Of the 25 who had a prescription for hormones prior to incarceration:

- Six (24%) continued taking hormones while incarcerated
- Ten (40%) were denied hormones outright
- Nine (36%) received hormones intermittently

I never have been on hormones. I tried at [institution name] but was denied.

- a transwoman in the RHU at a men's state prison

You have to complain and write sick call notes to the nurse over and over again just for the medical to give you what you need especially for hormones.

-a transsexual woman in a men's Philadelphia county jail

I'm not taking any hormones here!

-a transgender man in a state women's prison

There is no help in keeping the girls on their hormones and someone like me that was getting their hormones at [County institution] but when I hit the state jails I get the 'no we don't give them out.'

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

Denial or irregular delivery of requested hormone therapy causes a range of physical, emotional, and psychological harm. For trans-feminine individuals whose bodies are accustomed to regular estrogen intake, the rapid withdrawal of this hormone can cause heart problems, irregular blood pressure,³⁹ hot flashes, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, hair loss, insomnia, and difficulty with short term memory and concentration.⁴⁰ Trans-masculine individuals are also susceptible to health problems related to interrupted hormone access, including depression, lethargy, mood swings, irritability, sleep disturbance, and anemia.⁴¹ Individuals who rely on external hormone sources to maintain their endocrine system (especially those who have had surgery to remove hormone producing organs) will have to endure these symptoms until access is reinstated.

The denial or irregular delivery of hormone therapy causes a range of physical, emotional, and psychological harm.

Drastic, sudden fluctuation in hormone levels can trigger and exacerbate mental health conditions.⁴² It is likely that there is a relationship between hormone access and the percentage of survey respondents (33.9%) who indicated they had a mental health diagnosis at some point during their incarceration. Hormone therapy is only one part of the medical environment that many of our community members deal with in prison – though it can be seen as an indicator of the overall vulnerability of T/GV people’s health behind bars.

Drastic, sudden fluctuation in hormone levels can trigger and exacerbate mental health conditions.

³⁹ Mogul, Joey, Andrea Ritchie, & Kay Whitlock. (2011). *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

⁴⁰ Women’s Health Zone (2008). *Imbalances in Estrogen Level can Show Adverse Effects on Your Health!*

Retrieved from <http://www.womenhealthzone.com/womens-reproductive-health/imbbalances-in-estrogen-level-can-show-adverse-effects-on-your-health/>.

⁴¹ Hypogonadism (n.d.) In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved January 8, 2010, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypogonadism>.

⁴² Deanne Repich. (2006). *How Female Hormonal Changes Can Contribute to Anxiety and Panic Attacks*. Retrieved from <http://www.articlesbase.com/stress-management-articles/how-female-hormonal-changes-can-contribute-to-anxiety-and-panic-attacks-80950.html>

Medical

Healthcare access is integrally tied to the survival of incarcerated T/GV people. The majority of respondents, 42 (71.2%), shared that they have at least one chronic condition that requires ongoing medical care unrelated to their gender. An additional five (8.5%) stated they do not know if they have chronic conditions.

33.9% of participants self-reported living with HIV/AIDS. This is 21 times the HIV prevalence rate of 1.6% in Pennsylvania's total prison population.⁴³ These figures could be higher, as some participants remain

33.9% of T/GV participants self-reported living with HIV/AIDS.

unaware of their HIV status or fear the repercussions

Self-reported chronic illnesses:		
HIV/AIDS	20	33.9%
Serious mental illness	20	33.9%
Asthma	16	27.1%
Hepatitis C	12	20.3%
Hypertension	7	11.9%
Diabetes	6	10.2%
Heart disease	2	3.4%
Visual impairment	2	3.4%
Physical disability	2	3.4%

of disclosure. HIV/AIDS is one of several serious health issues that many participants live with behind bars; others, as shown by the table above, include mental illness, asthma, hepatitis, heart conditions, and diabetes.

When we asked participants about the availability and competency of medical care in their facilities, 51 (86.4%) of respondents had accessed prison health services at least once and 34 (57.6%) felt their medical needs, *unrelated to gender*, were taken seriously by medical staff.

If it is a serious condition, you are helped.

-a trans woman about her experience in men's prisons

Some good people will help.

-a transsexual woman in a men's Philadelphia County jail

All the medical providers are women. That is important to me.

-a feminine gay man in a men's state prison

It's OK - except hormones.

-a transgender woman in administrative segregation in a Philadelphia County men's jail.

⁴³ Statehealthfacts.org. (2008). *Pennsylvania: Inmates in Custody of State or Federal Prison Authorities with HIV or AIDS, 2008*. Retrieved from <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/profileind.jsp?ind=564&cat=11&rgn=40>.

Though more than half of the respondents were satisfied that their general health needs were being met, a greater majority, 38 (64.4%), believed their medical needs *as trans and gender variant individuals* were *not* taken seriously by prison staff. Requests for and delivery of gender-related health services were often met with ignorance and intimidation.

When I get my shot, the nurse has given it with air in it and when I ask to see it put together, the nurse hides it behind his back. He frightens me.

-an MTF in a men's state prison

They give you only what they think you should get, and not what you need or what I was getting.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

I am not properly getting care for my transgender situation. They are not staff equipped to deal with [T/GV inmates]. The facility itself has no education or knowledge besides what I briefly tell them. Being as though I am the only one here they don't even seek out what they need to be prepared for future instances which goes to show how they deem medical situations like mine. The severity of it doesn't bother them apparently.

-an MTF woman in a men's state prison

[Medical staff] were not fond of me being a trans male.

-a trans man about his experience in juvenile detention.

[Medical staff] ... make comments of my gender.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

[Medical staff] treat me different.

-a transman in a women's state prison

I'm not receiving mammograms despite presence of breasts and history of breast cancer.

-a trans woman in a men's state prison

It is tempting to infer from this data that T/GV individuals are, with the exception of trans-specific care, getting their overall medical needs met in prisons. In reality, the lack of comprehensive health care threatens the wellbeing and survival of T/GV people behind bars.

Institutionalized Discrimination & Violence

Prisons are inherently abusive. Racialized, sexual, and gender-based discrimination and violence are routine functions of these institutions and affect all incarcerated people. Therefore, abuse against T/GV people is not exceptional, though transphobia means that our community members are targeted in specific ways. This abuse is commonly carried out by prison staff and sometimes by other incarcerated people. Hearts on a Wire views violence inflicted on incarcerated T/GV people by non-T/GV prisoners as a form of institutional violence rather than of individual aggression. The purpose of this section is to expose prison abuse and how it affects T/GV lives.

Institutionalized discrimination and violence were the most difficult subject to ask questions about because incarcerated T/GV people endure severe and routine abuse. We encouraged participants to consider their own needs as they completed this section. A few participants chose to skip it altogether. Others heavily circled and underlined their answers, conveying the intensity of their experiences. Some people courageously shared their stories.

WARNING: This section contains graphic descriptions of abuse, and therefore may trigger painful feelings, especially for those with a history of trauma.

Sometimes they move out of my way, looks like the parting of the red sea. Or I'm standing in meal line and I look behind me and there is so much space between me and the person behind me that you could drive a mac truck through it.

-a femqueen serving a life sentence at a men's state prison

T/GV people consistently reported being alienated and excluded from communities incarcerated people form inside prisons. Prisons discourage and prohibit the formation of communities inside. We found that T/GV people were prevented from accessing even the institutionally sanctioned communities. This isolation increases vulnerability to assault and sexual violence.

They treated me like a leper.

-a trans woman about her two years in youth detention

I was told 'fags don't go to church.'

-a drag queen in a men's state prison

Ten respondents (17%) reported being prevented from practicing their religion due to their gender. Respondents experienced harassment

Harassment interfered with participation in communities of faith.

from other incarcerated people, guards, and those leading religious services that interfered with or barred them from participation in communities of faith.

They would just give me a hard time and smart disrespectful remarks.

-a trans woman about her experiences in men’s state prisons

The chaplain has removed me from services a couple of times. Once for holding a friend’s hands in a personal prayer for his aunt in the hospital. The second and third time ‘cause he said I looked too feminine. After each time he held entire sermons on homosexuals being damned. I just stopped going to church because I don’t need the headache.

-a femqueen serving a life sentence in a men’s state prison

An officer didn’t want me and my partner sitting together in church. I was sent to the hole.

-a feminine gay men in a men’s state prison

I was not allowed to attend church with hair in pigtail.

-a transgender woman about her experience in County jail

Staff has the ability to make the lives of T/GV people tolerable or a living nightmare.

Incarcerated people have daily contact with many staff members inside prisons. Guards, medical providers, social workers, counselors, and other professionals have the authority to control many aspects of life inside. They have

the power to make the lives of T/GV people tolerable or a living nightmare.

The CO said ‘I’m not stripping the queer.’

-a transgender woman in a men’s state prison

Searches were reported as consistently abusive and discriminatory. Respondents were humiliated, sexually assaulted, and injured during the course of searches. The survey didn’t specify intake searches or routine searches, so these results likely reflect both experiences.

Abuse during Searches		
Laughed at	29	49.2%
Put on display	28	47.5%
Called names	27	45.8%
Groped/felt up	20	33.9%
Physically hurt on purpose	7	11.9%
“Property damaged”	1	1.7%

They hate homosexuals in jails and are very verbally abusive.

-a trans woman about her experience in men’s prisons

Some participants reported that prison staff were invested in their safety and wellbeing. However, the vast majority reported abuse of some kind by staff. Abuse by staff varied from verbal harassment to sexual and physical assault. Also included here are instances of staff encouraging other inmates to assault T/GV people.

Reported abuse by staff			
Verbally harassed by staff(due to gender)	47	79.7%	Twenty seven (57.4%) of those who reported verbal harassment by staff reported that the harassment was committed by “a group of staff”
Sexually harassed by staff	26	44.1%	Five (19%) of those who reported sexual harassment by staff reported that the harassment was committed by “a group of staff”
Physically assaulted by staff	16	27.1%	Six (37.5%) of those who reported physical assault by staff reported that the assault was committed by “a group of staff”
Physical assault by inmates encouraged or permitted by staff	16	27.1%	Of these 16: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven reported staff encouraging inmates to physically assault them “a couple of times” • Four reported staff encouraging inmates to physically assault them “over and over”
Sexually assaulted by staff	16	27.1%	Of these 16: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four reported being sexually assaulted by staff “a couple of times” • Four reported being sexually assaulted by staff “over and over” • Two reported that forced sex was committed by “a group of staff”
Sexual assault by inmates encouraged or permitted by staff	11	18.6%	Of these 11: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six reported staff encouraging inmates to sexually assault them “a couple of times” • One reported staff encouraging inmates to sexually assault them “over and over”

In [institution name] this one CO [...] snuck me out of the cell and told me I had to blow him and swallow his cum or he'd write me up. I love sex, all of it, but not like this, not rape.

-an MTF in a men's state prison

Many times when a CO knows you are being bothered... they will encourage the inmate to keep on bothering and harassing you.

-a transsexual woman in a Philadelphia County men's jail

Abuse of T/GV people is not unique to the prison experience. One national study found T/GV people experience “near universal”

harassment on the job.⁴⁴ The murder rate of transgender persons is seventeen times higher than the national average.⁴⁵ Non-fatal violence against T/GV individuals is underreported “because of widespread doubts that state and local authorities will treat [T/GV victims] with respect or investigate the crimes.”⁴⁶ These statistics reflect the general attitudes of society toward our communities. Those attitudes extend into prisons and are amplified by incarceration.

The general attitudes of society towards our communities are amplified by incarceration.

I never told anyone about my attack ... no one would have believed me and I was scared for my life.

-a transgender woman in a men’s state prison

Verbal harassment happens constantly in prison.

-a transwoman about her experience in men’s prisons

Every night coming in from night yard being in the crowd of other inmates I’m always being grabbed on.

-a femqueen in a men’s state prison

A staggering number of participants reported abuse by other inmates. Nearly all reported verbal abuse while about half experienced physical and/or sexual assault. For many respondents, these forms of abuse were repeated, and although guards were aware of the situation they ignored it.

Although guards were aware of abuse they often refused to intervene.

About 20 guys circled me and pulled out their junk and shook it at me asking me to pleasure them. I yelled at them and said a guard was coming, the guard just looked up in the sky.

-a transwoman in a men’s state prison

In the hole I got beat up.... A guard just let it happen.

-an intersex femqueen about her experience in Philadelphia County men’s prisons

⁴⁴ Grant, Jaime, Lisa Mottet & Justin Tanis. (2011). *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. Washington DC: National Center for Transgender Equality & the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Retrieved from http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf.

⁴⁵ *Los Angeles Transsexual Day of Remembrance*. Retrieved Nov. 14, 2010 from <http://www.tsroadmap.com/los-angeles/day-of-remembrance.html>.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Campaign. (2010) *How Do Trans People Suffer from Discrimination?* Retrieved from <http://www.hrc.org/issues/1508.htm>.

Reported abuse by inmates			
Verbally harassed by inmates	53	90%	Of these 53: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty three describe verbal harassment by inmates as something that happens “over and over” • Thirty five report staff have failed to intervene in verbal abuse by inmates
Sexually harassed by inmates	43	72.9%	Of these 43: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thirty five report repeated sexual harassment by inmates • Eighteen report sexual harassment by groups of inmates • Thirty five indicate staff failed to intervene in sexual harassment by inmates
Physically assaulted by inmates	31	52.5%	Of these 31: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twelve report repeated physical assault by inmates • Two describe physical assault by inmates as something that happened “over and over” • Nine report being physically assaulted by a group of inmates • Sixteen indicate staff failed to intervene in physical assault by inmates
Sexually assaulted by inmates	26	44.1%	Of these 26: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine reported repeated sexual assault • Seven report being sexually assaulted by a group of inmates • Sixteen indicated staff failed to intervene. Seven of these reported that staff repeatedly turned a blind eye to sexual assault by inmates.

I was naked in a shared open shower, this guy ... punched me, threw me over the shower wall and raped me in front of everyone, I was so numb I felt I deserved it, no one helped me.

-a genderqueer person in a men’s state prison

Domestic violence.

-a transgender woman in a juvenile detention facility

Another way of looking at it: by type of abuse.										
	At all		By staff		By inmates		With staff's permission or encouragement		With staff's failure to intervene	
Verbal abuse	55	93%	47	79.7%	53	90%			35	59.3%
Sexual harassment	46	78%	26	44.1%	43	72.9%			35	59.3%
Physical assault	36	61%	16	27.1%	31	52.5%	16	27.1%	16	27.1%
Sexual assault	31	52.5%	16	27.1%	26	44.1%	11	18.6%	16	27.1%

Grievances

You don't win on grievances.

-a genderqueer person in a men's state prison

I know personally that when a grievance is put in they are pretty much ignored.

-a transsexual woman in a men's Philadelphia jail

Most (88.1%) of the participants reported that they were aware of the grievance policy of the facility where they were housed. A minority (11.9%) reported there was no grievance policy or that they were unsure if there was. Every facility is required to have a grievance procedure.⁴⁷ These responses speak to the general knowledge that incarcerated people have about their rights. Forty one (69.5%) respondents had filed a grievance.

For a significant minority, their right to file a grievance was unclear.

Reasons given for filing grievances		
Complaints against staff	11	<p><i>"Getting cursed out by an officer"</i></p> <p><i>"I wanted the bullshit to end about my sexuality. It did not."</i></p> <p><i>"The chaplain removed me from church a couple of times [...] 'cause he said I looked too feminine. After each time he held entire sermons on homosexuals being damned. I complained because he made a big deal of removing me in front of the entire church and he doesn't have the authority to remove anyone from church and he called me out of my name to the church."</i></p> <p><i>"I was working in the kitchen and staff didn't like [T/GV] working there. I lost my job as a result."</i></p> <p><i>"Denied help from social work."</i></p> <p><i>"Staff not doing their job properly"</i></p> <p><i>"A staff called me a faggot"</i></p> <p><i>"Mistreated by staff"</i></p>
Complaints about medical neglect	8	<p><i>"Not full medical treatment"</i></p> <p><i>"Failure to give me my female hormones"</i></p> <p><i>"I had to sue to receive medical treatment"</i></p> <p><i>"Against medical for poor treatment"</i></p> <p><i>"Because of not being treated for medical issues"</i></p>
Inmate abuse	4	<p><i>"To complain about the guy that sexually harass and sexually assault me"</i></p> <p><i>"Harassment"</i></p>
Prison conditions	3	<p><i>"Leaky toilets"</i></p> <p><i>"Certain issues on our block"</i></p>
Isolation	2	<p><i>"Challenge Z code"</i></p>

Of the 41 participants who had filed a grievance, eight (19.5%) reported that their situation improved as a result of filing a complaint. However the vast majority reported that nothing was done to address

⁴⁷ In fact, there is a grievance policy in every facility.

their grievance (48.7%), or something was done to address their grievance but it wasn't satisfactory (39%).

I wrote to my unit manager about other inmates grabbing my ass he still hasn't did anything. [...] No one seem to help me.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

I complain about the guy that sexually harrass and sexually assault me and they ignores it.

-a trans woman in a men's Philadelphia county jail

The majority of those who filed grievances reported retaliation (58.5%). Retaliation included punitive transfer, isolation, abuse and neglect.

I'm still single celled because of it.

-a feminine gay man in a men's state prison

I was transferred to another facility as a result.

-a trans woman in a men's state prison

Medical staff were angry with me.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

1 year in the RHU.

-a crossdresser in a men's state prison

Fear of retaliation and a sense of futility prevented many people from reporting mistreatment to the prison.

Despite awareness of the existing policies, 28.8% of respondents had never filed a grievance. A well-founded fear of retaliation and a well-grounded sense of futility prevented many people from reporting mistreatment or unmet needs through grievance procedures.

Nothing would have happened except made enemies.

-a transwoman in a men's state prison

Because staff retaliate against you.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

I don't want the retaliation that comes.

-a two-spirit person in a men's state prison

Pointless.

-a trans man about his experience in youth detention

Nothing would be done.

-an MTF about her experiences in Philadelphia county men's jails

The CO you're grieving [is the one] to resolve the issue. Every time.

-a butchqueen in a men's state prison

Intimacy & Sex in Prison

While in prison, many people form intimate and sexual relationships. 51 (86.4%) of the participants reported being sexually active and 45 (76.3%) reported forming partnerships during their incarceration. Some respondents describe the ways in which having sex and/or creating partnerships supported their resilience by providing companionship, protection, and access to resources:

Reasons why respondents chose their partners in prison	
Love	37
Lust	35
Access to goods/favors	18
Availability	17
Access to safety/protection	9
Loneliness	4
To keep from being sexually assaulted	1
Knowing them on the outside	1
Sexual assault	1

This is a very cold and lonely place in here and I get no mail or visits so to feed my need for love, touch, and commissary I have sex. It isn't that bad, I love sex and do get satisfaction and I feel wanted. I know it's false and only about sex and I'm being used, but I'm using them too. A girl has to survive in here.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

I'm currently in a relationship and have been since I've been incarcerated.

-an intersex person incarcerated in a men's state prison

People with whom incarcerated T/GV people are engaging in sexual activity	
Inmate (other than cellmate)	34
Cellmate	31
Guard	11
Other staff	7

All sex is criminalized in prison. Because most prisons prohibit condoms, other safer sex barriers, and lube, incarcerated people risk exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).⁴⁸ ACT UP Philadelphia's 2008 grassroots campaign

made condoms available in Philadelphia County jails.⁴⁹ Similar efforts to change policy at the state level have been unsuccessful despite the well-documented connection between incarceration and HIV transmission. As Hearts on a Wire member Najee Gibson explains,

"Condoms need to be in state facilities. You're out of your mind if you think inmates aren't having sex."

⁴⁸ World Health Organization (WHO). (2004). Policy Brief: Reduction of HIV Transmission in Prisons 2004, WHO/HIV/2004.05.

⁴⁹ Shabazz-El, Waheedah. (2008). ACT-UP Philadelphia Condoms in Philadelphia Jails Campaign. *Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project*, 30-36.

“Condoms need to be in state facilities. You’re out of your mind if you think inmates aren’t having sex.”

Of the 51 people who told us they were sexually active while

Strategies for reducing sexual risk	
Condoms	23
Improvised barriers	19
Latex gloves	8
Sandwich baggies	2
“Latex glove split in half for oral-anal”	1
Mutual monogamy with an uninfected partner	3
Hand jobs	2
Mutual masturbation	2
“Kinky sex”	1
Dental dams	1
“The pull out”	1

incarcerated, 35 (68.6%) reported having some way to prevent the transmission of HIV and other STIs. Fourteen (27.5%) reported being unable to protect themselves or their partners. Despite the official ban on condoms in most Pennsylvania prisons, many respondents were able to get them by other means or had developed creative strategies for practicing safer sex. This table presents alternative approaches to safer sex reported by respondents.

If I get caught in a relationship I have a high chance of getting a misconduct.

- a trans woman in a men’s state prison

Eight (13.6%) respondents said they were choosing not to have relationships or sex while in prison. When asked about this decision, they wrote about safety and punishment and the inability to find compatible partners as a result of being in prison.

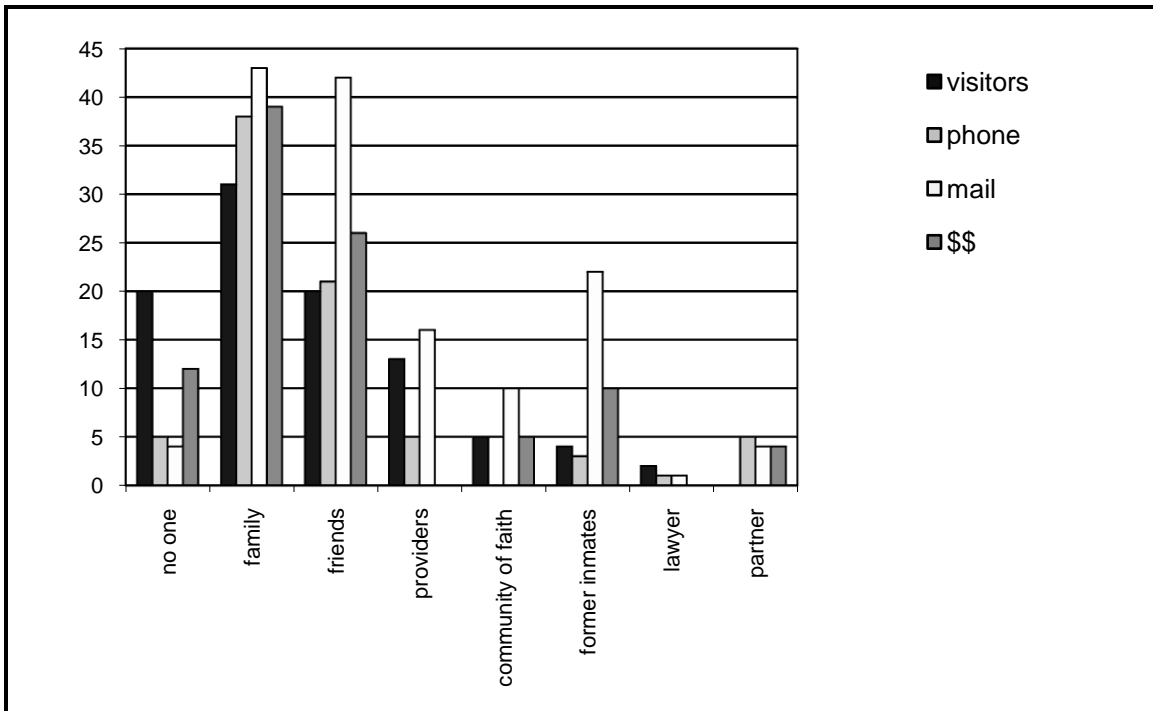
If I was bless with a vagina I would most likely be a lesbian. Men are airheads - come on now!... There's nothing to gain from consenting to any sexual escapades being incarcerated at all.

- a two-spirit person incarcerated in a men’s state prison

Relationships & Community Outside Prison

Having community on the outside is a vital part of surviving a prison sentence. The survey asked about the relationships that participants were able to maintain with people on the outside. We asked questions about visits and other communication with friends, family,⁵⁰ partners, service providers, and faith-based communities. This table and graph reflect the outside connections participants were able to rely on.

Relationships with People and Groups Outside of Prison									
	Visitors		Phone contact		Received mail from		Put money on account		
None	20	33.9%	5	8.5%	4	6.8%	12	20.3%	
Family	31	52.5%	38	64.4%	43	72.9%	39	66.1%	
Friends	20	33.9%	21	35.6%	42	71.2%	26	44.1%	
Social service providers	13	22%	5	8.5%	16		0	0%	
Community of faith	5	8.5%	0	0%	10	16.9%	5	8.5%	
Lawyer	3	5%	1	1.7%	1	1.7%	0	0%	
Former inmates	4	6.8%	3	5%	22	37.3%	10	16.9%	
Partner	3	5%	5	8.5%	4	6.8%	4	6.8%	



⁵⁰ Family can include many different forms of kinship, and for many T/GV people family is not limited to blood relation or assumed hetero-normative family structures. This is important to state because incarcerated T/GV people often don't have the visitation rights of their chosen family respected. The availability of these rights is at the discretion of prison officials. This reinforces the harm that prisons do to T/GV people's relationships and access to outside community.

We did not ask participants to quantify the communication and/or support (mail, visits, phone calls, monetary gifts) they received from people on the outside. For example, a positive answer could indicate that a participant got one letter during their entire time in prison or that they received three letters a week. What is clear is that many incarcerated T/GV people do not have adequate access to community on the outside.

Sometimes I don't get my mail. I don't get my partners mail. My partner is an ex-inmate; my love is not taken seriously.

-a femqueen serving a life sentence in a men's state prison

The prison mail system is itself an obstacle to communication with loved ones. A policy forbids incarcerated people from sending letters to one another. Mail delivery is dependent on the arbitrary judgment of corrections officers working in the mailroom who search and censor non-legal mail. Hearts on a Wire has had problems with letters, money orders, and surveys being returned to us by prison mailrooms.

Fully 33.9% of respondents had never received a visit during their incarceration. Respondents gave many reasons why visitation is difficult: geographical distance between the prison and their city/neighborhood, cost/lack of transportation, invasive visitor search procedures, and emotional trauma of seeing loved ones while in prison.

Reported factors contributing to difficulty of visits	
Prison too far away	31
Transportation too expensive	13
Find it too traumatic	11
Humiliating visitor search policy	8
"I don't want them to see me like this"	2

Eight respondents reported that community members had attempted to visit but were denied entry. Dress code and identification

policies get in the way of T/GV people who wish to visit prisons. Respondents explained the reasons prison administrators gave for turning away their visitors:

- ***"Dress code violation: too much legs."***
- ***"ID issues."***

Policies discourage formerly incarcerated individuals from visiting community members who are still in prison. Pennsylvania forbids formerly incarcerated people from visiting prisons for at least a year after their release. When one Hearts on a Wire member was re-incarcerated, about a third of the group was unable to visit her because they had been locked up within the prior year.

Strategies for Resilience & Survival

Incarcerated T/GV individuals use a variety of strategies for living with dignity and protecting themselves and their community members. Recognizing people's everyday forms of resistance is essential for accountable prison advocacy. When we asked participants to describe the ways they survive inside prison, we received a range of responses. Incarcerated T/GV people manage to survive and make impossible choices in the face of intense suffering, dehumanization, and violence.

Looking out for each other

I'm known for coming to the defense of my sisters.

-a transgender woman in "the Hole" at a Philadelphia Jail

We try to greet all the new children as soon as they get here. And we try to do meaningful things for our community in jail.

-a two-spirit femqueen in a men's state prison

Keeping to oneself

After I got in three fights they never gave me another cellie. I prefer to be left alone.

-a transman in a women's state prison

I asked to be put in PC (Protective custody).

-a trans woman in a Philadelphia county prison

Deflecting insults

[Verbal and sexual harassment] is done in a humorous manner. I laugh, they laugh.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

Passing as non-trans

Nobody here knows for sure of my gender. They make comments, I deny it.

-an MTF in a men's state prison

Giving consent

I never got raped in jail 'cuz I always just gave it up.

-a transsexual woman about her repeated trips to jail

Being fierce

I am humble and smiley person, but I don't show signs of timid anymore.

-a femqueen serving a life sentence in a men's state prison

I'm 6 feet tall with the aura of Grace Jones, therefore the so call straights knew from the door that in no way shape form or fashion that I would be a timid person. I'm known to chastise them before they have a chance to disrespect me whatsoever.

-a transfeminine androgyne in a men's state prison

Forming relationships

Someone in higher rank always knows me and respects me, and they [other inmates and staff] see that, and I make sure they see do.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

Abstaining from medical transition

Although I would really like to go on hormones (I really, really would like to go on hormones) I don't think this is the right environment to do so. Jail is a concentrated aggressive environment and hormones would break down some of my physical strength that I need to protect and defend myself.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

Filing grievances and lawsuits

I had to sue to receive medical treatment.

-a trans woman in a men's state prison

Refusing to use the prison's grievance system

I don't wish to have retaliation and [grievances] cause more havoc. I know I shouldn't let things slide but I have no support network to even begin without suffering any ramifications.

-an intersex woman in a men's state prison

They have a sexual harassment hotline here but if I were to call it they would definitely retaliate.

-an MTF in a men's state prison

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

T/GV People in Women’s “Correctional” Facilities

Our efforts to locate T/GV people in women’s prisons were met with obstacles imposed by the prisons and their system of record keeping. While we have included what information we could gather, the perspectives of five people hardly encapsulate the experience of incarceration for all T/GV people in women’s prisons. More information is needed:

- How do T/GV people end up in women’s prisons in Pennsylvania?
- How are these identities criminalized and policed?
- What is the experience of incarceration for T/GV people in women’s prisons in Pennsylvania?
- What are the differences in criminalization and rates of imprisonment among T/GV communities?

As a first step, we would recommend creative problem solving around locating and contacting T/GV people incarcerated in women’s prisons.

Intake Policy

The survey did not explicitly include questions about prison intake procedures, but several people brought up issues of gender discrimination and mistreatment during intake.

You should consider [additional research] on the “Intake Process,” i.e. how the county jail turned the individual over to the Department of Corrections; like how the individual was dressed, how they were treated when identifying themselves, etc.

-a trans woman in a men’s state prison

The intake process (receiving process) to me is very degrading when you are made to squat-spread...and cough. They also tell you to grab your [genitals].

-a transwoman in a men’s state prison

One participant suggested that intake could serve as an opportunity to learn about a T/GV person’s needs. This suggestion included asking individuals where they would prefer to be housed, as well as screening potential cellmates in order to ward off conflict and abuse.

Re-entry Support & Trans-competent Services

More research is needed on the barriers facing T/GV individuals upon their release from prison. A quarter of participants were currently locked up for parole violations. Re-incarceration is often the result of not being able to find adequate, trans-competent re-entry services.

***The DOC should prepare us for re-entry into society.
Transsexual individuals need to know the [medical]
standards of care and where to receive the care.***

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

Locating resources for getting identification, healthcare, housing, employment, and social benefits is difficult for anyone returning home from prison. This challenge is magnified for our communities.⁵¹ Finding re-entry services that are knowledgeable about our needs can prove nearly impossible. Informal social networks fill the void where service providers are unprepared and ill-equipped to assist. Useful research in this area could identify systemic and structural solutions to overcoming the challenges of re-entry for T/GV people.

Immigration Detention

Little is known about the immigration detention of T/GV people. None of the participants indicated that they had been arrested or detained for immigration reasons. We were unable to reach people who had been detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with this survey.

According to Caitlin Barry, an immigration attorney at the Philadelphia Public Defenders Office, undocumented T/GV individuals are deported at a higher rate than other detainees. Some of Barry's T/GV clients reported that they would rather be deported than be kept in ICE detention because of the risks in these facilities.⁵² In Pennsylvania, ICE detainees are held in separate units within county prisons. There is a need to document the experiences and needs of this part of our community.

⁵¹ T/GV people regularly experience abuse, discrimination, and denial of services. Queers for Economic Justice. (2010). *A Fabulous Attitude: Low-Income LGBTGNC People Surviving & Thriving with Love, Shelter & Knowledge*. Retrieved from at <http://www.q4ej.org/Documents/afabulousattitudefinalreport.pdf>.

⁵² Barry, Caitlin. (2010, June). *Border Crossings: Immigration and Transgender Communities*, Presentation at the 2010 Philadelphia Trans Health Conference.

T/GV People & Disability in Prison

More research is needed on the intersection of disability and incarceration within T/GV communities. Prisons often deny much-needed healthcare to T/GV individuals. For those who have a disability that requires medical care and/or accommodation, this atmosphere of negligence can have dire consequences. One survey respondent described how her impaired eyesight declined to legal blindness because she was denied proper eyewear while locked up.

Further study is needed on the connection between hormone access and depression and other mental health disabilities among T/GV people. A third of participants were diagnosed with a mental illness and most also cited problems with getting hormones. This suggests a possible link that should be examined in greater depth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The survey asked what needed to change and how we might support that change. Participant recommendations ranged from proposals for survival-based reform inside prisons to calls for institutional accountability and community organizing. People suggested immediate solutions for increasing individuals' chances of survival in prison and called attention to the need for greater inside/outside organizing efforts. Some participants specifically named the complacency of LGBT political organizations, whose agendas often exclude prison issues. These responses remind those of us on the outside that the dignity and self-determination of incarcerated people must be central to our organizing and not forgotten behind prison walls.

Options for Housing Placement

I would like to see transwomen be housed in a female's jail and not a man's jail.

-a trans woman in a Philadelphia County jail

The DOC needs to provide general population blocks for transgender and transgender friendly inmates.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

For inmates to stop being housed based on their sexual orientation.

-a trans woman in a men's state prison

Special units for TS's and special programs.

-a transgender person in a county jail

Allowed to have a gay cellmate and not be denied due to possible sexual behavior.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

If you want to have a relationship with somebody or cell up with them that should be your business. This would create a much safer environment for everybody.

-a stud in a women's state prison

Private showers not around men.

-a transwoman in a men's state prison

Addressing Health Needs

Prison should be more caring about our medical needs and not judge us for our gender.

-a butch in a women's state prison

The DOC needs to provide medical treatments without legal battles.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

Doctors in prison who can work with trans and gender variant people.

-a trans man in a women's state prison

Be allowed to buy and use female hygiene products under P.A. Department of Corrections policy DC-ADM 815 outline for women.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

Governor Rendell passed a discrimination law for Harrisburg protecting Transgendered. Why hasn't the Department of Corrections ever hired a trans person in their Healthcare Services Division? We sure could use an advocate within the system who knows and understands the rainbow of the communities.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

Hormone medication and surgical sex reassignment.

-a transgender woman in a men's state prison

I would like us trans to be afforded hormones if you choose for the first time here...I'd also like to see us be allowed bras, pantys, condoms, and proper lube.

-a genderqueer MTF in a men's state prison

Even if we didn't take hormones on the outside we should have the right to take them when we are ready! Let us be ourselves.

-a trans woman in a men's state prison

HIV/AIDS Prevention

We need to make sure that all inmates know there is protection against HIV...sandwich wrappers and plastic gloves are trans life savers but we need condoms in state prisons.

-a trans person in a community correction center

For inmates to have condoms without CO's writing an inmate misconduct report on you

-a transwoman in a Philadelphia County jail

HIV awareness should mandatory along with the intake blood [tests].

-an MTF at a county jail

More access to safe sex (condoms distributed) and more programs for T/GV.

-a genderqueer person in a men's state prison

Programs, Education & Job Training

Educational programs, NOT just GED classes (i.e. vocational training programs).

-a trans woman in a men's state prison

I think prisons should have more jobs and activities for trans-genders...we shouldn't have to be harassed by staff because we live our lives as women.

-a transgender person in a men's state prison

Mental health counseling, sex abuse survivors program, how to re-enter out with public, and sex education for transgenders.

-a transgender person in a men's state prison

Being able to see the counselor. They have too much work load. Either get more counselors or stop locking people up for petty things.

-a transgender person is youth detention facility

Voluntary programs instead of mandatory to help us help ourselves instead of being forced to do them.

-a feminine gay man in a men's state prison

Years ago I ask did they have a program for [sexual orientation and gender identity]. They didn't. They only had a sex offender program. To prepare and add this to the administrative directive will gain a greater respect amongst inmates and allow other inmates to come out of the closet. There are a lot of closet queens in prison afraid of being themselves.

-a femqueen in a men's state prison

Gender-based Policy Change

The DOC needs to provide the appropriate clothing; I have breasts and should have bras. I'm a transsexual and I should be permitted to have cosmetics, etc.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

I think that we should be allowed to express ourselves in our appearance by way of commissary that may label items under gender, simply labeled Gender P. meaning Gender Persuasion, which can cover all.

-a femqueen in men's state prison

I would like to see the DOC respect each person's identity and legal name changes; an individual who lives as a woman getting stripped of their legal name, clothing, having their head shaved...was truly shocking and harmful to me, not just for coming into prison but also for re-entry into society.

-a transsexual woman in a men's state prison

Institutional Accountability

The way write ups (misconducts) are handled...we need a fair trial, not to be judged guilty before we even walk in to see the hearing examiner. We need someone who is going to be impartial.

-a two-spirit MTF in a men's state prison

I feel that T/GV people should be taken serious when they make a complaint about an inmate harassing them and sexually assaulting them because it is real. It happens every day.

-a transsexual woman in a youth detention facility

Stop sexual harassment by staff and other inmates.

-a feminine man in a men's state prison

Visitation shouldn't be so degrading to visitors.

-an MTF at a county jail

Education on T/GV Issues for Prison Staff

This survey should be employed as an educational tool to the DOC staff so they can see what needs to be done.

-a trans person in a community correction center

One of the biggest problems for us is the ignorance level of guards and inmates. They used to have an orientation class for new guys into prison. I've suggested to the administration that they allow one or two queens to speak like some other inmates do so we can try to break down some of the barriers, misconceptions, and fears about us.

-a two-spirit femqueen in a men's state prison

State prisons should be informed about our people and our way of life, so they get a better perspective of our selves...that way transgender newcomers would not have to sit in the R.H.U. or the Mental Health Unit waiting on these people to make up their minds and figure out that they can live in G.P. [general population] as other inmates do.

-a femqueen in men's state prison

I would like to see COs, staff and medical trained for T/GV inmates in respect and proper treatment...treatment like a normal person.

-a genderqueer MTF in a recovery house

I would like to see ALL guards and personnel go through trainings on how to deal with GLBT populations in prison.

-a transwoman in a youth detention facility

Advocacy & Community Organizing

Take these surveys to the powers that be and fight for rights for those incarcerated.

-a feminine gay man in a men's state prison

You all should think about putting a group of speakers together to visit the [Philadelphia Prison System] at least once a month.

-a transsexual woman in a county prison

Publish results nationally! Show dateline, 20/20, that sort of thing!

-a genderqueer person in a men's state prison

[S]hould have a trans liaison to help trans better deal with issues in prison.

-a transman in a women's state prison

I hope and pray that this survey will enlighten the work of the ongoing LGBT struggle, regardless of being free or incarcerated. The DOC is a money-making venture. Our government is misappropriating funding prior, during, and post incarceration. Justice for all!!

-a two-spirit androgyne in a men's state prison

Outside Support

More support on the outside so we can stay out of jail in the first place.

-a transwoman in a men's state prison

I've always thought the gay-transvestite-transgender community has forgotten about their incarcerated and it's very disturbing because all other groups - White, Aryan Nation, Black, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Catholic, and Asian prisoners have outside groups who show support to their specific group within the walls. Sadly, our community is so superficial and it's 'out of sight, out of mind.'

-a transvestite person court-ordered to a state hospital

Visions for Justice

I would like to see less of us get incarcerated!

-a transgender woman in a youth detention facility

For transgirls and gay society to be treated with fairness, decency, and respect, and to be able to have the same rights.

-a transwoman in a men's state prison

More respect to T/GV people and know that everybody is not just a sexual being.

-a transwoman in a men's state prison

For trans people to have a voice so we can fit in like everyone.

-a butch in a women's state prison

Once I'm released from the RHU I will type Hearts on a Wire an essay on the changes I would like to see.

-a femqueen in a county prison

This survey provided one forum for T/GV people directly affected by criminalization and imprisonment in Pennsylvania to name critical issues. Further discussion between incarcerated and outside community members is clearly needed, especially to overcome the repressive impact prisons have on inside/outside communication. Building on the knowledge generated from this report and ongoing correspondence with participants, Hearts on a Wire hopes to hold a town hall meeting in Philadelphia to organize action in response to these issues.

AFTERWORD

Challenges/Limitations

The risk of isolation and retaliation in prison may have had a chilling effect on what people felt comfortable writing down. One person even told us, “Once I’m released from the RHU I will type *Hearts on a Wire* an essay on the changes I would like to see.”

Pennsylvania’s prison systems showed clear resistance to people opening channels of communication through prison walls. Some of our mail, survey forms and money orders were rejected by prison censors. When we approached one state women’s prison to get permission to distribute our survey they denied our request, explaining that they did not want “a collection of complaints.”

Outside group sustainability proved to be a challenge for completing this report. *Hearts on a Wire* has undergone much transition since forming in 2007. We began this research while housed in non-profit service organizations. We made a conscious decision to become autonomous from these structures when it became clear how they imposed limits on our capacity to organize politically against the incarceration of our communities.⁵³ This change allowed us to focus more broadly on prison issues and political organizing, but it meant changing locations multiple times and having to find new resources. Some members were unable to attend meetings consistently for reasons related to barriers to housing, employment, recovery programs, and welfare. Criminalization and incarceration continued to impact our ability to organize on the outside, as key members were re-incarcerated while the report was in process. Others relocated to pursue relationships, and professional or educational opportunities. The combined effect of all of these challenges prolonged the writing process for the report and continues to impact our organizing.

Accomplishments

Thanks to the guidance and contributions of people who took the survey, the *This is a Prison, Glitter is Not Allowed* report successfully documented many realities of incarceration for T/GV individuals in Pennsylvania’s prison systems. This report is the first recording of incarcerated T/GV people’s experiences in the state of Pennsylvania. While it certainly does not reflect everyone’s experience, the stories

⁵³ For more information, see Appendix B.

and data presented in this report reveal how imprisonment impacts the dignity, health, safety, and relationships of T/GV people.

Beyond documentation, the report gathered analyses and recommendations from incarcerated T/GV people about what needs to change. Participants' responses reflect their resilience and their creative strategies for building community inside and outside of prison. Their proposals call for change on many levels: social and economic justice, structural and policy change, and the creation of resources which T/GV communities need to live safely on either side of prison walls.

An intentional strategy of survey recruitment was to expand our correspondence with T/GV people in prisons across Pennsylvania. Increased contact with incarcerated community members highlighted the intense need for communication, not only between T/GV people inside and outside, but also among T/GV people incarcerated in different facilities.⁵⁴ This led to creating a newsletter that facilitates communication across different institutions through art, poetry, political discussion, legal and health information, and practical resources. We were able to link participants leaving prisons to resources on the outside, such as trans-competent housing and medical care. In these ways the newsletter serves as a tool to break the isolation of T/GV people across the experience of incarceration and re-entry. Ultimately, Hearts on a Wire's organizing capacity was enhanced when several re-entering participants became actively involved in the outside collective in Philadelphia.

⁵⁴ Prison policy forbids communication between people housed in different facilities.

Conclusion

Humane treatment of T/GV people by the criminal legal system is an immediate, urgent need. We must work to prevent the violence prisons inflict upon T/GV individuals and support our incarcerated community members to survive. However, these immediate needs must be addressed with the understanding that prisons themselves cannot be used for productive or non-violent ends. By creating this report we have taken a modest step toward documenting that fact. We hope this report stirs our collective imagining of a broad definition of community safety, replacing the cycle of incarceration with one of transformative justice.⁵⁵ Hearts on a Wire continues to do the work of raising awareness, building community, and empowering individuals with the dual intention of surviving today and abolishing the penal industrial complex⁵⁶ in the future.

⁵⁵ “Transformative Justice responds to the lack of - and the critical need for - a liberatory approach to violence. A liberatory approach seeks safety and accountability without relying on alienation, punishment, or State or systemic violence, including incarceration and policing.” GenerationFIVE (2008). *Towards Transformative Justice: Why a liberatory response to violence is necessary for a just world*. Retrieved from <http://www.resistinc.org/newsletters/articles/towards-transformative-justice>

⁵⁶ We define “penal industrial complex” as the prisons systems that profit from keeping many of our T/GV community members captive, as well as laws and social policies that criminalize low-income and T/GV people of color, thereby increasing the likelihood of incarceration.

APPENDIX A: The Survey



Every second page was left blank in order to provide space for further comments. These blank pages are not included in this appendix.

We are a group of trans and gender variant people, some of whom have been incarcerated, now working for the Trans-health Information Project (TIP) in Philadelphia.

This survey is intended for transgender and gender variant (TGV) individuals currently in Pennsylvania's various prisons or who are recently released. Our goal is to document what is happening in those systems to TGV individuals. We plan to publish the results of this study as a tool we hope will be useful for future TGV inmates.

This survey is **anonymous**. none of your personal information will be associated with the survey you fill out. However we know there is lack of privacy with inmate correspondence, and we are aware that TGV inmates face violence and discrimination; We want you to use your judgment when answering questions based on your assessment of your safety.

We want to hear how you have been treated while you have been incarcerated. Some of the questions we ask might be hard to answer or might make you feel upset. We acknowledge that we are asking you to remember and think about things that are not pleasant, and we encourage you to be gentle with yourself and take breaks if you need to.

You can answer the questions in the survey, and/or use them as a guide: We have included empty pages in case you want to explain more or tell us a story or add something we missed. We want to be able to read what you write, so please use your best handwriting. When we publish the results of the study we will use people's quotes from the written sections (anonymously, of course) to put a personal face on the issues that TGV prisoners face and the kind of changes you want to see.

We want to pay you for your time and effort in this project. Returning your **completed** survey will guarantee \$10 on your books (\$12 if you had to mail it out)

Return to:



Questions 1-5 are basic demographic questions

1. What sex was marked on your first birth certificate? (circle 1)

M F

2. Have you ever been diagnosed with an intersex condition? (an intersex condition means you were born with genitalia that does not fit typical definitions of male or female)

yes no

3. How do you see your gender now or in the future? (pick **at least one**)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender | <input type="checkbox"/> Transwoman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transsexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Femqueen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two-spirit | <input type="checkbox"/> Woman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive | <input type="checkbox"/> Drag queen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stud | <input type="checkbox"/> Transvestite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Butch | <input type="checkbox"/> Androgyne |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FTMF2M | <input type="checkbox"/> Genderqueer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transman | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Man | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MTF/M2F | |

4. Age range (circle one)

Under 18 19-24 25-34 35-50 Over 50

5. How do you describe your race/ethnicity? (check **all** that apply)

- Hispanic/Latina/o
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black/African American
- White/European
- _____

Questions 6-11 are about your relationship to correction systems

6. What kinds of facilities/corrections systems have you **ever** been in? (Check **all** that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Detention | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Correction Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Correctional Institution | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Detention Center | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County Prison/Jail | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Court Ordered to State Hospital | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Immigration Detention | |

Questions 12-17 are about housing and facilities

12. Where are you currently (or most recently) housed?

- General population
- Administrative segregation
- Medical segregation
- Protective custody
- RHU/The Hole
- _____

13. Have you been placed in housing based on your gender or perceived sexuality (eg. coded Z, A-Block at the Detention Center in Philadelphia)

yes no

14. Do (did) you have a cellie?

yes no

15. Given your options, do you feel you are (were) in an adequate housing situation?

yes no

16. What type of shower/bathroom facilities are (were) available?

Private/single occupancy

Public/multi-user

17. While using shower or bathroom facilities have you ever been: (check any)

- laughed at/called names
- groped/felt up
- physically hurt on purpose
- put on display
- _____

Questions 18-20 are about your experiences of isolation in institutions

18. Have you been placed in solitary confinement (RHU, the hole)?

yes no

If yes, for how long? _____

19. Why were you placed in solitary?

20. While in solitary, were you (check all that apply)

- denied access to medical treatment
- denied access to hormones
- _____

If you feel inspired to, please use the empty pages on the left to answer questions, explain, give examples, tell us a story or add something we missed.

7

Questions 21–27 are about medical issues in corrections

21. a. Were you on hormones before entering the corrections system?

yes no

b. If yes, were your hormones

- prescribed by a doctor
- obtained in some other way

c. Are (were) you able to continue taking hormones while incarcerated?

no yes off and on

22. Do you have any chronic condition(s) that require ongoing medical care?

- yes
- no
- don't know

23. If yes, what condition (s)? (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asthma | <input type="checkbox"/> Hypertension (High Blood Pressure) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health (bipolar, depression, anxiety, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes | <input type="checkbox"/> Tuberculosis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart Disease | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hepatitis C | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HIV/AIDS | _____ |

24. Have you accessed medical treatment in your current or most recent institution?

yes no

If no, what prevented you from accessing care? _____

25. Have you ever been denied treatment in your current or most recent institution?

yes no

If yes, why? _____

26. Do you feel your medical needs are (were) taken seriously by staff?

yes no

27. As a TGV person, have you been satisfied with the medical care in your current or most recent institution?

yes no

Please explain: _____

_____ Continue on the left

If you feel inspired to, please use the empty pages on the left to answer questions, explain, give examples, tell us a story or add something we missed.

9

This section asks painful questions. We want to remind you to be kind to yourself, to take breaks if you want, and as much as possible to answer in ways that don't leave you vulnerable to retaliation.

33. a. Have COs or other staff ever permitted or encouraged other inmates to sexually assault you?

- yes, once
- yes, a couple times
- yes, over and over
- no

b. If yes, was it

- One person
- A group

34. During a search, have you ever been:

- laughed at
- groped/felt up
- physically hurt on purpose
- put on display
- called names
- _____

35. Have COs or prison staff prevented you from practicing your religion due to your gender (for example: If you are Muslim, have you been told you can't wear hijab? If you are Christian, have you been barred from attending services?)

yes no

If yes, please describe the situation:

Questions 36-43 are about your experiences with other inmates.

36. a. Have you ever been verbally harassed by an inmate(s) because of your gender?

- yes, once
- yes, a couple times
- yes, over and over
- no

b. If yes, was it:

- One inmate
- A group of inmates

37. Has a CO or other staff ever failed to intervene (turned a blind eye) to verbal harassment by other inmates?

yes no

If you feel inspired to, please use the empty pages on the left to answer questions, explain, give examples, tell us a story or add something we missed.

13

This section asks painful questions. We want to remind you to be kind to yourself, to take breaks if you want, and as much as possible to answer in ways that don't leave you vulnerable to retaliation.

38. a. Have you ever been sexually harassed by another inmate(s)?

- yes, once
- yes, a couple times
- yes, over and over
- no

b. If yes, was it:

- One inmate
- A group of inmates

39. Has a CO or other staff ever failed to intervene (turned a blind eye) to sexual harassment by other inmates?

yes no

40. a. Have you ever been physically assaulted (beat up) by an inmate(s)?

- yes, once
- yes, a couple times
- yes, over and over
- no

b. If yes, was it:

- One inmate
- A group of inmates

41. Has a CO or other staff ever failed to intervene (turned a blind eye) to physical attack by other inmates?

yes no

42. a. Have you ever been in a forced sexual situation with another inmate(s)?

- yes, once
- yes, a couple times
- yes, over and over
- no

b. If yes, was it:

- One inmate
- A group of inmates

43. Has a CO or other staff ever failed to intervene (turned a blind eye) to sexual assault by other inmate(s)?

- yes, once
- yes, a couple times
- yes, over and over
- no

If you feel inspired to, please use the empty pages on the left to answer questions, explain, give examples, tell us a story or add something we missed.

15

Questions 44-48 are about your experience with grievances

44. Does your current or most recent correctional facility have a grievance policy?

yes no not sure

45. Have you ever filed a grievance?

yes no

46. Why? Why not? _____

47. What was the outcome of your complaint?

- nothing was done to address my grievance
- something was done to address my grievance but it wasn't satisfactory
- my situation improved as a result of filing a complaint

48. Were there any negative consequences for filing out the grievance?

yes no

Questions 49-52 are about relationships

49. Have you ever formed intimate relationships while locked up?

yes no

50. a. Have you been sexually active in your institution(s)?

yes no

b. If yes, are (were) you able to protect yourself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections?

yes no

c. What methods of protection have you used? (check all that apply)

- Condoms
- Improvised barriers (please explain: _____)
- Other (please specify: _____)

51. What factors have influenced your choice of partner(s) in prison? (check all that apply)

- Love
- Lust
- Availability
- Access to safety/protection
- Access to goods/favors (commissary, drugs, privileges)
- _____

If you feel inspired to, please use the empty pages on the left to answer questions, explain, give examples, tell us a story or add something we missed.

52. Who have your partner(s) been in prison ? (check any that apply)

- Cellmate
- Other inmate
- Guard
- Other staff
- _____

Questions 53-59 are about your relationships on the outside.

53. Who has visited you while you've been locked up? (check all that apply)

- No one
- Family
- Friends
- Inmates who have been released
- Social services providers
- Visitors from community of faith
- Other (please specify) _____

54. Have there been times you are aware of when you had visitors that were not been allowed to see you?

yes no

If yes, what was the justification given to deny your visit (if you know)?

55. If it is hard for your people to come see you, why? (check all that apply)

- Not applicable
- Prison too far away
- Transportation too expensive
- Humiliating visitor search policy
- Find it too traumatic
- _____

56. a. In your most recent institution, have you had phone contact with people on the outside?

yes no

b. If yes, with who? _____

57. Who have you gotten mail from while locked up? (check all that apply)

- No one
- Family
- Friends
- Inmates who have been released
- Social services providers
- Community of faith
- Prison correspondence programs
- Other (please specify) _____

If you feel inspired to, please use the empty pages on the left to answer questions, explain, give examples, tell us a story or add something we missed.

APPENDIX B: Research & Community Organizing

In addition to the methods sections, we wanted to say more about how we understood our research process as intertwined with our collective's community organizing efforts. This process was an opportunity both to highlight power dynamics around knowledge production and organizing strategy within the collective, and to work through them. In describing Pennsylvania's prisons systems, we also felt it was important to put our collective's work in a larger context of anti-prison organizing in Philadelphia.

Why We Chose to do Participatory, Community-Based Research:

- To recognize the power of stories/testimonial to inspire our imaginations and push us to think more critically about abolition and community safety.
- To break the isolation and silencing of T/GV individuals by the prison industrial complex.
- To co-create knowledge and build relationships that strengthen inside/outside organizing efforts.
- To use research as a way to create a forum for community members to speak with each other
- To challenge conventional research models that set up hierarchies of power. Those with privilege, resources, and institutional power often attempt to speak for silenced communities. In these cases the outcome often benefits the professional careers of researchers more than the lives of the subjects of the research. We were operating from the belief that our community is capable of identifying useful knowledge and representing itself.

Who was Part of this Research Collaborative:

Currently and formerly incarcerated T/GV people, allies, and Hearts on a Wire collective members (both inside and outside of prison) were involved in beginning, sustaining, and completing the research process. All the collective members who were part of this research have been affected by prisons, whether through direct experience or through having loved ones locked up. A unique challenge of doing community-based research through prison walls is that our research collaborative has changed a lot over 4 years. For some people, their involvement has fluctuated due to punitive isolation, re-incarceration, reentry barriers, or moving away. Others have stayed involved, working from the inside, while incarcerated, and from the outside, once leaving prison. Therefore, it is tricky to make generalizations about the group's demographics.

Collaborators in lock-up are all trans/gender variant. Many are in men's prisons and a few are in women's prisons. Most are Black and Latina, and some are Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and White. Ages range from late-teens to mid-60s. Inside collaborators have bodies and minds with different dis/abilities.

The core collective of outside collaborators includes formerly incarcerated people and allies. All identify as trans/gender variant (including but not exclusively, androgyne, gender variant, femme, trans-masculine, trans-fabulous, trans women, femqueen, genderqueer, trans man, trans). Some of us are intersex. Ages range from teenagers to mid-60s. We have mixed class backgrounds and current incomes. Roughly half of

us are Black and Latina and half are White. We have varied access to formal education. Our bodies and minds have different dis/abilities.

Research & Collective Organizing

The research process began within a few months after Hearts on a Wire officially formed as a group. This has meant that, in many ways, the research and the collective have developed as parallel processes, each informing the other's growth.

Hearts on a Wire set out to do participatory research without a clear-cut idea of what collaboration would mean. We approached the process with the intention of working with T/GV people directly affected by mass incarceration to create a document that would facilitate future collective action. As the research process unfolded, our relationships with inside correspondents deepened. These relationships, in turn, shaped our research process and introduced and defined new avenues for collaboration.

The collective set the intention of organizing with a horizontal model using consensus-based decision-making. We sought to value the skills, knowledge, and experience that each person brought to the collective. This same ethic was applied in asking participants about their experiences of PA's prisons systems, their analysis of needed to change, and how the outside collective could support that change.

Some of us have overlapping identities as T/GV people affected by imprisonment, allies, and service providers working with incarcerated community members. The make-up of the core outside Hearts on a Wire collective has shifted continuously over the past four years. These two facts have made dealing with issues of power and conflict during meetings complex. We approached these challenges of by naming the dynamics that people noticed. These often fell along lines of different experiences with and relationship to the prison industrial complex, previous provider/client relationships, uneven educational access, as well as differences in ideas of and language about doing organizing work against imprisonment.

We divided labor in the group through democratic decision-making based on collective members' self-identified skills and desires. Almost all outside collective members were involved in all activities, but usually they focused in one or two of the following areas: working on the newsletter, coordinating letter correspondence, doing graphic design/layout for the group's documents, building relationships of solidarity with other T/GV and prison activist groups. We edited documents and evaluated feedback in a cooperative workshopping process. Two of the authors of the report have been involved in the collective and the research since the beginning and bring knowledge of this history.

Eventually, the relationship between doing this research and building the organizing capacity of Hearts on a Wire became apparent. Even before this report was finished, we realized how the knowledge created and shared through our research process was strengthening our organizing efforts. For example, participants' and formerly incarcerated members' analysis of reentry issues led the outside collective to write a mandate for improving reentry resources for T/GV people. Several collective members crashed a meeting of the Mayor's Office of Reentry Planning to demand that formerly incarcerated T/GV Philadelphians be involved in the planning process. These members handed Hearts' mandate to the

Deputy Mayor, who held the meeting, and explained to the crowd why trans-competent reentry resources were needed to help trans people survive and reduce their entrapment in cyclical incarceration.

The Context of Anti-prison Work in Philadelphia

Because research and organizing don't happen in a vacuum, we think it is important to talk about how our work relates to the particular context of Philadelphia. It can feel, at times, that Hearts on a Wire is walking a tightrope between grassroots anti-prison organizing and the non-profit industrial complex in our city. This is due to a combination of factors.

While Philadelphia has a long history and a vibrant presence of anti-prison activism, most of the current coalitional work excludes trans and gender variant people from its understanding of how mass incarceration impacts local communities. As a result, some formerly incarcerated T/GV people have expressed feeling ignored or tokenized at meetings with other anti-prison groups. Some Hearts on a Wire collective members decided not to attend neighborhood "speak outs" against imprisonment for fear of being outed to their neighbors. Beyond this individual risk, some of these events were held in spaces that are hostile to T/GV people. This has led to a certain political isolation for Hearts on a Wire, but we gained some allies in Philadelphia's prison justice movement whose support continues to be invaluable to our work.

Philadelphia does not have a culture of non-profit organizations with radical agendas and budgets for paid organizing. A lot of anti-prison organizing happens by groups and individuals working out of the space of service organizations on an ad hoc basis. Hearts on a Wire owes much of its evolution to the support of and, conversely, its entanglement with these organizations. We held meetings in a non-profit office space because it was at an organization that many of our members felt comfortable coming to. Having a strategic relationship with this organization gave Hearts on a Wire access to in-kind resources, which facilitated getting this research off the ground. But, this relationship also curbed our capacity to do political organizing.

Two of us had service provider jobs at this organization. We were able to use some paid time to work on the research process and coordinate correspondence with folks inside. However, our relative access to institutional power, resources, and personal income to do this work affected power dynamics and relationships within the collective. Being housed in a service organization imposed limits on our early political work and imagination (e.g. our bosses telling us that funders didn't count incarcerated T/GV individuals as "clients," so they weren't a priority). That pressure excluded parts of our community and dismissed issues of incarceration that didn't matter to the organization. This experience echoed what participants said about the general complacency of LGBT organizations concerning the impact of imprisonment on T/GV people. In response, Hearts on Wire became independent and continued our research and organizing outside of the control of non-profit structures.

We deliberately decided not to apply for government or "service provision"-oriented funding so that our research would not be beholden to institutions that did not share our political vision for transformative justice. We managed to do all of this research with a budget of \$930, which we raised through a dance party benefit and individual

donations. The cost of publishing this report is covered by a Phoebus grant from the Bread & Roses Community Fund.

Hearts on a Wire encourages non-profit organizations to give concrete support to grassroots anti-prison work while respecting the autonomy of groups doing this work. Service organizations are in a unique position because many of their clients are directly affected by mass imprisonment. These organizations should support ways to connect people who come to them for services with grassroots groups tackling incarceration as a collective, rather than an individual, issue.

Hearts on a Wire urges anti-prison organizers in Philadelphia to recognize how racism, sexism, and transphobia intersect in the prison industrial complex, making T/GV people targets for prison violence. To address this, organizers first need to understand how transphobia shows up in their grassroots groups and activist spaces, making it difficult for trans people to participate in coalitional work against prisons.

Hearts on a Wire is currently building relationships of mutual support with other Philadelphia-area groups who see policing and criminalization as queer and trans issues, including Queers Against Prisons, Riders Against Gender Exclusion (RAGE), Books Through Bars, ACT UP Philadelphia, and anti-prison student activists.

A Note from the Authors:

This is a Prison, Glitter is not Allowed is the result of a 4-year collaboration between inside and outside collective members and incarcerated T/GV people across Pennsylvania. In the end, the published report was written by three white, trans-masculine people with educational privilege. While we have different experiences of detention, none of us has been incarcerated in adult prisons. As outside collective members and former service providers, we've tried to reflect critically on our role in the division of labor in making this report. In the writing process, we've grappled with questions of accountability to both the larger Hearts on a Wire collective and all the participants who took the survey. This process has been humbling, and it has also taught us about what it means to do participatory, community-based research over a long period. During this time we've needed to acknowledge and respond to issues of power - in the institutions we're trying to challenge, in the relationships we have built, and in the representation of people's experiences with which they have entrusted us.

We wrote the report with different readers in mind, which is why the language switches, in places, from sounding activist- and advocate-oriented, to academic, to poetic. We hope this publication will resonate with those who pick it up. To us, the most important readers are the people whose words gave life to this report. Hearts on a Wire will be sending a hardcopy to everyone behind the walls who contributed to this project so that they and the outside collective can keep talking about how this report might be used toward attaining justice for incarcerated T/GV people and their communities.

APPENDIX C: 2007 Transforming Justice Conference Points of Unity & Next Steps

From *Transforming Justice: Conference Report & Summary*⁵⁷

Over 250 people from 14 states attended Transforming Justice, with over 100 participating for the entire event. Twenty scholarships to low-income former prisoners were distributed. Approximately 60% percent of the conference attendees were transgender and gender non-conforming people who had at some point in their lives been in prison, jail, or juvenile or immigration detention. Though the conference was free, simultaneous translation, childcare, and meals were provided.

...

In the last part of the [final day of the conference], the facilitators led a session with the goal of building points of unity that participants could bring back to their organizations and communities for further discussion. The following are the five points of unity that we explored in this conversation:

1. We recognize cycles of poverty, criminalization and imprisonment as urgent human rights issues for transgender and gender non-conforming people.
2. We agree to promote, centralize, and support the leadership of transgender and gender non-conforming people most impacted by prisons, policing, and poverty in this work.
3. We plan to organize to build on and expand a national movement to liberate our communities and specifically transgender and gender non-conforming people from poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, racism, ageism, transphobia, classism, sexism, ableism, immigration discrimination, violence and the brutality of the prison industrial complex.
4. We commit to ending the abuse and discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming people in all aspects of society, with the long-term goal of ending the prison industrial complex.
5. We agree to continue discussing with each other what it means to work towards ending the prison industrial complex while addressing immediate human rights crises.

Conference attendees agreed to continue discussions in our home communities on these points of unity, particularly focusing on point #4 as an exciting and fertile place to begin building solutions to the prison-poverty crisis. Additionally, participants voted on concrete next steps to guide our work moving forward. All of the next steps include centralizing and building the leadership of transgender people most impacted by poverty, policing, and prisons, specifically people who have been imprisoned, arrested, or detained:

1. Develop a national platform on transgender immigrant rights issues & ask others to sign on to it;
2. Foster local conversations about responding to anti-LGBTQQ and interpersonal violence without relying on the prison industrial complex;
3. Create and strengthen local resources for transgender and gender non-conforming people coming out of prison and jail;
4. Create a national coalition that can support local transgender organizing to end the cycles of poverty, criminalization, and imprisonment.

⁵⁷ *Transforming Justice: Conference Report and Summary*. (2007). Retrieved from <http://srlp.org/transformingjustice>.