

Daai Ding: Sex, Sexual Violence and Coercion in Men's Prisons

by

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Research paper written for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2002.

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Introduction

Those who have any knowledge of life in South African prisons know that sex, sexual violence and varying levels of sexual coercion do occur, but the subject of sex in prison tends to remain an uncomfortable one and has received little in-depth attention. This may be explained by society's general attitudes towards prisoners. Because prisoners are often understood to be a group of people deserving of punitive and harsh treatment, the question of their welfare is not a 'natural' subject of public concern. Discomfort with the issue is likely to also spring from the fact that it raises two of our society's greatest taboos: homosexuality and male rape.

But better understanding of sexual interactions and violations amongst male prisoners is crucial. This is especially in light of the reportedly high incidence of sexual violence behind prison walls, the transmission of HIV, and the potential challenges that various sexual experiences in prison may pose for offenders when they are released. These issues affect not only prison communities but our society as a whole. Prison is not a black hole of nothingness into which criminals disappear forever but is rather a dynamic social world governed by power hierarchies and economies, filled with experiences and interactions between diverse people, and demanding constant negotiations of self and others. Prison is a powerful socialising experience and one after which, on completion of their sentences, most prisoners return to society.

In an age where sex has become a particularly dangerous, potentially lethal activity, those developing health and awareness strategies are increasingly emphasising the importance of the social contexts in which sex takes place. These contexts include the identities at play in sexual interactions and the meanings through which these interactions are understood - all of which fundamentally impact on the nature of sexual interactions. Without engaging with the social circumstances in which sex takes place there is little hope of achieving much success in promoting a culture of safer sex.

A similar argument is made in relation to curbing violence. Violence does not occur in a vacuum but rather is embedded in the way that many people have become accustomed to relating to each other. It is often thought of, for example, as a viable way to respond to conflict. Violence is also wrapped up with particular identities, often with notions of masculinity and may be used as an expression of 'manhood'. Or it may constitute a response to a sense of marginalisation and be acted out as a way of asserting a claim to power, often in contexts where there is a sense of broad disempowerment. Attempts to reduce violence have to connect with the meanings and identities through which violence is enacted if they are to have any impact.

It is the social circumstances surrounding both sex and violence amongst male inmates of South African prisons, and in particular, the apparently common convergence between the two - when sex is forced or performed in an act of violence - that is the central concern of this study.

A further motivation for exploring issues of sex in prison is related to the two taboos that it raises: homosexuality and male rape. Disturbingly, when the area does receive some public attention, the coexistence of these taboos seems often to result in their conflation and the muddling of two very different things. The first is a sexual orientation and the second an act

of violence. The public myths surrounding both taboos require interrogation and dismantling. Moreover, the fact that utterances on sex in prison so often become clouded by these taboos suggests the need to engage with, and accurately acknowledge prisoner experiences rather than leaving the myths unchallenged.

The analysis is structured under the following themes:

- **Of Wives and Men**

This section introduces prison *marriages* which are the relationships in which sex most commonly happens in prison. These relationships are power-defined and involve two kinds of participants: *husbands* and *wives*. The different roles of these parties and the rules of the marriage are outlined. In particular, the ownership and control that *husbands* exercise over their *wives* are investigated.

- **Vulnerability to Sexual Subordination**

The question of what makes prisoners vulnerable to sexual abuse and being coerced into becoming other prisoners' *wives* is the subject of this section. In addressing this question the various components of prisoner vulnerability to sexual abuse and subordination are explored. At the same time, qualities that enable some to resist violation and/or to sexually oppress others also emerge.

- **Gangs and Sex**

Gangster organisations in prison, collectively known as the 'Numbers' gangs, are important to a consideration of sex in prison because the practice of prison *marriages* is institutionalised in gang structures. The nature of this institutionalisation and the related attempts made by gangs to regulate sex in prison are given specific attention here. (However the role of gangs in sexual activity continually arises in other sections too).

- **Social Meanings of 'Man' and 'Woman'**

Much of the sex that takes place in prison happens along gendered lines. Depending on a person's role in the sex act, participants are identified in prison culture as *men* or *women*. In marriages for example, *husbands* are made up of *men* and *wives* of *women*. This section considers the meanings attached to these gendered identities and how these impact on prisoner experiences.

- **Promotion to 'Manhood'**

Following from the previous theme, respondent reports on the steps involved for a person who has been identified as a *woman* to be promoted to the superior identity of *man* are explored. The criteria for promotion to 'manhood' are set and ruled upon by the gang structures.

- **Alternative Modes of Sex**

In addition to *marriages*, another common site of sex is an interaction known as *uchincha*

ipondo. This mode of sex departs significantly from *marriage*-style sex in terms of how participants relate to each other as well as in the actual sex act. Reports of sexual relationships that do not fit into either of the broad categories (*uchincha ipondo* or *marriage*-style) are also briefly outlined.

- **'Homosexuality' and 'Gayness'**

In this section attitudes and understandings that emerge on notions of 'homosexuality' and 'gayness' are explored and linked to discussions on gender identity in inmate sub-culture. Inputs on how homosexual prisoners tend to get treated in prison are also reported.

- **Types of Sexual Activity**

The nature of actual sex acts, and the types of sex reported to occur are considered in this section. The terminology attached to the different types of sex is included as well as respondent associations of particular types of sex with particular circumstances. Respondent perceptions on the health risks and implications for those participating in sex in prison are incorporated under this theme.

- **Prison Warders and Sex in Prison**

Here, the involvement of some correctional officials in supporting and/or neglecting the occurrence of sexual violation amongst inmates is outlined. In doing so, the problems around the reporting and addressing of complaints of sexual abuse are introduced.

- **'You Tell Someone, We Gonna Kill You'**

This section expands on the problems of reporting abuses in prison. In particular it looks at the dynamics amongst inmates that serve to prevent victims and witnesses from reporting sexual violations.

- **On Release**

The question is posed of what the longer-term consequences are of sexual experiences in prison, especially coercive ones, for victims, perpetrators and others situated in this environment. What is the impact for ex-offenders when they are released and attempt to reintegrate into society?

Prison culture and the context of research

The sub-culture in which inmates are situated and the influence of inmate hierarchies on sexual activities taking place in prison is a primary interest of this study. The extent to which gang practices are intertwined with sex in prison, and the resultant repeated references to the 'Numbers' gangs, requires a brief introduction to the phenomenon.

Gangs are not an unusual part of prison life. In South Africa a collection of gangs known as the 'Numbers' tend to dominate inmate culture. Although originating more than 100 years ago outside of prison, the 'Numbers' have for long been an entrenched part of inmate culture with their operations being restricted to prison institutions. The resilience of the

structures has been a source of incredulity to many. Other, more recently organised and less prevalent gangs do make an appearance in correctional institutions but the 'Numbers', particularly the 28s and the 26s, claim that they alone, have the right to survive in prison. The 'Numbers' operate along quasi-military lines that mimic colonial, militarised institutions. Each has specific objectives, codes of conduct and intricately organised internal hierarchies.

Considered the original and most powerful of the 'Numbers', the objective of the 28s is to pamper, protect and organise catamites or '*wyflies*' for sex. The other most prevalent gang is the 26s. The 26s specialise in procuring money and goods and work closely with the 27s, the gang associated with blood (assault). The 27s offer protection to the 26s in return for material goods and consumables. (According to one respondent, these two gangs are now considered to have merged into one). The objective of the Airforce gangs (Airforce 3 and Airforce 4, also known as 23 and 24) is to escape from prison. (On the basis of our information the differences between the two Airforce gangs are unclear). The 25s or Big 5s collaborate with the prison authorities primarily to obtain food and other privileges.

In theory, but not practice, recruitment into the gangs is voluntary. As Haysom (1981:15) points out, in the prison context, 'there is no simple dividing line between self-preservation and self-interest'. Indeed, the prevalence of coercive recruitment strategies is emphasised by respondents in this study. Resignation from a gang is not tolerated, and to challenge leadership is to invite death.¹

As may be expected, 'there is in fact some difference between the ideal code and gang practices' (Haysom, 1981:16). A key example of such a difference is the fact that although the 28s are the only gang formally entitled to have sex relationships with *wyflies*, other 'Numbers' - whose codes expressly forbid such relationships - also participate in the practice (see section, [Gangs and Sex](#) below). It is also noteworthy that while shifts regarding gang operations are reported in this research, and divergences between stated codes and actual behaviour do emerge, interviewees continue to explain the 'Numbers' and their activities in the same minimalistic terms (outlined above) that have historically been used to describe the gangs.

Prisoners who do not belong to any gang are typically regarded as especially vulnerable to the abuses and excesses of prevailing inmate power structures. Amongst the terms used to refer to non-aligned prisoners are *mphatas*, *fransmanne* or *one-ones*.

Methodological Outline

This investigation was preceded by a review of the available literature on sex between male inmates in prison (see paper entitled 'Sex, Sexual Violence and Coercion in Men's Prisons' presented at AIDS In Context Conference, April 2001, University of the Witwatersrand). In large part this informed the framework and methodology of the primary research which is the subject of this report. In addition, initial discussions were held with a range of relevantly placed people in attempt to learn from experiences relating to the investigation as well as to seek advice on approaches to data collection.

Data was gathered primarily through in-depth interviews and in-depth focus groups. These

methodologies were considered most appropriate for a number of reasons. The exploratory nature of the research was not suited to closed-end questions but rather demanded discussion, explanation and probing. While the framework for the research was largely gleaned from the literature survey and initial discussions, a qualitative methodology allowed the flexibility for new themes or issues that emerged during the field work to be included in subsequent interviews or focus groups. Related to this, the type of information sought was qualitative rather than quantitative in nature as it was framed by an attempt to understand the social circumstances and meanings in which sexual interactions in prison are situated.

The sample

Interviews and focus groups with 23 people comprising both ex-prisoners and current prisoners were conducted between November 2000 and September 2001. Some interviews happened in English but all respondents were given the opportunity to be interviewed in their first language. Interviews and focus groups were captured on tape and transcribed.

- **Ex-prisoners:**

Individual in-depth interviews were held with eight ex-prisoners. An in-depth focus group with six other ex-prisoners was also conducted.

- **Prisoners:**

A focus group spread over three mornings was held with a group of nine current prisoners. Further data was collected during a subsequent debriefing session with the group. The process with prisoners differed somewhat from that with ex-prisoners. In addition to taking place over several mornings, two of the sessions began with creative activities that drew on participants' prison knowledge.² Some then volunteered to explain their drawings to the group. With respect to both activities, these explanations served well to springboard the group into relevant discussions.

In addition to these key respondent categories, one other interview is cited in this report. This interview took place with two representatives of arepp (African Repertory Educational Performance Programme) Educational Trust,³ who had conducted sexuality workshops with inmates as part of an HIV/AIDS intervention programme in an Eastern Cape prison. Their input assisted in planning the fieldwork and often also has strong resonance with the themes raised by other respondents. It is in this latter regard that it is drawn on in the report.

Individual ex-prisoners and local organisations working with (ex)prisoners and/or having connections to ex-prisoners, were approached to assist in accessing this constituency. This purposive and snowballing method yielded eight individual in-depth interviews with ex-prisoners. In addition to this method a 'call to ex-prisoners' to participate in research was placed in the Sowetan newspaper in July 2001. The outcome of this was the focus group with six ex-prisoners.⁴

The 'current prisoner' category of respondents was accessed on the basis of a pre-existing relationship between the group of prisoners and members of CSV's Criminal Justice

Programme who had previously worked with them on a development programme.

Important to note, especially in respect of the ex-prisoner category, is the role of self-selection in the sample. We spoke only to those who were willing to speak to us, and some were not willing. An intermediary told us, for example, that some of the people by whom he had run our request immediately dismissed the prospect of talking about sex in prison with a 'No way!' Indeed, because of the sensitivity of the research subject it was expected that many members of the research constituency would be unwilling to participate. The difficulty of researching the area was a subject of cautioning during initial discussions with relevantly placed people as well as one frequently cited in the literature.

While many of those who did participate appeared to speak freely, often expressed appreciation of the opportunity to talk about the issue, and endorsed the importance of the investigation, there were particular categories of respondent that we had initially intended to interview but were unsuccessful in accessing. Most significant of these categories was that of people who had themselves been sexually violated during imprisonments. As the analysis of the data bears out, such experiences are a source of humiliation and stigmatisation and as such, tend to be guarded with secrecy and avoidance.

Several respondents were at pains to stress that they had never themselves been involved in '*daai ding*' [that thing] - sex in prison. A small minority volunteered to share with us some of the circumstances in which they had personally been sexually involved in prison. Others hinted at their involvement.

In the cases of approximately half of ex-prisoner respondents, these were people who are, in different ways (and to varying extents) involved in working with prisoner issues (around prisoner rights, reintegration, or to reduce youth involvement in crime). This possibly influenced their willingness to participate in the study. It suggests that they had a commitment to improving prison conditions and developmental opportunities for prisoners and ex-prisoners as well as potentially having increased access to support in order to process their own prisoner pasts. The other half of ex-prisoner respondents do not however fit this description.

Interviews were conducted in Gauteng, with all respondents residing in Gauteng at the time they were interviewed. Some had however served portions of their time in prisons in other provinces of South Africa (see [Appendix](#)). It is likely that themes and commonalities emerging from the voices of respondents could alter were respondents from other geographical areas accessed.

All respondents are Black except one who is Coloured. They are drawn from a range of age-groups and had served sentences of various lengths.

With regard to the ex-prisoner category, attempts were made to access those who had been relatively recently released from prison so as to obtain as contemporary an understanding as possible of the dynamics surrounding sex in prison. At the time of interview/focus group the most recently released person had been out for two months, and the person who had been out for the longest had been released four and a half years previously, with other times since release varying between two and a half months and two years.

See [Appendix](#) for detailed breakdown of respondent information.

Ethics

The principles of informed consent were applied and an undertaking made to respondents that their identities would be protected. For this reason extracts from the interviews cited in the text are not referenced. Voices are, for the most part, not differentiated as it is feared that to do so could compromise anonymity. Quotes are drawn from all 23 participants. In a few cases divergences emerging between respondent categories are noted in the analysis, but individual participants are not distinguished from each other. Because of the sensitive nature of the research and concerns that the processes could resonate in powerful, potentially traumatic ways for some respondents, arrangements were made with CSVr's Trauma Clinic to make debriefing and counselling services available to respondents. However to date, with the exception of the group of current prisoners, respondents have not taken up this offer. Rather, several have indicated that they valued the opportunity to talk about the issues.

A decision to pose research questions to respondents in a general rather than personal manner was also largely informed by the ethical concern that the interviewing process should not be experienced as intrusive or embarrassing. Respondents were asked to tell us, on the basis of their prison experiences, about the ways in which sex happens in prison, who is involved, whether it influences prisoner relations etc., rather than being questioned about their own personal related experiences. Beyond the ethical motivation for this, the approach was also expected to maximise information gathering. It appears to have worked well, and often we were surprised at just how much and how quickly respondents were prepared to share. Meetings that we had expected to be used for familiarising prospective interviewees with the research and the researchers, and to build trust, tended to move quickly into the actual interview, with the initial goals of the meeting taking a lot less time than envisaged.⁵ Moreover, a few respondents did volunteer very personal information, but did so on their own initiative and in their own time. Others were able to frame what in several cases we suspect was personal information, in more general ways. Perhaps the most significant consequence of ethical considerations for the study was its impact (together with time and capacity limitations) on the sample of current prisoners. We had initially planned for a much larger proportion of the research constituency to comprise current prisoners. Ultimately, however, we concluded that it was only feasible to work on this particular subject with prisoners when it was combined with other non-research activities of more direct benefit to participants. Of importance here is that while sex, sexual violence and sexual relations between men are frequently difficult and sensitive topics of engagement, this is arguably even more the case in South African prison environments, especially when prisoners are asked to share information with outsiders. This difficulty springs largely from the intertwining of many sexual interactions happening in prison with gangsterism as well as the codes of secrecy enforced by the gangs. It was a source of considerable concern that by asking people to share what are regarded as gang secrets with outsiders, we could conceivably be putting people at risk of violent reprisal.

The difficulty of holding meetings anonymously in the prison situation compounded these concerns. Even if interviews were conducted in private, to keep the interaction entirely under wraps would be difficult. People could potentially be harassed as to the content of the meetings, and then be accused of breaking gang rules. What had they been speaking to us

about? Why had they been called out of the exercise yard? It is not that we consider conducting such research with current prisoners as impossible but rather that, in our view, it would best be done as part of a lengthy process involving buy-in of power structures, and thus probably as part of a broader programme comprising other components.

In light of these concerns our decision was to work with a group of juvenile prisoners who were already familiar with our team through a life-skills intervention programme that had been offered by CSV. On the one hand, trust levels between facilitators and participants and amongst participants were significantly developed, and participants were prepared for the group to operate on the 'ground rules' that had governed life-skills sessions. On the other hand, participants could easily tell fellow prisoners curious about what was going on, that they were continuing with the 'life-skills people'.

It may be that our approach to restricting interviews with prisoners in this way was overcautious and that had we gone straight into prison, we could have succeeded with other prisoners, and without any negative repercussions for respondents. In various ways, however, our experiences with the group seemed to confirm that our decision had been the right one. Even within this group, gang-related dynamics as well as sex-sensitivity dynamics, threats and confrontations emerged. Some participants also individually confided in facilitators that they were unable to speak about certain issues in the presence of other (sometimes specific) group members. Some also referred directly to the constraints of speaking in the context of prison, saying things like, 'Maybe, when I've been released, I'll talk to you about that'. Fortunately facilitators and participants were able to deal with conflictual dynamics as they arose. A separate debriefing session following the final focus group was also invaluable in this regard. (In two subsequent follow-ups with participants no research-related problems have been reported.)

Ethical concerns also have implications for the dissemination of this report amongst the group of current-prisoner respondents. Conventionally, it is CSV research practice that research and research products are fed back by researchers to participants. In this case, though, we will not be providing current-prisoner respondents with copies of the research report because of the possibility that it could give rise to conflict and victimisation (both amongst group members and between other prisoners and group members). They will nevertheless receive verbal feedback on the main findings of the research.

Of Wives and Men

This report does not pretend to provide a representative picture of the potentially vast range of relationships or circumstances in which sexual interaction takes place in prison, which after all involve numerous and diverse individuals. Neither are such circumstances static in nature, but rather can unfold differently over time. Alternative modes of relating may also be negotiated in the little pockets of privacy that prisoners create for themselves - even when they ostensibly resemble particular 'types' of interaction. This said, from what we've been told, sex in prison appears to be highly organised. It frequently takes place within a set of rigidly guarded rules, and is structured at the individual level and at the broader level - of inmate hierarchies - by very particular modes of interaction.

The dominant relationships through which sex reportedly takes place in prison are

partnerships known as *marriages*. These relationships are dominant in the sense that they reportedly provide the most common site of sexual interaction between prisoners, and because they are sanctioned and institutionalised by inmate power-structures.

Within these *marriages* one is either a *husband* or a *wife*. As in our associations with these roles outside prison, they are gendered: *husbands* are made up of men and *wives* of women. Other terms used to denote people in the role of *husband* or man, are 'big man', or 'boss'. A *wife* or *wyfie* or *wyfietjie* is also referred to as a 'small boy', 'young man', 'madam', 'girlfriend', or 'concubine'.⁶ Each role is structured by rules of relating that govern how one relates to one's partner, to other prisoners, to the physical space of the prison, to material goods, and to prison officials.

Men are the superior partners and own their *wives*. An important facet of the power they wield over their wives is that they control all the material resources and goods in the relationship.

If I take a young man, he'll know from that time that he's under my command ... For instance [if] his family give him money, it means, just like a woman, he must report ... to me ... [He must] give that money to me so that I can buy anything for him ... He surrenders himself to this man ... The man controls him.

Central to being a *man* is the expectation that he provides materially for his wife.⁷ *Men* can take more than one *wife* as long as they can afford to support them. One-*wife* relationships however, appear to be most common.

You won't just take someone and do things [sex] to them without helping them out. You must look after them.

Men procure food, cigarettes, *dagga* [marijuana] and other goods while their wives are usually removed from material transactions taking place outside of the relationship.⁸ One effect of this arrangement is that the *husband* role tends to be associated with movement and the *wife's* with inactivity. While the *men* are out dealing in goods, their partners usually remain in the cells, interviewees say. The active and passive ways in which the respective roles are perceived are frequently highlighted.

When the prison [cell-door] is unlocked [the husband] must see to it that he moves all around and looks for food, *dagga*, tobacco and all those things, while the wife stays behind in the cell.

[Small boys] don't even go to the kitchen ... they stay in bed and you must get [them] Tupperwares full of meat, peanut-butter, chicken, bread - everything.⁹

I tell him not to go to the kitchen and eat, he must sit here. I'll buy him food [and] cigarettes ... [That]'s what it's all about.

Men then are perceived as the agents of movement and wealth whereas their *wyfies* are seen to do nothing.¹⁰

They are required to keep the home-space in order, and to serve their *men*. *Wyfies* are also often forbidden from engaging in activities that are associated with 'manliness'. Their sphere of activity is restricted.

The wife does nothing. But if there are some things in our cell, the wife can look after the[m]: washing, those [sorts of] things.

It's a matter of being abused, that person is using you [all the] time ... If he wants tea, you must go and make tea. If he wants his washing to be washed, you must [do it]. In fact those things that are done by women, you must do them.

Wives are considered inferior, and as always needing to defer to their *men*.

You must be[have] ... the way [the man] tells you. [It will be] ... 'Do that' and 'No, don't do that! [You are treated] like children in the home.

Wyfies' interactions with the broader prison community - other inmates and warders - must, it appears, be endorsed by and mediated through their *men*.¹¹ Some explain, for example, that men may forbid their *wives* from talking to other prisoners. In addition, it is out of the question for a *wife* to report anything to the warders without first getting permission from the man.

Being a *wyfie* does have a few benefits, some say. Aside from being provided with consumables, one respondent points out that *wives* are also removed from the risks associated with smuggling and dealing, which although commonplace are officially outlawed.¹²

The young man is afraid to carry dagga, he wants somebody [to] carry [it] for him. Whenever he wants to smoke he'll just say, 'How about a *zoll* [*dagga*]?' This person is carrying all his problems. [If] the warders are searching the young man is safe, he doesn't have *dagga* in his possession.

Finally, *wyfies* are expected to satisfy their partners' sexual desires. This is arguably their most important function and appears to be a primary motivation for the existence of these partnerships.

If [he] stays with a person he knows that this person is going to do this and that for me and ... that it is my duty, every night, to give him whatever he wants ... It's just like a woman outside.

This aspect of these relationships is explored in more detail throughout this report.

Gangs and these relationships

These gendered *man* and *wife* relationships are practiced and institutionalised by prison gangs. The 28s gang is most frequently associated with sex in South African male prisons

because the stated objective of the gang is to take, provide for, and protect 'concubines' or *wives*. As the following respondent put it,

With the 28s sodomy is their priority number one and they will cater for these wyfies as if they are wives from outside.

But interviewees make it clear that these *man* and *wife* relationships are also practised by other gangs, all the 'Numbers' gangs in fact (as the most powerful and oldest prison gangs are known) even those whose codes expressly forbid them.

I'm speaking ... of almost all these gangsters because you'll find that even the 26s - in terms of their constitution they're not allowed to practice homosexuality - but they've got young people ... and they practice it.

The Big 5s are sodomists¹³ but they also like food ... and they pimp a lot, they work hand in hand with management [prison staff] ... and they turn the young ones into wyfies, so they will sort of live like man and wife. Then [the] 26s, well they were not supposed to ... but today they've got their wives as well.

With respect to the Airforce gangs (3 and 4), some respondents speak of sex and *marriage*-style relationships as a relatively recent phenomenon in those gangs. The following ex-prisoner and Airforce gangster maintains that members who are committed to the gang codes - codes that forbid sex - have realised it is futile, even dangerous, to challenge fellow gang-members on the issue.¹⁴

Now we (in Airforce 3) sort of turned a blind eye ... We condone it because we've discovered that there's no stopping it, this thing ... The [gang's] constitution doesn't allow it [but] there are those older ones who enjoy [it] more than any other thing and they start hating you ... conspiring against you [if you challenge them on it], and for that you can even die.

According to some interviewees, the key distinguishing factor between the 28s and other gangs is not the fact of keeping *wives* for sex, but that the former will fight or go to war with another gang if a relationship is threatened from outside of its ranks.

[In] all the Numbers gangs it is happening. But the 28s ... specialise in small boys [and] are not like us [the Big 5s] ... and the Airforce, because ... we have sex with them, but we do not have the courage to fight for them. The only gang that fights for them is the 28s.

Concerning gangsterism in general, one respondent emphasises its links with sex in prison. He maintains that sex taking place within these relationships is key to the tenacity of gangs.

Homosexuality promotes gangsterism in prison and gangsterism promotes homosexuality. It's like that because ... they see that if we break up we are going to lose these young men. We've got to stay together in order to have these young men under our power (because there are young men who can fight for themselves but are afraid because there's a gang).

It is uncertain whether many others would agree with his statement but it is clear that power-relations are central to much of the sexual interaction taking place in prison. This respondent's words highlight the role of power in these relationships and illustrate how gangs provide a key source of it. Importantly however, these relationships are not confined to the realms of gangsterism, but can be pursued by other inmates. As one respondent remarks,

Even if I wasn't in a gang I would still do it [have the kind of sex I'm having now].

The following section attempts to understand, in more detail, some of the components of inmate power that operate in sexual subordination as well as characteristics that make prisoners vulnerable to it.

Vulnerability to Sexual Subordination: Who Becomes a 'Wyfie'?

In order to explore how these *man* and *wife* relationships function in prison, as well as the profiles of the players, it is pertinent to examine some of the surrounding dynamics that inform and fuel their existence. What are the circumstances that lead certain people to become *wives* or *women* and others to become husbands or men?

Alternatively, one could ask how power and vulnerability are constructed and experienced in prison. To be a *wife* is not a prized position within inmate culture, but is rather usually associated with inferiority, stigma, and a loss of status. (See section, [Social Meanings of 'Man' and 'Woman'](#)). Many of the occupants of these positions have been coerced into their roles, and unsurprisingly then, tend to be drawn from a pool of people who are vulnerable within the prison environment.

Importantly, vulnerability to being made into a *wife* appears to be equitable with vulnerability to unwanted sex in general: much of the time it is those who are coerced into an initial sex act who are consequently taken as wives for the longer term. A range of factors structure this form of vulnerability within the prison context. These include, for example, lack of familiarity with the workings of inmate subculture, lack of material resources and a lack of physical strength.

'You know nothing and you are scared'

The first thing that came out quite clearly was the abuse, the rape [happening] pretty much first night. On the first night you are fresh meat and somebody is going to get you. Unless you belong, or are associated to, or become instantly associated to somebody else, ... it's open season. And a lot of them, in those first workshops about sexuality, the stories they told were [of] first night terror - first night things that happen to people. [arepp]

Newly arrived first-time offenders are particularly vulnerable, say interviewees. Awaiting Trial facilities get particular mention in this respect. Newcomers in general are the focus of intense inmate attention and are looked upon as resources at the disposal of other inmates. They constitute a source of material goods (clothing, money, jewellery and toiletries), of gang members, of sexual subjects, and of the means to other forms of power-validation on

the part of other inmates. Consequently, on their arrival, especially those who have never before been in prison are usually confronted by frightening and overwhelming situations.

On the one hand they are faced with numerous, contradictory invitations.

Your first day, when you've just arrived, you don't know anyone but everyone will shout at you, 'Hey, come here and join [our gang]'. [And another one, 'Hey, take this one', and ... 'Here's a cigarette'. And you'll be confused [*laughter*]. You'll be really, really confused!

On the other hand, it is common to be subjugated to various forms of abuse.

Muggings and theft, for example, are rife. As a respondent explains of his experiences of awaiting trial,

When you come to jail ... I will give you my old rags and take your pants and give you my torn ones. [I'll take] your shoes, your ring, belt, watch and I will sell them. You'll end up barefoot. These are the things that happen when you're [awaiting] trial.

Interviewees report new prisoners being sold and traded between gangs or particular cells.

Where I did my [awaiting] trial ... the person who usher[s] the trialist[s] into the cells is a prisoner. The same person is a member of the gang, [he] is a General for the 26s and ... [he] will buy you from the warders and sell you to the other cells.

At a general level, the workings of the power structures are quickly made apparent to new prisoners, as are the accompanying discrepancies between the living conditions of the haves and have-nots in these structures. The following interviewees describe for example, how *mphatas* (as non-gang members are known) are, in their experience of awaiting trial, deprived by other prisoners of basic requirements such as food rations or a bed.

In those cells of gangsters ... they are selling the beds ... If you don't have money to buy a bed, you sleep down ... on the floor ... So there's an empty bed, but you can't sleep there.

In Awaiting Trial ... [where] you are a first [time] offender, when you are going to [get your food] they give you a quarter [of a loaf of bread] - they called it a *katkop* - and porridge in the morning. You do not eat there but you take your food [back to the cell with you] ... When you enter the cell ... someone is standing with a card[board] ... box say[ing], 'Put your *katkop* inside here'. It's your food, but they just say, 'Put it inside'. You are paying rent for living in the cell.

If you indicate unwillingness to part with your *katkop*, explains another, then you are simply told that should you not acquiesce, 'you will have to be beaten'.

Fear is a powerful tool in the subordination of the newcomers.

Prison it's like being in another world, ... another planet where you sort of feel disorientated. It's the first time you come to the place and now the fear [is such that] you want protection, some kind of a protection. And you don't know where you will get that protection from.

You join a gang because ... you have chickened out badly ... You become scared of someone even before he touches you ... You end up thinking that he survives because he is in a gang. You ... come to me ... telling me that you want to join the gang.

Fear is fed by the disorientation of the newcomer, by the various direct assaults to which prisoners are subjected, as well as by conscious efforts on the part of other prisoners to instill fear. It sees many a new inmate recruited into a gang. While it is clear that there are numerous things to fear, the following prisoner's explanation suggests that the dangers are also exaggerated in order to recruit newcomers into gangs. Inmates sometimes work on increasing fear levels to generate compliance from newcomers.

You are from [awaiting] trial, you know nothing and you are scared ... They'll manipulate you because you don't know anything and you're still scared. That's when they'll recruit you ... 'You must do this and that, you will sleep here ... I will tell you what to do and how'. And for you to survive, you must follow the rules and you'll end up in a gang ... After two weeks you'll start ... thinking that maybe you shouldn't have joined the gang ... but you've joined ... and you can't leave.

One of the problems facing the new prisoner is a lack of information with which to evaluate the threats.

If ... this is a first [time] offender, anyone can take advantage. [He] knows nothing about prison, so you can trick him into believing anything.

Prison know-how

In fact in prison they say one word, '*Mawu ngana nqondo uzonya*' - If you don't have a mind, you are in trouble. We are fighting with [the] mind you see.

Indeed a prominently reported facet of vulnerability to unwanted sex and other forms of abuse is a lack of prison suss or street-wisdom in relation to prison culture. Because of their unfamiliarity with the workings of inmate power structures, first-time offenders can particularly easily, on arrival, be drawn into exploitative situations that will shape the remainder of their prison terms.

Automatically you are vulnerable to [a] lot of things ... What measures do you apply? ... It depends on the resistance you have, or maybe the know-how ... But now, just from out of the blue [you're in prison without that know-how]. That's why I see people crying.

Strategies for gaining control over desired newcomers are numerous and utilised in varying configurations. Contrasting with blatant bullying, assaults and threats of these, more sophisticated trickery and manipulation are also prized instruments for subordinating new prisoners. This is a prominent feature of interviewees' explanations of how prisoners become involved in situations of long-term sexual exploitation, i.e. how they are turned into *women* and *wives*.

You have to be careful of what's happening around you in jail. You need tactics and you have to know your story ... Some people like sex ... They won't force you, they will manipulate you. They do it well. You can refuse and refuse, but you'll end up doing it because they will work on your mind.

There are many ways that sex in prison [happens], it's not only ... by violence ... It depends on what kind of willpower you have ... what positions you put yourself [in] ... [and if you] understand the ... outcome of what you are doing.

It is in this regard that interviewees stress the importance of 'having a mind' or 'a strong mind' in order to counter manipulation and trickery on the part of others.

An important feature of this 'mind working' is to create dependence in the target. So, for example, offers of friendship, protection and consumables (like food, tobacco and *dagga*) are used to lure new prisoners and to begin a dependency dynamic in the interaction. Approaches of this kind are supported by the prison economy and social structures, which typically inform an environment characterised by physical danger and the inequitable distribution of resources.

An ex-prisoner provides the following example of how these approaches can take place and illustrates how various strategies are used in combination with each other. His explanation presents the process of manipulation or 'working on the mind' as something of an art - a gradual process requiring perceptiveness, skill and patience. At the same time it shows how fear is engineered and at work in creating the dependency dynamic.

These youngsters, when they are brought into cells, they are being approached ... especially by ... gangsters ... He's going to trick ... him while discussing [things] with him ... 'Where [do] you come from?' ... The young man ... is scared ... [The gangster] is going to ask questions in the line of, 'Do you have something to smoke? ... Are you hungry? ... And you find that this bigger guy who approaches this young man, his friends are also there and they pretend to be good guys. [And when] the gangster is speaking to this young man, he's studying him, he's studying his character Does he like *dagga*? Does he like food? ... He speaks nice to him, and after maybe he's learned what kind of a person he is, then he'll start instilling fear in him, 'You know ... in prison you mustn't do this and this ... See those guys? Those are gangsters, you mustn't go near them' ... Now remember that ... it's the first time [the young man] comes to this place, he knows nobody and perhaps he's heard somewhere that prison is a rough place ... He wants protection. Of course, he's going to start leaning on this guy, [thinking] that, 'Maybe this guy is a good man, maybe he'll help me'. It's when it starts now - *uyamngena manje* - he's approaching him, weighing him [up] softly until such time that // [stops short]

Moves resembling gestures of friendship and entailing offers or provision of food or small luxuries are the most commonly reported form that trickery follows. The aim of the exercise (to use the target for sex) may be realised only after a relatively slow build-up, as suggested in the above description, or it may be speedy. The process, however, often follows this pattern. Although the target is frequently unaware, an exchange is taking place and a debt being created for which he will later be expected to pay with sex.

'Hey come here'. You come to me. [I say] ... 'I'll give you cigarette' ... You don't know what's happening ... I buy you food. You eat ... At night, I come to wake you up ... I want to have sex ... And if you don't want [to have it] I'm going to tell you [that] you must pay my food back and give my cigarettes back. So you will do it because you don't have any money.

I just tell him - lie to him, 'I will do everything for you - everything that you need' ... *Ja*, I just twist his mind. After I have twisted his mind he is going to agree and give me [sex].

In the evening ... he says, 'Pay me. I was caring' ... So now you have no option ... That person protect[ed] you [but you did] not know that ... there is something [expected] beyond that.

'Having a mind' then, appears to entail not falling for these approaches of supposed friendliness and support, but rather to know that they should not be taken at face value, to know that nothing comes free in prison, or as one ex-prisoner put it, 'to understand the outcome of what you are doing'. To be naïve, gullible and trusting is to possess qualities that are counter to having a 'strong mind', are dangerous, and perceived as signals of inferiority.

In addition, 'willpower' is mentioned as necessary to staying out of trouble: to having the ability to resist the temptation of the goods on offer, or alternatively, to having no 'weak points', addictions or dependencies that reduce your capacity to be self sufficient and make you need things from others.

Related to this, interviewees also speak of prisoners 'working' on their targets' 'minds' in a slow, tortuous way, by tempting them and trying to lure them with the promise of goods, or making a point of displaying what they could benefit from giving in.

Whenever I've got a lot of *dagga* ... I open it and prepare ... it in a way that he'll be able to see that, 'Hey! That guy has a lot of *dagga*!' He's going to worry about that thing and he won't be aware that I'm reading his mind ... I'm pulling him in.

While in some situations a perceived lack of 'willpower' appears an appropriate reading of behaviour that renders a newcomer vulnerable, in others it is clearly not. The ability to resist, or awareness that one should resist at all, especially initially, frequently depends on a range of other factors such as ignorance of the prison norms and concerted trickery on the part of others. The potential intensity of manipulative energies is particularly stark in the following extract.

Those gangsters are planning for him ... They are going to monitor each and every move that he takes ... He's under observation 24 hours of the day: how he eats, does he like *dagga*? ... It can happen within a short period of time; it can take a long time. Usually ... they try to trap him ... into taking something from them, something which [he] won't afford to pay back ... He can even be trapped to maybe spoil something of mine, then to find that he'll have to pay back in money and he cannot afford that money.

Moreover, the economic circumstances of the individuals often constitute a fundamental component of vulnerability.

'Even in prison, money makes prison go round'

Sex is a commodity and embedded in the prison economy. Manipulation and trickery rely on this fact, and frequently take the form of the provision of consumables or other commodities (protection) in the guise of generosity, but for which a price (sex) is later demanded. Often targeted prisoners fall for it because they are not, at first, tuned into the workings of prison economies.

If you do not have cigarette, you do not have it, so do not bother prisoners because obviously a prisoner's things speak. If I give you [a cigarette, then] at night I will remind you ... 'Give me sex'. You start refusing and I say 'I want my cigarette ... I want it now'. And he does not have it. [He has to pay me] in some other way, he has to make a plan for me. [*I: How?*] In a right way, I smear Vaseline and I insert it [into him].

He will bring a packet of *dagga* and put it on your table without saying a word. You like *dagga* ... [and] you decide to take it. By taking it, you are now his wife.

Because of the exchange value of sex, material need is another important part of vulnerability. It is closely related to the 'strong mind' factor: the role that goods like food and tobacco play in trickery has been highlighted, and one is likely to demonstrate less 'willpower', or to be more susceptible to offers of such consumables if one does not have other ways to access these. While deprivation can be, and often is, organised precisely for the purpose of making targets vulnerable (for example, by being given only a fraction of one's food ration), some prisoners are anyway in more material need.

People who do not receive visits from family and friends are vulnerable and are a grouping likely to be subordinated through power-defined sexual relationships, say interviewees.

Maybe your family disappoints you [and does not visit you]. [You] lack money ... or you don't have cosmetics or ... cigarettes. It's obvious that you'll end up doing it [sex] ... not because you want to but because of family problems ... It's not that we decide that we want to have sex in jail because we've got long sentences or maybe we are stupid. No, ... it differs according to how your life is in jail, and also your family [- whether they support you].

It's like ... you've got nothing, you don't get visits, you see ... You don't get

visits, so you do that because you want cigarettes and food.

Visitors are a source of food, money, cigarettes and toiletries for prisoners. Those who don't get visitors are denied an access point to these commodities. As a result they are more likely to accept offers of these goods from others. Moreover, on learning the exchange value of sex (that often occurs through trickery), they may opt to sell sex in order to obtain them.

Newcomers and younger prisoners are also, according to interviewees, excluded from another key source of income/material commodities: smuggling networks. They tend to be excluded because they are inexperienced and do not possess the necessary skills, knowledge or hardiness. This further restriction on their opportunities to obtain commodities also makes them more likely to become dependent on others, and as a result, to provide sex to others.

Because in prison you ... survive by knowing your way around and being able to smuggle food ... [and] to get certain amenities or commodities, if you are still new, it's very difficult for you to do that - or if you are young. Then these young people would be dependent on older prisoners and there would be a situation of bartering: the young people getting certain material needs from the older prisoners, and those older prisoners, in exchange, getting sexual satisfaction. Warders in prison do not want to smuggle with youngsters because youngsters, if they get caught, they confess.

High levels of corruption, the related wealth of some prisoners, and consumption of luxuries and illegal substances in prison facilitate sexual abuse, says the following respondent.

You see today we have brandy and mandrax and all those things, so it is simple to rape certain prisoners. Someone wants to smoke *dagga* and has no money and comes to me, 'Okay, borrow me R100, I'll refund you tomorrow'. But tomorrow there's no R100 and if that person is younger ... I can rape that person.

The exchange value attributed to sex is reportedly frequently at play in sexual interactions. If something is owed to someone, it is regularly accepted, it seems, to force the debtor into sex in order to make the debt good. Indeed this premise is displayed through the workings of prison *marriages* where because *men* provide for their *wives* or *women*, they are automatically entitled to use their partners for sex.

The fact that sex is currency in prison also contributes to the blurring of the conventionally held distinction between coercive and consensual sex. As in the scenario described above, the notion of 'debt' may be drawn upon to justify blatantly forced sex, and be more closely suggestive of revenge or punishment than 'exchange'.¹⁵

But other scenarios in which the exchange value of sex is employed will display varying levels of coercion, and still others be defined primarily by consent. The latter scenario for example could apply when a prisoner, on the basis of relatively free choice (he has not been

hurt, threatened, tricked, or denied necessities) decides to sell sex to other prisoners in order to obtain goods or consumables.

'The weaker one'

That fear for one's physical safety is a salient facet of vulnerability has already begun to emerge. To be physically weak or not prepared to use violence increases the risks. Obviously, one is simply less able to fight off assaults. This has fundamental consequences for the nature of one's long-term prison identity: in a social system where 'manhood' is largely defined by the ability to use violence, a person who cannot fight or will not fight is unable to prove his 'manliness', and is consequently positioned as a *woman*.

As the small boys arrive, they test them. If they find the weaker one they rape him at night.

The following ex-prisoner explains why he was not sexually victimised in prison. He does this by comparing his physical ability and willingness to fight with someone who did not have these capacities and was consequently made into a *wyfie*.

He cannot fight with that guy [who was having sex with him] ... If you forced me I will fight ... I'm not scared to fight [*I: And the people who get forced?*]
They are scared people, they are smaller. You get big, tough people [trying to force them], that's the problem. Someone tried [with me] but I ... beat him. He was forcing his body against me and said, 'I want to sleep with you' ... I hit him. [He was] bigger than me. You see what the problem is? [But] I was not scared.

People who are not physically strong will often look for people to protect them. Along with material support, the 'protection' of wives is sometimes referred to as central to a *husband* role. It is noteworthy, however, that responses to questions regarding the regular role of *husbands* emphasise provision while mentions of a protective function are rare. It would appear that the protective role is at its height initially, and important in strategies to make targets into *wives* in the first place. The need for protection is an impetus for pairings but possibly does not arise much in the longer-term context of the relationships.

Newcomers who witness, hear about or experience assaults may quickly seek physical protection or respond to offers of these from other prisoners. Moreover, as already mentioned, violence and fear are engineered to 'persuade' targets into submission.

Respondents tell of the engineering of violence when they are asked whether prisoners who are wealthy are ever taken as *wives*. While economic vulnerability, it seems, is often the first port of call for making prisoners into wives, when this form of neediness is absent, another - physical safety - is created.

You must use your mind when doing a dirty one. Let's say I'm ... in a gang and I ... can see that this boy gets everything and is fine. All I'll do is to tell [my friends] that they must make him scared, try to take his things or hit him and then I will tell him that he mustn't be scared because I can fight these people for him. I can talk to them so they [will] leave him alone ... as long as he agrees to sleep with me.

Typically this involves a group effort whereby a group of inmates are tasked with intimidating, harassing and fighting with the target, thereby opening the way for a 'protector' to offer him protection. The 'protector' can be the individual who himself has desires on the target (as in the above description), or a gang whose members have been tasked with the recruitment by a senior. The latter scenario is outlined by the following ex-prisoner. His description shows how physical strength and a willingness to fight can protect the target.

Maybe a gang leader will send other gang members who are like [your] age to come and recruit [you] ... [They will do things] to make you join like sending other people to intimidate you ... They make sure you're always in a fight, they make you ... frightened so that you think, 'Oh, I don't have any protection, why don't I join this gang and then maybe things will come better?' They will also come and tell you, 'You were fighting ... yesterday, and today you've been involved in a fight again. Why don't you join us and then all these things will just go away?' And once you join they'll tell you that ... there's no door to exit gangsterism [*laughter*] ... It depends on how strong you are. If you decide to stand the pain of fighting ... then you will refuse, *ja* ... As time goes on they will see, 'No, this guy is serious. He can fight for himself, so he doesn't need any protection from us.' If however, in situations such as these, the target cannot or will not engage in the violence, he is likely to be condemned to become the sexual property of the instigator. As the interviewee continued when asked what happens if you are not the sort of person who physically can fight for yourself,

Then you're in *big* trouble because you're going to fall in that trap and join them and afterwards, one of the older guys - one of the bosses - will come ... and tell you, 'Now look here, ... I am your boss so you have to be my girlfriend'. He'll make arrangements ... to move you ... to his cell so that you can be his wife. And you've got no choice, that's not under any negotiation! They tell you and you do as they say.

Some prisoners do reportedly avoid being taken as *wives* by fighting and refusing to be intimidated,

You must be able to prove your manhood. I don't belong to a gang but I can fight with the[m].

Other testimonies, however, suggest that in some cases the determination of the attackers will not be doused in this way or any other. According to the following ex-prisoner, for example, gang-rape may be used when the target has not capitulated to various other strategies.

Once he doesn't succumb to that, I'm going to plan otherwise for him ... Then the only way is that we must plan that he be raped.

Good looks

As the above discussion makes evident, the different factors of vulnerability outlined thus far, as well as the inmate strategies to subordinate prisoners, work in combination with each

other, and are employed in varying configurations. In addition to these rather general components of vulnerability, other variables are also at play in either putting people at risk or protecting them from unwanted sex. The following discussion further explores vulnerability but in relation to characteristics that, according to interviewees, make one a specific target for sexual advances - the type of person who is singled out by fellow inmates for sex. In large part this is about a construction of physical attractiveness.

Implicit, sometimes explicit, in much of the discussion so far is the age factor. The youthfulness of sex-targets, for example, is suggested in the alternative terms provided for people in *wyfie* roles like 'small boy' and 'young man'. Younger prisoners are likely to be new and inexperienced prisoners who lack prison know-how and are therefore easily manipulated and excluded from areas of the prison economy. One respondent points out that youngsters also easily get into trouble by trying to prove themselves in a new masculine environment. He says that young inmates are often willing bait for gang recruitment because they are seduced by the gang tattoos or signals of power. They get gang tattoos only to later be told that the tattoo identifies them as a gang *wyfie*.¹⁶

In other ways too, age is certainly an important factor, and it is generally agreed that 'most of the victims are young ones'. But youthfulness does not operate in a simple equation with sex targeting, and to be older does not necessarily protect one from unwanted sex. Although it is less common, older people are also coerced into sex. In cases where this does occur it is often linked to other vulnerability factors such as economics or naïve behaviour.¹⁷

Some small boys are too clever and they can have sex with an old man because they work on the old man's mind.

Even an old man [of] 60 years can be raped here ... It depends on how he behaves himself, maybe he loves food or cigarettes.

Moreover, being 'young' is both a vague and relative concept. As the following prisoners point out, power-defined sexual relationships also take place amongst the youth in juvenile sections.

This side [in the juvenile section] we've also started thinking like the older prisoners. When I look at someone I think, 'Ah, this one can't tell me anything, plus he's small'.

It starts in the juvenile section ... We are young but it still happens. It's all about the face, if you are handsome that's when they make you a small boy. It's not because you are small or young ... No, it depends on how good-looking you are.

In the last extract the speaker highlights the role of 'good looks' rather than age or size in sexual targeting. Indeed, a key reason given for why certain prisoners are specifically targeted is their physical appearance.

This thing of taking a boy and making him a small boy, ... usually it's all about good looks. Maybe the person is fit and handsome. That's when they start taking chances of how they can have sex with him.

It's your appearance, it's a sexual attraction to people who have been isolated.

According to interviewees some of the characteristics of 'good looks' are smooth and hairless skin, plumpness, large thighs, rounded hips and being handsome or 'pretty' - physical characteristics often associated with femininity, or as one ex-prisoner put it, 'the appearance that can lead to a female appearance'.

It's actually the thighs that attract us. You know, this person who is well built, nice and fit - you look at their cheeks - hey! I fall in love.

You know, these young men who look pretty, lets say big thighs and handsome - round, fat and all that. Once such a young man comes into prison, ay yey yey, ... the excitement! ... Within the split of an eye, B section, A section, C section will know that, 'There's a young man, something of a queen!'

Some are not as young as we are saying, but [they] look younger ... if their skin is smooth.

The following interviewee's emphasis on 'large hips' also points to how fear of being identified as having these can impact on prisoner behaviour. Newcomers have to be careful, he says, not to reveal their lower bodies to other prisoners. To do so is to 'invite' rape. Like in popular social attitudes to the rape of women, attraction is offered as an explanation for rape, and as a result rape is constructed as largely the victims fault.

It happens ... that due to your body in fact, how fit you are, it's whereby you are attracting people to rape you ... You can find yourself more curved ... having hips ... In most cases you don't wear short things ... in terms of maybe pyjamas ... In the cell you must wear long trousers ... otherwise, wearing short things, you are showing the other guys that you have nice hips and ... you are attracting them, ... meaning that you must not just take off your trouser[s] in front of another man ... If you're trying to take off your trousers, you must go and hide somewhere, somehow.

But, as a fellow focus-group participant interjected, being discreet does not necessarily protect you. Others may go to lengths to view your body.

You have to hide somewhere, in the shower or toilet. So you normally find that [if] you are in a shower [and] they don't know your body, they have to ... spy [to see] how you look ... Maybe you'll hear a shout at the back, 'Hey, hey, hey! That guy, he's fit, he's really wide'. That's where things can happen to you.

Overall, despite the fact that good looks are often prioritised over age in reports of sexual targeting, age also impacts on looks. Interviewees frequently refer to an appearance of healthiness, or 'fitness' as particularly attractive.

When somebody comes in still having that natural skin appearance because he's just been sentenced, his physical stature is more or less of a person who's been well fed from outside ... [A prisoner] starts to fantasise ... 'To relieve myself,

how can I approach this somebody?'

Someone who's been in jail for ... 15 years ... ha[s] a jail mind. The person has been damaged ... They don't care how ugly you are, they look at how fresh or fit you are. If you are fit but ugly they cover your face.

In this, and other components of 'good looks' the age factor certainly has a place.

No one will want to marry me. My skin is not softer than the 23 year old. [It's about] how soft is your skin ... Is it smooth or hard and hairy?

While fresh, young skin may be desirable, the lack of these qualities does not necessarily protect a prisoner from unwanted sex. In further explication of how older prisoners are sometimes coerced into sex, some respondents describe various measures taken to increase the 'attractiveness' of more mature victims.¹⁸

They can shave his beard and have sex with him. We cover his face with a pillowcase or a towel. We will make him wear a towel and stuff papers on his chest to make breasts, and smear his lips with beetroot.

In this extract the intent to feminise the target is made particularly plain. Moreover it points to the extreme objectification of the victim: the less appealing face is covered and/or decorated for the act.

In exploring what constitutes 'good looks', the issue of race as a facet in sex-targeting did not emerge spontaneously. It is also clear that people of all races are sexually exploited and assaulted. But when interviewees were asked whether race is of any relevance, many agreed that it was. Most of the time their answers seem to contain the assumption that to be of lighter race is obviously more attractive (and that therefore further explanation is unnecessary).

The colour, your facial appearance, it attracts someone leading to a rape ... Whites, because of their colour, they were raped.

When they come, they are fresh and obviously we are swept off our feet ... 'Hey there's a White boy', and 'I feel proud because I have a White boy.'

Some Coloured boys I know ... were penetrated a lot.

Some link an increased risk for Whites, Indians, and Coloureds to a supposedly greater susceptibility to other facets of vulnerability.¹⁹ Intimidated by being a racial minority, they may more quickly seek protection, and they 'like food'.

White boys [and] Indians, when they come to jail they find a lot of Blacks and then obviously there are those who are scared and like things and don't understand life in prison.

The food here ... does not fill you up and most of the Whites like food.

One prisoner says however that in his experience while races of less colour are automatically more vulnerable, prison officials are aware of this, and, as a result, abuse is often averted by increased security offered to these types of people.

The way I see it, security becomes tight if there are Whites, an Indian or whatever because it is clear that they are handsome ... The policemen know what the prisoners are doing [and] keep an eye on them.

'They saw I was smart'

If you don't think for yourself, nobody is going to think for you. You must think for yourself and look what is going on. But if you mix with others, you will always find yourself in trouble.

Further insight into the construction of power and vulnerability, and the accompanying 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities, is given in interviewees' utterances on the behaviour and characteristics of those who tend to be left alone by fellow inmates. While many of these have already been touched upon or are implicit in the above discussion, additional or related factors are also provided.

A young ex-prisoner tells how, on his arrival, he managed to prove himself to other inmates and to protect himself from sexual (and other forms of) abuse. The ways in which he interacted with others afforded him a masculinised status. His story develops several of the issues already outlined. The notion of 'having a mind', for example, is given more flesh, and emerges as assertiveness, refusal to be bullied or intimidated, and a sense of self-sufficiency that excludes drawing on the prison authorities. Significantly, this prisoner was not strictly a first time offender. Although he tells of his first experience of prison, he had previously spent time at a juvenile centre where other boys told him what happens in prison. Consequently he was more prepared than some, for what he would encounter: he had a certain level of prison suss.

When you have ... just arrived in prison ... you can get raped if you don't use your mind. You've got to think ... Other prisoners ... tell themselves that you are scared and ... threat[en] you. [They] will insult you and call you names. If you don't talk back they will do whatever they like to you ... you will be a target [*I: How do you talk back?*] In my case what happened is that when I woke up ... I found that my belt was missing. I told them ... that my belt was missing ... Then, because when I [had] arrived, there was one [guy] that gave me a bad look, I said, 'I suspect you'. He shouted 'Go and tell the police²⁰ if you think I took it!' Then I said, 'People don't worry, I will get my belt.' They were expecting that I would ... report the matter to the police [but] they saw that I was smart, I was not putting trust in the police. They saw that I trusted myself in recovering my belt ... When you arrive in prison, you must check ... how they think and try and understand the situation. Don't impose yourself.

This looks like something of a balancing act: according to him, you must assert yourself and 'talk back' but without imposing yourself. Indeed other respondents talk about rape and gang rape as forms of punishment for sex-targets who do not submit and who, as a result,

are labelled as 'boastful some-ones' or as people who 'think too much of themselves'. Prisoners who do not capitulate to other demands (not necessarily of a sexual nature) may also be labelled in this way and consequently be raped.

[Gang rape] happens especially if he's not our brother [not a gang-member]. They say 'this dog ... is proud of himself.' Then maybe we'll just ... grab him or beat him up and say 'voetsak', take him to wherever there's a shelter ... and rape him ... He can do nothing, he cannot fight back.

They can say, 'You see that guy, he's a boastful someone' ... So we just want to take it out, what is in his mind ... 'He thinks he knows [better]', they normally use [the word] *uyazitshela* - he's boastful. 'Let's do it to him, let's rape him'.

If they tried to recruit [somebody] and he refused, they would ... be having a chip on their shoulder, and they would most probably come and rape you or assault you, just to show you that if they want to do anything to you, they can.

It is also an aggressive and defensive form of assertiveness that is required. It disallows a show of genuine emotion, openness or vulnerability. As the young ex-prisoner continued,

I was wise ... It's like I'm wearing a mask. I don't laugh with anyone ... If you come to me and smile ... I just look at you ... So you say, 'This boy ... has a small heart' ... [I'll say] 'Hey! What you want?!' ... You see I'm angry, but I know in my heart I'm not angry. I'm just making you scared so you leave me alone.

In addition, his story highlights another aspect of power and status in prison culture, that of crime. See below.

Crime status

The crime for which one is in prison can accord or refuse one status amongst fellow inmates.

I used to say, 'Outside I was shooting people, I [would] rather die than being ill-treated by a stupid person'. Some prisoners get arrested for stupid crime ... I won't say [a person who committed fraud] is a criminal because ... he's not ... brave as compared to the person involved in a robbery. The people involved in robbery ... carry firearms and knives. They are not scared to shoot or stab ... The person who is doing fraud doesn't carry anything, he deals with cheques and money. We are not the same because of the type of crime we have committed.

Status-according crimes, he says, involve violence and weapons while 'stupid' crimes are defined as those not involving weapons. To carry out a violent, weapon-assisted crime is to prove one's 'bravery' and to give one a stake in a claim to 'manhood' in the prison context.

[If you committed a] robbery ... with weapons, there is no person who will boss you around in prison [if they] have been arrested for less serious crime ... People who [take small boys] ... are serving long sentences ... Outside they have committed serious crime like robbery, hijack[ing] murder and so-on ... Those in

prison for theft and rape are taken as *women*. They are ... called 'sissies'. When you commit those crimes, it's seldom [that] you use weapons. Even those that rape don't always use weapons.

On the other hand, those convicted of weapon-less crime are more likely to be positioned as *women*. His explanation of the way in which rapists are viewed emphasises the role of weapons. Violence without weapons is not enough.

Other interviewees add comments on the issue of crime-status. They agree that the crime for which a prisoner is convicted often impacts on his prison experiences and his relationships with other inmates.²¹ For instance, some say they were respected because of the nature of their crime. Another refers to the need to prove oneself capable of the crime one says one committed, as a motivation for involvement in gangsterism.

He's being involved in gangsterism just because ... he wants to impress other people that, 'No, I did crime outside ... It was not a frame-up or whatever, I *did*, I committed this crime'.

Several confirm the negative ways in which sexual offenders are perceived.

If you are convicted and admitted for indecent assault or rape they would hate you and they might even kill you.

However, they describe the possible consequences for the prisoner in different terms. While the last extract refers to inmate hatred of these offenders, the following interviewee supports the claim that they are likely to be sexually victimised in prison, but provides a different explanation.

Sexual offenders are usually victimised, especially in Awaiting Trial. 'You need to be raped too 'cos you raped our sisters outside'. These prisoners try to hide what they're in for.

So while sexual offenders reportedly attempt to keep their offence under wraps, for others who committed 'masculine' offences, prisoner-knowledge around their crime can operate as a protective device.

Publicity

Related to this issue of crime-status is that of broader publicity - not only amongst inmates but also in the outside world. Interviewees say that offenders whose trials and crimes have been made public knowledge are often protected from victimisation.

According to their explanations, publicity can compliment crime-status. The following ex-prisoner, for example, tells how his crime of 'cold-blooded murder' was all over the newspapers by the time he arrived in prison. As a result of this substantial publicity, he says, he gained respect from other prisoners, and was free from victimisation.

With my story ... [the] English press was there: ... Sunday Times, Sowetan, City Press, Citizen etc. So they took my picture [and] their front pages [were],

'Teacher gets twelve years' blah blah, 'for a cold blooded murder' ... And so when I landed in prison even those who did not know me [had] newspapers [and] they were already reading [about me], so they respected me from there. Inside it helped me. [If you're known outside] you won't suffer anything.

But publicity does not only work to the offender's benefit when it overlaps with a 'brave' or 'manly' crime-status. Rather it extends to those considered 'sissy' crimes. It is the attribute of being 'well known' that appears to be of primary significance.²²

It has an impact whether you're known outside. It gives you status, just from the exposure ... by the press, the community, ... the prisoners themselves, that 'Ooh, he's coming!' Automatically, you're covered ... Eugene de Kok ... cannot fight the gangsters but because of his status in the press, ... he's covered ... Like Boesak, why was he not raped? ... Now those who are kept in the darkness are vulnerable and are victims in prison.

Presumably the perpetrator's chances of getting away with victimising a well-known prisoner are slimmer.

Educational involvement

Similarly, some interviewees suggest that higher levels of education and/or significant involvement in educational and developmental activities protect people from abuse. This is presented as being partly for the same reason that a high public profile protects people: these sorts of prisoners are more likely to take steps to address cases of abuse, and in addition, often have access to assistance structures outside of the prison. (They do not therefore have to rely solely on prison officials.)

Educated men, I'm talking about people who have been to tertiary level ... - bank managers, lawyers, doctors etc. - they don't engage in such activities. They'd rather further their studies, exercise, or read lots of books ... [*I: And no one is going to force them?*] No. They can think ... and secondly, when you are empowering yourself educationally they fear you because they know that you know a lot [and] you might cause problem[s] for them.

Some also refer to other types of people who can play a protective role: to be around them reduces chances of victimisation. These may be certain 'cell bosses' or people who have the respect of the gangs though do not participate in their activities. In general, though, respondents say that networks of prisoners involved in developmental activities are loci of power that constitute alternatives to gangsterism and to an extent, keep gangster activity in check as far as their members are concerned.

There are those networks [of] ... positive people who ... are against those bad things ... The gangs are aware of that [and they] won't just come and bully you ... because they know that these people are wiser than them, and they might take further steps, maybe to the authorities (those who are not corrupt) ... So ... it's going to be much more trouble for them [so] they won't disturb you.

Like maybe you are recruited by the ... gangsters or maybe you ... come across the people ... who are running the prison softly: people involved in sports, rehabilitation, recreation and so forth. Once you are there, it's not easy for someone to come ... to you by force.

However, prisoner access to these networks is usually not a simple matter of choice. Respondents stress the significance of what happens on arrival in prison. You can be recruited into a gang or by people who 'run the prison softly'. This seems partly a matter of luck as well as the negotiation of other vulnerability factors. One explains, for instance, how he was fortunate to be initially allocated to a cell where the cell boss or *china* as they are known, was a 'good' person who did not tolerate gangster activity. But the potentially formidable nature of some of the recruitment strategies with which gangs target newly arrived offenders is clear. Moreover, resignation from a gang is very rarely tolerated. Another issue, explored in more detail below, is that once a prisoner has had a feminised identity attached to him, it is enormously difficult to shake this identity off. More often than not he will continue to be considered as a sex object for other prisoners' use (see section, [Promotion to 'Manhood'](#)).

In addition to the potentially protective role that developmental networks can reportedly play, it is pertinent here to also consider respondents' comments on boredom in prison as a contributing factor to sexual exploitation and abuse as well as to gangsterism and violence more generally. Several respondents are of the opinion that a key challenge regarding high levels of abuse in prison is to involve inmates in positive activities.

The main cause of this thing [sexual abuse] and gangsterism is idling ... They must come up with rehabilitation programmes; the members must be committed ... Where management is weak ... these things will forever happen ... Recreation would reduce [it], attending school etc. ... They must also do away with the privilege ... system where TVs [and] stoves were taken away ... visits were reduced ... People end up frustrated. Most of them have got no life skills and they end up doing these ... things ... Most of them ... are confused people, confused in the sense that they ... start realising that they are not man enough because ... they don't possess their illegal firearms anymore.

Boredom, idling and the resultant frustration, say respondents, see inmates employing negative methods to alleviate the boredom, and to obtain personal power where there are no positive channels through which to do this. The following focus group exchange expands on the issue.

R3: What I've experienced about school is [that it's] something that is good [for] everyone although they don't ... go because of the lack of support and facilities ... If they can get enough support ... violence and crime in prison will become lower.

R2: Just because [you're] sitting the whole day doing nothing ... [It's] only negative things that you experience and when you want to go to school the wardens don't want to let you ... People ... do things because of boredom ... There's no-one helping. The only thing that's happening is mess all the time ... That's why they end up doing all these bad things.

R3: Just imagine if you can be locked in this room for a period of three years ... What's going to happen in your mind? ... That's why I can just [say], 'Let's hit this guy ... we're going to get money from him'. It's ... because you are stranded ... you are hungry and doing nothing, just sitting. You can always become negative ... Even the gangsters ... 90% of the prisoners want to be kept busy.

It happens everywhere

During discussions on coercive and violent sex some respondents offer opinions on specific environments that they consider most problematic. As has already been outlined, the dangers of Awaiting Trial sections are stressed, and are largely understood as the consequence of many of the inhabitants' newness to the system or first-time status. Some respondents perceive these sections as the key site of forced sex (as well as other forms of violence) and where the rape of new-comers is the order of the day. As time passes and inmates have spent longer inside (whether they are still in Awaiting Trial, or have been moved to another section for sentenced prisoners), levels of force are perceived by these respondents to decline. Alternatively, the words of others suggest that levels of coercion do not necessarily decline as inmates have been there longer, but rather that forced sex is increasingly registered with a sense of resignation.

At first ... it comes as a shock ... you feel that your physical integrity is violated ... But as time goes on people learn to accept this ... as part of the package in prison.

What this respondent registers as a sense of acceptance might also be experienced by many victims and witnesses as helplessness or not something about which they cannot do anything much. (The ways in which complaints and reporting can lead to further victimisation are explored below). Related to this, the force is possibly more visible during initial sexual interactions. But these first experiences also serve to cast victims in sexualised identities that will often stay with them for the remainder of their sentences. (See section, [Social Meanings of 'Man' and 'Woman'](#)). Similarly marriage relationships are a common consequence of an initial violent sex encounter. Marriages can then be considered to derive from an initial act of conquest, that of rape. As time goes on, levels of coercion do not necessarily reduce but may just become less visible.

Over and above the emphasis placed by some on Awaiting Trial facilities, some respondents specify other sites that they consider problematic. One for example, stated that in his experience juvenile facilities, where, he says, 'rapes happen like almost every day', see the highest levels of sexual abuse.²³ He also points to the problem of insufficient age controls to ensure that only genuine juveniles are kept in these facilities. But even so there are always bigger boys who will bully and abuse the younger ones.

For another, facilities holding prisoners classified as maximum-security-category pose the greatest danger, partly because the inmates 'are just a lot more violent' and also because of the lengths of their sentences,

There's this attitude that you're not afraid of doing anything evil because it

cannot get worse. Even if they had to find you doing that, they'd give you what? An extra 6 months or 2 years. If you're doing 70 years it doesn't make much difference.

The reported influence of length of sentence on preparedness to perpetrate acts of sexual abuse is somewhat qualified by the alleged tendency of these acts to go unreported, or if reported to go unacknowledged. (See section, [Prison Warders and Sex in Prison](#)).

Apart from the emphasis placed by some interviewees on Awaiting Trial facilities, other respondents tend to agree that sexual violation can 'happen everywhere'. In all prisons, all sections within these prisons, and in different cell-types (communal and two-person units) there are people who perpetrate abuses. Emerging from respondent testimonies is the important point that power and control is often quite localised. While one cell can be a horror zone, the one adjacent to it may be relatively peaceful, depending on who runs it and has the authority in the cell. Spaces where a lot of movement happens, like the passages between cells, another respondent explained, can also be very dangerous, precisely because you never know who you may run into. This also suggests the changing of power dynamics between physical spaces and times: onemight be safe in a cell with people who 'run the prison softly', but not remain safe when fetching one's breakfast or going to shower. Furthermore, respondent discussions show how the movement of people targeted for sex from sites of protective power to sites of abuse and violence, is apparently easily organised. (See section, [Prison Warders and Sex in Prison](#)).

Despite these considerations however, levels of abuse and violence will differ between institutions and parts of these institutions according to a range of possible factors. A family-member of a prisoner, for example, provides a relevant anecdote. His relative was transferred from Johannesburg Prison to C-Max after he tried to escape. The prisoner told his cousin that while his plan was to escape, he knew that if he failed there was a likelihood that he would be moved to C-Max. Compared to the situation in Johannesburg Prison, where on a daily basis he was involved in fighting off people who were trying to rape him, he had information that C-Max would be less dangerous. Indeed, reporting from the Pretoria prison to his visiting relative, he exclaimed that it was a relief to be in an institution where gangsterism currently has less of a hold. This raises issues of the likely impact of levels of overcrowding, types of accommodation and security levels on sexual abuse. C-Max is a maximum security institution where prisoners are housed in single cells, and levels of security are higher than in other institutions.

Gangs and Sex

It is already clear that sex is thoroughly intertwined with the workings of gangs in prison. It is already clear that sex is thoroughly intertwined with the workings of gangs in prison. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore in detail how sex is organised and utilised within each of these gangs, a few important additional issues that emerge on the relationship between prison gangs and sex are outlined here.

Interviewees able to convey in-depth knowledge on these issues were not accessed from all gangs but only from the Big 5s and Airforce 3. It is mainly from these specific interviews that the first part of this section draws its findings. All respondents however contributed to

discussions regarding the effects of gang practices on other prisoners.

Importantly, while respondents speak in terms of what 'the gangs' do and understand them as key agents of sexual activity in prison, prison gangs should not be viewed as consisting of homogenous populations. Evidently, to differing degrees, sex and coercion is a contested issue within gangs. Gang structures support and organise specific sexual activities, but not all their members endorse these practices. It is impossible to tell whether they are endorsed by the majority of their members: presumably these attitudes change over time and between prison contexts. But we do know that some strenuously disapprove. One ex-prisoner for example expresses fury about the forced sex he witnessed amongst his fellow gang members and sees it as reflecting badly on himself as a member of the gang. In the toilet I saw the guy with [an]other guy doing those things. I was mad! ... 'You said you are [a] 26 and the 26s don't do these things'. I went to the other guys, ... 'Look [at] what is happening in the toilet!' They just looked at me ... 'It's not our problem' [they said]. 'But it's our friend ... and our gang- member, and you know [that] we must not do those things!' The 26s are crooks! ... I am a 26 and I know ... but now [people like that] make others [look] stupid!

Sex as a topic of recruitment-speak

Some of the issues outlined here expand on those discussed generally in relation to vulnerability. For instance, in terms of the trickery used to subordinate people into the role of wife, it is pertinent to note how the topic of sex can itself be used as a way to recruit gang members.

A long-standing former member of the Airforce 3 gang explains how this works. Prospective members are made to believe that the gang does not engage in sex. This is used to persuade people to join the gang. So, by cashing in on both fear of unwanted sex and/or disapproval of male on male sex, new Airforce 3 members are recruited.

[If] I want him to be an Airforce 3 ... I'll tell him that Airforce 3 do not indulge in prison activities like homosexuality ... He'll see that '... If I can be one of these gangsters I'll be in the right hands'.

Some new recruits, for whom a prime motivation for joining may have been the belief that sex is not practiced in that gang (and that they would therefore be protected from unwanted sex) are subsequently made into wives for other gang members.

Classification and structures for determining sex roles

New recruits are sent to be 'classified', a process that determines or formalises whether they are allocated a feminised or masculinised rank.²⁴ Specific gang 'officials' are tasked with classifying new members. In Airforce 3 this position is reportedly held by the 'Blacksmith'. The respondent describes how the classification process can unfold.

[The new member] knows that homosexuality is not being practised [in the Airforce], but ... once you are in the office²⁵ of this guy called Blacksmith ... he is going to trick you into having sex ... He must classify you whether you ... are a young man or ... a full soldier: 'Look, there is the camp of full soldiers ... and

the camp of young soldiers. [To] be a full ... soldier you've got to know that you'll be working with blood ... To prove to us that you can ... we can give you a knife and say, 'Go and stab so and so, or go and stab a warder'. Now the young man will ... think about the beating up that he'll get from committing such a crime. By that time, he already has this tattoo and has been told that ... if he takes it out ... he's going to die ... He must choose to stab or he must choose to be a young man [*wyfie*] ... Once he says he falls into this camp of young soldiers ... then the Blacksmith will say '*Uyangigcwalisela* - make me believe you' ... [that] you can be a young soldier ... He'll say, 'Okay'. At that moment, he hasn't got an[y] idea of how he must convince this guy. But ... the Blacksmith has the intelligence of speaking ... of scaring him ... [so that] he must be compliant ... The Blacksmith will say, 'Come'. Maybe they go to the shower ... (soldiers are standing guard outside ... to keep watch for the warders). 'Take off your trousers' ... [The Blacksmith's tone] has changed now. The young man will see, 'Aish, I haven't got a chance ... I must agree with everything that this man says'. Maybe he'll say, 'Ay, man, I don't like this thing'. [The Blacksmith] will say, 'No, ... you've already taken my tattoo and you want to tell me stories!'

According to him then, the classification process of Airforce 3 involves a literal sex act for those who do not commit to proving their capacity for violence and thereby to qualify for 'full-soldier' status. It is the act of sex that appears to result in a sex-defined role. The respondent went on to explain that 'young men' are then allocated to serve other high-ranking members.

According to another ex-prisoner, who has over 20 years of experience in the Big 5s, the 'Medical Doctor' is the official responsible for classifying new members in this gang. In the Big 5s, the Medical Doctor performs a ritual of listening to the pulse of the recruit. Depending on the number of *kloks* that the doctor 'hears' flowing in the blood, the new member is designated as either a *wyfie* or a 'soldier'.

He must put your hand like this. [**I: He holds it at the pulse?**] *Ja*, and he says 'Jou bloed klok 25 male getale van vier'. Your blood beats 25 times 4. 'Times 4' means you are Section 4 which means you are a Free-Moscow [*wyfie*]. If you are a big man I say [that] your blood beats 25 times 5. That means your blood is full, [that] you are a soldier. The medical doctor ... must hear how many times your blood *kloks*.

The 'pulse rate' that the doctor will detect, explains this interviewee, is determined by how the new member comes across to the doctor in a preceding conversation.²⁶

I talk with you before[hand]. Can [I] see that this guy is a small guy? Yes he is a small guy. You must put [him] in such a place because he is a small guy.

Like in the account of classification in Airforce 3 (above), he highlights the coercion involved, especially for those named as *wyfies*.

If the Big 5 says you are a *wyfietjie*, you are a *wyfietjie*. If we say you must be a soldier you must be a soldier ... You must know that you can't do [any]thing

[else] because ... no one agrees to be a wyfie. All of us denied to be wyfies, but as we are in a prison we must agree with these guys.

Ranks, rules and access to sex

On the basis of the available information it is apparent that the structures of these gangs and others broadly divide along the lines of *female* or *wyfie* and *male* or *soldier*.²⁷ For example, as the above interviewee states in relation to the Big 5s, Section 4 is for *wyfies*.²⁸ Sections 1-3 consist of the masculine ranks including soldiers, commanders and officials (such as the 'Judge', the 'FBI', the 'Spy' etc.) and Section 5 is for the 'Cabinet' - also masculinised. For each of the 'Cabinet' positions, there is a corresponding wyfie position. The highest-ranking wyfies are those of the 'Cabinet' members, one of whom is considered 'Mama of all *wyfies*'.²⁹

Section 4 is in turn divided into different *wyfie* ranks that determine who sleeps with who. *Wyfies* of particular categories are allocated to specific masculine ranks.³⁰ Similarly, the Airforce interviewee explains that,

They are allocated into offices ... If they allocate two or three boys to me, it depends on me whether I want to do this thing [use them for sex] or not ... All the gangs are doing it that way.

The movement of *wyfies* up the feminised hierarchy was not an area of investigation. However the Big 5 respondent mentioned that achieving the most senior *wyfie* positions in his gang (those in the Cabinet) requires being fully versed with the language, structures and codes of the gang. More generally, in relation to the masculinised positions too, thorough gang knowledge in addition to active participation is reportedly central to rising in the ranks.

It appears that movement through the lower feminised ranks in the Big 5s does not necessarily depend on any particular skill on the part of the *wyfie*, but can be influenced by other factors. The same respondent states that he was made to jump a rank when it was discovered that he, a *wyfie*, and the person to whom he was allocated, both came from the same area outside prison, and were known to each other. He was passed on to a higher-ranking man. (For an explanation of why this was considered necessary see section, [On Release](#)). To some extent, horizontal and downward *wyfie* movement also takes place. As the following respondent explains,

When a new small boy arrives [who] the boss wants ... the boss will get rid of the old small boy [i.e. his current/previous boy], even promise to hit him should he [try to] come back ... The other prisoners will [then] have him as their small boy.

On the basis of the available information it seems also that the movement of *wyfies* through *wyfie* ranks may depend more on their *husbands* than themselves. As the *husbands* are promoted, so their *wyfies* move to the corresponding rank.

Men's access to sex

Access to sex is not automatic for gang members who occupy masculine positions. Rather, in terms of the gang codes, it is a privilege accorded to higher ranking members. 'Soldiers' (the lowest masculine rank) are not entitled to a regular sexual partner. 'How can a soldier go to war being drunk?' was the response of several interviewees to questions of sex entitlement within gang hierarchies.

Although 'soldiers' are not eligible for a partner of their own, there are situations where they are invited to partake in sex. One example of this is provided by a former member of the Big 5s, who tells how newly recruited *wyflies*, known as 'Free Moscows', are available to the soldiers for a restricted period of five days following which the 'Free Moscows' move up to the next *wyfie* rank (Diamond 10). From this point on they are no longer available to the soldiers, but rather to the (higher) corresponding masculinised rank (number 18 or 'Radio').

Interviewees also report that one of the punishments meted out by some gangs to their *wyflies* who have contravened their codes of conduct is gang rape or rape.³¹ 'Soldiers', according to their reports, often carry out the punishment.

When ... their young men have violated their policy ... then he's likely to get a sentence where ... he's going to be given to five soldiers to satisfy themselves with him ... Airforce 3s have already adopted that style from the 28s and Big 5s.

If you get a punishment, all the *soldate* [soldiers] - fifty or a hundred of them - come to sleep with you ... It's [called] 'funky mama' ... When that happens the soldiers are happy because ... [they] don't sleep with anyone [so] if [wyflies] don't [break the rules] then the soldiers don't get [sex].

In addition, some interviewees point out that other opportunities for sex can be orchestrated by the soldiers. They are on the alert for spotting contraventions, but they can also trick a *wyfie* into breaking the rules so that they can perform the punishment.

On the other hand, the soldiers may break the stated codes of the gang, and 'when the coast is clear' as one put it, go to seek sex. The sex may be achieved through rape or gang-rape according to respondents. Conceivably it may also be achieved through more consensual arrangements although this was not reported.

The place of wyflies in gangs

The extent to which marriages are institutionalised within some gangs is further highlighted in a consideration of the place of *wyflies* within these gangs. As mentioned above, for example, the Big 5s have a ranking system particular to *wyflies*, which corresponds to its 'masculine' counterpart. Position within this system determines who sleeps with whom.

In addition, the *wyfie* hierarchy also regulates *wyfie* behaviour and control at the broader level of the gang (as opposed to the level only of individual relationships).

Sometimes it is not the husband who is advising his wife [but] the gangsters [who] keep on arranging meetings [for] wives [to tell them what to do].

The organisation and schooling of *wyflies* within these gangs supports the system of gendered power relations and endorses the control that men exercise over their *wyflies* at an individual level. A former Big 5 member expands on this in relation to his gang.

The Star is the big one ... the first [wyfie] in the Cabinet and all the [other wyflies] listen to her. He teaches them what ... we do not want in Big 5 ... 'If you stay with a person you have to treat him this way and not that way because if you do this, you make him angry' ... He tells them those things.

It is noteworthy that while these structures can also serve as a channel for *wyflies* to air their own grievances, complaints regarding unwanted sex are apparently out of bounds.

The Star would ... tell us [men] what it is [the wyflies] do not like. But they cannot tell us that they do not like sex. The Star will tell them that they must not say things like that. If there is something that bothers them besides sex, ... the Star will tell us.

Moreover, *wyflies* may have additional functions over and above the requirements of their *marriages*. Although this was not widely reported, one interviewee noted that *wyflies* might play a role to promote the greater good of their gang. He says, in his gang, Airforce 3, *wyflies* are trained to perform missions for the gang by using the promise of sex.³²

Youngsters are made wyfietjies for a purpose ... Let's say we want a hacksaw ... and there's somebody who's working with hacksaws. I, an elder person, can't approach him [with] 'Give me a hacksaw' ... but I know ... his weak point is young men ... I'm going to [send] a trained young man ... The young man [has] been taught ways of approaching that person: he can ... ask for a light and start a conversation ... and that man will start getting ideas [because of] the way in which the young man approached him and enticed him ... Usually the young man will end up saying, 'My brother wants ... hacksaws' or 'he wants knives. If you can give me knives ... I can give you sex'. And believe me, ... there are people who if [they're] approached by a young man, they won't sleep, they'll be thinking of that the whole night ... Arrangements will be made ... If [the young man] is an Airforce, ... he has been trained to try and rob that person without giving him thighs,³³ but if he sees, 'If I don't give him thighs, I won't get the things', [then] he's got to give [him sex] ... He's working for the gang.

The functioning of *wyflies* for broader gang objectives is then, on the basis of this description, again defined in terms of sex.

Overall, the structures of the gangs provide for sex to take place, in particular through the endorsement of the power-defined *marriages* or partnerships. Specific rituals both define who become *wyflies* and regulate their behaviour once defined as such. The objective of the regulation appears to revolve largely around ensuring that they 'willingly' provide sex to their partners (and others as the gang may wish). The above discussions also show how the processes of *wyfie*-recruitment, status-allocation and regulation involve particular protagonists who have special training and skills to carry out these processes.³⁴

Gangs preside over who may have sex

Members of various gangs are not the only people having sex in prison, but according to the gangs, sex in prison is their terrain.

People who are not gangsters are not allowed to practise homosexuality in prison.

Non-gang members are not supposed to be having sex, and those who are must keep it under wraps, say most interviewees. Alternatively they must make financial payment to a gang for the privilege of participating in sex.

If gangsters ... find two mpathas [non-gang members] doing sex, they won't just leave you. They will obviously demand that you pay them or become part of their gang ... [or] they'll stab you or hit you with a lock or a spoon.

If ... [they] catch you, then you must pay so the other people who are not in gangs can see that they are not supposed to do it.

Although it seems the 28s have the greatest claim to sex because they have 'signed' for it (it is part of their constitution), other gangs also display an ownership of sexual activities over those who do not belong to gangs. Several interviewees refer to the gang practice of raping those non-gang members who refuse to, or cannot pay, for their participation in sexual activity.³⁵

It's not possible for just anybody to do what they want ... If I'm a 28 and I find you doing that and you don't belong to us, you must give me R28.00 and if you don't give me my R28.00 so you can be my *broer* [brother], then I will have to force you to give it [sex] to me.

Sometimes the non-gang member needs to pay for having sex with a member of a gang as well as for being caught having sex. The non-gang member, it seems, would pay to sleep with a gang-member of feminised/*wyfie* status and not the other way around. Wives do not pay to sleep with *men*.

Sometimes ... a *mphata* man has a wife of a gang member. The members of the gang of this wife come [to him] for money. He knows that every time he [must] give them so much money.

Moreover, gangs claim ownership not only over who has sex in prison, but also attempt to rule on the types of sexual interactions taking place.

Gangs preside over the nature of sexual activity

Gendered identities within prison cultures are intertwined with particular sex roles. Rigid rules for how sex takes place accompany 'masculinised' and 'feminised' identities. Similarly, gender status and role in sex tend to be conflated: *men* penetrate and *women* are their passive receptors. What one ostensibly does, and does not do in the sex act reflect the broader power dynamic in the relationship.

The younger guy knows that he's the one who has to provide space for the penis ... because he knows that he's the wife. So if you are the wife, you are the wife.

It is this particular kind of sex - with *men* penetrating *women* - that is sanctioned and protected by the gangs, as well as providing a means of income generation.³⁶ Anything else is apparently taboo. The endorsement of this particular mode of sex by inmate hierarchies is evident in the reported lack of tolerance for alternative kinds of interaction. For a *wife* to attempt to penetrate the *husband* would be scandalous, and is often registered as an inconceivable scenario by interviewees. Questions on the possibility of such situations were frequently met with incredulous laughter. The construction of the gender/sex role equation is also evident in the fact that if a *man* is found to have been raped, he is demoted to *woman* status.

The alleged lack of tolerance in gangs of sex practices that diverge from this sanctioned type is outlined below (see section, [Alternative Modes of Sex](#)). However, it will also be shown how the 'illegality' of these practices makes them an additional site for extortion on the part of gangs.

Social Meanings of 'Man' and 'Woman'

The social meanings attached to being either a *woman* or a *man* are potent tools in the construction and maintenance of sexual power-relations in prison. Respondents' narratives on these - how prisoners in these roles respond to those around them, and others to them - reveal how this operates.

The primary focus here is on the meanings with which *women* are invested. But because *women* are largely defined in relation to *men* and (their own lack of) 'masculinity', this focus also sheds light on prevailing notions of 'manhood'.

'Even the criminal in you is now gone'

To be a *woman* in prison is not a prized position. *Wyfies* and people who have been raped are labelled as *women*. Basically anyone who has been penetrated in a power-defined sexual interaction is a *woman*.

In fact the person who has been raped in prison is regarded as a woman ... When he walks around ... prisoners will whistle for him as if whistling for a woman. Other prisoners will be fingering him and call[ing] him 'sweetheart', saying 'Hello sweetheart' [*mimics*] when he passes ... If he mistakenly step[s] on your feet, you will call him 'bitch' ... This happens to all those who have been raped and those who were not raped [but] who agree to sleep with the big boys.

Interviewees agree that most *women* try (unsuccessfully) to hide their status. It is a source of embarrassment and shame.

He hides it and he would not talk about it but you and I know about it ... There is nothing that happens in jail [that] we do not know about.

Their explanations on the nature of the shame involved in being a woman also point to a notion of masculinity that tends to be elevated and aspired to in this context. To be a *woman* is not to be a man, and removes any claim to respect.

They are shy ... because [if] I [a woman] share my story with you ... [then later], maybe [when] we are fighting, you will tell me, 'There is nothing I can talk to you [about] because you have been sodomised' - something like that. They say you are stupid.

The *woman* is stripped of his claim to masculinity, not only in relation to prison experiences, but also in relation to the past. A *woman* could not have committed a 'masculine' crime, or is not a 'true' criminal, and therefore not worthy of respect.

It's like ... from the start, before you came here, you weren't a criminal, you are just a useless criminal. [We can tell this] by the way ... you let people do this to you ... [If] you are a gun-man ... you can't agree [to let this happen to you].

We are all criminals in here and if I say you are a criminal that means that I respect you. But if you have [had] sex [done to you], it's obvious that they will [see] you differently ... Even the criminal in you is now gone and you are now a woman ... There is nothing we can do for [a person who has been raped] and we don't care. Some people just look and some want to sleep with him and when he walks past people want to touch him or threaten to rape him.

These extracts also highlight an important tension that runs through interviewees' narratives of prison sex: the tension between understandings of coercion and consent. While distinctions between these concepts are often blurred, and incidents display varying levels of consent and coercion, unambiguously coercive sex is often represented as the victim's doing or fault. As one put it,

You can never allow another man to come on top of you if you do not like it.

In these representations, discourses of sexual-power relations legitimise and naturalise the sexual subjugation of *women*: you are not a real criminal because you have 'allowed' yourself to be penetrated, you 'let' others have sex with you so you must 'give' it to me. As a *woman* you are the sexual property of *men*. This discourse of victim responsibility coexists, in interviewees' narratives, with general agreement that in these situations there is very little or no choice involved on the part of the victim.

The *woman* label tends to stick. Interviewees tell how even if one is transferred to another section or prison, the chances of shaking off a feminised identity are slim. (In order to do so, criteria for promotion to 'manhood' have to be fulfilled. See section, [Promotion to 'Manhood'](#)). Inmate networks succeed in wide information dissemination.

If I allow myself to be a lady I'm going to be a girl until I finish my sentence. That's definitely sure and that's the truth. Even if I can be transferred to [an]other prison ... the guys there will know that where I come from, I was so-and-so's wife and will make sure that I become a wife there.

One outcome of being defined in this way is that *women* are considered sex objects, and available for others' use.

Once they know that you were raped, other prisoners will say [that] you must sleep with them whether you like it or not.

This assumption is particularly evident in the following group interchange.

R1: There[re] 5 of us and we take turns having sex with him. He will refuse, but they will manipulate him and he will end up doing it ... I won't stand and look [on] if someone is busy with [him] and when I want to do it, he wants to tell me a whole lot of stories. Obviously he's not doing the right thing.

R2: He did not agree that they should do it ... but it is his job. They rape him because they know that it's his work, he's available. They cannot just find [a person] in a shower and grab him if he does not do that thing. They rape you when they know that you are doing it.

R3: A person who is slept with always ... he is used to being watered³⁷ [people sleeping with him]. So if I go to him ... and he refuses, I would think he gives others, so why is he not giving me?

Here, being available for sex is described as 'his job' and the 'right thing' for someone who has been raped or sexually penetrated to be doing. *Men* are not about to accept refusal from a person who's 'job' is to provide them with sex. The shame and harassment that accompany the label *woman* are, as a result, only one motivation for keeping the status secret. Another motivation appears to be the attempt to protect oneself from ongoing and numerous episodes of sexual coercion that may be perpetrated by any number of prisoners.

The general sense of shame associated with 'womanhood', however is not entirely representative. Some tell of a minority of individuals who do not try to hide their status. Rather, they appear to embrace the identity.

You can see [from] a person's walk, ... his body language, ... [that] he is now having the actions of a lady ... He's trying to show everyone that he's now a woman He doesn't want to be separated from his man ... [He's] not hiding ... There are those who can become proud of being women in prison but most of them ... don't want other people to know what's happening.

For *men* it is reportedly the norm to want to advertise relationships. In sharp contrast to general attempts made by *women* to hide their status, prisoners who have *wyflies* are keen to let others know about it - it is something to be proud of. To have a *woman* is a signal of 'manhood'.

The men always try, by all means, to let the others know that, 'This one is my wife' ... [They are] boasting, boasting ... Like outside [prison], if we've got a new girlfriend, we like to say to our friends, 'You see I've got a new girlfriend and she's very beautiful' ... If he ... does that thing, he get[s] proud of himself

that he's a man [amongst] those gangsters.

Apparently, to be a sexual-penetrator in any power-defined interaction is registered as something to boast about. Rapists too, publicise their activities, adds the following respondent.

When they feel horny they do it. We hear everyday that something like this [rape] happened because ... we hear them talking about it in the corridors ... You see, prisoners honour that kind of behaviour ... They make it look like it's fashion ... They won't talk for an hour without mentioning it.

Victim 'responsibility' and perpetrator 'entitlement'

Additional facets of the discourses that naturalise the sexual subjugation of women emerge. The notion of victim responsibility, for example, is implied in the following respondent's account of the problems he had with a gay cell-mate. Although the speaker says that he refrained from raping his cell-mate, there is an element of responsibility attributed to the gay for 'attracting' fellow prisoners by 'acting like a woman'.

The fact that he was acting like a woman ... was making things difficult for other people as well as me. So to avoid becoming tempted, the best was not to allow him to be near me or use the shower I was using [cos if not] I might end up also raping him ... When we [would] walk around, I didn't have a problem with him ... but when we are seated in the kitchen, I couldn't sit next to him or facing him because I would think about it.

Understandings of what it means to be a *woman* become thoroughly sexualised. At the same time, his explanation of the steps he took to avert the 'attraction' and 'temptation' suggest a real sense in which he felt that he could not trust himself to maintain control in situations of attraction or sexual excitement. This relates to a perception offered by several other interviewees too, whereby feeling aroused, or being attracted to someone, is considered to necessitate a culmination in actual sex, 'needing' sex.

In a similar vein a few respondents refer to sex in terms of addiction. Sex is sometimes perceived and/or talked about as something on which one can become dependent.

It's like it's now inside your blood ... you feel like doing it all the time.

This is also tied up with the notion of sex drive as an all-powerful force over which a person has no control. The words of the following respondent provide the most striking example of these perceptions.

It happens that ... a person ... is used to sex and can't live without it. They always want to have sex ... Like me, ... I can't sleep anymore before I[ve] ejaculate[d] ... I have to get a small boy to have sex with so I can sleep. I can't sleep before I have sex.

The notion of dependency and uncontrollable sex drive is used to justify the abuse of others (and is used frequently outside of prison as well) - that is, if the impulse to provide

justification even exists. The words of a few respondents suggest that the objectification of others as one's sexual property can be so extreme as to render the victim invisible.

They don't want to be their friends anymore'

The inmate responses and perceptions of *women* outlined here are reportedly dominant in the sense that they are both common and sanctioned by the inmate power structures. Not all inmates, however, subscribe to these. But to challenge these meanings, or to even just behave differently towards *women*, is apparently often curtailed by counter-acting pressures. A consideration of some of the additional ways in which a *wife* status can impact on relations with other inmates points to some of these pressures.

These include difficulties arising from possessiveness and jealousy on the part of some *men*. Respondents say, for example, how it can be dangerous for prisoners to spend time with people who are other prisoners' *wives* because *men* can interpret this as an infringement on their property.

Another interviewee refers to the potential danger involved in associating with *wives* if one is known to (or perceived to) disapprove of male on male sex and/or prison *marriages*. Association in these situations can be construed as a threat to the sexual status quo because the protagonists are thought to be influencing the *wives* in a way that is detrimental to prison *marriages*. They may be filling their heads with 'unwifely' thoughts such as non-subservience.

The *wives* may also begin to behave differently towards fellow inmates. The following respondent explains how he sees it,

The one being fucked by the older one - in fact once [t]he [older one] does that to you, you change completely - he changes. [The one being fucked] could [have] be[en] my friend, ... but once that happens, he will look at me in a different perspective ... He is now scared of [his man] and he has to respect him because he has sex with him and [his man] is old.

The supposed ownership that the man wields over his *wife*, and that can be endorsed by fear, he says, may militate against *wives* associating with others. The description provided by another respondent echoes the above discussion on the role of shame in interactions.

Maybe you'll want to go there to comfort him ... [but] it's difficult ... He can say that you mustn't come to him and talk shit.

Fear for one's own safety, especially in relation to blatant rape, also reportedly plays a significant role in informing inmate responses to sexually subordinated prisoners. See section, ['You Tell Someone, We Gonna Kill You'](#).

Promotion to 'Manhood'

Despite the tenacity of the *woman* or *wyfie* label, with determination, particular abilities and

preparedness to incur certain consequences, it is possible for people who have been defined in this way to discard the identity. Although the majority of *women* remain in their subordinated roles some are promoted to 'manhood'.

Discussion on the promotion of *women* to 'manhood' status mainly revolves around the operation of gangs and their conditions for promotion. But while the majority of *women* are under the control of various gangs, some are not. It is reportedly easier for *wyflies* removed from the influence of gangs to bring an end to their feminised identity if they wish. Although detail is not provided, a few interviewees distinguish between *women* in gangs, and those not in gangs, when responding to questions on the potential termination of a *wyfie* status.

[An] *mpatha* [man] - we call them uwelehlathini³⁸ - he has no defence so if the wife says, 'Enough is Enough', then that wife can go away. But from gangsterism no, a [wife cannot stop being a wife].

You will do it forever, but if you are not in a gang then you can do it and after some time they can stop.

However, as one pointed out, sometimes even in situations such as these where a prisoner has managed to terminate a sexual relationship, others may still define him in a sexualised manner and expect sexual services from him. Or the identity may be rekindled if, for example, he is moved to another section.³⁹

Primarily, however, respondents refer to gang practices in explanation of how feminised identities can be shaken. In short, if a prisoner wants to stop being a *woman* he has to prove his worthiness of being a *man*. Sometimes it is also described as a purification process - the requirement that a person purify himself of the 'contamination' of 'womanhood'. Usually this involves violence (and is not dissimilar to practices described in relation to how gang members are classified as *women* or *men* in the first place). An inmate must be prepared to use violence against others and, some say, the violence must commonly involve the spilling of blood.

If you ever allow yourself to ... be in a position where you act as a woman ... that will tend to be with you for a long time, unless you ... purify yourself from having been slept [with]. Usually it would mean having to spill blood.

There must be blood ... [to] get promoted ... because the danger is that one calls himself ... a soldier, [but] when there is a fight, he wants to hide behind the others ... So you've got to prove that you are a man, and the only way ... is to take a knife [and] go and stab somebody ... If you can't do this then you've got no choice.

He become[s] violent ... [and] by so doing, he gets promoted, 'This man is brave, he doesn't deserve to be there'.

People seeking promotion are allocated particular people to assault. Common targets of these acts include *mpathas* (non-gang members) and warders. This someone that you're

supposed to stab must not belong to a gang ... You only prove your manhood by exercising violence against someone who is not part of whatever gang.

Over and above the required assault, 'manhood' is associated with the courage to withstand the punishment that usually follows. The punishment, respondents say, is itself often violent.

When you spill blood that's always associated with you having to be assaulted terribly by the warders and having to go to solitary confinement for at least a month. After that, you've proven that you're a man.

Warders often assault the culprit. Prisoners are also punished by being separated from other prisoners, denied privileges and having their sentences extended.

[But] he automatically jeopardise[s] his release period. [If] you don't want to jeopardise ... [your] time of release you have to remain [a wyfie], to abide it until you're out of prison.

Fear of the violence expected from aspiring *men*, the violence they may be subjected to, and the lengthening of their sentences, reportedly prevents many *wives* from attempting to attain 'manhood'.

Most of them are afraid to go and stab so then they remain wives.

The formula for promotion reportedly follows this general pattern. The process may however be more drawn out and involve different steps. An ex-Big 5 member explains, for example, the events leading to his promotion. During his time as a *wyfie* he was a trouble-maker within his own ranks. He fought with other wyfies (known as 'Diamonds'), and as a result was the recipient of gang punishments.⁴⁰ The leadership of the gang, the 'Cabinet', eventually decided to promote him to a masculine rank where he had to show that he could also 'make trouble' outside of the gang, i.e. fight for the gang.

I was very naughty ... I stayed a wyfietjie for three years ... and [then] they saw 'This one causes trouble for us' ... If you are a Diamond you must fight within the home [with other wyfies] ... I hit Diamond 1 ... [The gang] brought me five cups of water, I [had to] drink and they hit me in the stomach and I threw up the water. [That] was my punishment. After that ... I [was] in Diamond 2 ... where I hit Diamond 6 ... [They brought me] before the Cabinet ... They [decided to] put me here, [in the section of Soldiers]. They said, 'Hey, this one is making trouble at home ... he must go to make trouble outside.'

Somewhat qualifying the general pattern of promotion, a few respondents refer to other factors that can play a part in promotion out of *wyfie* status. Here, issues of age and good looks again emerge.

In the past, up to [the age of] 40 you can get those who were still wives but not today because prison today consists of very young people ... In the 28s the gang arranges a meeting and says, 'Okay, we can promote this one because of this

and that' ... If that person is older it does not mean that he must go and stab someone. They can replace him.

The above extract suggests that as people get older the violence requirement is less essential to their promotion. Although the speaker does not explain what is required, his words suggest that older *wyflies* become less in demand especially because there is a constant flow of young people (potential *wyflies*) into the system.

In discussing the issue of promotion, an ex-Airforce 3 member refers to how their *wyflies* are called upon to seduce other prisoners in order to achieve certain gang priorities (see above). Good looks increase their chances of success, he says, and good looks fade with age. When *wyflies* cannot anymore be used for seduction purposes they may be promoted.

In our gang ... we want somebody who's handsome [so that] when he approaches a person, ... that person will start getting ideas about him ... Now, once he starts getting older and we see, 'No, these other people ... are not interested in him any longer', we promote him.

Aging *wyflies* are not, however, automatically released from their roles. According to this interviewee, expressing dissatisfaction with their positions plays a part, not because the fulfilment of their wishes is a priority, but rather because they are regarded as a dangerous influence on other *wyflies*, and as such, a threat to gender and sexual relations.

Whether promotion along these lines is common or not is unclear. It is not widely reported. Most interviewees refer only to the violence-related variety. Moreover, on the basis of the available information, only specific prisoners (like long serving *wives* or those who were already relatively old when they were sentenced) would qualify. As suggested above, the potential for promotion without violence may also be informed by other factors like the supply of alternative *wyflies*.

It is pertinent to note that rising in the masculinised gang-ranks more generally, and not only for *wyflies* seeking *man* status, is often dependent on displays of 'masculinity': violence and violence-related courage and bravery. In different gangs, there may also be additional requirements. In Airforce 3, where the objective of the gang is to escape from prison, 'Officer' status is reportedly only available to those who have an escape under their belt. In addition 'manly' behaviour can earn one respect and status amongst the gangsters even if one does not actually belong to a gang. The following ex-long-term prisoner explains his experience,

I've never been a gangster ... but I learnt that ... if you can be active and violent and all that, it's very rare they can approach you [wanting sex] ... For instance, I was one of the most feared and most experienced prisoners in terms of escape ... Whether you are a Big 5 or a 28, I have influence ... [and] expertise. [So] when I speak, they listen ... They had respect rather than [wanting to see how] they could take me over.

Interviewees say that the majority of *wyflies* do not get promoted. Some endure their roles with a sense of resignation.

All of them do not like [being wyfies] But as time goes on, you get used to it because there is nothing that you can do about it.

Others may value or come to value the support they receive from their *wyfies* more than they dislike the sex. Others may come to enjoy the sex. Presumably these relationships unfold over time in a variety of ways.

But you find that they come to like each other, or to love each other to an extent that this young man now, like, you know, [*laughs*] he feels that, 'I'm protected under this man and I must give myself altogether to him'.

Generally however interviewees maintain that if afforded a choice, most *wyfies* would not be *wyfies*. They say that the majority of *wyfies* do not get promoted because they are frightened and because if they were to commit the necessary violence, they would likely extend their prison sentences. Indeed, achieving seniority within gang structures more generally, because usually dependent on shows of violence, may well mean increased time in prison.

However, the official knowledge, control and punishment of prisoner violence also merit consideration here. Culprits can only be punished if they are caught and if assaults are reported and investigated. Presumably, when warders are assaulted these processes are relatively simple. Because warders are apparently common targets of 'manhood promotion' violence, official punishment is likely. Whether the same applies when non-gang members are assaulted is less clear and is likely to depend on a host of variables that will alter between different institutions and sections within these institutions.⁴¹ Nevertheless, rising in the gang ranks suggests a preparedness to risk the extension of one's sentence - and thereby implies a prioritisation of prison life over getting out.

Revenge and cycles of abuse

Some respondents point out that abusive behaviour can follow a cyclical pattern: victims can become abusers. While former *woman* status is not reportedly a characteristic of the majority of *men* in prison, some of the most determined *men* were themselves once *women*, say interviewees. They often explain this as an act of revenge for what the men were subjected to before they achieved 'manhood'.

Perhaps when you were ... very afraid ... and intimidated they slept with you, and that's a very terrible thing ... What I've found is that people who will usually enjoy this homosexuality ... have had that done to them before. It's like you want to get back at someone else. It's amazing how selfish or evil human beings can be because ... when you were raped basically, you know how terrible you felt, how afraid you felt. But then you will want to also do it to others. So people who actually thrive on this behaviour and who will always be wanting to sleep with boys or men are those that have had this done to them before.

There are some of these people that have sex in jail ... [who] are doing a skiet terug [revenge] because someone once did that to them.

Those [men who] have [had] done that to them - they are crazy. They always want to do it.

One response then to sexual victimisation can be to perpetrate the same on others in the long term. A facet of an explanation for this is found in prevailing beliefs around masculinity in this context. If *women* are stripped of their 'manhood', and to possess and sexually penetrate a *woman* endorses 'manhood', then doing so is a feasible way of proving one's worthiness of 'manhood'. Perhaps this is especially the case for those previously deprived of the status. Maybe for them, there is a sense in which they feel it necessary to display and prove their 'manhood' over and over so as to ensure that it can never be taken from them again. Another possible explanation for why victims may become perpetrators is the role of unaddressed trauma that may well play itself out in cycles of violence. This and other reported responses to sexual victimisation in prison are discussed in more detail below. (See section, [On Release](#).)

Alternative Modes of Sex

This section considers sex that takes place outside of the bounds of power-defined relationships or interactions. Despite gangs' outlawing of sex that departs from the *marriage*-style variety (where *women* provide sex to *men*) sex along different lines does occur.

'Uchincha ipondo'

The most commonly reported alternative type of sexual interaction is known as *uchincha ipondo* or variations or other translations of this. *Uchincha ipondo*, literally meaning to change or exchange a pound, is defined in terms of how the sexual interaction takes place: as an equal exchange.⁴² (This contrasts sharply with the situation where only the *man* is allowed to penetrate, the *wife* providing a passive sexual outlet.) In this type of sex both the power dynamic and the related rules of interaction associated with *marriage*-type situations are undermined. Fundamentally, these interactions diverge from the predominant form in their consensual nature. As some interviewees also point out, *uchincha ipondo* is marked by the extent to which sex is exchanged for sex rather than for material goods or protection. That other commodities are not involved distinguishes it from *man* and *wife* interactions.

You don't need anything from him ... You have money ... You tell him that you also have feelings and are serving your sentence like him: 'Let's have sex'.

It is often considered by respondents as 'doing each other favours' or 'taking turns to be the *man*'. They tend to describe the practice in relation to *marriage*-related sex.

It's mostly young guys who are experimenting with sex ... and it will be mostly a mutual kind of thing. You find two young guys who do each other favours ... You'd have one time the one acting as a man and then the other time, the other one swapping ... They call it 'exchange *ipondo*'.

You do not know who is the husband [and] who's the wife, they're all husbands sometimes, they keep on exchanging. And those are the only people with a fair

relationship, they are friends.

These interactions seem also to be marked by the similarity of the status of the participants in relation to prisoner hierarchies: they are often of similar age and rank (if they are in a gang). In this way, these interactions subvert the power-defined rights to sex that are entrenched in the gang structures. Moreover, often participants in *uchincha ipondo* are reportedly those who are also other mens' wives. They get together in order to express their own sexual desires, which are negated in their relationships with their men.

These small boys that get fucked, if they are friends, they also do *uchincha ipondo* together because each of them sleep[s] with other people ... They *chinch* *ipondo* so they can also feel good.

Sometimes you find [that] we are members of the same gang and we are the same age and even the [same] rank. So we decide to *uchincha ipondo*. It's different because both parties agree to give each other, it's not one sided.

Uchincha ipondo tends to be associated with youthful prisoners rather than the older ones, presumably because it is younger ones who are often other men's wives. In addition however, the association of younger prisoners with the practice also appears to relate to the stigma attached to participants and the gangs' disapproval of it.

Interviewees emphasise the need for these interactions to be safely guarded. They agree that sex along these lines is not accepted by gangs, and as such must be kept secret.

In most cases it's taken as corruption ... It's not allowed but it's happening ... They've got to be very careful and very secretive because once they are seen, ... it's taken as a very serious matter.

That is not allowed at all by gangsterism. Those people [are] just taking their chances [and] they make sure they're not caught.

To be found participating in *uchincha ipondo* is, according to some, to invite punishment.

If a young man has sex with another young man ... in my presence, I've got a right - even if they belong to another gang - to assault them and explain later.

If one is caught doing *uchincha ipondo*, a common form of punishment is evidently physical assault. Sometimes both parties are forced to have sex with the person who catches them. According to an ex-Big 5, *uchincha ipondo* is one of the contraventions, which in this gang earns participants 'funky mama', i.e. punishment by gang-rape. Alternatively, they may be required to make payment to keep the contravention quiet.

For instance if they were to be caught by like a 26 guy, that guy is going to threaten them, ... 'I've seen you ... doing this. Now it's either you pay me like R26.00 or R126.00 ... and if you don't, I'm going to tell the other 26 guys' ... So in order for him not to tell, they must pay him and then that issue will remain confidential. And if they were to be caught by [a] 28 ... that guy will tell them

that 'Now, I want to have sex with both of you.'

A few interviewees refer to the illegality of the practice in less categorical terms. They say that, to an extent, inmates can get away with it as long as they are discreet and don't draw attention to the activity. It can be known about but should not be advertised.⁴³ As the following respondent explains in relation to non-gang members,

[Your activity] ... should not attract or disturb other inmates because you are vulnerable in terms of the structures of sexual activity in prison ... It shouldn't be something that is exposed to an extent that you can boast about it ... It should be kept ... low profile.

Or it may involve negotiations and conditions rather than instant punishment. According to one respondent, for instance a *man* may permit his *wife* to partake in *uchincha ipondo*, but with provisos such as that they only do it in his absence, or that both participants are then sexually available to him (and not just his *wife*). He says also that for a wife not to seek permission from his *man* and to conduct it behind his back could be more dangerous if it was found out.

Certainly the reported commonality of the practice suggests that participants are not necessarily punished for their activities. Levels of tacit tolerance of *uchincha ipondo* are likely to vary between situations depending on, for instance, the individuals involved, intensity of gang power structures, the presence of those who seek benefits from other prisoners' contraventions of sex rules, as well as opportunities for discretion. Notwithstanding the fact that *uchincha ipondo* takes place, respondents are united in their understanding of *uchincha ipondo* as unpopular with inmate power structures.

A few maintain that it is considered more damning for an older prisoner to be found participating in this form of sex than it is for a younger prisoner.

I've seen [two older men doing it as well] but it's more scandalous than that of the younger people ... It's not allowed. No Officer of a gang can do that. His gang, hey! They can ay, ay, yay, ay!!

There are a number of potential explanations for this. It may be accepted that young people will, to some extent, experiment with sex. But it is suggested here that the increased seriousness of the contravention when older prisoners are involved is also associated with notions of 'manhood'. The last extract hints at this when the speaker states how outrageous and dangerous it would be for a gang member of 'Officer' rank to participate in *uchincha ipondo*. This is likely to be because he occupies a masculinised rank that enables him to sexually penetrate his subordinates and signals his worthiness of this privilege. He certainly does not get penetrated because only *women* get penetrated. To allow penetration of himself could conceivably then call both his 'manhood' and role in the gang into question. As in the above discussion on the factor of age in vulnerability, 'older' may be used to refer to those typically holding masculinised status while broadly speaking, it is the 'young' who constitute the pool of *women*. Furthermore, as a higher-ranking official in the gang, it is presumably expected that he sets an example and upholds sexual norms rather than defying them.

Because *uchincha ipondo* subverts the rules of sex in prison, i.e. the *man* and *wife* sex roles, it disallows the allocation of a single gender-status to the protagonists. (Both parties penetrate and both are penetrated. So who is the *man* and who is the *woman*?) In so doing, the practice undermines the construction of a masculinity defined by power and penetration, and at the same time interferes with the heterosexually-orientated environment that is the preserve of the gangs. In light of this it is interesting to consider the following extracts.

It's a serious matter! How can I put this? - It's like being a big man, ... a man in a house ... where everything is under your control ... [Now,] when we come to this thing of let's say lesbians,... if my wife is practis[ing] ... that, if it comes to my ears, it would be a shock ... And it's the same as ... [if] my wife hears that I've done this homosexuality with another man, it would shock her. It's just like that. So now, if ... I get a man of my age and I do this with him and ... the other gangs hear about this - Ay! It's a scandal, it's a big scandal!

[It's] the younger ones who do that, you cannot find my age [group] doing that. Eh, you see in fact if you are not homosexual, if people discuss homosexuals you feel shame sometimes. So for a person of my age to have sex with another man is very much disgraceful, so we discourage that sort of practice.

In both of these testimonies, *uchincha ipondo* is associated with 'homosexuality'. In contrast, *marriage*-style sexual relations in prison mimic heterosexual practices: surrogate *women* are created to serve their *men*. As such, distance is put between these interactions and participants' notions of homosexuality. But *uchincha ipondo* disrupts this process and represents, at least to these interviewees, 'homosexuality' - a whole different sexual orientation. This is a substantial threat to the sexual status quo.

Not only, then, do inmate power structures attempt to dictate who has sex, but also the nature of the sexual activity. Nevertheless sex happening within a framework of *uchincha ipondo* is reportedly common.

A personal account from one respondent is fitting to keep in mind when thinking about the two key modes of sex reported - *uchincha ipondo* and *marriage*-style sex - as well as the characteristics associated with their protagonists. This respondent told how he had arranged to move from his two-person cell because his cellmate wanted to have sex with him. He told his cell-mate that he would have sex with him on condition that it was *uchincha ipondo*. But his cell-mate dismissed this possibility outright, and said that he wanted to take the interviewee as his *wife*. The cell-mate worked in the kitchen, explained the interviewee, so had easy access to food supplies and therefore could provide for a wife. Our respondent explained that he began to feel nervous and requested a cell-transfer.

One of the issues to which this account points is the levels of negotiation that may be involved in determining modes of sexual encounter. A particular mode of sex is not necessarily the automatic outcome of either a pre-existing power-defined interaction or alternatively, a mutually desired or mutually agreed upon one. *Marriages* or *marriage*-style sex do not necessarily only take place in situations of coercion. In this instance, a direct request for *marriage*-style sex and a marriage relationship was put to the interviewee. Certainly, the possibility remains that, had the interviewee not moved cells, his proposer

could have turned to more insidious means to convince him (and this is presumably what he feared when he requested the transfer). But his story stands out in that sex and the kind of sex was raised as a topic of open discussion between both prospective parties, rather than a consequence of trickery, fear or violence. In addition then, to suggesting modes of sex as a potential site of negotiation, it also cautions against any simple generalisation on levels of coercion operating in *marriage*-style sexual relationships.

Other consensual relationships

Sexual relationships that are distinguished by some respondents from both *man* and *wife* relationships and *uchincha ipondo* interactions are also reported. Like reports of *uchincha ipondo* they are recognised for their apparently fully consensual nature. Sometimes they are described as involving 'gays', at other times they are not associated with any particular kind of people. It is likely that this loose category of 'other consensual relationships' includes a range of actors and relationships that can be further disaggregated.⁴⁴ One interviewee, for example, explains how friendships between prisoners can develop over time to involve intimacy and sexual relations.

You care for them and all that, and you find that it is mutual - they care for you and it's very easy that one thing would lead to another and you'd end up sleeping with them.

Others refer to relationships involving 'gays'. They distinguish these from other types of relationships by the ways in which participants relate to each other.

There's a difference ... because they play together, they talk to each other, they move a lot around with each other.

In my cell ... we had a gay [who] ... had a friend ... [They would] bathe together ... at the shower at night ... [Their relationship] was different because the boy who was a friend of the gay didn't force him ... It became a relationship ... It was nice for both of them.

In this respect, relationships such as these resemble *uchincha ipondo* interactions, also noted for their consensual nature and the generally amicable relationship between participants. Some respondents however offer explanation of how these relationships differ to those involving *uchincha ipondo*.

Actually it is not that he is in *uchincha ipondo* ... He has chosen this thing ... They are in a relationship ... You can see that they have true love ... Many people are in *uchincha ipondo* ... Maybe ... [my cell-mate] says [to me] 'Today there is something I want to do. Go and visit somewhere. I go [and when I leave] I see someone going into [my] cell. When I come back [my cell-mate] tells me, 'I have been doing this *uchincha ipondo*'. [But] that gay has someone he loves, who he has true love for. He does not *uchincha ipondo*.

This respondent emphasises that the relationship involves 'true love'. *Uchincha ipondo*, on the other hand, is an activity or practice of sexual exchange (and does not necessarily

involve people who feel 'true love' for each other). His description of how *uchincha ipondo* may take place is suggestive of more casual sex where feelings for the partner are less significant than the sexual activity. It is also noteworthy that while both *marriages* and *uchincha ipondo* are known to involve, and are defined by, particular sex roles, the nature of sex is not mentioned in accounts of these relationships. Neither are the other elements that have a place in definitions of both *marriages* and *uchincha ipondo* - such as age and ranking of participants. Rather, the relationship itself is the key defining factor in respondents' explanations.

Table

Some defining features of three key reported relationship-types in which sex takes place in prison.

Type of relationship	Role players	Norms operating between participants	Sex norms
<p>Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrenched and endorsed by prison gangs and prison culture May involve gang -members or non-gang members or both Usually brought about by coerced sex-act perpetrated by <i>husband</i> against <i>wife</i> 	<p>Husbands</p> <p>identified as men often the older partner</p>	<p>Husbands = superior partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Own and control their wives Must provide for wives (food, drugs and other goods) Involved in the 'business' of prison (smuggling, procuring goods) 	Men/husbands penetrate
	<p>Wives</p> <p>identified as women often the younger partner</p>	<p>Wives = inferior partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must defer to their men Must maintain the home space and serve their men Must service their men's sexual desires 	Women/wives are penetrated
<p>Uchincha ipondo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlawed by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protagonists do not occupy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neither partner is considered superior or 	Partners take turns to penetrate and

<p>gangs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May involve gang-members or non-gang members or both • Consensual 	<p>distinct roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They tend to hold similar positions in broader inmate culture • If in gang are of similar gang rankings • may both be wives of other prisoners • of similar ages 	<p>inferior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship/interaction defined in terms of equal sexual exchange • Both parties provide sex to the other 	<p>receive</p>
<p>Other consensual relationships (least information available)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensual • Often understood to involve gay people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protagonists do not occupy distinct roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship defined by 'love'-feelings that partners have for each other 	<p>Actual sex not discussed</p>

'Homosexuality' and 'Gayness'

Respondent notions of 'homosexuality' and 'gayness' were not a research focus. However, as emerges from the discussion on Alternative Modes of Sex, these notions are clearly significant to understanding the meanings through which sex in prison is often understood, organised and lived. This section briefly expands on the issues raised around concepts of homosexuality and gayness by capturing additional contributions on the subject. It complements the discussion on the different modes of sex, but also relates closely to the above discussion on Social Meanings of 'Man' and 'Woman'. See also section, [On Release](#).

According to respondents the term 'homosexuality' is taboo amongst prisoners.

Once you're talking about 'homosexuality' openly in prison It's an insult, it's a challenge ... You can be assaulted [for that].

Indeed, as has been argued in relation to *uchincha ipondo*, efforts are often made to distance sexual practices from any notion of 'homosexuality'. Respondents who venture a distinction between prison sex and 'homosexuality' state that, for the most part, men have

sex with men in prison only because there are no women around.

A few respondents however, refer repeatedly to 'homosexuality' in their explanations of prison sex.⁴⁵ Although some then disaggregate different 'ways' in which 'homosexuality' happens in prison, the term is generally used as a hold-all to refer to sexual encounters in prison whatever the nature of these. It is often conflated with coercive sex or rape. For example, they talk about 'victims' of homosexuality and people going into prison who are afraid of 'homosexuality' when it is clear that what they are afraid of is being coerced into unwanted sex.

At times, it is also difficult to tell whether certain respondents are more disapproving of the fact that coercive acts involve only men or the fact that one of the participants is unwilling. The following response, for instance, was provided by an ex-prisoner when he was asked about why he decided to report, to warders, the ongoing sexually coercive practices of a cell-mate on a new young prisoner,

You see, for me it is not right for a man to sleep with another man. It's not right ... because you are also a man like I am a man. And what will you gain out of that? You will gain nothing.

On the other hand, where some respondents offer their understandings of what it means to be 'gay' or 'homosexual', these are attached to very particular kinds of people. More often than not, 'gayness' and/or 'homosexuality' are associated with a feminine appearance and style, or people who have taken on the identity of 'woman'.

[From] the way he acts, and the way he talks you can see that this one is not a man. He acts like a woman ... You're sitting with him and he just hugs you.

A gay is a man who makes himself a woman.

According to the following respondent, it is impossible for a non-effeminate person to be identified as 'gay'.

There are people outside who are doing that thing, men loving each other. I used to see them ... [They're] not gays, [they're] men! Men, big guys.

This statement offered by a participant in the juvenile focus group took place during a heated debate about 'gayness' as well as about whether or not male on male sex even takes place beyond prison walls. A few of these participants are under the impression that it is only in prison that men have sex with each other. As one retorted in response to the above participant,

R1: There is no such thing! **R3:** Actually, outside who is going to have a desire for [that] while there are so many women?

By no means are the majority of respondents of this opinion. But it is the case that for a number of them, witnessing or experiencing prison sex and sexual violence was their first encounter with male on male sex. Especially in cases such as these, coercive sex in prison

impacts or generates particular notions of homosexuality. It is argued below (in section, [On Release](#)) that prison experiences regularly fuel attitudes of homophobia and intolerance.

Treatment of homosexuals in prison

The femininity usually associated with 'gay' or 'homosexual' people in prison relates to the broader place of *women* in prevailing inmate culture. One respondent for example, maintains that homosexuals are often welcomed by *men* because they are thought to require less 'convincing' than others to provide sex.

When they come into prison they still behave in the same way - in a *moffie* kind of a way - and that's wonderful for people who are practicing homosexuality inside prison because what it actually means is that it's easy, it doesn't take much convincing ... It's more difficult to convince somebody who's been straight outside to sleep with them than people who are homosexuals.

It appears that because of the tendency to conflate gender with sex role, people who display feminine qualities or embrace a feminine identity supposedly signal a readiness to be a *woman* in prison and therefore to provide sex to the *men*.

Related comments by other respondents link homosexuals with prison prostitution, saying that they are frequently the ones who sell casual sex to other prisoners.

Most of these homosexuals turn into prostitutes and they sell. They have everything and smoke expensive cigarettes.

Respondents do not expand on these statements, and do not speak much about prostitution. A more general question arises here: in a context of such apparently widespread coercion, what is involved in selling sex rather than being coerced into it? How do some people manage to operate as free-lance sex-sellers? And are homosexuals better placed to do so, as some respondent accounts imply?

In contrast, other respondent stories suggest that homosexuals and gay people can be as vulnerable to humiliations and abuse as other prison *women*.

When he starts acting like a woman we do not take him into consideration: we just regard him like a woman.

The following ex-prisoner gives an account of the repeated rapes of his gay cellmate.

The gay guy [in our cell] ... was trying to survive in prison by having a boyfriend to protect him ... To the gay guy, it was something that he liked from outside prison. Since he liked it from outside and was behaving like a woman made other prisoners want to fight to sleep with him. When he [was] asleep at night [they] would come ... to try and take him by force ... He would scream to wake his boy-friend. This used to happen [intermittently]. Prisoners used to say 'Let's leave him for a week so that he forgets'. Then they would come back a week later ... to try again ... They would take him to the toilet [and rape him].

As women they may be regarded as the sexual property of other prisoners. Indeed, homosexuals, especially effeminate ones, are regarded as a group at risk in men's prisons, and because of this are often separated from other prisoners, say respondents.

Types of Sexual Activity: the 'Old Road' and 'New Road'

This section considers the ways that respondents talk about actual sex acts, the terms attached to these and the types of sex they say takes place in prison.

The term 'sodomy' is often used loosely to refer to sex between men in general, rather than purely in relation to anal sex. It is also sometimes used interchangeably with 'forced sex'. When going into more detail the question is raised of whether anal sex is even the most common form of sex. Respondents, however, do not describe a wide repertoire of possibilities but talk only about two types of sex taking place between prisoners (and only very rarely about masturbation). These are anal sex and thigh sex.

There are a variety of terms or phrases used to refer to anal penetration.⁴⁶ Those supplied by respondents are to 'do it in the eye', 'Cape Town', '*pepskag*', 'the old road' and doing a 'boiler' or putting it 'inside the boiler'.

Thigh sex appears, more than anal sex, to be referred to simply as 'thighs' or 'legs'. For example, respondents talk about prisoners 'seeking' another's 'thighs'. But additional terms are also provided. These include 'the new road', '*spilary*', '*wyfskaf*', 'eating the leg' (*udli nyawo*), and 'dried fruits' as in ('they must give me dried fruits').

A split emerges in respondents' assessments of which is the more common of the two types of sex. While a few say that they do not know, most maintain that thigh sex is practiced more widely than anal sex. Participants of the juvenile focus group, however, think otherwise. They say that anal sex is most popular.⁴⁷

A lot of people are used to doing a boiler. A 'boiler' is the old way and that's what they always do.

Sometimes they do it between the thighs but most of the time it's at the back.

This group provides a number of explanations for why they think this is so. Explanations include an association between the anus and the vagina;⁴⁸ hastier orgasm; and that anal sex is considered a step beyond thigh sex in the stakes - after thigh sex some people wish to graduate to anal sex.

Putting it inside the boiler - it's like a girl ... you have that feeling that it's inside. When it's outside *inethwa yimvula* ⁴⁹ [it's exposed] ... [but] if it's inside it's like it's inside a girl.

If you keep on doing the sides [thighs] you end up wanting to go inside.

He tells himself he is sleeping with a woman, he feels like it goes in the vagina.

[With] the new road, you take time to cum. The new-comers like it [but] we want the old road. In the old road two minutes is enough ... [It's] fast ... You want to cum quick [so] you do the old road.

One of these respondents links anal sex to the nature of the relationship. If it is one of 'true love' he says, anal sex will be used. Those who are in true love, who are seriously in love, do it at the back.

Amongst other respondents anal sex is sometimes associated with particular types of prisoner. Members of the 28s gang, say several, are the ones that practice anal sex rather than thigh sex.

I don't have ... the exact percentages, I can only talk about what I've heard which is [that] the most prevalent form of making love would be between the thighs.⁵⁰ But the 28s will definitely go for the anus.

Other respondents link anal sex practices to a particular race group (Coloureds) and/or geographical area (the Western Cape).⁵¹

When it comes to the Blacks, most of the time they use the thigh sex. But ... this thing [anal sex], it looks like ... Coloureds ... are the people who come with that style according to what I've heard and what I've seen ... they always prefer the anal sex.

The one in the anus ... is most [prevalent] in the Western Cape. Here in the Transvaal and most of these other provinces, it's very rare.

The type of sex (thigh or anal) purportedly practiced is, according to some, a facet of certain gang identities. The following respondent expands on this. As a long standing Big 5 member he emphasises the importance of the nature of the sex activity in this gang. The Big 5s accept only thigh sex amongst their members. Like the respondents cited above, the Big 5s consider anal sex to be 'the work' of the 28s.

It was sex ... in the legs [that we were having] ... In the Big 5s, if you have ... anal sex ... you can [be] reported ... They tell you, 'If the guys do that, you must report them to the Spy'⁵² ... Every morning [the Spies] go around ... and ask these wyfietjies, 'How did you sleep? How did you have sex?' If you are reported [for] anal sex ... [they're] going to kill you ... [As a Big 5] you don't do that If you do that ... [it means] you are a 28 ... [The] Big 5 don't need you, you do the work of another camp, ... of the 28s.

He says then, that gang routines are in place to enforce conformity of sex activity, and that those who contravene the rules are punished. They are considered traitors who are doing the work of another gang. He reports having witnessed several killings as a result of Big 5 members being discovered for having anal sex instead of thigh sex. While, according to this respondent, these are the rules in the Big 5s, conceivably there are ways whereby individuals can escape discovery or publicity around their sex activity.

The perception of some respondents is that the method of sex is influenced by its purpose. If it is used as a punishment by gang members through rape or gang rape, anal sex will be used. Others disagree saying that rape and gang rapes do not necessarily involve anal sex, but follow perpetrator preference.

Overall, on the basis of the available information, it is difficult to assess respondents' comments on the prevalence of different types of sex as well as their associations of particular types of people with specific sexual activities. Indeed, some draw attention to their own uncertainty around their perceptions. The discrepancy between what a current group of prisoners and all other respondents have to say about most practiced sexual activity is not easily explicable. Also, while it is possible that anal sex is most widely practiced amongst members of the 28s, some respondents make plain that it is certainly not restricted to the 28s. Those who speak about their own participation in anal sex are not members of this gang but of other gangs.

Note on Privacy

Sexual activities can happen anywhere, say respondents, at the toilets, showers, cells. Sometimes warders may be paid to let participants use private spaces. But even in the communal cells in which many prisoners spend most of their time, pockets of privacy are created. Most respondents refer to the practice of curtaining off beds with blankets or sheets to create small, private cubicles. Privacy is also facilitated, some mention, by noise levels as other cell inhabitants are doing their own things. As one explained, 'You find that in any cell there are more than 50 radios'. A guarding system - where people are posted to watch for warders, or specific other prisoners, also commonly accompanies forced incidents of sex and gang rape, they say.

Sex as diseased

During discussions on different types of sexual activity, respondents supply associations between sexual activity and the state of participants' physical health. Sex is perceived by several respondents as unhealthy, diseased and having strange manifestations in the body. Some link these manifestations to particular types of sex, others associate them with male on male sex in general. Their words on these issues also highlight notions of male on male sex as mysterious and unnatural.

Several talk about a transformation in the body shapes of people who participate in sex. According to them bodily change takes place in relation to the role that persons play in the sex act, i.e. whether they penetrate or are penetrated (as such interviewees also make the division along the gender categories of *men* or *husbands* and *women* or *wives*). Penetrators become thin and haggard-looking say these respondents.

What I suspect is that unnatural sexual intercourse ... is not healthy ... You find someone who's a husband ... getting every kind of food, but he is very thin ... Those who have been in prison for several years ... are physically condemned today. If you take a husband - let's say a person of 30 years - and compare him to a person who's 50 but not having sex in prison, you'd think that the one who's

30 is older than the one who's 50 ... What caused that, I don't know but if we go into prison today I can point them out, [and] say, 'This one is enjoying sex, one, two, three' ... They're thin, thin, they are not healthy.

The less noted but related perception is that while penetrators become thin, people who are penetrated gain weight. These bodily transformations are a source of much perplexity to some. The following respondent relates these transformations specifically to anal sex.

Some put their penis straight away [in]to ... the anus. Where [do] those sperms go? ... I'm confused when it comes to that ... Do they have the space to stay [inside the other person] or what? You find [that] the person that is being penetrated was thin but now he [be]comes fat ... - in fact like a woman ... I don't know, maybe those sperms ... are working or just running around in his stomach ... If you sleep with a man it destroys your mind ... The person who is penetrating ... is totally thin ... His eyes are going down ... I don't know whether he doesn't eat much or it's a matter of delivering [his health? his energies?] to the other person.

Although participants in only one focus group comment that women tend to gain weight, their perception is worth consideration. A few potential explanations spring to mind. The fact that the lives of *women* in *marriages* are often characterised by little physical movement, and that *husbands* are expected to provide them with a constant supply of food certainly could impact on body weight. (See section, [Of Wives and Men](#)). In addition though, overeating could be related to the emotional state of some *wives*. Disruptions in eating patterns can be a symptom of depression and trauma. Many of these *wives* are subjected to ongoing coercive sex. The resultant trauma of these experiences combined with the humiliation and shame that reportedly often accompany the labelling of such people as women could conceivably manifest in eating disorders and weight gain.

The extent to which sex roles are linked by these respondents to bodily effects is interesting and is highlighted in a comparison between *uchincha ipondo* and *marriage*-type sex. The following respondent explains,

R3: In *uchincha ipondo*, they are the same because it's balancing each other. It's your turn, [then] it's my turn. You see, it's balanced. [*Laughter*]

Because participants in *uchincha ipondo* take turns to both penetrate and receive, says this respondent, the effects are balanced. Neither party gains or loses weight. *Uchincha ipondo* is thus registered by these respondents as healthier than sex taking place within *marriages*. His fellow focus-group participant disagrees however, on the source of the perceived relative health of people practicing *uchincha ipondo*.⁵³ It is not because they are 'balancing' each other, he says, it is simply because they typically have less sex than people in *marriages*.

R5: But I think although it is the same, it's not really the same because when they are changing *pondo*, it happens sometimes, not everyday like a *man* and a *woman* sleeping in one bed all the time.

Health

Beyond the weight gain and weight loss that some associate with certain sexual activities, one respondent raises a few other concerns regarding the physical well-being of sexually active prisoners. His prison experiences seem also to have contributed to a perception of anal sex as generally unhealthy and diseased and giving rise to mysterious conditions in both parties. A focus of his concerns is an adapted 'style of walking' that he has registered in young people who have been penetrated in the anus. For him this indicates that to be anally penetrated is immensely painful. While his generalisation is to be guarded against, when sex is forced (which it reportedly often is) injury and pain are indeed likely if not inevitable.

In my view, anal sex is painful because ... youngsters who have undergone that ... change their style of walking.

He also expresses concern about some prisoners not paying attention to cleanliness and personal hygiene. In addition and importantly, he points out that embarrassment means that prisoners suffering from potentially sex-related infections will rarely seek medical assistance.

HIV/AIDS

Respondents speak notably little about HIV/AIDS in their discussions of prison sex. While the perceptions outlined above (regarding physical effects of sex and health concerns) are raised spontaneously, these are never linked to HIV/AIDS. Interviewees seldom raise issues of HIV/AIDS. Rather, they respond briefly when directly questioned on the issue. Similarly, in their experiences most prisoners speak little amongst themselves about HIV/AIDS. When discussions do take place these seem to be amongst a few activist individuals or in the immediate aftermath of awareness interventions. Relevant respondents provide different examples of the latter including television and radio programmes, short-term workshops conducted by outsiders, and an internal organisation of inmate activists who, according to one respondent, produce dramas for fellow inmates. Rarely, however, do they think that such initiatives have much of an impact on sexual interactions happening. Some say that amongst older, long-term prisoners especially, there tends to be a strenuous denial that HIV/AIDS exists. The notion of sexual drive as requiring 'urgent' satisfaction is also supplied as militating against safer sex practices.

Most prisoners having sex, say respondents, do not use condoms. They cite a range of explanations for this. These include the dismissal and ignorance of the dangers of unprotected sex, the powerful desire for 'flesh on flesh' sex, not knowing how to use a condom, and that condoms are simply not available. Most say that if they had wanted condoms they would not have been able to get them. If they are available, this is apparently only for a very short periods. Furthermore, the requirement that requests for condoms be made to health officials hinders their availability.

We get most of the condoms in hospital and the hospital is far. You can't just go to the hospital; you have to go for a reason, not things like condoms. That why a lot of people do it flesh to flesh. It's difficult to get them ... The hospital brings the trolley with medicines to us [but] they don't carry condoms ... Some people

like using condoms, but they can't get them.

Although the question of perceptions around HIV and AIDS is not a focus here, it is appropriate to include an insight offered by representatives of the arepp Educational Trust, which is a product of their work with prisoners. In light of the insidious violence and abuse reported between prisoners (and in broader society especially in relation to young men) their contribution is striking.

Quite a lot of them were very clear: they were just following a preordained path ... Eventually they get caught ... for one of the really bad things that they've done and now they are in prison because it was going to happen. They're going to stay there for the rest of their lives or for the next ten years. Somebody even said, 'I'm going to die in gang conflict here' ... and that's it. It's very difficult then to even conceptualise AIDS. What future is there? ... [They] don't know if [they're going to be] alive tomorrow morning. As we began working we started seeing the flaw in this type of approach to HIV education that stresses the value of one's self or one's life. There was a guy in the hospital who was dying of AIDS while we were having the workshop, across the corridor. He was dying and everybody knew. But he was merely doing what all of them were going to have [to do] at some point ... It's better to die in gang violence or something [like that] because, somehow it improves your standing there, it improves your fellows - ... it's a power-related death. [That's] far preferable to what he was going through.

The sense of fatalism they detected in the young prisoners with whom they worked and the connections of this to violence - specifically a status-achieving violence - are indeed food for thought. Taking this possibility a step further, it is not unreasonable to suggest that while various levels of coercion operating in sex encounters are increasingly recognised as undermining or negating peoples' ability to safeguard their health, here, exposure to violence (and identities bred in this context) may contribute to a non-engagement with health issues in the first place.

Prison Warders and Sex in Prison

The discussion so far has repeatedly referred to gangsterism as a route through which prisoners can subordinate, abuse and exploit others, as well as placing people on the receiving end of such treatment. Gangsterism certainly does constitute a key site of power in prison environments (although this will differ between contexts) but there are other sites of influence, a crucial one of which is the prison authorities. We know that the good management of prisons is presently hindered by severe staff shortages and restrictions on resources in a context of overcrowding, but to ask where custodial officials or warders are - especially in relation to the sexual exploitation and violence taking place - remains a pertinent question.

This section brings together the responses given by interviewees to these questions. These include the involvement of warders in the availability of consumables and illegal substances in prison, and the direct participation of some warders in the sex trade. Warders are also a source of much disdain concerning their handling of prisoner complaints.

Warder participation in sex-trade

According to interviewees, corruption is a daily part of prison life, and sex is not excluded from its reaches. Some warders are actively involved in organising sexual and other forms of exploitation and abuse amongst prisoners. A few respondents, for instance, tell of warders who run their own gangs, organising prisoners to assault and rob fellow inmates.

There was a warder [who] had his own gang and they used to mug other people ... There were cells with his people ... and if you stayed in those cells ... you were going to be mugged and you couldn't complain ... because he's also a gangster.

More generally, the large majority of interviewees state that warders 'sell' prisoners to other inmates.

There are some [prisoners who] ... live a nice life, they have money ... They can tell the warders to do them favours, saying, ... 'I like that boy ... and they give the warders a bribe, maybe R10.00 to buy Coke. The warders will make sure that they lead you to that prisoner's hands so that he can use you for sex.

Warders accept payment to ensure that desirables, or particular individuals are allocated to specific cells. New arrivals especially are sold in this way, say respondents, but inmates with money and relationships with corrupt warders can organise for other prisoners too, to be relocated into their cells. This is one point at which the power of guilty officials and that of the gangsters often overlaps.

You give [the warder] money and tell him that you want a certain boy in your cell ... He will agree and he will tell the other warders some story.

Even when a prisoner has been relocated to single cells for protective reasons, they are apparently not necessarily safe from being sold back into what they are attempting to escape.

R4: The gangsters will communicate with ... a prisoner at the single cells.

R1: They get to you in money ... They will just give money [to] the warder who works in the section of the single cells, 'We want so and so, he is our brother'.

R4: *Ja*, [and] you [will] have to be taken back [to the communal cells] ... they will do whatever they like with that person, wherever he is.

Smuggling

Respondents also point out that without warder participation in smuggling networks, the availability of food, drugs and money in prison would be severely limited. They often cite warders as the primary source of the consumables with which *men* provide their *wives*, as well as the source of weapons. (In relation to food, prisoners who work in the kitchens are another key source).

If there is money you can buy anything and [if] the warders like you, you can send them to buy cartons of cigarettes and sometimes, if you have really made

them happy, they can bring you Nandos or what-what.

For you to look after [small boys] you need to have lots of money ... You have to sell [in order to support them]. There are lots of boys who sell drugs or *dagga*, all those things, and the police smuggle everything.

Influence of sex on procedures

It is significant to briefly consider the ways, according to respondents' stories, in which prevalent circumstances of sexual activity are referred to by warders in their dealings with prisoners. These include both protective cautions to prisoners and more negative manifestations.

One young prisoner for example (in explanation of the importance of using 'your mind') refers to being warned by officials at reception not to accept things from other prisoners. Whether or not new prisoners are sometimes enlightened on the potential consequences should they accept these offers, is unclear. In the instance provided however, this is not the case.

At reception they tell you ... 'Do not allow prisoners to give you their things' ... Obviously a prisoner's things are going to talk. I cannot give you a cigarette and then go [away and not bother you again] ... So if you do not understand [stops short]

Sex, according to some interviewees, is also utilised as a reason by some warders to refuse opportunities, like schooling, that require the frequent movement of prisoners. The following example refers to a situation where, because there are no facilities in the juvenile section, young inmates attend school in the adult section. Juveniles attempting to get an education may be denied this on the grounds of a claim that they are actually going to sell sex to older prisoners.

Those who are going to school want the police to open a gate for them to go there [but] the [warders] say, 'These juveniles go there for prostitution, they don't go to school ... So ... you can't go out here'.

In some cases, juveniles do go to 'spin'⁵⁴ under the guise of attending school. But at the same time, behaviour like this is prejudicial to the opportunities of those who are genuinely keen to get education. Moreover, little effort, say respondents, is made to ensure that those who say they are going to school are restricted to the classroom.

Finally, prisoners may also be encouraged by authorities to get into relationships. *Marriages* can make the lives of officials easier, say some respondents. Little detail is available here but it seems that the control wielded by *men* over their *wives* can reduce the control necessary on the part of warders. Moreover, *marriage* is sometimes referred to as a sign of participants having 'settled' in prison, and of therefore being less eager to escape, or giving less trouble.

The Prison Department encourages this because a person like myself was

escaping, but you find those who have married in prison ... don't complain about anything [even if] they can serve 20 years ... The [officials] tell you openly, 'Look man, if you think your skull is full of problems, get this and this' ... If ... you are [a] troublesome one they realise that the only thing that can turn you is [a] husband.

There is however a tension reflected in the words of interviewees on the extent to which *marriage* can operate as a controlling device from an official perspective. As this ex-prisoner went on to explain,

On the other hand what I registered was that 80% of war that I've seen in prison resulted from homosexuality.

Others too endorse the point of view that *marriage*-relationships are the cause of much, or most, of the violence taking place between inmates including gang-wars.

Certainly, not all warders are corrupt or unreasonable. This, for instance, is illustrated in relation to the topic of prisoners' schooling.

There are warders that love to see the inmates have success out of their lives.

However, the more talked about attitudes are the negative ones. The question of whether school is accessible to all prisoners wanting it became a pertinent issue during this focus group as a result of respondents' emphasis on the potential role of school, or involvement in other positive networks, to protect participants from unwanted sex (see section, [Vulnerability to Sexual Subordination](#)). Again concerning prisoners' access to schooling,

R1: They tell you straight ... [when] you want to go to school, 'No, you failed to learn outside. Don't waste our time by passing up and down here, we're not working for you'.

R2: They don't want you to develop ... I think ... that while ... you find prison[ers who are] doctors, teachers, lawyers etcetera, the [warders'] ranks are too low ... If I start learning ... while he has only passed Standard 8, he thinks that once I pass my matric, I'll be better than him and I'll tell him about the law which I'm studying ... That's why they reject most of the inmates who are willing to study in prison.

Prisoners know which warders they can or cannot approach for various requirements but more generally, it seems that few warders are interested in taking abuse-related complaints.

Reporting of victimisation

They bribe the warder ... so he can organise that the person they want is placed in the same cell ... [The guy who wants you works in the kitchen] and has already started giving [you] little or no food [at meal times] ... When you get to the cell he'll be there with food and obviously you will eat ... You'll be thinking that because you stay together, you must eat with him. At night, he will ... ask for sex. You'll tell him that you are not that kind of person, you're not a woman, you don't have a vagina. He'll try to convince you or even rape you because he's

thinking of the money he gave to the warders and he knows that the warder will support hi[m] the next day ... If you go and complain, it will just fall on deaf ears ... When the warder comes in the morning, he won't want to know what actually happened. You will be the guilty one.

'They drop the case just like that'

Sexual victimisation, exploitation and violence more often than not go unreported, say respondents. A few of the interviewees know of rapes that were reported and the perpetrator[s] charged, but they provide various reasons for the general silence surrounding these abuses. (See section, ['You Tell Someone, We Gonna Kill You'](#) below). Moreover, when victims or third parties who have witnessed victimisation do come forward, their complaints tend to fall on 'deaf ears' and are rarely followed up.

In the same way that warders are bribed to secure partners for other prisoners, they take bribes to keep quiet about abuses.⁵⁵

Before something happens the [prisoners] normally buy the prison wardens, they give [them] money.

The cops tell him, 'Go and call that guy [who did this to you]' The one who raped the boy talks to the cops ... 'How much [do] you want?' ... The cop ... says, 'I need R5 or R10' ... That boy ... won't talk again. ... It's case closed. It's only money, only money speaks in prison.

In addition, continues the speaker, because of the control warders have over prisoner movement, victims attempting to seek assistance elsewhere (such as through a social worker) are frequently refused access by corrupt warders.

The cop [who took the bribe] is the one who's standing at the door ... You won't go ... without his allowance because he's the one to escort you.

Complaints from prisoners are often merely dismissed, sometimes with retorts to the effect that prisoners are not worthy of any rights or access to justice.

[It's] 'You're a criminal. If you were a person you would not be here, so we are not going to take your complaint'.

Alternatively people reporting may be told that their complaint is 'domestic' in nature and therefore outside the ambit of warder-responsibility.

[If] the youngster go[es] to report ... they can just say, 'You are living together, go and sort out your problem' - without ... any investigation ... Sometimes they will tell you, 'You belong to the same gang so what do you want us to do?'

Respondents' explanations also suggest a sense of resignation amongst warders or their own submission to inmate power structures.

Some of them even tell a young man (the ones who look pretty) - direct in the eyes, 'My boy, here you've got no choice. Take a man for yourself in order to survive this place' ... Some are talking from experience and are telling the truth.

Fear for their own safety can also play a role in warders' inaction. The following ex-prisoner says that during his time in prison, he was a witness to several abductions of prisoners by gang-members. The gang-members, he believes, were instructed by their 'boss' to kidnap certain young men who were later raped and made into gang *wyffies*. The kidnappings took place in a communal area where prisoners eat and watch TV.

They [would] come with a blanket and put it over [the boy's] head. They steal him, take him to the cell ... [and] rape him ... I saw that happen. [They] do it knowing very well the types of police working on the shift. The[y] will not do it when they know that the police on shift are strict and disciplined people. There are those police [who] prisoners do not respect, ... [and] police who were scared of certain prisoners ... (A white police[man] ... was stabbed by a prisoner ... [and] the incident instilled fear in some of the police). This thing [abductions] used to happen in the presence of the police during the day when we were watching TV ... The [gang-members] know the time when the warders are patrolling in the area, so they wait for them to come and go before doing it ... The prisoners who do this ... know very well that the warders are scared of them. The warders know that the people ... are gang members and if they interfere they may be putting their lives in danger ... In order to safe-guard themselves, they pretend as if nothing is happening.

His story also reflects prisoner knowledge of different warders and how this impacts on their behaviour around different staff-members. They can get away with some things in the presence of some warders but not others.

'You Tell Someone, We Gonna Kill You'

A number of other reasons are provided for why inter-inmate violations more often than not go unreported.

These include a sense of resignation or apathy regarding the occurrence of sexual and other abuses in prison, on the part of prisoners as well as staff. As one respondent put it,

[Rape] is not something that surprises or shocks us these days ... We are already used to it and we know that it happens all the time.

But beyond the lack of attention allegedly given to violations known to take place as well as to the complaints that do in fact get lodged, there are substantial pressures on inmates not to report violations at all. Fear is fundamental. Victims are, according to interviewees, often threatened with their lives should they dare to tell. The following respondent explains in relation to incidents of gang-rape,

He's going to be warned, ... 'Go and tell the warders about what we've done to you, but tell them to take you home with them ... Even if they transfer you to

another section, you'll find our brothers are there. We'll come for you'.

In addition, the prevailing social meanings associated with rape and/or having been in a sexually submissive situation, militate against reporting.

When I go ... to the hospital, I don't talk. I don't tell them who assaulted me. I must stand for my manhood.

Even when prisoners who have been assaulted in this way are released from prison, the shame of having been raped, say respondents, means that they usually try to keep it secret. (See section, [On Release](#)).

Not only does fear prevent victims themselves from lodging complaints but it works to silence and intimidate witnesses. It can also have a substantial impact on how other prisoners relate to victims.

[Rape and kidnappings] happen at times when there are many prisoners and also when there are few prisoners around ... There are those who whisper to others saying that, 'Look they are taking so-and-so'. There are those who are afraid even to look at the incident, [who] are scared that the [gangsters] might come ... and take them ... In prison people worry about their sentences. There is a term 'watching my ticket' meaning 'minding your own business'. There is no time to feel pity or sorry for other people, you worry for your self ... Those prisoners who are scared, even though they feel sorry [for the person], they can't show it ... because [they] might think that feeling sorry could lead them to being victimised by other prisoners who will think they have been raped as well. They can't afford to be seen with them ... They can't even walk or talk with them because they are scared that it might happen to them as well.

Terror is one of the factors ensuring that witnesses 'mind their own business'. Furthermore, the extract presents fear of victimisation as following from association with someone who has already been victimised. If one is seen with a victim, one may become a victim oneself. According to this respondent, one of the things that showing support can suggest to others is that the supporter has been through a similar experience. As such it relates to the notion that a rape-victim becomes the sexual property of other prisoners (see above section, [Social Meanings of 'Man' and 'Woman'](#)).

Another respondent puts it slightly differently. It is more, he says, a matter of if you are seen to be supporting someone who has been victimised, you can be perceived as attempting to protect him, and therefore present an obstacle to others who might want to do it again. You may be perceived as trying to demonstrate your superiority over the perpetrators, and this is to invite trouble.⁵⁶

They've seen that the other person is easy to rape ... But you can be friends with the raped person and now you want to be overprotective of him. You now act like a bodyguard; it's obvious that the guys will say that you think you are clever. They will say that you act like the boss and [are] criticising what they've done to [your] friend. [So it will be] 'Let's rape him as well'.

Moreover, as far as witnesses to incidents of gang-related violence are concerned more generally, gang lore is powerful in ensuring silence. There are strict codes operating between gangs in terms of which both reporting information to prison officials and interfering in the activities of other gangs are considered amongst the most serious contraventions. *Mphatas* (non-gang members) have not pledged allegiance to a gang but are nevertheless just as unlikely to challenge or report on gang activities by virtue of their vulnerable position. Some respondents tell of murders that took place in their presence, of having been forewarned by gangsters that a 'mission' was imminent, and instructed to '*Shafkop!* - hide your head, don't even look at us'. As one put it, 'I can't interfere [because] that's where war begins.'

On Release

One of the areas this research set out to explore is the impact of sexual experiences in prison on people when they are released. How do such experiences affect their attempts to reintegrate into society - anyway a stressful time? Reintegration challenges are numerous and occur on economic, social and psychological levels. Ex-offenders are expected to slot into 'ordinary' life but are seldom well-equipped or supported to do so. The focus here is on the potential effects of coercive and violent sexual experiences on their return to society. One answer to the reintegration question lies in the difficulty we had in accessing particular types of respondent. We had hoped to interview people who had fulfilled wifely roles in prison, and who were prepared to talk about how this impacts on their current lives. In general we did not succeed,⁵⁷ and were repeatedly told that we could forget about finding people who had been wifely and who would be willing to talk about their experiences.

'In solitude'

A fundamental and common response to coercive sexual experiences (together with the resultant usually enforced identity of *woman*) is isolation, shame and emotional pain, say respondents. The silence that often shrouds the abuse in prison continues outside of the prison walls when offenders are released.

Most of them cannot talk about [being wives in prison]. They cannot.

The most hurtful thing is that men are controlled by pride, they are so secretive about bad things that happen ... They will never go for counselling, they will keep quiet ... Men are not like women. Women ... accept and [they] come up with things like [the concept of] 'rape survivors'. Men will never ... I'm talking about these things because I was not part of that, maybe if I was raped I wouldn't be talking.

The perception that the victim is in some way to blame for the abuse is powerful. Frequently the words of respondents suggest that they consider the shame and silence that typically accompany experiences of sexual violation to be self-explanatory, and thereby testify to the potency of public myths that link notions of 'manhood' with invulnerability. Indeed, the fact that people who have been sexually penetrated are defined as women endorses these notions. In the context of the prevailing inmate culture, sexual violation literally means a loss of 'manhood'. The words of respondents are telling on this issue.

When asked to expand on their perceptions around the silence, some refer to a loss of status, a loss of power, and as being only as good as a woman, i.e. worth nothing. According to respondents, relations with families and intimate partners constitute a significant site of this anxiety. They point to difficulties in sexual relations with women partners; and 'How can they tell their wives?!' is a common refrain. If a victim's family were to know of his victimisation, they maintain, his place in the family and identity as a man would be called into question or demolished.

The main problem is when he is released how will he be accepted at home [and] with friends? ... He might be a married man [with a] wife and children [who will think] that, 'You're nothing. After all, you've been raped, you are just as good as we ... women ...' How can he tell [his family]? He can't! He cannot even tell you as a friend while being imprisoned ... [so] how can he discuss [it] with his family?!

Somebody who was acting as a female inside prison, you'd find that it takes away their self-esteem. At times they will hate themselves so much for having lowered themselves, for having not been man enough to stand [up] against other men, that they would start feeling that they are not worthy of having a normal relationship.

On the one hand, silence around sexual victimisation can be understood as operating at a social level. The main ways in which these violations are understood in prison (and in broader society) militate towards silence on the part of victims. Sexual victimisation is constructed as a gendering experience that changes *men* into *women*; and 'real men' do not 'allow' themselves to be raped or coerced into sex. These notions are able to maintain currency in a context where male rape generally receives little attention but is rather a subject of taboo.

On the other hand, traumatic stress almost certainly plays a part in the reported silence of those who have been victimised. Common symptoms of trauma, for example, include feelings of a lack of connectedness and inability to trust others, as well as avoidance. Avoidance of the subject of trauma and things associated with it often become a coping strategy amongst people suffering from trauma. This is likely to be compounded in contexts where the source of the trauma is the subject of widespread public denial.

More generally, as outlined in above discussions, certain modes of behaviour frequently become necessary to survive prison, modes which prize an aggressive self-sufficiency, deep mistrust of others and refusal to show vulnerability.⁵⁸ (See section, [Vulnerability to Sexual Subordination](#))

Other traumas which people ... suffer is ... being suspicious of everybody, paranoia, you don't trust anybody. I'm still going through that ... [even though] this is my second year outside. You find it very difficult to trust because [in prison] anybody who approaches you it's because they want something ... It's either [that] they will rob you aggressively or they are going to try and twist your mind in order to get something from you ... Besides that, there's always a danger that you might be stabbed ... or hit by a hard object ... Amongst the

gangs you never know what happens, ... you're always looking over your shoulder ... [and] there's never a time when you can say you're sleeping peaceful[ly] ... Those kind of memories, you carry with them with you.

'Past tense stories' and the violence potential

Possible repercussions of sexual victimisation include the perpetration of further violence: victims may become perpetrators.⁵⁹

The fact that in some cases such violence unfolds during imprisonment has already been noted (*wyflies* may achieve *man* status - through violence - and then inflict the same harm on others). Or violence may manifest after release. The majority of respondents have stories of prison wives who, on release sought violent revenge against their perpetrator.

The friendship is one-sided. [In] 80% of those friendships ... only husbands love their wives ... Those who were wives in prison ... stab [their prison husbands] outside ... because they did not like what happened in prison.

Three of them were made [into] wives by a prisoner ... The minute they were released they went to the guy's house in Meadowlands and they killed the wife [and] two daughters and they left the last born son. They told him, 'We are the guys who your father did this, this and that to.'

This guy met his prison wife in the taxi rank and his prison wife pulled out a gun and said, '*Ja*, do you remember that you used to have sex with me?' ... This other guy tried to apologise, 'I'll never do that again!' That man just blew him [away].

An ex-prisoner respondent says that it was the possibility of repercussions such as these that contributed to his decision not to take a *wife* in prison.

At the end of the day I [must] be able to face this person: ... a person can 'agree' in prison that ... she can be your wife, but when you meet him outside, yeow! It's very bad! ... People are dying for the very same thing out here.

Furthermore the likelihood, or not, of bumping into a prison spouse after release appears to be a factor that can determine who gets involved with who in prison. Another ex-prisoner explains that as a gang *wyfie* he was moved from the *man* to whom he was initially allocated when it was discovered that they came from the same neighbourhood. This increased the possibility of them meeting on the outside and was considered dangerous for the *man*.

Because I stay in Tembisa [and] he was from Tembisa he knew [that] outside I [would] fight him ... I can't sleep with him because he knows me from outside.

Besides reports of revenge violence acted out by ex-prison *wyflies* on their *ex-husbands*, some also speak about aggression towards fellow ex-prisoners. This aggression is explained as springing from the need to maintain silence on *wyfie* histories, and to keep past sexual

victimisation secret. According to respondents, people who have been *wyflies* in prison live with the constant fear and threat that fellow ex-prisoners will publicly shame them by revealing their prison experiences to other people. Secrecy about these experiences is something they fiercely guard.

[In prison] a person who this thing happens to is always withdrawn and shy, ... it eats him. [But] if you get him outside and tell him about those things in front of his friends he can even kill you ... There were guys who were staying in my street and they were doing five years. They were three friends. When they got to jail, the one blundered⁶⁰ and that thing was done to him ... When they went outside it was found out [because] the [other] guys were talking ... He ended up killing one of them.

Aye! Outside ... if we meet each other ... [we're] going to talk about past tense stories, [and] I tell you, 'Remember what happened to you?' Then you start fighting ... [You say] that I'm lying ... because ... you don't want your friends to know ... It means one of us must go back [to prison].

The last speaker cites the potential for violent conflict around the breaking of this secrecy as one path back into prison. Fights relating to the exposure of these stories (or prevention of exposure) can see the protagonists re-arrested. Another respondent also links sexual subjugation in prison to the issue of recidivism but on a more general level. Rather than violent conflict as a direct consequence of the breaching of the secrecy, he considers the isolation, shame and loss of self-esteem often experienced by victims of sexual violence as rendering them likely to re-offend or engage in other destructive behaviour.⁶¹

Most of them that I have seen were arrested and convicted again. That is why I say that maybe this is a cause of recidivism ... because they ... are now venting that anger ... If they don't come back to prison they might end up raping women outside or hating men. But they come out psychologically affected ... because they are frustrated: they don't want to come out with these things ... and they cannot deal with them ... They are like in solitude ... and that frustration would normally lead them to drug addiction, theft, etcetera.

All respondents' stories of the impacts of prison sexual violation emphasise the immense weight of stigma in the lives of victims when they are released. The stigma associated with their violation is such that shame and isolation characterise the lives of numerous victims. Dynamics around secrecy, according to respondents, are both motivators and tools in post-release violence - violence that may be used in attempt to enforce secrecy of 'past-tense stories' as one respondent put it, to punish secret-breachers, or violence that together with the breaking of another's secrets may be used as a method of revenge.

Overall, the fact that violence may be acted out in cycles - where victims of violence in turn become perpetrators - is not unusual and can be an outcome of unaddressed traumas as well as a learnt mode of relating. In prison, however, the intensity of these potential connections is particularly starkly revealed through a consideration of the social relations and gendered identities. The extent to which the use of violence and notions of 'manhood' are intertwined with each other in inmate hierarchies means that the use of violence is constructed as a

necessary qualification for 'manhood'.⁶² As such, to respond to a violation (that is understood to remove masculine status) with further violence (which endorses a claim to masculine status) within this framework, follows a logic. The ways in which notions of 'manhood' are related in inmate culture to aggression and violence should prepare us for violence to be one response to a loss of 'manhood': it is through violence that it can be regained.

Following release, negotiations of prior victimisation will differ amongst individuals, and will not necessarily involve the perpetration of further violence or abuse. But the fact that violence is a commonly reported consequence is significant and cause for concern.

Most respondents offer these possible consequences in relation to victims of sexual abuse during imprisonment. But what of those who perpetrate these acts in prison?⁶³ Interviewees do not contribute much in way of response to this question. It is not unreasonable to suggest however, that for their part too, destructive notions of masculinity are further entrenched in the prison environment, and that in other arenas, they may very well continue to act out identities which involve the subjugation, ownership and abuse of others. Indeed these sorts of identities are not unfamiliar to society outside of prison, and echo dominant gendered power relations. Presumably many of the *men* perpetrating sexual violence and coercion in prison could slot relatively easily back into being the men of outside society.

A comment provided by representatives of arepp is also interesting as it relates to this issue as well as to a broader consideration of the role that prison experiences can play in identity formation and learnt ways of relating. It vividly points to the dynamic links between what happens inside and what happens outside of prison. On the one hand, as this research indicates, gender relations in broader society are mimicked and adapted through the specific *marriage*-type relationships in prison. On the other, and suggested in the following extract, relationships in prison may provide young prisoners with some of their most decisive views on sexuality and gender issues in which to ground their future relationships. (The extract is a reflection on a sexuality workshop that the interviewees had conducted with a group of juvenile prisoners.)

They had learnt [about sexual relationships with girls mainly] from TV, books, from what other adult prisoners say, and *clearly* from the things that they were going through ... It was quite clear that you become somebody's *woman*, so a lot of the understanding of what a woman would do for them was based on the behaviours that they were being told to perform for older men ... These boys can come out ... at 35, 38 and their concept [of relationships with girls] has been built on that. (arrep)

Other respondents offer different examples of the ways in which patterns of prison sex relationships may be replicated or adapted when offenders are released. For instance, some prison *wyffies* continue to employ the transactional potential of sex to support themselves outside. They may do this either by seeking out a man to support them, or by selling sex to different men, say respondents.

Some speak of cases where ex-offenders who had been *men* in prison, once outside, visibly recreated networks and relationships that closely resembled the ones they were part of in

prison. The visibility of these relationships is accounted for by the fact that they remain between males and that the generational patterns typical in prison are replicated.

[There is] one [who], even out here, stays with lots of small boys ... He was a big boy in prison ... [and now] he sleeps with them outside ... [in a] shack they built ... You see him in town ... walking with the small boys [and] buying them food.

An older guy who's been doing this for a long time, ... outside he doesn't have interest in women, he's now looking for young ones.

The sketchy nature of the information provided on scenarios such as these raise more questions than they answer. We do not know, for example, just how young 'the small boys' tend to be, the levels of coercion operating, or the extent to which it may be possible to generalise on the way in which such scenarios unfold over time. While one respondent tells us that an ex-prison *husband* in his community is now facing charges of child-molestation, other cases could conceivably be defined more by consent than coercion. Moreover, the question of whether, in some instances, patterns such as these can be traced further back than to prison experiences, is pertinent.

The specifics of these scenarios aside, that proximity to the varying levels of sexual abuse and exploitation in prison can be traumatic and serve to instill and/or entrench destructive identities and modes of relating (amongst both victims and perpetrators) is substantial cause for concern.

'This changed'

Reports of more positive impacts of prison-sex experiences exist but are rare. They also serve as an important reminder of the existence of consensual sexual interactions in prison, as well as the possibility that individuals may renegotiate sexual identities in ways that are characterised more by increased tolerance and exploration than by stigma, exclusion and disempowerment.

One respondent, for example, relates a story about friends of his, who during their imprisonment were *man* and *wife*. Since release, he says, they have stayed together but the roles of their relationship have shifted. Free from the fetters of prison power structures, they are, on the outside, able to explore different ways of relating.

They were a man and a woman in prison ... Outside they are still doing that ... [but they] are changing. The power is not on one person ... Now we can't see who is the woman, they are the same ... It looks like they are sharing the life.

The relationship appears no longer to be power defined and has lost the 'look' associated with prison *marriage*-relationships.

Another ex-prisoner also provides an interesting insight in relation to his own attitudinal change. He explains how his understandings of sexual attraction transformed during his imprisonment and that this shifted his previously homophobic attitudes.

I always had this negative attitude towards homosexuals. That was my attitude when I got to prison ... But what I noticed is that as time went on this changed ... because naturally speaking, you want to satisfy your sexual needs, [and] when you start living very close to someone - at the beginning the relationship might not be that of wanting to sleep with them - but because you are so close to each other, these people start becoming more than just ordinary friends. They start becoming your companions and friends in all respects, even in the sexual sense ... I realised that it is possible to have very close feelings to a person of the same sex as you ... You start lacking reasons for why you would resent those people.

It seems however that this transformation of homophobic attitudes is a pretty unusual response. Rather, prison is a site where homophobic attitudes are generated or exacerbated.

Socialisation into homophobia

The ways in which the gangs attempt to regulate and police sex in prison and the distance that is put between 'accepted' modes of prison sex and 'homosexuality' has been discussed above. Sex approximating 'homosexuality', say respondents, is considered deviant. On another level, notions of homosexuality can become conflated with forced sex as has also been mentioned. Further exploration of this conflation points to the formative role that prison experiences can play in shaping meanings and identity, particularly as far as 'homosexuality' and male on male sex are concerned.

For a number of respondents, witnessing or experiencing prison sex and sexual violence was their first encounter with male on male sex. Given this prior non-engagement with issues of diverse sexualities, it is perhaps not surprising that in such a context notions of 'homosexuality' and 'sexual coercion' can become confused. For some, prison encounters, which, it seems, are more often than not primarily defined by coercion, constitute the yardstick for understanding sex and sexual relationships between men. Even when prison experiences do not necessarily provide individuals with their first encounter with male on male sex, they are likely to influence perceptions on the subject. This is suggested in the following extract. Here it appears that prison experiences have altered and contributed to the speaker's prior understanding of gayness. His definition differs to those of others in that it doesn't refer to femininity (see section, ['Homosexuality' and 'Gayness'](#)). Interestingly, he also associates gayness with a willingness to go 'public' on a preference for same sex relationships. But included in his definition is a distinct reference to coercion,

[A gay] is one who has no feelings for women. He can propose me as a man and I do not understand what is going on and I have to sleep with him. We are having an affair and he wants [it] to be known at my home that he is having an affair with me.

His definition is striking in its presentation of contradictory statements, such as the use of the word 'affair' juxtaposed with a strong sense of unwilling participation on the part of one of the parties (contained in, 'I do not understand what is going on I have to sleep with him'). It is not unreasonable to suggest that this confusion is the product of his incorporation of his prison experiences into an understanding of 'gay' that he gleaned prior to incarceration.

Similarly, for another respondent, who has spent most of his life in prison, potential violence and criminality appear to have become integral to his understanding of male on male sex. His explanation of why he would never get involved with men outside prison suggests that he views violence as a necessary component of such relationships. In addition, sex with other men has, for him, become a signal of criminality - it is a part of prison life, and those who do it outside are exposing themselves as criminals. He sees continued same sex activity as constituting a sort of preparation for returning to prison.

You have to know one thing ... you are digging your own grave [if you have relationships with men outside] ... You have sex with a criminal in jail and you do not know what he is thinking ... Eventually you are going to fight and he can kill you ... I would never, ever ... go out with a man ... You have to scrutinise the kind of a person [who would have sex with men even when out of prison] because he is abnormal ... Actually such a person can kill you at anytime; he can do crime again because he would not suffer: he knows that he has a wife both outside and inside ... If they still do that you must know that that person has not yet stopped being a criminal. He is still a criminal because he does that thing - the main thing we do in prison.

As such, prison experiences can, for some, be considered a socialisation into homophobia.

Conclusion

The picture painted here of the attitudes that underpin sexual violence and coercion in prison sheds a disturbing light on understandings of gender amongst sections of South African society. Prison environments are one channel through which potent and destructive notions of what it means to be a *man* gain momentum. Related to this, that homophobia is alive, well and bred in prison is difficult to ignore. If prevailing inmate structures had their way, it seems, no sex would be happening other than that contained within power-defined relationships between *men* and *women*. A logical outcome of the impact of these apparently dominant social processes, together with unaddressed trauma, is the further perpetuation of violence and abuse.

Prison sex experiences do however vary. An ex-inmate once told a co-researcher that amongst the numerous stresses he faced in attempting to make a new life for himself following release, was the difficulty of expressing his prison-found preference for sex with other men in a community whose members unanimously regarded sex between men as filthy and immoral. He told us this a long time before we embarked on this investigation. Out of the investigation, one interviewee's lonely voice points to the possibility that some people may take their exit from prison having rethought their previously held prejudices on sexual issues. Others, a few suggest, may leave with new and positive definitions of their own sexual identities. Like the first ex-prisoner, such people could then face the difficulties of reconciling their new sexual identities with life in a homophobic society. But as our exploration makes clear, these sentiments and experiences are certainly not the only ones. The point is that the circumstances surrounding sex in prison and their impacts are neither uniform nor static. Rather they are likely to vary between the prison contexts in which they unfold, and between the diverse individuals involved as well as changing through time. This investigation no doubt leaves many of these circumstances unexplored.

The primary concern that arises from this research is how much violence and coercion are present when sex happens in prison. The fear, isolation, shame and the sense of lost identity that often accompany the experience of having been forced or manipulated into unwanted sex are amongst the more commonly reported implications of prison sex experiences. This raises deep questions about control and management in prison and about how these can be improved, at least to limit, if not to eliminate sexual violence and coercion.

Finally, as much as society is tempted to think of prison as a black hole into which those who disrupt society disappear forever, it probably is also tempted to think of what goes on there as weird, perverse and fundamentally 'other' to the rest of society. This may be even more the case when talking about sex. Certainly, the newly arrived inmate is disorientated and registers the prison as 'another planet'. But while there is no doubt that prison is a strange and removed place in which horrifying acts appear to be commonplace and demanding of specific attention, the connections between what goes on inside prison and in the rest of society need to be engaged with. Identities based on the use of violence, aggression, manipulation and subordination, played out on a daily basis between men and women, and reaffirmed or competed for amongst men, are far from foreign to us. Indeed, much of what we hear from respondents resonates strongly with peoples' treatment of each other beyond prison walls. Interviewees consistently remind us of these connections with statements like, 'they [*wyfies*] are treated just like women outside', or in denouncing certain modes of sex with, 'how would you feel if you found your wife having sex with another woman?' Prisoners are not in the business of creating from scratch a whole new society, but rather in drawing on and adapting identities and ways of relating that they bring with them from outside. In turn, these intensified and adapted social processes will be fed to the outside when prisoners are released.

Appendix: Respondent Information

Prisons in which respondents report having done time

Gauteng
Old Fort ** Pretoria Krugerdp Leeuwkop Johannesburg Boksburg Heidelberg Modderbee Walter Sisulu Child and Youth Care Centre *
Northern Province
Louis Trichardt Venda

Other
North West Province
Losperfontein Brits
Mpumalanga
Witbank Barberton
Western Cape
Pollsmoor
KwaZulu Natal
Waterval

** The Old Fort is no longer a prison

* This is not a prison but a Youth Care Centre for children in trouble with the law. It falls under the Department of Social Services & Population Development, Gauteng Provincial Government. It serves as a place of safety for children in need of protection, and caters for children awaiting trial.

Spread of time respondents had done in prison

Note: where current is indicated, respondents are presently incarcerated. Here, the lengths of time indicate the period of sentence that respondents had spent in prison at the time of the interview.

@ least 8 m	(current)
@ least 9 m	(current)
1 yr	(current)
@ least 1 yr 7 m	(current)
1 yr 8 m	(current)
2 yr	
2 yr 6 m	(current)
3 yr 6 m	(current)

4 yr	(current)
4 yr 2 m	
4 yr 6 m	
5 yr	
5 yr 5 m	(current)
5 yr 6 m	
5 yr 6 m	
5 yr 8 m	
6 yr	
7 yr 2 m	
24 yr	
24 yr	
27 yr	
32 yr	
not available	

Spread of respondent ages at time of interview

Note: where age is indicated as eg. 20 - 21, respondent age is one of the two. Exact age is not available but rather year of birth.

18
20-21
21
21
21-22
21-22
21-22
22
22-23
23-24
23-24

24
26
27
early 30s
30s
32
36-37
48
50
52
60
not available

Spread of period since release as at interview
 (does not apply to current prisoner respondents)

2 months
2 months
3 months
4-5 months
5 months
6 months
8 months
11 months
< 1 year
1 year, 3 months
1 year, 6 months
2 years
4 years
not available

Acknowledgements

Many, many thanks to all participants for giving your time and sharing your stories.

We gratefully acknowledge Ireland Aid for the funding that has made this study possible.

Thank you also to the following people and organisations:

Kindiza Ngubeni for enthusiasm, support, tireless translating, transcribing and gentle ability to establish ease and trust.

Amanda Dissel for initiating the project and for ongoing guidance, feedback and encouragement.

Lindi Mkhondo for your work with young prisoners, assistance and debriefing expertise.

Penny Plowman & Mona Saungweme for all your dedicated reading and editorial feedback, Phineas Riba for meticulous transcriptions and Libby Lamour for language editing.

David Bruce, Bronwyn Harris, Sibusiso Ntuli, Helen Hajiyanis, Polly Dewhirst and Piers Pigou for your continued assistance, support and debriefing as well as the CSV Research Committee, Yvette Geyer, Ruth Prinsloo, Ingrid Palmay, Mary Robertson and the Self-Care team.

Sipho Madini, Teresa Dirsuweit, Kate Wood, Teboho Kekana, Colin Nxumalo, Peter Mahlaba, Charles Maisel, Graeme Reid, Clifford Bestall, Brigid Schutz, Gordon Bilbrough, the late Butiki Pitikoe; Gideon Morris, Cheslan America and Bertie Fritz of the Judicial Inspectorate; and the work of the late Stephen Donaldson for advice in getting it going, as well as Steve Rothenberg, Jonny Steinberg and KC Goyer for your interest and encouragement.

The Department of Correctional Services for granting permission for the in-prison component of the research, particularly Director S. Bengu and Ms Olga Manchidi. Special thanks to Mr Conrad Groenewald, Ms Daleen Kruger and Mr Lategan for your assistance in facilitating the process as well as to Mr Kenny Lokalakala and Mr Van der Bergh.

Notes:

¹ Haysom, N. (1981) Towards an understanding of prison gangs. Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

² Participants were first asked to draw a diagram to explain what happens to people when they arrive in prison - the physical spaces, the people they meet, what is required of them etc. The second activity involved drawing how they see the physical space of the prison and indicating activities that happen in the different spaces.

³ arepp Educational Trust is a dynamic educational organisation that uses theatre and puppetry to provide alternative, supplementary social education. The current focus of their work addresses HIV/AIDS, sexuality, life skills, gender and abuse. The interview took place with Brigid Schutz and Gordon Bilbrough.

⁴ This followed an attempt to work with the Parole Board to access recently released

offenders. Despite the valued willingness of a parole officer to assist us, the initiative was derailed by logistical problems as a result of the Board moving offices, coupled with our own time limitations.

⁵ Rather it was locating prospective interviewees and getting them to meetings with researchers in the first place that was time-consuming and difficult.

⁶ For easier reading *wyfie* or *wife* are used in this report. Respondent quotes, however, often incorporate the alternative terms. Respondents appear to use these terms interchangeably. It is possible though that more in-depth investigation could yield minor differences in meaning.

⁷ Descriptions of the way in which the provision of consumables occurs as well as the consumption of these, vary. Sometimes interviewees describe the man as carefully controlling his wife's consumption of cigarettes or *dagga*. In other cases interviewees suggest that wives have constant access to the consumables available.

⁸ One respondent mentioned that husbands are also expected to buy their wives shoes.

⁹ Food-stuffs are obtained through smuggling networks and theft from the prison kitchens.

¹⁰ 'Nothing' was a common initial response to the question of what wives do. Domestic work appears to be accorded as little value inside prison as it is outside.

¹¹ The behaviour of wives is also regulated, on behalf of men, by gangs. See section, [Gangs and Sex](#).

¹² As is made clear elsewhere, warder corruption sees many a prisoner not only getting away with possession of outlawed substances, but also being provided with these by officials. Nevertheless, skills and prison know-how are still required to successfully participate in the smuggling system.

¹³ Although this respondent uses the term 'sodomist', discussions outlined below show that the word is often used even when anal sex is not involved. Another respondent, himself a former member of the Big 5s, maintains that members of this gang in fact never practice anal sex. See section, [Types of Sexual Activity](#).

¹⁴ The objective of the Airforce gangs is to escape from prison. They are not supposed to be at all concerned with anything inside the prison because their 'kingdom is outside'.

¹⁵ Other forms of violence are also sometimes reported as being used to punish debtors. One respondent tells us, for instance, how if someone is 'having a credit' - has not been paid back for a cigarette that he supposedly loaned - or has been refused sex, then he may exact his revenge by boiling water and pouring it over the debtor or refuser as the latter sleeps.

¹⁶ In his description they get the tattoos when they arrive in Awaiting Trial and have the

meaning of the symbol pointed out to them when they go to serve their sentences.

¹⁷ Or, economically vulnerable older men may seek to hitch up with a husband.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the example provided here refers to an event of gang rape but was provided in response to a question on characteristics of 'small boys' or wyfies. Marriage partnerships, rape or other coercive sex incidents have a similar consequence in that they are understood to turn the victim or junior partner into a woman or 'small boy'.

¹⁹ The research was conducted in Gauteng where Black prisoners are in the majority. In a province such as the Western Cape where the racial profile of prisoners is different, these dynamics are likely to shift.

²⁰ 'Police' is used to refer to prison officials.

²¹ One interviewee, while generally confirming that offenders committing violent crime with weapons receive respect, included fraud in his list of status-according crimes - the very crime that the above interviewee refers to as 'stupid crime'. 'But with crimes like ... fraud, you know murder, armed robbery; especially bank armed-robberies, heists, they sort of respect you.' On the one hand his comment makes it look as though deviousness is another characteristic that is respected, and part of a definition of 'manhood'. This is also suggested by the emphasis on skill in manipulating and tricking people into subordinated sex roles. On the other hand it is suspected that his inclusion here of fraud is related to the preceding topic of discussion in the interview: Greg Blank, a well-known fraudster was reportedly not victimised, but for a different reason. (See 'Publicity' section below).

²² It looks however as though sexual offences constitute an exception to this trend.

²³ The respondent had spent most of the time he had served in juvenile facilities.

²⁴ Descriptions from several interviewees suggest that in some gangs or cases the gender-ranking of the new recruit has already been decided by the time classification takes place, and that the classification process just formalises the decision.

²⁵ 'It's an imaginary office in a cell somewhere' he explains. In addition, 'office' refers to the position of the official.

²⁶ It is not clear what exactly in the interaction indicates to the Doctor how the person should be ranked. It is possible that as in the case of the Airforce gang, it relates to a preparedness to use violence or to physical appearance or levels of aggression etc.

²⁷ Literature on the 28s describes a 'blood line' and 'private line' structure in this gang. It is possible that other gangs have similar structural characteristics. On the basis of the available information however, this cannot be clarified.

²⁸ The insignia and tattoo of the Big 5s is a swastika. Wyfies are tattooed on their left arms

and soldiers on their right arms. In addition, he showed how the diagrammatic representation of the gang, the swastika, has the left half representing the feminised positions in the gang and the right, the 'manly' ones.

²⁹ The 'Cabinet' consists of five rankings: Minister of Defence, Minister of Peacemaker, Minister of Justice, Prime Minister and President. The corresponding wyfie positions are known respectively as Star, Moon, Sun, Crown and Queen.

³⁰ The most junior of these is known as 'Free Moscow'. This is followed by 'Diamond 10', 'Diamond 9', etc., with the highest rankings of Section 4 being 'Diamond 1' and 'Diamond 2'.

³¹ Often rape is explained as an appropriate form of punishment for wives or women because 'you can't beat them up'. As such the type of punishment reflects the construction of gender identities and the way in which women's identities are sexualised.

³² The existence of wyfie 'missions' somewhat qualifies the inactivity often associated with the role. The extent of these however is unknown. Wyfie missions were only reported by one respondent.

³³ For an explanation of 'thighs' see section, [Types of Sexual Activity](#).

³⁴ In addition, consider the following extract about trainings provided to soldiers in the Airforce 3 gang, 'They're being taught on how to approach other people and how to convince people to become members, how to lie to other people. If maybe I find it difficult to approach [someone who] I want to be my young man, then I can always go to my soldier, 'You see that one? Why don't you speak to him [so] that he must be one of our brothers'.

³⁵ In contrast to other respondents, one focus group participant says that mphatas who have sex with each other will not be bothered, and that it is only in relation to those mphatas who have sex with gang members that punishment is exacted or payment extorted. Again, the extent to which gangs police sexual activities is bound to differ between cells, sections and prisons.

³⁶ As mentioned above, gangs make money from non-gang-member men, from whom payment is demanded for engaging in sex, and wives are sometimes sold or rented out to other gangs or men.

³⁷ If people sleep with you frequently, you remain 'wet' from all the semen. [prison slang]

³⁸ Uwelehlathini means a person who is in darkness, left in the bushes, ineffectual.

³⁹ The respondent was in the juvenile section and referred to being moved to the adult section.

⁴⁰ His testimony here is a little unclear. He says on the one hand that all wyfies know that fighting with their men or with others of masculine rank is out of bounds and a crime worthy of a death sentence. He knows that he should fight only with other wyfies. On the other hand, he refers to incidents such as where a wyfie bites his man, and is then reallocated to another man but of the same rank as the slighted one. It could be that certain forms of assault are not considered 'real' violence or not a threat to the status quo. '[If] you've got a trouble with the guy who is having sex with you, ... [we will] not promote you ... [If] maybe you bit that guy ... [then] we give you another guy ... another Spy'.

⁴¹ In general, violence taking place between prisoners tends to be more difficult to reprimand. The difficulty relates to numerous issues including for instance the differential ways in which types of violence are perceived, factors militating against reporting, problems of proof, overcrowding, staffing shortages, and issues of control and management.

⁴² One group of participants translated it as 'exchanging a R2.00'

⁴³ It is interesting to note one interviewees' insight here. In part because of the stigma attached to uchincha ipondo, and the 'manly' status attached to penetrators in power-defined sex, the practice can also be manipulated by participants to their partners' detriment. One participant can boast about [having had sex], not revealing that it was uchincha ipondo rather than marriage-style sex, and the other cannot dispel the untruth. 'Let's say that you agree ... and swop the way you want to, but then you find that one ... is in a gang and the [other] one isn't. The one that's in a gang has power to go around and tell other people what he did to you [but] you can't tell anybody because you'll get into trouble, you see?'

⁴⁴ When asked about relationships other than those of man and wife, some only refer to uchincha ipondo. Similarly, when asked about the occurrence of fully consensual relationships, some only refer to uchincha ipondo.

⁴⁵ These respondents are those who maintain that they personally were never involved in sex in prison, and the ways in which they speak about it endorse these assertions.

⁴⁶ Not all respondents supply the same terms.

⁴⁷ One notable difference about this group in relation to other respondents was that it was explicit that several members of the group had been and/or continue to be themselves involved in sexual interactions of various kinds. Some suggested that they had been victims of coercive encounters or participate in uchincha ipondo, others stated that they regularly have sex with 'small boys'. In contrast, with the exception of only a couple, other respondents did not volunteer that they personally had had sex in prison. Whether this difference has any bearing on the discrepancy of their reports of anal sex as most prevalent is uncertain, but bears mentioning.

⁴⁸ A few other respondents also make this link with anal sex even though they perceive thigh sex to be the most common.

⁴⁹ The literal translation of inethwa yimvula is 'the rain is raining on you'.

⁵⁰ This respondent was the only one who referred to 'making love'.

⁵¹ It is likely that these associations are related to the practice being known as 'Cape Town' amongst some prisoners.

⁵² The 'Spy' is a masculine rank in the Big 5s.

⁵³ Their words suggest that they are talking about people who participate in uchincha ipondo and not marriage-type sex. However this is not explicit. The question arises of whether the stated manifestations of uchincha ipondo alter when participants are simultaneously in a marriage-type relationship.

⁵⁴ 'Spin' is a term in prison slang that refers to hanging around or moving around in order to do 'business': trading drugs and food etc.

⁵⁵ Warders are paid for their silence in relation to all sorts of abuses and assaults, not only those of a sexual nature.

⁵⁶ Other forms of violence are also reported as a possible outcome of this.

⁵⁷ While one ex-prisoner respondent declared that he had been a wife (and later had been promoted to husband), a few others hinted that they may have been involved in coercive sexual encounters. Others who more overtly spoke from personal experience are current prisoners who cannot easily speak of reintegration issues.

⁵⁸ Compounding the problem, offenders tend not to be well received by society when they are released.

⁵⁹ While the focus here is on sexual victimisation, high levels of violence often typical in prison contexts will contribute to further violence more generally.

⁶⁰ 'Blundered' was a term used frequently during this focus group to refer to not conducting oneself in a way that protects one from unwanted sex - not 'using one's mind' (See section, [Vulnerability to Sexual Subordination](#)). It includes both the behaviour that renders the individual vulnerable and the result (being sexually penetrated).

⁶¹ Importantly, on a broader level, the same could be said of numerous prison experiences, which in the South African context tend to breed more of what prisons supposedly seek to transform.

⁶² While the intertwining of notions of 'manhood' with aggression and ability to use violence are certainly not restricted to the prison context, the latter provides a powerful magnification of more broadly experienced gender identities.

⁶³ It is acknowledged above that victims and perpetrators may be the same people: according to respondents some of the most determined men are those who have been promoted from wife status.

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