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Final Report
November 2008

# Gendered Violence and Safety:

## A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities

## Part II of III

## Focus Group Methodology and Findings

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# GENDERED VIOLENCE AND SAFETY:
## A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH TO IMPROVING SECURITY IN WOMEN'S FACILITIES

## PART II OF III:
## FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

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For further information on the project, *Gendered Violence and Safety: A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities,* please contact Barbara Owen at the Department of Criminology, CSU Fresno, barbarao@csufresno.edu.

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# ABSTRACT

In response to the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA), this project investigated the context of gendered violence and safety in women's correctional facilities. Through a multi-method approach, including focus groups with female inmates and staff and survey development, we examined the context and correlates of both violence and safety in correctional facilities for women. The data support our original hypothesis that sexual violence is embedded in a broader context of violence and safety and that this context is gender-based. We argue that prevention and intervention, through inmate programs and education, staff training and other operational practices, are primary strategies in meeting the goals of PREA. Like all aspects of incarceration, violence in women's correctional facilities was markedly gendered and nested within a constellation of overlapping individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors. We found that many of the factors contributing to potential violence converge within living units and, thus, present an opportunity for measuring the relative degree of safety and danger of each unit. We also found that violence in women's jails and prisons is not a dominant aspect of everyday life, but exists as a potential, shaped by time, place, prison culture, interpersonal relationships, and staff actions. On-going tensions and conflicts, lack of economic opportunity, and few therapeutic options to address past victimization or to treat destructive relationship patterns contribute to the potential for violence in women's facilities. Our findings did not suggest that women's jails and prisons are increasingly dangerous. While some patterns that shape vulnerability and aggression exist in any facility, most women learn to protect themselves and do their time safely. We also found that most staff and managers are committed to maintaining a safe environment. Building on the focus group data, we developed a comprehensive battery of survey instruments to assess prisoner perceptions of violence and safety in women's facilities. The resultant battery is comprised of multi-dimensional instruments with specific questionnaire items and response categories designed to accurately capture women's experiences in correctional facilities. The operational implications of this model focus on prevention and intervention by addressing multiple factors that shape the context of violence in women's facilities. We offer this study as a way of increasing the ability to ensure all forms of safety for women offenders.

This report is presented in three parts. Part I summarizes our findings and provides specific recommendations for improving safety for women offenders. Part II provides a detailed analysis of the focus group data. Part III describes the development of quantitative measures of violence and safety in women's correctional facilities. Two bulletins regarding the applications of these findings were also developed.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003, this project investigated the context of gendered violence and safety in women's correctional facilities. Through a multi-method approach, we examined the context and correlates that produce and support both violence and safety in facilities for women. The data support our original hypothesis that sexual violence is embedded in the broader context of violence and safety and that this context is gender-based. We also suspected that prior victimization often contributes to a cycle of future and repeated victimization among women. We have analyzed our data through an ecological framework suggested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their 2004 report, *Sexual Violence and Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue.* This model provides both a framework for analysis and a foundation for prevention and intervention policies and practices in women's correctional facilities. We argue that prevention and intervention, through inmate programs and education, staff training and other operational practices, are primary strategies in meeting the goals of PREA.

## EMPIRICAL GOALS

Our specific empirical goals included describing the dynamics and context of interpersonal sexual and physical violence in women's correctional facilities. To construct these descriptions, we developed a focus group strategy and interviewed specific groups of female inmates and staff in two state prison systems and three local jail systems. By employing open-ended, unstructured interviews, focus group methodology elicited multiple perspectives on safety and violence from the female inmate and staff participants. For the inmate focus group interviews, we developed a two-session interview protocol that yielded rich and detailed descriptions of women's experiences. Individual interviews were also conducted with the female inmate focus group participants at their request. A total of 40 focus groups, with 161 inmate and 30 staff participants, were completed by the research team during the course of the project. Overall, the profile of the sample resembled the profile of women nationally, with a slighter higher number of women who were serving longer than average sentences.

Four questions structured the core of the interview for the female inmate and detainee groups:

1. What do you know about violence or danger in this facility?
2. How do women currently protect themselves from the violence in this facility?
3. What are some things that can be done here to protect women from danger and violence?
4. What else should we know about violence and danger here?

The questions for the staff participants were:

1. What do you know about violence or danger among women in this facility?
2. What problems are associated with preventing and responding to female sexual and physical violence in this facility?
3. How do women currently protect themselves from the violence in this facility?
4. What are some things that can be done here to protect women from danger and violence?
5. What else should we know about violence and danger here?

The Ecological Model (CDC, 2004) was then used to frame these data. We also drew on an Escalation Model (Edgar and Martin, 2003) and found that most violence began with identifiable (and preventable) conflict that escalated over time. Multiple organizational, environmental and individual factors contribute to violence in women's facilities. Analysis of the focus group data found that the dynamic interplay between individual, relational, community, facility and societal factors create and sustain violence potentials in women's jails and prisons. Staff members play a critical role in creating the potential for violence and conflict. In a similar way, aspects of policy and practice also can support or mitigate such violence. In advocating this prevention and intervention strategy, we argue that these same factors can create and sustain safety as well.

Like all aspects of incarceration, violence in women's correctional facilities was markedly gendered and nested within a constellation of overlapping individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors. We learned that violence between female inmates occurred on a continuum, ranging from verbal intimidation to homicide. Violence was most prevalent at the lower end of the continuum and quite rare at the extreme end. While our research was consistent with prior findings that violence in women's prisons was not as severe or as prevalent as in men's institutions, we did find that some forms of violence were particular to women's facilities and required their own definitions.

We found that violence in women's jails and prisons is not a dominant aspect of everyday life, but exists as a potential, shaped by time, place, prison culture, interpersonal relationships, and staff actions. On-going tensions and conflicts, lack of economic opportunity, and few therapeutic options to address past victimization or to treat destructive relationship patterns contribute to the potential for violence in women's facilities. Four categories of conflict and violence are detailed:

- Verbal conflict
- Economic conflict and exploitation
- Physical violence
- Sexual violence

For female inmates, the most common forms of violence and conflict include verbal conflict and economic exploitation. Bullying and intimidation occur primarily over material goods or control over physical spaces, such as cells or dorms, especially when women exhibited vulnerabilities. We learned that any form of violence had the

potential for escalating into a more serious and dangerous form. Physical violence was typically the result of escalating conflict over debts or "disrespect," or occurred between women in an on-going difficult relationship. Sexual violence was rarely discussed in our interviews unless prompted, but when mentioned, was seen to be usually a product of these problematic inter-personal relationships. In an attempt to capture the complexity of sexual violence, we have constructed a "continuum of coercion" that describes the sexual victimization that occurs, which includes:

- Sexual comments and touching
- Sexual intimidation and pressure`
- "Fatal Attractions" (Stalking)
- Sexual aggressors
- Sexual violence in relationships
- Sexual assault

In our discussions with inmates and correctional staff, there was general consensus among inmates and staff regarding the causes of fighting and other forms of violence in the prison. Generally, both groups believed that jealousy, debts, and disrespect were the major catalysts for violence. We contend, however, that these factors are dynamic contributors to the potential for violence, and interact within the four levels outlined in the Ecological Model (individual, relationship, community, and society).

The women's jail and prison population is characterized by women with long histories of abuse and victimization and, for the most part, this past trauma remains untreated. These personal histories can result in intense and dysfunctional relationships with other women with similar histories. Women's relationships take on such importance that jealousy looms as a frequent trigger for violence. Other violence erupts when women respond to debts with violent retaliation. Women referred to unpaid debts as a form of disrespect, but disrespect also encompassed a wide range of other behaviors as well. "Disrespect" refers to interpersonal behaviors that impinge upon another woman's status, reputation, sense of self, personal space, or rights of "citizenship." The concept of disrespect is closely tied to the subcultural norms and values of the prison and jail world. Idle female inmates, either due to a lack of available programming or individual resistance to such participation, are most likely to participate in these risky behaviors and relationships.

With few exceptions, women told us that they became less worried about physical or sexual violence over the course of their incarceration. While again stressing that "anything can happen at any time," most women learned how to protect themselves from all forms of violence. Day-to-day tension, crowded living conditions, the lack of medical care and the potential for disease, and a scarcity of meaningful programs and activities were seen as more significant threats to a woman's overall well-being than physical or sexual attack. Some individual women said they did "not feel safe at all," but most said they learned to protect themselves. Health concerns eclipsed worries about sexual or physical safety in every focus group and these concerns were related to lack of medical care and cleaning supplies, deteriorating physical plant conditions, substandard food, and the lack of rehabilitative programs. Idleness and an inability to earn money were also said to undermine women's sense of well-being.

Women also expressed little confidence in the ability of staff members to protect them from violence, either from other female inmates or from staff. Women described staff as "just not caring;" "playing favorites" with aggressors; "enjoying their fears" or refusing to take their fears seriously; "covering up for their buddies;" and telling them "This is prison—deal with it." Women also stated that they were told by staff that they would have to "name names" if they went to staff for help in dealing with threats to their safety. Staff, too, remarked that they often felt unable to protect women, but their reasons differed from those offered by the women. Lack of knowledge about reporting practices, reluctance to "snitch," distrust of the entire investigative process, and concerns about retaliation from inmates and staff were mentioned frequently. Inmates had little confidence in this process even in facilities with well known formal policies and procedures to report such concerns. Staff felt that their abilities to respond to violence depended on inmate reporting, but there were tremendous barriers and liabilities surrounding reporting feared or actual victimization.

One point of agreement was a strong perspective on place. In every site location, inmates and staff were unanimous that some facilities were far more dangerous than others; and, within facilities, particular living units were also defined as particularly risky and dangerous. Contributing factors to any particular locale included an interactive combination of individual, relational, and living unit and facility characteristics. Living units function as "neighborhoods" and, as such, exist as the physical place where the processes that shape violence or safety converge. This insight about place led to our approach of creating an instrument that can empirically measure the context of violence and safety within these living units.

In terms of staff, the most common problem reported by the inmate participants was "down talk" or disrespectful and derogatory verbal interactions. Most of the staff sexual misconduct described occurred at the lower end of a coercion continuum. By far, the most prevalent form of officer sexual misconduct was inappropriate touching, comments and suggestions, or other non-physical assaults. However, we heard a wide range of staff sexual misconduct that we placed upon a continuum of coercion as follows:

- Love and seduction
- Inappropriate comments and conversation
- Sexual requests
- "Flashing," voyeurism and touching
- Abuse of search authority
- Sexual exchange
- Sexual intimidation
- Sex without physical violence
- Sex with physical violence.

Part II of the final report provides a complete description of the methodology and findings from the focus groups.

## MEASUREMENT GOALS

Measurement goals included creating new measures of safety, danger, risk and violence that are specific to the behavior of women and can be used in the operation of women's institutions to improve safety and security. We developed a comprehensive battery of survey instruments to assess prisoner perceptions of violence and safety in women's facilities. The resultant battery is comprised of multidimensional instruments with specific questionnaire items and response categories designed to accurately capture women's experiences in correctional facilities. Initial survey items were developed from a preliminary analysis of the focus group data, pre-tested, and then piloted in one large prison system and three jails.

Surveys were administered to inmates or detainees housed in "low" and "high" violence housing units as identified by correctional administrators, supervisors and line staff via our structured interview and rating forms. Surveys were then administered to inmates and detainees in low and high violence units at six different facilities. The average response rate across all survey administrations was 83.20%. Response rates from the low violence units averaged 91.89% (544/592). Response rates from the high violence units averaged 73.76% (402/545).

This new instrument created and tested major constructs derived from the focus groups and included the following:

Problems in the housing unit

- Issues involving women inmates
- Issues involving staff

Violence in the housing unit, and policy, procedures, and climate in the facility

- Likelihood of violence
- Personal awareness of policies and procedures related to safety and violence
- Reporting climate (refers to the attitude of staff and inmates about grievances, complaints, or other reports of physical or sexual violence and misconduct; whether staff members are open to grievances and complaints or hostile to them.)

Potential factors leading to different types of violence and misconduct

- Inmate sexual violence
- Inmate physical violence
- Staff verbal harassment
- Staff sexual harassment
- Staff sexual misconduct
- Staff physical violence

Part III of the final report provides exhaustive detail on the construction and development of this battery of instruments.

## OPERATIONAL GOALS

The third goal of this project is to improve policy and practice by applying what we learned about female offenders as a result of our empirical and measurement objectives. The prevention model advocated by the Centers for Disease Control was modified to frame our recommendations to address sexual and other forms of violence in women's facilities. Two short operational bulletins were developed from our empirical work. The first bulletin, *Violence and safety programs in women's prisons and jails: Addressing prevention, intervention and treatment,* written by Bernadette T. Muscat, applies a victim services perspective to these issues. Marianne McNabb developed a second bulletin, *Translating research to practice: Improving safety in women's facilities,* which examines our findings from a practitioner's perspective.

It is important to note that this study did not attempt to provide any measures of incidence or prevalence of individual-level violence and victimization. Instead, we focused exclusively on elements that contribute to a correctional climate that supports or undermines safety for female offenders. In our emphasis on place, specifically housing units, we explore a range of factors that impinge on these potentials.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Prison Rape Elimination Act is intended to improve sexual safety in correctional environments. In this study, we argue that sexual safety has a gendered meaning. We argue that improving safety for female offenders requires a focus on both "kinds of person" and "kinds of places" in order to effectively prevent and intervene in violence in women's facilities. In presenting our findings and recommendations, we applied three different models discovered during our review of relevant literature. The Ecological Model, with an emphasis on the interaction of individual, relational, community, and societal factors, expands the targets for improving safety (CDC, 2004). The Escalation Model illustrates that early intervention can prevent the escalation of violence (Edgar & Martin, 2003). The Sanctuary Model proposes that definitions of safety for women must be expanded to address psychological, physical, social, and moral forms of safety (S. Bloom, 2008). We also draw on the field of victim services as adapted to women's correctional facilities.

The first step in meeting the goals of PREA is to recognize that safety and violence have different meanings for female and male inmates. Our data lead us to conclude that aspects of the overall context, including individual, relationship, living unit, and facility-based factors, either support or mitigate the potential for sexual and other forms of violence in women's facilities. While many individual-level risk factors can be addressed with individual-level treatment, we argue strongly that aspects of place, policy, and practice contribute to violence and safety. In many cases, the living unit may be the "place" where sexual and other forms of violence can occur, but we also found that any location in a facility has this potential. In a similar way, aspects of policy and practice either support or mitigate such violence.

We also argue that a prevention approach is the foundation for a gender-appropriate response to PREA. Just as the data in this study show that violence occurs in a multi-level context, we argue that safety can be maximized by addressing these

contextual factors. We also submit that, in order to meet the goals of eliminating physical and sexual violence in all facilities, systems and agencies must expand their approach beyond counting, investigations, and sanctions. We agree that these strategies are integral to a broad-based response to PREA but argue here that a comprehensive approach to PREA includes prevention, intervention, and treatment, as well as the more traditional responses of investigations and sanctions.

We suggest that correctional systems consider a broader definition of safety to include physical, psychological, social, moral, and ethical safety. Expanding on these broader components of safety for female offenders directs our attention not only to improving safety in women's facilities, but also supports successful re-integration and rehabilitation. For many women, jails and prisons do not address these multiple dimensions of safety. We suggest that investing in programs, education, and treatment that address interpersonal violence and its collateral damage will increase safety in the women's prison, and may reduce recidivism among female offenders by addressing their pathways to prison.

We continue to believe that improving all forms of safety is good correctional practice and has broader implications for meeting the goals of incarceration. We have proposed strategies for addressing these issues (in Part I of the report), based on an analysis of violence and safety using the framework of CDC's Ecological Model (in Part II of the report), and have begun to develop measurement strategies which can ultimately move the corrections field closer to improving safety in women's correctional facilities (in Part III of the report).

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As in all correctional research, we depended heavily on facility staff throughout the country to complete our work. In every site, we received excellent cooperation and support. Facility managers and line staff assisted us in too many ways to mention here. We are particularly appreciative because we know that research projects often compete with the demands of daily operations and can challenge staff in accommodating the requests of outside researchers. We are grateful for their help.

We also had excellent support from many research associates: We thank Janet Mullings, Ashley Blackburn, Shondra New and Adam Matz for their expert interviewing and note taking skills. Invaluable assistance was provided by Steve Parson, Kelle Parson, Chuck Parker, Angela Parker, and Millicent Wells. Ms. and Mr. Parson deserve additional thanks for their work in the production of the final report.

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Finally, we are very thankful for the many women inmates and staff members who participated in the focus group and the survey work. These participants were true partners in this work.

# FOCUS GROUP DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS 1

In order to describe the context and correlates of safety and violence in women's correctional facilities, we conducted focus group interviews with female inmates and detainees and staff in two large state prison systems and three jail facilities. Using a unique focus group methodology developed for this study, a total of 40 focus groups, with 161 inmate and 30 staff participants, were completed by the research team during the course of the project. Two to three team members were involved in each interview: one facilitator, one transcriber, and, in some cases, a third team member assisted with these tasks. Each focus group interview was transcribed during the interview and reviewed by the facilitator. Transcripts from each of the focus groups were then coded and analyzed through The Ethnograph© qualitative analysis software. The processes associated with focus group sampling, methodology, data collection, coding and analysis are described here. The chapter concludes with a demographic description of the focus group participants.

## STUDY SITES

Prison and jail facilities selected for study were from four geographically dispersed regions of the country. While not strictly statistically representative, these facilities represent the available range of incarceration options for women. Each of the prison facilities housed multiple custody levels of female inmates, from minimum to maximum; and ranged in size from several hundred to many thousands. All three jail facilities detained both female and male offenders, housing women in a separate area, and included sentenced and unsentenced women. The jails were representative in size of most small to mid-size jails in the United States.

## INMATE GROUPS

Our sampling strategy was purposive in nature. We constructed focus group categories based on the salient experiences of inmates, which represented a range of incarceration experiences. We reasoned that women's perceptions of violence and safety were mediated by their membership in these experiential categories. For the prison participants, groups were constructed according to security level, time served, housing designation, age, and program participation. The method of selection varied among the different facilities. For the jail participants, focus groups were constructed based on housing designation, sentencing status, and security level. All sampled inmate groups included five to ten women who met the focus group criteria. Project staff worked closely with the facility contacts to develop sampling frames made up of eligible inmates and then made selections from these lists. Again, while not strictly random, the project team was confident that inmates chosen for participation were not selected with any bias or purpose other than eligibility and availability. Given the

range of responses in the focus group interviews, we remain confident in this approach and its ability to render a range of perspectives on safety and violence in women's facilities.

Prison inmate focus groups included:

- General Population-Low Security Group. Women inmates participating in this focus group were classified, and often housed, as "low" security level. Additionally, this group served between one year minimum and eight years maximum on the current term at the time of the interview. The participants were housed in general population housing in the facility.

- General Population-High Security Group. The women inmates participating in this focus group type were classified, and often housed, as "high" security. In terms of time served, the inmates participating in this group had served between one year minimum and eight years maximum on the current term at the time of the interview. This group, too, was housed in the general population housing.

- Reception Center Group. Women participating in this focus group type included all security level specifications, including those who were unclassified at the time of the interview. Women in this group had served three months or less at the current facility on this term, yet prior jail or prison time was not a factor for exclusion. All women participating in this focus group were required to reside in reception center housing at the time of the interview to be eligible for inclusion.

- Long-termer Group. Women eligible for inclusion in a Long-termer Group must have served eight years or longer on the current term. These long-termer women female inmates were not restricted from inclusion based on security level, age, or current housing assignment.

- Older Inmate Group. The women female inmates participating in this group were drawn from all security levels and had no specific criteria regarding time served, classification or housing unit. All women participating in this group were over the age of 50 at the time of the interview, an age often defined as "senior" by correctional systems.

- Substance Abuse Program Group. Women participating in this focus group type were currently participating in an in-prison substance abuse treatment program. Women in this group were housed in general population housing with other women participating in the same substance abuse program. Security level, time served or current age were not considered in constructing this group.

At the jail sites, focus groups reflected local housing configurations and specified the sentencing status, facility security level, and housing designation. All sampled jail inmate groups included five to seven women who met the focus group criteria. Here again, lists of eligible inmates were constructed with final selections made by project staff.

Jail inmate or detainee focus groups included:

- Sentenced Group. All inmates included in a Sentenced Group were serving a jail sentence at the time of the interview. These sentenced women inmates were housed in general population at the time of the interview.

- Unsentenced Group. All inmates included in these groups were not sentenced, and were either in custody pending trial, sentence, or some type of administrative hold.

- Violent Group. Those inmates included in a Violent Group were designated as "violent" by the facility staff and housed with others designated as such. These inmates were at multiple phases of the criminal justice process, such as sentenced, unsentenced, pending trial, or under some other type of administrative hold. This group was formed by facility housing designations made prior to inclusion in the focus group.

- Non-Violent Group. Inmates included in this group were designated by the facility as "non-violent" and housed with others designated in this way. Much like the Violent Group, the Non-Violent Group inmates could be in any phase of the criminal justice process, sentenced, unsentenced, pending trial, or under some other type of administrative hold. Thusly, this group was also formed solely by facility housing designations made prior to inclusion in the focus group.

For both prison and jail inmate groups, Spanish-speaking women inmates were not excluded from the initial sampling process. When these Spanish-speakers reported to the interview, we indicated that the group interview would be conducted in English. While their participation was limited, most of the Spanish-speaking women remained in the focus groups.

## STAFF GROUPS

To best capture the perspectives of staff in all job classifications, staff focus groups were selected based on set group criteria as well. These group criteria were specific to the employee's job classification and types of interaction with inmates. Each of the sampled staff focus groups contained five to seven staff members including both male and female staff together. Although there may have been some utility in constructing single-gender staff groups, the difficulty of organizing staff groups of any type prohibited this level of sampling. As we also found in our earlier study (Owen & Wells, 2005), this mixed-gender approach yielded rich and complex data. In both jails and prisons, staff was divided into two groups:

- Staff Custody Group. Staff members considered by the facility as "custody staff" were eligible for inclusion in this group. Additionally, those "custody staff" included in this focus group type were currently working in a position or post with direct interaction with inmates. Most managerial or executive staff positions did not meet this "direct interaction" criterion and were excluded. These groups included mostly "line staff."

- Staff Non-Custody Group. Any staff member that the facility classified as "non-custody" including plant operations, educational, medical, therapeutic, or contracted staff were eligible for inclusion in this focus group. Direct interaction with inmates was an additional criterion. The requirement of direct interaction with the inmate population excluded most managerial and executive staff personnel.

Constructing these focus groups and arranging the interviews required considerable collaboration with the research sites and significant facility staff time. We received outstanding cooperation from every site. In some facilities, the research team worked directly with facility managers; in other cases, the team worked with central office staff. In the prison sites, approval from a central office entity was necessary. Research staff also met with facility executive managers to develop the research process. In most cases, a correctional staff person was assigned to work directly with the research team. On-going collaboration with the facility staff member was critical to the success of the data collection phase of the study.

A member of the research team acted as a facility liaison and worked closely with designated facility staff to: 1) obtain clearance for all team members involved in focus group administration and permission to bring materials, including laptop computers, into the facility; 2) arrange private space for conducting the confidential focus groups at the facility (a challenge in any correctional facility); and 3) create a specific process for constructing the focus groups, according to the criteria described above.

A list of group criteria was given to the facility staff member that outlined specific requirements for participation in the focus group. Scheduling the interviews, calling out the inmates and ensuring confidentiality in the interview room were additional tasks that required close coordination. The facility staff member developed the interview list of participants and arranged for them to be present at the focus group time. The list was then conveyed to the research team liaison, who made the final selections. At the time of the focus group, the team liaison confirmed with the participants that they met the group criteria before entry.

The research team completed a total of 40 focus groups at eight different correctional facilities in different geographical regions. Each of the 40 focus groups had approximately five to ten participants who met one of the above outlined group criteria. It was an objective of the study to sample various types of participants, thus, our focus groups were representative of the women's prison and jail experiences and of those who staff these facilities. Of the total 40 groups completed, 27 were various types of inmate focus groups and the remaining 13 were staff focus group types. Of the 27 inmate focus groups, 21 were drawn from prison populations and included:

- Four General Population Low Security Groups
- Four General Population High Security Groups
- Five Reception Center Groups
- Five Long-termer Groups
- One Older Inmate Group
- Two Substance Abuse Program Groups

The remaining six inmate focus groups were drawn from jail populations and included:

- Two Sentenced Groups
- Two Unsentenced Groups
- One Violent Group
- One Non-Violent Group

The 13 focus groups completed with staff members consisted of:

- Seven Custody Staff Groups
- Six Non-Custody Groups

## THE FOCUS GROUP METHOD

The research team utilized the semi-structured focus group interview to collect the data. The qualitative method of the focus group "has gained in popularity in a growing number of contexts over recent decades" (Wibeck et al., 2007, p.249). The focus group method as discussed by Bertrand et al., (1992) allows the participants to respond freely to questions regarding perceptions and experiences. This approach best fit our research goals in that the focus group methodology has been advocated in the literature for researchers who "are interested in examining the context-embedded gendered experiences" (Pollock, 2003, p. 461). Focus groups have been viewed as "carefully planned discussion groups designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest" (Javidi et al., p.231). Typically, these groups include five to ten participants, a facilitator, a recorder or note taker, and are from one to three hours in duration (Javidi et al., 1991; Pollock, 2003; and Wibeck et al., 2007).

This method is particularly valuable for "understanding collective experiences of marginalization, developing a structural analysis of individual experience and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, and class" (Pollock, 2003, p.461). We found this approach to be productive in understanding the safety and violence concerns of women and staff in correctional facilities. The focus group methodology was also critical to informing the framework and survey constructs used in the second phase of the study.

## THE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The focus groups' questions were developed through a multi-stage process. Drawing from the literature, the intent of the PREA mandates, prior work conducted by the project team, and one meeting with subject matter experts, we developed basic questions about women's experiences with violence and safety. We determined that open-ended questions elicited the widest responses without influencing inmate or staff answers. These initial questions were pre-tested in four preliminary inmate groups, and revised and modified through team discussion. In the pre-testing stage, we asked female inmates to respond to the nature of the questions and to provide any type of feedback about our approach. We asked for feedback on the use of focus groups for this topic and on the general set-up (the physical arrangements, using laptops to type responses, staff composition, and reviewing the written

materials). In developing these questions, we were also cognizant of the dual purpose of the focus group data: description and survey construction. The initial format and open-ended nature of the questions proved to be productive and resulted in the desired outcome.

The questions pre-tested in focus groups were identical to the final questions used below. The pre-test found that these questions elicited the range and depth of the responses sought in the study. The pre-test, however, resulted in two changes to our protocol: 1) We added more details to the prompts; and 2) we determined that one focus group session was inadequate in capturing the rich and "thick description" surrounding these issues of safety and violence. The one session approach also wasted the opportunity to capitalize on the rapport that developed in Day 1. As a consequence, we retained the original questions and supplemented them with more detailed prompts and expanded the focus group meetings to two sessions as described below. In the pre-test, we also examined any potential differences in using male and female facilitators or note-takers. Analysis of the pre-test findings showed no discernable differences in the findings based on the gender of the project team.

In focusing on the context and correlates of violence and safety and not addressing questions of prevalence or specific individual experience, the questions were designed to elicit perceptions about safety and violence, which could include individual experience, but was intended to capture inmate and staff perspectives on broad issues. In addition to yielding complex and detailed narrative descriptions from inmate and staff perspectives, the focus group findings were used as the basis for constructing the survey instrument; this second phase of the data collection is described in Part III of this report.

These four questions structured the core of the interview for the female inmate and detainee groups:

1. What do you know about violence or danger in this facility?
2. How do women currently protect themselves from violence in this facility?
3. What are some things that can be done here to protect women from danger and violence?
4. What else should we know about violence and danger here?

The questions for the staff participants were:

1. What do you know about violence or danger among women in this facility?
2. What problems are associated with preventing and responding to female sexual and physical violence in this facility?
3. How do women currently protect themselves from the violence in this facility?
4. What are some things that can be done here to protect women from danger and violence?
5. What else should we know about violence and danger here?

Each of these questions was presented verbatim in each focus group interview, but, as in all qualitative work, topics expanded and new topics emerged in the structured

conversation. (See Appendix B for inmate focus group script, and Appendix C for the staff focus group script.)

## THE FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Due to the multi-site nature of this study, a detailed protocol was developed to ensure that the focus groups were conducted in a consistent manner across all sites. In addition to outlining the steps for arranging the interviews, the protocol contains a comprehensive interview script used to structure the focus group process. This protocol also described the overall purpose of the study, information about conducting focus groups**,** and instructions about setting up the interview.

### The two-session focus group

In this project, the focus group method for both staff and inmate groups follows the traditional size of five to ten, guided by a facilitator, and a note taker. We did, however, introduce an additional dimension to the focus group approach by conducting two sessions with the same group. The richness and complexity of the narratives developed in the pre-test focus groups led us to develop a two-session approach. In the final form, each inmate group met with the research team for two hours each for two consecutive days, totaling four hours of focus group data collection with each inmate group. In addition to collecting more data, the two-session approach built on the rapport established in session one**,** allowed for revisiting any topic or thread**,** and gave the inmate participants time to reflect on the issues overnight. We found the two-session approach to be enormously productive in a variety of ways.

Appendix A contains the formal protocol: a brief summary is provided here. In the initial two-hour meeting with inmate focus groups, the research team introduced the project, obtained informed consent, and asked participants to complete a demographic card. The team also addressed any questions raised by the participants. After these items were completed, all questions were reviewed with a focus on obtaining the participants' views on all forms of violence and safety. On the second day, the group resumed the discussion where it left off. By spending four total hours with the group, participants gave every indication that they were increasingly comfortable with the discussion and were willing to share openly and freely. Again, the day-long break between focus group meetings gave the participants time to reflect on the discussion questions and provide more complete and detailed responses.[1]

All staff focus groups were conducted in one session. Due to the constraints of the correctional environment, including varying staff schedules and staffing coverage issues, conducting a staff focus group on consecutive days was not possible. Staff interviews typically took between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted in a single session.

[1] In several cases, inmates returned the next day with notes they composed between the two focus groups based on their further reflection. Additionally, others told us that they talked with their roommates, friends or the occasional staff member about their views. The transcribed interview notes were careful to distinguish the source of their information.

## LIMITATIONS

Criticisms of the use of the focus group method include those associated with all forms of qualitative methodology. In this study, the sampling of inmates and staff members was not random, but, instead, was purposive, as described above. The focus group method is also criticized for using small sample sizes and not producing a representative sample of the target population (Bertrand et al., 1992). This study combats these issues with sample representation by developing the group criterion and conducting various types of focus groups across several institutions. Lastly, many criticize the validity of generalizations made from focus group data (Bertrand et al., 1992; Javidi et al. 1991; Pollock, 2003; and Wibeck, 2007). This study combats validity issues through the sampling of women from both prisons and jails, across several facilities and regions of the country. We remain confident that this approach provides a valid and reliable description of women's experiences in correctional confinement with our findings and subsequent recommendations applicable to most women's facilities in the United States.

## CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP

Each interview team consisted of a facilitator, a note taker, and, at times, an assistant facilitator/observer from the research team. The facilitator led the group discussion, guiding it through the protocol and research questions. Verbatim notes were taken by the note taker on a laptop computer. These notes captured the full detail of the group discussion and were taken in a format consistent with the coding process for data analysis in The Ethnograph©. The additional assistant facilitator/ observer, when present, assisted with the administration of informed consent and demographic data collection. Additionally, an assistant facilitator/observer contributed additional questions. As a team, these researchers executed the interview protocol for all sampled participants.

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A separate but similar protocol was developed for both inmate and staff focus groups. Upon arrival, the research team situated the tables and chairs in the room in a circle with a place for each participant to sit. At each participant chair, we placed a pencil, a blank name-card, an agenda (see Appendices D and E), an informed consent sheet (see Appendices F and G), a demographic form (see Appendices H and I), and several blank pieces of paper for participant note taking. Additionally, the research team reserved a copy of the participant rating form (see Appendix J), used for both inmates and staff, to be handed out toward the end of the focus group. These documents, including the agendas, the informed consent, demographic forms, and rating sheet, have been appended to this report. Agenda versions varied slightly for inmate and staff groups but both versions gave the participants an outline of the focus group process, a listing of the basic focus group discussion questions, and research team contact information. The approved informed consent document was similar for inmate and staff participants and included the descriptive section, and a detachable signature page collected by the research team.

The inmate demographic forms provided a place to indicate (1) if she would like to speak privately with the research team and/or (2) if she would like to talk to another professional about feelings that resulted from the focus group discussion. (See Appendices H and I for a listing of the demographic and other descriptive information collected prior to the interviews.) These last two questions are meant as a protective measure for inmate participants who may be uncomfortable with the focus group setting or discussion topics.

The participant rating form (Appendix J) was developed to serve as a preliminary quantitative indicator to capture participant rating**s** of the focus group discussion topics. This simple rating sheet asked the participants to rate their perceptions on:

- facility violence level
- success of female inmate's self-protective measures
- success of facility protective measures
- the likelihood of inmate sexual and physical victimization in the facility.

Two additional questions focused on the level of sexual and physical violence at the present facility compared with other facilities the participant had experienced.

As the focus group participants entered the room they were greeted, asked to take a seat, and a team member confirmed that the participant met the group criteria and had no language barriers. Inmates and staff were given an agenda (Appendices D and E) and a short description of the project (Appendix K) to read while waiting for the group to start. Led by the facilitator, introductions of the team were made. The facilitator then reviewed the overall project, the agenda**,** and goals of the focus groups. The focus group discussion questions, the focus group process, and the participant demographic form were described. Questions about the project were solicited at this point. After the introduction section was completed, the facilitator reviewed the informed consent documents.

We were very concerned with the possibility that the focus group could contain women who were in conflict with one another, involved in an exploitative relationship, or otherwise vulnerable. We addressed this by asking women to fill out their demographic sheets whereby they could indicate their request for an individual interview and they were also provided an opportunity to decline to participate. Inmates declining to participate were thanked and excused at that point. A total of 31 women requested private individual interviews; however, most of them, when approached to arrange the interview, indicated that they had covered their issues in the focus group. When given the opportunity to request a referral for professional help, 18 women indicated the need for a referral to counseling. These referrals were made.

A total of eight women across all sites declined to participate. Five others sent word the second day that they could not attend due to competing demands (work, visits or legal appointments), but no woman indicated to us that she was absent due to their concerns about participating in the study.

### Inmate Focus Groups

The inmate participants were asked to provide a name that they would like to be addressed by and to write it on the name-card in front of them. In some groups, the participants chose to be known by their location around the interview table (#1, for example) or by a nickname. Before the facilitator introduced the first discussion topic ("What do you know about violence or danger in this facility"?) it was made clear that we were not interested in learning about the participants' own behavior and experiences, and that we were not asking for any names to be used in these discussions. The promise of confidentiality was reinforced here as well. The procedure for participants to pass on particular questions was also discussed. The interviews proceeded according to the scripts. In the case that the discussion did not cover a particular area of interest to the research team, the script contained probes and follow-up questions. Once each topic was thoroughly covered, the facilitator summarized the discussion, confirmed the accuracy of the summary, and introduced the next topic. The first day discussion typically took about two hours. At the end of each topic discussion, the facilitator summed up her/his understanding of the comments and reviewed and revised them with the participants. Differences in perspective were also teased out in this period. The inmate participants also expressed positive feelings about coming back for the second session. In ending session one, the participant rating form was distributed. The facilitator explained that the team would be back the next day at the same time and place to further discuss these issues. Note paper was also given to the inmate participants to record any thoughts they might have before the next session. The note taker assisted the facilitator in administering the rating form, and each participant was directed to take the informed consent forms, agenda, and note paper. The group then closed for the day.

When the inmate participants returned the next day for the final focus group discussion, they were greeted by the team and asked to sit in the same places as in the first session. The facilitator welcomed the group and thanked them warmly for returning back to discuss the last topics. To begin, the facilitator polled each participant and asked if there were any comments or questions from the previous session. Follow-ups and probes included questions about the focus group process as well as the quantitative rating process. Once the group concluded, the team thanked the participants and excused them. At this time, participants who had indicated a desire to speak to the research team individually were approached privately. Great care was taken to ensure privacy for those who wanted an individual interview.

### Staff Focus Groups

The staff focus group protocol describes the similar procedures and discussion topics. In the staff protocol, the five discussion topics were covered in one focus group session. After the discussion was completed, the note taker aided the facilitator in administering the participant rating form. When the rating forms were completed and collected, the facilitator thanked the participants and concluded the focus group.

## FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

Each of the completed focus groups was documented by the note taker and then promptly reviewed and cleaned for accuracy. The reviewed transcriptions were given to the facilitator for a second review. The transcripts were then formatted for uploading to a qualitative data analysis program called The Ethnograph©. This software allows both data management and analysis of narrative data such as the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews developed in this project. The Ethnograph© software was chosen for this project due to its capacity to code by segments. Once coded, searches can be done by one or more code words.

This format required the assignment of an individual identifier code to be attached to each participant which then was used to track participant's involvement in the focus group conversation. The Ethnograph© format also assigns a line number to each of the lines of the transcript for easy reference and assigned code words. From this cleaned state, the focus group transcripts were printed out in hard copy for the coding process. To improve the inter-rater reliability of the coding process, the hard copy of focus group transcripts were coded by the primary coder and then reviewed by a secondary coder. Almost 200 codes were used to capture the complexity of the focus group narratives.

When the coding was finished on the hard copy transcripts, a third research team member was solely responsible for entering these codes to the Ethnograph© program. After all transcripts were coded, program output files were converted to hard copy and distributed to the research team members responsible for the analysis.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
## INMATE FOCUS GROUPS PARTICIPANTS

A total of 161 individual female inmates participated in the focus group process. These 161 women were housed in jails and prisons around the United States. A total of 130 women were interviewed at five prisons and an additional 31 were interviewed at three jails. Demographic data were collected on these participants during session one of the focus group process with a brief "demographic card" (Appendix H). Please note that we purposely excluded questions about offenses or any other questions relating to criminal history.

### Ethnicity and Age

Ethnically, the majority of women interviewed identified as white (33.5%), 28% self-selected African American, 18.6% indicated Mexican American**,** with 8.7% selecting "Other Hispanic" as an ethnic identity. Fewer than 6% identified themselves as Other, with 2.5% selecting Asian/Pacific Islander**,** and .6% (one respondent) identified as Native American. Four responses were unusable. At the time of the interview, the women ranged in age from 20 to 67 with a mean age of nearly 36 years. Just over one-third of the women interviewed were between 20 to 29 (35.7%), 30.5% were between 30 and 39, another 21.5% were between 40 to 49, with 9.1% between 50 and 59, and the remaining 3.2% were between 60 and 67 years of age. Just under 5% percent did not provide their age.

### Incarceration History

Inmate participants were asked to indicate their number of jail and prison admissions. In terms of jail admissions, the modal response was one admission (reflected by 52 of 161 women or 60%) and responses ranged from zero to 104 times in jail. Just under 20% had been to prison two times. Over half (57.8%) of the 161 women reported a response of one to three jail admissions. About 20% had been to jail between four and seven times, with the remaining quarter indicating eight or more jail admissions.

### Current Sentence

Women interviewed in the focus groups were asked to report the number of years and months of their current sentence and to describe any special conditions of the sentence. Current sentence lengths ranged from less than one year to 156 years with a bi-modal distribution reflecting modes of less than one year and two years. Nearly one-third (30.4%) of the women interviewed were sentenced to less than one year to four years time. Next, 18.7% reported a sentence of between five and ten years, and another 8.7% listed a sentence of between 11 and 15 years. Another 6.8% of the women interviewed self reported a current sentence of 16 to 22 years. About 18% of the women reported a sentence of 25 or more years. An additional 14 women (or 8.7%) self identified as unsentenced, with ten women (or 6.2%) specifying a life sentence. Twelve women indicated that they were serving an indeterminate sentence. Two women were serving life without the possibility of parole and another two women stated they were presently serving concurrent sentences.

## PRISON STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 67 staff members were interviewed in both prison and jail facilities. Interestingly, female staff members made up over three-quarters of the sample. Ethnically, the majority of staff members (44 or 65.7%) identified as white, and 11 (16.4%) were African-American. Additionally, nine (13.4%) staff members identified as Hispanic, two more (3%) selected American Indian, with one staff member selecting "Other." Over 60% of those participating in the staff focus groups were in custody positions, with most serving in line positions.

In terms of their experience at the current facility, responses ranged from one month to 22 years of experience with a mean value of just over eight years experience. Responses for other correctional experience range from no prior experience to 22 years, with a mean of just under three years "other experience."

The following chapters describe our findings from these focus groups.

# INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONSHIP FACTORS 2

As described in Part I of this report, the context of safety and violence is shaped by dynamic and static factors across multiple dimensions. This chapter reviews the first two levels suggested by the ecological model (CDC, 2005): individual-level and relationship-level characteristics. As anticipated, women's past experiences were extremely important to understanding their current lives in jail and prison. We begin this discussion with a description of women's lives before prison, their entry into jails and prison, and their experiences with violence and victimization. This chapter then examines the significant role of interpersonal relationships in building the context for potential violence and conflict. Much of the literature of women's incarceration has demonstrated that women "do their time" by forming intense relationships. As women adjust to their imprisonment, they develop friendships and, sometimes familial or sexual relationships, with other prisoners. Previous studies found that women in prison organize in these family-like arrangements, replicating common gender roles on the street. These prison families include complicated emotional relationships, sometimes based on practical or sexual ties. We have learned from the interviews that these relationships shape the potential for violence and conflict. The potential for inappropriate relationships with staff exists as well.

In detailing the role of relationships in jails and prison, it is critical to note that not all relationships women form in prison have the potential for violence. The evidence from the interviews was clear that the majority of relationships among women are non-violent, but troubled and conflicted relationships contribute greatly to problems in women's facilities. Here, we examine the individual and relationship characteristics and processes that create, activate, and reinforce the potential for conflict and violence among women offenders.

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS IN LIVES BEFORE INCARCERATION

As reviewed in Part I of this report, the pathways research proposes that female offenders come to prison by different pathways than male offenders. Our focus group findings indicated that the pathways model accurately described many of the participants' lives prior to prison, specifically in terms of their experience with relational violence. Although the focus group protocol did not include direct queries about pre-prison experiences, many women shared their experiences with victimization and how this past shapes their current lives while incarcerated. Although a few women came from more advantaged social and economic positions, with little or no criminal history or prior victimization, many of the focus group respondents described pre-prison lives grounded in the typical pathways: violence and untreated trauma, disconnections from conventional institutions, and economic and familial stress. This woman described some of the economic struggles that many of our economically-disadvantaged participants faced before prison:

> *I was 33 when I started drugs. I used to be a working, law abiding citizen. I learned to work and go in a store and get what I could afford. But I only make seven dollars an hour. I'm struggling with all of my kids. I think if I was on welfare, I could get stuff for free and get all the help I needed. I think if I commit a crime I go to jail and you feed me [at the jail] and my family can take care of my kids. So I go to jail. Then I get depressed and turn to dope [that I get in jail]. I then get mentally, physically and emotionally raped because of all the guilt and the shame. I ask myself, "Can someone please love me and help me?"*
>
> *[When released], I then get kicked back to the streets [and think], "Why should I do right when I know I be coming back [to jail]?" So I learned to be a prostitute and end up with HIV. Then I come back here. Here, I learn to get what I want by bending over with my shirt open and I pretend I want you to fondle me because I can't get a cup of coffee. Educate us women so I can go back home. If you educate me, I can make it.*

## PRIOR VICTIMIZATION

One critical pathway involves past victimization as an important contributor to women's criminality. Many of our participants described sequential victimization; first by family members as girls and young women, then by intimate partners as teens and adults. This victimization then continued into their imprisoned lives. Inmate and staff participants made the connection between prior abuse and the potential for sexual and physical abuse both as perpetrator and as victim while incarcerated. One woman made this connection succinctly:

> *I am also an adult survivor of child molestation and rape, because I went through that as well. I have a short temper, trust issues, so don't look at me crazy or I may go off. I will call myself more of a violent person. I will not start the violence, but if you come at me, I will react.*

This non-custody staff member made a similar connection between women's past abuse and current inability to advocate for themselves:

> *I think that a lot of them [inmates] have been abused previously and they don't know their legal rights. They need to be protected. Most of them are passive. At least that is my opinion. They don't protect themselves. They feel unworthy.*

Many women acknowledged getting caught in a cycle of violence in their past lives, as expressed in this example:

> *All of my relationships have been abusive. I have four kids and every one of their fathers was abusive. I had to be violent in order to protect myself. I defended myself by swinging bats at them, I had to stab them. But when you love someone, it's hard to walk away. You have to be just fed up with that violence. It does not even matter if you are on your death bed. I was on my death bed with my son's father and I still went back.*

As noted in the literature review in Part I, one of the common effects of childhood abuse is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Specifically, "triggers" can recreate

an abusive situation in the mind of the victim, no matter how far removed from the initial traumatic event. Women who have been previously victimized respond to these triggers differently than non-victims. Two common responses to perceived threats to survivors of abuse are violent "over-reactions," out of proportion to a real or perceived threat, and "under-reactions," when the victim does not react to a risky situation and passively accepts re-victimization. One woman's description of her childhood abuse reflected a clear description of PTSD:

> *I knew that when my father was on the rampage, I just blacked out and I was just not there. And when I came here, I had terrible impending fear of the dark until my 20s. When I am in the presence of raw brutality, I just become not present.*

In the focus groups, women talked extensively about violence in past intimate relationships; in some cases, these abusive relationships were directly related to the women's incarceration, as shown in this woman's story:

> *I just want to share something. Sometimes a lot of people think domestic violence wasn't as bad as it is. One of my [criminal] charges is child endangerment. I was on probation and I was in a real violent relationship. I would just come in to my probation officer's office beat up and beat up bad. I was getting stabbed and all of this. I would show up and they would ask me what happened and I would tell them that I fell or something, but they didn't believe me.*
>
> *The probation officers showed up to my house one time and I didn't barely open the door. I was beat real bad and my house was all torn up so I didn't want them to see any of it. I went back to the probation office with sunglasses up and I was not covering up nothing. They told me that I needed to leave and they wanted to put me into a battered woman's shelter and all of that. But I was scared to leave him, and I loved him. I didn't go.*
>
> *So, once I didn't come back on time from selling drugs till late and he killed my baby [crying]. He beat her up so bad and put her back in the crib and put her bottle in her mouth. She was nine months old. I came in and he said, "Go look at your baby." And she was so beaten that when I picked her up, she literally melted into my hands. Every bone in her body was broken [crying badly].*
>
> *So they violated my probation and gave me that child endangerment charge because I didn't leave when they told me to go to the shelter. They said that I had the knowledge that he was a violent man and I let my kids stay with him.*

While an extreme example, this story illustrates the seriousness of prior violence in the lives of some female inmates and its contribution to their incarceration pathway. In describing these prior experiences with violence, many women connected these prior experiences with its expression within the same-sex relationships in prison, as this woman observed:

> *I have been beat by my spouse. I have been shot by my spouse. I did not know how, in here, it was as bad [as on the streets] and that it was the same thing. But domestic violence is domestic violence, it is the same thing.*

Another woman said that:

> *Violent relationships in prison are the same thing as my old man beating me. Or stabbing me or beating me over jealousy or someone looking at me. But you are just trying to get away. I always see that this woman's girlfriend [in here] was always bruised up. It was the same thing as when I was not trying to get away from my old man when I was walking around with bruises.*

When asked about this connection between past and present violence, another woman suggested that:

> *The violence comes from the person that you are. It comes in from outside in the world with you. If you are an abusive person or have been abused in the world, when you have someone that does love you, you are going to abuse them.*

Women describe how the cycle of violence plays out in the prison environment, as in this narrative:

> *A lot of girls go though domestic violence in the streets. I have been in one with a male. I say it all starts in the home from a young age, a baby. If you always see your dad hitting your mom, if you are a boy, you think it is right to hit on your woman. And then you think that is right for your man to hit on you because he loves you.*
>
> *But whether you come in here having been beat by a man or what, when you come in here, you look for the same kind of relationship, whether it is a woman or a man. In your subliminal mind, you are looking for the same thing, and before you know it, you are with an aggressor [in here] that is beating on you. Then you have become an aggressor: You find and go for a woman that you can control because you like being over her.*

As we will see later in this chapter describing women's in-prison relationships, it is this repeated pattern of prior and present interpersonal violence and abuse that is the most salient factor in the potential for violence and safety in women's correctional facilities.

The pathways model recognizes the nexus among childhood abuse, drug abuse, and sex work. Although few women are now incarcerated in prison for prostitution, many have engaged in sex work or come to view their bodies as a commodity to be traded in prison or jail as on the streets. At the close of one focus group, this woman ends the session by thanking the interviewers and making an astute, albeit sad, observation about imprisoned women:

> *I just thank you for coming and listening to us. I hope that someone does make a difference in what goes on. We abuse ourselves because we keep staying in the problem. It's more than the jail. It's everything. We don't know any different. We thought showing titties for something to eat is normal.*

## STATIC AND DYNAMIC INDIVIDUAL VULNERABILITIES

The focus group participants identified individual characteristics of women who were more likely to be targets of aggressive inmates as well as those who are likely to be vulnerable to staff misconduct. Some of these elements can be seen as "static factors" and include:

- Younger or older
- A slighter build
- Mental or physical disabilities
- Non-English speakers
- Poor or resource-rich

We learned that static factors did not represent necessary or sufficient causes of vulnerability. Static factors were always mediated by dynamic or behavioral factors, chiefly, "being naïve", "acting like a victim" or "putting yourself in that situation." This notion of dynamic, rather than static or fixed, factors shaped our understanding of the overall context of conflict and violence in women's facilities. These dynamic factors were primarily behavioral, and offer enormous potential for addressing violence in women's facilities through programmatic and therapeutic interventions.

Younger women, older women**,** and those naïve about incarceration were described as more vulnerable. For the young women, especially if they also had a slight build, age contributes to vulnerability, as shown here:

> *She is slighter and she is smaller and she is attractive. She is more of the physical type that they might try to bully. In the county jail, I had a cellmate who had been in prison. She was very little and she was very petite and she was here for a violent crime. So she was in our two-man cells and her Bunky tried to force herself on her.*

In contrast, we also heard that younger inmates were more violent and older women were sometimes victimized by younger inmates. One woman describes why younger inmates may be violent, by saying,

> *It is the maturity level, mental maturity. A lot of the women are still children when they come in here. They are women physically but they are still children [points to her head]. Common sense, goals, direction? They don't have any. They are just worried about music or movies instead of setting a life direction. What does this person have to offer? They don't know who they are. They are lost out there. Life is obscured with drugs and alcohol. They have no clear view. In here, some clear up, some see, but some are stuck in a time warp.*

Older women were said to be especially vulnerable because of physical infirmities, as shown here:

> *Just yesterday morning, there was an elderly lady, she was walking down the yard and an inmate ran by her and socked her in the face, and her cane went flying. Why it was done? Who knows? This other inmate went up to her and socked her and she socked her hard. She had the big gauze on her face from*

> *being hit. The youngsters have no respect for the little old ladies. The youngsters just knock them down.*

Other participants in this group noted, because random violence is so rare, that the older woman "must have done something" but the others repeated "you never know." Focus group participants also cautioned that some older women "were the ones to watch out for," indicating that age was not always a defining feature of vulnerability. Thus, potentials for victimization may not be as influenced by age, but, rather, by how one learns to behave in a way that avoids risky situations and risky relationships. Although age was mentioned as a vulnerability, it seemed to be less important than behavior, or a woman's ability to control her surroundings, as described here:

> *Vulnerability is not an issue with age. It is who you associate with. If you associate with people that are like you in your same age group, you can be fine. I wouldn't limit [vulnerability] to older women. I would limit it to a certain sense of attitude of being vulnerable that streetwise women can pick up on.*

Many respondents noted that younger offenders may feel the need to establish a violent reputation as a form of protective coloring in the uncertain world of the prison or jail. These comments made the connection between youth and violence in one women's prison:

Inmate 1: *The violence is here more because we now have the youngsters. Youngsters with a long time to do and no cares. They have no concept of what it is like to do a long time term*.

Inmate 2: *A lot of youngsters who are coming in with a lot of time. They are pretty pissed off at the world out there, If you are coming in here with 15 years or whatever, you have your whole life ahead of you and that is hard. It puts a chip on their shoulder.*

Inmate 3: *You have got this new breed that are just ruthless*.

Inmate 4: *I, too, have seen a lot especially with the youngsters coming in with double life sentences and they have a mentality of nothing to lose. They are at a time when they will not listen to you.*

One staff member agreed with this assessment by stating:

> *The younger inmates are more prone to violence. I don't know if it is the makeup of the crowd or just youth. The combination of a lack of education with substance abuse could be a cause.*

According to our respondents, one of the problems with young inmates is that they engage in more violence which triggers more uses-of-force by custody staff, making conflict and trouble for everyone near the incident, as suggested by this woman:

> *The youngsters fight and get sprayed {with pepper spray}. Everyone is more macho now. It is a whole build up of attitudes. My co-worker got sprayed the other day when it wasn't necessary. Things got out of hand and he [the CO] decided to spray everyone in the building*.

While some participants mentioned the vulnerabilities faced by inmates with physical disabilities, the majority of the comments focused on mental health concerns. This staff person described their vulnerability:

> *Some inmates have a lower mental health. They [aggressors] see that right away and the experienced ones want their canteen. We see that all the time.*

Just as we saw that youth represented a duality of vulnerability and aggression, our participants applied this same duality to women who had mental illnesses or mental disabilities. That is, some participants suggested that while those with mental health challenges may be victimized, the mentally ill are also likely to commit violence, as expressed here:

> *[The mentally ill] can be spontaneous. This one inmate got up in the day room to get something to drink. The next thing you know she is beating up an inmate based on something that happened a year ago.*

A custody staff member described the dynamics of this group of inmates:

> *I work with the psychologically and physically impaired. They have the same issues – girlfriends, debt payment, loans, commissary. They don't have the finesse, though. All weapons are of opportunity or convenience. Most of them [are more vulnerable than general population]. Not all of them, but most of them, I would say 1/3 are extremely street smart. They know how to carry themselves and manipulate. They prey on the others due to lack of education and learning and language barriers. I 'm getting more of those.*

Female inmates also expressed their opinion that inmates with mental illnesses were likely to be "aggressors" rather than victims, as seen in this comment:

> *They go nuts. They are crazy. They need to be in a special unit. They do something crazy to people. I had a roommate who is crazy and who is nuts. She fought with my roommate one day and she is just nuts. They will whip some ass, they have this strength. I don't know where they get it from. They are just crazy bitches. Like the retarded ones, they have this strength. Like the women who are mothers, they have this strength to care for their kids.*

The assaults by the mentally challenged or mentally ill may result in violent retaliation, as the following woman explained.

> *A [mentally ill] woman came up to me and she smacked me in the face with a cup and I got a big old black eye. I tried to close the door and [staff] didn't come for me, so I will be real – I beat the shit out of her.*

Women with mental health issues are as likely to hurt themselves as others. In one interview, a woman said that her self-destructive behavior of cutting and bleeding in the public areas of her cell caused her roommates and staff members to be very angry with her. Even though she said she "cleaned all the blood up with bleach," her roommates were very hostile toward her and wanted her out of the room. She also reported, quite disturbingly, that a staff person looked at her wounded arms and said, "You are disgusting. Get out of my sight" and was unresponsive to her need for medical and psychiatric help.

Some women indicated that they might "look the other way" if a mentally ill woman was victimized for commissary, but that they would intervene in a potentially violent or coerced or sexual situation, as described here:

> *If someone does try to mess with them, then the others would just tell her to leave her alone. The fight I had was really behind another girl. She is really slow. She don't think it's [giving oral sex] not cool because she's slow. So I told her, "You can't be doing that." These older women have her in a cubicle. Having her doing oral sex on them. She'd do one, then another would say, "Do my friend." Then this one and then this one. And I said [to the dominant woman], "What do you want to do her like that for?" And then she went after me with the lock*.

Non-English speakers were said by inmates to have additional problems with vulnerability. A custody staff person remarked:

> *If you have no way to communicate you can't ask for help. There is also no way to decide what their mental abilities are.*

The inmates described the same problem:

> *Officers need to speak both Spanish and English. I speak both and when I tell the officer about an inmate's problem [and if] the officer doesn't like me [they] ask me, "Why are you meddling?"*

Being indigent, or without resources, was described as a major contributing factor to economic violence, a common form of conflict and exploitation reported by our inmate respondents. Women without any way to provide for themselves were seen by others as potential economic aggressors. Women who have a visible means of support and "shop" either conspicuously or carelessly, or those who "brag about how much money they have on the books," or those who are "well-taken care of" by their families or others outside the prison, can become targets of this economic exploitation. This potential for economic victimization interacts with other behavioral factors, such as "trying to buy friends," and "not keeping your mouth shut." When asked who is vulnerable, this woman answered:

> *The first-timers do not know NOT to tell that she is getting boxes [packages from home]. People who have nothing take advantage of that. The staff is pretty good about protecting this type of person.*

In the next chapter, we will discuss the significant role economic conflict plays in the overall climate of a facility.

**Prior victimization and "Acting like a Victim"**

The link between past and present victimization is a critical individual factor in creating vulnerabilities. As one inmate said, "…if you have been victimized, you present an aura that allows you to be victimized again and bullies look for it." When asked if women who were victims on the outside were more prone to prison victimization, this high custody inmate ruminated on how victims might react and underscored the dynamic and dual nature of victimization:

> *I think they are because they don't know any other way. If someone calls you a name that is not ok, but they don't know. I am not personally going to let anyone put their hands on me because I was raised up in a strict household. If you don't know, then you will keep it in and one day you will just snap and then you will be here for life.*

"Acting like victims" was said to mean that women acted afraid, passive, and appeared to more aggressive women as easy targets for economic and/or sexual exploitation. Women who did not stand up to potential threats were likely to continue to be victimized, as one woman said, "Some people walk around with 'victim' blinking on their head." Another described a potential victim as one who is:

> *…walking down the sidewalk with the head down and terrorized inside. You can smell fear here; you can smell it and you just know.*

In another interview, a woman observed the cyclical nature of being exploited in the correctional environment:

> *Once you get punked [2], then you get punked every time you turn around. You gonna get your canteen taken. She is going to take it.*

Displaying fear and other outward signs of vulnerability are a significant contribution to the dynamic of vulnerability in women's facilities. Characteristics such as age or size were almost always mediated by behavioral aspects or perceptions of "weaknesses." In almost every interview group, the concept of "how you carry yourself" was said to be the most important component of safety. A "typical victim" was one who was timid or showed her fear to others, as described here:

> *A victim is one that's real quiet and don't take any action. They [other female inmates] can tell you're afraid and you don't care. Stand your ground and nobody will mess with you.*

In the same vein, not "standing up for yourself" when other women were aggressive was seen as extremely dangerous and created almost certain vulnerabilities. No single characteristic is as important as the ability to stand up to threats, as one woman said:

> *I am small but I am just mean. Like I said, "Don't judge a book by its cover."*

Custody staff agreed with this view and also described potential victims as those who were "weak" and afraid:

> *There is a lot of violence here and there is a difference between the women who are easy targets or easy prey and the others. The first thing is the easy targets give up all their stuff and then that makes it worse.*

The notion of "giving up their stuff" illustrates the role of economic exploitation in the dynamics of victimization in women's facilities and will be described further in this report.

[2] The term "punked" is used in women's facilities to describe economic or physical exploitation. Unlike the use of the term in male prisons, "punked" does not have a sexual connotation in women's prisons and jails.

One focus group of custody staff members introduced the concept of the inmate-victim as a "rabbit," a term that conveys the sense of prey in contrast to that of predator, as illustrated in this exchange:

Custody Staff 1: *Rabbits are weaker. They are not as intelligent. They are just terrified, which is a weakness.*

Custody Staff 2: *They are so desperate for acceptance so they are more willing to pay the price for the sexual favor or what have you, and they want to get under the wing of someone who is appealing to their weakness.*

Custody Staff 3: *They are stuck in the victim role. They are blaming everybody else and are big drama queens.*

Custody Staff 1: *Rabbits. Easy to spot. The inmates tend to talk in groups and say, "Oh, look at this one. She will last like five minutes." You see the body language: chin up is confident and chin up high if you are challenging. If you are sitting like this [leaned back with hands crossed] this is a shot-caller stance. Weakness is very bad in this environment and assertion of power is always incremental.*

Custody Staff 2: *I think there are less rabbits and more predators, more than half are neither.*

Custody Staff 3: *I would go less predators like 5% and more rabbits. Predators could have more than one rabbit. Rabbits, 25%, 75% in between.*

One inmate explained the types of inmates in prisons for women:

> *There are three types of people: There are victims, victimizers, or observers. You don't choose, it is just your personality. I fall into the observer category and that keeps me out of danger.*

Here an inmate described a victimization that was avoided because she "stood up" for herself:

> *They kept on harassing me and were after me. I was always afraid to take a shower. They would always be right behind me. Finally I got mad. There's times you can turn your cheek, and times you can't. I turned around and said, "Hold up! Whatever you want, whatever you want to do to me, do it right here in front of everyone. Do it right now. I'm tired of being scared." Finally they just stopped. But I had so much fear. So now when someone says they want something, I say no.*

In contrast to the "weak" and the vulnerable, the respondents had very clear views on those who were described variously as "predators," "bullies," and "aggressives." Aggressors were said to have the following characteristics and behaviors:

- Loud and outspoken
- Aggressive, domineering or intimidating
- More masculine
- A desire to control or lead
- A user and manipulator

The term "bully" was sometimes used to refer to women who engaged in economic aggression rather than sexual aggression. Some bullies, however, were said to be a bully in the room but not in the yard:

> *They just want to bully in the room. They are not big enough to take it to the yard because someone would slap the snot out of them.*

Other terms were also used, as said here:

> *No, we call them punks, not bullies. No respect for themselves. They try to act like someone who they are not. They have no respect for anyone. Bullies who do that -- they usually get regulated.*

Very often, staff and some inmates defined women with masculine characteristics as aggressors. As this custody staff person suggested:

> *If you were going to profile, it would be the one that has no hair and more male characteristics. It is not just their attitude around staff, it is the male attitude with the way they treat everyone. It is their identity. They crave the attention of the male role.*

A final individual characteristic was described as "the will to change." We heard numerous reports of how a woman "changed her personality" and no longer resorted to violence to the degree they had in the past. This change often came about through maturity gained with age, due to a stable relationship or an "epiphany" about the way they were doing their time. In the following quote, the woman described how she had changed even though violence is endemic in certain social groups in prison:

> *I think it just depends on who you are or who you run with. You could get in the mix and end up getting a lock or a cup to your head. It is a lot about who you are. For me, I did 13 months in [a higher custody facility]. I was fighting every other day and here I just chose not to. I have learned about myself and my addiction to violence.*

Women also noted that their styles of doing time tended to change over their multiple jail or prison terms. As this woman said:

> *When I first came here I used to run my mouth to officers. I used to call them [officers] police and give them no respect. Now I try to stay humble and keep my mouth shut. I try to gravitate toward people doing the right thing and stay out of the mix. I stay away from the ones doing the wrong thing.*

This section highlighted specific individual factors that may contribute to violence in women's facilities. We found that, while each of these factors may contribute to safety and violence, these individual factors were always mediated by dynamic behavioral and contextual factors. We now turn to the role relationships play in this context.

## RELATIONSHIP FACTORS

Our data suggests that troubled relationships are among the most significant contributions to the potential for violence and conflict in these facilities. There are multiple reasons as to why these relationships involve violence: prior victimization of either or both partners, poor coping skills, the role of economic exploitation in these relationships, and the lack of other outlets to occupy their time or their emotions. Consistent with the prior literature, this woman suggested that prison relationships are complex:

> *People make these families in here. They show them a bit of love, even though it may be an abusive kind of love, but they can't see it because that's the only love they ever have. So we have moms and stuff, and girlfriends. But some of it isn't a good kind of love. This one girl I knew, this one girl has bruises all over, and she said. "That's just the way it is. She's just physical, but she loves me." And I say, "That's not love." And I ask her why. Why does she stick with her? But it's because she has to have somebody love her and she's willing to take that.*

We also listened to accounts of the immediacy, importance, and intensity of these relationships in the lives of incarcerated women. Because of these powerful emotions and attachments, any threat to the relationship could be the catalyst for desperate, and often extreme, reactions. The root of the relationships and their role in creating the potential for violence were suggested by this woman:

> *Women are clingy and have too many needs. In prison, we lose our identities and our dignity. We are our numbers. We feel like pieces of shit. We left our kids outside. So in here, if I find someone to focus on and they look at someone else, I'm gonna beat the shit out of them*.

Another woman described the intensity of the prison relationship:

> *Here, there is an overwhelming desire to be THE ONE in a relationship. When the relationship does not develop the ONENESS, then that is where trouble comes. Friends, family [get ignored]. [The partner says] "Don't go to school because I need you*. *[They fear their partner] will rise up and [be productive] and leave me here.*

The potential for violence was illustrated in this story:

> *I know a relationship that is so violent and dysfunctional. [The aggressive partner will say:] "I know these women are looking at you. Who are you sitting by in class? Don't look at her, better not look at her." She will spit on her and push her. She [victim] is trying to leave. Her only solution is to get shipped up north. The long-termer is leaving. It is the short-termer [who] is the violent [one]. It is jealousy and insecurity. That was my situation. The person [I was involved with] was so inadequate and that was a very violent relationship.*

It is important to again note that not all relationships in women's facilities are troubled or violent, nor does all violence occur within a relationship. We heard many descriptions of relationships that were calm and nurturing and some accounts of violence between friends and/or cellmates.

## SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PRISON AND JAIL

Generally, women suggested that the existence of homosexuality or same sex relationships were an inevitable part of prison life. Many said that it was a means of getting through a prison sentence. A few expressed disgust. Almost all the women interviewed indicated that prison sex was always available and that any woman had a choice about her participation. As one woman told us:

> *I asked them [other inmates] why they get into relationships in the prison. They said, being lonely, being horny, and needing canteen.*

As one lifer explained:

> *Look, those of us who have long sentences, there's three ways to deal with it: become involved with an officer, turn to homosexuality, or become a Christian. Nine out of ten, you fall into homosexuality. Some try all three. I've tried all three and I am most comfortable in a relationship. Look, we are just people.*

The flexibility of these relationships and their sexual component was captured by a saying we heard numerous women use throughout the country:

> *Gay for the stay, straight at the gate. That's what we say.*

When coerced sex was discussed, we received mixed responses. Some women said it happened; most said it was extremely rare. The consensus seemed to be that forced sex by strangers was a very rare event. Some women said they worried about such sexual assault prior to their first incarceration, but almost all women said that it was not a major worry after they became adjusted to jail or prison. As discussed in Part I of this report, such rare assaults are primarily a specific form of intimate partner violence, existing within a troubled relationship. Women did tell stories or related prison myths about stranger-based sexual assault, but few believed it to be a serious problem in their lives in jail or prison.

Generally, staff members believed that sexual coercion and, certainly, sexual assault, was extremely rare, although sexual relationships were not. While any homosexual act in prison is an official rule violation, it appeared that the reaction of officers ranged from benign neglect to zero tolerance. Inmates generally perceived that staff had negative staff reaction to prison sexual relationships. These inmate comments illustrate the range of their opinions on staff perspectives on prison or jail sexual relations:

> *I think it is very selective. If you are on the yard and are hugging on someone and looking like a little boy, you get a hard time. If you are discreet, you pretty much are left alone. They get comfortable and leave you alone.*

> *I was with a woman for 8 years, and we wouldn't last that long today because of the staff. Even if you didn't have a track record [of violence] they would break you up. Now there would be fights because the staff members would be separating us. Because the staff members have a problem with homosexuality and they nitpick and they start it.*

> *A big problem we have is we have gay officers coming in here [to work]. A lot of them allow the situation to go on because they agree with it. Some officers allow it [sex] to happen. Yeah, they bust it up [sex on the yard], but they watch for awhile. You know they were watching.*
>
> *[Staff will see a woman] that will be in a muumuu in the day room with someone digging on her. The cop will just say "Will you take that nasty shit somewhere else?"*

This comment by a staff participant represents one of the more negative attitudes about female sexuality while incarcerated:

> *Only other thing is that males are a little more discriminating about who they have sex with. Females are not. They, by and large, are tramps. If they play the gay games, they don't care who they are with, how dirty they are, who watches. No morals, no standards.*

## DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

As stated above, most sexual violence was said to be partner-based violence in women's prisons and jails. These relationships mirror classic battering patterns. The violent partner in an abusive relationship in prison attacks the passive partner with assaults on their self esteem as well as physical and sexual assaults. These relationships are characterized by unequal power and are often humiliating as well. The dominant partner makes demands in addition to sexual services, such as housekeeping and economic support. This relationship may be continuing a relationship pattern developed through prior victimization, lack of boundaries, and confused definitions of love and intimacy. One participant explained how her background led her to equate love with sex in any relationship:

> *To me, I always thought that being loved means you have to want to do it [sex] with me. If they don't [want sex], that means they don't love me. I have a big problem with that.*

Another woman related how she was violent toward her partners. Note that in this conversation, she understood the irony of the "because I love you" statement, as did the rest of the group who laughed in response.

> *We're incarcerated. We're away from our loved ones. You are the person here that I'm pouring my heart out to and so soon as I [feel bad about something], get a bad letter from home, all that [violence] is going out to you <u>because I love you</u>.* [Laughter]

We also heard evidence that the continuing cycle of violence from the streets comes to the prison. Women who had been victims in the past could become victimizers in the present. We saw how, without any treatment for this past trauma, the cycle continues, as illustrated in this woman's account of her troubled relationship:

> *This is what they learned. They grew up with this. They seek it out. This is what they are used to. You try to put them in a safe environment; they go back to what is comfortable. If your father has been raping you, hitting you, it is what they know.*

> *They think, "If she is beating me, it is because she is trying to raise me up." She [past partner] didn't recognize safety and security. She was abusive in the beginning. She would start wrestling matches with me. I am bigger, and I would have to walk out of the room [so that it wouldn't get seriously violent]. She was trying to see how far she could go. It was not that she wanted to get hit, but she wanted to know the boundaries.*
>
> *Then you have some of the women who just like the sick life. She has always had the bad sick relationships with women.*
>
> *I don't think people recognize safety. If you have never had it, you don't know what you are looking for. Because that is what they are looking for. They seek the same [abusive] behavior*.

One self-identified "masculine" woman described the complications of her relationships:

> *Getting involved in a relationship is my downfall. I get violent toward my women. Like this girl that went home in 2004. I was beating her every day. Every day, I would put my hands on her. Busting her mouth. Her eye. By the time she was fixing to go home, I was always hitting her.*

A fuller understanding of this woman's history provides the context for this behavior. The woman quoted above reported to us in an individual interview that she had been molested by her stepfather and brothers since she was a very young child and began using drugs and alcohol while still in elementary school. She also described a near-rape from a larger, stronger cellmate, which terrified her. Although counter-intuitive, many women see that such violence is a way of feeling safe in the uncertain world of the prison, as described in this comment:

> *I know many women who have that boy exterior because that is the only way that they feel safe.*

It was very clear to us that, just as sex roles are transient in the women's prison with some women moving from the "masculine" to the feminine role during the course of their confinement, so, too, were the aggressor and victim roles. The dynamic quality of this duality is illustrated by this comment:

> *I have seen those that were abused and then become the abuser. They have been hurt for a long time and now they want to protect themselves.*

In the literature, there has been some suggestion that it is not always the masculine partner who is the abusive one in the relationship. We found evidence of this as well in this description of a couple known to be in a violent relationship:

> *The boy is very passive, the girl is very dominating. The girl [passive boy] was involved with another boy in another unit. The girl found out about it, and she was just ripping her a new butthole. A lot of verbal. She'll slap. Then she'll get out the frustration. There is so much jealousy! Why would you want to get involved with anyone in here?*

## RELATIONSHIPS AND JEALOUSY

Jealousy was said to be a prime cause of relationship violence. This point of view was expressed in every focus group, as illustrated here:

> *My biggest downfall was getting into a relationship with a woman. Relationships are not always good and a majority of them end badly. We are women and we are all jealous. Jealousy leads to a whole bunch of nonsense and fighting.*

Staff members also held this view, as suggested in this staff remark:

> *Ninety-nine percent of the violence is due to falling in love, falling out of love, and jealousy*.

We learned that anything could provoke jealousy. Small acts, such as looking at, speaking to, or sitting next to another woman, to more obvious acts such as "cheating" or "disrespecting" were described. Some violence occurs when one woman attempts to break up with her partner. As this woman said:

> *The only fight I had was with a lover. Straight up. With my girlfriend. She was crazy jealous and she had a real bad anger problem.*

One form of jealousy involved third-party interference. Other women who are believed to be coming between the two partners are at risk for violence. Part of this jealousy was cast as "disrespect," a primary force in much prison violence for both women and men. Women, we were told, feel disrespected when a third party interferes with her relationships, especially with a romantic partner. The interference could be imagined, or it could be unintentional. In any case, the violation is perceived as "disrespect" and the consequences can be dangerous as shown in these comments from several study sites:

> *It goes down to respect with the girlfriend. Some girl is messing with your girlfriend behind your back. She is stepping on your toes. She knows me and you are together. Don't come between us! I'm more mad at the other woman because she knows that you are mine. You are gonna get yours after.*

> *It's not the relationships. It's people getting in the middle of relationships.*

> *They will disrespect your relationship or whatever. They flirt with your girlfriend and that is disrespect. There is a lot of drama behind women; we are all just full of drama.*

> *Prison is all about respect. Sometimes lovers want to be sneaky. That's really pissed me off. If you disrespect me, I'll kill you.*

## RELATIONSHIPS AND ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

One of the complications of understanding violence and coercion in women's prisons and jails concerns the connection between romantic relationships and economic resources. This interconnection points to the importance of understanding the overall context of violence and conflict rather than focusing on any single component in isolation. Women may enter into a romantic or sexual relationship in order to gain access to the economic resources of another. One woman may be "talked into" or coerced to enter into the relationship by a woman with no resources; or the two may be in the relationship freely – one obtaining needed goods, and the other obtaining needed intimacy. Here economic exploitation merges with relationship conflict. The direction of these economic and interpersonal relationships was not clear from our data. Some asserted that the woman who had access to resources while incarcerated was a likely target while others felt that someone who was able to purchase friends and sex was the exploiter. Seemingly, both situations occur. The complexity of such relationships, however, makes it difficult to determine the nature and extent of coercion. Staff was aware of these complex dynamics as expressed in these views:

> *I knew one inmate that told me she would trick out [trade sex] for commissary. I would have had no idea unless she told me. So you don't always realize what goes on, even though you work here*.

> *They do it [sexual involvement] because they don't have anything. No money, no commissary, so they do favors for it. The more money an inmate has here, the more girlfriends she has*.

Almost all the women agreed that these exploitative relationships were directly tied to the limited economic opportunity while in custody, as suggested in these two comments:

> *If I know you got money, I gonna let you rub on me because I know jail will not support me. I have no support, and talk crazy and then I am ready to fight you – my girlfriend*.

> *If the system would provide you the appliances like the hotpot, hairdryer, then you wouldn't have to borrow them and make you feel like you owe someone. It would make you feel ok if you had your own. Then you wouldn't feel so handicapped and have sex with this girl just so you could have shampoo or soap.*

Targeting a woman with resources was also described to us:

> *There are some people who they look to see who has money when you are coming from reception. If you have jewelry and money, that is a good person to look at and work. There are people who have that reputation and they are users.*

These exchange relationships can escalate into violence when women who are involved engage in a sequence of them, creating jealousy among the spurned partners.

This quote provides further insight into why a woman would stay in a violent relationship:

> *They are feeding me, and buying me tobacco. Why wouldn't I put up with a little arguing? And some is physical.*

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the role of individual characteristics and the impact of relationships in creating the potential for violence in women's facilities. While such individual characteristics, such as size, age, naivety and the like, were said to increase the risk of victimization, our participants were clear that this risk was increased by behavioral and dynamic characteristics. We found that victimization and exploitation were supported by larger contextual variables. Past victimizations were also seen to contribute to these vulnerabilities with "acting like a victim" being most significant. In the next chapters, we examine how community, facility and staff factors shape this context of conflict, violence and victimization.

# COMMUNITY AND CULTURE 3

In the CDC (2004) ecological model, community-level components follow individual and relational factors. Here we expand this concept of community to examine the cultural, social, and environmental aspects of jails and prisons. We begin by outlining the cultural dimensions of women's institutions, examining the norms and values attached to women's behavior. In focusing on the community aspect of women's lives, we then turn to elements of this environment that surround daily living, particularly those conditions that aggravate or mitigate conflict. We also examine the prison economy and its role in violence and conflict. It is our view that the dynamics of potential violence are structured by place and time via these community and cultural factors.

## PRISON CULTURE AND THE INMATE CODE

Research on prison culture includes a description of the ways in which prisoners define their experience in prison; how they learn to live in prison; how they develop relationships with other prisoners and the staff; and how they change the way they think about themselves and their place within the prison and the free world. We suspect that these varying degrees of attachment to prison life correlate with risks of violence and conflict. The inmate code is a set of norms and values that outline acceptable or unacceptable conduct for prisoners invested in the prison world. One aspect of the prison code involves teaching newcomers, or "youngsters" the rules of prison life, but long-timers told us they often resent have to "school" the ever-increasing number of newcomers. We found that several factors related to these subcultural norms and values contributed to the potential for violence and conflict. As the prison literature indicates, group norms can promote violence in a number of ways. Perhaps one of the most important group contributors to violence is the prison code of "do your own time" and the advice to not get involved when others are victimized. This element of the prison code, the importance of "respect," and the need to react with violence at any sign of disrespect were the primary factors in producing and supporting violence described in the interviews. These elements, in the past, may have been more salient in men's prisons, but we found evidence of their importance today in women's prisons as well.

## COMING TO PRISON

Women entering jail or prison for the first time told us that they initially feared the threat of violence, but most developed strategies to navigate through prison in ways that avoid or minimize the risk of violence and victimization. As we have seen, many individual-level variables contribute to vulnerabilities to violence, such as personal characteristics, risky actions, or entering into difficult relationships. Excepting the rare

random event, the wide majority of the focus group participants agreed that "women put themselves" in situations that turn violent; again pointing to the dynamic and perhaps unpredictable, nature of these events.

Women entering prison typically pass through some form of a reception center where they are isolated from the general population for a period of days, weeks, or months, depending on policy and conditions of the system. Once processed through the reception center, women entering the general population have much to learn as they begin their sentences: the facility layout, institutional rules, and schedules, as well as the inmate norms, values and traditions. Some formal and informal rules may differ across housing units in the same facility. Women who have been in prison previously have some advantage over first timers. Those entering prison for the first time, however, may have some prior knowledge about doing time if they have had numerous jail terms, or have friends or family who have done time. Women without this cultural capital, such as first timers, who have spent relatively short periods in jail before they arrived, and who enter higher security rather that minimum security facilities, can be aliens in a strange world. Once they begin to adjust to this new world, most women told us that prison was not as bad as their worst fears, as described by this newcomer:

> *I was afraid of sexual violence before I got to prison. But when I got here I saw that it was different because no one bothered me. Yeah, I think I was watching too many movies before I came here or something because it was different than what I saw in the movies.*

Over time, women explained to us, almost all newcomers adjust. One woman described this socialization process as adaptation:

> *I think that it [becoming comfortable in prison] is an adaptation to our environment. It is the social graces and if you don't adapt, you don't make it. It is survival. You see women that are depressed all the time and they are more introspective. And I get out there and I don't even like all people, but we are social beings. We say "Hi. How are you? And we all have to stand up to the officers at some time, and it becomes a community and an identity of self. And now it is your barrio, your area, your neighborhood.*

This idea of neighborhood became important in our analysis in two ways. First, as we outline in this chapter, place has significance in that the individual and dynamic factors at all levels merge to create the climate for violence and conflict. Second, the notion of place led us to our sampling strategy and instrument development for the next measurement phase of the project, as described in great detail in Part III of this report.

## LEARNING HOW TO DO TIME

Women learn "how to do their time" through several channels. Sometimes they learn from other women, such as those they met in county jail or those they knew "on the streets." Or, as one woman said, "Sometimes you get an old timer who wants to take a youngster under their wing. I've had a couple of people who took me under their wing." Others say that they learned by "watching" or observing what to do and not to do.

Just as in the outside community, neighbors in the prison community sometimes have problems getting along. These problems range from small conflicts and short-tempered exchanges, to shouting threats and sometimes overt violent acts. Some respondents suggested that differing cultural and educational backgrounds contribute to the problem. Communication conflicts in the living units, specifically rooms or cells, were key to these problems. These conflicts included disputes about levels of cleanliness and neatness, disagreements over material goods, misunderstandings about the intent of a statement, and concerns about "snitching." Learning how to negotiate conflict with other inmates is an important part of learning to do time and protecting oneself from potential violence, as suggested in this statement:

> *To protect yourself, it is all in the way you go to them [other inmates]. It's all in the way you talk. If you say, "Excuse me, can I talk to you?" If you approach them and are respectful, it is better. Also, take them away from their audience, outside.*

Some of our participants described their approach to staying out of trouble as a negotiation rather than a threat, as in this example:

> *When the negativity is coming my way, I flips it in a decent way. I give them a way and come out with a game and by the time it is over, they know I am done. You don't have to be all big and bad to keep yourself out of a lot of mess.*

Typically, women learn how to do time by finding out and following the informal rules that shape the inmate code of behavior. Most women agreed that it is better to "school" a newcomer on the rules than to argue or fight about them. After all, one respondent said, "it is only common courtesy" to tell someone the rules. She continued in saying:

> *Let them know the do's and the don'ts. If you have to ask about something, ask someone in your cell, not someone who does not live in this cell.*

Inmates are sometimes told by long-termers how to stay out of trouble, as one woman reflected about being "schooled":

> *She told me, mind your own business, don't use drugs, don't let anyone offer you anything. If they offer you something and they are friendly, there are ulterior motives. Stay out of the mix.*

Some of our participants suggested that newcomers should look to the old-timers for advice on how to do time, but also said "not all listen." This woman described a common situation where "youngsters" refused to learn how to do their time without trouble:

> *Be observant of the people. There is a lot of manipulation. You are new and you don't know what prison life is around. I been here 10-15 years. I know the system. I know how to use you to get what I want. You are not aware of the manipulation. You are just lost.*

> *Sometimes you wind up going to medium custody, close custody over it. Somebody might have led you to believe that you could do this and get away with it. I give you this and tell you that it's ok, and then when you get caught, I'm going to turn my back on you and you're the one who gets written up. I tell them, "Be observant of the people you are associating with. Observe how they treat people they are with. Are they respectful? Are they treating them right?" That's the ones you pick up on.*

> *Say, she goes by rules and regulations [gestures to her neighbor]. I want to hang around with her. If you get with someone that gets case after case after case, then [you're going to get in trouble]. There's a world out there! I want to be in it. So you need to get an education, do something to better yourself. They have college classes, bible classes. There are all kinds of things here.*

At times, violations of prison etiquette occur because the newcomer doesn't know any better. Most women were willing to give newcomers the benefit of the doubt when they did things without "knowing any better." One woman said, Sometimes there are mistakes that happen so you do have to give the newcomers a chance."

Some of the rules mentioned by our participants are standard precepts of the prison code, such as "do not snitch" and "don't ask about offenses," while others can be thought of as etiquette or courtesy among women forced to live in crowded conditions with others not of their own choosing. These informal rules might include the time when it is expected you will be quiet because others are sleeping, how to make the bed in a specific way, or even spitting in the toilet instead of the sink while brushing teeth.

"Running the room" is another significant source of conflict. Bullying", "controlling" and generally setting standards according to personal preference was said to occur frequently, as one woman commented:

> *You get a lot that want to run the blocks. There is always a certain inmate that wants to run the block.*

Expecting others to conform to the dominant person's schedule was also described:

> *There was a lady in the bunk above me. When she would go to sleep, she thought that I needed to go to sleep, too. And she went to sleep real early. We got into it and started fighting. It was a whole big thing that could have been avoided*.

In rooms or housing areas where one woman "takes over", the dominant inmate enforces very specific rules. We were told about some inmates who enforce extreme rules, which forced their roommates to bend to their will, as suggested in this remark:

> *There are types that won't let you come in the room all day long. They get the type of people that they can prey on. They can't use the bathroom [in the room]. They have to use the one in the day room. They would get socked if they turn the water on too loud. They get slapped in the head for sitting on the chair. They can't shower until a certain time. Or they have to pay to stay in the room. I don't like that.*

## CLEANLINESS

Cleanliness and tidiness in the ever increasing crowded conditions of the contemporary prison are chief among these rules of prison etiquette. Almost every focus group interview stressed the critical importance of keeping the cell or room neat as well as personal cleanliness and hygiene. Many conflicts began as a dispute over interpersonal or room cleanliness. Women view those who do not maintain their living quarters as "disrespecting" their cellmates or dorm-mates, as expressed in these comments from various study sites:

> *You have a lot of fights because you have nasty roommates. They're on their cycle and they don't wipe the toilet seat.*
>
> *I think that disrespect could be a smell too. This chick was in our pod and she wouldn't shower and she smelled and then she was farting and it was stinking up the whole pod.*
>
> *They have poor mouth hygiene and they pick up your cup and drink out of it*.

One woman described her approach to addressing this problem by saying:

> *If I live with a woman and she is really stinky, I mean, really, really bad, you go to her nicely and you ask her to wash her ass. If she don't, you eventually want to roll her up in a mattress and all of us will put her in the shower. Then we get in trouble*.

Staff, it was often reported, can ask one inmate to educate another on the importance of cleanliness:

> *We feel violent because there is an environmental cleanliness issue with different people, but then there is one more issue here. The staff will say, "Hey, you are a long-termer. Get her [new inmate] to clean." So now I have to choose to get her to clean, or just put myself in a problem situation. This elevates the tension*.

Part of the reason there is such an emphasis on cleanliness is that women are quite fearful of contracting a disease or infection in prison. This fear is exacerbated by the pervasive feeling that medical care in prison is inadequate, as shown here:

> *I think this is such a big deal because medical doesn't take care of your problems. And it is important about the hepatitis. And this worries us because medical don't take care of us as best as they could.*

## THE MIX

Owen's (1998) ethnography detailed the subculture in women's prison characterized by homosexuality, drugs, and gossip. A key element in surviving prison life is negotiating an aspect of prison culture known as "the mix." In its shortest definition, the mix is a part of prison culture that can bring trouble and conflict with staff and other prisoners. The mix is the "fast life" or "la vida loca," the crazy life, lived while "running the yard" in prison. Becoming involved with the mix can lead to violating the prison's formal rules, developing negative relationships with other prisoners leading

to fights and generally getting in trouble while in prison. A variety of behaviors can put one in the mix: issues such as same-sex relationships, known as "homo-secting" in many systems, involvement in drugs, fights, and "being messy," which means making trouble for yourself and others.

For the vast majority of the women in prison, "the mix" is generally something to be avoided. Most women want to stay out of trouble and do their time in their own way. Most women want to serve their sentences, survive the mix, and return to society, resuming their lives in the free community. This concept of "the mix" remains salient as an explanation of violence and conflict, as illustrated in these comments drawn from three different sites:

> *I think that if you were in the mix, you will find trouble*.
>
> *The only violence that I see is people that get in the mix*.
>
> *Back on that unit, people would say, "You're in my business" and cut her. Or somebody sets you up and someone says you did it and you end up having a scar behind it but you didn't do it. But you're in the mix and it happens*.

Lifers and women who had already served very long sentences were especially likely to say they had gotten out of the mix. Partly because of "aging out," they also were keenly aware that they were running out of chances to ever have a life outside of prison. However, to survive in prison and maintain their sense of self and safety, this group of women also indicated they must be ready to protect themselves, even if it means new charges, as illustrated in this exchange:

Inmate 1: *You can say anything you want. It will bounce off me and that is it. But if you put your hands on me, I will fight for my life. That is just how I am and is how I have become in here. One act of violence and it is over for us lifers. We will have no chance of getting a date [parole].*

Inmate 2: *Sometimes we are tired, but we get to a point that it builds in my mind. It gets kind of dangerous in there [her mind] because of things we have worked for and then it could be over with one little fight. I got into a little thing a few years ago. I lost my lid, but I was lucky it didn't get caught.*

Inmate 1: *I just don't know what is going to go on. If I have to fight with you, it goes on to the point that it is physical. If I have to fear for my life, I will try to kill you. If I have to die in prison, so will you.*

Inmate 2: *I can understand and relate to all of what she is saying. Our life is so vulnerable because we are lifers and we think, "Fuck!" We have been here too long, watching family members die on the outside. If you are going to fight and hurt me, we are going to get a write up. I am going to make it worth it for me. It is not that we are violent. If we step out of this prison, we are not coming back. But we have to survive here.*

## ADVICE

When we asked both staff and inmate focus group participants what kind of advice they would give to women about keeping safe and avoiding violence, we received very similar replies in the jail and prison study sites. Advice included:

- Relationship factors, such as
  - Avoid damaging or violent relationships
  - Do not mess with anyone's girlfriend

- Economic factors, such as
  - Avoid economic risks such as debt
  - Do not loan or borrow items
  - Avoid conspicuous consumption

- Programming factors, such as
  - Program with others who are motivated to "stay positive"
  - Develop goals

- Prison culture factors, such as
  - Stay "out of the mix" (homosexuality, gambling and drug use)
  - Stay to yourself
  - Don't tell others your business
  - Watch the company you keep and don't get in the wrong group
  - Stay in your room
  - Stay off the yard
  - Avoid "messy" women
  - Avoid drug activities
  - Stay out of the gangs
  - Don't let anyone see you cry
  - Keep out of the politics
  - Don't talk about your case (offense)
  - Believe in yourself
  - Don't have an attitude
  - Stand your ground
  - Keep your family issues private
  - Learn how to say no
  - Be clean
  - Clean your room

One custody staff member at a very large prison for women said he gave women this advice:

> *Do not involve yourself in any type of relationship here because most of our problems are from relationships. Do not borrow or lend or steal anything. Do not tell anyone the amount of money you have on the books. Stay out of the mix.*
>
> *Do positive programming. Go to AA, NA. Get some education. The state provides tons of education. There is work. There is church. There are all venues of positive extracurricular activities. They need to utilize what the state has provided.*

In the same prison, one inmate said that a specific staff person "told us a few things" when she came in:

> *He told us, "Make sure to keep your room clean. Keep it safe. Respect other persons in the room. Go to school; program; find something to do.*
>
> *He also said, "Don't do no snitches. Don't be trying to get in a relationship with anybody. Mind your own business." I took his words to heart.*

## NORMS

We also learned that several prison norms applied to prison violence: "being messy", targeting certain offenses, "doing your own time", "snitching", and socialized violence. The slang word "messy," like the term "the mix," transcended state borders. Being "messy" refers to stirring up trouble by gossiping, telling stories about others and generally playing "he said, she said." Being "messy" can also be a form of violating the "mind your own business" normative construct. Often this information exchange is based on hearsay or may be intentionally designed to cause conflict. Inmates talked about officers as well as other inmates as being "messy." This messiness was considered a very common cause of violence because either the story itself would cause someone to attack the woman who is being talked about, or the target of the talk would come back and punish the person being "messy." These examples convey the impact of being messy:

> *What normally instigates things in prison is "he say, she say" things. People getting into each other's business.*
>
> *That is going to get her pissed off and start a big ol' fight. It's not safe at all to tell people's business.*
>
> *They should not go around saying stuff and I know they do it. They do it to get shit started.*

It is important to note that inmates also described officers as "messy," meaning that they talked about inmates to other inmates. "Messy" officers contributed to potential violence in two ways: First, inmates felt that this type of behavior instigated conflict among the inmates, often for the amusement of staff. Second, "messy" officers inhibited reporting victimization because many inmates felt that these reports would

"get back" to the person they were reporting. Here we provide some examples of "messy staff":

> *These officers are real messy. If you say something about the other offender they will go to the other offender and say, "Hey, so-and-so said." That is unprofessional*.

> *It is not only the inmates making the violence; it is also the staff. They put us in the crosses.*[3] *Like, if you go to a staff, and tell them someone is going to beat me up and all that, or that you are going to be victimized.*

> *After you are done, they [the staff member] would pull in the inmate you are complaining about and say, "Oh, so-and-so is snitching on you." Right there now, you are in the crosses and are about to get beat up. This is the violence.*

Another subcultural norm that promotes violence is the stigmatization of certain types of crimes. While women do not seem to express the same degree of scorn and hatred toward certain crimes as men, there is antipathy and potential violence toward those whose crimes involved victimizing children. In men's prisons, it is well known that child molesters and those who injure children encounter a form of extra-legal punishment in prison when they are targeted for victimization because of their crimes. In women's prisons, we found similar reactions. As one participant said, these offenses included "child abuse, child neglect. It is just like with the men." We also heard discussions that tied "missing our kids" to these strong feelings against those who had "child cases." Some women mentioned that these "child cases" were likely to increase vulnerability for victimization, as shown here:

> *Just like the inmate that killed her kid. She is going to get her ass beat.*

The norms, "do your own time" and "mind your own business**,**" support the practice of non-intervention in conflicts among other inmates. The socialized value of "mind your own business," also includes an element of self protection.

Another aspect of this adaptation is the norm of "mind your own business," which includes an element of self protection as suggested here:

> *This is our life until whatever day we go home. If I got scared or I broke down every time someone got in a fight, I would be a nut case. You don't think about it. It is not you and you're safe, so who cares?*

We learned that women in prison will not intervene in relationship violence, and, only rarely get involved in any other form of violent victimization. We learned that to help another may put oneself in peril. Or, if it is violence between partners, there is the belief (and probable reality) that those in conflict will band together against the woman who intervenes. Some exceptions to the non-intervention norm were found when there is a personal connection, as shown in these two comments:

> *Unless it is someone you care about, you really don't get involved. The next day they make up and then they are both mad at you*.

[3] Meaning subject to attack from both sides (i.e., staff and inmates), as caught in the "crossfire" between two opposing military forces.

> *Recently, I stopped a fight in a room because it is two people who I know and I care about them. I held one of them back. But, the first time I didn't because I didn't know them. You just don't know. Once it escalated and it wasn't going to stop, you had to pull them off.*

In responding to a question about intervening in intimate partner violence, one woman said:

> *No, because she'll say, "That's my woman." And it was her thing, her issue to deal with. But I have said something. I would ask the girl if she wants me to, and then I would say something to the girl. She told me to mind my own business. Then I said to the officer about what was happening. And the girl and I almost got in a fight about it, but I didn't care. I could take care of myself.*

This remark, however, represented the opposite view:

> *I would never tell, but I would intervene. I would pull the girl off of her. I would want someone to help me. Maybe I'm trying to repent and pay back, I just feel guilty now that I'm here. I think about what I did. I feel guilty and I want to do something to help others.*

While women were often reluctant to "get in anyone's business," they would often intervene in situations where staff wronged another inmate. Inmates were very clear that "speaking on" staff behavior was very different than intervening in inmate related behavior:

> *I think it's at the level that we get so tired, that we get so abused, mentally, emotionally, verbally, and then all of a sudden that dorm may get to the level that we are not going to let [staff] do her wrong. That's when the aggression will come out. That was a good moment, but at another time, they would say we was inciting a riot. All the rank come running up, but we was just speaking on behavior of [the staff].*

Much of the literature on women's prison subculture indicates a lack of strong sanctions against snitching in women's prisons as that opposed to what occurs in men's prisons. That is not to say, however, that snitching or reporting someone's actions to authorities does not result in retaliation by some individuals. For this reason, snitching was mentioned as a cause of fights and other violence. Many, but not all, women also saw that this rule against telling also decreased the likelihood of coming forward if they saw a fight or knew someone was going to get assaulted. This comment from a female participant described a common reaction to snitching:

> *I fought them because they snitched on me in county jail. I hate snitches--people telling your business. Just the first opportunity I had to get to them, I would.* [In answer to a question about whether it was in front of officers] *Sure, why wait? What can they do to me? They [COs] threw me against the wall. It does not matter what I do or don't do. I did not care. I was coming to prison anyway.*

We found that, unless there was serious injury or staff members intervened, neither the victims nor the observers, tended to report physical or sexual attacks or other violence to correctional staff. There remains a stigma attached to the "snitch" and

most victims will not come forward, as suggested in these three examples from different facilities:

> [After describing a sexual assault]…*she told her if she went out and told, she would get whooped on again. We didn't want to be in the middle of that. We didn't want the police to have to ask us what happened so all of us who saw just left.*
>
> *Most of the girls aren't going to speak up about it [assault]. There is no proof and they are not going to speak up. Ninety-nine percent of the people are not going to say anything.*
>
> *It is not because you are signing up for the abuse, but you are trapped. I was just in a situation like that. I am not going to run to the police. I do not want a snitch jacket because I don't want to get in trouble. Snitch jackets are not a nice thing to wear here. So you have to endure and accept the abuse until this girl goes home*.

Staff, too, were said to adhere to the norm against snitching. In one facility, women in a therapeutic program reported that officers called them snitches when they participated in the program because:

> *We hold our sisters accountable, but the [officers] tell us we are breaking the [informal] rules and call us snitches. Officers call us snitches and we have dealt with it [snitching] all of our lives. We were raised not to snitch*.

In the quote below, the custody staff member commented on this:

> *Women come running up and tell you that someone is getting into a fight. The men don't do this. The women tattle on each other and I'm not used to this.*

It is highly likely that the woman who tried to report a fight and potential injury to this officer would receive a response that would not encourage her to do it again.

Snitching contributes to violence in three ways. First, someone who snitches may be physically assaulted as a form of retaliation. Second, aggressors are freer to target victims because the group norm against "snitching" supports such reaction and prohibits intervention. Third, with the prohibition against seeking safety by asking staff for help, women may address threats to safety with pre-emptive violence.

It became apparent in our focus groups that, for some women, violence was not feared or something to be avoided. Although most women told us they avoided violence and its consequences, others described their normative support for this behavior. For some women, violence was an expected way of life, both inside and outside prisons and jails. One woman told us that she has become so used to the prison environment, where violence is an accepted and expected element, that a non-violent living unit would be confusing to her:

> *This is our survival. I have been down so many years that if someone touches me, I am going to go off. There is always violence unless you are going to the convalescent home or the honor dorm.*

> *I know how to live around the violence [in this unit] but there I would not know how to react. Here, I know if someone dropped dead, I am going to step over the body and then move on. Maybe there [in the other unit], they are going to try to patch them up and I wouldn't know how to do that.*

In some of the focus groups, participants said they were quick to use violence and believed that it was the only acceptable response for a range of perceived or real wrongs. In some interviews, it appeared that the inmates seemed to enjoy talking about it. Perhaps this was a form of "grandstanding" or showing off in front of others in the group interviews, but in some study sites, questions about violence often triggered laughter; even when they were describing a serious violent incident. Our sampling strategy that purposively selected women in higher custody levels and long-termers may also account for this higher acceptance of violence.

Many women described their own involvement with violence as the aggressor, as in this example:

> *Once you hit me, I'll pretty much hit you back. That is how I was raised*.

Another woman announced her propensity for violence by saying:

> *I like the fists connecting. I would get off on that. If it hurt a little bit, I liked it. It was a part of my addiction to violence. I think that it is part of my maturing or whatever. I am now a different person*.

In the following quotes, it is important to note that the stories were humorous to both the woman telling the story and the inmates who listened to it. The violence or potential violence in this story was not abhorred, feared, or considered abnormal:

> *I put two roommates out. One of them was dirty and one of them wanted my cat [sex] so I put him out. I used to participate in homosexuality, but it don't work for me because it makes me violent. I used to have this friend, but she would aggravate me because I am good as gold but I get aggravated. One day she say something real smart and I would turn around and hit her. It got so I needed to leave her alone because I would kill her. Then there was the other roommate. This roommate would eat blades, swallow tweezers, she would bite, throw blood up all over my bed. So I had to whup her up a little bit.* [Laughter]

In describing a "set up" so a cellmate could get off the unit via a medical transfer, one woman said:

> *A person told me to break her finger, so I did it. When I heard it crack, I got sick. But she asked me to do it. Then after I did it, she said, "You is really my friend!"* [Laughter]

In the following narrative, the woman is describing an incident where she retaliated against a woman who would not pay her for braiding her hair. The storyteller treated her story, which was quite violent, as a joke, laughing about the injury she inflicted on the other inmate. To her, the only response available to her for non-payment was fighting:

> *We was in the day room eating and I dumped my tray and hit her two times. And she just went down [*laughter*]. She went to a seizure. The sarge came and talked to me and he said, "You knocked her out?" And I said, "I didn't mean to but she didn't give me her money."* [Laughter] *But it went so smooth when it happened. I was already at my door when she went down. So the sarge said, "You knocked her out," and asked why, and I said "Two dollars." But I hurt my hand.* [Laughter]

The women participants acknowledged that such violence had consequences. Some inmates were more worried about "losing their date" by fighting than experiencing the fight itself. Other inmates resented the fact that officers wrote them up for fighting; which seemed inconsistent with their complaints that officers would not protect them from aggressors. These comments support this contention:

> *When I got here I was afraid of fighting and losing my date. I am afraid of having to fight her here and losing my date. So, yes, I am scared of her*.

In this example, staff reaction to fights was recounted:

> *If you fight, 7 out of 10 times, they're going to be OK. They are roommates. They are drama. If you fight here, staff want to body slam us. They want to take [our classification status]. Sometimes at [another facility], you can have a fight and you go right back to your dorm. On other units, [staff] let you fight. If they can see you're not trying to harm the other woman, they don't even do use of force.*

## GANGS AND RACE

In men's prisons, gangs are frequently mentioned as a primary source of prison violence. In this study, we received mixed reports about the contribution of such factors to the potential for violence and conflict. This inmate comment represented the view that individual relationships are more important than gang influences:

> *I think that women are different than men because men are, like, "We belong to this gang so we are not going to associate with you." But I may belong to this gang and you may belong to this gang, but if I get angry with you, then I'm angry with you [not your gang].*

However, the aggressive behavior of "youngsters" was frequently said to be related to gang activity in many places. Staff members were likely to mention gangs as a cause of violence, as suggested in these remarks:

> *They might not come in with a gang affiliation. Or they might have one and they might not have exercised that here yet [meaning they don't show it early]. It [the gang behavior] is not as bad as in the male institution, but now they come in with the swagger, they shave their heads and look and act like men.*

> *Now the younger women have stronger gang ties. The violence is [increasing]. Now more than ever before, you have a gang presence. It is all about getting what they can get when they can get it.*

> *They say we don't have gang activity but I do not agree with that. They may not be as organized or go under the title of gang, but they are out there. There are some groups that have friction between themselves or with other inmates [from a specific region]. There are some inmates that have run with some gang on the street that clique up here.*
>
> *Things have changed with females. There are all female gangs now. They have to keep their mouth shut about being in a gang so that they can successfully transport information. If we know, we watch them, so they don't hurt us, but there is a higher percentage than we think.*

Inmates offered similar observations:

> *They [gang members] are a danger to each other. The alcohol, the gangs, if we don't put ourselves into those behaviors, we are pretty safe here from it*.
>
> *There is a new breed of youngster. They are gang banging. If we [long-term inmates] get in a fight, we quit because we make our point or we get tired because we are old. With the kids, they will "get them down and keep them down." With us, it was one on one. Now it is a bunch of them.*
>
> *A lot of youngsters are gang bangers. They act all bad. There are a lot in gangs on the street and they come in here with the same attitude. Older ones are more laid back. You don't see it as much, not out in the open, not trying to prove a point. Half the time I don't know the older ones who are like that. You can tell the younger ones by the way they carry themselves.*

This older lifer suggested that those in gangs were somewhat more vulnerable to violence because of their gang membership, as shown here:

> *One of my roommates was a gang member from the time she was a very young girl. This is the only instance I have observed this. Young gang members are very vulnerable to violence among themselves. I think that gangs are strikingly similar to cults. I would like to see more education about these groups because these women don't know what the hell they are in.*
>
> *There are women who are 60 years old that are still active gang members and it is one of the most dangerous things in this prison. I didn't understand the danger to her or danger to others 'till I had this interaction with the younger girl I just mentioned.*

Both staff and inmates agreed that gang affiliation was often related to male partners, as suggested by this non-custody staff member:

> *Usually they are not in gangs themselves, it is their boyfriends or brothers that are in the gang. But as far as gang violence, I don't see the paper work for it. I don't see the gang violence here. They don't segregate based on prison gangs here.*

Others said that "territory" and "where they are from" had a greater influence than gang membership on potential conflict. Staff and inmates both claimed that one's home neighborhood had more to do with affiliations inside than any formal gangs or

other ethnic or racial groupings. The term "crew" was also said to be more appropriate than "gang" when discussing women's group affiliations.

There is an element of racial tension in women's prisons, but by no means to the same degree as in prisons for men. Our focus groups were almost always composed of mixed races. We do recognize the possibility that the sensitivities surrounding race may have dampened this discussion in the focus groups. This comment represents one perspective on race and ethnicity found in the interviews with women inmates:

> *I am aware of a black gang thing. I ran into it yesterday with some of the behavior that they think is big and bad. But we don't hear about the BGF [Black Guerilla Family] and all that. Women's affiliations are different. Their guidelines are different*.

This jail participant noted:

> *I came from a very, very racial town. A lot of fights that was there [in the jail] was behind the color of someone's skin. That was in 2002. A lot of the women's state of mind was if you weren't white, you weren't right. I saw a lot of violence against offenders because of the color of their skin.*

This account by a black woman illustrated the dynamics of these racial conflicts:

> *One fight I got into was with this white girl. At first, we were kind of close. We shared. She was a Featherwood, you know part of the Aryan circle. She explained to me they weren't prejudiced, they were just down for themselves. Down for their people; not against any certain race. I can understand being down for your color because I am. We never really talked about it. One day these other Aryans moved in. I was going to do her hair, braid her hair, and she wanted to pay, but I said no. This one time she got crunk on me because I was going to do [braid] another girl's hair first. She started screaming. I jumped up and got in her face. She said I was a black nigger and she did not want me to touch her hair. I punched her in the mouth. She was bigger than me. They said I was the aggressor.*

## THE PRISON ECONOMY

Like every social system, jails and prisons have their own specific economies. For women offenders, this economy takes the shape of providing services, hustling, dealing in contraband, loaning items and other forms of "trafficking and trading." The inequality among the "haves" and the "have-nots" creates a climate for potential economic crimes in the same way they do on the outside: There is theft, fraud, and extortion among the offenders. These comments describe theft and extortion:

> *You have someone who says, "Ooh, I'd like to see that ring." And you take it off. You take it off and then they say that it is theirs. You are jacked. They punk you for your wedding ring, your gold, your jewelry. "Punk, take off your ring. I like it." You take it off and now it is mine.*

A custody staff member described his observations on extortion:

> *Her deal was that she was very masculine. She had one particular girlfriend, a feminine girl. When new inmates came in, they did not know who was coupled with who. The girlfriend would buddy up to the new girl and they would become a couple. She would get commissary from the new girl, you know, trafficking and trading. As soon as the new girl was under her control, she would bring the masculine friend in. They both would extort her for commissary and threaten her with violence.*

A staff participant provided another account of an attempted extortion:

> *One old lady, this was her first time in. They tried it with her, but it did not work. They got tired of it not working, so the masculine went into another housing unit, got her in the shower, got a hold of her, and said, "You are giving me commissary, bitch!" and the lady said, "No, I'm not. My money is my money and I don't believe in the gay lifestyle." She had a lot of guts. They had her pinned up against the wall, but the other offenders came in, and surrounded them to protect the older offender.*

Fraud and con-games are other ways of getting desired goods and services as outlined here:

> *But you know there's lots of criminals here and, well, you got people who want what you have, and con you out of it. Then that brings violence*.

The extortion process was also said to be more subtle, as suggested in this comment:

> *Of course, it's not like "Give me that or I'm going to beat you up." It's more like you befriend someone because they have money. Everyone is going to test to see. If I'm broke and don't have anything, I'm going to test it out and see if I can get you to give me something. Sometimes you can get their whole [amount].*

Many women explained that they would help out another inmate who had no supplies coming into the jail or prison, as suggested here:

> *Back in the day, we used to just put stuff in people's houses [cells] because she didn't have anything. Now we can't because people will lie and say so-and-so is doing this and officers will add to it and then you've got a case.*

In several cases, however, participants explained how being generous can result in violence, as seen in these comments from three women:

> *I told you the incident where I went to Seg over the girl. I was paying her to wash clothes. Because I went to the store well, I would give her more than the going rating. I would give her $10 when it was $5. Plus it was the holiday and so I would give her a little more. So the officer took her stuff [confiscated it] and she felt like I had to repay her what she lost. So we started arguing. Once I give it to her, that's on her. You give it and turn your back, you deal with it. [Goes on to explain she didn't feel she owed her anything more and so they argued and fought.]*

> *The state don't give you anything but 5 bars of soap or whatever. We are females. We need things. And so someone will go buy toothpaste, shampoo, whatever, and give it to another person, trying to be nice. So then someone says you're doing it to the officer, and then someone else says I know who told on you [and then there's a fight].*
>
> *Some people will come up to you and ask for something, and so you give her something. Then she goes to others and says, "Go to her. She'll give it to you." But then you say, "No," and they get mad. Then you've got people mad at you.*

**Debts**

In every study site, debts were said to be a common cause of violence. Debts can occur as a result of non-payment after receiving services, such as braiding hair, cleaning a room, getting ice or laundry, or over commissary items. Those based on owing for contraband, such as tobacco and drug debts, were cited as the most serious and common form of indebtedness. In places that had more recently banned tobacco, it appeared to be a significant problem and was mentioned by both inmates and staff in those facilities as a cause of violence due to debts or theft. These comments convey this point:

> *The going price for a can of tobacco is $500. Or she can give me a couple of $100 bills. There is no more cocaine or heroin, it's all tobacco. They fired a whole crew of administration workers for it. It's tobacco.*
>
> *There is a lot of violence over a $100 pack of cigarettes. There is a lot of, "bitch, give me back my money for that cigarette or I am going to kick your ass."*
>
> *There are more debts because of the tobacco. On the streets, you have the opportunity to get the drugs, to make the money for the drugs. When you come here, you cannot make that money so you don't do the drugs. But tobacco is a whole 'nother thing. Just like the drugs, it is the chase, the excitement, and the adrenaline – the whole thing. Women who would not have chased the drugs will do anything to get the tobacco.*

In addition to tobacco, other types of debts could cause violence. This comment provided detail on the connection between debts and violence:

> *Debts. That is my opinion as to what causes violence..It [a fight] was supposed to be over $4.00. This girl got hurt bad over that much.*

Debts become serious quickly because of interest that accumulates because:

> *If an inmate can't pay when it is due, debt doubles – there is interest or penalties. There is a domino effect. One debt starts another debt.*

Custody and non-custody staff identified debts and theft as one of the most common reasons for violence:

> *Drug debts and tobacco debts are driving them [inmates] crazy right now. Tobacco is easy to get in here – the availability varies. It is all about getting what they can get when they can get it.*

## LONG-TERMERS AND SHORT-TERMERS

In addition to the cultural and economic factors described above, the prison community is made up of women whose sentences range from very short terms to those who live in prison for decades. Almost all facilities in this investigation housed women of all security levels and sentence lengths together. It was clear to us that housing these groups of women with different time to serve can cause tension. Each side of this chronological divide sees the other from their own perspective on "going home." The short-termers define the lifers as both more likely to be calm and more likely to be aggressive. There was some agreement that the prison is "their house" and they have "something more coming" because lifers and other long-terms have been and will be at the prison for much longer than the short-termers. The nature of this conflict was recounted in this comment:

> *I feel some women have contempt for lifers. It is almost a subculture of short-termers against lifers. I think it is from some of the unfortunate attitudes of some of the lifers, "wanting it my way. "*
>
> *The women who are long-termers and lifers, [have staff] look out for them [more] than those who are there for a short amount of time. That is my opinion. That is understandable and they are going to be there for the rest of their lives. They see favoritism with them because they know them for a long amount of time.*

In some systems, long-termers have less access to programming opportunities than short-termers and this, too, may create conflict among the two groups. Among the long-termers, there is some resentment of the short-termers because "they get to go home" while the long-termers will not in the near future.

Release dates can contribute to the dynamics of prison and jail violence. We heard about the phenomenon of "short and shitty" in many interviews, which means becoming more volatile and short-tempered as one's release date nears. As this general population woman inmate observed:

> *If they are getting closer to getting out, the tempers are short. They get short and shitty. They are getting real attitudes and real antsy, and I try to ignore it. When they are getting close to parole, they are scared and don't want to get out there. Maybe have to take care of their kids, answer to a job, pay their bills. They do something in here to get time added.*

At the same time, however, "being short" made women vulnerable. We were told that some women who do not have a release date in sight may try to "take your date" out of jealousy or despair. As one woman said, "there is a lot of fear of going back home." Keeping "your date quiet" was one lesson this short-termer learned:

> *I was in a dorm with a woman doing 99 years. To her, anyone who had little time she was negative to because she had a long time. I kind of feel sorry for them. Lately, they are so overcrowded, so they put short-timers and long-timers together. It's dangerous.*

*I was waiting to hear if I would be released soon and was excited about it. Someone said to me to be quiet because there is a long-timer here and she might flip out if she hears me.*

*That's why they tell you not to tell anyone that you made parole. They say, "How's it going to make you feel if you see some woman get parole the first time and you've been sitting here for five years?" It makes you miserable and hateful. Even your closest friend doesn't want you to leave. The short-timers get told, "Don't get hooked up with lifers because they will take your date." If you get hooked up with the wrong group, they will snatch your time and take your out-date and that type of thing*.

## LIVING WITH PARTNERS

Another source of conflict in this community involved desires to live with one's partner. Given the primacy of relationships in this world, living with one's partner becomes a focal point as well. Women request housing changes to escape potential victimization, but, perhaps just as often, to be housed with a friend or intimate partner. On the one hand, some women told us that intimate partner violence occurred because the partners weren't together, as suggested here:

*In my life, there has been less violence when couples are together and not about worrying about who's out there seeing somebody, being with somebody*. *Homosexuality is where all the violence is, but that's because, as lovers, we've been locked up away from each other. Yes, there are lovers now who be cutting up each other. Oh my God, they do. But they didn't do that before. Most of the women here have been locked up for 20 years and they didn't do that then.*

On the other hand, living with an intimate partner did not solve the intense relational conflicts that comprise the most common and most serious violence in women's correctional facilities. Housing together romantic partners who consistently engaged in violence created the potential for on-going intimate violence. This narrative describes an extreme case of violence that was the result of a relationship:

*Well, look at the girl who just got killed. It was her lover. They will put lovers together. So they put them together to avoid trouble and so look what happened. What's to say that that is not trouble? She slit her throat and hung her because she was with another girl in another cell. And they had put them together so when she went back that night she killed her. Because they were cellies too.*

*Who's to say that trying to solve one problem ended somebody's life? Is that right that you let lovers live together to avoid the traffic and trading? When lovers aren't together, they wanted to avoid the problems of one girlfriend saying to someone "Give this to my baby in the other dorm." [And that person says],"No, I'm not going to do that for you." [The first woman says], "What you mean, you not? Bitch, you going to do what I say and give this to my girl?"*

*But that's not a good solution. Maybe if they move them off the unit. But you can't keep them separated. In some situations, it pacifies them. But what*

> *happens when one of them gets mad if someone else is looking at her? They create these jealousy scripts in their mind and they go off. Putting them together means you can't get away. They are in the cell together. Not like a dorm where there's people around.*

Staff members tended to believe that women who tell them they are in danger only want to move to be closer to a friend or lover. In many cases, this assumption is correct. We heard about situations where a woman would commit violence to get moved to close custody or segregation when her partner was there. We were also told that some women will report that their cellmate or someone in their dorm had or was going to attack them and they were afraid, hoping to get moved to the desired housing unit. Unfortunately, the result of that, which many women ruefully admitted, was that when a woman truly was in fear of her life, administrators and custody staff did not believe her. This "crying wolf" was described by one inmate who said:

> *Here people are abusing the system to get with or away from their girlfriends. They're using it as a ploy to break up. That's the inmates' fault because so many have used and abused the system. [Several others tried to interrupt and stop her] If they follow through with everything [and] look at who has given many complaints, [they could see who was manipulating], but they don't see it.*

## CONCLUSION

These community components, specifically cultural and economic factors, provide a normative and material framework that shape women's behavior in jails and prison. In a dynamic process, these community components interact with the individual and relationship factors to create a context and climate where both safety and violence are possible. The next chapters describe the effect that facility-level factors and staff behaviors have on this climate.

# FACILITY FACTORS 4

The CDC (2004) model describes the many societal level factors that contribute to the potential for violence and victimization, such as sexism, racism, poverty and larger cultural norms that create and support conflict in the wider society. We focus, at this fourth level, on the facility-related factors that function in a similar way. If we see prison culture and living units as women's neighborhoods, the facility becomes the equivalent of the wider society. When attempting to understand prison violence, we find it helpful to consider the prison as its own society. Here we examine the elements of the institution that lead to greater risk of violence, such as differences among juvenile facilities and adult jails and prisons, reputations of specific housing units, the impact of rules, the effect of crowding, and a range of operational issues.

## EXPERIENCES IN JUVENILE FACILITIES

Although we did not ask specific questions about women's experiences in juvenile facilities, some women discussed their experiences with sexual violence in these institutions. In this interview, the participant seemed to be working through her experience, expressing both positive and negative feelings about the facility staff. She described a traumatic sexual assault in this account of experience in a juvenile facility:

> *It is a really good program and they helped me out. However, there are always some bad eggs anywhere you go. Sexually, I got raped by staff in there a couple of times. I was scared [and] they kept it a secret and they offered me drugs [to keep me quiet].*
>
> *I had bad thinking and waited until I aged out on my 18th birthday and told someone at another facility. Facility investigators came and did an investigation there. I didn't know that it was happening to other girls there. When I came out, 13 others stated that they were raped, too.*
>
> *There, they did not care about male staff and juveniles being together by themselves. That's what happened there. Male staff were allowed to walk females [juveniles] around and take them out by themselves. I am mad about that situation. I don't like it.*
>
> *They should watch who they hire in juvenile justice. I had a lot of behavior problems back then. I had no family to depend on. He took advantage during the rough times of my life. It's fucked me up. I had to go to counseling. I don't want that to happen to nobody. They need to watch who they hire. The staff need more training. They just did not care about us.*

## EXPERIENCES IN JAILS

Although we found that women's experience with incarceration had many gendered commonalities that shape violence and safety, we recognize that jails and prisons have some distinct facility characteristics. In this section on facility factors, we examine these characteristics briefly. In the jail, these factors include the transient and diverse nature of the population; tension due to anxiety about trial and sentencing issues; architectural differences; physical plant characteristics; and the greater possibility that correctional officers and inmates have overlapping social contacts in the community. Women in prison at the time of the focus group interviews discussed their jail experiences retrospectively, while our jail focus groups discussed both their current confinement, as well as any past experiences in jail. Many younger inmates may feel they are targeted for victimization by more savvy, older inmates and these younger women may be more likely to engage in violence as a means of establishing a reputation as one "not to be messed with." In this example, one woman talked about the violence she saw while in an adult jail at age 16 and its effect on her behavior when sent to prison. She said she acted "tough" as a form of self-protection, as described here:

> *When I was in the shower, some other offenders took my clothes so I had to go across the dayroom to my cell without my clothes. They were laughing, but they were intimidating me. I showed that I was aggressive. Inside, I was in fear, but I went off on them. I showed aggression and ended up getting in fights. I am not a victim. I started young and I was angry.*

In some interviews, women told us that the jail experience was somewhat safer than their prison experience; in others, women asserted that their jail experience was decidedly more violent and that prisons were much safer. The retrospective accounts of the jail experience provided by those in prison contained many more descriptions of staff violence than what was offered in the focus groups comprised of current jail participants. Of those who said that their jail experience was somewhat safer, most were from smaller jails that housed few women. This young woman offered a description of her experience in small jails:

> *I come from a small county. It was just like six girls, I didn't have no trouble in county. I was just scared in county. I wanted to go home. I didn't want to come to prison either. I was scared. I cried every night. Nothing happened to me in jail. It happened when I came to prison.*

Participants agreed that there was a greater likelihood of staff and inmates "knowing each other from the streets" in smaller communities. One staff member suggested that "those we knew prior to them coming to the jail expect special treatment." While not directly tied to any specific danger or safety concerns, both inmates and staff members indicated that any kind of prior relationships between staff and inmates could be a source of potential problems relating to staff over-familiarity and other forms of misconduct.

Although mentioned as a problem in larger jails as well, contact between female and male inmates in the smaller jails was also judged as a potentially dangerous situation, as described by this staff member in a small county jail:

> *In the facility I worked at before, there was some sexual violence between female and male inmates. Some males would get a hold of the females with the mental health issues. You have to keep track of who you were transporting between the buildings. To go to medical you had to cross the facility and they [male inmate trustees] would lure them [female inmates] into the bushes.*

Some women described jail experiences of danger and violence, usually in larger jails. These focus group participants said that this danger and violence was caused by staff and other inmates, and that they "would rather" be in prison than in county jail. They recounted multiple stories of staff behavior, ranging from being "disrespectful," as demonstrated by name calling, to specific accounts of outright violence and abuse. Introducing a theme that will thread throughout this report, these women said that jail staff "just don't care" about the women in their custody. In addition to not being helpful, women said that jail staff often "looked away" when problems between two women occurred, as illustrated here:

> *In the county is a lot of violence. Staff don't care what you do as long as you don't touch them. You can put a blanket up on your bed and do whatever you do. It's happened all the time. We took this girl's stuff while she was sleeping. We fought. You can lay in the bed with a girl. They just don't pay attention. I didn't feel safe there at all. A girl got hit on head and she was sleeping right beside me.*

Another woman agreed with this view and observed:

> *In my county, they try to be by the book, but everybody has a price. A lot of stuff happened in the dorms, as far as couples. A lot!*

When we asked women how they protected themselves in county jails, inmates throughout the country responded by saying: "Learn to fight!" and "Buy your way out. Buy enough for everyone so they will leave you alone."

It was in the county jail that most women learned the prohibition against informing, "telling" or "snitching" on other inmates. They also learned the survival skill of "minding your own business." This narrative illustrates both of these themes as one woman recalled an assault in another jail:

> *Rule number one: "If it ain't your business, don't get into it." This woman had been in someone else's business on the yard. The one that was being talked about and her friend, they tied another girl down and they had a dildo and they gagged her and the whole nine. The guards looked away. [Women] are sometimes out there doing the bullshit and the guards just let them work it out. It was also like [name of other participant] was saying that a woman can be battered --I mean bad --and if there are no witnesses, nothing happens.*

## JAIL STAFF

In some interviews, women described violence that occurred between female inmates and jail staff members. In offering her perspective on staff in a large county jail, this woman described violence between staff and inmates:

> *It is a power trip for the COs. The inmates [respond by] beating the COs with their locks or cups. You walk near the COs and you can get slammed into the wall, while they call you "bitch" or "inmate." You are just a number.*
>
> *And they will say, "What the fuck are you looking at?" And, I'm like "What?" They will have physical assaults to the inmates out in open. It is a physical assault. They will tell you not to look, to turn your face to the wall. Then after they assault someone, they bring out a video camera and they ask you if you saw anything. If you say "yes," they take you and the person who they beat on the elevator ride. That means you are gonna get beat.*

We heard from other women that the "elevator ride" was a common term that described abuse in the privacy of the jail elevator.

In another state, a woman who was arrested when she was 16 said that her county jail was known for having violent officers and that:

> *I was real scared 'cus I saw movies with women getting raped and all, but my problem was with officers, not inmates. We were supposed be shackled going from tank to tank, but we weren't this time. This one officer jacked me up and threw me against the wall. I literally passed out. My face hit the wall so hard I passed out.*

We heard consistent reports regarding disrespectful and derogatory speech by jail staff. One woman asked, "The officers in the county—do they train them to be assholes?" Women also suggested that officers often harmed them without any provocation, as seen here:

> *When I went into jail, I was moody. Just coming down from drugs. This one male officer, he was harassing me, so I just smiled at him and he said, "What the fuck you smiling at?" And I said, "I know I can smile." And he threw me to the ground. He put his knee in my back. Some lady [officer] busted my lip. So they took me to another room to beat me up, but a sergeant stopped that and asked what was going on and he put me in a single cell.*

Other descriptions of jails indicated that some county jails reflected, perhaps, prejudices found in rural counties toward gays and minorities. These forms of discrimination created another context for violence, as described here:

> *There was a lot of harassment toward gay people. When I came in, they would harass me a lot. Move me from tank to tank. Put me in seg for anything. If you was Mexican and gay, that was a bad mix right there. That's bad. They treat you bad. They scream at you. That's when you get aggravated. You know you wouldn't do anything, but they see you look like a little boy so they would aggravate you all the time.*

In several of the focus groups, it was acknowledged that female inmates would attack the officers as well. One woman who defined herself as "aggressive" said:

> *There was a lot of harassment toward me. The officers toward me. I used to get violent toward officers, throwing hot coffee and stuff like that at them. It was the female officers toward me. A lot of them started harassing me. Put me on lock down. So I started getting violent, spitting on them. I just feel like*

> *they didn't like me. So they were assaulting me, the ladies were, the officers were. They put me in segregation. They would hogtie me, pepper spray. Yes, they would hit me.*

Inappropriate searching was also mentioned as a problem the women had experienced when they were in the jail; however, staff sexual assault in the jail was rarely mentioned by the inmate focus group participants. When prompted, a few respondents said, while it could happen, it was not a common occurrence; nor had it happened to them or anyone they knew.[4] However, we did hear reports of consensual sex between staff and inmates. In responding to a question relating to staff and inmate relationships, a certain county jail was described as "off the chain" (outrageous) in terms of staff-inmate sexual activity:

> *That was a horrible place to be. Everyone did what they wanted. They [staff] didn't care. I could do whatever I wanted. Hopping to any dorm I wanted. The guards were just as bad as the convicts. Bringing in dope, sleeping with the inmates.*

High tension levels were also ascribed to the county jail experience. Many women mentioned that "coming down off drugs" or "detoxing," the lack of knowledge about the disposition of their case or their sentence, fear, boredom, and generalized anxiety about the future created a high level of tension that led to conflicts between jail inmates. As one woman stated, "In jail, there is a lot of anger. People coming in, People getting out." Others described their time in jail as "chaotic." In a prison focus group, one woman pointed out the difference between jail and prison:

> *There was overcrowding and lots of tension. A lot of people "coming down." Fresh off the street mainly. Women were all together with different attitudes. There was not as much security there as you see here [in prison]. Probably see one officer on the floor by the time they do their rounds.*

Contributing to this chaos in the jail was a sense among the women that, because the staff "did not care," "aggressive women" and "bullies" were free to "run the tank." This woman described her experience:

> *I had problems with different inmates coming in and out. Most trying to tell you what to do or tampering with your belongings without asking. Lots of times, they wouldn't have visits or phone, so every other day was a fight in the tank. So before I reached this point [prison], I was in a lot of fights coming in. Trying to stand up for myself. With the inmates and the officers.*

During her first incarceration, a woman decides how she is going to respond to threats to her property, self respect, or physical or sexual safety. Women also learn that some correctional officers do not prevent such threats from occurring, as shown here:

[4] In fact, a young woman participating in a jail focus group reacted to probes about staff sexual misconduct said, "Wait. Are you trying to tell me I should be worried about this? Is there something going on here that I should know about?" We quickly assured her that our questions on this subject were designed to make sure we understood her experience and were in no way suggestive of problems that were present.

> *I experienced something in county jail. It was with inmates, then the officers. These two girls were trying to court in the dorm. They wanted the top bunk that I was in so they could be together, and when I refused to give it to them, they were threatening me. They got me up in a corner and they were going to jump on me. They were calling me names. I told them I can't beat the two of you. And this other lady [inmate] called the officers and said "Fight! Fight!"*
>
> *They had me in the corner threatening me and everything. And then the male officer came, and the male officer said, "Just fight them back." And I said, "Then you would come in here and throw us around." I know they would. They would throw us down and beat on us if we was fighting.*
>
> *I wanted to talk to someone else, but he said he was the lead officer. And they [the aggressors] heard that and said, "See. We can do whatever we want to."*

Similar to the prison community, the jail participants described other forms of conflict that were caused by "snitching," stealing canteen items, jealousy and "fights with girlfriends." While acknowledging the potential for all levels of violence in the jail, the most common type of conflict was simply the verbal arguments that occur among diverse people who live together in confined settings. This self-identified "middle-class woman" described her reaction to observing conflict in the jail:

> *Needless to say, jail has been somewhat disturbing to me. I've never been part of this, I'm not a street person, I'm an educated person, I have my own business, I know no one. I'm not condemning or whatever. Most of the girls here are not the type who I hung out with. I was a business women in a highly technical area. When I came in first, I was a little scared. I didn't know what to expect. I was subject to a lot of verbal, what I would consider verbal abuse from the inmates. There is not only physical and sexual, but there is a verbal element. What I've seen, there is a sense of survival here. People are out for themselves. I've seen fights over commissary. A lot of people have a hustle. They generate hostility and fights. I recognize that for me, I'm 47, I'm observing, I don't want to be pounced on. You find yourself a way to fit in. How they can act, what they can say, and what they can do. I've seen a lot of fights over rumors and they are never the same as when they start. They would rather pick up their fists, than to use their words, than to be adult about it and to discuss things. If that is really the issue or if there was something else. They are too quick to fight. TV is a problem. Not filling up the coffee pot will spark verbal conflicts.*

The tension created by the uncertainty of the jail experience also contributes to the potential for violence. Being away from home contributes to this uncertainty, as suggested by this woman:

> *You got things going on at home. It builds up and it may be an innocent bystander and you may end up fighting because you are stressed.*

Some of our respondents understood all too well the violence that sometimes occurred because of an individual's mental state, as reflected in this comment:

> *It's part of the violence. No hope of release. Nothing to work or hope for*.

Another common form of conflict described to us was intimidation by the "strong" of the "weak." Some women mentioned that "bullying" those with "low self-esteem" or who were "weaker" occurred frequently as well.

Generally, participants said that consensual sex among the female inmates occurred in jail, but, perhaps, they felt, not as much as what occurred in prison. As one woman explained, "Most of us of us haven't been here long enough to want to do that, I don't think." Others said that certain places, such as the shower or bathroom room stalls, were known as places for sexual activity. In general, we understood that sexual violence in jail was a rare occurrence.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

In the rest of this chapter, we combine the focus group observations on experiences in jails and prisons. With few exceptions, these descriptions of contexts and correlates that produce or mitigate violence and victimization were quite similar across these two types of facilities. In addition, we found these gendered processes to be common across states and counties as well. However, we found that institutions differ widely in their climate of tension or safety. Staff and inmates alike reported knowing which facilities are the "bad" prisons or jails in a given jail or prison system, or which housing units are undesirable within a jail or prison. As they do their time, women soon learn that facilities or specific housing units vary greatly in terms of potential violence, levels of programming and sense of safety and community. In an older prison with a reputation for "calmness," two older participants described their institution in surprisingly positive terms. One woman began by stating:

> *There is a much more strong sense of community here than there ever was in [another prison]. And people are concerned with helping and supporting one another. There are much more avenues to do that here.*

In the same group, another participant added:

> *I see young women coming in and becoming included and this becomes a community action. And I have been in many circles and I have had many interactions and it becomes a good feeling. We all have common interest. That is how I see community, many circles interconnecting with a spirit of good will. I think we are talking about a higher level, loving one another, and feeling good will.*

For the women who are fortunate to live in such facilities or housing units, safety and security are not problematic issues, as described here:

> *In our housing unit, our hall is all one big neighborhood watch. People say, "Hey watch my room. I am going to be gone for a minute." We just band together and we are safe here. Because of the programming, we have a good dorm. We try to help each other out. [If] we cry, someone will see it and come over and hug us. The people here are pretty trustworthy. They tell you the right way to go.*

Women inmates who are housed in a "good" prison are very aware of the possibility of being sent to a "bad" prison and this threat was said to keep the prison relatively free of violence:

> *Women appreciate being here because everyone likes and wants to be here and so the violence is less. Nobody wants to get wild because they like it here.*

One key contribution to the sense of place was based on housing options. These options vary greatly across any given facility. Housing in prisons for women can be in two-person or three-person cells, rooms designed for multiple women, or in dormitories of various configurations. Housing may also be based on security or custody levels, individual needs (such as medical or mental health) or other variables. Just as in any city, there are some locations in a prison that are known as "high crime" areas, and there are some "neighborhoods" that are much safer.

One of the things that became very clear was that prisons, and even housing units within a prison, differed in the prevalence and fear of violence. In fact, some housing units were referred to as nicknames such as "the Jungle" or "the Thunderdome" because of the higher incidence of violence. Inmates and staff made the distinction between the "good' and the "bad" places to live. This comment represents those who feel their prison is a safe place to do time:

> *I have done time up north as well, and it's different here. It is mellow here. There is violence here but it is avoidable. You make your own problems. If you put yourself in that situation, that is your price. It is mellow.*

Compare this sense of calmness to these descriptions of more chaotic living units:

> *On [certain] units, that's all you have. They just put all the lovers in there and let them do what they want. They just don't care, and girls will say, "I'll go in the high tent because I want to live with my girl." It's chaos. I have a lot of friends that live over there, but it's chaos. Whatever! You want to live like that, ok*.

> *That unit was off the hook [extreme]. It was baby Iraq, because they have a lot of [non-programmers] and the fuckups over there. Our yard is pretty good. The worst unit is kinda ghetto out there.*

> *There is a lot of violence here. There are four different yards. I have been told that it is a good thing that, as nice as you are, you are lucky to be on the yard you are on, because you wouldn't survive on the other yards.*

This woman described how she developed a plan to get transferred from a violent prison:

> *It was a real Thunderdome. That's why I'm here. I had to change my religion to get off that unit. [*Laughter.*] Yeah, this is the only prison that has Native American religion so they have to send you here. Do I look Indian to you? [*Laughter.*] It was just any little thing and you gonna be fighting over there. Over there, it's full of youngsters. Any little thing. If you say you're gonna do something to me, I'm going to get you first.*

It seemed to be the case that any woman, placed in certain housing units, may need to develop aggressive or violent strategies to survive these risky environments, supporting our contention that violence is created and sustained by factors beyond individual-level characteristics. In some of our focus groups, women had story after

story of violence, involving both inmates and staff, which they ascribed to the character of the facility or the specific housing unit.

Facilities with similar custody levels could be described in very different ways. The differences between units extended beyond violence. For instance, here is one woman discussing how staff treated inmates differently in one prison:

> *The next morning the captain came around and said, "Sorry for this, we will get you a bed." And I was just shocked that they said "sorry" to us. I couldn't believe it.*

Although our study did not measure any form of prevalence, we suspect that high violence housing units may be associated with a greater prevalence of sexual violence and staff sexual misconduct.

## CELLS VERSUS DORMS

There was no consensus among the inmate participants as to the safest type of housing. One of the paradoxes that emerged in the interviews, and seen in the literature as well, was that some women believed cell blocks to be more dangerous and others believed that dormitory units had more violence. We suggest that the reason for the mixed finding is this: While living in a cell with only one or two cellmates reduces one's victimization potential, cellblocks are often close custody or disciplinary units where there are more women who have histories of violence, subscribe more deeply to the more aggressive values of the prison code, or do not or cannot participate in productive programming. In addition, these units are often staffed by those who expect women to be violent. These conditions foster more incidents of violence as compared to other units with less violent inmates and staff with different expectations and attitudes. In contrast, non-disciplinary living units with two-woman cells or rooms, which were populated by lower custody women who were more likely to program and typically staffed by those who interacted well with the female inmate population, were highly desirable low-violence units. In any case, living with only one other "personality" was highly desired. Some women even said they were motivated to commit violence to be moved to disciplinary housing because they wanted to live in a cell with only one other woman. We were also told that many fights occurred between cellmates, as in this account. After explaining how her roommate had gotten her in trouble, she recounted her conversation with the roommate:

> *"Look bitch, I'm not going to argue, scream, and get worked up. If we are going to fight, let's fight." She kept arguing and I said, "I'm not going to argue with you." The officer was standing at the door. She was on the bunk and I was standing up in front of her. The officer said, "Get on your bed and stay on your bed. You just get up if you need to pee-pee." [*Laughter.*] We was about to kill each other! There was just this tension. It's not going away, even if I stay on my bed and just get up to pee-pee. It's not going away. You are in closed quarters, maybe a six by nine cell. It's close custody. You get tired of her.*

We were also told that problems with cellmates often escalated to violence because there is no place to hide or stay away from each other when they were in conflict.

Generally, women thought dorms were safer because women with violent histories were not housed there. Many women in open bay dorms felt safer in this condition because they were not "locked in" with other women. Furthermore, the dorms provided more witnesses so extreme violence was unlikely. At the same time, some women said that dormitory living may be more stressful overall because there are more "personalities" to manage.

In the crowded conditions that characterize contemporary corrections, women are often housed in spaces designed for far fewer women than they now hold. Crowding increases potential risk for violence whether it be a cell, room, or dormitory. As one woman from a crowded multi-person room said:

> *There is a mindset that you have to stay in control with the eight women in the room. It is a dangerous situation up there. There are fights all the time in the room. They are screaming on the top of their lungs, being locked up in these rooms.*

## CLASSIFICATION

Although most discussions of classification issues include program eligibility, the bulk of the comments surrounding classification centered on housing options within the facility and their effect on safety and violence. The focus group participants most frequently identified three problems related to classification: mixing women of different sentence lengths; changing beds to avoid conflict; and housing more aggressive women with those more vulnerable. Although all prisons, and even jails, to a certain extent**,** have custody classifications, there is less strict separation in women's facilities. In most women's facilities, different types of offenders, with different approaches to doing time, live in close proximity to each other. While these mixed or "administrative" facilities usually run somewhat smoothly, the interview participants often questioned the utility of this policy. Both staff members and inmates identified problems, for example, when long and short-termers lived together, or when individuals who were potential victims were placed with potential aggressors. Almost all focus group participants, inmate and staff, agreed that three types of separation should be addressed in the classification systems: 1) those who have been violent in the facility and those who have not, 2) short-term inmates from those doing more time, and 3) inmates with mental health problems. This custody staff participant offered this observation:

> *I think there are a lot of vulnerabilities with how they house them here. With the classification levels, they are all rooming together. And some have bad rooms and I think that there would be many less problems in the living areas and the inmates would be better off by segregating them a bit. We do need to revamp the classification system. It should not be the same level classification like with the males, because you could have a whole bunch of level 4 inmates that I would rather have a whole yard of.*

Staff and inmates alike agreed that existing classification systems were unsuccessful in predicting those who were likely to engage in violence and those who would not. A non-custody staff person also recognized the safety issues that can occur when all types of inmates live together:

> *If you have never been in trouble in your life and made one mistake, and you get put in a room with someone that is a hard-core gang banger, then you are constantly trying to protect your stuff. I think the women inmates will be better off if segregated like the men.*

In one system, female inmates were initially classified by size and weight, because, as one staff person said, "It is important for those in close quarters to make it as equal as possible. There is really minimal violence here. Most is random or impulse." In the same focus group, another custody staff said:

> *They pretty much make their own violence with homosexuality, girlfriend issues, this, that, and the other, like extortion, commissary deals gone bad. But classification matches up cellies by physical description, so no one has an advantage. They are grouped together according to physical and mental status.*

Staff and inmates were very aware that jails and prisons for men had a different set of challenges in classifying their inmates. These non-custody staff participants wondered if a safekeeping or "sensitive needs yard" would be appropriate for female inmates:

> *The female facilities do not have a safekeeping custody level. That would help. Someplace your weaker, your more vulnerable inmates could be housed. The reason for [safe keeping] in the male units is that for males, it is the rape situation. It's not the same thing as protective custody. Safekeeping dorms are for vulnerable inmates. They wouldn't have to have a cell by themselves. [But] every place has problems. You would still have isolated incidents.*

Even in systems that had some separation protocol in their classification system, some inmates suggested more differentiation, as seen in this inmate comment:

> *Ever since I came in, I was wondering why don't they separate each group of offenders. The prison should have a unit, [based on] age groups, first time offenders. Because I'm an old timer. Some of us are good. Also some of the first timers learn from the older people. But there would be neutral ground. Less violence.*
>
> *Don't put a 47 year old with a 20 year old. I have a little 20 year old and she tells us what to do and it is in a big way. Keep us in our age ranges, not a 40 year old with a 20 year old. That is a conflict right there! Bigger mouths.*

## HOUSING CHANGES

We discovered that housing changes were a central interest of women and consumed a great deal of staff time. In addition to the factors related to conflicts and tensions in the room or cell, inmates and staff discussed the problems and barriers in moving inmates from one bed to another. For inmates, the major concern involved the difficulty—and sometimes impossibility—of getting a room change to avoid the potential for violence. For staff, room changes brought out concerns of "being manipulated" into changing a room for an inmate's personal advantage that was misrepresented as a safety issue. Equally important to staff was the lack of flexibility

to make these decisions due to crowding or policy. Staff related numerous instances of inmates "manipulating" the system to get housed with a friend, relative or romantic partner; or to avoid a debt or other potentially violent conflict.

In a few interviews, inmates expressed their belief that some staff members moved women to be with their partners:

> *I had a staff that moved up all the gays in the same unit. You got a girlfriend – go get her! It was like the honeymoon hotel! If you got a woman and you want to be with her, go talk to [specific staff names] and they will put you together.*

Generally, however, staff members said they were suspicious of requested moves and would not move women, even when women claimed to be in danger. Women also said that staff dismissed their concerns, as described here:

> *If you ask for a bed move, staff say, "The only bed move you get is to disciplinary housing. They won't do it because it makes all this paperwork. If you fight, the Lieutenant asks, "Do you really have a problem with her?" Most women say, "No, I am OK." And then they make you sign [a statement that you are not enemies]. And then you get punked when you go back to the room. [The aggressor says] "This room better be clean when I get back." The staff know you are having a problem with another inmate and they do not do anything.*

In another prison, this story was told:

> *I am not going to name names but this girl was screaming and says I need to be out of the room. The cop said, "Is this a medical emergency?", and she said no and was crying and says "I need to get out of this room." Then he says, "This is not the Hilton." But she was an old lady. If you want to be all up in the mix then you are putting yourself in the mix, then you need to deal with it. But she was an old lady.*

This woman recommended that:

> *Staff need to be more understanding when someone comes to them and says I need to get out of the room. Instead of seeing the look on my face and acting on it, staff interrogate you as to why [you want out of the room] and they don't do much else.*
>
> *Staff think that women are all whiney and just like to know why. They ask us why even when they should act. You know that they would never ask a man that. You should be able to go up to an officer and ask for a bed move and not having to tell. I think that everyone just wants a safe place to be.*

One inmate explained that staff members were unlikely to move inmates who looked masculine, but did move the "femmes," and those who were seen as favorites. One woman said, that if she wanted a bed move, "All I have to do is put on red lipstick and take out my braids" (thereby looking more feminine) and a certain staff member will grant her request. We discuss the implications of perceived staff favoritism in more detail in the next chapter.

Some staff members explained that housing changes were problematic due to crowding issues so that, even when inclined to move an inmate who requested a

change, they may not be able to without disrupting several others, as detailed in this staff account:

> *Due to space, even when an inmate reports a problem, we create further problems for the inmates. The inmate comes up and she is asking for a move and we agree. Then we have to disrupt someone else's room who has not done anything. Now, she has had a problem with this first person and now she has a problem with this second person, too. So if person A in this room is my biggest problem and we need a bed, person A is the last person that we are going to move. We try to go to the inmate with the least resistance. But inmate A when she refuses to go, if I try to get her to bed move then all she is going to do is go to Ad-Seg. She will get a 115 for refusal to move, and then there is a problem after she gets back. So when we try to call for the inmate with the least amount of resistance for us, we don't know what it does to her.*

In some interviews, women did say that some staff were responsive to their requests. In this example, a woman said she asked for a room move and:

> *The girl who tried to beat me up also told the housing staff she wanted me out of the room. I think that is what got me moved. We have pretty decent housing staff. If something can't be handled, then they will make the move for you. They will make the change. You have to go through the proper channel of command.*

But moving out of a problematic room may not be the end of one's problem, as shown here:

> *They PC you up for the night and they move you to another yard. But, there is someone on the next yard and all it takes is to get a message to them. You aren't necessarily safe going from one yard to the next.*

In addition to asking staff for a room move, inmates also can "pay" an inmate clerk to move them on paper. But, they also warned, inmate clerks who appear to be "playing favorites" regarding these moves run the risk of "having a note dropped on them" by other inmates who did not get their desired room change. Other issues surfaced regarding housing assignments. Inmates and staff agreed that the process of "dumping" an undesirable inmate on another unit or another room or cell was a reality in women's prison. This custody staff member described this process:

> *Everyone wants a break. Sometimes we are wore out with a problem inmate. But it can be a fair dump. For instance, if we had a problem inmate in a unit and cannot take care of it then we will call another unit and ask if they have an inmate that they have problems with and we swap them.*

In many of the focus group sites, inmates provided accounts of "problem inmates" being dumped in their room because staff felt these cooperative inmates would "take care of" the "needy" inmate. Women told us that these needy inmates included mentally ill, older**,** or disabled inmates. Women who had this experience were mixed in their reaction: sometimes they took on this task with good cheer and compassion; other times these higher functioning inmates felt they were "being asked to do the cops' job" or that they were being taken advantage of by the staff.

## RULES AND DEPRIVATION

Many women perceived violence to be aggravated by tension that was created by inconsistent rules and the overall deprivations of prison life. Like all inmates, women are often upset by the myriad of rules and deprivations of prison. Any small catalyst may potentially cause a woman to explode and react with aggression and violence. This element was mentioned frequently by the jail inmates, probably because they were new to incarceration. Prison inmates, too, complained that the daily indignities and deprivations of prison created a tension that had the potential for violence. These many comments from across all our study sites explain the effect of the constant tension on their daily lives:

> *I look at myself. I was not that angry of a person or that violent necessarily, if unprovoked, before. But the person I have become here might. It's depressing living in this environment. That's not saying we are innocent. But we have problems dealing with one another and the rules build up tension inside*.

> *Tons of stuff [rules] that is stupid. It increases tension. I know me. I get stressed about it and I take it out on people. Something small. We deal with that on a day-to-day basis. When we get up, we don't know who's going to be working.*

> *It seems like the tension level starts to rise when our program is not flowing like it should be flowing. When we are not taking a shower when we are supposed to, or when we are not doing what we are supposed to be doing when we are supposed to be doing it. Then we start getting on each other's nerves. Like the showers, I know it is nothing to the outside, but it is a big deal here.*

## CROWDING

Crowding aggravates every correctional task for the staff and creates and magnifies problems in inmate interactions and relations. In some women's prisons, overcrowding has exacerbated the difficulties involved in trying to live in close quarters to the point where women identify the crowding itself as a cause of violence. The first quote was a humorous attempt to explain why crowding causes violence:

> *You know, I have 15 personalities of my own. Then I am in a room with eight other women. The crowding has to influence the violence here*.

Staff particularly expressed concern about the impact of crowding on their ability to transfer inmates to other rooms or cells when conflict emerged among inmates. As this custody staff member said:

> *The size of the population has a lot to do with it. There used to be at least 25 [open] beds on each unit so we had more flexibility within the unit if someone had a problem. There is not a lot of movement without disrupting someone else's program. Now this person is a problem that we cannot solve. [The problem] is the sheer number of inmates. You have 4000 inmates here and you have some manipulating by trying to get out of the room and it makes it*

> *hard when someone comes up to you telling you something serious. Sometimes there is nothing you can do, and some inmates can't be completely forthright with us because there are always people around.*

Staff also stated that crowding pressures limit their ability to know all the inmates in their housing unit. In these crowded conditions, inmates may "get away with things" because staff coverage is inadequate. This inmate agreed in describing these problems:

> *It's just radical there. They have some officers in there, but there is so much crowding that you get away with more because the cops can't control all these women. They say they are so understaffed because there is absolutely no cops around.*

Crowding has had predictable consequences as described in this staff comment:

> *It is not that women are getting more violent. They are getting forced to be more like that in close quarters. They are forced to either let it happen or victimized. They are forced to let it go or just deal with it right there. More crowding has caused more friction. Then more sparks and you have the boom-boom-boom [fighting]. This has very little to do with sexual assaults because you do not prevent assaults from happening un-witnessed.*

Women also expressed their concerns over their loss of privacy and staff's ability to observe them while dressing or sleeping. We were told that crowded conditions limited their access to showers, their ability to change clothes in private, and provided more opportunities for staff to observe them in inappropriate ways, as well as for staff to claim that women were "displaying themselves inappropriately" to male staff.

## PHYSICAL PLANT AND CONDITIONS

Staff members were more likely to see safety problems in terms of physical plant problems:

> *A lot of our problems in this institution are because there are a lot of dark spots. I was at a newer institution, inmates couldn't go past the building, and inmates couldn't go past [a certain line]. They can walk behind all of these buildings and at night. Administration says you need to separate and walk the yard. But I walk with a partner. I'm used to a men's prison where they will stick you, whack you over the head, or hit you. I will walk with a partner no matter what. You can get clobbered and you would get knocked out until someone looks for you.*

Some respondents saw a relationship between poor living conditions and violence. Noteworthy in this regard is that sometimes it was a staff member making the connection between living conditions and violence:

> *In this old facility, we do not have heat in winter or cool air in summer. That contributes to violence. Not saying to baby them with plush conditions, but the living conditions need to be improved. The inmates need to be given what*

> *they need to clean. The living conditions contribute to violence. I can understand inmate frustration [when staff do not want to help them].*

One long-termer described her understanding of the impact of environment on behavior. Referring to an assignment for an in-prison college class, she said:

> *I did a study on how physical structure affects violence. I asked them [about fighting]. Eighty percent of them had gotten into fights and these were women who did not bother anyone or get in trouble [here] and they were getting into fights. [I concluded that] physical structure impacts fights. I have seen the gang bangers come here. Gradually they calm down here. That kind of crap is not going to fly here. The psychology of the grass, sitting in the open area. That calms you.*
>
> *I was on another facility and there was bad grass and more dirt than grass. I thought to myself, "On this ugly yard, no wonder people are so violent." This violence has to do with environment and staff.*

Women also described how the quantity and quality of food, the mold in the showers, broken windows, and hot and cold living conditions contributed to an overall state of tension and generalized anger which contributed to tense and potentially violence situations.

## LACK OF PROGRAMS

Lack of programs was also identified by both inmates and staff as a facility issue that contributes to the climate of violence and conflict. Almost all the focus groups indicated that increasing the number of programs and "things to do" would decrease violence in their facilities. One lifer said that such proactive activities would "reduce the negative energy" in her institution. Women and staff members felt that a wide range of programs, including treatment and services, education, games and recreation, as well work and vocational programs, would improve safety. Such programs, it was suggested, would give women something to feel more positive about and less involved in the "drama" of relationships and the mix. This woman captured this point of view succinctly:

> *Programs will keep women occupied and participating in something positive and useful brings about an attitude thing. They have taken away so much. It narrowed down on what we had. [This] does cause violence.*

The lack of opportunity to earn money though program participation was said to lead to hustling and "trafficking and trading" for some women. In one system, women complained that the craft shop had closed and that contributed to an increase in violence:

> *It kept a lot of people busy. We had contracts for making things. It was taking care of the indigent problem. If you're not indigent, you don't need to bully or manipulate.*

The need for programs to manage emotions was mentioned in almost every focus group. Anger management or conflict resolution classes were recommended most frequently. Although they might have been through such programs in the past,

participants argued that they could continue to benefit and suggested anger groups or any forum in which they could talk about problems in a safe environment. As this woman suggested:

> *They need a better anger management class. Look, we are highly angry, bitter, pissed. I am a screw-up on the street. Always have been. I've been a dopehead since I was 12. I know I have an anger issue and it's not with anyone, it's with myself. But I'm not going to take it out on myself so I take it out on others.*

Another woman said that a conflict resolution program for long-termers and lifers would be very helpful, because:

> *Some of them are here for the rest of their lives. You are resentful and you don't have any way to process it out. What are you going to do but take it out on your roommate? I honestly feel it would be a little bit better place if we had programs.*

There was some controversy in both staff and inmate focus groups over the value of "couples" counseling groups since so much violence occurred within intimate partnerships. The idea of couples counseling in prison was not looked upon with a good deal of favor by staff. They argued that the couples are transitory and such programs might represent tacit approval of these relationships.

Inmates acknowledged the fact that much of the violence may be due to intimate partner victimization in one or both partners' pasts. For this reason, both staff and inmates believed that any program that assisted women in dealing with victimization and self esteem could be helpful. Other program suggestions included classes to teach women how "not to be a victim", as illustrated here:

> *How to stay safe. How to not be a victim to predators. How not to be a victim in prison because we are all a victim in some kind of way.*

It should be noted that the number and range of current programs varied widely between the facilities in which we conducted the focus groups. Even in those institutions that had a broad range of programming, there were long waiting lists or some programs were not considered (by inmates) to be worth their time. Women who had been through the existing programs asked for continuing programs or other programs to help them stay focused on proactive activities.

## CAMERAS AND TECHNOLOGY

The use of technology, such as cameras and modern tracking systems, has been discussed as one promising aspect of preventing, detecting and investigating sexual assault. In our previous interviews with staff about PREA (Owen & Wells, 2005), newer facilities with improved technology, such as cameras, were said to promote a safer environment. Staff reported that they felt cameras "kept the inmates in check, and videotapes helped clarify issues that came up. They (the inmates) do not know when they are being watched." In this set of interviews, a range of opinions about cameras were offered. Although most of the participants thought cameras were a good idea in general, their limitations and potential for misuse were also discussed, as in this example:

> *The camera doesn't see everything that's going on. You need more than one camera. It [camera] doesn't record everything that's going on and when it is recording they just tape back over it.*

Almost all women and staff interviewed acknowledged the limitations of cameras, both due to blind spots and the fact that "everyone knows" where to "hide" from the cameras. Cameras, we were often told, can be used for the opposite purpose in allowing unscrupulous staff to view women inappropriately.

## GRIEVANCES

The interviews contained significant description about problems with grievance systems and procedures. Little of this information was directly related to violence and safety issues but did illustrate a fundamental fact: Almost all women we interviewed had little faith in the system's ability to respond to any of their concerns. This has a direct bearing on a women's willingness to report any physical or sexual assault. In general, the women in all of the study sites felt that their grievances and the corresponding appeals were dismissed by staff and ignored by management. Women had grieved a wide variety of issues, including personal property, sentence computations, facility quality of life conditions, visiting and family contact, program eligibility and, most often, staff behaviors. These reports also included accounts of "lost" or thrown away forms and nervousness about "the grievance officer being buddies" with the alleged problem staff. Women reported two primary outcomes of their grievances: staff dismissing and ridiculing their efforts ("You know it won't do any good") and, more seriously, retaliation for any staff-related complaint. This comment reflected a typical officer response to a grievance:

> *We have a grievance form we can write officers up. The officers will say, "Go ahead and write me up. Make sure you spell my name right." The form don't make it [to the appropriate officials]. I have seen officers pull inmates out of the cell and ask [the inmate] why did you write that? Then the officers say, "Your time is going to be hard."*

This inmate comment described her learning that getting a reputation as a troublemaker exposed her to the "tag, you're it" response:

> *I was given an informal orientation by a CO on the yard who was pissed off with us. He said "Let me tell you about 'Tag, you're it'. You know what that is. I got a buddy on every yard. You piss me off, I got a buddy on another yard and [you will get pulled up] for shit you do and even some shit you don't do. Guess what, 'Tag, you're it'!"*

Staff commented about grievances procedures from a decidedly different perspective. Their comments can also be placed in two categories: Most staff felt that the grievance procedures in their system provided a productive avenue to address inmate concerns. The opposite perception was that inmates "manipulated" the grievance system in a way that disadvantaged staff.

These interviews with female prisoners suggest that their lack of confidence in one process led to a lack of confidence in all reporting processes. In terms of violence and safety issues, particularly those related to PREA, this lack of confidence in

grievance procedures undermines women's ability to trust procedures concerning sexual assault. Each of these concerns about the disutility of grievance procedures is mirrored in inmate concerns about reporting and investigation procedures.

## REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS

Reporting and investigation procedures have specific implications for improving safety in women's facilities. Sound investigations must begin with inmate reporting. But, as shown in the discussion of grievance procedures above, the process of reporting a fear, a concern**,** or an assault is problematic for most inmates and the staff who respond to such reports. Staff at all levels described their own difficulty in hearing reports of any suspected violent event—sexual or otherwise. As one custody person said:

> *You always ask, but most of the time they will not tell you what happened. We try to put a little pressure on the inmate to tell us what happened. If it is an inmate that is worried about her reputation and gaining respect or whatever, then she will not tell us.*
>
> *Basically, I just fall back on my experience with inmates, I just say you are not going to get this type of injury from the shower or falling off the bunk. I come with a little more harsh stance and say that I am not taking this cockamamie story. I tell them if they choose to tell me, then I have to take the steps necessary to make sure they are safe. Pretty much just letting them know that someone else might buy this but I know it's not true, so just let me know. Anybody who has worked here long enough, you can tell if they have some sort of injury. You can know. It is a gut thing.*

In a jail focus group, one custody line staff said:

> *The vulnerable inmates won't talk to you. They have this scared look and you can see them a mile away. I ask them "Are you being treated okay"? They tell me "If I move out, the other inmates are all going to say something. You cannot do anything about that.*

Another custody staff person in a large women's prison said:

> *They sometimes do tell staff [if they are being preyed on] but they often times can't. There are eight women in a room. There are two staff for what 256 inmates? One inmate told me that another tries to ask her to leave the locker open when she is gone and she is afraid to do it. But if she doesn't she might get hurt. I think eight women in a cell makes it harder. If they want to come up and talk to you it makes it harder. The other inmates are watching always.*

Staff, too, acknowledge this problem with "everybody knows," as outlined here by custody staff participants:

> *The inmates are good, they can hear everything. We have inmate clerks, so and if we [staff] are going to do a room move, they [inmates] already know that the information is going to get out. Sometimes the confidentiality isn't purposely given up but there are inmates who have been doing this as long as I have. They know the system. If there is something going on in the room,*

> *they are going to know about it. It is like the inmate that said other inmates were making sexual advances. She didn't want to tell because they are scared. And then, some just choose not to tell.*

Inmates throughout the country said lack of confidentiality in reporting was a critical barrier to reporting. "If we tell," she said, "everyone would know" because:

> *We would be put on blast [by inmate grapevine] and the confidence is lost. Anything on the housing unit will not be kept secret. There is an inmate and she's typing the reports, we [inmates] will find out.*

One non-custody participant offered this view on the difficulty of preventing sexual assault:

> *Unless we take total control over preventing assault--unless we segregate each one, we cannot eliminate it. Since we are speaking on females, what they want they are going to get [sexually]. Whether they take it [from another inmate through violence or coercion] or whether they agree upon it [consent to sexual acts]. Unless we totally segregate the inmates, you will never stop sexual activity. Unless an inmate tells you what has taken place, [you might not ever know]. The only way to prevent it is to respond by a report and investigate. We also need to hold inmates accountable when the investigation comes back negative [unfounded]. Whether it is staff/inmate misconduct or inmate-on-inmate.*

Most staff agreed with our view that prevention should be a key strategy in addressing all forms of inmate violence. This custody staff continued by saying:

> *Whenever they come in, we sit and listen. We can take care of the problem right away. So responding is not the problem-- it is prevention that we can't do. We need more outside places to report. A contract social service agency at the prison is probably the most important resource for them. We can prevent a lot of things if we give them more resources to have inmates help inmates.*

Retaliation for reporting anything to staff was a major theme in our interviews. One woman said simply:

> *Retaliation is just a big thing here. If you report anything, there will be retaliation.*

Another woman inmate said:

> *You can't even go to the chain of command about the officer because the Sergeant is going to tell that other officer now and then retaliate against you. You have no outlet nowhere. If you tell the officer about another officer, they go back and tell him. You constantly have to watch your back. They have their little pets -- inmates --that they will tell to go harass inmate so and so for them.*

The inmate participants said that the most common forms of retaliation by staff included threats to be sent to a more secure prison, additional room searches, closer

scrutiny and threats to "get back at us" through increased disciplinary reports. As one woman said:

> *Officers retaliate or get their friends to retaliate. You don't have to do anything wrong but they provoke you. An officer will tell you to be quiet but then that same officer asks you questions but they gave the direct order not to say anything. If they don't do it, they have friends who will get you.*

Inmates were also very clear that retaliation by inmates was a very real concern to them. Verbal threats of violence were commonly directed toward women who were suspected of reporting on other inmates. Women also said that they feared retaliation from "friends" of an inmate who may suspect them of reporting on them. In a few rare cases, inmates suggested that other inmates may retaliate against them on behalf of staff.

In some interviews, inmate respondents mentioned that staff who provide negative information about staff or "back up" an inmate's story often experienced repercussions from other staff as well. One woman indicated that one officer who supported her claim against an officer "was snubbed by the other officers for being a snitch."

False reporting of both inmate and staff sexual misconduct was a primary concern of staff. Staff members in both jails and prisons were wary and distrustful of inmate reports. In many cases, staff indicated doubt of inmate reports. As one custody staff person said, "inmates 'cry wolf' so much." This inmate participant also pointed out the complication of "crying wolf:"

> *There are people that manipulate that and it makes it bad for everyone. Maybe you're a person that "cries wolf" all the time. Each time you have to see into it, but this one time might be the time that something is really happening. If you have a relationship and then you need to get out of it, staff will tell you, "We told you not to get into relationships and you did, so now deal with it!" And they don't help you.*

Problems with reporting among mentally ill inmates were also mentioned. These inmates, staff suggested, were both more vulnerable to assaults and likely to commit such assaults. As one non-custody staff said about women inmates with mental health diagnosis, "I know we have inmates who do not understand what they are claiming."

The problems created by delays in reporting were mentioned by many staff, as shown here:

> *But a lot of things that come to our attention are stale. It is three to four days old and she has already showered and urinated. Where is the evidence? We cannot do much about proving it after that long even if we know that the testimony is true.*

Despite these problems with reporting and investigation, every staff member we interviewed for this project said that they took the investigation of any allegation of sexual assault or related violence very seriously

## SOCIETAL FACTORS

The CDC model lists a variety of social factors that promote intimate violence: Here we briefly discuss one of these factors, staff stereotypes about women offenders. As one would expect, staff more often expressed the view that violence occurred because of the "type" of women in prison. The element of sexual stereotyping is present in this explanation of violence offered by a female staff member:

> *It's the way these women are. It's the same as they were in the free world. They were violent in the free world; they are violent in here. It's the type of person. It's also the female gender. We're more emotional. We fly off the handle. They are just more violent*.

One inmate agreed with this point of view by saying:

> *It is cat fights, bitch stuff. Whenever you have a bunch of women, you will have this.*

If staff believe that women are inevitably going to engage in "cat fights," then they are less likely to try and help inmates learn how to deal with conflict in a more appropriate manner. If incarcerated women themselves believe that they are supposed to act a certain way, they are more likely to act that way. We will further develop this contention in Chapter Five, which describes staff related factors and contributions to violence and conflict.

# STAFF FACTORS 5

All correctional staff play a critical role in creating the context of safety and violence. Staff-related factors overlap at each level of the ecological model, involving individual, relational and community factors. Beyond their obvious role in maintaining security, staff attitude and behavior also affect the social climate that shapes all forms of safety for women offenders. This impact is much broader than narrowly defining the problem simply as staff sexual misconduct. In this chapter, we outline the complex ways staff contribute to the context of potential victimization that go beyond this narrow definition of victimization. Here we combine all staff-related issues, including managers, executive staff, and the like, although almost all the comments in the inmate focus groups seemed to relate to custody line staff. We found that many staff understand their larger role in creating a safe environment through respectful interaction, assisting women with their problems, and monitoring all forms of safety. In contrast, we learned that others contribute directly or indirectly to an atmosphere of tension and anxiety that can lead to potential violence and victimization. In this chapter, we describe the wide impact that staff has on the climate of the facility and the ways in which their actions and attitudes create or compromise safety in women's facilities.

## STAFF-INMATE INTERACTIONS

Staff–inmate relationships occur on a continuum of positive to negative. At the positive end, some staff members are helpful and caring when a woman feels threatened. Inmates also view staff members who "just leave us alone" in a positive light. In the middle, we heard descriptions of staff who were indifferent to women's problems and concerns, often being "too busy" to or disinterested in responding to a request. Toward the negative end of the spectrum, other staff members were said to participate in a campaign of unintentional or intentional dehumanization by words and attitudes toward the women. Many were seen to be unhelpful as a resource when a woman feels she is being targeted, either by not believing her or by making light of the danger. At the extreme, we heard reports of staff who actively and overtly harmed incarcerated women. In jail and prisons, caste and social distance separate the perspectives of the jail and prison staff from that of the inmate world. Staff members may have some knowledge of the inmate world, but cannot know everything. Typically, staff only see what inmates allow them to see. Inmates, on the other hand, are firmly confined to their social caste as prisoner, regardless of their own social, educational and economic attainment. Due to these structured inequalities between inmate and staff, inmates often feel vulnerable to these inequities of power and status. This inmate expressed this perspective on the relationship between staff and inmates:

> *There is a vulnerability on the side of the inmates and there is a power with the staff. There is an attitude of contempt for inmates among the staff, especially the ones that want to have sex with us. It is like she is "deliciously below us." There is that taboo that draws people. A sick perversion. The inmates gain more power by association with someone more powerful than us. It was seen with the Nazi concentration camps. The bald Jewish women were so provocative to a Nazi man.*

Staff behavior is a significant factor in "setting the tone" in a unit. Staff members appear to have the ability to make a unit run smoothly or create such a high degree of tension on the unit that the risk of violence increases, as stated here:

> *Not all officers are bad, but you do have officers that do what they can to make life a living hell.*

Inmates have very specific perspectives on "good staff" and "bad staff" and look forward to, or dread, when these individual staff members come on shift. The importance of staff attitudes and subsequent interaction is illustrated in this comment:

> *The thing is, they are in charge of care, custody and control. When they fail to control the environment we are in, it becomes a problem. It's so intense. It is a hostile environment. The officers don't control their dorm, they say, "Go away! Don't bother me!" Maybe they don't feel well or have a problem at home, so then when someone does ask them [and they do not respond], then I'm pissed off. Then I piss someone else off.*

Staff and long-term inmates "grow up" in the system together. Especially with the lifers who had entered prison young, there was real warmth toward some officers, as the following account illustrates.

> *Some of the laws [officers] have raised us. I look up to some of these laws. I call them mom, dad, grandpa.* [Laughs a little] *They don't care. They'll just say, "Ah those kids." I mean they've known us for 10 - 12 years. We've gone through family deaths and they have helped us. They've guided us. They have not crossed the line. We have an inmate that just had her mother die. And one officer had been at visitation and seen the mother and talked to the mother. So it's kind of hard. So you get close to some of these officers emotionally. But every shift is different.*

Other inmates saw the closeness between the lifers and some officers from a somewhat different perspective, as suggested here:

> *What it is, see, is older people, that been here for awhile, become a family. When one gets into it, they all go down. The way that the guards are, the majority of them have been working with them [older inmates] for so long, they become buddies. The officers will tell them what you said. They are going to go back to the inmates and tell them what's happening with you.*

Inmates also acknowledged their role in continually antagonizing staff members, which made their prison time harder, as described here:

> *I came in when I was 25 years old, a wise crack with an attitude. [I thought] "He [judge] sentenced me to do life, not to work." But through the years, I have changed. And some [inmates] are more vulnerable and some hit the wrong note with the wrong staff. And I talk to them and say, "You can't talk to the staff like that, you have to bite your lip and either defuse or come back and defuse with us." Some of the older ones, even being assertive is difficult. In our unit on the weekends, one CO is very hard to deal with. If you don't have to see her, it is a good day. There is some staff and some inmates we just need to avoid.*
>
> *When I see youngsters coming in, [I'd tell them] "Don't get foul with the bosses because you are going to get your ass crossed out." But they don't listen. [I'd say] "Don't get fly. Just say 'yes ma'am,' 'no sir'." But, like you, [points to another participant], you don't listen and you get into trouble anyway. Then you wake up afterwards.*

We also heard from women who explained that staff members could be "handled" and "manipulated," which was consistent with staff complaints about women as "manipulators":

> *I think you could put manipulation under it. Not just inmates but staff too. Just like, I don't know. Getting over. You can make a lot of the COs bend to your way so you won't get the little write ups. My experience is that it works better with the men than with the women, but you can do this with the women too. You follow them for a few days and know them. You sort of manipulate them.*

## DISRESPECTING INMATES

The most pervasive theme of the focus groups across all states and all facilities was that staff treated inmates "disrespectfully." One woman said that this verbal abuse was worse than other forms of staff misconduct:

> *You can talk about the beatings and the rapes. But for women here, it is the subliminal messages that we are worthless. When an officer looks at you like something he scraped off his shoes. When you wait patiently and see them joking, passing magazines. They don't want to be bothered with us. That [staff speaking disrespectfully] is a rape of my spirit. You come into my cell and terrorize me. You rape me every single day [with the demeaning attitude]. I can take the physical violence. You can wash that away, but it is the emotional violence that is so hard here.*

In every facility, we heard detailed comments about staff language and disrespect. We were consistently told that some staff routinely call women "bitches" and "whores." Other comments included "being told we are worthless"; that "we are not good moms" and that "we are retarded or stupid." Remarks about body shapes and sizes, degrees of attractiveness, and other gendered comments were also mentioned frequently. One woman said that certain staff members have told her that "I am too pretty to be in prison." Even though the female participants were clear to state that not all staff used these terms, they were troubled by other staff not intervening in this verbal abuse. One woman suggested this explanation for the verbal abuse:

> *This is my take, especially for the men [COs], they were all disrespected or abused by their momma's and they come in here and take it out on us.*

The inmate focus group participants also noted their inability to respond in kind when called names:

> *They can call you everything – ho, bitch, black bitch. They aren't supposed to say that stuff, but let us say that to [them and we get written up].*

Although these everyday insults continually undermined women's feelings of safety, more extreme language was also reported in our interviews. This troubling example was reported to have occurred in a transportation bus.

> *I heard him tell this Mexican girl that "I am not your old man or your husband. I will pull over this bus and fuck you and fuck you hard." And I am like "He cannot say that. That is wrong*."

Another form of staff-inmate interaction was found in inmate stories about officers who would verbally "play" with inmates and then, retreat to their staff role in sanctioning an inmate for this behavior. This account illustrates this process:

> *She was verbally playing with the CO. She must have said something that he didn't like, and he handcuffed her and he took her to jail [segregation]. Even though they started out playing.*

Some accounts of this "playing" showed that staff may play around with each other while they are on duty.

> *They have their little Game Boys or boxes that sounds like pig noises for 20 minutes over the intercom. They are running down the halls throwing water at each other and shit, playing little boy games. Like little boys, they lock the unit down to play handball against the walls.*

Some categories of officers were said to be particularly abusive. One woman asserted that:

> *New young guards talk crazy and rude: "Get your ass out of the hallway!" They are so young. They think we're here for some big terrible crime. They feel that they need to be harder to make their point. It's "Hey, fat girl!" It's very degrading. People who already have low self esteem. "Hey, black girl!"*
>
> *You know mostly everybody's name, [so why call them names?]. They are trained to treat you like the lowest scum on earth. Some don't, some of them do. There are racist officers trying to write you up for anything. They talk to you like crap.*

According to our inmate participants, screaming at women was an everyday occurrence, as illustrated here:

> *The new COs must know how to scream because that is all they do. They should learn not to be screaming. It [screaming] does not mean that the inmates are out of control. It could be something else—problems with his kids, his wife is cheating on him. He comes in here and can control 140*

> *women who will do whatever he wants. I have seen staff out of control—screaming, spittle, neck cords [bulging], and you see the women shrink back.*

Custody and non-custody staff also discussed the "respect" issue, but their perception was that female inmates had to earn the respect of staff members, and most did not:

> *I was walking on the yard and, there was a woman [inmate] said "Hey, what time is it?" I said I didn't know. Then she screamed out, "Thanks, bitch!" So I turned around like "Come here, now it is time to counsel you." She needed to keep her mouth shut. They can come in and spit at us and hit us and all of that. How do they expect our respect? Oh, no. Not me.*

Some non-custody staff members recognized the problems that can come from attitudes on the part of custody staff toward inmates:

> *Here, you still have officers not teaching correctly, teaching bad attitudes. If an officer has a bad attitude and passes it on [to other officers], like "You run this place; that inmate can't tell you nothing; you are never wrong." They are teaching the wrong attitude.*

## INMATE PERCEPTIONS OF STAFF

Not surprisingly, inmates had many things to say about their perceptions of staff. The idea that there was not much difference between officers and inmates is a standard refrain among inmates as suggested in this comment:

> *The officers that come to work here, they just pick them off the streets. If you don't have a felony you can work here. It does not matter if you do drugs or have a misdemeanor, you can work here. I filled out an application to work here and I caught a felony right after that. I came in instead of working here!*

Many inmates had the impression that staff came to work under the influence of some substance, as described here:

> *They [officers] come in high. Third shift is real good and toasty [high]. Some of the guards come in smelling like drugs or alcohol.*
>
> *I know what crack smells like. One officer here tries to cover up the [crack] smell with perfume.*

Focus groups with staff echoed the inmate view that the quality of employees was a real problem, as illustrated by these staff comments:

> *Lowering standards for employment is the biggest problem. We have officers that are illiterate. Some of the reports we have seen can't spell "when" or "are." Half the time you can't read it. I got hired through law enforcement. There were 90 people in the room to get that job. We had to write an essay. I was one out of seven hired. I thought "Damn, I'm good. I'm the best." It made me feel good about myself. I don't feel special anymore when you're hiring people who just got their GED and are 18 years old. Every word starts with "f" and that is the only word they know how to spell! And these are my peers!*

> *My opinion is to raise pay and education level and age level requirements and hiring people that truly believe that their position is a role model and to conduct themselves that way. I have officers say, "It's weak to say thank you and please to inmates." That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.*

Another staff member summarized this point of view:

> *The majority of us came in eons ago when this job was valued. You were lucky if the state considered you. The salary was competitive and benefits were included. The waiting list was one year long. The generations now in their lower twenties are not looking at this as a long term plan – a career. It's just a place to go and if they get sick of it, they quit*

## MALE VERSUS FEMALE OFFICERS

Inmates had varied opinions about male and female officers with no consensus on who was more likely to be the better officer. Some female inmates thought female officers were more likely to use force; others said the male officers were. Some women did not like the fact that the males were more distant, but, on the other hand, female officers were described as nosy or "too involved" with the inmate population. These quotes from several study sites capture attitudes about male officers:

> *The male staff are very confrontational with women. They like to get into your face and talk crazy to you. They want to lock you up. They want you to go off.*

> *When the male officers work, they come in here with an attitude. They say, "If you don't do what I say, you're going to the hole."*

> *Male officers look at you like if you say the wrong thing they are going to do something. Training is real bad. They are trained to treat you like crap.*

Some of the inmate participants preferred female officers, as suggested here:

> *The CO women are more concerned and more sympathetic than the men who come in.*

However, just as many women indicated they would rather be guarded by men, as seen in these comments drawn from every study site:

> *I would rather have men in general. They are less petty and invasive.*

> *The women staff here are so unprofessional. It is like they went to a totally different training than the men.*

> *I think there is less social distance with females. They are real bad about getting close and males are more stand-offish*.

> *I'd much rather have the men on the floor. The women are just nosy and they are just looking to punish us more and we are punished enough.*

> *The women are way worse than male staff. All of the problems I have had with staff were with females. When they are stripping us out, just derogatory*

*comments, or just being rude. They grab your boobs, and it was not just to me.*

*Some of the women [officers], they need to go to anger management. They have the baby dramas, and their problems. God forbid if their boyfriend leaves them! The dorm is in for it then! The women are more so than the men.*

*The women COs are more violent and aggressive than the men, especially if you're sure of yourself. They want you to bow down to them, they seek you out to see how far they are going to push you*.

In contrast, one inmate acknowledged that female officers may have to be more vigilant in the prison environment:

*I have to give female officers their props because I've been in a jail and I saw a woman grab a female officer and slam her head into the bars. For the males, the guy cops, there is no aspect that this woman is going to beat the crap out of me. The women [COs] have to have this in the back of their mind. There are some big women [inmates] out there and they are bigger than me. That would be a constant thought for me.*

Some staff members also had some opinions on male and female officers, although there was no consensus in who was more likely to be an effective officer:

*It is mainly male staff members with female inmates [that are verbally abusive]. Females are more emotional. They [male staff] say, "I can't say anything to them without them snapping about it. I need to quit*."

*Men are more strong of character. It's more effective to have men*.

*There are three kinds of female officers: 1) inmate friendly officer; 2) professional; and, 3) a Bessie Bad Ass. The two has an easy time. One and three have problems. Three will write reports all night long. Having to relieve them [3s] is a mess*.

## STAFF AS PROTECTORS

A small number of women inmates told us that they feel confident that they can go to staff members when they feel threatened. Others said that they did not trust staff to intervene or respond to any form of aggression and would look the other way, as illustrated in these comments from across all the research sites:

*The staff turn their head when they are getting into trouble. They just turn their head. There are some [inmates] that have to pay to stay in the room because of it.*

*She came from behind me and she put me in a headlock and she just flipped for no reason. My face turned like a tomato and another inmate got her off of me. It was a scary moment for me. The CO literally told us that there is one of her and there is 11 of you and you are going to let her do this? The staff will*

*say, "I don't want to hear about it". Until something happened, then they moved her.*

*If it's a good fight, they [COs] let it happen before they call a code. They find it interesting if Pit Bulls [two aggressive women] are fighting. They want to see what happens.*

*If we recognize that there is going to be a conflict with an inmate, we will go to a CO and we request a move. But they will not do anything until something actually happens. They will wait until someone gets hurt, then that is when it is a valid concern – after it happens.*

Some inmates did tell us that they knew specific staff members to whom they could go to for help. Sometimes this was a higher ranking officer, sometimes it was a person whose position involved requests for assistance, but many times, it was a correctional officer who was perceived to be more helpful and trustworthy, as shown in these two examples:

*Some of the older officers, they are just trying to do their job. Like Miss [name]. She's got her ways, but if you got a problem, she's on top of it and she'll solve it. Don't traffic and trade in front of her, but if you are being threatened, you can go to her and she will nip it in the bud. Then you go to others and they would do nothing.*

*There is this officer and everyone is straight when it's her shift, and I know that if I'm in danger or feel threatened, I know that I can go straight to that woman and she'll deal with it.*

## STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF INMATES

The perception of female inmates and how to manage them is in flux. In past decades, there was a perception that female inmates were completely different from male inmates and should be managed as such. Overall, women's prisons and jails were treated as stepchildren or "correctional afterthoughts" of the correctional system. In some systems, a gender-based approach diminished when policies and procedures were brought into line with those of facilities for men. More recently, gender specific programming has been the approach of progressive correctional departments that, at least with rhetoric if not reality, subscribe to the pathways model of criminality and provide programming to meet women's special needs.

Our participants reflected this mix of views in whether or not women in prison should be managed differently from men. One inmate said, "They need training, gender-responsive (training), because they do not know how to talk to us." In another group, a woman suggested that staff should have training on how to "stand, talk and walk in the presence of women." This statement from a male staff member noted that some officers were not effective when they thought they could treat women the same as male inmates:

*With these women, they come up to us from this round about way. From the male perspective, we are like "Get to the damn point." With that, we just want to get to the damn point. If people were trying to address that in training and trying to get people to know that women and men communicate in different*

> *ways, that would help. The gender responsive training doesn't cover that as much as it should and that was one let down. Many custody staff have the old mentality dealing with women as men. And it doesn't work. I don't think that they can deal well with the gender responsive stuff.*

An inmate sums up staff attitudes by saying:

> *We are not men, and they need to not talk with me like a man. The new staff have little attitudes that they have from working in a men's prison and they need to change up. I think there is an attempt by the COs and the administration that they need to become more like the big guys' prison and there is no need for it, but they do it and it is very intimidating*.

## STAFF CONFLICTS IN RUNNING THE UNIT

Lack of consistency in running a unit was said to be a primary source of tension for women when procedures between shifts are different, or staff members' actions are unpredictable as illustrated in this inmate comment:

> *Each CO has a different way of doing things, and we are supposed to do it one way one day and another way another day. One CO put the lights on at 6 am, and if you turn off the lights, she gets mad. We tell her that the flies are attracted to the lights. The inmates ask if they can turn the lights off and she says no. And, yet, this other CO will keep the lights off and it is not a problem. It is different each day and you never know.*

The following quote is from an officer who is describing the same situation from a different perspective.

> *It makes it hard when you come in, and your unit is off the hook [disrupted]. You can look at the unit and know exactly who you are relieving. You are cleaning up their mess. The Bessie Bad Ass and the inmate-friendly do not realize that their shift is horrible, and what you have to do to clean it up. I was a preschool teacher and when I first got this job, I was scared [of inmates]. I learned in the first two weeks I was here that it was the other officers you had to worry about, not the inmates.*

Women were especially incensed at situations where housing unit officers would tell them they could do something, i.e., go to the bathroom, be out in the dayroom or make a phone call, and then another staff member would come in and write them up for the infraction, without the original officer explaining that they gave them permission. These types of incidents were mentioned frequently and never failed to bring similar stories from other women.

## STAFF IN CONFLICT WITH STAFF

Female inmates are aware of the conflict that exists among staff members. Inmates seem to know almost everything about what is occurring between staff members, including who is sleeping with whom, which marriage is in trouble, and which staff members are fighting with each other. This example illustrates staff conflict as observed by an inmate:

> *I'll see an officer at a post and another one comes and they just be looking. Nitpicking. Trying to see anything they can. [It] creates tension. I've seen shirts come off between officers on a lot of racial issues. We laugh, but it's not really funny.*

Getting caught up in "staff games" was another consequence of staff conflict:

> *I was under investigation. Other staff had a conflict and they played it out on me. Investigative staff told me I was cleared and then I got locked up with people I did not even know as co-defendants. All because I was caught up in staff games.*

Arguments between staff are also observed by the inmates, as in this example:

> *Two COs had a fight. It was a husband and wife. They had a fight right here in the parking lot. She [CO] had an inmate girl friend in another unit. One day she [CO] was talking to her [inmate girlfriend], but the husband was listening in on the phone when she was talking to her. She [CO] would write kites [notes] to a girl. Then have someone give the kite to this girl. The girl already has a girlfriend, but she is saying, "Let me just use her. Let me get what I can get from her." But the girl's girlfriend got jealous and went to the warden. The husband was so pissed that he and the husband and wife went at it in the parking lot.*

At another site, this woman said:

> *Staff are so busy sleeping with each other that they don't know what is happening.*

There were also comments about custody versus non-custody staff and the differences in attitudes toward inmates between these groups. One inmate remarked that those individuals who had been non-custody and moved into a custody position changed because:

> *Anybody out of uniform is not respected here. They [those staff members who moved from non-custody to custody] got into uniform and now they have changed. They used to say they did not understand it [why custody was so rough], and now they do it with relish. Staff do it to fit in. To have their back covered. You see this metamorphosis.*

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STAFF-INMATE VIOLENCE

We agree that all staff members have the right and responsibility to use appropriate force to subdue an inmate or gain compliance to a lawful order. A few inmate focus group participants, however, described violence against them that appears to be outside the scope of duty. It appeared from our discussions with inmates that certain officers were much quicker to resort to force, sometimes escalating to excessive force. It seemed also to be true that some inmates were much more likely to engage in a pattern of physical altercations with officers. That is, some officers seemed to be more violent than others, and some inmates were also more prone to violent interactions with officers. These two groups, together, created a dynamic that dramatically increased the potential of violence. Given a more submissive, less

argumentative, and non-aggressive inmate, these officers may not have used force. Given a more professional, calmer officer, these inmates may not have ended up being the victim of excessive force. Escalation of any conflict is possible, but two combustible individuals contributed to this escalation. It was clear, in every account, however, that, in any contest, inmates always ended up losing, especially because officers who engaged in frequent uses of force tended to be men. One woman describes this staff effect when intervening in a fight between two inmates:

> *I wasn't fearful of what the ladies [inmates] could do. I was more fearful of what the officers would do if we were fighting. They come in and slam everyone around. I was more fearful of that. I could deal with the two women.*

Many inmates described incidents where they felt that actions by officers escalated the violence potential. For those who had a tendency to react to stress with violence, the inmate participants felt that staff "caused" them to become violent toward staff, as seen in these examples taken from several study sites:

> *She [CO] kept harassing me over a period of months. She was provoking me. She harassed me all day long and I just snapped. I was in the [officer's dining room]. I've stabbed sergeants. When I went into [there] and said I'm going to beat her, they had to stop me*.

> *I think that a lot of times they don't take into consideration that we are all going through something and if they are being insensitive, it could just set us off*.

> *When I went to close custody, this sergeant would keep messing with me. I used to lay down thinking of how I was going to get him.*

Some inmates went so far as to explain that correctional officers goaded them into being violent so that they could, in turn, use violence against the women, as shown in these two accounts:

> *I was going through some issues and [a female correctional officer] was always nitpicking. I could be acting perfect and she would pull me out of line and make me wait for nothing. Just stuff like that. That day I was having a real bad day and the officer working. She and I did not get along at all. She would talk crazy, real, real crazy and real, real flying off the handle. We got into it. She started pushing the door open and I started putting on my socks and shoes. I was ready to fight. I told her I got just enough time to cover what I was going to do to her.*

> *Now staff will set you up. They go out of their way to provoke you. The kids bite [and then get into trouble]. We [older inmates] know that we can walk away. When I walk away, I cry, but I will not let them see my tears. But the youngsters have not learned that.*

One female inmate recounted overhearing an officer who said, "I wish there was more violence here so I can have more to do."

Inmates were very aware of which officers were violent and avoided interacting with them whenever possible, as described here:

*He's just got a reputation for slamming females. Everyone just knows that.*

We were also told that inmates with mental problems who were non-compliant were likely to be the target of excessive force:

> *She [inmate] was banging her head against the wall and a female CO responded and the inmate was not listening to her and she was banging her head and another male CO came over and he tried to make the inmate stop and she wouldn't. He took his hand and he banged her head against the wall and threw her to the ground and he was a big guy. Even the lady cops said "You didn't have to do that." He smashed her face into the ground. He said, "If you want to bang your head, I will bang it for you."*

Women also told us that staff violence against any individual woman had a real effect on those inmates who observed the violence. When one woman is treated with violence by officers, the incident raises the tension level in the facility and all women are affected by it. Many of the inmate observers were scared, upset, and angry. This event occurred in a jail:

> *And she [inmate] told the lady [officer], "If you touch me again, I'll kick you." And so she kicked the lady. And, Oh God! The male guard, he slammed her head against the wall and they were literally punching her like that [demonstrated fist blows to the stomach]. She was shackled and she fell to the ground and they pulled her up by the arms [demonstrated arms being pulled up and backwards]. And I was sure her arms were broken. They were punching and kicking her. And we were all crying.*

The following narrative illustrates the complexity of inmate attitudes toward violence: While some women indicate they are not strangers to violence and they engage in it fairly frequently, they have limits on what they view as acceptable. Female inmates fighting with each other seemed to be perceived as normal, but a male lieutenant who utilizes force against them was not, as detailed here:

> *There was this lieutenant. He was so violent toward the inmates. He broke their arm, broke their teeth. There was this little girl, 100 pounds. He got her on the ground, beating her. We were all afraid of the lieutenant. You didn't want to do nothing. You wait till he's not there if you want to fight 'cus he'll kill you."*

In contrast, some custody staff believed that staff who were afraid to use force against the inmates contributed to the violence, as stated here by a custody participant:

> *The inmates know the new officer will try to go by policy, but with us, we will be spontaneous right along with you. [It] causes violence because they hesitate. We just jump in*.

We also heard a few staff members express the opinion that there were unnecessary incidents of excessive violence, as suggested by this non-custody staff member:

> *I have seen and heard a number of things about physical violence. It's what I consider abuse. I felt like the officers were excessive a number of times. I saw them body slam an inmate against the wall. A number of things happen*

> *more to mentally ill inmates. I was told by one officer that a mentally ill inmate who was very psychotic and unable to control her actions was pulled by the hair and dragged from one unit to another.*

We also heard stories of extreme violence perpetrated against staff members by female inmates, such as having a pencil stuck in an officer's neck, cutting an officer's face, and having a "lock in the sock" used on an officer. There has been group violence by female inmates against officers as well, although these incidents are very rare. This officer describes such an incident:

> *I had three officers taken down. The inmates planned on killing them. An offender escaped the cellblock and came and told us they were going to kill them [the officers]. We ran in there. One officer was down and unconscious. I could see her laying down at the end of the run. I figured she was dead already. The other two were practically unconscious. They were being held up and pummeled in the face. They could not stand on their own. Two of the officers were tough officers. One officer was not tough, but was in the wrong place at the wrong time and she was weak. The other two were by the book, very tough but consistent. Excellent cellblock officers, but they messed up that day. Assaults on officers were not a felony then, they were a misdemeanor. Now they are back to a felony. I would love to tell you we were appropriate when we went in there, but we weren't. If there was ever an excessive use of force, that was it, and I would do it again.*

## STAFF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Staff sexual misconduct was a significant theme in the inmate interviews but most was at the lower end of the continuum, involving verbal and other forms of harassment. This continuum is described in detail in Part I of this report. Our focus groups with female inmates provided few descriptions of sexual violence perpetrated by staff. However, the most serious and significant detail about staff sexual misconduct was found in our content analysis of inmate letters received by Stop Prison Rape. We include this summary in this chapter.

One woman dismissed any possibility of staff sexual misconduct by saying, "I would not get involved with a man. I have free will, and do not get myself in that situation." In the majority of the interviews, most inmates did not think that staff sexual misconduct was a significant threat to their well-being. It was not always clear to us whether they meant there was no misconduct or they didn't define inmate-staff sexual relationships as a problem.

One staff member pointed to the complexity of determining the nature of any relationship because "It's hard to tell if it's an actual relationship or if the inmates just have the hots [for the officer]. They get all goo goo, ga ga over an officer." Some inmates agreed that female inmates can initiate relationships with staff, as suggested here:

> *Inmates try to bring themselves out like that to [attract] the men. Try to seduce them. Trying to show off a little bit or try to come at them a bit.*

One example of an inmate "making the first move" is illustrated here:

> *She [jail inmate] used to flirt in an obvious way. One of the sergeants liked her. He was her boy toy. She got away with everything while he was on duty. She would stick her titties on the window.*

Some staff may respond to these overtures as stated here in an inmate interview:

> *We have one guy who came in with a hard-on walking around in our pod, and he is teasing the girls and looking at them in their bras and he was dancing for the girls. And, you might think it is funny, but I think it is very unprofessional. They [inmates] make sexual comments toward the guys [COs]. I don't think the staff should fall for this. He should not flirt with them. It goes both ways. The women can be rather blunt, obvious, even with the visitors, and making comments. It goes both ways.*

Not surprisingly, staff members were said to be particularly vulnerable to attention from women inmates, as suggested by this female inmate:

> *When men come to work in a place like this, we call them "prison superstars" 'cus they are a legend in their own mind. They can't get women to pay attention to them on the streets so they come in here and they get attention because we don't see a lot of men. Some of the women act certain ways to get a man to pay attention to them and the officers get them [the inmates] to depend on them.*

There were some staff members who did acknowledge there might be a problem, but most thought that any sexual relations were consensual, as in these staff comments:

> *It's a problem or people wouldn't get walked off. There is a problem with staff being over familiar or inappropriate with the inmates that sometimes it can be sexual. It has been consensual and although by law it is not, but you never know. We have a lot of staff that get in trouble here for inappropriate behavior with inmates and two-three times a year, someone gets walked off. I wouldn't classify it as victimization because the inmate is doing it consensually.*

## COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

We discussed issues related to reporting and investigation in the previous chapter as they relate both to inmate and staff incidents. While it is obvious that sexual relationships between staff and inmates are both morally and legally wrong, the collateral consequences of such misconduct further threaten women's safety and wellbeing. Staff members, too, expressed feelings of betrayal by fellow staff members who engaged in such relationships. They also described the distrust and low morale among staff generated by staff sexual misconduct.

One consequence is that female inmates involved with staff are placed in a difficult situation *vis a vis* other inmates as well as staff. Some inmates may be jealous of the attention, especially if the officer is attractive and desirable to other inmates. Conversely, officers may be jealous of each other over an attractive inmate. Further, we learned that officers sometimes became jealous because their desired inmate was in a relationship with another inmate. Such jealousy may cause staff members to perform in an unprofessional manner, as this account related:

> *When I was 19 years old, I was in a relationship with a male officer. He would come to my cell, but I was scared to get sexual with him. It wasn't physical. But in the process, I started messing with women, and he didn't like that. When he found out that I was messing with women, he got mad about it. He would cross her out all the time so that I would intervene. He kept messing with her and messing with her.*
>
> *One time, we were in line waiting to get our food and I'm talking to her. He started giving her a hard time, so I said something to him and he said he wasn't talking to me. But I said, "If you're talking to her, you're talking to me." He said to go to my house. I walked away and he wouldn't get off my back. Then he took me by the back of my neck and slammed me into the floor. I hit the floor so hard everyone in the dayroom heard it. I was thin then, no more than 110 pounds, and he was over 6 feet tall. This side of my face was twice as big and my eye was swollen. A lot of inmates told [the investigators] about our relationship. I denied it. I ended up getting a major case because he lied*

Additional problems are created when the inmate comes forward to report the officer or staff member. In some cases, we heard that the reporting victim was threatened by other inmates because she was blamed for getting the popular staff member "in trouble." This retaliation by other inmates is illustrated here:

> *The others [inmates] were ready to fight the two girls because they thought they had a good staff person and they didn't want to lose him. He had everyone swooning over him, everyone in administration, the officers, because he was good looking. So anyone that was talking against him was sent away. They moved her off in the middle of the night.*

Another complication arises when staff members involved with inmates are married to another staff member working in the same facility:

> *There was a guy that would invade my space in the kitchen. He would follow me back to the supply closet while I was doing inventory. I got fussed at [by his wife who was a lieutenant in the prison]. I got called into the count room with the lady from IA, the Warden, and the lady from classification. They told me to go pack, that they could protect me from him, but not from her.*

## INMATE LETTERS SENT TO STOP PRISON RAPE

While our focus group interviews and subsequent individual interviews contained some descriptions of extreme staff sexual misconduct, the most detailed information was derived through content analysis of letters received by Stop Prison Rape (SPR). SPR is an advocacy organization that "seeks to end sexual violence committed against men, women, and youth in all forms of detention." According to their website (spr.org, accessed February 2008), survivors and their loved ones frequently turn to SPR for access to vital information and resources. As part of this project, we examined all the letters from females contained in SPR archives of letters from inmates across the country.

These letters contained in the SPR files were written by inmates who have been sexually assaulted or from inmates and free world individuals who are seeking help

for an imprisoned person. While most of the letters concerned male inmates, we were able to review 57 letters either from female inmates or others connected to them. There were many letters written by a third party, typically a husband or significant other, who was seeking help for an inmate. We examined these letters to obtain an additional level of detail about women's experience with sexual assault and add to our understanding of the context of sexual assault from another data source. SPR staff explained that these letters were in no way representative of the prevalence of sexual assault in prisons and jails. The difficulty of writing a letter about a traumatic event, the problems in obtaining the materials needed to write a letter, and concerns about staff blocking the letter combine to make writing a letter to SPR a rare event. We thank SPR for sharing their letters with us.

The letters were coded, omitting any identifying details, such as individual names, states, or facilities to protect the confidentiality of the writers. These letters ranged in length from a few lines to multiple pages. Like the focus group interviews, these descriptive data often reflected the anguish and pain of sexual assault victimization. While the data collected for this study and the BJS National Inmate Survey provides evidence of inmate-inmate sexual and other forms of violence, the SPR letters did not focus on violence among inmates. Few of the 57 letters we reviewed described incidents of sexual assault involving other inmates. Of those which did, some mentioned assault by female inmates in same-sex facilities and some mentioned assault by male inmates in mixed-sex faculties, typically jails. The few women who wrote about incidents involving other female inmates indicated an unwillingness to report to the prison officials because of fear of retaliation by the perpetrator. A concern over not being taken seriously was also expressed in these letters. One letter also reported that her roommates observed the assault and "did nothing," further increasing her feelings of unsafety. Being "treated like I did something wrong" also reflects a theme in these letters. The rest of this section focuses on staff-related assaults.

### Backgrounds of Inmates

Women routinely mentioned their personal histories of violent victimization in their letters. Many letters contained a description of past abuse as girls and prior to incarceration, expressing anguish at this happening again while in custody. One woman wrote that she was a "victim in recovery, a survivor of rape." In one letter, a woman said that her assault and the subsequent investigation "caused PTSD." One letter described an assault by an officer known to commit misconduct. She said "that other women have said that this officer had asked them to show him their breasts and watched them while they showered," but "I did not expect him to be a rapist." However, when the assault occurred, "The guttural tone of the voice he used and the glazed, scary look in his eyes made it clear to me that he was not kidding and that I had better not question what he told me to do." One woman said that her assaulter "acted as if [sexual assault] was a natural part of the job."

There were four categories of events involving staff as described in these letters. In the first category, the women wrote about a relationship with a male staff member that had gone bad in one way or another. In one instance, a letter described a personal relationship with a correctional officer: The writer reported that she had "not had sex yet but planned to do so" and had discussed "sexual positions" with this officer. She described the relationship as a "flirtation." It appears the relationship was

interrupted by an investigation, which resulted in sanctions against the inmate but not the staff member. The woman wrote to ask SPR "where to turn for help" as she felt she "took the blame" because she did not want the correctional officer to lose his job. Several other letters describe the repercussions of these relationships "gone bad." In a letter written from a jail, a woman wrote about a staff member who brought both female and male inmates into his office to "make phone calls, play cards, drink coffee and eat food." She said that the officer told her he would help her stay out of prison, but this help "came at a price." She further reported that he "scared and harassed me until I performed oral sex on him."

The second category involves more aggressive or violent sexual misconduct that began with inappropriate interaction. After writing SPR and receiving the survivor packet, one woman wrote a second letter, requesting specific legal help. She described a circumstance wherein a jail sergeant offered "food, cigarettes and phone calls" in exchange for revealing her breasts. This sergeant also wrote notes asking "if I liked pornography and anal sex" and "pulled me into the office" to continue this harassment. Finally, this letter describes, "other inmates watched this 'so and so' molest me and they were scared and crying while this happened". Although there were "multiple penetrations with his fingers," she wrote that "I did not wash but no one took the evidence." She also said that this officer was well-known to all the female inmates as the "pervert of the unit." It appears that ultimately the staff person was fired but she concluded that "No one wants to help me."

The third category of letters describes violent sexual assaults by staff. In one letter, a woman describes a violent assault with threats wherein an officer "forced my pants down and opened his zipper as he pushed me down." The assault was interrupted by another inmate who knocked on the door. She continued in saying that the assaulter told me that "he would crush my skull if I said a word." Despite this threat, the female inmate reported the assault and was asked by an investigator if "it was in there long enough" to count as a rape. She was very nervous about reporting the assault because "I had heard of the horrific retaliation the victims had suffered at the hands of the guards." She also said that many staff members attempted to dissuade her from reporting the event. When she reported the assault to a female staff person, she "told me to put everything in writing but she said I would regret reporting the event." A lieutenant also asked her to recant "because he would not have this in his prison. I refused and was told I would be in disciplinary housing for a year" and an investigative officer "told me that I did just not get it. Inmates never win." She wrote that she was told that any investigation would be done by his friends. She also reported being denied visits because the staff person said "she does not deserve a visit" and was told "that is what you get for reporting rape."

In another account of staff sexual assault, a woman said that she could tell the officer was going to assault her because "this has happened to me before so I acted as if it was OK with me." After the oral and vaginal assault, "I left as if nothing was wrong." She felt particularly injured because "I used to be able to talk to him about personal issues—one being why I had no desire to ever be with a man again because of the abuse I had suffered as a child. I thought he understood because we talked openly."

Some women reported being verbally and sexually assaulted while being transported. One woman said that the private transport officer assaulted her in a bathroom after talking about "taking me into the desert, shooting me and leaving me for dead."

In a few letters, women reported that staff involved with sexual misconduct would often turn to other inmates for retaliation. As stated in one letter, after her relationship was over, the officer "hired a girl to sexually assault me." The "girl" said she did it because she was told the letter writer was a "snitch." A concern that "friends of the officer" or "predatory women" would retaliate as a favor to the officer" was also common in these letters.

A fourth category of staff sexual misconduct involves a sexual assault that occurred while searching. In one letter, a woman told of being assaulted "vaginally with his fist," an officer told her, "You have been around long enough to know how to keep your mouth shut."

Others report being impregnated by sexual assaults in jail, having staff masturbate in front of their cells or in offices and being assaulted during medical exams. There were also letters that described sexual harassment and assaults at the hands of parole officers, defense attorneys, and other criminal justice staff.

Many of the letters told of a range of inappropriate behavior that often escalated into a sexual assault. While some of the staff sexual misconduct reports included a discussion of a prior relationship with the officer, other letters described staff bringing in contraband, providing "food and cigarettes" as well as verbal comments about sex, and other sexualized discussions. As one woman wrote:

> *The officer made comments about my breasts and gave me cigarettes and food. He kissed me, had his fingers inside of me and asked me to show him my breasts. I did do this and allowed him to touch me. Did I want him to? NO. Did I like him? NO. Did I want to smoke, eat good food? Yes.*

She further stated that both she and the officer were reported and "I was called "snitch" even though I did not want to cooperate. She wrote:

> *While in the "hole," "another officer also gave me cigarettes and food and I gave him oral sex. He then pulled out a condom and I said no because I was on my period. I have never told anybody about that. I was in the hole and staff were giving me hell already. Sometimes I feel guilty about what happened.*

**Facility Reaction**

Most of the letters described significant problems in facility reaction to inmate-on-inmate violence, staff sexual misconduct and other PREA-related concerns. The most common statement was "not being believed" and other reactions that discouraged the inmate. One woman who tried to report an assault by her "girlfriend" was told that "there is no such thing as assault in this place" and that if she continued to pursue reporting this incident, she would be punished by being put in protective custody. She persisted in reporting and was placed in Segregated Housing, losing her privileges and job. In another case, a woman told her counselor about a staff assault and he said that "I had too many problems and he did not know how to deal with me."

Another letter writer reported being told by a correctional officer about a woman who "deserved being raped by other inmates because she was a snitch" and "that no

matter how many times she reported it, she would not be protected." This letter concluded by saying, "The Warden is the only one who cares about what happens to inmates here." In yet another letter, one woman reported an assault to the PREA officer of the facility but felt that this official was "stand-offish" and did not take her claim seriously. Many women said that retaliation by other officers was a form of continuing the abuse as suggested by one woman who wrote, "All the guards know what has happened to me and with each passing day it gets worse." Others told of "being forced to recant during the process of investigation" because "no one was going to believe me." Another woman wrote that she was continually asked, "What do you hope to gain by your claims?"

**Individual Reactions**

Related to descriptions of their own backgrounds of trauma and abuse, women wrote about the emotional and practical difficulties as a result of the violent incident. The wide majority reported their inability to feel safe after the incident and other feelings of helplessness. Probably the most poignant of the individual reactions was found in the statements about hopelessness and despair that many women expressed in these letters. These statements included:

> *I can bear no more pain in my life.*
>
> *I thought I could deal with this by myself but I can't.*
>
> *I was straight, but after this rape I feel twisted.*
>
> *I look at men dirty now. I know I need help. I have nightmares. I don't trust. I cry.*
>
> *I want justice. I want help.*
>
> *What do I do now?*
>
> *I've been done worse as a child, even raped, but right is right and wrong is wrong.*
>
> *That is what happened to me. It may mean nothing to them – but it means something to me. I didn't invite what happened. But the fact is, it did happen.*
>
> *There is nothing I can do about it. It's just something that happened to an already abused woman. Done. I didn't/don't matter.*
>
> *I was raped in custody and I am in search of a way to recover.*

While these letters represent the most extreme form of sexual assault, they also reflect similar patterns and processes to those reported in our focus groups.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, staff have a significant impact on the potential for violence in women's facilities. In Part I, we recommended a range of prevention and intervention strategies designed specifically to reduce violence and conflict in women's facilities. One specific recommendation concerns staff training. Many staff, whether new to the system or veterans transferring from institutions for men, are often unprepared for the complex and often subtle dynamics that play out in relationships with staff and offenders and shape the context for sexual violence in women's facilities.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS TO THE FOCUS GROUP DATA

These concluding remarks are also contained in Part I of this report. As they summarize the focus group data, they are repeated here for readers of Part II. Like all aspects of incarceration, violence in women's correctional facilities was markedly gendered and nested within a constellation of overlapping individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors. We learned that violence between female inmates occurred on a continuum, ranging from verbal intimidation to homicide. Violence was most prevalent at the lower end of the continuum and quite rare at the extreme end. While our research was consistent with prior findings that violence in women's prisons was not as severe or as prevalent as in men's institutions, we did find that some forms of violence were particular to women's facilities and required their own definitions.

We found that violence in women's jails and prisons is not a dominant aspect of everyday life, but exists as a potential, shaped by time, place, prison culture, interpersonal relationships, and staff actions. On-going tensions and conflicts, lack of economic opportunity, and few therapeutic options to address past victimization or to treat destructive relationship patterns contribute to the potential for violence in women's facilities. Four categories of conflict and violence are detailed:

- Verbal conflict
- Economic conflict and exploitation
- Physical violence
- Sexual violence

For female inmates, the most common forms of violence and conflict include verbal conflict and economic exploitation. Bullying and intimidation occur primarily over material goods or control over physical spaces, such as cells or dorms, especially when women exhibited vulnerabilities. We learned that any form of violence had the potential for escalating into a more serious and dangerous form. Physical violence was typically the result of escalating conflict over debts or "disrespect," or occurred between women in an on-going difficult relationship. Sexual violence was rarely discussed in our interviews unless prompted, but when mentioned, was seen to be usually a product of these problematic interpersonal relationships. In an attempt to capture the complexity of sexual violence, we have constructed a "continuum of coercion" that describes the sexual victimization that occurs, which includes:

- Sexual comments and touching
- Sexual intimidation and pressure
- "Fatal Attractions" (Stalking)
- Sexual aggressors
- Sexual violence in relationships
- Sexual assault

In our discussions with inmates and correctional staff, there was general consensus among inmates and staff regarding the causes of fighting and other forms of violence in the prison. Generally, both groups believed that jealousy, debts, and disrespect were the major catalysts for violence. We contend, however, that these factors are dynamic contributors to the potential for violence, and interact within the four levels outlined in the Ecological Model (individual, relationship, community, and society).

The women's jail and prison population is characterized by women with long histories of abuse and victimization and, for the most part, this past trauma remains untreated. These personal histories can result in intense and dysfunctional relationships with other women with similar histories. Women's relationships take on such importance that jealousy looms as a frequent trigger for violence. Other violence erupts when women respond to debts with violent retaliation. Women referred to unpaid debts as a form of disrespect but disrespect also encompassed a wide range of other behaviors as well. "Disrespect" refers to interpersonal behaviors that impinge upon another woman's status, reputation, sense of self, personal space, or rights of "citizenship." The concept of disrespect is closely tied to the subcultural norms and values of the prison and jail world. Idle female inmates, either due to a lack of available programming or individual resistance to such participation, are most likely to participate in these risky behaviors and relationships.

With few exceptions, women told us that they became less worried about physical or sexual violence over the course of their incarceration. While again stressing that "anything can happen at any time," most women learned how to protect themselves from all forms of violence. Day-to-day tension, crowded living conditions, the lack of medical care and the potential for disease, and a scarcity of meaningful programs and activities were seen as more significant threats to a woman's overall well-being than physical or sexual attack. Some individual women said they did "not feel safe at all," but most said they learned to protect themselves. Health concerns eclipsed worries about sexual or physical safety in every focus group and these concerns were related to lack of medical care and cleaning supplies, deteriorating physical plant conditions, substandard food, and the lack of rehabilitative programs. Idleness and an inability to earn money were also said to undermine women's sense of well-being.

Women also expressed little confidence in the ability of staff members to protect them from violence, either from other female inmates or from staff. Women described staff as "just not caring;" "playing favorites" with aggressors; "enjoying their fears" or refusing to take their fears seriously; "covering up for their buddies;" and telling them "This is prison—deal with it. " Women also stated that they were told by staff that they would have to "name names" if they went to staff for help in dealing with threats to their safety. Staff, too, remarked that they often felt unable to protect women, but

their reasons differed from those offered by the women. Lack of knowledge about reporting practices, reluctance to "snitch," distrust of the entire investigative process, and concerns about retaliation from inmates and staff were mentioned frequently. Inmates had little confidence in this process even in facilities with well known formal policies and procedures to report such concerns. Staff felt that their abilities to respond to violence depended on inmate reporting, but there were tremendous barriers and liabilities surrounding reporting feared or actual victimization.

One point of agreement was a strong perspective on place. In every site location, inmates and staff were unanimous that some facilities were far more dangerous than others; and, within facilities, particular living units were also defined as particularly risky and dangerous. Contributing factors to any particular locale included an interactive combination of individual, relational, and living unit and facility characteristics. Living units function as "neighborhoods" and, as such, exist as the physical place where the processes that shape violence or safety converge. This insight about place led to our approach of creating an instrument that can empirically measure the context of violence and safety within these living units.

In terms of staff, the most common problem reported by the inmate participants was "down talk" or disrespectful and derogatory verbal interactions. Most of the staff sexual misconduct described occurred at the lower end of a coercion continuum. By far, the most prevalent form of officer sexual misconduct was inappropriate touching, comments and suggestions, or other non-physical assaults. However, we heard a wide range of staff sexual misconduct that we placed upon a continuum of coercion as follows:

- Love and seduction
- Inappropriate comments and conversation
- Sexual requests
- "Flashing," voyeurism and touching
- Abuse of search authority
- Sexual exchange
- Sexual intimidation
- Sex without physical violence
- Sex with physical violence.

As we have seen in the description of the focus group data, the Ecological Model (CDC, 2004) was used to frame these data. We also drew on an Escalation Model (Edgar and Martin, 2003) and found that most violence began with identifiable (and preventable) conflict that escalated over time. Multiple organizational, environmental and individual factors contribute to violence in women's facilities. Analysis of the focus group data found that the dynamic interplay between individual, relational, community, facility and societal factors create and sustain violence potentials in women's jails and prisons. Staff members play a critical role in creating the potential for violence and conflict. In a similar way, aspects of policy and practice also can support or mitigate such violence. In advocating this prevention and intervention strategy, we argue that these same factors can create and sustain safety as well.

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# APPENDICES

# Appendix A



# Focus Group Protocol
# Staff and Inmate Groups

## Basic Information about Focus Groups

### What is the primary objective of a focus group?

Focus groups provide a venue that allows the collection of high quality data concerning the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding a few topics in a social context where they can consider their own views in the context of the views of others.

### What is a focus group?

A focus group is a "group" discussion that gathers together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest to the researcher.

- The discussion is usually "focused" on a particular area of interest. It does not usually cover a large range of issues, but allows the researcher to explore a few topics in greater detail.
- Focus groups are also "focused" because the participants usually share a common characteristic. This may be age, sex, educational background, religion, job title, or something directly related to the topic. This encourages a group to speak more freely about the subject without fear of being judged by others thought to be superior, more expert or more conservative.

### Focus Group Team

There are two roles in the focus group process: 1) facilitator/moderator, and 2) note taker/observer.

### What does the focus group team do?

There are two team members, with one focusing on taking notes and observing and the other focusing on facilitation and moderating.

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## What is the role of facilitator/moderator?

Your major goal of facilitation is to collect useful information to meet the goal of meeting. Facilitating and conducting a focus group interview requires considerable group process skills. The facilitator **should not**: 1) indicate any judgment about what is said or what is considered acceptable, nor 2) ask questions or respond to statements in a tone that makes participant feel guilty or embarrassed. The facilitator **should** attempt to explore further contradictions brought up amongst focus group members, but **not** attempt to arrive at a consensus.

## What is role of the note taker/observer?

*Note: It is important that someone who is skilled in note-taking, and if possible, has a background in corrections (i.e., is familiar with the terminology/slang/ jargon) be appointed as note taker.*

1. Your role is critical. Since the purpose of focus group is to understand the perspectives and experiences of the people being interviewed, it all comes to naught if the note taker/observer fails to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed. There is no substitute for these data.

2. The note taker/observer may also help the facilitator/moderator. She or he may point out questions that are not well explored, questions missed by the facilitator/moderator, or suggest areas that could be investigated further. This person should also help the facilitator/moderator summarize the focus group by noting significant and or unique contributions made by the group.

3. Every good focus group interview is also an observation. Nonverbal data are still data. Note where and when the interview occurred, who was present (note relevant demographic details and other salient information), how participants reacted, any surprises during the session, any argument/debate/ agreement, and any other additional information that would help establish a context for interpreting and making sense of the interview. Also document how much time is devoted to each topic by recording the start time of each topic. Observational data should be recorded differently from verbal data (e.g., in parentheses or italics). Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotes from participants. If an excessive amount of pronouns are being used and recorded, clarify to whom the pronouns are referring to in parentheses. Highlight in brackets what you believe may be some important contributions that the focus group made.

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These comments can be used in your wrap-up and summary at the end of the focus group.

4. The note taker/observer recording the data should go over notes from the focus group as soon as possible after the focus group (i.e., no later than the same day), ensuring the notes are complete and legible. If you took notes by hand, make any notes on your written notes (e.g., clarify any scratching/shorthand, ensure pages are numbered, fill out any notes that don't make sense, etc.). Type up the notes as soon as possible in the manner and format utilized in the sample (attached Sample of Typed Focus Group Notes). It is very important that you follow this format exactly.

5. If there are areas of vagueness or uncertainty where the note taker/ observer is not sure what a participant said or meant, the note taker/ observer can check with the facilitator/moderator. Guessing what the person said is unacceptable. If there is no way of following up with the respondent, the area of vagueness or uncertainty becomes missing data and should not be in the final version of the typed notes of the focus group.

6. The facilitator/moderator should also review the finalized notes and check their accuracy to ensure the written report reflects what occurred. It is important that the notes be understandable to anyone not present.

7. As soon as possible (i.e., preferably the same day or following day), the two focus group interviewers should go over the notes, and create a narrative summary in a separate document, highlighting main points, significant or unique ideas or recommendations, and other noteworthy results from the focus group.

8. Send the typed notes and narrative summary to Barbara Owen.

## What do the participants do?

Participants will be asked to reflect on questions asked. They get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say.

It is not necessary for the group to reach consensus. It is not necessary for the group to disagree. The focus group can provide insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinions and ideas, and the inconsistencies

# Appendix A



and variation that exist in a particular institution in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices. The focus group interview provides some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide some checks and balances on each other which weed out false or extreme views. The group dynamics typically contribute to focusing on the most important topics and issues. It should be easy to assess the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view of the program among participants.

## Planning and Conducting Focus Groups

### Schedule Interviews

1. Contact the staff at the institution via phone followed by a letter or an email. Explain the purpose of the project and provide them with a description of the study and very specific details of the type of groups requested. For the inmate groups, provide the descriptions of each type (e.g. Reception Center inmates, general population-low custody etc). For the staff groups, request custody and non-custody staff with no supervisors or mangers.

2. Gain clearance for all project staff and equipment (e.g. the laptops) and supplies.

3. Provide this person with a list of characteristics that the focus groups should have. Make arrangements to review the list or pool of candidates this person provides you, checking to make sure the list has the appropriate characteristics.

4. Ask to hold the focus group sessions in a private setting with adequate airflow and lighting. Note if using a multipurpose room, whether other staff, especially supervisors or administrators, can see or hear conversations in the focus group. Try to get a room where chairs can be configured so that all members can see each other. Privacy for both staff and inmate groups is critical so make this clear at the onset of the arrangements.

5. Schedule focus group meetings. For staff, tell your contacts that we will need between 1.5 to 2 hours. For the inmates, explain the two day, two session approach.

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6. Emphasize the importance of everyone on the list being present in the focus groups.

7. For the inmate groups, determine the appropriate call out procedures and work closely with custody staff to make sure inmates will be able to walk to the interview space and that custody staff will allow the focus group to proceed without any staff or other inmates seeing or overhearing the focus group session. A private space is critical to this work.

## Follow-up

The day prior to the focus group, verify with your contact that everyone on the list will be able to attend. If indeed there will be some no-shows, ascertain whether some staff substitutions may be feasible. Also, verify that everyone knows the location of the session and verify that no other activities are scheduled for that room during your time slot.

## Supplies Needed:

- Writing tablets and pens
- Tent cards/name badges
- Markers
- Copies of documents
- Laptop with extension cords

Bring name tags or tent cards. This will facilitate who said what during the session. To protect the anonymity of the focus group participants, discuss with your group how to best do this. Suggest that participant numbers be used but this is up to the facilitator. Mention to all of the focus group participants that they can use their own, or fictitious initials.

## Conduct Focus Group

Arrive well ahead of the start time. Review the space to ensure everything you need has been provided. Ensure that the space is private, comfortable and conducive to a productive session. Check off participants as they arrive.

Make sure that the space is conducive to laptop use. Ensure you have what you need; comfortable writing surface, electrical outlet close enough to accommodate your cords, etc. You may want to pack an extension cord.

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The Team Members Script provides detailed instructions regarding how to conduct and facilitate the focus group session. It contains both the "house-keeping" tasks you need to accomplish and the questions to be asked of the participants. It is important that the script be followed closely and in the same manner for each session.

## Steps

1. Distribute all of the on-site documents:
   - participant demographic form
   - informed consent
   - appropriate agenda
   - participant rating form

   Place these documents around the table where you want participants to sit.

2. Begin by introducing yourself and then let the note taker/observer introduce himself/herself. With staff, you may want to have the participants introduce themselves. Be sure to structure the time so this is very short.

3. Explain that the means to record the session will be written notes (including laptops) and that no tape recorders will be utilized.

4. Distribute the agenda tailored to the group with whom you are meeting. Work your way through the agenda exactly as it is structured.

5. Carefully word each question before that question is addressed by the group. Ask the group to think about the question before answering. Then, facilitate the discussion around the answers to each question, one at a time. Use sample prompts provided to you for follow-up and discussion purposes.

6. After each question or topic is answered, briefly, but carefully reflect back a summary of what you heard (the note taker can assist with this). Specific prompts are included in the scripts.

7. Ensure even participation. If one or two people are dominating the meeting, then call on others. It is important to manage the interview so that it is not dominated by one or two people, so that participants who tend not to be highly verbal are able to share their views. Consider using a round-table approach, including going in one direction around the table,

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giving each person a minute to answer the question. If the domination persists, note it to the group and ask for ideas about how the participation can be increased.

You also may want to have a short version of the questions in front of you.

## Debrief

At the end of each focus group, review the focus group's activities and results with your other focus group team member. Make plans to review and proof the notes as soon as possible. Note important points (e.g., observations, problems, etc.) and significant or unique contributions made during the debriefing in a separate narrative summary. Also note in this narrative summary whether your procedures varied from the protocol and whether or not you encountered any problems. Once this is done, send the notes and narrative summary to Barbara Owen.

## Analysis of Focus Group Data

This will be centralized and not the responsibility of the focus group teams. Please send all material to Barbara Owen via email: barbarao@csufresno.edu

## Close out

At the end of the site visit check in with the administrator's office before leaving and express your appreciation.

## Things to remember:

- We will not be providing individual reports to the facility.
- Remember to customize the handouts.
- Remember to record questions and prompts in your note-taking.
- Remember to summarize each topic before moving on to the next topic. Include the summary in your notes.
- Remember to note times you begin and finish topics.
- Call James or Barbara if you have any questions or concerns.

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## List of Useful Tips for Leading Focus Groups

### Prompts:

While we have provided a list of verbal prompts with the focus group questions, there are many other types of prompts. Here we are listing some prompts to keep in mind.

### Non-verbal

1. **Silence:** Being quiet is the best way to get/keep people talking…while we all love to talk, keep mum about your views and stay quiet. Often other folks will continue speaking when they look at you to determine if they should continue and you don't pipe up. However, the opposite is true when someone is droning on and not adding to the discussion. Speaking up when they pause often causes them to stop.

2. **Looking expectant & accepting:** Looking eager and truly fascinated by the respondents' comments is another wonderful non-verbal prompt. While it is hard to juggle the papers in front of you sometimes, it is important to look engaged in the discussion and gaze intelligently at the speaker.

3. **Other hints:** Body language and small noises (hmmm- in an interesting way) also elicit further conversation. Nodding or cocking your head to the side, leaning forward, opening your hands (never cross your arms- it closes folks off); deploying a half smile and other welcoming facial expressions are ways human beings show that they are interested in what others have to say.

### Short Verbal Prompts

Again the purpose here is to encourage and welcome comments.

- Can you say more?
- Tell me more about that….
- Say more?
- Yeah…
- Such as…
- How so….

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Also throw in a few positive reinforcement comments, like *"that was really interesting"* or *"good."* However, be careful not to prejudice or limit the discussion this way.

## Keeping a running list

We also have found it helpful to keep a running list of "follow-up" questions by jotting down things to follow up while people are talking. Use a fresh sheet of paper to make notes about possible follow-up questions to remind you to ask when your respondent finishes speaking.

## Outline

Although the note taker has primary responsibility for recording the interview, the facilitator should also keep a running schematic outline as well. With this outline of important points, you can help the note taker when you develop the final report of each interview. It is also helpful to do this after a series of interviews. Sometimes you may have time to review the notes right after the interview, but often you don't get to them until in the evening. You can also use these notes to complete the report.

# INMATE FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

## Preliminary Activities

Confirm that there are no serious potential problems with the focus group participants you selected (e.g., no language barriers, participants are competent, etc.) Again, work closely with the contact person to ensure that call-our procedures and space requirements are on track.

Verify as participants arrive that they are attending the appropriate focus group. Check their name to confirm their attendance. Arrange documents (2 copies of informed consent per participant, 1 copy of agenda per participant, 1 copy of demographic note card, 1 copy of participant rating form, 2 pages of blank paper per participant for note-taking, 1 pencil per participant) and labeled tent cards around the table/seats. Immediately prior to going over the agenda, introduce yourselves. It is important that you communicate your willingness to understand your participants' point of view.

## BEGIN

Note taker: Mark time for each section.
Facilitator: Narrative within quotes and bold print needs to be spoken out loud to the focus group participants.

**1. REVIEW OF AGENDA AND GOALS OF FOCUS GROUPS**
[approximately 5 minutes]

- Announce to the group that everyone should have a copy of an agenda
- Inform the group that…

**Goal of these focus groups is to discuss your feelings, perspectives and experiences regarding four topics:**

- **What do you know about violence or danger in this facility?**
- **How do women currently (with emphasis) protect themselves from this violence in this facility?**
- **What are some things that can (with emphasis) be done here to protect women from danger and violence?**
- **What else should we know about violence and danger here?**

# Appendix B



In the event participants do not know what a focus group is, you can define it:

**What is a focus group?**

- **A focus group is a "group" discussion that gathers together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest to the researcher.**
- **The discussion is usually "focused" on a particular area of interest. It does not usually cover a large range of issues, but allows the researcher to explore a few topics in greater detail.**
- **Focus groups are also "focused" because the participants usually share a common characteristic. This may be age, sex, educational background, religion, job title, or something directly related to the topic. This encourages a group to speak more freely about the subject without fear of being judged by others.**

Briefly mention to the inmate group that**:**

**We are going to meet twice to make sure we hear everything you have to say about violence here. We will spend about another hour or so today and then arrange to meet again another hour or so tomorrow to finish this up.**

**We will be conducting several focus groups here at this facility and other facilities throughout the country. We are also giving each of you 2 blank pieces of paper in case you want to make a note if anything comes up and you want to remind yourselves of it. You also take this paper to your housing unit after today's focus group in case you want to write down any thoughts prior to tomorrow's focus group.**

Also mention that:

**Focus group participants will be provided the opportunity to have a private follow-up interview with the researcher if they would like.**

Finally, mention that:

**The information gained from these focus group sessions will be used to develop measures to accurately assess violence in women's facilities.**

Participant demographic form.

**We are also asking you to fill out this form that helps us analyze the information we are receiving here. Please note that we are not asking you to indicate your name on this form.**

2. **OBTAIN INFORMED CONSENT** [approximately 10 minutes]

Inform the group that:

**You and other members of your focus group may be assured of complete confidentiality with your comments. Only a few team members will see the actual notes from the focus groups. The notes will be analyzed and results reported only in aggregate form. No one from your facility will be identifiable in any focus group results or subsequent reports. However, we are required in this type of study to obtain your informed consent to participate.**

**Please read** (researcher should also read it out loud to the female inmates) **and sign the informed consent handout. We are giving you two copies; one copy will go to the project's records and the other copy you can keep for your records" (see Informed Consent Form).**

Be prepared for some participants to take longer than others to read and fill out the consent form. Stress that:

**All of today's participants were randomly chosen, and that although you are free to decline to participate, the variety of input anticipated from the focus group is critical to the success of the project.**

3. **REVIEW OF COURTESIES** [approximately 5 minutes]

Inform the group that:

**Although it's critical that all of you participate as much as possible, due to time constraints, the focus group session needs to move along while generating useful information. My role as facilitator is to cover this material during the short time we have together today and tomorrow. I will ask the questions, act as time- keeper and generally move the discussion along. I will try to keep us on track with these ground rules:**

1) **So we can get everyone's input, please talk one person at a time. I may interrupt to keep us on track by guiding the discussion;**
2) **I will be asking for follow-up clarifications as we go along;**
3) **Please correct me if you don't think I am capturing your viewpoint in my summary comments;**
4) **Feel free to agree or disagree with other comments in an orderly manner; and**
5) **We need to balance the fact that everyone's perspective is important and the fact that we have limited time.**

4. **INTRODUCTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS** [approximately 5 minutes]

*Inform the group that:*

**We are not interested in knowing what a particular participant says, but rather what the experiences or background of the participant says (e.g. detainee, sentenced inmate, long term inmate, etc.).**

After you state the above, ask participants to introduce themselves:

**We would like for each of you to briefly introduce yourselves. You may use a nickname or any other name if you do not want to use your own name.**

Be prepared to steer some participants who deviate from the introductions to the main goals of the focus group.

5. **DISCUSSION TOPICS** [approximately 120 minutes for all four topics- each group will differ on the stopping point]

# INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR

# INMATE FOCUS GROUPS

Note: It is highly unlikely that the questions (as well as answers) will follow a set order like the one indicated in this interview script. What is important is that the four main questions be asked. For that reason, it may be necessary for you and your fellow team member to note which questions have been answered and what remaining questions need to be asked.

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

**INTRODUCTION** [approximately 2 minutes].

> **We are interested in understanding more about violence, including sexual violence in women's prisons. We will be asking you to tell us about things you have heard about, seen or experienced. If and when you make what you regard as sensitive comments that pertain to what you have personally experienced, feel free NOT to personally refer to yourself. Rather, discuss the experience as if it occurred to someone else you knew here. Everyone understand? Everything you tell us will be entirely confidential and not revealed to anyone here at the institution. We very much appreciate your help with this important project. You are free to not answer or just say "pass" when we go around the room.**

**TOPIC 1. KNOWLEDGE OF VIOLENCE & SAFETY** [approximately 45 minutes – some information about the other topics gets covered here, hence the longer time requirement]

> **First, I'd like to go around the room and ask each of you to tell us about violence or danger in this facility (prison or jail). We are interested in physical violence, such as fights and any sexual violence. We're interested in what you've heard, witnessed or personally experienced here. By the way, we're defining violence as being hit, kicked or in any way physically or sexually hurt or assaulted by another prisoner or staff member.**

[After each respondent states their view (round 1), you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

**Probes:**

- **What kinds of things lead up to this violence?**
- **What happens in these incidents (ask for specific details)**
- **What happens after an incident?**
- **Who is vulnerable?**
- **What do you do when you see this happen?**
- **What does staff do?**
- **When are weapons used? Not used?**

*If the participants do not cover the areas below, ask these probes:*

- **What about physical violence?**
- **Committed by detainees or inmates? By staff?**
- **What about sexual violence?**
- **Committed by detainees or inmates? By staff?**
- **What about other forms of violence like:**
- **Bullying or being pushy?**
- **Sexual pressure or intimidation?**
- **Material violence (taking things)?**
- **Verbal violence?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Question 1]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes

## TOPIC 2. HOW DETAINEES OR INMATES PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM VIOLENCE? [approximately 25 minutes]

*Inform the group…*

**Next, I'd like to go around the room and ask each of you to describe how women (detainees or inmates) currently (with emphasis) protect themselves from this violence we just talked about. We're interested in what you've heard, witnessed or personally experienced here.**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

### Probes:

- **How do women detainees or inmates here currently protect themselves?**
  - **Report?**
  - **Capitulation (i.e., give in)?**
  - **Avoidance behavior?**
  - **Self-harm?**
  - **Suspicion?**
- **Attack to forestall a perceived threat?**
- **Where do women go for help? How do you go for help?**

- **Do women go for help when they are just afraid? Or after something actually happens?**
- **Do you go to staff for help? How?**
- **Do you know about this institution's procedures for reporting any violence, abuse or misconduct?**
- **Are posters or phone numbers used?**
- **Is there a locked box to drop written complaints in?**
- **Have you heard about the Prison Rape Elimination Act?**
- **What do you know about PREA? How did you hear about it?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Topic 2]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

## TOPIC 3. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT WOMEN HERE?

[approximately 25 minutes]

Inform the group…

**We need to move on toward our third topic. What kinds of things can (with emphasis) be done to protect women here? That is, what recommendations can you make that would help protect women here?**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

**Probes:**

- **What can the women detainees or inmates do here do to protect themselves?**
- **What should be done in prisoner orientation?**
- **What can the officers do here to protect women?**
- **What can the administration do here to protect women here?**
- **What should be done in staff training?**
- **What can other staff (i.e., non-custody) do here to protect women?**
- **What can volunteers do here to protect women?**
- **What can family members do to protect women detainees or inmates?**
- **What can anyone else do to protect women detainees or inmates?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Topic 3]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

*Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes*

## TOPIC 4. WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE?

[approximately 25 minutes]

Inform the group…

**Our last topic is very important. What else should we know about violence and danger here in this facility?**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

### Probes:

**Is there anything you thought of since yesterday's focus group?**

**Any recommendations you can give us as to how we can best assess how violent or dangerous this facility is?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**Wrap up Topic 4]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

6. **PARTICIPANT RATING FORM** [approximately 10 minutes]
   **(pass out form)**

   **We are passing out a form that asks you to make some estimates about how safe you feel this facility is for women inmates. Each question asks you to make a guess about a specific question. {Facilitator then reads each question and asks if participants have any questions}**

7. **Wrap Up** [approximately 5 minutes]

   **We've certainly gained a lot of valuable information from you today. To highlight just a few of your comments, we've learned** (insert significant contributions… interviewer/note taker can mention them).

   If any themes emerged from the comments of the focus group, attempt to summarize them here. Ask the note taker to remind you of some that he/she noted.

   **We thank you for the use of your valuable time today. If you should have any questions or other thoughts concerning our work, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via the contact information provided on your copy of the informed consent form.**

   Note taker and facilitator need to debrief, identify and note the major themes of the focus group.

# STAFF FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

## Preliminary Activities

Document how focus group was selected.

Verify as participants arrive that they are attending the appropriate focus group. Check their name to confirm their attendance. Arrange documents (2 copies of informed consent per participant, 1 copy of staff participant demographic form, 1 copy of agenda per participant, 1 participant rating form, 2 pages of blank paper per participant for note-taking, 1 pencil per participant) and labeled tent cards around the table/seats.

Immediately prior to going over the agenda, introduce yourselves. It is important that you briefly stress your qualifications, background, experiences, etc. so as to communicate your willingness to understand your participants' point of view.

## BEGIN

Note taker: Mark time for each section.
Facilitator: Narrative within quotes and bold print needs to be spoken out loud to the focus group participants.

### 1. REVIEW OF AGENDA AND GOALS OF FOCUS GROUPS
[approximately 5 minutes]

- Announce to the group that everyone should have a copy of an agenda
- Inform the group that…

**Goal of these focus groups is to discuss your feelings, perspectives and experiences regarding five topics:**

- **What do you know about violence or danger among women in this facility?**
- **What problems are associated with preventing and responding to female sexual and physical violence in this facility?**
- **How do women currently (with emphasis) protect themselves from this violence in this facility?**
- **What are some things that can (with emphasis) be done here to protect women from danger and violence?**
- **What else should we know about violence and danger here?**

# Appendix C



In the event participants do not know what a focus group is, you can define it:

**What is a focus group?**

- **A focus group is a "group" discussion that gathers together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest to the researcher.**
- **The discussion is usually "focused" on a particular area of interest. It does not usually cover a large range of issues, but allows the researcher to explore a few topics in greater detail.**
- **Focus groups are also "focused" because the participants usually share a common characteristic. This may be age, sex, educational background, religion, job title, or something directly related to the topic. This encourages a group to speak more freely about the subject without fear of being judged by others.**

Briefly mention to the group that**:**

**This particular focus group is one of several being conducted at this facility and other facilities throughout the country." We are also giving each of you a blank piece of paper in case you want to make a note if anything comes up and you want to remind yourselves of it.**

Finally, mention that:

**The information gained from these focus group sessions will be used to develop measures to accurately assess violence in women's facilities.**

**2. OBTAIN INFORMED CONSENT** [approximately 10 minutes]

Inform the group that…

**You and other members of your focus group may be assured of complete confidentiality with your comments. Only a few team members will see the actual notes from the focus groups. The notes will be analyzed and results reported only in aggregate form. No one from your facility will be identifiable in any focus group results or subsequent reports. However, we are required in this type of study to obtain your informed consent to participate.**

**Please read and sign the informed consent handout. We are giving you two copies; one copy will go to the project's records and the other copy you can keep for your records" (see Informed Consent Form).**

Be prepared for some participants to take longer than others to read and fill out the consent form. Stress that:

**All of today's participants were randomly chosen, and that although you are free to decline to participate, the variety of input anticipated from the focus group is critical to the success of the project.**

Hand out participant demographic form.

**We are also asking you to fill out this form that helps us analyze the information we are receiving here. Please note that we are not asking you to indicate your name on this form.**

3. **REVIEW OF COURTESIES** [approximately 5 minutes]

Inform the group that:

**Although it's critical that all of you participate as much as possible, due to time constraints, the focus group session needs to move along while generating useful information. My role as facilitator is to cover this material during the short time we have together today and tomorrow. I will ask the questions, act as time- keeper and generally move the discussion along. I will try to keep us on track with these ground rules:**

1) **So we can get everyone's input, please talk one person at a time. I may interrupt to keep us on track by guiding the discussion;**
2) **I will be asking for follow-up clarifications as we go along;**
3) **Please correct me if you don't think I am capturing your viewpoint in my summary comments;**
4) **Feel free to agree or disagree with other comments in an orderly manner; and**
5) **We need to balance the fact that everyone's perspective is important and the fact that we have limited time.**

4. **INTRODUCTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS** [approximately 5 minutes]

   *Inform the group that:*

   > **We are not interested in knowing what a particular participant says, but rather what the experiences or background of the participant says (e.g. experienced supervisor, female housing officer, etc.).**

   After you state the above, ask participants to introduce themselves:

   > **We would like for each of you to briefly introduce yourselves. Please limit your introductions to name, age, title, and work experience in corrections.**

   Be prepared to steer some participants who deviate from the introductions to the main goals of the focus group.

5. **DISCUSSION TOPICS** [approximately 120 minutes for all four topics- each group will differ on the stopping point]

# Appendix C



# INTERVIEW SCRIPT

# FOR STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

Note: It is highly unlikely that the questions (as well as answers) will follow a set order like the one indicated in this interview script. What is important is that the four main questions be asked. For that reason, it may be necessary for you and your fellow team member to note which questions have been answered and what remaining questions need to be asked.

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

**INTRODUCTION** [approximately 2 minutes].

> **We are interested in understanding more about violence, including sexual violence, in women's prisons and jails. We will be asking you to tell us about things you have heard about, seen or experienced. If and when you make what you regard as sensitive comments that pertain to what you have personally experienced, feel free NOT to personally refer to yourself. Rather, discuss the experience as if it occurred to someone else you knew here. Everyone understand? Everything you tell us will be entirely confidential and not revealed to anyone here at the institution. We very much appreciate your help with this important project. You are free to not answer or just say "pass" when we go around the room.**

**TOPIC 1. KNOWLEDGE OF VIOLENCE & SAFETY** [approximately 45 minutes – some information about the other topics gets covered here, hence the longer time requirement]

> **First, I'd like to go around the room and ask each of you to tell us about violence or danger among female detainees or inmates in this facility (prison or jail). We are interested in physical violence, such as fights and any sexual violence. We're interested in what you've heard, witnessed or personally experienced here. By the way, we're defining violence as being hit, kicked or in any way physically or sexually hurt or assaulted by another prisoner or staff member.**

[After each respondent states their view (round 1), you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

**Probes:**

- **What kinds of things lead up to this violence?**
- **What happens in these incidents (ask for specific details)**
- **What happens after an incident?**
- **Who is vulnerable?**
- **What do you do when you see this happen?**
- **What does staff do?**
- **When are weapons used? Not used?**

*If the participants do not cover the areas below, ask these probes:*

- **What about physical violence?**
  - **Committed by detainees or inmates?**
  - **By staff?**
  - **Can you give an example of a specific incident?**
- **What about sexual violence?**
  - **Committed by detainees or inmates?**
  - **By staff?**
  - **Can you give an example of a specific incident?**
- **What differences are there between physical violence and sexual violence (i.e., with regard to motivation, premeditation, etc.)?**
- **What about other forms of violence like:**
  - **Bullying or being pushy?**
  - **Sexual pressure or intimidation?**
  - **Material violence (taking things)?**
  - **Verbal violence?**
- **Violence instigated by inmates? Instigated by staff?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Question 1]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

**TOPIC 2. PROBLEMS** [approximately 15 minutes]

*Inform the group…*

**Topic 2 pertains to problems associated with sexual and physical violence among women. We now would like to know what problems each of you encounter in preventing and/or responding to sexual and physical violence among women in your facility? What are some of the things that have gone wrong or could go wrong? Later on we will be asking you about ways we can address some of these problems.**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

**Probes:**

*[Be especially aware of chain of command and custody/noncustody issues in shaping your probes.]*

- **What doesn't work in preventing sexual and physical violence among women?**
- **What doesn't work in responding to sexual and physical violence among women?**
- **What kinds of things contribute or interfere with your ability to effectively prevent sexual and physical violence among women in this facility?**
- **What kinds of things contribute or interfere with your ability to effectively respond to sexual and physical violence among women in this facility?**
- **What do you believe are the causes of these problems?**
- **What do you need to better prevent these problems?**
- **What do you need to better respond to these problems?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Topic 2]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

## TOPIC 3. HOW FEMALE DETAINEES OR INMATES PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM VIOLENCE [approximately 15 minutes]

Inform the group…

**Next, I'd like to go around the room and ask each of you to describe how women (detainees or inmates) currently (with emphasis) protect themselves from this violence we just talked about. We're interested in what you've heard, witnessed or personally experienced here.**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

### Probes:

- **How do women detainees or inmates here currently protect themselves?**
  - **Report?**
  - **Capitulation (i.e., give in)?**
  - **Avoidance behavior?**
  - **Self-harm?**
  - **Suspicion?**
  - **Attack to forestall a perceived threat?**
- **Where do women go for help? How do they go for help?**
- **Do women go for help when they are just afraid? Or after something actually happens?**
- **Do women go to staff for help? How?**
- **Do you think the women detainees or inmates here know about this institution's procedures for reporting any violence, abuse or misconduct?**
  - **Are posters or phone numbers used?**
  - **Is there a locked box to drop written complaints in?**
  - **Have you heard about the Prison Rape Elimination Act?**
  - **What do you know about PREA? How did you hear about it?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Topic 3]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

**Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes**

## TOPIC 4. WHAT CAN BE DONE BY STAFF TO PROTECT WOMEN? [approximately 15 minutes]

Inform the group…

**We need to move on toward our fourth topic. What kinds of things can (with emphasis) be done to protect women here? That is, what recommendations can you make that would help protect women here?**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

### Probes:

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **What can the women detainees or inmates do here do to protect themselves?**
- **What should be done in prisoner orientation?**
- **What can the officers do here to protect women?**

- **What can the administration do here to protect women here?**
- **What should be done in staff training?**
- **What can other staff (i.e., non-custody) do here to protect women?**
- **What can volunteers do here to protect women?**
- **What can family members do to protect women detainees or inmates?**
- **What can anyone else do to protect women detainees or inmates?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**Wrap up Topic 4]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

*Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes*

## TOPIC 5. WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE?

[approximately 15 minutes]

Inform the group…

**Our last topic is very important. What else should we know about violence and danger here in this facility?**

[After each respondent states their response, you can probe with the following questions if these things were not covered in their answer:]

**Probes:**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Is there anything you have thought of since we began?**
- **Any recommendations you can give us as to how we can best assess how violent or dangerous this facility is?**

Examples of other possible prompts or probes to be used when appropriate:

- **Does everyone agree with that?**
- **What do you do (speaking to an individual) that is different from that person (another person in focus group)?**
- **Do you feel that way too? Does this statement fit general opinions? Any one else have some thing to add?**

**[Wrap up Topic 5]** (note taker/observer should assist)

**Is there anything else we should know?**
**If not, let's summarize VERY BRIEFLY the consensus & alternate points of view (e.g., "OK, let me tell you what I am hearing here--Points 1-2-3— Do I have it right? Did I miss anything? Anything else you can tell me so we better understand?)**

*Note to note taker/observer: Note the time in your notes*

6. **PARTICIPANT RATING FORM** [approximately 10 minutes]
**(pass out form)**

**We are passing out a form that asks you to make some estimates about how safe you feel this facility is for women inmates. Each question asks you to make a guess about a specific question. {Facilitator then reads each question and asks if participants have any questions}**

7. **Wrap Up** [approximately 5 minutes]

   **We've certainly gained a lot of valuable information from you today. To highlight just a few of your comments, we've learned** (insert significant contributions… interviewer/note taker can mention them)."

   If any themes emerged from the comments of the focus group, attempt to summarize them here. Ask the note taker to remind you of some that he/she noted.

   **We thank you for the use of your valuable time today. If you should have any questions or other thoughts concerning our work, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via the contact information provided on your copy of the informed consent form.**

   Note taker and facilitator need to debrief, identify and note the major themes of the focus group.

# Inmate Focus Group Agenda

< Date >

1. Review of agenda and goal of meeting
2. Discuss and obtain informed consent
3. Review of courtesies
4. Introductions
5. Discussion topics:
    - What do you know about violence or danger in this facility?
    - How do women protect themselves from this violence?
    - What can be done here to protect women from danger and violence?
    - What else should we know about violence and danger here?
6. Wrap up

Barbara Owen, Bernadette Muscat, Stephanie Torres
Department of Criminology
California State University—Fresno
Fresno California 93740
Phone: 559.278.5715
Fax: 559.278.7265
Email: barbarao@csufresno.edu

(or interview team information)

# Staff Focus Group Agenda

< Date >

1. Review of agenda and goal of meeting

2. Discuss and obtain informed consent

3. Review of courtesies

4. Introductions

5. Discussion topics:

    - What do you know about violence or danger in this facility?
    - What problems are associated with preventing and responding to female sexual and physical violence in this facility?
    - How do women protect themselves from this violence?
    - What can be done here to protect women from danger and violence?
    - What else should we know about violence and danger here?

6. Wrap up

Note: If you have questions about the Prison Rape Elimination Act, access NIC's website at: http://www.nicic.org

Barbara Owen, Bernadette Muscat, Stephanie Torres
Department of Criminology
California State University—Fresno
Fresno California 93740
Phone: 559.278.5715
Fax: 559. 278.7265
Email: barbarao@csufresno.edu

(or other team member information)

# Gendered Violence and Safety: A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities

## Inmate Information Sheet & Consent Form

**Barbara Owen**
Department of Criminology
Stop S2 104
CSU Fresno
Fresno, CA 93740
(559) 278-5715

Or other team information

You are being asked to take part in a research study that will collect information to improve the safety of women detainees and inmates. We will be asking questions about your experiences with violence in prisons and jails, including sexual violence, that you and other women have had. We are asking you to talk to us about these things in a group and maybe an individual interview. Your decision to be interviewed for this study is voluntary. Your participation and any information you may offer as a volunteer participant will have absolutely no effect, positive or negative, on your status as an inmate or detainee within the <Name of Facility>, any pending trial, or what happens after your release. You may also stop your participation at any time by telling your interviewer that you no longer wish to be part of the interview.

The researchers are fully independent from the <Name of Facility> and guarantee the confidentiality of this information. Nothing you say to the research team will be reported to <Name of Facility> in any way that could identify you or any of your comments. These data are stored away from the facility and no individual identifiers, like names or numbers, are used in the data storage.

### WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

We want to know more about how violence, including sexual violence and assault, occurs in women's facilities and how we can make these correctional institutions safer for women. The information you give will be used to develop a survey that asks individual women about their experiences and other policies and

programs to educate staff and inmates about these issues. You will be given a copy of this information sheet that explains the details of this project.

## HOW WILL THIS STUDY WORK?

The information will be collected through a focus group interviews or a personal interview that takes approximately one and a half hours to complete. Researchers from California State University—Fresno, and Commonwealth Research Consulting, Inc. will be conducting the focus group and/or interview, and you may ask questions or ask to stop the focus group or interview any time. The questions asked will be related to what you've heard, witnessed or personally experienced here in this facility. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you do not have to do so.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

It is possible that you may not feel comfortable talking about yourself or about some of the topics to be discussed in the interviews. If any discomfort arises, the interviewer will refer you to someone here at this facility to talk to about these problems. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any question. All your answers will remain completely confidential and will not have any impact on the rest of your stay at the <Name of Facility>.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The information collected from these focus groups or individual interviews will provide information about inmate and detainee needs and provide some ideas about programs to help decrease violence and protect inmates and detainees like you. There are no direct benefits to you beyond helping us get a better idea about what kind of programs and services will help other inmates and detainees both while they are incarcerated and when they return home.

## WILL YOU GET PAID?

There is no monetary incentive for participation in this project. All participation is voluntary and extremely appreciated.

## HOW WILL YOUR PRIVACY BE PROTECTED?

The principal researcher, Barbara Owen, and co-investigator, James Wells, will protect your privacy in every way possible. All information that is collected will be

given a code number and we will not record your name on any of the interview documents. The information will also be kept in an office at CSU Fresno and no one in this facility will ever see the answers you give us. No information that identifies you will be given to anyone or any agency. Your name will not be in any reports or publications. All the answers will be combined and no one individual can be identified in the way we will write up the data.

## CAN YOU QUIT?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop participating in the interviews at any time. You can chose not to answer any questions and still participate in future interviews. Your participation in the interviews is not connected to any treatment you are receiving here.

## IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, please contact (team information). You can also ask your interviewer any question pertaining to the research as the interview session is in process. Any of the individuals involved in this project will be ready to answer any questions you may have. The CSU Fresno Institutional Review Board (IRB) also monitors the protection of those participating in sponsored research such as this project. If you have concerns about this study and how it may affect you directly, please contact the IRB at 559-278-4468 or write them at Institutional Review Board. CSU Fresno; Fresno CA 93740.

If you have any specific concerns about sexual violence and victimization, your researcher can provide you with referrals; both here in the facility and through the (system appropriate contact).

# Consent Form

## Gendered Violence and Safety: A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities

By signing below, you are agreeing that you understand the content of this form and that you have been given a copy of it. Remember, you can withdraw from this study at anytime without any problems or implications. If you agree to join this study by speaking with us, please sign your name below.

_____
Name

_____
Signature

_____
Signature of Interviewer

_____
Date

You will be given a copy of the information sheet describing the project that has the contact information.

# Appendix G



# Gendered Violence and Safety: A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities

## Staff Information Sheet & Consent Form

**Barbara Owen**
**Department of Criminology**
**CSU Fresno**
**Fresno, CA 93740**
**(559) 278-5715**

You are being asked to take part in a research study funded by the National Institute of Justice that will collect information to improve the safety of women detainees and inmates. We will be asking questions about your experiences and knowledge with violence in female prisons and jails, including sexual violence that you and other staff have had. We are asking you to talk to us about these things in a focus group and/or interview. Your decision to be interviewed for this study is voluntary. Your participation and any information you may offer as a volunteer participant will have absolutely no effect, positive or negative, on your status as a staff member. You may also stop your participation at any time by telling your interviewer that you no longer wish to be part of the interview.

The researchers are fully independent from your facility and guarantee the confidentiality of this information. Nothing you say to the research team will be reported to your facility in any way that could identify you or any of your comments. These data are stored away from your facility and no individual identifiers, like names or numbers, are used in the data storage.

### WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

We want to know more about how violence, including sexual violence and assault, occurs in women's facilities and how we can make these correctional institutions safer for women. The information you give will be used to develop a survey that asks individual women and staff about their experiences, as well as

policies and programs to educate staff and inmates about these issues. You will be given a copy of this information sheet that explains the details of this project.

## HOW WILL THIS STUDY WORK?

The information will be collected through a focus group interviews or a personal interview that takes approximately one and a half hours to complete. Researchers from California State University—Fresno, and Commonwealth Research Consulting, Inc. will be conducting the focus group and/or interview, and you may ask questions or ask to stop the focus group or interview any time. The questions asked will be related to what you've heard, witnessed or personally experienced here in this facility. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you do not have to do so.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

It is possible that you may not feel comfortable talking about yourself or about some of the topics to be discussed in the interviews. If you need to talk about your reaction to this focus group or interview, please contact your institutional human resources department. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any question. All your answers will remain completely confidential and will not have any impact on your status at this facility.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The information collected from these focus groups or individual interviews will provide information about inmate and staff needs and provide some ideas about programs and policies to help decrease violence and protect inmates and staff like you. There are no direct benefits to you beyond helping us get a better idea about what kind of programs and policies will help other inmates and staff.

## WILL YOU GET PAID?

There is no monetary incentive for participation in this project. All participation is voluntary and extremely appreciated.

## HOW WILL YOUR PRIVACY BE PROTECTED?

The principal researcher, Barbara Owen, and co-investigator, James Wells, will protect your privacy in every way possible. All information that is collected will be given a code number and we will not record your name on any of the interview

documents. The information will also be kept in an office at CSU Fresno and no one in this facility will ever see the answers you give us. No information that identifies you will be given to anyone or any agency. Your name will not be in any reports or publications. All the answers will be combined and no one individual can be identified in the way we will write up the data.

## CAN YOU QUIT?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop participating in the interviews at any time. You can chose not to answer any questions and still participate in future interviews. Your participation in the interviews is not connected to any treatment you are receiving here.

## IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, please contact (team information). You can also ask your interviewer any question pertaining to the research as the interview session is in process. Any of the individuals involved in this project will be ready to answer any questions you may have. The CSU Fresno Institutional Review Board (IRB) also monitors the protection of those participating in sponsored research such as this project. If you have concerns about this study and how it may affect you directly, please contact the IRB at 559-278-4468 or write them at Institutional Review Board, CSU Fresno; Fresno CA 93740.

# Consent Form

## Gendered Violence and Safety: A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities

By signing below, you are agreeing that you understand the content of this form and that you have been given a copy of it. Remember, you can withdraw from this study at anytime without any problems or implications. If you agree to join this study by speaking with us, please sign your name below.

_____
Name

_____
Signature

_____
Signature of Interviewer

_____
Date

You will be given a copy of the information sheet describing the project that has the contact information.

# Inmate Card

**Please answer the questions below. Note that the information will be kept completely confidential and reported only in group form.**

- Institution you live in currently? (please name the facility)

  _____

- What is your current age? (please fill in the blank below)

  ____ Years

- What is your race/ethnic background? (please check one)

  __ Mexican American __ Other Hispanic
  __ Caucasian __ Indian
  __ African American __ Asian/Pacific Islander
  __ Native American __ Other __ No Response

- How many times have you been to jail? (please fill in blank)

  ____ Times

- How many times have you been to prison? (please fill in blank)

  ____ Times

- How long is your current sentence? (please fill in one or both blanks)

  ____ Years ____ Months

- Any special conditions of your sentence: (please fill in blanks below)

  _____

  _____

---

**This section is your opportunity to tell us about some things you may want to talk about alone without the others in the group.**

- Would you like to talk to *us* at a later time *by yourself* about any physical or sexual violence that you have seen or experienced while in this facility? (please check one)

  ___ YES (please indicate participant number _____)

  ___ NO

- Would you like to talk to a professional about any feelings that you may have as a result of the discussions that have come up in our focus group? (please check one)

  ___ YES ___NO

# FOCUS GROUP

## Staff Participant Demographic Information Form

Note to Participant: Please do not provide your name on this form as we do not wish to record your name in this focus group. We are interested in documenting the make-up or profile of the participants that attend our focus groups. Your name will not be attached to any of the findings.

Participant #: _____ Date of Focus Group: _____

Location of Focus Group: _____

Demographic Information:

1.Please indicate your current position: (e.g., line Staff, Sergeant, Assistant Director, etc.):

_____

a. Are you a government employee or privately contracted employee (circle one):

Government Private

b. Do you work in (please circle)

Custody Non-custody

c. Are you (please circle)

Line staff Management

2. Please indicate your gender (circle one): Male Female

3. Please indicate your racial/ethnic preference (circle one):

African-American American Indian Asian Hispanic

White/Caucasian Other (please specify): _____

4. Please indicate the total number of years of correctional experience you have:

Years at current facility _____
Years at other facilities _____
Total years experience _____

Once you complete this form, please turn it in to one of the focus group team members.

We sincerely appreciate your attendance and participation.

# Participant Rating Form

Participant Number: _____

**How violent is this facility?**
Please estimate on a scale of one to ten how dangerous or violent you believe this facility is to women inmates here.
(1 = not dangerous or violent; 10 = very dangerous or violent).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**How successful are women at protecting themselves from violence?**
Please estimate on a scale of one to ten how successful most women inmates are in protecting themselves from violence.
(1 = not successful; 10 = very successful).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**How successful is this facility at protecting woman inmates from violence?**
Please estimate on a scale of one to ten how successful this facility is at protecting women inmates from violence.
(1 = not successful; 10 = very successful).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**How likely are women to be victimized in this facility?**
Please estimate on a scale of one to ten how likely a female prisoner is of being a victim of sexual violence during their length of stay here.
(1 = not likely; 10 = very likely).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

# Appendix J



**Compared to other facilities you know about, please estimate on the scale below your guess as to the relative safety of this facility in terms of female inmates being a victim of sexual violence during their length of stay here.**

Please circle your estimate:

- Don't have any basis for comparison
- The likelihood of being sexually victimized is lower here
- The likelihood of being sexually victimized is about the same
- The likelihood of being sexually victimized is greater here

**Please estimate on a scale of one to ten how likely a female prisoner is of being a victim of physical violence here during their length of stay here.**
(1 = not likely; 10 = very likely).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Compared to other facilities you know about, please circle your guess as to the relative safety of this facility in terms of female inmates being a victim of physical violence during their length of stay here.**

Please circle your estimate:

- Don't have any basis for comparison
- The likelihood of being physically victimized is lower here
- The likelihood of being physically is about the same
- The likelihood of being physically victimized is greater here.

**Once again, we appreciate your help with this important project. When you complete this rating form, please turn it in to your facilitator.**

# Appendix K



# Project Description

## Gendered Violence and Safety:
## A contextual approach to improving security in women's facilities

Funded by: The National Institute of Justice

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# Abstract

This project will develop gender-based descriptions of violence and safety in women's correctional facilities. In describing this context, the organizational, environmental and individual factors contributing to violence in women's facilities will be measured. The effects of inmate and staff culture on safety and violence among women inmates will also be explored. The experience of sexual victimization both prior to and during past and present incarceration are expected to be significant factors informing this context. While sexual violence among and against women will be a significant focus of this research, the project will take a broader view of the correlates of violence and safety in female facilities across multiple dimensions. These data will be used to 1) develop an instrument measuring safety and violence in women's facilities and 2) as a basis for operational practice bulletins informing staff training, inmate orientation, violence and assault prevention programs, victim treatment and other applications.