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Accomplishing the Difficult but Not Impossible

Collecting Self-Report Data on Inmate-on-Inmate Sexual Assault in Prison

Valerie Jenness
Cheryl L. Maxson
University of California, Irvine
Jennifer Macy Sumner
Penn State Harrisburg
Kristy N. Matsuda
University of Missouri–St. Louis

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) increases opportunities for scholars to conduct research in carceral settings to determine the prevalence and contours of sexual assault. However, researchers face many challenges, including working cooperatively with state agencies while maintaining independence; gaining access to prisons and prisoners; securing necessary institutional approvals; and collecting generalizable data on a highly sensitive topic, sexual assault in prisons. This article reports our responses to these challenges in a study of inmate-on-inmate sexual assault in California. We describe our research procedures and provide an assessment of interviewer effects and threats to the generalizability of our sample. Our experience should be instructive to other researchers undertaking similar efforts at a moment in time in which others have rightfully decried the decline of in-prison research.

Keywords: *prison research; Prison Rape Elimination Act; inmate violence; research methods*

In 2003, President Bush affirmed bipartisan congressional efforts to define prison rape as a national social problem worthy of immediate legislative action and substantial federal funding when he signed into law the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). The passage of the PREA signals that prison rape in particular and sexual assault more generally have been rendered increasingly visible as a pressing issue for corrections officials and lawmakers, redefined as a civil rights violation for inmates and wards, taken up by the courts as a form of "cruel and unusual punishment," and politicized as an issue that inextricably intersects with faith-based initiatives, human rights, public health, and public safety (Jenness & Smyth, 2007). In both symbolic and material terms, it is historic legislation. Most relevant for the

purposes of this article, it is consequential for the implementation of criminal justice policy and criminal justice research (Smith, 2008).

The PREA has many objectives, but a central goal of this federal legislation is to provide for the analysis of the incidence and effects of prison rape in Federal, state, and local institutions and to provide information, resources, recommendations, and funding to protect individuals from prison rape. Consistent with this goal, the PREA requires the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to collect systematic data on sexual assault in Federal, state, county, and municipal prisons and allocates funds for researchers in other institutional settings to design and conduct research on sexual assault in carceral settings.

Despite the unprecedented growth of the correctional population in the United States, especially the massive increases in incarceration rates since the early 1970s, there has been a discernable decline in scholarly attention to life inside prison walls (Simon, 2000; Wacquant, 2002). As Wacquant (2002, p. 385) argued

> observational studies depicting the everyday world of inmates all but vanished just as the United States was settling into mass incarceration and other advanced countries were gingerly clearing their own road towards the penal state. *The ethnography of the prison thus went into eclipse at the very moment when it was most urgently needed* on both scientific and political grounds. [Emphasis in the original.]

Compared to the era in which Donald Clemmer (1940) and Gresham Sykes (1958) did their work—what Simon (2000) has identified as the "golden-age of U.S. prison sociology"—the current era of prison research in the United States has produced a paucity of "in prison" research (for exceptions, see Fleisher & Krienert, 2009; Irwin, 2005; and Rhodes, 2004). To quote Goodman (2008, p.740), the result of this decline has been that prisons are "woefully understudied locales" at this moment in history. In-prison research in other countries might be more common (Bosworth, 1999; Sparks, 2002).

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This state of affairs is not a result of lack of interest on the part of researchers or because the topic of life inside prison has receded in importance (Simon, 2000; Sparks, 2002; Wacquant, 2002). Rather, veteran prison researchers know that doing research on inmates is difficult work, in large part because it is often fraught with many administrative concerns, bureaucratic obstacles, and legal prohibitions. In other words, prisons are heavily regulated institutional arenas that are not conducive to serving as convenient research sites; likewise, prisoners are "special populations" for those conducting research on human subjects. As Arriola (2006, p. 138) recently summarized in an article aptly titled "Debunking the Myth of a Safe Haven"

> Conducting research in correctional settings is extremely difficult. Inmates (and any other institutionalized population for that matter) are considered a special population deserving of additional research protections. Thus, getting Institutional Review Board approval for research in correctional settings is difficult. Moreover, many correctional administrators may not see research as a priority and not want researchers "poking around" for fear that they may discover something less flattering. Additionally, multiple levels of approval may be needed before the research can move forward (thus, gaining entry may be difficult), and inmates are generally distrustful of researchers and therefore may be less willing to serve as research participants than those who are not confined.

The problem succinctly described by Arriola is exacerbated when the topic to be studied inside prisons is sexual assault. Investigating sensitive topics like sexual assault in highly regulated organizational environments like prisons is a recipe for a plethora of research problems related to access, compliance, confidentiality, and the systematic collection of valid and reliable data.

In this context, and against the advice of experienced prison researchers, we responded to the passage of the PREA by seizing a unique opportunity and ultimately completing the first systematic empirical study of sexual assault in California's correctional facilities. California houses the largest correctional system in the western world and a recent report by the Little Hoover Commission, an independent bipartisan state oversight agency charged with investigating state government operations, declared: "the bare facts have earned California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation an ignoble distinction for systemic failure" (Little Hoover Commission, 2007). In short, there is no denying the mammoth nature of California corrections, which includes 33 prisons and more than 150,000 inmates; and, by many accounts the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is a dysfunctional organization. These facts do not make research any easier.

The remainder of this article is devoted to detailing how we successfully executed in-prison research with inmates in California. Our focus is threefold. First, we describe how we secured financial and administrative support from the CDCR as well as necessary approvals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of California, Irvine and the Office of Research at the CDCR. Second, we detail our research methodology, with a focus on imposing scope conditions on the research;

systematically selecting prisons to serve as research sites and randomly selecting prisoners to participate in the research; training a team of interviewers and utilizing ducats[1] to access inmates for confidential interviews; and collecting original, generalizable data on prison life by conducting face-to-face interviews in seven California prisons for adult males, including asking prisoners sensitive questions about their experiences with both detected and undetected sexual assault in correctional facilities. Third, we provide a systematic assessment of the data born of our efforts, regarding the threat of interviewer effects and the generalizability of our sample(s).

Although others have cautioned against the worth of reporting the details of how prison research was done, for example Sparks (2002, p. 558) references it as "ethically dubious" and a form of "self absorption," we think describing and disseminating successful research methods—in prison and elsewhere—is a worthwhile pursuit, especially when gaining access is difficult (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). Doing so can be instructive for future researchers who are faced with navigating similar terrain in the pursuit of worthwhile research agendas. Research notes, if instructive to others, can point to how (more) in-prison research can be successfully conducted—perhaps contributing to a new golden era of prison research.

Securing Agency Support, Research Funding, and Institutional Approvals for In-Prison Research on Prisoners

A year after the passage of the PREA, in Fall 2004, the then Acting Secretary of the CDCR, Jeanne Woodford, commissioned us to conduct a study of sexual assault in California prisons and juvenile facilities. As reported in detail elsewhere (Jenness, 2008), the Director expressed a heartfelt commitment to fully implementing the PREA, which required conducting research to determine the prevalence and contours of sexual assault in both youth and adult facilities. To meet this requirement, she offered us unfettered access to official records for data collection as well as any prison(s) in the state from which to collect original data from a sample of inmates. More important, she promised the CDCR would not interfere with the research or, in any way, attempt to control the findings. She emphasized: "this is a serious issue, not one to be subjected to politics." This invitation, which came with US$399,994 in funding from the CDCR to conduct the research, can unabashedly be described as "the pull of the policy audience" (Leo, 1996; Musheno, 1997; Sarat & Silbey, 1988; Savelsberg, King, & Cleveland, 2002). That noted, the first warning to scholars embarking on politically charged research topics in prisons is to try your utmost to secure unqualified support from savvy, high-level administrators who recognize the importance of research. It may be obvious, but nonetheless important to state forthwith: our research design, and by extension our data, would probably have been doomed were it not for the initial and sustained backing and enthusiasm of influential stakeholders.

Prior to undertaking the research, we worked to secure IRB approval to conduct research on both adult prisoners and juvenile wards in California. Rightly assessing

the regulatory terrain relevant to research on adults to be more forgiving than that regarding juveniles, and that the issues surrounding official data would be very different from those with interview methods, we focused first on securing necessary approvals to collect official data on adult inmates. Shortly thereafter, we submitted a separate application to collect original data by conducting face-to-face interviews with adult prisoners. This arduous, but not impossible, task took approximately 6 months, during which time we submitted no fewer than six IRB proposals/modifications.

Along the way, we confronted many predictable and unexpected challenges as well as a few encouraged, but not required, practices. The predictable challenges included ensuring credible informed consent from those participating in the study, establishing mechanisms and safeguards to protect the confidentiality and safety of those participating in the study, and establishing protocols for responding to situations in which study participants are (re)traumatized by revealing sensitive information in response to our efforts to collect self-report data. Other requirements came as a surprise and, we learned, may have been unique to an IRB with a reputation for being particularly stringent. For instance, one mandate from the IRB required that we revise our protocol to include specifications related to study staff clothing and other signifiers (e.g., the utilization of university stickers on bags used to carry materials in and out of the prisons) to assure that we would be adequately distinguished from prison staff while in the field. Although it was not required, IRB encouraged us to apply for a certificate of confidentiality. We decided not to do it after assessing that the time involved was prohibitive, even as we met requirements associated with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Ultimately, we prevailed and secured approval to study adult prisoners in California from two regulatory entities: the IRB at the University of California, Irvine and the Office of Research at the CDCR.

Unfortunately, however, we could not overcome the institutional barriers we confronted when trying to secure appropriate approvals to simulate our research design with the juvenile population. After considerable engagement with our IRB and more than 3 months of negotiation with the CDCR, we concluded that the terms of doing research on youth in California facilities were counterproductive to the goals of our study. The juvenile sample was to serve as a comparison on the prevalence, correlates, manifestations and consequences of sexual assault in adult facilities. Such a comparison would have required roughly similar approaches to facility and inmate sampling, solicitation of research participation, and conditions of data collection. Although the CDCR personnel were supportive of our effort to conduct research on youth and genuinely interested in such a comparison, two CDCR policies stood in the way of an adequate comparison sample. First, the organizational subunit of the CDCR responsible for juveniles required that all researchers report unadjudicated crimes disclosed by wards during the course of data collection as well as any evidence of child abuse occurring in their institutions. Such a departure from our confidentiality procedures for adult inmates was nonnegotiable from our point of view. Second, because of liability concerns, the CDCR was not willing to waive

active parental consent and instead to provide consent as the legal guardians of wards or to appoint an advocate to act as the legal guardian of wards. We determined that collecting interview data only on wards for whom the CDCR could identify, contact, and secure consent from a parent/guardian would result in what one consultant referred to as "dirt for data." Informed by the literature (Esbensen, Miller, Taylor, He, & Freng, 1999) and over two decades of empirical research on youth by the coprincipal investigator, we concluded that under these conditions, we would not produce a sample that leans toward generalizable by any stretch of the imagination.

Method

We conducted research on adult prisoners in California's prisons by imposing clear scope conditions on the data collection, carefully selecting research sites from which to systematically collect data, randomly sampling inmates and deliberately sampling transgender inmates, training a team of interviewers to systematically conduct face-to-face interviews with prisoners, ducating prisoners at seven prisons such that interviews could be conducted in a confidential setting, and, most important, collecting original data on currently incarcerated adults that enabled us to induce an exceptionally high participation rate, optimize both the reliability and validity of self-report data, and conjoin original data collected via interviews with official CDCR data.

Delineating Scope Conditions

A lesson we learned early in the study was the value of delimiting scope conditions of this research. As CDCR personnel and our own interests often threatened to expand the sample or substantive issues addressed by the study, we maintained our focus by retaining the primary scope conditions articulated early on in the research effort. The focus of this research was delimited with regard to both the target population to be researched and the dependent variable to be explained. First, it was designed to collect self-report data from prisoners and official data from the CDCR on two specific populations of inmates: (a) the population of adult males housed in California state prisons who are not housed in reception centers or fire camps and who are not classified by the CDCR as "EOP"[2] and (b) adult transgender inmates housed in a single California prison. With regard to the latter group, transgender inmates were included in the study at the request of the CDCR and in light of anecdotal information that indicates transgender inmates are particularly vulnerable to inmate-on-inmate sexual assault in prison. In this instance, we failed to resist the expansion impulse, and this proved to be a fortuitous decision in light of subsequent findings (Jenness, Maxson, Matsuda, & Sumner, 2007), litigation (Giraldo v. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2007), and policy concerns (Jenness, 2008). Examples of expansion requests that we had

to decline were the inclusion of females, of jails as sampling sites, and an increased focus on staff-on-inmate assault, all of which need to be examined in subsequent studies (Jenness et al., 2007).

The second way in which this research was delimited was by focusing on inmate-on-inmate sexual assault.[3] In conceptualizing the problem of inmate-on-inmate violence and the issue of sexual assault and rape in particular, this research acknowledged the related, yet nuanced characteristics of possible types of violence. In simple binary terms, sexual activity can be described as consensual or coercive, even as that determination is ultimately a matter of degree (Cowling & Reynolds, 2004). Coercive sexual activity can include violence or the threat of violence, in what is commonly known as sexual assault and rape; and sexual assault and rape can be seen as a subsection of inmate-on-inmate violence more generally. However, carceral environments, like other environments, include the possibility of coercion without violence, for example, in the form of "protective pairing" (i.e., a situation in which an inmate seemingly "willingly" engages in sexual activity with another inmate in exchange for protection from another inmate or group of inmates [see Donaldson, 2003]).

With these scope conditions in mind and remaining cognizant of the complicated nature of sexual assault in carceral settings, our data efforts were organized around collecting self-report data on the many types of sexual activities that occur in correctional institutions, including consensual sex, sexual assault, rape, or other types of undesired sex, and also nonsexual inmate-on-inmate violence. We describe the multiple approaches we took to capturing reports of institutional violence in a later section and briefly enumerate the other types of questions included in the interview. After considerable deliberation and consultation with research colleagues and correctional officials, we decided that the optimal approach to gathering valid self-report data and to optimizing our ability to generalize from the data was to conduct face-to-face interviews with randomly selected California inmates from a handful of prisons in settings that ensured confidentiality.

Acknowledging the limitations that accompany any form of self-report data collection, especially the "unreported" occurrence of phenomena of interest, face-to-face interviews were chosen for several reasons. First, doing so allowed the research team to ensure that the inmate answering the interview questions is actually the person who was randomly selected for participation in the study and to whom official data obtained from the CDCR was matched. Second, in-person interviews provided opportunities for unsolicited information to emerge that frequently illuminated our understanding of the self-report data and the larger context in which sexual assault is experienced and understood by inmates. Third, face-to-face interviews allowed us to avoid administering an instrument that might be experienced by inmates as a "battery of tests" or "social science inventory" that could leave the respondent feeling deprived of the opportunity to tell a unique and personal story. Instead, the interview schedule that was utilized was developed with the goal of achieving a balance between closed-ended questions and open-ended conversation.

This allowed inmates, frequently restricted from sharing their stories with outsiders under the color of confidentiality, to ensure their voice is revealed in the study data. In other words, the study was devised with the notion that there is value to allowing inmates a rare moment to tell their stories and be heard in a confidential setting, especially if interviewers can engage in what Anzaldúa (1987) called "open-hearted listening," which is not mentioned in methods textbooks but is nonetheless crucial to good data collection as well as the honorable treatment of human subjects.

Of course, the choice to use face-to-face interviews as a data collection method does not diminish the value of prior research that has made extensive use of anonymous survey instruments (e.g., Hensley, Koscheski, & Tewksbury, 2005; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000). One benefit of this method is the ability to widely distribute the instrument. For example, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2000) used this method to disseminate questionnaires to seven prisons in four states. Return rates using this method are often less than ideal for generalizability, however. The use of questionnaires has produced participation rates between 18% and 33% depending on the sampling technique (Hensley et al., 2005; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, Rucker, Bumby, & Donaldson, 1996; Tewksbury, 1989; Wooden & Parker, 1982). In contrast, the use of in-person interviews has yielded higher participation rates (Hensley, 2001; Hensley, Tewksbury, & Castle, 2003; Nacci & Kane, 1982). A study utilizing face-to-face interviews of a random sample of male inmates in three prisons in Oklahoma yielded a 58% participation rate (Hensley, 2001; Hensley, et al., 2003). There is still room for improvement.

Selecting Research Sites

The State of California currently has the largest corrections agency in the nation (Petersilia, 2006). When field data collection began, there were 162,083 adult prisoners incarcerated in 33 prisons in California (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2007). Despite the rising rate at which females are being incarcerated in California (Petersilia, 2006), well above 90% of these inmates are males housed in 30 prisons; of these, 119,153 met the criteria for inclusion in our study of the inmate population (i.e., inmates housed in prisons for adult males who are not housed in reception centers or fire camps and who are not EOP). Recognizing that a true random inmate sample would necessitate collecting data from inmates housed in 30 different prisons, which was financially and logistically prohibitive, we sought to secure an inmate sample from perhaps half a dozen prisons that would approximate the characteristics of the larger CDCR study population. Selecting research sites was complicated by the fact that CDCR's 30 prisons housing adult male inmates are spread across the State, spanning 904 miles from the southern most prison to the northern most prison. Looking across this vast physical terrain, we were confronted with 593,775 possible combinations of six prisons.[4]

Fortunately, our choices for site selection were unrestrained because CDCR officials agreed to provide access to any prison requested by the research team. We examined facility population data and consulted with CDCR officials and tentatively selected five prisons—including prisons located in northern, central, and southern California—as viable research sites. As we approached the end of data collection from these five prisons, we compared interview participants with the entire inmate population in each of California's 30 prisons that house adult males on eight characteristics: age, race/ethnicity, offense category, custody level, life sentence, sex offender registration, gang affiliation, and mental health status. These inmate population characteristics represent factors identified by the existing research literature as correlates of prison violence; as such, they guided the selection of the research sites. After comparing demographic data on the inmates we interviewed from five prisons with the larger population of inmates, we determined that custody Level 4 (maximum security) inmates were underrepresented in the prisons in our sample. To correct for this, we selected a sixth prison from which to randomly sample Level 4 inmates. In our quest for a representative cross section of the inmate population, our study clearly benefited by the open access to all prisons as well as the inmate data provided by the CDCR's Offender Information Services Branch (OISB).

In addition to the six prisons selected for the random sample of inmates, a seventh prison provided a research site from which to gather data from transgender inmates beyond the rare instances in which transgender inmates emerged in the random sample. This prison was chosen because it is known to house a concentrated population of transgender inmates.

Selecting Sample(s)

We relied on a similar process in each facility to randomly sample inmates. About a week prior to the first day of data collection at a particular prison, the CDCR Office of Research sent us a facility roster that identified every inmate housed in the prison. The roster indicated the inmate's name, CDC number, custody level, classification score, housing location in the facility, and mental health status. Inmates housed in reception centers were excluded. Once we received the roster, we removed inmates categorized as EOP. Importantly, inmates with other mental health designations (e.g., Correctional Clinical Case Management System [CCCMS]) and inmates on restricted status (e.g., inmates housed in administrative segregation or security housing units [SHUs]) were retained on the final roster from which we randomly selected study participants.

From the final roster, we used statistical software to randomly select 100 inmates from each prison to be study participants. This approach ensured that CDCR officials could not interfere with the random selection on purpose or inadvertently. We randomly ordered the CDCR numbers of selected study participants to eliminate bias and sent the list of selected inmates to our liaison at the prison, typically the Public

Information Officer or another Lieutenant, so that inmates were scheduled and notified by a ducat to meet with an interviewer on the research team. Maintaining consistency in our sampling procedures, including providing detailed written instructions to our liaisons, supported our goal of attaining a representative sample of inmates.

There were three departures from this sampling method. First, at the final prison from which we collected data—the prison included in the study specifically to correct for underrepresentation of Level 4 inmates—we only interviewed Level 4 inmates. In a second prison, we decided to forego interviewing Level 1 inmates because sufficient numbers of Level 1 inmates were already interviewed. The third exception, described below, involved securing a convenience sample of transgender inmates from a single prison known to house a disproportionately high number of transgender inmates. This prison constitutes the seventh prison from which we collected data.

For the purposes of this research, a "transgender" inmate was identified either through self-identification, identification of related medical needs (i.e., hormonal treatment), or participation in groups for transgender inmates. Once we received a list of inmates meeting one or more of these criteria from our liaison at this prison, we asked that they all be ducated for an interview. We made two trips to this facility to ensure that we provided all transgender inmates who were identified an opportunity to participate in the study.

Training Interviewers

Prior to initiating data collection, we trained a team of nine interviewers to comply with the guidelines elaborated in an extensive training manual for interviewers. As much as possible, we wanted to reduce interviewer bias and ensure that all participants were approached to participate in the study in a similar fashion. The training manual codifies detailed procedures for obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and professionalism, and responding to special circumstances researchers confront when conducting research in prison settings. Standard structured interviewing techniques and probing strategies, as well as appropriate responses to unusual circumstances, were addressed in this manual and reviewed in-person in a training session with all the interviewers. Likewise, the interview schedule, consent forms, and various log/procedural forms were included in the training manual and reviewed in a training session required for all interviewers.

The process of training interviewers occurred over the course of several days. Interviewers reviewed the manual and interview instrument prior to a daylong, in-person training session. In this session, training materials were reviewed in detail and interviewers practiced the consent process and rehearsed completing the interview schedule until the project leaders were convinced that the interviewers had acquired considerable familiarity and competence with the interview schedule and expectations for data collection as well as ease with the interview process. We simulated

challenging interview conditions and risks of departure from established procedures. Subsequent meetings featured more mock interviews under the supervision of senior research staff. This advance work, including a pretest of the interview schedule and procedures, was designed to keep errors in the field to a minimum.

The trained interviewers included two university professors and seven graduate students. The interview team ranged in age from 25 to 55 and included White, Asian, and Hispanic interviewers. Two interviewers were male and seven were female. One of the graduate students speaks fluent Spanish and was trained to conduct interviews in Spanish. In other words, this project relied on a demographically diverse interview team. This becomes an important issue in a subsequent section in which we discuss interviewer effects on the data.

Ducating Inmates

Once selected for inclusion in the study, inmates were ducated by on-site CDCR personnel and, if not able to move about the facility freely, were escorted by corrections officers to meet with an interviewer in the order in which they were listed on the roster sent to the facility. Ducats stated the appointment was for "research on prison life" or "interview";[5] officers were asked not to discuss the research with inmates. Although upper level prison administrators were briefed on why the research team was coming to the facility and why they were there for multiple days, we made an effort to keep rank-and-file officers, especially the ones who escorted inmates to and from interviews, unaware of the purpose of the study. We did so to minimize the degree to which they could intentionally or unintentionally contaminate the field or otherwise undermine the research. Despite our best efforts, however, on occasion it was clear that rank-and-file officers had a good, and in some cases erroneous, sense of why we were there; and in either case, we did not confirm or deny their assumptions.

There were two exceptions to the protocol related to accessing inmates for interviews. First, CDCR policy precluded utilizing this system at the facility from which we sampled only Level 4 inmates because this facility housed many inmates in a Security Housing Unit (SHU) or in administrative segregation. These inmates are not permitted to leave their housing unit so officers retrieved the inmates from their cells without advance notification and escorted them to an interviewer who conducted the interview while wearing a stab proof vest in a confidential counseling room. Second, when primarily Spanish-speaking inmates were identified, they were told that a Spanish-speaking interviewer would return at a later date to invite consent from the inmate and conduct the interview in Spanish. In every case, a trained Spanish-speaking interviewer returned to the prison and followed the same guidelines as with the English-speaking interview.

If an inmate could not be scheduled for the interview—for example, because the inmate had paroled, been transferred, or was in the hospital—the CDCR staff was

instructed to note the reason and then proceed to the next inmate on the list until all interview appointments were filled. Some inmates who were scheduled for interviews did not show up to the meeting with the interviewer. Inmates occasionally prioritized another appointment (e.g., a medical ducat for the same time or a work assignment) and sometimes we were told that inmates refused to leave their cell for unspecified reasons. Regardless, the research team recalled "no shows" on subsequent days to maximize the likelihood of offering every inmate selected for participation in the study an opportunity to participate.

Coupled with these unavoidable departures from our specified ideal protocol was notable variation in the procedures whereby inmates were notified of the interview appointment and escorted to and from the interview rooms. Most often, this variation was a result of the requirements for inmate movement connected to custody levels, the availability of CDCR staff to provide required escort service, and the local particularities of operations from facility to facility. Most relevant for this discussion, inmates routinely move about the prison with a CDCR officer as an escort, but typically are more informed about the reason for the movement than in the case of being brought to an interview room for this research. We decided that the benefits of limiting the amount of discussion about the nature of the research outweighed the value of announcing well in advance the purpose of the meeting. The fact that some inmates "refused" to leave their cell when contacted by a correctional officer suggests the absence of intimidation by correctional staff; indeed, our overarching concern was that, if anything, correctional staff would discourage participation in the study. Thus we did not inform them of the nature of the appointment, either. In any case, we have no evidence to suggest that CDCR personnel undermined the data collection.

In addition, efforts were made to ensure inmates did not feel pressure to participate or consequences for not participating by correctional officers providing security outside the interview rooms. Inmates who declined to participate were told they could wait for a period of time before exiting the interview room so it was not obvious whether they participated in the study. This tactic served to protect the identity of those who participated and those who did not. Inmates rarely utilized this procedure; rather, after declining, they wanted to get back to the yard, their work assignment, their cell, and so on. Inmates who chose not to participate in the study appeared unconcerned about exiting the interview room. In short, the main communication to the research team by those who did not participate was "no thanks, I've got other things to do, and I'd like to get back to it."

At the same time, inmates who chose to participate in the study rarely exhibited concern that their time in the interview room might reveal their participation in the study. Although it is difficult to discern in any definitive way why inmates did not express concern about participating in the study, our impression is that they were convinced they were selected at random (in fact, on occasion, interviewers took great pains to explain what random meant); that they could decline the interview, forego answering any given question, or discontinue an interview without consequence (a fact that was

emphasized in the informed consent and restated as needed throughout the interview); that the interviews were confidential (in fact, interviewers occasionally declined to initiate or continue an interview if/when it became questionable whether the setting was confidential); that the interviewers were not law enforcement (in fact, the inmates made note of the fact that interviewers did not ask for names of other inmates—a significant signal to them that the interviewer was not law enforcement); and that research might shed insight on the conditions of confinement that contextualize their lives (something they expressed to interviewers).

Perhaps the most telling observation about the context in which inmates were contacted about the study is the complaints we received from inmates who were not randomly selected to participate in the study. On numerous occasions, inmates expressed curiosity about why they were not included in the study, feelings of being excluded, and a desire to participate. The random selection procedure was again emphasized to those not selected ensuring that the general message beyond the walls of the interview room was one of "randomization."

Finally, knowing that the inmate communication system is highly efficient, it was a concern that the research procedures might suffer unique challenges after the first day (or even first several hours) at each prison. To test for contamination born of inmate awareness of our presence and the nature of our study, we compared the likelihood of inmate participation and (for participants) inmate response to the sexual assault/misconduct question on the first day at each prison to any subsequent day at the same prison. We find no differences in the willingness of participants to participate on the first day versus all others. This was true of the random sample alone, $\chi^2(1) = .122$, $p = ns$, and the entire sample, $\chi^2(1) = .07$, $p = ns$. We also find no differences in the likelihood of reporting sexual assault/misconduct from the first day as compared to the other days for the random sample, $\chi^2(1) = .005$, $p = ns$, and the full sample, $\chi^2(1) = 1.25$, $p = ns$. We would have expected significant differences if inmates and/or officers were discouraging participation in the study after the purpose of the study was revealed.

Setting the Stage to Secure Informed Consent and Conduct Confidential Face-to-Face Interviews

It was a requirement for each interviewer to conduct face-to-face interviews with inmates in settings in which the interview could not be overhead. In other words, privacy was defined by sound, not sight. The particular interview environment varied depending on the available space at each prison. For example, interviews were conducted in correctional counselors' offices, chapels, and visiting rooms (with and without glass separating the interviewer and the inmate), as well as conference rooms and what appeared to be custodial closets. Interviewers were ultimately responsible for ensuring a private setting for the interview, while correctional officers were responsible for securing a safe environment for the interview.[6] This division of labor

worked well even when an interviewer indicated an unwillingness to do an interview in a particular setting and/or an officer indicated an unwillingness to allow an interview to be conducted in a particular setting. The need to ensure privacy required constant vigilance on the part of the interviewing staff. We had to be aware of the possibility of being overheard in a neighboring office because of sheer proximity or vents that carry sound, being viewed through windows (we tried to position participants with their backs to windows), and the occasional construction anomaly such as when one interview space had a "peephole" slot accessible to an administrator's office.

Once the inmate and the interviewer were in a private location amenable to conducting a confidential interview, the interviewer identified himself or herself as a researcher, impressed on the inmate that his name had been randomly selected from a prison roster, and then invited the inmate to participate in the study by briefly describing the nature and purpose of the study, thoroughly explaining that participation was voluntary, and that there were no consequences for declining to participate and ensuring confidentiality if the inmate agreed to participate in the interview. The only exception to inmate confidentiality was the disclosure of intention to do harm to themselves and/or others in the future. This exception was emphasized by the interviewer orally and in writing on the informed consent form inmates were asked to sign before the interview commenced. We asked the university IRB for a waiver of signature as evidence of consent, but our request was not granted. Thus, inmates were required to sign an informed consent form prior to participating in an interview and the interviewer countersigned the consent form.

Inmates were not required to answer any question they did not want to and were allowed to discontinue the interview at any point. Recognizing that the interviewees for this research exist in carceral environments, the research design and attendant logistics were organized around ensuring that the research team did not, in any way, dictate to inmates that they "have" to participate in the research; interviewers did not promise anything to inmates in exchange for participating in the study nor did they threaten anything for declining to participate.

Soliciting Self-Report Data about Victimization in Confidential Interviews

The interview schedule included 111 questions on the primary instrument and 33 questions on each supplemental incident form. The primary interview instrument asked inmates to provide information about their daily prison life, emotional health, fear of victimization in prison, perceptions of sexual and nonsexual victimization in prison, personal victimization from sexual and nonsexual assaults in California correctional facilities, opinions on safety and reporting, demographics, gang affiliation, and past and current incarcerations. If an inmate answered affirmatively when asked about involvement in sexual assault or nonsexual violence, the interviewer then asked a series of questions designed to capture the details associated with these violent

incidents. This approach allowed considerable flexibility in terms of data analysis by, for example, enabling analyses that treat the individual or the incident as the unit of analysis and by enabling systematic comparisons between sexual and nonsexual violence.

This instrument was designed to obtain accounts of victimization experienced by inmates throughout their incarceration history in California correctional facilities (i.e., any juvenile hall, California Youth Authority facility, jail, prison, or other correctional facility). Supplemental incident forms consist of follow-up questions for the most recent incidents of victimization, including up to 11 incidents of sexual assault/misconduct (i.e., the 10 most recent incidents and a worst event) and four nonsexual assaults (i.e., three most recent incidents and a worst event). The questions on the incident form are specific to each incident of victimization recounted by the inmate being interviewed, including a narrative of the event, the number of individuals involved, the location of the event (both in terms of the facility and location within the facility), the year and time of day of the event, the racial/ethnic and gang composition of parties involved in the incident, the inmate's perception of the cause of incident, whether a weapon was used, whether medical attention was received if needed, and the inmate's understanding of whether there was an official response to the incident.

We recognized the difficulty eliciting reports about sensitive experiences like same sex behavior and sexual assault, especially among men for whom such reports might jeopardize their masculine self-identity (Pino & Meier, 1999) and among men in prison (Carpenter, 2007). Sex between inmates is against institutional rules as well as the California Penal Code (Sections 286(e) and 288a(e)). Therefore, we worded these questions simply and provided inmates with multiple opportunities to recall and recount victimization of a sexual nature. First, inmates were asked: "Have you ever had to do sexual things against your will with other inmates while incarcerated?" If an inmate answered affirmatively, then the interviewer followed up by asking the inmate to reveal the number of times it has happened, and then to recount the details of up to the five most recent incidents of sexual assault. If the inmate indicated no experience(s) with sexual assault in response to the general question about "sexual things against your will," then the interviewer proceeded to ask: "Just to be sure, have any of the following things ever happened to you with other inmates while incarcerated: groping or fondling, kissing, genital contact, oral sex, or penetration against your will?" An affirmative response would also result in up to five supplemental incident forms for the most recent events. By combining these two approaches to inquiring about sexual assault, we operationalized "sexual assault" for the inmates; at the same time, we provided each interviewee with two opportunities to report sexual assault.

In addition, inmates were asked: "Well, what about sexual things [with other inmates while incarcerated] that were perhaps not against your will, but you would have rather not done?" Again, an affirmative response could result in up to five incident forms. This question was designed to capture sexual conduct that the

inmates would rather not do but nonetheless engaged in for all sorts of reasons (e.g., economic exchange, barter, relationship pressures, protective pairing, etc.). In later analyses, we refer to this activity as sexual misconduct (Jenness et al., 2007).

Although staff-on-inmate sexual assault was not the primary focus of the research reported on here, the interview schedule included a question on staff sexual assault. Specifically, we asked: "Have you ever had to do sexual things against your will with staff? [If yes] How many times?" No incident form was attached to a positive answer to this question.

Inmates who reported more than one incident of sexual victimization by answering yes to any of the three questions were asked: "Of all the things that have happened to you, including what you've just told me, what was the worst sexual thing that has ever happened to you while incarcerated?" For this question, a new incident form would be completed if the incident was not previously described or, if the incident was previously described, it was indicated to be the "Worst Event." Asking this question enabled us to understand how inmates experience severity and provided an opportunity to hear more about the event itself.

The interview also included questions regarding experiences with nonsexual, physical victimization. Inmates were asked: "Have you ever been hit, kicked, punched, or otherwise assaulted while incarcerated? And again, we are just speaking of other inmates." Following the same logic and protocol deployed for the sexual assault/misconduct questions, an affirmative response to this question generated incident forms for up to the three most recent events. Inmates who indicated more than one nonsexual victimization were asked: "Of all the things that have happened to you, including what you've just told me, what was the worst incident of nonsexual violence that has ever happened to you while incarcerated?" For this question, a new incident form could have been completed if the incident was not one of the three most recent events; otherwise, a previously recounted incident was indicated to be the "Worst Event."

The length of the interviews depended on the volume of victimization reported and the loquaciousness of the inmate. The shortest interview was 10 min, whereas the longest extended just over 3 hr. The median duration for interviews was 40 min. We noted little evidence of participant fatigue even during the longer interviews. On the contrary, many inmates expressed appreciation to members of the research team for taking the time to come to a prison, sitting down face-to-face with inmates, taking their views seriously, and listening to and documenting their stories about prison life. Inmates often made comments such as "I've never talked about these things before." Going further, an inmate who reported sexual assault during an interview said to the interviewer after the interview was complete: "Who would have thought, and only God knew, that I would be sitting in front of [the interviewer] talking about all these things."

Quite apart from whether inmates reported sexual assault or not, they routinely signaled—orally, in written form, and via gestures—that they welcomed our presence as an opportunity to be heard. As an inmate wrote to the principal investigator

> Good day to you, happy new year. Forgive me I if skip past niceties but I know you are forbidden to exchange them and I'm not trying to upset the balance. ☺ I'm going to stay in my place, but I hope you are doing well and feeling great. Sometime back I asked about your case study findings and in a response I was told to write back in early 2007 so here I am. I'm still interested in educated society's opinion of my people and our little piece of hell we got going on in the darker side of the golden state so please get at me in your convenience. Thank you very much. You're like our Jane Goddall or whatever that lady who hung out with the monkeys name is ☺. Good stuff, take care. One love. (written correspondence dated January 16, 2007).

These and similar comments, the routinely expressed "thank you" after an interview as well as while we were entering and exiting the prison, and numerous letters received after leaving the field, left us with the strong impression that our presence and the opportunity to talk in a confidential setting with nonlaw enforcement personnel was generally welcomed by inmates.[7]

Finally, in anticipation of the rare event in which an inmate reported (re)experiencing trauma as a result of being asked questions about sexual assault, interviewers were trained to offer the inmate information about services for survivors of sexual assault in prison. In consultation with the only advocacy group exclusively devoted to advocating on behalf of inmates who have experienced sexual assault while incarcerated, Stop Prisoner Rape (SPR, now Just Detention International), we prepared a card with contact information for SPR on it and instructed interviewers to make it available to inmates who indicated particular discomfort or upset with revealing an account of victimization. Respondents generally declined the resource.

Concatenating Official Data

As a final step in data collection, we concatenated existing official data retrieved from the CDCR's data base on inmates—the Offender Based Information System (OBIS)—to self-report data described above. Because the University of California, Irvine IRB, the research protocol, and our own professional ethics required that the identities of research participants be kept confidential (only known to the research team), we received central file information on all individuals currently housed in California adult correctional facilities from the CDCR, from which the research team extracted information for study participants. This enabled us to collect official data on the following variables without revealing to the CDCR which inmates are included in this study: date of birth, height, weight, race/ethnicity, prison term start date, mental health status, verified gang membership, classification score, custody level, current sentence length, time remaining on sentence, commitment offense, sex offender registration, and age at first arrest in California.

To protect the identity of each inmate participating in the research, we assigned each inmate in the study a unique study identification number for this project. This study ID was used to link the interview and official data for each inmate in the study.

At the time we initiated the study, it was not necessary to obtain inmate consent to access the official data; that is, IRB did not require informed consent from inmates to access official data. However, the UCI IRB has since required informed consent from inmates to access official data for a subsequent study being conducted at UCI. This speaks to the vagaries of IRB and lack of consensus over what is required for research that includes inmate participants, even as IRB requirements have become increasingly rigid.

An Assessment of the Data

The interview procedures described above yielded an impressive respondent-participation rate and relatively little loss of interviews due to incompleteness. During the interviewing phase of data collection, which ran from April 26, 2006 to October 4, 2006, 429 inmates were invited to participate in the study. Of those, 370 (86.2%) inmates agreed to participate in the study and indicated their agreement by signing an informed consent form. Our sampling and informed consent procedure yielded an 85.3% active participation rate for the randomly selected sample and a 93.5% active participation rate for the transgender sample. The active participation rate reflects the rate at which inmates who were contacted by interviewers agreed to participate in the study and signed an informed consent form (Esbensen et al., 1999).

We achieved an exceptionally high participation rate, one that defied our and others' expectations and exceeds what is commonly found in the literature. The systematic literature review of research on prison rape conducted by Gaes and Goldberg (2004, p. 2) found that "Most research papers report survey return rates of 50% or less. Many response rates are 25% or lower." Interestingly, one of the first sexual violence studies to emerge after the passage of the PREA had a response rate of 39% (Wolff, Shi, Blitz, & Siegel, 2007). Comparatively, the BJS survey results report an average response rate of 72% (Beck & Harrison, 2007).

Only nine interviews were excluded for a range of reasons; however, an analysis of these incomplete interviews suggests that no systematic bias was introduced into the data. In the randomly selected sample, three interviews were eliminated because the inmate elected to end the interview early (i.e., before the crucial questions about sexual assault were asked and/or answered); one interview was deleted because the inmate was a reception center inmate; and one interview was not used because the interviewer discontinued the interview when it became clear that the inmate was unable to comprehend the questions being asked. Four interviews were eliminated in the transgender sample: three interviews because the inmates indicated they did not identify as transgender and one because the inmate had to end the interview for another appointment and did not return. The result is 361 usable interviews (322 from the random sample and 39 from the transgender sample).

We complete the description of our research experience with an assessment of the samples along two dimensions that can be used to address how well our research

procedures yielded valuable data and served the ultimate purpose of the study. In the following sections, we present analyses on the degree to which these data reveal interviewer effects and the degree to which the random sample generalizes to the entire adult male prison population in California. Thereafter we comment on the validity of the data.

Assessing Interviewer Effects

Recognizing the threat of interviewer effects when conducting "stranger-interviews" (Weinreb, 2006), we consulted with other researchers when we designed this research. Some indicated that interviewer characteristics, such as gender, age, and race, did not matter; others put forth warnings about which types of interviewers to avoid. With regard to the latter, we were told, men were to be avoided because these researchers thought male inmates would not talk to men about sexual matters; for others, women were to be avoided because researchers anticipated that inmates would bypass honest reporting in the pursuit of flirtation and a desire to present the Self as entirely "manly." Furthermore, we were advised that elderly "grandmother" type interviewers were ideal because they do not inspire homosocial competitiveness with inmates nor are they easily sexualizable objects of interaction. This—often times competing and mutually exclusive—advice raised questions about interviewer effects.

Table 1 provides a summary of interviewer characteristics and the number of inmates contacted by each interviewer, the percentage of inmates who granted consent to be interviewed, and the percentage of usable interviews conducted by each interviewer. Using age, sex, race/ethnicity, occupational status, and language used in the interview as key interviewer indicators, there is no evidence to suggest that the characteristics of the interviewer had an impact on inmates' willingness to participate in the study. Although the number of inmates contacted by each interviewer varies considerably (with a low of 3 and a high of 98), the inmate participation rate for each interviewer varies little (with a low of 80%, a high of 92.3%, and a mean of 86.2%); related, the number of usable interviews conducted by each interviewer does not vary considerably, with a low of 80%, a high of 92.3%, and a mean of 84.1%—omitting the 100% participation rate of one interviewer who conducted just three interviews. A series of chi-square tests reveal there is not a statistically significant relationship between interviewer characteristics—younger versus older, White versus non-White, male versus female, professor versus graduate student—and inmate participation rates and usable interview rates. Also, the Spanish-speaking interviewer produced participation and usable interview rates comparable to other interviewers.

Likewise, we analyzed both samples—the randomly selected sample and the transgender sample—to determine if there is evidence of interviewer effects on how inmates responded to questions about involvement in sexual assault/misconduct, nonsexual assault, consensual sex while incarcerated, and current street and/or prison

Table 1
An Assessment of Interviewer Effects on Potential and Realized Study Participants

	Interviewer Characteristics					Potential and Realized Study Participants		
	Age	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity	Professor/ Graduate Student	Language	Inmates Contacted by Interviewer	Participation Rate (Consent Granted; %)	Usable Interviews (%)
1	38	F	White	Graduate student	English	50	80.0	80.0
2	54	F	White	Professor	English	3	100.0	100.0
3	45	F	Hispanic	Graduate student	Spanish	19	89.5	89.5
4	29	F	White	Graduate student	English	98	86.7	82.7
5	26	F	Asian	Graduate student	English	77	83.1	83.1
6	25	F	White	Graduate student	English	26	92.3	92.3
7	55	M	White	Graduate student	English	35	82.9	82.9
8	26	M	White	Graduate student	English	64	87.5	81.3
9	43	F	White	Professor	English	57	91.2	89.5
Total						429	86.2	84.1

gangs (i.e., the so-called "sensitive questions"). This series of chi-square tests revealed no evidence to suggest that interviewer characteristics had an impact on whether inmates reported current street and/or prison gang membership in either sample. In the random inmate sample, no effects were found for reporting of sexual assault/misconduct or nonsexual violence. However, younger and non-White interviewers were more likely to receive reports of consensual sex than their older and White counterparts while sex and occupational status of the interviewer did not differentiate reporting of consensual sex. In the transgender sample, no interviewer effects were identified for reporting of sexual assault/misconduct, nonsexual assault, or consensual sex.

Assessing the Samples

To assess how well the randomly selected sample represents the population of the subset of six prisons from which we collected data and the larger population of adult male inmates in all the CDCR prisons housing adult males, we relied on eight demographic variables to make systematic comparisons: age, race/ethnicity, offense category, custody level, life sentence (or not), registered sex offender (or not), verified gang affiliation (or not), and mental health status. The data reported in Table 2 show that our randomly selected sample is statistically similar to the population of inmates in these six prisons; thus we are confident that our random selection process was

Table 2
A Comparison of Characteristics of the CDCR Adult Male Prison Population and Selected Research Samples[a]

	Total Adult Male Prison Population		Facilities for Random Sample		Usable Random Sample	
	n	*M*/%	*n*	*M*/%	*n*	*M*/%
Total	119,153		19,584		322	
Age						
M (*SD*)	119,153	36.6 (10.83)	19,584	37.9 (10.79)	322	39.1 (10.67)
Median		36		38		39
Range		18, 92		18, 87		20, 68
18-25	20,579	17.3	2,796	14.3	36	11.2
26-35	38,623	32.4	5,762	29.4	90	28.0
36-45	34,906	29.3	6,223	31.8	102	31.7
46+	25,045	21.0	4,803	24.5	94	29.2
Race/ethnicity						
Hispanic	46,581	39.1	6,392	32.6	92	28.6
White	30,422	25.5	5,274	26.9	99	30.7
Black	35,316	29.6	6,806	34.8	116	36.0
Asian	1,395	1.2	269	1.4	4	1.2
Other	5,439	4.6	843	4.3	11	3.4
Offense category						
Violent	69,436	58.3	10,834	55.3	157	49.1
Property	20,617	17.3	3,680	18.8	76	23.8
Drug	20,953	17.6	3,668	18.7	63	19.7
Other	8,124	6.8	1,393	7.1	24	7.5
Custody level						
1	22,482	19.2	4,496	23.4	79	25.3
2	39,127	33.4	5,489	28.6	86	27.6
3	29,070	24.8	5,136	26.7	90	28.8
4	26,688	22.7	4,092	21.3	57	18.3
Life sentence						
Life	26,155	22.0	4,613	23.6	76	23.6
Life Without Parole	3,067	2.6	578	3.0	14	4.3
Death Row	599	0.5	3	0	0	0
Sex offender registration						
Yes	18,360	15.4	2,760	14.1	40	12.4
Gang (verified)						
Yes	15,576	13.1	2,065	10.5	27	8.4
Mental health problems (official)						
CCCMS[b]	19,301	16.2	4,845	24.7	91	28.3
Other Mental Health[c]	486	0.4	65	0.3	2	0.6

Note: CDCR = California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.
a. Does not include inmates in reception centers or fire camps, or inmates who are designated "Enhanced Outpatient" (EOP) mental health status.
b. Correctional Clinical Case Management System.
c. "Other Mental Health" includes inmates in Crisis Beds, Department of Mental Health Status, and EOP.

enacted with integrity and without contamination. There are no statistically significant differences on any of the eight demographic variables tested, as indicated by chi-square analysis and *t*-test comparisons between means, as appropriate.

Despite concerted effort to ensure that the randomly selected inmate sample generalized to the entire adult male inmate population housed in CDCR prisons, statistically significant differences between the sampled inmates and the total population emerged in every variable we tested, with the exception of sex offender registration and "lifer" status. However, considering the size of the CDCR total population (n = 119,153) included in this analysis, it is more informative to examine the magnitude of the differences between the total CDCR population and the randomly selected sample.

On three statistically significant variables, the magnitude of the difference is small. There is only a 2-year difference in age, with the mean age of the population of about 37 and the mean age of the sample of about 39. The difference in the distribution of the proportion of inmates in each custody level is never more than about 6% points. Also, 13.1% of the population are officially verified gang members compared with 8.4% in the sample. Offense category comparisons show a somewhat larger magnitude of difference; the current commitment offense of the total inmate population is more often a violent offense (58.3%) than the random sample (49.1%).

Two other variables—race/ethnicity and mental health status—warrant attention. The total inmate population has more Hispanic (39.1% vs. 28.6% in the sample), fewer White (25.5% vs. 30.7% in the sample) and fewer Black (29.6% vs. 36% in the sample) inmates. Also, inmates classified as CCCMS are 16.2% of the total prison population but represent 28.3% of the random sample.

In general, we interpret these statistical and substantive comparisons to suggest that our prison selection and inmate random sampling procedures produced a study sample that is roughly comparable to the total targeted CDCR inmate population on many, but not all, dimensions that might be correlated with sexual assault. Of greatest concern, the study sample has somewhat fewer Hispanic inmates and more inmates with officially recognized mental health issues. Accordingly, the study sample should not be strictly regarded as statistically representative of the CDCR population. The differences between the study sample and the total CDCR population primarily reflect differences between the population characteristics of the six facilities from which data were collected and the total CDCR population rather than the sampling and access procedures used to select study participants. Ultimately, the question remains as to whether we could have selected a more representative subset of prisons from California's 30 prisons for adult men—in the truest statistical sense of the word. Recall that we were confronted with 593,775 possible combinations of six prisons (30!/6![24!]).[8]

Data Validity

The issue of whether the study participants were forthcoming in their responses is always a concern in studies of this type. Our objective was to gather self-report

data on matters that are arguably sensitive in nature; therefore, we anticipated that (at least some) inmates might be reluctant to describe some of their experiences while incarcerated. Not surprisingly, then, on occasion inmates being interviewed respectfully declined to answer sensitive questions, often by simply saying some version of "I don't want to talk about that." Although this response deprived us of valuable data, it also served to affirm that inmates were approaching the interview with sincerity and seriousness. Indeed, inmates routinely expressed interest in how the promise of confidentiality would be kept as well as how the research team related to the CDCR more generally (i.e., that no one on the team is a CDCR employee). Once assurances of the research team's obligations and commitments along these lines were expressed in compelling terms, inmates often suggested that they felt comfortable reporting their experiences to the interviewers. For example, when an interviewer asked why an inmate described multiple sexual assaults in the interview that were not reported to anyone else, the inmate replied, "Because you said it was confidential and you can't send me to the hole." Likewise, other inmates explained that they were convinced we were not law enforcement.

We derive some confidence in the veracity of inmates' responses by comparing self-report measures to official report measures for two arguably sensitive items: gang membership and mental health status. Twenty-three inmates in the study were recorded as verified gang members by the CDCR and 17 (74%) of these inmates confirmed their status as gang members by responding affirmatively to an interview question about current or former, street or prison gang status. In a similar vein, 111 inmates in the study were classified by the CDCR as having mental health problems and 89 (80%) of these inmates reported to the interviewer that they had mental health problems since their incarceration. Of course, there are good reasons why self-report and official data do not align perfectly, and yet these two findings, coupled with our field experience and high degree of intercoder reliability in data entry and coding,[9] enable us to proceed with confidence that what was reported should be treated seriously even as concerns about what was not reported are legitimate and worthy of consideration.

Discussion and Conclusion

Unlike the experiences reported by field researchers in general (Feldman et al., 2003; Sharp & Kremer, 2006) and prison researchers in particular (Arriola, 2006; Sparks, 2002), members of this research team were invited by the CDCR to conduct research on California prisoners, well treated in the field by inmates and correctional staff alike, and otherwise able to conduct the research described above in a fairly unproblematic way. The result was the production of a valuable data set that is in compliance with all relevant regulatory agencies and accepted standards for good research (Jenness et al., 2007). With rare exception, inmates and correctional officers treated us respectfully and, by extension, demonstrated a commitment to contributing

to the successful implementation of the research. More important, the methodology described above served to produce a compelling data set that speaks to the contours of prisoners' lives in the modern era.

One of the key findings generated by this research effort and the data set it yielded—that 4.4% of randomly selected inmates in California reported being sexually assaulted by other inmates while imprisoned—was much awaited. In some sense, arriving at this prevalence rate was, from the point of view of many stakeholders, including the CDCR, the raison d'etre for this study. In this light, the fact that this finding was (loosely) corroborated when the BJS released findings from the first national study of sexual assault in detention facilities across the United States is telling. According to the BJS report, an estimated 27,500 inmates—2.1% of the nation's prisoners—report experiencing sexual violence by another inmate during the year prior to the interview (Beck & Harrison, 2007). The BJS study's reporting period was truncated to the prior year and included both males and females, and thus, might be expected to generate a lower prevalence rate of inmate-on-inmate sexual assault than our study. Notably, the BJS study provided a separate estimate of staff-on-inmate assault. When victimization by staff is included, the national prevalence rate increases to 4.5% or an estimated 60,500 prisoners in the United States. This triangulation of findings based on very different methods[10] and attendant data sets boost our confidence in the method and data described in this article. Future research would benefit by fully including juvenile, female, and jail populations as well as pursuing more nuanced dimensions of consensual and coercive sexual assault by inmates and staff.

The research approach described in this article suggests a number of lessons related to successfully conducting in-prison research. First, inmates are, under the umbrella of confidentiality, willing and able to report sexual assault and other so-called sensitive issues, even as researchers would be well advised to attend to the prospect of being hustled (see Venkatesh, 2002). Second, independent researchers (i.e., those not formally affiliated with corrections agencies) can conduct in-prison research in a way that produces respectable samples and results in valid and reliable data. Third, similar research on youth is problematic, arguably in prohibitive ways. Fourth, and arguably most important, this research reminds us of what Thomas A. Edison, one of the greatest inventors and industrial leaders in history, said: "There's no substitute for hard work." In this case, we would emphasize that the gritty, grueling, field work is made possible by working collaboratively—what some might refer to as being "embedded" (Jenness, 2008) —with corrections agencies that are so easily critiqued in the scholarly literature.

As we confronted many difficulties and challenges in pursuing this work, we charted some innovative terrain with our research design, produced some empirical findings that informed policy recommendations that challenged the CDCR to rethink its approach to inmate housing decisions, revised officer training, and pursued additional research on the topic with transgender inmates. At the same time,

we are mindful of Walgrave's (2008) warning about "embedded criminologists" accepting problems defined by government as "the real ones":

> There is nothing wrong with criminology focusing on issues as they are experienced by the public and addressing public authorities. Criminological matters indeed are by definition public matters. There is also nothing wrong with doing research ordered by governments or other public authorities, but minimal conditions must be respected. First, criminology must work autonomously and base its approach on the full scope of relevant criminological achievements. Second, governments must accept that criminologists also investigate the wider macro-social, economic and cultural grounds for the current penal populism and that criminologists also question the punitive apriorism in the response to crime. Third, criminology must be allowed to address its results not only to governments but also to the public to feed the democratic debate on how to cope with the existential anxiety and its multileveled causes.

Although we admittedly felt the pull of the policy audience, our methodological approach to gathering systematic data produced a solid foundation for informing both policy and scholarly audiences. We hope other researchers will take up Simon's (2000) and Wacquant's (2002) call to return to prisons to conduct urgently needed studies of prison life, especially studies that are based on sound protocols, respectable samples, and compelling data that enable us to portray life inside prison walls.

Notes

1. In prison, a ducat is written permission to move throughout the institution for a particular appointment or responsibility, such as a medical appointment or a work assignment.

2. Enhanced Outpatient (EOP) refers to the mental health status of an inmate indicating the highest level of mental incapacity. EOP inmates were excluded from the randomly selected sample because of a concern about their ability to participate in an interview and comprehend the substance of questions.

3. Although staff-on-inmate sexual assault was not the primary focus of the research reported on here, the interview schedule included a question on staff-on-inmate sexual assault.

4. Mathematically calculated, the possibilities for 30 choices from which to select six possibilities is: 30!/6!(24!).

5. We learned an invaluable lesson during the pilot process. An inmate reported experiencing considerable anxiety between the time he received a ducat that said "PREA" on it and the moment the interviewer conducting the pilot interview explained that, contrary to what he assumed, he was not being brought to the interview room to face allegations of rape. Thereafter, we insured that the purpose written on ducats was suitably vague such that inmates could not discern the interviews were about rape in prison.

6. At times the safety measures were arguably more cumbersome and intrusive than protective, at least from our point of view as nonexperts on prison security. For example, correctional officers often provided us with security alarms and emphatically cautioned us against accidentally activating them, explaining that if the alarm is activated then CDCR personnel will race to the location of the alarm. These security devices, which resembled garage door openers, often appeared outdated and composed of overused parts that were precariously taped together, leaving us to wonder if they were functional. Nonetheless, concerned that alarms were easily inadvertently activated, we handled them carefully, for

example, by holding them delicately in one hand and away from our body and interview materials. Placed on the interview table for easy access, these devices occasionally became more of a distraction than a precaution as inmates inquired about their use during an interview.

7. This general pattern should not be read to suggest that we did not ever get greeted with hostility or disdain by inmates. We did. However, it was a rare occurrence and a short-lived moment as inmates who did not want to participate were not pressured to do so.

8. As described earlier, the purpose of the transgender portion of the study was to conveniently oversample a specific subpopulation of the CDCR inmates commonly thought to be more vulnerable to sexual assault in prison. Because we did not intend to use the transgender sample to represent the larger CDCR population, it is not useful to make comparisons along these lines. However, a follow-up study of transgender inmates in California prisons that is currently underway is well positioned to provide a systematic assessment of the degree to which transgender inmates differ along these dimensions (Jenness, Sexton, & Sumner, 2009).

9. In total, 8,865 fields were available for data entry in the primary interview database and 4,050 fields were available for incident form coding. Two coders agreed 97.7% of the time in the primary interview database and 96.5% of the time in the incident database. Five interview data fields and six incident data fields produced higher than a 10% error rate and were examined closely by principal investigators and project managers. To decrease potential issues with variable quality, the structure of these 11 variables was altered to increase coding reliability (Jenness et al., 2007).

10. This survey was conducted via an audio-assisted computer program in which inmates, using a touch-screen laptop, answered a questionnaire and followed instructions via headphones.

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Valerie Jenness is a professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society and the Department of Sociology and is the interim dean of the School of Social Ecology at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on the links between deviance and social control, the politics of crime control, social movements and social change, and corrections and public policy. She is the author of three books and many articles published in sociology, law, and criminology journals. Her work has been honored with awards from the American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems, the Pacific Sociological Association, and the University of California. She is a past president of the Society for the Study of Social Problems and past editor of *Contemporary Sociology*.

Cheryl Maxson is an associate professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine. Her research concerns street gangs, status offenders, youth violence, and community treatment of juvenile offenders. She has served as an executive counselor and vice-president elect of the American Society of Criminology and as president and vice-president of the Western Society of Criminology, where she is honored as a fellow, and with the Society's Paul Tappan and Joseph Lohman awards.

Jennifer Macy Sumner is an assistant professor of Criminal Justice in the School of Public Affairs at Penn State Harrisburg. Her research focuses on the interactions between prison policies, practices, and culture. Her recent work examines the correctional policies, housing environments, and culture of transgender inmates in California prisons.

Kristy N. Matsuda is an assistant research professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Her broad research interests include juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, and gangs.