Wedding Behind Bars:
The Emic Perspectives of Male Prisoners on Same-Sex Sexual Practices in Ghana

“Jail Bars and Cuffs”
http://img.myghana.tv/?pm=P79A

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Dedicated to

Prince Samuel Larbi and Prince Fiifi Larbi

For your love and support.
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Summary

Same-sex sexual practice is illegal in Ghana; individuals who engaged in such practices could be convicted to prison custody when arrested, the subject of sex and homosexuality in particular are therefore topics that are hardly discussed within Ghanaian families or in public. Ghanaians rarely speak about such issues, to avoid creating suspicion within their community, since men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ghana are often considered deviants and they could become social outcasts in most Ghanaian communities.

Inmates who engage in MSM in prison stand the risk of being sent to court for engaging in homosexual acts and having an additional sentence for engaging in an illegal act, or being punished by the prison staff. Such prisoners are also at risk of been infected with HIV/AIDS and other STD’s since they do not have access to condoms.

Since the aim of this study was to explore the emic perspectives of prisoners, in relation to same-sex sexual practices in prisons in Ghana, I did participant observation and conducted in-depth / focus life history interviews. I selected my informants through the convenience sampling method, considering the limited time for the fieldwork. It comprised of inmates who are willing to participate, readily available and not assigned to any job outside the prison. I abided by ethical standards while conducting this study, bearing in mind the rights of prisoners. I categorized my data into various themes such as motivation of MSM; I coded similar answers and then analyzed the answers. It wasn’t easy with my position as a prison officer and now a researcher asking sensitive question. Although the result of this study can be generalized to represent what pertains in other prisons in Ghana, there are some limitations to the study considering the limited period for the study and the number of my respondents, and I also assume some prisoners may withhold certain information from me knowing very well I am a prison officer. These notwithstanding, this study focused on what motivates prisoners to engage in MSM, how they perceive their sexual practices and how they identify themselves. I also explored how inmates consider risk involved with MSM in prison and what they gain or lose in such sexual relationships in prison.

I adopted concepts such as “the body we do” during the participant observation to understand how prisoners carry their body about, what they do with their body and how they relate with each other using the body as a non verbal tool for communication. I also used the theory of “doing gender” to explore how prisoners construct masculine and feminine identities
through their daily practices, the meaning of these identities (masculine/ feminine, gender) and their perspectives on MSM, during the in-depth interviews.

It is explicitly clear in my findings that, prisoners who engage in same-sex sexual activities are motivated by certain factors to do so. However, the motivation for an inmate to initiate or propose a sexual relationship is different from the motivation for an inmate to accept a sexual proposal. Whereas the “husband” proposes to satisfy his sexual desires, to boost his masculine ego and to avoid household chores, the “wife” on the other hand accepts the sexual proposal in order to be given food, soap, drugs or to be protected from bullies or to be given some privileges in the prison. Considering these benefits, inmates keep engaging in sexual relationship, irrespective of the punishment meted out to them by the prison staff.

The response from my informants indicates that inmates have knowledge about the risk involved with MSM in prison but how they perceive risk is influenced by whether they are involved in sexual activities in prison or not. Prisoners who are not involved in sexual activities seemed concern about being mocked or beaten by their colleagues, or being infected with HIV/AIDS or STDs when they engage in MSM, however, it seems inmates involved in sexual activities do not care about being infected with a disease or being punished by the prison staff, since they keep saying “all die be die” meaning every death is death.

With the issue of their identity, my findings indicates that inmates in prison who engage in MSM do not consider themselves as homosexuals, neither do they identify themselves as bisexuals. Four out of my six informants who are involved in sexual activities consider themselves as heterosexuals, whiles the remaining two do not identify themselves with any of those identities, care should therefore be taken when referring to them as homosexuals.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the background and the objectives of the study, as well as the statement of the problem and studies done on MSM in prisons in Africa, and other parts of the world. What does the constitution of Ghana say about same-sex sexual practices? What are the risks of engaging in MSM in prison? Why the need for this exploratory study? To provide background for the study, I explain how the constitution of Ghana considers men having sex with men (MSM) and how this practice is perceived in most Ghanaian communities. The existing gap in the literature and why the need for this exploratory is also discussed.

Background

Ghanaian law criminalizes sexual activity among people of the same gender, even though this is not explicitly stated in the criminal code. Section 104 of the criminal code of Ghana, which is often referred to, states that “unnatural carnal knowledge” is a crime and explains this to mean “sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner or with an animal” (Ansah-Addo 2010; Mensah-Bonsu 2008). Homosexuality in Ghana is considered to be “unnatural” and thereby a crime. As a result, MSM in Ghana are considered illegal and individuals engaged in such practices can be convicted to prison custody when arrested (Prince 2004). Inmates who engage in MSM in prison stand the risk of being sent to court for engaging in homosexual acts and having an additional sentence for engaging in an illegal act. Such prisoners are also at risk of been infected with HIV/AIDS and other STDs since they do not have access to condoms (The Mirror 2008). The prison authorities suggest that making condoms available to inmates may encourage them to engage in MSM, which is illegal. This notwithstanding, available literature indicates that prisoners in most countries engage in MSM irrespective of the consequences and Ghana is no exception (Singh 2007; Adjei et al. 2006).

This study explores the emic perspectives of Ghanaian prisoners, to gain insight on their views on MSM in prison. It focuses on how prisoners consider their sexual practices, how they identify themselves, what it means to behave in masculine or feminine ways in prison and what they gain or lose in such sexual relationships.
I developed interest in this issue working as a prison officer in Ghana for the past eight years and observing male inmates involved in MSM, irrespective of the punishment meted out to them by the prison staff, or the risk of being infected with HIV/STDs. This increased my curiosity to explore the emic perspectives of prisoners on the issue, therefore influencing my choice of topic for this Master’s thesis.

**Statement of the Problem**

Some male prisoners in Ghana engage in same-sex sexual practices with their fellow inmates. These inmates have no access to condoms, so they engage in unprotected anal sex, which exposes them to the risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS and other STDs (Adjei et al. 2006). Prisoners involved in sexual activities are also at risk of being sent to court for additional sentence for engaging in an illegal practice (Ansah-Addo 2010; Prince 2004). This practice can add 2-3 years to the sentence they are already serving.

Prisoners involved in MSM are often punished by the prison staff when caught in the act of sex without being sent to court for the additional sentence. The prisoners are often either barred from going outside the prison for some time, or, for a period of time, made to scrub the toilets/bathroom alone or not allowed to receive visitors. They can also lose part or all of the one-third remission of their sentence granted when they exhibit good conduct. A prisoner’s remission can be forfeited by the prison authorities when caught in MSM. For instance a prisoner sentenced to 15 years is entitled to five years remission (one third of his sentence), so such a prisoner would be released after 10 years in custody if he exhibits good conduct, including abstaining from MSM. He could also serve the whole 15 years or have part of his remission forfeited by serving 12 or 13 years for breaking prison rules, which includes engaging in MSM. The motivation to engage in this behavior is not well understood in the Ghanaian context.

Available literature indicates that, many studies have been done on MSM among prisoners in America and other European countries. Although there is some literature on studies done in some parts of Africa, like South Africa (Gear 2001; Singh 2007) and Malawi (Jolofani and DeGabriele 1999), no study has been done in Ghana to explore the perspectives of prisoners in relation to MSM. Therefore, this study has contributed to fill the existing gap in the literature on MSM in Prisons in Ghana and Africa as a whole.
Research Objectives

The objective of this study was to understand the emic perspectives of male prisoners in Ghana on practices and experiences of MSM. This included what motivates inmates to engage in MSM, how they perceive their sexual practices, what they consider as risk involved with the practice and how they identify themselves. It was interesting to explore these issues from the perspectives of inmates who were not involved in sexual practices, as well as those who were engaging in MSM in prison.

The following were my main research questions:

- How do prisoners perceive their sexual practices in prison?
- How do the prisoners identify themselves? (As homosexuals, heterosexuals etc.)
- What does it mean for prisoners to behave in masculine or feminine ways? How do they construct masculine and feminine identities?
- What do prisoners gain or lose by engaging in MSM?

Review of Literature

Same-sex sexual practices in prisons

Many prison institutions, especially in Africa, refuse to admit that inmates engage in MSM (Gear 2001; Jolofani and DeGabriele 1999). This may be because the practice is prohibited by law in most African countries and people are arrested for this offence and convicted into prison custody. Prison staff admitting that prisoners have sex in custody may imply that the prison authorities are condoning illegal acts within the prison. This notwithstanding, available literature indicates that sexual activities occur in most prisons either in the form of rape, sexual assaults or coercion (Stern 2006; Singh 2007), Ghana is no exception.

According to Singh (2007:78) who conducted his study in South Africa, “sex in prison often takes place in situations of violence or intimidation therefore both perpetrators and victims are reluctant to discuss its occurrence. Sexual activities occur through homosexual interaction, creating an unrelenting social stigma to it and often forces avoidance of complaining to the authorities”. Gear (2007) also observed that, most sexual abuse in prison is not reported, whiles coerced and sexual assaults are “legitimized” by prisoners and considered to be “normal”. Some
prisoners may refuse to report sexual abuse to the prison authorities to avoid being stigmatized or for fear of being attacked by the perpetrator or other inmates.

**Sexual orientation of prisoners**

According to Moseley and Tewksbury (2006), the best way to tell if an inmate will practice anal sex in prison is to find out if he ever practiced anal sex before incarceration. Available literature indicates that a prisoner’s sexual orientation is significant for determining whether that prisoner might be a target for sexual approaches or assault in prison (Hensley et. al 2005). Hensley and colleagues (2005) who did their study in a maximum security prison in the U.S. argued that, an inmate with a homosexual orientation is at a greater risk of being targeted for sexual assaults than a prisoner who is fully heterosexual.

**Motivation and benefits for MSM in prison**

The literature shows that male prisoners have various reasons to engage in MSM and it is clear that they are not always engaging in voluntary practice. A number of researchers, who did their studies in prisons, investigated what makes inmates engage in MSM and how they benefit from such sexual relationships (Krebs 2002; Gear 2005). They identified the factors below as some of the reasons why male prisoners engage in sexual activities:

*Need for food, soap and other consumables*

Most literature on prisons in Africa (Joshua and Ogboi 2008; Jofolani and De Gabriel 1999) indicates that the need for food or other consumable items are the main reasons why some prisoners engage in MSM. Food given to inmates by the prison authorities appears to be inadequate for many inmates, so those who do not get supplementary food from their family or friends outside the prison are reported to engage in sexual activities with another prisoner in exchange for food. Other consumables like cigarettes and marijuana are prohibited in most prisons in Africa, but they often find their way into prison. Since these items are hard to come by in prisons, inmates are often ready to do anything for their colleagues including offering themselves for sex in order to have cigarette or marijuana. According to Gear and Ngubeni (2003), who did research in South Africa, those who assume the role of “wives” were given, food, cigarettes or drugs by their “husbands” in return for sex. According to them (2003:14) “dependency dynamic” whereby an inmate depends on another inmate for food and other
consumables renders such inmates vulnerable to give in to the sexual demands of the provider. Toussaint et al. (1998), in Cote d’Ivoire, also identified hunger for food as a factor that could motivate an inmate to engage in unprotected MSM, irrespective of the risk.

Need for protection

The fear of being a victim of physical or sexual violence and the need for protection has been indicated in the literature as a reason why male inmates may offer themselves as a “wife” to another male prisoner. Gear and Ngubeni (2003) noted that weak prisoners, who cannot personally defend themselves, may be assured of protection if they are the “wife” of a “strong” prisoner. It becomes the “husbands” responsibility to protect the “wife” from being physically molested or sexually assaulted by other prisoners.

Need for money

Available literature suggests that some prisoners offer themselves to other inmates for sexual activities in exchange for money. These inmates need money to buy certain items they need in the prison, so they resort to “selling” their bodies to their colleagues for sex. These are often not permanent sexual relationships but rather one time or casual relationships. Jolofani and DeGabrielle’s (1999) found that some inmates engaged in MSM, in order to make additional money they desperately needed, to buy basic supplies such as blankets, soap or food.

Sexual gratification / love

Some authors indicate that, their studies show prisoners voluntarily engaging in MSM to satisfy their sexual desires or because they are in love with that particular inmate. Gear (2001) in her study in a male prison in South Africa, found that some inmates engage in MSM for their own personal sexual satisfaction. Gear and Ngubeni (2003:13) also indicated that their respondents stated there is a consensual sexual relationship, based on a “feeling of love” between the partners.

Congestion in prison

Congestion in most prisons in Africa has been identified to be a favourable condition for inmates to engage in sexual activities. According to Toussaint et al. (1998) who did their study in Cote d’Ivoire, Singh (2007) who did a study in South Africa and Joshua and Ogboi (2008)
who conducted research in Nigeria, congestion in prison is believed to provide conducive environment for inmates to engage in MSM.

Prison marriage / gender identities

The literature indicates there are “prison marriages” (Gear and Ngubeni 2003; Singh 2007). These marriages are characterized by mutual and consensual sexual relationships where individuals perform gendered roles (Jolofani and DeGabriele 1999; Gear 2005).

According to Jolofani and DeGabriele (1999), who conducted a study in Malawi, prisoners who are chosen as “wives” generally have feminine bodily features. They stated that those who assume the role of a “wife” or a “husband” are expected to perform certain responsibilities associated with that gender. Jolofani and DeGabrielle (1999) suggested it is an unequal relationship, since inmates who perform the role of a husband have more power than those who assume the role of a wife and they control the “wives”. This suggestion is supported by Gear and Ngubeni (2003), who studied inmates in South African prisons, and said “wives” rarely act without their “husband’s” permission. They further explained that male prisoners in such “marriages” who assume the role of a “wife” basically perform domestic chores that are associated with the female gender, like cooking and washing for their “husbands”. According to the authors, the “wives” are those who are penetrated in the act of sex, some of them walk and talk like females (Gear and Ngubeni 2003; Gear 2001). According to Gear and Ngubeni, the “wives” position is not a valued position since they are seen as women and considered to be weak, inmates do not envy the position of a “wife”. Some “wives” were initially forced or assaulted sexually by their “husbands”, who later coerced them into a consensual sexual relationship. They reported that respondents in their study mentioned fear as the only reason why “wives” remain in a “marriage” irrespective of the fact that they are being abused and not respected (2003:12).

The “husbands” position, according to Gear and Ngubeni (2003), is a more prestigious and enviable position than the “wife’s”. The “husband”’s main duty is to protect the “wife” from being assaulted sexually by other inmates. He is also in charge of provision of basic items like food and soap. The “husbands” are those who penetrate during the act of sex and most of them appear physically strong (Gear and Ngubeni 2003:12; Gear 2001).
Other forms of sexual activities take place outside the “institution of marriage” in prison. In this case, none of the prisoners assumes the role of a “wife” or a “husband”, rather they tend to penetrate each other in turns and therefore none is more powerful than the other (Gear and Ngubeni 2003).

**Risk attributed to MSM in prison**

*HIV/AIDS*

“Sexual activity takes place in prisons and puts many prisoners at risk for HIV infection” (Stern 2006:117). This quotation is supported by a number of researchers who considers sexual activities within prison to be a contributory factor to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and STDs in prisons (Potter and Tewksbury 2005; Sabitu et al. 2009; Dufour et al. 1996; Adjei 2006; Simooya et al. 2001). This may be a result of prisoners, in most countries in Africa and some countries in Europe and Asia, not having access to condoms (Lorway 2006; Farrell and Strang 1991). This is not the case in the Ukraine (Stern 2006), Australia (Dolan et al. 2004) and some other European and American countries, where prisoners can access condoms.

In the UK, Farrel and Strang (1991:1477) suggest, “Providing condoms would help reduce the risk of sexual transmission of HIV, but the British system refuses to do so on grounds that it might encourage homosexual acts”. This suggests that the UK’s position as of 1991 was that prisoners should not have access to condoms. However, there are some countries, like South Africa, where prisoners are allowed by policy to have access to condoms, but the prison authorities do not make condoms available to the inmates (Gear 2001).

Dufour and colleagues (1996) also found that even though condoms were made available for inmates in Quebec City prison, most of the inmates were not going for the condoms and chose to have unprotected anal sex and expose themselves to risk, because of the repugnant attitude of the prison staff. Jolofani and DeGabriele (1999) suggest that most HIV positive inmates may have been infected before incarceration, making HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases the commonest medical problems in prisons (Dolan et al. 2007; Miranda et al. 2000). Simooya and colleagues (2001), in their study in Zambia, focused on inmates’ past exposure to STDs and their behaviors in prison, which were likely to expose them to the risk of an infection. They found that prisoners are at risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS and other STDs in the prisons, since they engage in unprotected anal sex. However, there is lack of
statistical significance between MSM and HIV/AIDS, which they attribute to inmates unwillingness to admit they engage in MSM (Simooya et al. 2001). Sabitu and colleagues (2009), in a study done in Nigeria, found that prisoners engaged in behaviours that exposed them to HIV/AIDS infection, although about two thirds of them had knowledge of the risk involved.

**Mental Health /Sexual Identity Problems**

According to Jorm et al. (2002), some people who engage in homosexual activities are likely to suffer from mood disorders such as anxiety, depression and a high tendency to commit suicide. Jorm and colleagues did their study in Canberra Australia, to measure mood disorders, among heterosexuals, bisexuals and homosexuals. According to them, the incidence of anxiety and depression was highest among bisexuals, followed by homosexuals and the heterosexuals. According to the authors, those who suffered most were bisexual.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented what the constitution of Ghana says about MSM and the risk prisoners expose themselves to by engaging in same-sex sexual practices. Studies done on the topic in some parts of Africa and other parts of the world were also highlighted, showing that sex takes place in prisons and the inmates who engage in such sexual activities are motivated by the need for basic consumables and other factors. The literature also shows these inmates are at risk of HIV/ AIDS and other infections, since most of them do not have access to condoms. I identified the existing gap in the literature on the topic in Ghana, which this study addressed.
CHAPTER TWO

Fieldwork and methodology

This chapter describes the setting where this study was conducted, the methods I used in gathering my data and my position as a researcher. I will explain the type of study I conducted, how I selected my informants and how the data was collected and analyzed. In addition, I will explain the ethical issues I considered before and during the study. A brief profile of my informants is given in this section; however, I use pseudonyms considering the sensitive nature of the topic. Below is a brief account of my first visit to the prison kitchen, with a focus on the role I played in the kitchen while gathering data by observation, casual conversation with the inmates working in the kitchen and creating rapport for later interviews, in addition to my experience there.

My “kitchen” experience (role as a researcher)

“Good morning!” I greeted the officers and inmates working at the kitchen. “Good morning madam!” they responded. “I am not madam, just call me Hannah”, I jokingly emphasized. “How can we help you?” One of the officers asked me. “I am here to help you instead” I said. “How do you mean?” She asked. “I’m here to help you dish out the food to the prisoners”, I told her. “You can’t be here, the smoke from the firewood we are using to cook is so strong that you may end up sharing tears”, she warned. “How come you and the prisoners are able to work here?” I enquired. “We are used to it”, she emphasized. “Well, I also want to get used to it”, I joked. “That’s fine, you are welcome, you may stay here as long as you wish, just feel free and help in whatever way you want to help”.

The smoke from the firewood was indeed unbearable; it was so intense that it wasn’t easy working in that environment. I engaged in casual conversation and shared jokes with the prisoners while helping them to dish out the food. One of the inmates suddenly asked me, “we hear you are a senior prison officer in one of the prisons, what are you doing here in civil dress and why are you exposing yourself to such a smoke?” “It is true I’m an officer”, I answered, “but the fact is, I’m now a student, I’m here to learn from you”. “What can a ‘jail man’ teach an officer?” he asked. “A lot”, I answered, “I have a lot to learn from you”. “What do you want to learn from us?” another inmate asked. “I’m here to learn everything about life in this prison, including this ‘kitchen smoke’ experience”. “Then just get your pen and paper ready”, he said,
“since your eyes are becoming red and any moment from now the real ‘smoke experience’ will take place in the form of tears, and you can write it down”, he jokingly said while we all laughed.

The Study Setting

This qualitative study was conducted in a central prison in Ghana. I have decided not to disclose the exact prison or to give a vivid description of the interior in consideration of the sensitive nature of the topic and for security reasons. The prison is an institution where people who have been accused of committing an offence are kept away from the community for a period of time or for the rest of their lives. This prison is characterized by high outside perimeter walls, secured locks, doors, barbwire and security cameras, as well as armed and unarmed prison officers, positioned in various areas within the prison at all times. Most of the officers are alert and vigilant and their main concern is to ensure inmates do not escape. There are sentry positions within the prison, which are manned by prison officers. This is similar to what Foucault described as the panopticon (Foucault 1995:201). The officers at the sentry positions have a wide view of the prison yard and can see what is happening in the various units at the same time (Foucault 1995).

Prisoners Population

The prison where this study was conducted is a home to approximately 1,900 inmates, including 62 foreign nationals. The inmates are from various socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. As of the end of May 2011, there were 1576 convicted prisoners, while 353 inmates were on remand, making a total of 1929 inmates in the prison.

Sentences

Of the total number 1,576 convicts, 15 inmates have been sentenced to death by hanging, 20 were serving life imprisonment and the rest were serving sentences ranging from a day in prison to 154 years in prison.

Sexual offences

In this prison, 136 inmates were in custody for defilement, 55 were convicted for rape, 8 for carnal knowledge (had sex with animal) and 16 are incarcerated for engaging in homosexual activity.
The cells

There are 51 cells including segregation cells where inmates who are suffering from communicable or contagious diseases, like chicken pox or TB are kept while they undergo treatment. Each cell contains between 15 and 110 inmates, depending on the size of the cell. I was constantly confronted with a unique smell whenever I entered a cell. The smell is difficult to describe, since it is neither good nor bad and that’s what makes it unique. From my observation, it seems the inmates are congested in their cells since some of them virtually lie on each other on the floor.

Data Collection Methods

Participant observation

Considering my research questions, I carried out participant observation and in-depth/focused life history interviews; for instance, I had to observe the roles inmates perform in a sexual relationship and how the sexual partners relate to each other, in addition to in-depth interviews in order to get a better insight into MSM in prison.

I conducted participant observation by:

- being in the prison yard at various times of the day and interacting and engaging in informal conversation with the prisoners
- visiting the various workshops situated within the prison during working hours to interact with some of the inmates
- participating in their church activities
- helping in the kitchen to dish out prisoners’ meals, as well as helping in other units within the prison
- observing and cheering inmates during their competitive games (football, dame or oware—a game also known as Awari or mancala played with small seeds and a wooden board)
- accompanying prison staff to the cells for head counts and routine inspection of the cells and other parts of the yard
- being in the yard occasionally during the night with the night duty officers
taking advantage of incidents like a fight in the yard or a “wedding ceremony” within the prison to observe the activity

My aim for conducting the participant observation was to observe non-verbal gestures like touching, walking, eye contact and expression of masculine and feminine identities among the prisoners. It was necessary to observe these gestures in order to understand how prisoners behave and construct feminine and masculine identities. I was interested in seeing how inmates expressed love and liking, non-verbally, since these may be difficult to express in words, considering how sensitive the topic is. I observed where, when and how prisoners exhibited sexual behaviours and how they interacted with each other in their daily activities. In the course of my observation, I engaged in informal conversations with some of them creating a rapport that facilitated good responses during formal interviews and helped for triangulation of the information. It was not conducive for me to take down notes while observing, so I recorded short notes in the form of a text message on my phone intermittently. These short notes were later “transferred” into my diary daily, which I went through every day and took note of items that required clarification.

In-depth interviews/focused life histories

I conducted in-depth/life history interviews with 11 prisoners. Of this number, six were involved in a sexual relationship in prison and the other five were not. The interviews were on themes such as life in prison, gender identity, sexuality, motivation of MSM and risk. I also included issues related to their sexual practices before conviction and in prison custody, how they perceived masculine and feminine identities in prison and the meaning they gave to such identities. I explored what makes prisoners engage in MSM. The focused life histories were based on their (inmates) life stories before incarceration. It focused on their sexual relationships, practices and sexual identities before incarceration, which I believed helped to complement the information I gathered from informal conversations and formal in-depth interviews.

I conducted the interviews in English and Twi, a popular Ghanaian language. I did not depend on a translator, since all my informants could either speak English or Twi, which I am fluent in. The Ghanaian language (Twi) facilitated the interviews since the inmates could express themselves better in Twi than in English. This was also helpful since the inmates may have found it difficult to find appropriate words in English to express their sexuality.
The schedule for interviews was flexible and this enabled me to probe further to get the needed information. I used open-ended questions to allow my informants to express themselves without restriction. For example they answered questions like, “What motivates you (inmates) to engage in sexual relationship in prison?” I planned to tape-record all the interviews, but four of my informants who are involved in MSM refused to be tape-recorded. So I took notes of important details. The other two inmates, who were also involved in sexual activities, gave me the permission to tape-record their interviews, but I had to stop the recorder and take handwritten notes, when I realized they were not comfortable with the interview being tape-recorded. All the other informants (five) who were not involved in MSM however gave me permission to tape-record their interviews, which I did. The in-depth interviews and the focused life histories recorded were later transcribed and translated where necessary. The handwritten notes were written out clearly, since I only took short notes during the interviews. The focused life history interviews also gave me the opportunity to seek clarification on certain issues discussed during the in-depth interviews.

Study Samples and Data Analysis

I used a convenience sampling method in selecting my informants, in consideration of the limited time for the fieldwork. My sample included prisoners who were willing to participate in the study, readily available and not assigned to go out and work, since some of them could spend the whole day working outside the prison. A prison staff who is in charge of research gave me the names of some inmates who are involved in sexual relationships, but considering the topic (the emic perspectives of prisoners and not limited to only the perspectives of inmates involved in sexual practices), I recruited prisoners who were not involved in sexual activities to get a fair idea on how both groups of inmates perceive sexual practices in prison. Although this was not a comparative study, choosing informants from both groups gave me a better understanding of the issue being studied. I used the snowball technique during the interviews, to get additional names of prisoners involved in MSM, since some of the inmates involved in sexual relationships “on my list”, declined to take part in the study. My informants were therefore made up of six inmates who were involved in MSM in prison, as well as five inmates who were not involved in sexual activities in prison.
I transcribed and translated my data; I then categorized the data into various themes like sexual identity before custody/in custody, perception on MSM, gender identity, risk and motivation. The observations I made, as well as various interview excerpts, were grouped under the above themes. I analyzed the inmates’ answers and similar answers were given similar colour codes. The analysis were done based on these colour codes.

**Ethical Considerations**

I abided by ethical standards, bearing in mind the rights of prisoners. Since I was exploring issues that are considered intimate, sensitive and illegal in Ghana, I ensured the privacy and confidentiality of my informants by using pseudonyms. I also conducted the in-depth/life history interviews alone with the prisoner, with the prison staff at a watching distance for my safety, but without the prison staff hearing what was being discussed, to ensure confidentiality of the prisoner’s information. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants of the in-depth/life history interviews. I respected their opinion not to answer some questions or their wish to withdraw from the study at any point.

**Limitations of the Research**

There are limitations to the study considering the convenient sampling method, which I used in selecting my informants. Since I did not choose my informants randomly, it is likely my sample did not represent all the prisoners. Although the sample size (11 informants) may seem small, I believe it is enough for a qualitative study, since the focus was on in-depth interviews. The limited time period for my study and my position as a prison officer, however, contributed to the limitations of the study, since I assume that some of my informants might have withheld certain information from me, knowing my position. It is also possible that I could have gathered more in-depth data if the study period had been longer.

**Reflections**

Considering my position as a prison officer and how sensitive my topic was, I had a tough time deciding how to introduce myself to the prisoners. I keep asking myself “would my informants open up if they find out I’m a prison officer? How can I hide my identity, since some of the prison staff may know me as an officer? Considering my gender, would the prisoners (males) be frank and willing to give me the details on their sexual practices? Another dilemma I
had was whether or not to tell the officers and inmates what my study was about, since I was repeatedly asked “what are you here for, what is your study about? I reflected on these questions many times without an answer, not because there were no answers, but rather because MSM is illegal in Ghana and prisoners who engage in it are punished by the prison staff.

There was no way I could hide my professional identity, so I told the inmates that I’m a prison officer, but now I am a student. I was there as a researcher and more importantly as a student to learn from them. I assured them my data was not for Ghana prisons service, but any recommendations I would make or present to the prisons service would be in their interest.

I played various roles during the study. As part of my data gathering techniques, one role was helping inmates to thread beads in a workshop. We engaged in casual conversation, shared jokes and laughed while we worked creating rapport for later formal and informal interviews. I also took the role of time-keeper in the visiting room where prisoners meet and converse with their visitors. My duty was to ensure that visitors do not spend more than the accorded time. This was quite interesting, since I could see and hear how inmates passionately pleaded with friends and family members who came to visit, to bring them food or money frequently. I also assisted at the infirmary as a liaison officer between the nurse and the prisoners. I called the names of inmates whose turn it was to see the medical staff, while assisting some inmates who had difficulty walking to see the medical staff. I assisted in other units of the prison as well, including the kitchen, all in the capacity as a student who was there to learn from the inmates.

**Brief Profiles of My Informants**

**Profile of Informants Involved in Sexual Activities**

*Zanga (Husband)*

Zanga is 35 years old; he is serving eight years for assault and he has been in custody for two years. He is a heterosexual, divorced, and has three children. He started MSM in prison. Zanga dropped out of school in primary class one.

*Atamfo (Husband)*

Atamfo is 45 years old; he is serving life imprisonment for robbery and he has been in custody over two decades. He is a heterosexual, divorced, and has three children. He started MSM in prison. Atamfo dropped out of school in middle school form two.
**Noko (Husband)**

Noko is 38 years old; he is serving 22 years for robbery and he has been in custody over a decade. He is bisexual, not married and has no children. He started MSM before incarceration. Noko dropped out of school in primary class six.

**Bedia (Husband)**

Bedia is 45 years old; he is serving life imprisonment for manslaughter and he has been in custody over two decades. He is a heterosexual and married with four children. He started MSM in prison custody. Bedia dropped out of school in primary class three.

**Dinka (Wife)**

Dinka is 24 years old; he is serving six years for escaping from lawful custody and he has been in custody for six months. He is heterosexual, not married but has one child. He started MSM in prison custody. Dinka dropped out of school in primary class six.

**Onua (Wife)**

Onua is 38 years old; he is serving 15 years for defilement and he has been in custody for seven years. He is heterosexual, not married, but has one child. He started MSM in prison custody. Onua dropped out of school in primary class four.

**Profile of Informants Not Involved in Sexual Activities**

**Oyiwa**

Oyiwa is 32 years old; he is serving 12 years for conspiracy and he has been in custody for six years. He is heterosexual, and married with two children. He has never engaged in MSM. Oyiwa completed junior high school.

**Suroku**

Suroku is 28 years old; he is serving seven years for stealing and he has been in custody for two years. He is heterosexual, not married but has one child. He has never engaged in MSM. Suroku dropped out of school in junior high school form one.
Akiti Borge

Akiti Borge is 25 years old; he is serving 30 years for robbery and he has been in custody for four years. He is heterosexual, but not married. He has never engaged in MSM. Akiti Borge completed junior high school.

Wonana

Wonana is 28 years old; he is a recidivist, serving two years for stealing and he has been in custody for eight months. He is heterosexual but not married. He has never engaged in MSM. Wonana dropped out of school in primary class five.

Black Coat (Leader)

The black coat is 43 years old; he is serving life imprisonment for murder and he has been in custody over two decades. He is heterosexual, and married with three children. He has never engaged in MSM. He completed middle school form 4.

The above are profiles of inmates who willingly agreed to take part in the study and therefore took part in the in-depth/focus life history interviews. There were other inmates who were not part of the study sample, but they contributed to this data either verbally or non-verbally during my observation and casual conversation with them.

Thesis Structure

In chapter one of this thesis, I discussed the background and the objectives of the study. I also gave an overview of studies done on the topic in some parts of the world, and in Africa in particular. I explained how Ghanaian law considers the issue of MSM and how Ghanaians perceive men who have sex with men in their communities. I also explained the risk that inmates expose themselves to by engaging in sexual activities in prison. The existing gap in the literature on MSM in Ghana and Africa as a whole that this research intends to contribute to was also highlighted.

Chapter two presented my fieldwork and the methods I used. It included the study setting, which entails the prisoner’s population, facilities within the prison, number of cells and the number of inmates who have been convicted for sexual offences. The methods I used in collecting my data, how my informants were selected and a brief profile of my informants were
also described in this chapter. I discussed my reflections before and during my study, ethical issues I took into consideration during the research and my position as a researcher. Some limitations of the study were also highlighted in this chapter.

The social life in the prison will be described in chapter three. It includes the various leadership positions among the prisoners and how leaders are selected. I will also describe a “typical day” in the life of a prisoner.

Chapter four will consider friendship and intimate relationships and the importance of these in prison. I will present a case study that illustrates how friendship can transform into intimate relationship and describe a wedding ceremony between two male prisoners.

The gap between rich prisoners and poor inmates will be highlighted in chapter five. I will explain what motivate inmates to engage in same-sex sexual activities, and present a case study that illustrates the role of food, sex, money and drugs in the prison. I will further discuss why inmates seek privileges and protection in prison.

Chapter six will be on gender and sexual identity. In this chapter I will discuss how prisoners perceive their sexual practices, how they identify themselves and what it means to be masculine or feminine in a male prison. I will also explain how inmates who are involved in sexual activities perform various roles associated with a particular gender in the Ghanaian community. I found during my fieldwork that the roles inmates perform are similar to what pertains in heterosexual relationships or marriages in most Ghanaian communities.

Chapter seven will discuss the perception of inmates on the risk involved in engaging in MSM in prison and how they try to reduce their risk.

Chapter eight will present a discussion and conclusion. This is the concluding part of my thesis, so I will focus on the findings of my study.
CHAPTER THREE

The Social Life of the Prison

In this chapter, I focus on the social life in the prison. What are the various leadership positions in the prison? What privilege do these leaders have? What happens in the prison within 24hrs? I describe various hierarchies of leadership among the prisoners, mode of appointment and responsibilities attached to the positions. The social hierarchies of the prisoners and the possibilities for getting privileges need to be considered, in order to understand why prisoners become involved in MSM. I end this chapter with an inmate’s narration, which describes his first 24 hours in the prison. This narration highlights most of the activities that take place within the prison in a typical day. It is important to view the social life in this prison community in order to understand the inmate’s perspectives on MSM in prison.

The Prison as a “Social Being”

The prisoner’s community is like a social being with “life”. The inmates have their unofficial rules and regulations that are not written, but they are known by all inmates and some officers. Failure by inmates to adhere to these norms often attracts sanction from their colleagues, which ranges from performing a chore like scrubbing the bathroom to paying a fine.

The prisoners have their own jargon that is either coined from the English language or several Ghanaian languages. An English word or a Ghanaian language word used as prison jargon may have a different meaning than its real meaning. For instance, an English word like “all bus”, “line” or “no line”, which are used by the inmates have different meanings than their original meaning. According to inmates, “all bus” means junior officer and “all bus tentenpaa (Twi)” refers to a senior prison officer, these words are warning signs used to alert inmates who may be smoking a cigarette or wee (marijuana) when an officer is approaching. The “line” and the “no line” terms mean rich and poor respectively. These words are unique to the prison in this study and seldom understood by the prison staff. Inmates continually change the words and their meanings when they identify that most prison staff can understand “those words”. This exact jargon notwithstanding, the usage and meaning of a few of their “words” are similar to jargon in other prisons in Ghana, since I identified a few words with the same meaning used by inmates at the prison where I have worked. It was interesting to know that the word kpee, coined by the
prisoners to mean anal sex, sodomy or homosexuality has the same meaning in most prisons in Ghana.

There are various leadership positions among the prisoners, which are hierarchical in nature. These positions are occupied either through appointment by the prison staff or by popular acclamation by the cell members. Most of these positions are often given to inmates serving long sentences like life imprisonment or sentences above 20 years.

**Leadership Positions in the Prison and Mode of Appointment**

The important leadership positions among the inmates are the national black coats, the black coats and cell leaders. The rest are cell judge, police, IGP, commando, among others. Appointments to these positions are either done by the prison staff or the prisoners and are generally based on an inmate’s good conduct. The leaders have assistants who act in their absence, for instance, in situations where they are on admission at the hospital or have gone outside the prison to work. There are benefits attached to the various positions, however, this varies depending on the position. The benefits range from having a double plate of food, called a “double ration” in prison parlance, or having certain privileges like sleeping in a spacious cell or using a toilet normally reserved for only leaders. Individuals often occupy these leadership positions until they are discharged from prison custody or elevated to a higher position. The leader is stripped of the position only when he breaches a prison rule or is involved in misconduct like a fight, stealing or a homosexual act. The national black coat and all the black coats have a unique uniform, which is blue in colour with an inscription “black coats” that distinguishes them from the other inmates. The rest of the inmates wear their own clothing which can be any colour. The prison has cream or white-coloured shirts with embossed black stars; these are given to inmates who are going outside the prison to work, to court or to the hospital. The black star embossed on the “outside” uniform represents the state of Ghana. The black star is one of the symbols and colours in the flag of Ghana, which means the lone star of African freedom.

Figure 1 below illustrates the social hierarchies among the prisoners. The rectangle shows the positions, the triangle shows who apponts them and the oval describes some of their responsibilities. The detail of the hierarchy is described below the diagram.
Figure 1.

**National black coat**
- Leader of all the leaders/spokesman
- Ensures law & order among inmates

**Black coats**
- Appointed by prison staff
- Block leaders
  - Rep. Block members in meetings
  - Represents cell in meetings
  - Teaches new inmates cell rules

**Block leaders**
- Appointed by prison staff

**Cell leaders**
- Appointed by cell members
  - Represents cell in meetings
  - Teaches new inmates cell rules

**Cell police**
- Appointed by cell members

**Cell members**
- Floor leader
- Cell malam
- Seven seven
- Cell Judge
- Cell IGP
- Cell Pastor
- Tangas man
- Cell father

Cell members appoints all the above
The national black coat

The position of a national black coat is the most senior leadership position among the inmates in this prison. Only one prisoner occupies this position. Ascension to this position is only by appointment by the prison staff and is based on the good conduct of the inmate, in addition to his leadership qualities. This position is often given to inmates serving long sentences like life imprisonment, or sentences above 20 years. The inmate would have served greater part of his sentence before being given such an appointment. The national black coat acts as the mouth-piece of the leaders and he is the spokesman for all the inmates as well. He represents the inmates in all meetings with the prison staff.

The black coats

These are inmates who have been appointed as leaders in the prison. Some of them are in charge of the various units within the prison. For instance, the black coat in charge of the kitchen supervises all the inmates working at the kitchen. The others who are not assigned to a particular unit have the responsibility to ensure law and order among inmates in the prison yard. They are appointed by the prison staff and do not need the approval of the inmates to assume office.

Block leader

A block is made up of a number of cells; the block leaders are in charge of the various blocks. The block leader sees to issues concerning his block members, solves minor conflicts and represents all the members on that block in meetings. The block leader is appointed by the prison staff but often presented to the block members for popular acclamation. Inmates who are chosen for this position are often serving high sentences and have some qualities of a good leader and finally need the endorsement of their block members.

Cell leader

A cell leader is the leader of all the prisoners in a particular cell. He is appointed by his cell members through a unanimous decision. The cell leader solves minor conflicts among cell members and represents the cell in all meetings with the prison staff. In addition, he holds weekly meetings with all his cellmates on Sunday evenings in their cell. They call this meeting *kyere ‘w’adwen*, meaning express your opinion. It is an open forum where cell members are given the opportunity to voice their grievances and make contribution to issues concerning the
cell. The cell leader unofficially collects cell fees from all newcomers (“tourists”) to the cell, which he claims he often uses to buy broom, soap and disinfectants for cleaning the cell, although they are occasionally given these items for cleaning the cells.

Cell police

It is the duty of the cell police to teach new inmates, who are known as “tourists”, the rules or “do’s and don’ts” in that cell. Each cell has its own rules and regulations, some of these “do’s and don’ts” are:

- No wearing of footwear in the cell, except for the cell leaders.
- No sitting on a chair in the cell, except for the leaders.
- No eating in the cell.
- No combing of hair in the cell.
- No using of mirror in the cell, except for the cell leaders.
- You are not allowed to strip yourself naked in the cell.
- Do not touch anything that does not belong to you.
- No fighting in the cell.
- No brushing of teeth in the cell.
- No use of abusive words in the cell.
- No chewing of stick in the cell.
- Do not collect soup or porridge for your colleague.

Failure to adhere to any of these rules attracts a sanction, which is either a fine, sweeping or scrubbing the cell and fetching water for the cell. The cell police, in addition, ensure peace and order in the cell. He also acts in the absence of the cell leader. The cell police is appointed by his cell members through unanimous decision often based on how disciplined a prisoner is.

Seven-seven

The seven-seven is the assistant to the cell policeman and acts in the absence of the cell police. He is also appointed by his cellmates through a consensus and the criteria to qualify for that position is to be a disciplined inmate.
Cell father

The cell father acts like a “father” to all the cell members. He often advises cell mates and solves minor conflicts among cell members. This position is often given to the oldest man in the cell, in terms of the age of the inmate, unless he has committed a major prison offence, which disqualifies him from holding that office.

Tangas man

The tangas man is the sanitary officer in the cell, his appointment is by unanimous decision of cell members and an individual needs to be neat to qualify for this position. The tangas man gives permission to cell mates in the night to use the water closet in the cell, he also ensures the water closet in the cell is kept clean at all times. The cell members are not supposed to use the water closet toilet in the cell without the permission of the tangas man. Not adhering to this rule can attract a fine or a punishment to scrub the toilets for a specified period of time.

Floor leader

It is the duty of the floor leader to ensure proper arrangement of items in the cell and also to arrange prisoners who have no bed on the floor, when it is bedtime. It is his duty to ensure that every prisoner who has no bed gets space on the floor to sleep. The floor leader position is often given to the inmate who has spent the longest period in that particular cell.

Cell judge

The cell judge acts as a “judge” during kyere’ w’adwen (open forum), which is held in the cell every Sunday evening between 18:30 pm and 20:30 pm. An inmate needs to exhibit signs of impartiality to qualify to be appointed by his cellmates. The duty of the cell judge is to adjudicate cases between cellmates and pronounce judgment on cell mates who are “guilty” as well as “tourists” (newcomers) who do not pay the cell fee. He either orders the “tourist” to sweep, scrub or fetch water for the cell. In the case of other cell members, he can fine them to pay an amount to the cell leader. These are all unofficial rules formulated by the inmates themselves, which are not endorsed by the prison staff.
Cell commando

The cell commando is the general overseer in the cell. He is appointed by his cell mates and he sees to the day-to-day activities in the cell. For instance, he ensures the cell is swept daily and kept clean at all times. He also sees to it that there is always drinking water in the cell, for cell members.

Cell pastor

The cell pastor is the leader of all the Christians in that cell; he leads the Christians in that cell in evening prayers and other Christian religious activities. This person is appointed by the Christians in that cell, considering his conduct and how devoted he is in terms of participating in Christian religious activities.

Cell Malam

The cell malam is the leader of all the Moslems in the cell. He leads the Moslems in the cell in prayers. He is appointed by the Moslems in that cell, based on how devoted he is to the faith.

Cell IGP

The cell IGP (a name used by the prisoners to represent the position of inspector general of police in general, not specific to an individual) is responsible for sharing the ration (food) for all his cell members. He shares the food, which is meant for all his cell mates. It is his duty to ensure every cell member gets food. He is appointed by the cell leader and approved by the cell mates through consensus. Individuals given this position are generally not expected to posses any special qualities.

A Typical Day in Prison

Below is a narration by Antokeke, an inmate who narrated this story to me when I asked him to give me an account of his first day (24 hours) in prison. This narration highlights most of the activities that take place within the various units in the prison, in a typical day. It is important to consider the social life in this prison community in order to understand the perspectives of inmates on MSM.
Antokeke is my name, I’m 35 years old, I was convicted for contempt of court and I was sentenced to a month in prison. It’s been two weeks now since I came to custody, but my experience on the first day is still vivid in my mind. It was a Thursday evening, around 16:00, when we got here from the court. As I stood in front of the prison in handcuffs, accompanied by a police officer, I wondered how life was going to be for the next 30 days in this huge building, with high walls and other security features. The police officer gently tapped on the gate in compliance with an inscription on the gate tape gently.

*At the gate*

I was lost in my thoughts as the gate-keeper opened the gate, inspected the police officers identity and ushered us in. On entering the prison, I was confronted with a unique smell, which is difficult to describe. Did it smell good or bad? I asked him, it was neither smelling good or bad, that’s what makes it unique. He answered and continued, I stretched my neck to look at the yard and I was surprise to see people like a swarm of bees. Looking from afar, I could see that a certain portion of the yard looked unkempt, but when I eventually came to the yard I realized it was cleaner than I thought. The cemented floor looked dark because of the charcoal most of my colleagues use in cooking; I nodded in the affirmative, as he continued his narration. So on that fateful day, I went through the security checks and other administrative procedures at the gate. I was later taken to one of the offices to authenticate my identity. I was informed about the rules and regulations in this prison and given a blanket, cup and a bowl, which I was to use for the next 30 days. The chief officer invited an inmate over and asked him to take me to his cell. I later got to know that the prisoner was our cell leader. I guess I was brought to the prison late, since meals had already been served, but the chief officer sent a message to the kitchen and I was given some food.

*In the cell*

The cell leader welcomed me to the cell and handed me over to another inmate whom I later learnt was the floor leader. He showed me where and how to arrange my things in the cell properly and told me he would show me where to sleep when it was bedtime. Another inmate whom I later learnt was the cell police took over from the floor leader and he taught me the do’s and don’ts in the cell, as well as the cell fee of 5.00 Ghana cedis (2.5 euro) which I was suppose
to pay to the cell leader. He went on to explain the sanctions that are associated with failure to pay the cell fee or to adhere to any of the cell rules.

I was already worn out, so I asked if I could be shown my bed so that I could take a little rest, I was really dumbfounded when I was told there was no vacant bed. “Where will I sleep then?” I asked him. “You just have to hang around, the floor leader will show you where to sleep when it is bed time”, he answered. I had no choice but to sit on the floor waiting for bedtime. An inmate just walked up to me, as I sat on the floor and introduced himself to me as Minipa, a cellmate. I later learnt he is noted for taking pride in taking new prisoners whom they call “tourists” around. Minipa sat beside me as he engaged me in a casual conversation. He advised me to take my shower before they rang the bell for “inside”. “What is inside?” I asked him. “We are locked up in our cells at 18:00 so the bell is rung at 17:30 as a warning to start going into our cells”, he explained. “Can’t I stay outside a little longer?” I asked him. “No you can’t”, he answered frankly. “You cannot stay outside the cell after 18:00; it is only the black coats who are our leaders who are given that privilege to stay in the yard until 19:00 when they are also locked. I guess it’s time you go and take your bath, we can do all the talking after 18:00 when we are locked up in the cell”, he suggested.

Washroom facilities

Minipa took me to the back of the cells and showed me where the showers were. “I would like to visit the gents before bathing”, I told him. “Well, have you seen that queue?” he asked me while pointing to a long queue. “Yes I nodded, it leads to the toilets, they are five in number, you are free to use any of them” he replied. “Do I have to join that long queue? Are these the only toilets in the yard?” I asked impatiently. “No, the toilets are 12 in number, have you seen those locked doors?” Minipa asked while pointing to a place. Yes! I nodded. “They are all toilets, two have been reserved for officers working in the yard and the other five are also reserved for the black coats who are our leaders”, he explained.

“So the earlier you join that queue, the better it will be for you, since it is now 17:15 and in 15 minutes time the bell will be rang for ‘inside’” he explained. “What happens if I’m still in the queue and the bell rings?” I asked him. “I’m afraid you have to leave for the cell or ask permission from a prison staff or a black coat to use the toilet before going to the cell and in that case, you have to be fast since you cannot be outside after 18:00”, he advised. “Whether you will
be given the permission or not depends on your conduct in the prison and your relationship with
that particular officer or black coat”, he added. “What do I do if they refuse?” I further enquired.
“I’m afraid you have no choice but to go inside the cell and ask permission from the tangas man
to use the water closet inside the cell. You are allowed to use that water closet toilet only at
night” he answered.

“Who is the tangas man?” I questioned. “He is a leader in charge of the toilet in the cell.
Never use that toilet without his permission, he warned, or else you will be sanctioned by the
“cell judge” to either pay a fine or scrub the toilet for some time”, Minipa warned. “Is there any
other bathroom where I can take my shower when they ring the bell and I have still not taken my
bath?” I asked. “No there is no other bathroom, so you better be fast” he warned again. I
hurriedly joined the queue and impatiently waited for my turn. I was fast about it and hurriedly
went and took my bath. I was almost done when the ‘inside’ bell was rung. I rushed out of the
bathroom and saw inmates trooping into their cells.

Final headcount

We were head-counted by a prison staff who did it meticulously to ensure he did not miss
anyone. The doors were securely locked a few minutes after 18:00 as I sat down quietly
wondering where I was going to sleep and how the night was going to be.

A night in the cell

Cell mates who had beds were comfortably lying on their beds while those of us who had
no beds were sitting on the floor. Some cellmates were reading, watching television, conversing
or playing games like oware. (a game also known as Awari or mancala, played with small seeds
and a wooden board). I was lost in my thoughts until I heard some cell mates arguing over which
television channel to watch. This generated a heated argument until one cellmate stood up and
turned off the television. ‘Who is that inmate who turned off the television?’ I asked Minipa who
was sitting beside me. “He is the owner of the television set so he has all power over it”, he
explained. “How come the television set is for him?” I enquired. “Formerly we were not having
television sets in our cells, we only had the one under the shed outside, so we could only watch
television before 18:00. So we pleaded with the prison authorities to provide us with a television
set. They promised to get us television sets in due course, but for the time been, we were allowed
to buy our own television sets”, Minipa explained. “We all agreed during kyere’ w’adwen to
contribute something to buy the television set, but unfortunately prisoners with ‘line’ (rich) are not many in this cell, most of them are ‘no lines’ (poor). That inmate has ‘line’ so he bought it alone for all of us to watch” he told me. “You mean the prisoner who put off the television bought it all alone?” I asked him out of disbelief. “Yes he did”, answered Minipa. “You made mention of ‘line’ and ‘no line’, what does that mean?” I asked. “These are our terms, you will get to know them very soon”, Minipa assured me. “The ‘no lines’ are poor inmates and those with ‘lines’ are the rich inmates” he explained. “What is kyere`w’adwen?” I asked. Minipa explained to me that it is an open forum held on Sunday evenings in the cell. “We discuss issues concerning this cell and cell members; we are given the chance as well to ask questions or contribute to all the discussion”, he explained. “Interesting!” I exclaimed, going back to the issue of the television set, “does it mean he will take it away when he is leaving prison custody?” I tried to find out from Minipa. “I don’t think so, he can take it home but in actual fact, most inmates who bought television for their cells left it for their cell members when they were discharged”, he said.

**Bed time**

Minipa and I were still conversing when a cellmate stood up, clapped his hands and said aprapra. All the inmates sitting on the floor stood up, as Minipa signaled me to stand up. “What is the problem?” I asked him. “There is no problem”, he assured me, “if you hear aprapra in the morning, it means go out of the cell, but if you hear it in the evening, it means it is bedtime so we have to get up for the room to be swept”. “What time are we supposed to sleep?” I enquired. “It depends on the individual, but the lights in the cell will be put off at 21:00”. “Who is the inmate who announced aprapra?” I asked. “He is the cell commando, he is the general overseer of this cell and it is his duty to ensure the cell is clean at all times”, Minipa explained.

Inmates who had no beds started laying their blankets or thin mattresses on the floor. I stood there as I watched the floor leader instructing some prisoners to move closer to each other in order to create some space in between them. The floor leader invited me to where he stood and pointed to a small space between my new friend Minipa and another inmate, and told me that henceforth, that would be my sleeping place. I had mixed feelings looking at the space I had to occupy, but I was happy I was sleeping near my newfound friend. I laid my blanket on the floor and lied down quietly with tears in my eyes as I thought of my room and bed at home. The light
went off at 21:00 and I later fell asleep in the pool of my tears. I could not have a good sleep
considering how warm the room was. I was awoken in the middle of the night by a cellmate who
accidently stepped on me, on his way to ask one of the cell members, whom I later learnt was the
tangas man, the permission to use the water closet toilet in the cell.

At dawn

The cell door was unlocked the following morning at 05:00; I stood up to go out when
Minipa signaled me to lie down. “It is not yet time to go out he said, the inmate who went out
works in the kitchen, so they [the cell doors] are opened at this time so that they can prepare the
breakfast on time”, he explained. “When can we go out?” I asked. “Just lie down, you will hear
the bell when it is time to go out”, he advised. I laid down impatiently waiting for the bell, as
seconds seemed like minutes and minutes seemed like hours.

In the morning

At 06:00, the bell was rung, our cell was opened and we were head-counted by a prison
staff. We trooped out of the cell with most of my colleagues rushing to the toilets to avoid
joining the usual long queue. I had wanted to go to the toilet but on seeing how long the queue
was, I just took my shower to freshen up for the day, while wondering what the day has to offer
me.

Breakfast / outside labour

Porridge was served as breakfast at approximately 06:45; I later heard some names being
mentioned so I asked Minipa what it was about, and he told me they were going for “outside
labour”, meaning they were going to work outside the prison. “Can I go with them?” I tried to
find out. “No you can’t, you are not yet qualified to go out”, he explained. “You can only go out
after serving majority of your sentence. Your offence and conduct in prison is also considered
before you are chosen to go out”, he said. I didn’t understand what he meant by offence being
considered, so I asked for clarification and he explained to me that for instance, those who are
convicted for escaping from lawful custody are not assigned to go outside the prison for any
duty.
Complaints

I saw a queue in front of one of the offices so I asked my friend what that queue was for, he explained to me those are inmates with complaints, either they are sick or have a personal problem. “Those who are sick will be treated at the infirmary, but those with major cases are often referred to the regional hospital. Any other personal problem is addressed by the prison staff accordingly”, Minipa explained.

Prisoner’s market

Somewhere in the yard, I saw inmates displaying food items like fish, tomatoes, rice, and other commodities, so I enquired from Minipa what those items were for, he explained to me that was the prisoner’s market, they are selling those items, so they are showcasing the wares for all to see, he explained. I asked Minipa who owned the items and he explained to me that some of the sellers are the owners themselves, but others are selling the wares for their friends. “How come I did not see this market yesterday?” I asked him. “You came at a time when they had packed their wares”, he answered.

Workshops /Educational facilities

My friend informed me he was going to the carpentry workshop, so I proposed to go with him but he refused. He told me there were other workshops for learning blacksmith, shoe making, tailoring and kente weaving. The others he told me were basket weaving, bead-making, painting and decoration. According to Minipa, it is the chief officer who assigns inmates to the various workshops depending on the inmate’s interest or previous knowledge. He pointed to a strip of classrooms in the yard and told me that is the junior and senior high schools. He said the prison administration often supply the students with exercise books, pens, school uniforms and sandals. As a researcher and a student, my joy had no bounds when Antokeke told me Minipa told him most of the inmates who took part in the junior high school basic examination the previous year excelled in the exams.

Watching television / playing games

Minipa pointed to a group of inmates under a shed in the yard and asked me, “do you see those inmates under the shed?” I nodded in the affirmative and he said, “as you can see, some of them are watching television, and others are playing games or conversing with their friends. This
is what you will do until you are discharged, if you are not interested in learning a trade or attending the school”.

Visits

As we were engulfed in our conversation, I heard an inmate calling my name loudly. Minipa told me I had a visitor. “How do you know?” I asked. “The prisoner calling you is a “black coat” in charge of visits. He intentionally shouts so that you can hear him even in the cell or a friend will hear it and come and call you. You will often see inmates running competitively to inform the prisoner who has got the visitor. It is interesting to know that it is more or less a competitive race, since the first person to inform him he has got a visitor is given some of the food or money the visitor brings”. I responded to the call and the “black coat” pointed to a bag hanging on a wall and instructed me to pick one shirt from the bag and wear it. I picked the shirt and saw an inscription “visit” boldly inscribed on the front and back of the shirt. I wore the shirt and followed the “black coat” to the visit room and Minipa also left for the workshop.

I saw my wife in the visit room but it was not possible to have physical contact with her, because of a barrier between us, so we communicated through a barricade. My wife brought me food and money, which were given to the prison officer supervising the visit. He searched through the food to ensure there are no prohibited items hidden in the food. He gave the food to me and gave the money to an assigned officer who recorded it in my cash property book. The officer told me I could come for the money any time I wanted to buy something either at the “prisoner’s market” or outside the prison.

Head counts

A bell was rung at 11:00 while I was in the yard, so I asked an inmate standing beside me what that bell was for and he told me it was time for “number checking”. “What is ‘number checking’?” I asked him. “We have to go to our various cells to be head counted by the prison staff”, he explained. “It will be done again at 13:00 and 15:30”, he added. Minipa did not show up at the cell, so I enquired from one of my cellmates why he did not come and he told me those at the workshops and classrooms are often head-counted at those places.
Religious activities

As it was a Friday, I saw a group of inmates around 13:00 saying Muslim prayers under the shed, a place designated for Islamic religious activities. I asked one of my colleagues where the other religious groups hold their programmes and he pointed to a church within the yard. He told me all the various Christian denominations have their church services in the church on Sundays at various times. He told me that apart from these two religious groups, members of all the other religions either pray individually or in small group in their cells or any other appropriate place.

Lunch / Supper

*Booza! Booza!* I heard an inmate echo. “What is the meaning of that?” I asked the inmate I was speaking to. “It means food is ready”, he explained. Another inmate shouted *wontete*. “What language are they speaking?” I asked again since I could not understand that word. “This is our own jargon”, he explained. “You will understand all very soon”, he assured me. “*Wontete* means, the menu for this afternoon is *banku danka* and *zontoli*, I believe you know *banku*, I mean the usual *banku* made of corn dough”. “Yes!” I nodded, “that is what we refer to as *banku danka* and we refer to palm nut soup as *zontoli*” he explained.

A bowl of *banku* and palm nut was later served just as my colleagues had speculated. I could not hide my joy when I saw how big the *banku* was, but my joy was cut short when Minipa, who had come from the workshop to collect his food, told me the meal I’m being served is my lunch and supper, he told me that the lunch and supper is often combined into a meal. Some inmates later lighted coal pots in the yard to re-cook the food served to them or added some ingredients like fish to the soup. Others also cooked a new meal altogether. I saw some inmates eating alone, while others were eating in pairs or in a group. I ate my food alone, Antokeke stated, but I later gave Minipa part of the food my wife brought from home. He thanked me and jokingly said, he guessed that is his reward for being a “tour guide” since I’m a “tourist” on tour at the prison and we both laughed.
Cease work

At 15:30, they rang the bell again and I learnt it was the “cease work” bell, meaning all inmates at the workshops and classrooms were to stop work and close for the day. The inmates at these places trooped to their cells or yard to cook, eat, play games or visit the washroom.

End of a day

I saw inmates packing their wares at the “prisoner’s market” and I knew it was time to visit the washroom before I heard the “inside” bell, which would be a symbol of the end of a day and the beginning of another night experience, Antokeke concluded, after giving me a vivid account of his first 24 hours in the prison.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the social life in the prison; I have given a vivid explanation of almost all the activities that take place in the various units in the prison, as well as the time those activities occur. The inmates who play various roles are also highlighted. It is important to understand the life in the prisoner’s community since that is the first step in understanding their perspectives on MSM in prison.
CHAPTER FOUR

Friendship And Intimate Relationships In Prison

Prison life is give and take, you scratch my back, I scratch your back, I give you something, I take something from you in return, you give me something, you take something from me in return, that is what we call you scratch my back, I scratch your back, our people will say hu m’ani so ma me e’nti na atwen mienu nam (two heads are better than one).

This quote is from Bedia, a “husband”.

The quote above illustrates the role of reciprocity and the bases of friendship in the prison, which will be discussed in this chapter. What do prisoners consider as friendship and what do they consider as intimate relationship? I start with a case study that illustrates how friendship can transform into an intimate sexual relationship. I will in addition describe a “wedding ceremony” in the prison. I will then explain the difference between friendship and an intimate relationships in prison, what influences an inmate’s choice of sexual partner and how some inmates become friends and others become intimate sexual partners. The importance of friendship and intimate sexual relationship will also be discussed.

Case Study 1: Wuwu (“husband”) and Onua (“wife”)

The case study below illustrates how friendship in prison can transform into a sexual relationship and how the need for basic commodities like food or soap could be bases for an inmate to accept a sexual proposal. This case is typical of my sample and shows the tendencies of most sexual relationships to start as friendship.

- Onua (wife) is a 38-year-old prisoner who is serving 15 years for defilement; he has been in custody for seven years. The last time he was visited in prison was four years ago. He is considered a “no line” (poor) prisoner, but he at times performs menial jobs like washing or fetching water for other prisoners to earn money or food.
- Wuwu (husband) on the other hand is 35 years old; he is serving 15 years for rape and has been in custody for five years. Wuwu is considered among his colleagues to be a “line” prisoner (rich), since he often gets visits from his family who often bring him food and money.
• Onua was in custody when Wuwu came as a “tourist” (new prisoner) in their cell. Onua identified Wuwu as someone he knew from somewhere in Ghana and through a casual introduction they both realize they knew each other. They became close friends and often played games, or were seen watching television, conversing or taking their shower together.

• Onua knowing his friend (Wuwu) had “line”, he decided to perform menial jobs like washing his clothing or fetching water for him to bath. He did this in order to be given some food, since his only source of food is the prison ration, which is woefully inadequate.

• Wuwu provides the “apparatus” (ingredients) and Onua does the cooking. Initially they were serving the food to each other separately and each ate his portion, but with time they became so close that they serve the food in only one bowl and eat together.

• According to Onua, Wuwu proposed to take him (Onua) as his “wife” for sexual activities and promised to take complete responsibility for him, including providing him with soap and drugs, so he willingly agreed.

• According to Onua, he agreed to Wuwu’s proposal not because he was feeling as though he wanted to have sex, but just because he wanted to ensure he does not lose the food and other items Wuwu often gives him. He thinks refusing Wuwu may push him to propose to another inmate.

• With time, Onua and Wuwu’s friendship transformed into an intimate sexual relationship. They often hide in the toilet or other convenient place to have sex.

The Wedding Ceremony Between Wuwu “Husband” and Onua “Wife”

The “wedding ceremony” which is described below explains how inmates who are caught in sexual acts are “wedded” by their fellow inmates. It illustrates how inmates who were formally considered as friends could now be considered by their fellow inmates as “couples” or sexual partners.
Prologue

On June 7 approximately 14:25, Onua and Wuwu entered the church in the yard and had sex in a corner; a prisoner entered the church and saw them in the act. The prisoner demanded a huge amount of money to keep silent. Wuwu could not afford this amount so he offered to give the other prisoner less money, but he refused. The inmate who saw them then shouted *kpee kpee kpee* meaning sodomy or homosexuality, to draw the attention of inmates and officers in the yard, these prisoners left everything they were doing and rushed to the chapel to see the culprits. One of the “black coats” (leaders) brought them before the chief officer and reported the issue to him. The chief officer interrogated them and found them guilty of the offence and punished them, by forfeiting part of their remission on their sentences, made them to scrub the bathrooms, toilets and Wuwu was sent to another cell, but not before the “wedding” which are always organized by inmates for their fellow inmates who are caught in the act of MSM. It is interesting to know that the “same couple” would be “wedded” again the next time they are caught in the act of MSM.

Change of cell, according to the inmates is the most “painful” punishment, since any inmate who is allocated a new cell automatically becomes the last on the list in that cell to be given a bed. So in the case of Wuwu, all the cell mates lying on the floor in his new cell would be given beds before him. According to the inmates it is a shame to have been caught in the act of anal sex, therefore, the wedding ceremony is considered humiliating.

The wedding

The “black coat” and a group of prisoners went through some used clothing that had been donated to the prison and found some ladies clothing and suits for men. Onua, as the one who was penetrated, was dressed in the lady’s attire and Wuwu, who did the penetration, was dressed in the men’s attire. Ash was used as powder and grounded charcoal was also used for makeup on their faces, the grounded charcoal was used on the “ladies” eyebrows, cheeks and lips. “Her” hair was also covered with a scarf.

Wuwu and Onua were surrounded by a large number of inmates who were hooting and teasing them. A number of prison staff were at a watching distance but said no word. Some of the prison staff occasionally teases them as well.

Some prisoners were drumming, while other prisoners were singing and shouting *ayefro*
Dondoo! ayefro Dondoo! Ayefro Dondoo! (A popular wedding cheer in Ghana). Wuwu and Onua frowned as they were paraded through the prison yard by their colleagues as the latest “couple”, amidst drumming, hooting and teasing.

**Friendship and Intimate Relationships in Prison**

Friendship and intimate relationships are common in prison. They are unions that are recognized among the prisoner’s community and considered to be one of the most important networks for the inmates within the prison. An intimate relationship is like a lifeline for most inmates who are poor; although they are fed three times a day, some of them consider an intimate relationship as a beacon of hope for their “survival”.

Friends are inmates who are close to each other but do not engage in sexual activities. These inmates might have been convicted for the same case (having acted as partners in crime) or they knew each other outside prison. For instance, they might have attended the same school or stayed in the same neighbourhood. Friendship as I mentioned earlier, is devoid of sexual activities. Although the financial status of a friend may not be so important, since they might have been friends before coming to custody, “no line” prisoners are often interested in friends who have “line” in order to get assistance in the form of food or soap. Friends often play games, converse, and cook or eat together. Some also visit the toilet or bathe together.

Most friends are in the same cell, although there are some friends who are in separate cells. Friends may be working in the same place or in different places in the prison. For instance, an inmate working in the kitchen can be a friend with a prisoner working in any workshop. Some friends are so close to each other that you may think they are sexual partners. However, one distinction I noticed between friendship and intimate relationship during my observation is that, friendship seems like an equal relationship. Individuals, who are friends are seen by their fellow inmates as equals, therefore none of them is considered superior or inferior. Intimate relationship on the other hand seems like an unequal relationship, since inmates consider the “husband” to be more superior to the “wife” in such relationships. I observed that friends do things as equals without one partner being controlled by the other, unlike an intimate relationship when one partner is the “husband” and wields more power than his “wife”.

Although an inmate may decide to perform chores like washing or fetching water for a friend, he is not obliged to perform those chores. However, for prisoners in an intimate
relationship, the one who assumes the role of a “wife” is obliged to perform those chores like washing, fetching water or cooking. According to my informants, although some friends remain friends until one person goes on discharge, there are several instances where relationships that were considered as friendship had transformed into intimate sexual relationship overtime, like what is illustrated in the case study above. Prisoners sometimes use the word “friends” to mean sexual partners.

Zanga is a 35-year-old inmate, he has been in custody for two years and he is serving eight years for assault. Zanga is involved in asexual relationship where he is a “husband” for another inmate. According to him,

\[
every\ \text{prisoner has a friend, life in prison would have been so boring without a friend, at least it's good to have someone you can call a friend, you can converse or confide in that person, cook or eat together.}
\]

Friends are often seen playing games, conversing, cooking or eating together. Friendship in prison is often between the rich and the poor; it is generally based on what the friend can do for him or give him. Although there are a few friends who are both poor, or both rich, most friends are one rich inmate and one poor inmate. According to Bedia who is a “husband”,

\[
\text{Friendship in prison is based on food. If I'm poor and I know you are rich, I will take you as my friend and get food from you. We can also become friends if we are both rich so that we can combine our apparatus (ingredients) together and cook.}
\]

New inmates who are admitted into the various cells are often referred to as “tourists” by their colleagues. According to Atamfo, one of my respondents,

\[
\text{We call them “tourist” because they are just like foreigners who have visited a place. When foreigners come to Ghana, they are often called tourists; a Ghanaian would then take them around and show them various places in the country. That is exactly what we do here, this prison is like a country, and prisoners who are interested in tourists often take them round and show them the various places within the prison.}
\]

These “tourists” are unofficially expected to pay a cell fee to the cell leader, which ranges from 2 Ghana cedis to 5 Ghana cedis (1 Euro - 2.5 Euros). This money is received and administered by
the cell leader. According to the cell leaders, these monies are used to buy brooms for sweeping, disinfectant and soap for scrubbing the cell. The prison staff has no control over these monies.

Inmates who come into custody without any money may not be able to pay the cell fees. Such inmates are given some time to pay with the anticipation that they will have visitors who will give them some money to pay the fees. If a prisoner does not honour his obligation by paying the fees, he is brought before a cell “judge”. The “judge” enquires why he has not paid and then “sentences” him to sweep, scrub or fetch water for the cell for a period of time as his punishment for not paying the cell fees. The pronouncement of the punishment is done in the cell on Sunday evening, between 18:30 - 20:30 at a forum the prisoner call kyere’ w’adwen (open forum).

According to Atamfo, you could easily tell a rich or poor prisoner by the offence he is convicted for, he said: “Tourists who are convicted for stealing mobile phones or a bunch of plantain are immediately considered ‘no line’ and those who are convicted for dealing in cocaine are considered to ‘have line’.”

Some inmates have been in custody for days, months or years, without being visited by anybody. These inmates might have come into custody without having money on them. They are often referred to by their colleagues as “no line” prisoners, meaning they are poor and have “no line” for survival in the prison. “Line” for survival, according to the inmates is either money or food. “No line” prisoners, often depend on only the prison ration, which they often claim is of low quality and inadequate in terms of the quantity.

_The food is inadequate and the quality too is bad. We are given half cup of ‘koko’ (porridge) in the morning without sugar or bread and we take small ‘gari’ or ‘Banku’ in the afternoon, which serves as both lunch and supper. The truth is, most prisoners here either cook something in addition or they go begging for food. The quality is so bad that most people don’t even eat it. [Onua]_

Most “no line” prisoners complain of hunger and some have to depend on other prisoners for assistance in terms of food or soap. I was told inmates are occasionally given soap by the prison staff, but there was no such distribution during my period of study. Some “no line” prisoners’ bath or wash their clothing without soap; others have to wash clothing for other inmates in order to get soap to bath or to wash their own clothing.
Choosing a sexual partner

Inmates seldom choose sexual partners based on good looks or good character. According to Oyiwa a 32-year-old man who is serving 12 years for conspiracy and has been in custody for six years,

*Looking does not matter, the most important things is what you can get from that person, whether food, cigarette or kpee even if you don’t look nice he can look after you by giving you good food and buy nice clothing for you and you will look nice. They are more interested in somebody who is young, hungry and likely to accept their proposal.*

He further explained that, “Some inmates pick sexual partners because they see that particular prisoner to be in need and they want to give him food to eat. Others also pick sexual partners because of trumu trumu (sodomy, homosexuality).”

According to my respondents, the financial status of the person is the most important factor to consider when choosing a sexual partner or when accepting to be a sexual partner. The rich and the poor both consider the financial status of an inmate before choosing him or accepting him as a sexual partner. The poor want to know what that friend can offer him and the rich also consider the financial status of an inmate to determine how he can lure him. The question is, what can the poor offer the rich? It is interesting to know that the “no line” prisoners also have something to offer the prisoners with “line”. A “no line” prisoner is basically interested in a friend who can give him money or provide him with food or any other necessity like soap for bathing and washing. If the “no line” prisoner is interested in cigarettes or *wee* (marijuana), then he expects his friend to provide him with these items as well. The rich prisoner on the other hand chooses an inmate, who is “no line” as a friend so that the poor inmate can perform menial jobs like washing, cleaning, cooking and fetching water for him. The “no line” prisoner can also be his partner for sexual activities. Onua passionately explained to me,

*I am no line; I have no food, no soap or anything. I use to wash for other prisoners in order to get soap or use the soapy water to wash my things. I have to eat the ration like that without any supplement until Wuwu and I became friends, now I am Wuwu’s wife, I do the cooking for him and get some of the food to eat, I wash his things and through that I also get soap to wash my things, once a while, I satisfy him sexually.*
Suroku, a 28-year-old man, is a recidivist, serving seven years for stealing and has been in custody for two years. I tried to find out from Suroku, whether the main reason for choosing friends in prison is to have sex with the person or to get food from the person, he frankly said,

*It may be difficult to choose one, because the rich prisoner chooses a friend because of kpee and the poor prisoner chooses a friend because of food.*

Considering Suroku’s statement above, it is clear that the motivational factors for a “no line” prisoner to engage in sex with men in prison is different from what motivates inmates with “line” to engage in same-sex sexual activities. Whereas the poor inmate accepts his colleagues’ proposal in order to be given food or any other basic necessity, it is obvious that the rich inmates propose to the poor inmates to satisfy their sexual desires.

I found that some inmates become friends because they have similar interests. For instance, an inmate who smokes cigarette or wee (marijuana) may choose a friend who also smokes. Those who are interested in sex may choose an inmate who is also interested in sex and become sexual partners. Some “no line” prisoners are often so hungry that they are lured with food or other basic necessities to become sexual partners for other prisoners. Onua said,

*How would I have survived in prison without my ‘husbands’ support? I would have died of hunger by now or I would have been looking like a sick person by now, I get food, cigarette and wee (marijuana) from Wuwu, I get protection as well. No other prisoner can bully me, because he is strong and would always come to my aid. Personally, I don’t get satisfaction from it, I agreed to be his wife because I was hungry and agreeing to his proposal was my only way of survival.*

**Conclusion**

The above data indicates that prisoners place much value on friendship and intimate relationships. Although they both have similar characteristics, it is explicitly clear that friendship, unlike intimate relationships, is devoid of sexual activities. The financial status of an inmate is more important than his looks when choosing a sexual partner or accepting to be a sexual partner. Although there are several motivations for inmates who are rich and inmates who are poor when choosing or accepting to be a sexual partner, it is obvious that most inmates consider the financial status of the prisoner before proposing or accepting a sexual proposal. The
poor inmate wants to know what that sexual partner can offer him, whiles the rich prisoner considers how poor the inmate is, since the poorer he is, the more likely he is to accept his proposal. The poorest inmates are therefore more likely to accept sexual proposals and become “wives”. The economic inequality among such inmates then reflects into other forms of inequality where the “husband” is considered by their fellow inmates as superior to the “wife”.

Despite the fact that friends may support each other in one way or the other, what they do for each other are very minimal compared to what sexual partners do for each other. Friends, unlike intimate partners are not obliged to give anything to each other or to do anything for each other. I am therefore tempted to say that being in an intimate sexual relationship in prison, is the surest way for a poor inmate to get food and other basic necessities. It is also a medium by which an inmate, whether rich or poor, can have his sexual desires met.
CHAPTER FIVE
Motivation of MSM in Prison

Money rules this prison; if you have money, you can get everything you want, just name it. If you have money and you want to have four or five male prisoners for kpee, it is possible, with money, some prison officers can smuggle anything into the prison for you, except a lady. With money you can have people to serve you or go on errands for you, money is the president of this prison. [Akiti Borge]

This chapter discusses what motivates inmates to engage in same-sex sexual activities. Why do prisoners engage in MSM and why do they remain in the sexual relationship irrespective of the punishment? The above quote illustrates the importance of money in the prison and the “power” inmates have if they have money in the prison. I begin this chapter with a case study that illustrates the most common reasons why prisoners engage in men having sex with men (MSM).

Case Studies 2 and 3

The following two case studies illustrate how lack of basic commodities like food or soap could propel an inmate to engage in MSM. Case study 2 demonstrates how a poor inmate could not refuse the sexual proposal of another inmate because he gave him food free of charge and he feels indebted to him. Case study 3 illustrates how a rich inmate can lure a poor inmate into a sexual relationship by giving him gifts such as food, money or cigarettes. These cases are typical for my sample and what happens in the prison. They show the general tendencies of poor inmates being enticed with food and other basic consumables.

Case study 2: Zanga “Husband” and Dinka “Wife”

- Zanga is a 35-year-old prisoner serving eight years for assault. He works in the kitchen and is considered as a prisoner with ‘line’ (rich) since he often comes to the cell with surplus food. Zanga often sells surplus food to other prisoner’s for 10 pesewas (5 cents) to 1 Ghana cedis (50 cents).
- Another prisoner, Dinka, is 24 years old; he is serving six years for escaping from lawful custody. He has been in custody for the past six months without being visited by a
relative and he is considered as a ‘no line’ (poor) prisoner. He depends on gifts from prisoners with ‘line’, but most often, he eats the prison ration without supplement.

- On May 19, 2011, he washed the clothing of a rich prisoner who gave him 40 pesewas (20 cents) for his services. In the evening of that day, around 4:30pm he decided to buy food from one of the kitchen boys who often come to the cells with surplus food.
- Dinka saw Zanga coming to the cell with a bowl of banku (English translation), so Dinka offered to buy the banku for 20 pesewas (10 cents). Zanga refused to sell the banku to him, but rather gave it to him for free. Later that evening, Zanga told Dinka that he was ready to take good care of him by providing him with food and any other thing he wanted if only he would be his sexual partner.
- After Dinka ate the food, Zanga told him he wanted them to engage in kpee that night in their cell when the light were off.
- Dinka said he felt indebted to Zanga, so he agreed to his proposal. They were caught that night in the act having unprotected anal sex.

Case Study 3: Atamfo “Husband” and Alee “Wife”

- Atamfo is a 45-year-old prisoner serving life imprisonment for robbery; he has been in prison custody for 10 years and 9 months. He is the leader (Black coat) of all the prisoners working in the kitchen. Atamfo often gets food surplus, which he gives to friends for free or sells for extra money, which he uses for cigarettes and wee.
- As the leader of the kitchen boys, Atamfo always has abundant surplus food to give out, so he is considered as a prisoner with ‘line’.
- A prisoner by the name Alee is 35-years-old and serving 15 years for stealing and he has served seven years of his sentence. Since Alee was transferred from another prison, his family has ceased to visit him.
- Alee is a ‘no line’ prisoner so he often performs menial jobs like washing for other prisoners, including Atamfo, and they give him food or money in return.
- Atamfo started giving Alee money, cigarettes and food even when he had not done anything for him. Atamfo later proposed having a sexual relation with Alee, but Alee refused.
• Atamfo stopped giving Alee menial jobs to perform and stopped giving him free food or cigarettes.

• Subsequently, Alee seldom had menial jobs from other prisoners, so he had no money. He was starving since he was dependent only on the prison ration, which was inadequate. He then decided to accept Atamfo’s proposal so he could get his daily food supplement and drugs.

• He informed Atamfo about his acceptance and they became sexual partners. Apart from surplus food, Atamfo often gives Alee money to buy ingredients and cooks for both of them.

• Atamfo provides Alee with his daily cigarette and gives him soap for washing and bathing. They often hide in the toilet and have anal sex.

• Atamfo pays a ‘no line’ prisoner to stand at the entrance of the toilet to be on watch for approaching prison staff.

The Role of Food and Sex in the Prison

Unmet needs

Prisoners, like all individuals need certain basic things in life; food and soap are the most essential commodities in prison. Those who smoke cigarettes or wee (marijuana) also place a high value on “smoke”. All these commodities are hard to come by in prison, although inmates are served with three meals each day and occasionally given soap by the prison administration. Inmates who have no money or receive no visitors are often obliged to eat the prison food without supplement. Others have to bath or wash their clothing without soap. The surest way for a “no line” prisoner to have his needs met in prison is to be involved in a sexual relationship. By being a “wife” of another prisoner, the “no line” prisoner gets soap, as well as food from his partner to supplement his daily meals.

It was surprising to learn that sexual activities occur frequently in the prison without the prison officers’ knowledge. Sex generally occurs in the cells at night, at the church, toilet or certain places within the yard during the day. At times cell leaders decide to punish the culprits without informing the prison staff on duty; this is called di wo fie asem, meaning mind your own business. They also refer to it as “house arrest”, which means a cell leader decides to solve the
issue within the cell without informing prison officers. Cell leaders often punish culprits by making them sweep, scrub or fetch the cell water. Some of my respondents told me that cell leaders often take bribes from the culprits and put them on “house arrest” instead of reporting them to the prison staff for the appropriate sanctions. These sexual activities often occur between “line” inmates and “no line” inmates. Although there are instances where two rich inmates or two poor inmates may be involved in sexual activities, the majority of cases are between a rich and a poor inmate. The poor one may have the desire to have sex, but they have nothing to entice or lure another prisoner. It is the rich ones who have money and food, who often entice or lure poor inmates into sexual relationships. My data indicates that prisoners who are “husbands” in sexual relationships often initiate or propose to the “wife”; they do this because of an intense desire to have sex. The “husbands” are “rich” and have what it takes to lure a poor inmate. The “wives” on the other hand are poor and accept a “husband’s” proposal because they are hungry and they know becoming a “wife” is the surest way to get soap, cigarettes or drugs, as well as additional food.

Payment in kind

The use of money is one of the commonest forms of payment for goods and services. The question then is, how can a “no line” prisoner without money pay for goods? One may be tempted to say that the poor prisoner should stay without buying. Inmates who have no means to pay are often left with no option other than to pay in kind. Some perform menial jobs like washing for other prisoners, going on errands, cooking or fetching water for the providers of the food. Others pay in kind by offering themselves as sexual partners for the providers of food. Some inmates are one-time sexual partners, whiles others are permanent sexual partners. The one-time sexual partners give in to sex only when they are given food, cigarettes, wee (marijuana) or soap; it is like paying for the food or drugs with sex. The “contract” for one-time sexual partner ends immediately after the sexual act, so these inmates have no responsibility towards each other.

Those who are permanent sexual partners are the “wives” and “husbands”. Inmates in such sexual relationships have certain responsibilities towards each other; the “wives” are expected to wash for their “husbands”, fetch water for them to bathe, cook for them and clean the cooking area. The “husbands” on the other hand are supposed to provide the food to be cooked.
He is also expected to provide the “wife” with soap or other necessities. It is his responsibility as well to ensure the wife is protected from bullies in the prison. Unlike one-time sexual partners, the relationship does not end after the sex act. The rich inmate or “husband” provides the needs of his “wife” in the form of food, soap or drugs and the wife reciprocates by offering himself for sexual activities. Sex is undoubtedly the medium of payment for some poor prisoners who feel indebted to other prisoners. According to one of the black coats (leader),

*no line prisoners who do not get visitors from home are often given food by prisoners who have line; these prisoners entice them with the food and later lure them into *kpee*. Most often, the no line prisoner cannot say no, because he feels indebted to the rich prisoner.*

Inmates who engage in sexual activities risk being mocked by their colleagues and punished by the prison staff. This notwithstanding, some of the inmates are involved in this practice despite the mockery and the punishment. Although some of the prisoners who practice MSM in prison may have done so before incarceration, my data indicates that only one inmate, out of the six informants involved in sexual activities in prison, ever engaged in same-sex activity before incarceration. The remaining five informants started to engage in MSM in prison custody.

Inmates who initiate or propose a sexual relationship with other prisoners often do so because of an intense desire to have sex. Three of my informants, who are “husbands” in the sexual relationship, claim that the desire is so strong that they can’t do anything about it other than to look for a sexual partner. However, there are other inmates who have been in custody for decades but have never engaged in MSM. Two of my informants who are not involved in MSM attribute engaging in MSM in prison to lack of self-control.

I tried to find out from Bedia, a “husband” who has been in custody over two decades, whether the long sentences like 70 years, 100 years or the 150 years that prisoners are serving are a contributory factor to inmates engaging in sexual activities in prison. He answered by saying, “the sentence does not matter, there are some prisoners here who have served more than 20 years but they’ve never been caught in *kpee* others come in and within a month they are into it”.

According to Wonana, a 28-year-old recidivist, who has been in custody for eight months and is serving two years for stealing, although he is not involved in MSM, he knows
those with line have money and food so they can always pay to have sexual satisfaction and those with no line too are so hungry that they are ready to do anything for food. Nothing can stop kpee in prison, those who are hungry will always give in to kpee for food, so there would always be kpee unless everybody is satisfied and all our needs are met.

**Motivation for Inmates to be “Wives”**

**Need for basic necessities**

Food, whether cooked or raw is an essential commodity in the prison. Those who have food or have the means to afford it, irrespective of the quality or quantity are highly respected by their colleagues. Inmates who have money or food are considered as having “line”, meaning they have a *line* of survival. Such inmates are considered by their colleagues to be rich. Foods is indeed an important commodity within the prison, abundance of it or lack of it, is a push or pull factor to determine whether an inmate is likely to lure or to be lured into sexual activities.

These inmates either buy these foods which are either cooked or uncooked at the prisoner’s market within the prison, or they give the money to an assigned prison staff to buy the food outside the prison for them, which are generally uncooked food items. Others also receive both raw and cooked food from friends and family members outside the prison.

Most inmates often consume the food they buy from the market or receive from home alone, or give part to a friend or a sexual partner. Some inmates who get more food than necessary may decide to sell some to other inmates. Such food items are often sold at a price that is relatively cheaper than in the market. No matter how cheap the food is, there are some “no line” prisoners who cannot afford it. Some of these inmates may offer to do menial jobs like washing or fetching water for the inmate selling the food, as payment for the food. According to one black coat (leader), “some prisoners are so hungry that, they will do anything to have food to eat”.

Although the prison inmates are served three meals a day, the lunch and dinner are often combined into a meal and almost the same kind of food is served repeatedly over a period of time. This notwithstanding, the inmates are assured of getting their three square meals each day. According to Onua who is a “wife” in the prison,
The food is inadequate and the quality too is bad. We are given half cup of ‘koko’ (porridge) in the morning without sugar or bread and we take small ‘gari’ or ‘Banku’ in the afternoon which serves as both lunch and supper. The truth is, most prisoners here either cook something in addition or they go begging for food. The quality is so bad that most people don’t even eat it.

Prisoners who have money to buy charcoal often re-cooked the food before eating. Those who can afford it often add ingredients like fish, pepper, tomatoes or spices to the soup while re-cooking. Those who have “no line” and have no means to buy charcoal or any other ingredients may be compelled to eat the prison food as it comes or go begging prisoners with “line” for food. Hunger is a force that drives most “no line” prisoners to become “wives” of other prisoners who can provide them with food. Food that may be for sale can be given to them free of charge in response to a sexual request by the providers of the food, since prisoners who have the desire to have sex also often use food to attract or lure their prospective partners into a sexual relationship.

Noko a 38-year-old man, who has been in custody for 13 years and 6 months and is a “husband” in a sexual relationship, stated, “the wives need food, cigarettes or soap that’s why they accept to be wives, it can even be for protection. Most often the wives give in because of food or any other thing”. A “black coat” agreed, “most of the prisoners who are penetrated give in because they are hungry”. Suroku spoke with passion when he said, “Ekom ye’ ya (hunger is painful), so no line prisoners have no choice but to do trumu trumu (anal sex, sodomy or homosexuality) for survival”. He went on to explain, “a prisoner may give himself as a ‘wife’ to another prisoner for kpee because he is hungry and that prisoner has line so he can provide him with food”. It is interesting to note that trumu trumu and kpee are both prisoners’ jargon, which is used interchangeably to refer to anal sex, sodomy and homosexuality.

Oyiwa is a 32-year-old man. He has been in custody for six years and he is serving 12 years for conspiracy. According to him,

Some people want money, the rich prisoner may give him money or food, or maybe he want cigarette or wee (marijuana) but he can’t buy, so allowing that prisoner to do kpee with him, he would buy him those things.

In my attempts to find out whether the wives also give in because of the desire to have sex, all my respondents were confident when they told me that the wives mostly give in because
of food, soap or drugs but not to satisfy their sexual desires. Below are excerpts of an interview I had with Akiti Borge, a 24-year-old man who is not into sexual activities in prison. He has been in custody for four years and he is serving 30 years for robbery.

**Interviewer:** Why would an inmate give in to the sexual demands of another inmate?

**Akiti Borge:** I’ve said it over and over already; prisoners are doing kpee here just to get food to eat.

**Interviewer:** How do you mean?

**Akiti Borge:** The wives give in to kpee just to get food from their partners.

**Interviewer:** Don’t you think it’s because they want to satisfy their sexual desires?

**Akiti Borge:** That applies to only the ‘husband’, because he is not poor, he has everything he Needs; so he does that for sexual satisfaction, but the wife gives in because he needs food to eat, cigarettes or drugs.

Sex seems to be functional and serves only a purpose in an intimate sexual relation in prison, without emotions involved. Consider Noko’s response below, when I asked him how he expresses his love to his “wife”:

**Interviewer:** How do you express your love to your ‘wife’?

**Noko:** There is nothing like expressing my love, but there are things we do that lovers also do.

**Interviewer:** Things like what?

**Noko:** We help each other when we are in need, it’s my duty to give ‘her’ food and buy ‘her’ cigarettes once a while and it’s ‘her’ duty to cook the food and wash for me. It is also my duty to protect ‘her’. I believe these are things that people who are in love also do.

*Seeking privilege and protection*

It was interesting to know that apart from receiving food and other gifts from their “husbands”, some inmates who are “wives” of certain leaders agreed to be “wives” in order to enjoy specific privileges. The leaders are entitled to privileges so their “wives”, on the other hand, are unofficially accorded some amount of privilege. For instance, the “husband” who is a leader can allow his wife, who is not a leader, to use the toilet facilities reserved for leaders, in
case there is a queue at the general toilet. The wife can also sleep on their “husbands’ bed in the “black coats” cell during day, which they consider a privilege. It was emphatically clear that these “wives” were not intimidated by their leader “husbands” into accepting their proposal.

I also identified protection from bullies as a factor that motivates inmates to engage in same-sex sexual activities in prison. Some inmates who consider themselves to be weak and feel threatened by other inmates, so they accept being the wife of an inmate’s whom they see as strong and capable of protecting them. According to Noko, “A prisoner may get food from home alright but if he is the weak type then he still needs protection, so he can still be in a relationship despite he does not need food, so that ‘her’ partner can protect her”.

Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the “husband” to protect his “wife” from being bullied by other prisoners. If the husband is not strong enough, then he has to give food or money to another prisoner who is strong and can come to their aid whenever they are in a fight with another inmate or whenever they are being cheated or bullied by other prisoners.

Interviewing a “black coat” on why inmates engage in MSM, he responded,

*the no line prisoner who is being penetrated gets food, soap, cigarette, or any other necessity, most often they do the cooking for both of them and wash for the “man” as well. Apart from the food and other things, the partner can protect him from other bullies if he is strong but if he is not the strong type, then he can give money or food to a strong prisoner to protect his “wife” for him.*

Akiti Borge who does not practice MSM also said, “inmates accepts to be ‘wives’ because they want to have some privileges, especially if the person is a leader or they want to be protected, in the case of those who see themselves as weak”.

**Motivation for Inmates to be “Husbands”**

*Need to satisfy sexual desires*

The “husbands” confessed they get into a sexual relationship because they want to satisfy their sexual desires. All four of my informants who are “husbands” stated that, they initiate or propose to engage in sexual relationship with other inmates. They admitted during the interview that they are not hungry or in need of soap or anything else. They stated emphatically clear that
they are in sexual relationship just to satisfy their sexual desires. The “black coat” added that “those who do the penetration are doing it because they want to satisfy their sexual desires”. Noko a “husband” also said, “most of the ‘husbands’ do kpee because of sexual desires, I for instance, I am not hungry, I just want sexual satisfaction”.

Makes you feel like a man

Prisoners are obliged to follow a daily routine in the prison; they are told what to do at all point in time like children. Some prisoners feel powerless since they cannot do things their own way. For instance, a prisoner cannot decide when to sleep or when to wake up, the cells are locked at 18:00 and he cannot come out of the cell until the following morning at 06:00. According to some of them, the prison regime makes them feel less like a man and the only way they can feel like a man in prison is to be in sexual relationship. This applies to the “husbands” who often initiate or propose a sexual relationship. They seek sexual partners so that they can also give instructions to that inmate and they will be carried out. Below are excerpts of the interview I had with Noko to that effect:

Interviewer: Apart from sexual satisfaction, what else do you gain from these sexual activities?
Noko: I feel like a man,
Interviewer: What do you mean by that?
Noko: What I mean is we are being controlled by prison officers like children, they tell us the time to sleep or wake up and a lot more, so as a prisoner you don’t feel like a man, it is only when you are a husband to another prisoner that you get that boss feeling again and you feel like a man.
Interviewer: What is that boss feeling?
Noko: Someone depends on you for everything, you give instructions and they are obeyed, when it comes to kpee you initiate it and you do the penetration.

Respect and control

Respect and being in control are feelings that some inmates miss when they are in prison custody. Some of the prisoners feel they lose the respect they command as a man by being incarcerated. It is only in a sexual relationship that they get the needed respect and the power to
control. Therefore, they propose to be “husbands” and get the needed respect from their “wives”. These “husbands” are responsible for their “wife’s” needs and therefore feel like being in charge and in control. Noko a “husband”, in response to what he gets from a sexual relationship said, “I get the respect I need as a man, it feels good to be in control”. He explained further and said, “men are suppose to be in charge or in control but being in prison is like losing everything. It really feels good to be in charge or in control in a sexual relationship”.

*Avoiding household chores?*

Most prisoners have coal pots in the prison where they re-cook the prison ration or cook their own food and they are obliged to clean the cooking area after cooking. Inmates who are in sexual relationships as “husbands” often avoid this task, since their food is usually re-cooked or cooked by their “wives” who do the cleaning as well. Inmates are suppose to fetch water from a reservoir in the yard for bathing, or for washing their clothing; most “husbands” seldom perform these chores since it is the “wives” who wash their “husband’s” clothing and fetch water for them to bath. Wouldn’t being a “husband”, in prison be a way to avoid household chores?

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<tr>
<th>Benefits for being a “wife”</th>
<th>Benefits for being a “husband”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Food</td>
<td>1. Sexual satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Cigarettes</td>
<td>2. Makes you feel like a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Marijuana (wee)</td>
<td>3. Respect from your “wife”</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Soap</td>
<td>4. It feels good to be in control</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Protection</td>
<td>5. Avoiding household tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Money</td>
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<td>7. Privileges</td>
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Why do inmates remain in sexual relationships?

Fear of losing benefits

Prisoners continue engaging in sexual activities irrespective of the risk of being humiliated or punished. Two of my respondents who are “wives” told me they want to get out of the sexual relationship but they are afraid of losing their soap, drugs, protection and food that they are currently enjoying from their “husbands”. Two of the “husbands” also told me they can stop engaging in sexual activities but they do not want to stop because they are enjoying it. Others also said it is only in a sexual relationship that they are accorded respect as a man, so they do not care what the prison staff or their colleagues do to them. According to Oyiwa,

*It’s because of what they get from it, like food, money, cigarette and other things. He knows if he stops, he will no longer get those things, so such a person does not care what they do to him, no matter how they beat or humiliate him, he will still do it.*

The black coat I interviewed also said,

*I know some of the “women” who want to get out of those sexual relationships but how will they survive, so such people are still in the relationship because of the food and other things they get from their “husbands”. Some are afraid they may lose the protection they are currently enjoying or may be intimidated by their partner.*

In my attempt to find out from Zanga who was “wedded” as a husband to Dinka, during my period of study, what he gains from his relationship and why he is still in the relationship, he frankly told me,

*I’ve been in custody for the past two years, just recently I’ve been having an intense feeling to have sex. I did everything to control the urge but it did not work. At least I was able to satisfy my sexual need, that’s the only way I could survive here without sex, I don’t see how they expect a young man like me, who couldn’t stay a week without sex outside prison to stay here eight years without it. I will do kpee anytime I feel like having sex, I don’t care what they do to me.*
Why would you like to go through that wedding again? I asked him. I don’t care, they should just prepare to do more weddings for me, I don’t see why they are making so much noise about kpee, even outside where there are women, some men decide to go in for men’ he said.

*Being used to it*

Wonana, on the other hand, thinks inmates who are involved in sexual activities cannot stop because it has become part and parcel of them. According to him,

> it’s just like a thief outside prison, he can be caught, beaten, sent to court and imprisoned but when he goes on discharge, he will go and steal or rob again and he will be beaten again, sent to court and imprisoned again. This is similar to those who are into sexual relationships, we beat them, disgrace them and punish them but they can’t stop, it’s part of them, they are used to it.

Why do you think they can’t stop? I probed further and Wonana tried to explain.

> ‘Ako` `omo mogya mu, `enti `omo entumi ngvae’ (It’s in their blood, so they can’t stop).

*The “wife” or the one who is being penetrated will die of hunger if “she” decides to stop.*

> Enoa na `ode twa ne “jail” (that is the only way he can survive in prison). Most of them don’t care, after all who knows he was a “woman” in prison.

Bedia, who is a “husband” in a sexual relationship, tried to explain to me why they are always engaging in sexual activities despite the humiliation and punishment. He said, “it is just like a thief who has been caught many times and punished but keeps doing it. The feeling is good, I get sexual satisfaction and it makes me feel like a man once again”. According to the “black coat”, “some inmates are still in the relationship because it has become part and parcel of them, so it’s difficult to stop and I guess they may be enjoying it”.

The above excerpts explain the reasons why inmates remain in sexual relationship irrespective of the humiliation by their colleagues and the punishment by the prison staff. There are all indications that the “no line” prisoners need food to survive in prison and since the food is for sale and they have no money to pay, they have no choice but to pay in kind, doing menial jobs and offering themselves for sex is their only means of payment.
Conclusion

Analyzing the response of my informants, it is clear that prisoners who engage in same-sex sexual activities are motivated to do that as a result of unmet needs for basic commodities. It is clear that the motivational factors for an inmate to initiate or propose a sexual relationship are different from the factors that motivate an inmate to accept a sexual proposal. Whereas the “husband” proposes to satisfy his sexual desires, to boost his masculine ego and to avoid household chores, the “wife” on the other hand accepts the sexual proposal in order to be given food, soap, drugs, to be protected from bullies or given some privileges in the prison. They therefore decide to remain in the relationship irrespective of the sanctions.
CHAPTER SIX

Gender And Sexual Identity

In this chapter, I discuss what it means to be masculine or feminine in a male prison, and how inmates who are involved in MSM consider and interpret their sexual relationship, in terms of gender construction. How do inmates involved in MSM identify themselves? Do inmates consider their sexual relationship as a homosexual or a heterosexual relationship? What are the similarities between the gender roles they perform and what pertains in most Ghanaian communities? I answer these questions by providing their interpretation of their sexual relationship and link this to a general interpretation of gender construction in Ghanaian society. I also explain how prisoners identify themselves in terms of their sexuality and how they construct masculine or feminine identities in prison.

Being Masculine / Feminine in a Male Prison

Inmates in a male prison consider some of their colleagues as masculine and others as feminine. Whether an inmate is considered as masculine or feminine, according to the prisoners, depends on the physique of the inmate, his body posture, and voice, and also whether he has ever been penetrated or has penetrated another inmate during anal sex in the prison. Being considered masculine or feminine is not a permanent status; it is something that can change over time as a result of a change in the criteria that qualifies the individual as a member of that group. For instance, an inmate who ceases to be a “wife” and later becomes a husband to another inmate is no longer considered as feminine by his colleagues, but rather as masculine.

Masculinity

According to my respondents, to be considered masculine in the prison means that you have penetrated another male prisoner in a sexual act, have a physique like a giant, are strong and able to defend yourself in a fight, walk upright and talk with a bold voice. Prisoners who are currently not in a sexual relationship, but are known to have penetrated another prisoner in anal sex, are all considered to be masculine. This inmate will cease to be masculine immediately if he is caught being penetrated by another prisoner in a sexual act; he is then considered as feminine. According to Suroku,
we consider those who are very strong as masculine and those who are tall and thick, especially those who are like giants. Sometime ago, two prisoners who are considered as masculine engaged in a fight in this prison and prison officers could not even separate them. Most often, officers and prisoners are afraid of such people”.

Atamfo who is a “husband” said, “the strength we exhibit tells whether we are men or not, those who are considered masculine are those who are strong or look strong, or those who were caught penetrating another prisoner”. In addition, he proudly said, “I am the man; I have ‘line’ so I take care of the ‘no line’ who is my wife”.

Some of my respondents described masculinity in terms of having a wife and being responsible for his upkeep, being in charge and in control. According to them men who are “wives” are being controlled by their “husbands”, so they are not men. Men are those who have a “wife” to give instructions to and to control. Below are excerpts from Noko, a “husband”, explaining masculinity in terms of being in charge and in control.

| Noko: Men are supposed to be in charge or in control but being in prison is like losing everything. |
| Interviewer: How do you mean? |
| Noko: What I mean is we are being controlled by prison officers like children, they tell us the time to sleep or wake up and a lot more, so as a prisoner you don’t feel like a man, it is only when you are a husband to another prisoner that you get that boss feeling again. |
| Interviewer: What is that boss feeling? |
| Noko: Someone depends on you for everything, you give instructions and they are obeyed, when it comes to kpee, you initiate it and you do the penetration. It really feels good to be in charge or in control. |

Bedia, who is a “husband”, also said, “I am a man, I have line, so nobody can lure me; I rather give ‘no line’ prisoners food or cigarette. Moreover, I like being in control and it's good to feel like a man once again”.

Life in prison can be likened to life in a regimental unit; there are specified times for all activities in the prison. Inmates are obliged to follow these routine activities accordingly. For
instance, inmates are opened or locked up in their cells at a specified time, the lights are put off at night at a specified time, and inmates have no choice but to enter their cells a few minutes before 18:00 for the cells to be locked. Those who want to read after 21:00 may not do so, since the lights are put off at 21:00. According to my informants, going through this prison routine makes them feel like children who are being controlled and being told what to do at any point in time. This makes them feel powerless; some said they feel less like a man. According to these inmates, to assume the role of a “husband” in a sexual relationship in prison and to be responsible for your “wife’s” needs and be respected as a “husband” by your “wife”, is the only way that they feel like a man in prison.

Noko further went on to explain to me why men who have no wives are not considered masculine, below are excerpts of that interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer:  Are you saying prisoners without wives are not men?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noko: How can you be a man if you are not in charge? A man should be in charge and in control. A man should be able to protect his wife, so we are the men here.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer:  How do you consider prisoners who are thick and tall?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noko: The physique does not matter, what matters is whether he is a husband or wife, if you are thick tall and you are being penetrated by another prisoner, you are no man, you are a woman.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interviewer:  Apart from having a wife and doing the penetration, what else qualifies an inmate to be masculine?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Noko: We walk upright and talk with a commanding voice, we talk like men. You will even see the women by how they walk and talk.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Interviewer:  How do men talk?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Noko: Men talk with a bold voice.</td>
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</table>

Some of my respondents, on the other hand, considered masculinity in terms of strength and being able to defend yourself as well as your wife in a fight; According to them, a man is no man if he cannot defend himself or his “wife” during a fight.

Onua, who is a “wife”, said, “A man should have a wife and he should be strong enough to protect his wife”. Oyiwa, who is not in a sexual relationship, said, “Those we refer to as men are those who have been caught penetrating another prisoner, most of them look strong”.

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Wonana in support of the above comments said, “Those who are thick [and] tall are referred to as men, the man is the one who does the penetration, a man should walk straight, without shaking the body and the voice should be deep, it should not be too soft”. Below are excerpts of an interview I had with Akiti Borge, an inmate who is not involved in sexual practices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer: Which inmates do you consider as masculine?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akiti Borge: “Men are those who are thick tall and have form”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: What do you mean by ‘form?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akiti Borge: “A person with form is a person with a well built body”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: If a prisoner is well built but he is not strong to fight, is he considered a man?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Akiti Borge: “A man should be able to defend himself, it is not common to see a well built prisoner who is not strong, those who were caught penetrating another inmate are also considered as men”.

The above responses illustrate how prisoners determine a masculine inmate. Although there are varying views, it is explicitly clear that body physique, walking posture and whether or not an inmate penetrates or is penetrated during anal sex are all major factors that determine whether an inmate is masculine or not.

**Femininity**

Some inmates in this prison are considered to be feminine, although they are men and may possess the physical and biological features associated with men. Some of these inmates are not just considered feminine, but they are given names generally given to females in most Ghanaian societies as well. According to nine of my respondents, a major factor that qualifies an inmate as feminine is whether he has ever been penetrated by another inmate during sex. According to these inmates, a prisoner ceases to be a man or masculine the very day he is penetrated by another inmate in a sexual act. He remains feminine until the day he is caught penetrating another prisoner in a sexual act, where his status then changes from feminine to masculine. According to Onua who is a wife, “I see myself as a man, but most often my colleagues refer to me as a woman, they said those of us who are wives and are being penetrated during kpee (anal sex) are all women, so they refer to us as women”.

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The body posture of an inmate, his voice and the strength he exhibits, according to the inmates, are factors that can qualify a male prisoner as feminine. Prisoners who do not walk upright or talk with bold voices are all considered as feminine. According to Atamfo, who is a “husband”,

some of my colleagues walk like females, so those who walk, talk and do thing like females are often considered as females. Some of them too have been caught being penetrated in kpee so they are considered as female; some of them are even given female names like sister Esi, Auntie Akosua.

Akiti Borge, in support of the above comments, said,

Prisoners who are considered feminine are either wives of some prisoners, or they act like women, some of them have big bottoms like women, so we give them female names. Others are also called by female names because they were penetrated during kpee. We consider those who are penetrated as women.

Wonana, one of my respondents, explained that the general terms for feminine in the prison are either kojo besia (“man woman”) or obaa (girl). Kojo is a name for a male and the besia means girl, so literally kojo is a girl and obaa is a girl. These two terms have distinct meanings. Those referred to as kojo besia are those who are viewed as walking, talking or behaving like women. According to Wonana, those who speak with soft voices and walk shaking their body are considered as kojo besia even though they may not have been penetrated by a prisoner in a sexual act. On the other hand, a prisoner referred to as obaa may not behave like a woman but has been penetrated by another inmate during sexual act, so the inmates then refer to him as obaa. Noko who is a “husband” said,

Women are those who are penetrated, so no matter your structure if you are penetrated by another prisoner you are considered a woman, you will even see the women by how they walk and talk, women talk as if they are afraid”.

Whether an inmate is weak or strong when it comes to carrying a load or defending himself in a fight or whether he is fast or slow in performing basic chores, are all factors that inmates may consider to label a prisoner as feminine.
Bedia who is a “husband” explained, “we all know women are weak and slow in whatever they do, they take longer time in cooking, bathing or washing, so in such circumstances we refer to such people as females”. Suroku said, “Some prisoners are considered feminine, because such prisoners are weak or they have ever been caught being penetrated by other prisoners”.

Being masculine or feminine is not a permanent status, it can change when the factors that qualified the prisoner to the original category changes. For instance, an inmate who was considered feminine because he has a soft voice will cease to be feminine when his voice changes into a deep voice. An inmate who is considered feminine because he was penetrated by another prisoner in a sexual act will also cease to be feminine when he is caught penetrating another prisoner; his status changes to masculine, but according to prisoners this is something that seldom happens.

Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Whether an inmate is considered masculine or feminine is associated with certain roles and responsibilities that are socially constructed by the inmates in the prison. These roles and responsibilities are similar to what pertains in most Ghanaian communities.

Masculine roles / responsibilities

Masculine roles and responsibilities are associated with “giving out” and ensuring safety. It is the responsibility of men who are in a sexual relationship and considered masculine to provide money or the “apparatus” (ingredients) for the food for both of prisoners (he and his wife). It is also his responsibility to provide his “wife” with other necessity like soap for bathing or washing. The safety of his “wife” is also his prime concern. It is therefore his responsibility to protect his “wife” from bullies at all times and also to defend “her” whenever “she” gets into a fight. This is similar to what pertains in most Ghanaian homes where it is the sole responsibility of the husband to provide food and other needs for the whole household and to ensure their safety. Noko who is a “husband” said, “It’s my duty to give ‘her’ food and buy ‘her’ cigarettes once a while, it is also my duty to protect ‘her’”. Atamfo who is also a “husband” said, “I provide the money for the food or provide the food, I also provide ‘her’ with soap for washing, I protect ‘her’ in addition”.

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Feminine roles / responsibilities

Inmates who are in sexual relationship as “wives” and considered as feminine by their colleagues, perform certain duties, which are basically household chores. These chores are similar to what is performed by most women in Ghanaian households. The “wives” perform household chores that are considered the sole responsibility of women in most Ghanaian communities. It is the responsibility of the “wives” to fetch water for their “husbands” for bathing and to cook for both of them. It is also “her” responsibility to clean the cooking area and to wash “her” “husband’s” clothing as well. Onua, who is a “wife” said, “I do everything a wife will do for a husband, I cook and wash for him, and I satisfy him sexually too”. Akiti Borge explained,

we all know in most of our homes, it’s the man who provides the money for the food and the woman, who is the wife, does the cooking, washing and cleaning of the house, that is exactly what happens here.

Although these are the common practices, there are a few instances when the “husbands” help the “wives” in carrying out some of these domestic chores, or they perform the chores themselves. The roles and responsibilities performed by individuals in a sexual relationship in prison may have been influenced by the general perception in most Ghanaian communities. In most Ghanaian communities, household chores are considered to be the responsibility of females and men’s duty is to ensure there is food for the wife to cook for the household, as well as to ensure the safety of the members of the household.

How Prisoners Consider and Interpret their Sexual Relationships

All my informants who are involved in “permanent” sexual relationships in prison, other than a “one time” sexual relationship, see themselves as couples and often relate to each other as a “husband” and “wife”. One of my informants consistently referred to his partner as “her”, below are the excerpts of that interview.

Interviewer: How is your relationship with Ziggi?
Noko: “Ziggi and I are very close; we are like husband and wife”.
Interviewer: What do you do as husband and wife?
Noko: “We cook and eat together, she washes for me and I also protect her from other men. I provide the food; I give her soap, and also make sure she is not bullied by other prisoners”.

Interviewer: What do you get in return?

Noko: “She gives me satisfaction”.

Interviewer: What do you mean by satisfaction?

Noko: “She gives me sexual satisfaction”.

Interviewer: Why do you keep referring to him as ‘her’?

Noko: “She is my wife and I consider her as a woman”.

The above dialogue shows how some of the inmates who engage in same-sex sexual activities in prison perceive their relationship as a heterosexual relationship. Some of them also consider it to be normal and they do not see why the prison staff is against it. Zanga said, “I don’t see why they are making so much noise about kpee even outside where there are women, some men decide to go in for men”. Atamfo also said, “There are no women in prison so what is wrong if two men decide to engage in sexual relationship?” According to Noko, who is a “husband”, “I don’t see anything wrong with it; the only thing is, I know I can get a disease by it”. These excerpts illustrate how most inmates who are involved in sexual activities perceive the practice.

**Sexual Identity**

It was interesting to know that 5 of 6 informants involved in MSM in prison were all heterosexuals before incarceration. Although they are now involved in same-sex sexual activities, they still considers themselves as heterosexuals, with the exception of Noko, who does not identify himself with any of those identities (homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual). Regarding the issue of their sexual identity and in response to my question whether they identify themselves as homosexuals, bisexuals or heterosexuals, 5 of 6 informants insisted they were still heterosexuals, while Noko clearly stated he was none of those identities. Zanga said, “I am a heterosexual, I had female sexual partners at home, I’m not a homosexual, I’m doing what I’m doing here because there are no women here”.

A 45-year-old inmate, Atamfo, who has been in custody for 11 years and is serving life imprisonment for robbery, on the other hand said, “If I say I’m a heterosexual, the issue is I’m serving life imprisonment. I will never go out to get a woman. I’m into kpee here because there
are no women here, so I don’t see myself as a homosexual or a bisexual”. Noko, a 38-year-old man who has been in custody for 13 years and 6 months and who is a “husband” in a sexual relationship, was emphatically clear that, he does not belong to any of those categories; the excerpts below illustrated his position:

I am not any of them. I do what I do at any point in time because of curiosity or it may even be out of necessity. For instance, I had sex with a lady when I was 14 years. It was just out of curiosity, I just wanted to know how it feels. I later allowed a man to penetrate me when I was 16 years, all because I was curious. In prison now, I can’t get a woman, so I go in for a man, so I don’t see how I can say I am this or that. I am not any of them, I am Noko, that is my name and that is who I am.”

These illustrations clearly show that most inmates who were heterosexual before incarceration but who are now engaging in same-sex sexual activities do not consider themselves as bisexuals or homosexuals.

**Conclusion**

The above data indicates that most inmates consider their sexual relationship as a heterosexual relationship and the partners in these relationships perform roles that are similar to what husbands and wives perform in most Ghanaian communities. Considering the response from my informants, it is also clear that inmates involved in MSM do not identify themselves as homosexuals or bisexuals but rather as heterosexuals.
CHAPTER SEVEN
Risk Involved in MSM in Prison

“I am a husband, I care less; most of my colleagues also care less, especially those who are wives. The person is so hungry he is already starving to death, so what difference does it make if he dies of HIV/AIDS or starvation? ‘Owuo biaa ye’ owuo’ (all die be die)’.

(A quote by Noko, a “husband”)

This chapter discusses how prisoners perceive risk involved in MSM in prison and what they do to reduce the risk. My analyses are done based on answers to the following questions:

• How do prisoners perceive the risk of MSM?
• What do they do to reduce the risk of MSM?

Perception of Risk

Various inmates perceive risk associated with same-sex sexual practices in prison differently. How it is perceived depends on whether the inmate is involved in sexual activities in prison or not. What inmates consider as risk also varies accordingly. Although how they perceive risk varies, my data indicates they all assert that there are risks involved in MSM in prison.

“All Die be Die”

“All die be die” (every death is death), is a popular slogan among inmates who are involved in MSM in prison. Although many activities may be considered as risky for MSM in prison, all my informants perceived risk in terms of being infected with a disease. My data indicated that prisoners, who were not involved in sexual activities, seemed concerned about being infected with HIV/AIDS or STDs if they were to become involved in sexual activities in prison. One of the “black coats” (leaders), who is not involved in MSM said,

I know those who do kpee (sodomy) can get AIDS through it since they don’t use condoms, if one partner is positive he can give it to the other partner.

His comments made me ask other respondents whether they would buy condoms if they were being sold officially by the prison staff, or unofficially by their colleagues in the prison yard.
Five of my respondents said inmates involved in same-sex sexual activities were not ready to spend their money on condoms. Noko, who is a “husband”, was emphatically clear when he said,

Nobody is interested in condoms, so officers who smuggles things into prison will not even bring it [a condom], because nobody will buy it. Jail man will not use his money to buy condoms, when he can enjoy it raw. He will rather use the condom money to buy food for his sexual partner.

Noko’s comments about not using their money to buy condoms, but rather enjoying the sex “raw” (meaning not using condom), aroused my curiosity to find out whether inmates who were involved in sexual activities would use a condom if it was available in the prison free of charge.

Akiti Borge one of my respondents, who is not involved in sexual activities, frankly asked me, “How can they eat toffee with the cover on”? He went on to say,

They are doing the kpee because they want to enjoy and how can they enjoy when the condom is on? It is only a few of them who may use it, most of them say all “die be die”, so they do not care.

Atamfo who is a “husband” was frank when he said, “‘wee’ (marijuana) and cigarettes are more important than the condoms”.

Although there are indications that my informants who are involved in MSM have some knowledge of the risk involved with engaging in unprotected anal sex, they are willing to take the risk irrespective of the consequences. Below are excerpts of the interview I had with Noko, a “husband”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer: How do you consider HIV/ AIDS?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noko: “I know AIDS is there but I’m not bothered”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: What do you mean by you are not bothered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noko: “I don’t think about it. All I want is to get sexual satisfaction so I don’t think about AIDS”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: Would you have sex with an inmate if you knew he was HIV positive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noko: “I may not, but I know most of the prisoners who are wives would do, even if they know the person is positive”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewer: In your case, why did you say you may not, instead of saying you would not?
Noko: “It depends on how sexually aroused I am at that particular time. I will do it if I’m really feeling for sex, because as I told you earlier on, I don’t care about AIDS, but if the sexual desire is not that strong, then I will forget it”.

Interviewer: In the case of the wives, why do you think they will give in, even if they know the prisoner is HIV positive?
Noko: “Madam, people are so hungry here that they are ready to do anything for food. So I can assure you most of them will give in irrespective of the AIDS”.

The above dialogue propelled me to find out from Oyiwa, who is not into sexual activities; whether an inmate will agree to have sex with another inmate if he knows he is HIV/AIDS positive. He convincingly told me that in his opinion, inmates who are involved in sexual relationships are not bothered about AIDS; they are only interested in food to survive in the prison. Below are excerpts of his interview.

Interviewer: How do your colleagues in sexual relationships consider AIDS?
Oyiwa: “I don’t think they think about AIDS ‘Ope’ nea ‘obe’di awu (he only wants what he will eat before dying). They are so hungry that they don’t care about AIDS”.

Interviewer: Are you saying a ‘no line’ (poor) prisoner will still give in to kpee if he knows the prisoner is HIV positive?
Oyiwa: “If he is hungry and he is assured of getting food or anything he needs, I can say he does not care about AIDS. They often say that AIDS die be die”.

Interviewer: Are you saying ‘no line’ (poor) prisoners do not think about AIDS?
Oyiwa: “Their main concern is where to do it and they will not be caught, not AIDS”.

Wonana, who is also not involved in a sexual relationship, expressed his opinion on whether an inmate would agree to have sex with a prisoner if he knows the prisoner is HIV/ AIDS positive. He said,

* I think he will agree if he is hungry, They don’t care about AIDS, they often say all die be die, meaning whether you die of AIDS, malaria or TB, you are dead, it’s all the same, so whatever will happen should happen. *
The comments below by Onua, who is a “wife”, confirms the statement of the other respondents, he said, “they tell us all sort of things about diseases, but I don’t care “Owuo biaa ye’ owuo” (every death is death)”.

Some of the inmates consider being in prison as a “death sentence”, therefore they do not care about the consequence of any behavior they put up with in the prison, which may expose them to many risks. Such prisoners see themselves as being “dead” already, so they do not care about anything. Bedia, a “husband” serving life imprisonment sent this signal when he said, “All die be die, odwan funu nsro sekano” (A dead goat is not afraid of a knife).

*Physical infliction of pain / punishment*

Inmates who are caught by their colleagues in the act of anal sex are often beaten by their fellow inmates before the wedding ceremony. Two of my informants, therefore, consider the physical pain inflicted on them as the risk involved with engaging in MSM in prison. According to Atamfo and Zanga who are both “husbands”, “We are at risk of being beaten severely by our colleagues and punished by the officers when caught”.

Suroku who is not involved in sexual activities however considers developing mental illness as a risk involved with MSM in prison. He tried to convince me when he said, “Some of them develop psychological problems especially the wives, you will see them talking to themselves and behaving abnormally”.

The above comments indicate that, what inmates consider as risk differs for each person and how they perceive risk is influenced by whether or not they are involved in sexual activities in prison.

*Minimizing the risk of HIV/AIDS*

Notwithstanding the above perceptions, my data suggest some inmates involved in sexual activities try to minimize the risk involved in engaging in unprotected anal sex. Answering the question as to how inmates involved in sexual activities reduce risk, the “black coat”, who was one of my respondents said,

*I know the only way, is to abstain from kpee, but some of them at times use polythene as condoms, but I don’t know if it can work like condoms, some of them also use Vaseline*
jelly to prevent friction which often results in sores, so I guess these are all protection methods.

Oyiwa, who is not involved in sexual activities, confirmed the “black coat’s” statement. He said,

Formally some of them were using plain polythene which was meant for bagging roasted ground nut or sugar, so when the prison officers saw what they were using the plain polythene for, they prevented us from having access to that polythene, there is no way you can get that polythene into prison anymore. So they do the kpee without any protection”.

Suroku, who is also not involved in sexual activities, revealed, “I only know of mercy cream, Vaseline or “Nkuto” (Shea Butter) which they normally use to reduce friction, which I think often causes trumu kuro (anal sores)”.

On the contrary, Atamfo, a “husband” convincingly told me he does not do anything to reduce the risk. He frankly said, “I don’t use anything”. Noko, who is also a “husband”, however, confirmed Oyiwa and Suroku’s assertion when he said, “Some people use polythene, but the question is, how much feeling can you get from that polythene? I would rather do it raw than to use polythene. It’s like eating, toffees with the wrapper on”.

Conclusion

My data indicates that risk is interpreted in a particular way by the inmates. Although there are other risks like being mocked or beaten by their colleagues during the “wedding ceremony”, or punished by the staff, inmates continually referred to HIV/AIDS and STDs when I asked them how they perceived their risk. This chapter focused on HIV/AIDS and STD’s in general, even though I originally did not intend to do so. This notwithstanding, my data indicates that inmates have knowledge about the risk involved with MSM in prison, but how they perceive that risk is influenced by whether or not they are involved in sexual activities in prison.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Discussion and Conclusion

Theoretical Perspectives

Adopting the practice theory of “the body we do” (Mol and Law 2004:45) and gender theory of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987), gave me insight as I observed how prisoners relate to each other, what they do as intimate sexual partners and how they perform their daily chores relative to the male or female “gender”. Adopting the meaning-centered approach (Good 1994) was helpful in understanding how masculinity and femininity are constructed within the prison. In addition, there is no better approach to observe the tactics prisoners employ in their daily practices, as a result of their limited agency, to manipulate the prison system to have space or “opportunities” to engage in sexual activities (De Certeau 1984: xix), than the method I used.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research explored the emic perspectives of prisoners on same-sex sexual practices. My main objectives were to understand what motivates inmates to engage in sexual activities, how they perceive their sexual practices and risk, as well as, how they identify themselves. In view of this, I presented what the constitution of Ghana says about MSM and the risk prisoners expose themselves to by engaging in same-sex sexual practices. Studies done on the topic in some parts of Africa and other parts of the world were also highlighted, showing that sex takes place in prisons and the inmates who engage in such sexual activities are motivated by a need for basic consumables and other factors. I showed the existing gap in the literature on this topic in Ghana, which this study helps to address. I also explored the importance of intimate sexual relationships in prison.

It is explicitly clear from my data that same-sex sexual activities take place in male prisons. Although the sexual orientation of an inmate can be a factor to influence an inmate to engage in MSM in prison, I disagree with Moseley and Tewksbury (2006), who said the best way to tell if an inmate will practice anal sex in prison is to find out if he ever practiced anal sex before incarceration. I also disagree with Hensley et al. (2005) who argued that an inmate with a homosexual orientation is at a greater risk of being targeted for sexual assaults than a prisoner who is fully heterosexual, since 5 of 6 of my informants, who are involved in sexual activities in
prison, were heterosexuals before incarceration and the remaining one was a bisexual. Only the bisexual informant had ever engaged in MSM before incarceration. Therefore, I argue that although the sexual orientation of an inmate can influence that prisoner to engage in MSM in prison, situational factors like the need for basic consumables such as food can influence an inmate to engage in same-sex sexual activities even though he is a heterosexual before custody and he has never practiced MSM.

Based on my empirical data, I argue in support of Gear and Ngubeni (2003), Singh (2007) and Jolofani and DeGabriele (1999) that there are “prison marriages” where those who assume the role of a “husband” or “wife” perform certain duties associated with that gender in most Ghanaian communities. However, what was unique in my fieldwork experience, in this particular prison, was the practice of holding a ”wedding ceremony” for inmates found in the act of MSM. The “bride” and the “groom” in this instance are not always happy participants, as the ceremony is viewed as a public humiliation for being found out.

However, it is clear that prisoners who engage in same-sex sexual activities are motivated as a result of the experience of an unmet need. It is also clear that the motivational factors for an inmate to initiate or propose a sexual relationship are different from the factors that motivate an inmate to accept a sexual proposal. Whereas the “husband” proposes to satisfy his sexual desires, to boost his masculine ego and to avoid household chores, the “wife” on the other hand accepts the sexual proposal in order to be given food, soap, drugs or to be protected from bullies or given some privileges in the prison. Although there may be other non-instrumental motivations for MSM, such as the need for love, affection or intimacy, the inmates did not mention these during the interviews.

My data indicates that the prisoners have knowledge about the risk involved with MSM in prison, but how they perceive the risk is influenced by whether they are involved in sexual activities in prison or not. Inmates are at risk of HIV infection (Stern 2006: 117, Potter and Tewksbury 2005; Sabitu et al. 2009; Dufour et al. 1996; Adjei 2006 and Simooya et al. 2001), since they engage in unprotected anal sex. If it is true that some of the inmates involved in MSM use plain polythene as condom, or lubricants like Vaseline during anal sex, the question is, whether the use of lubricants or polythene is meant to improve penetration or to reduce risk of sustaining anal sores or bruises? This is a matter for discussion. Although providing condoms to the inmates may help to reduce the risk as Farrel and Strang’s (1991:1477) suggested, I argue
that unless the inmates change their perception of risk, they may not use a condom even if it is
given to them free of charge.

It is worth noting that inmates, who engage in MSM in prison, consider their sexual
relationship as a heterosexual relationship and therefore do not identify themselves as
homosexuals or bisexuals, but rather as heterosexuals. Care should therefore be taken when
referring to them as homosexuals.

**Recommendation**

My position as a prison officer in Ghana, has put me in a fix, I therefore lack the courage
to make any recommendations. I am not in a position to give my opinion on the findings of this
study, but it is explicitly clear that the issue of food is real for the inmates. If the authorities are
serious about tackling the issue of MSM in prison and its health implications, then there is the
need to focus on improving the quality and quantity of food for inmates.

Having worked in Ghanaian prisons, I know that much has been done by the prison
service over the years to improve its health educational programmes for inmates and health
workers within the service, but looking at my empirical data, I am obliged to say that a lot more
needs to be done. It is therefore imperative on the prison service to intensify its health
educational programmes in all prison establishments in Ghana, without giving preference to a
particular prison.
Appendix

The Prison Parlance / Meaning

Below are a few examples of the prisoners’ jargon and I can say from my experience working in other prisons that, some of these jargons are used in other prisons either in a similar way or in a slightly different way.

1. A tourist……………………………………A new prisoner on admission
2. Line..............................................Having money or food / being rich
3. No line..........................................No money or food / being Poor
4. Kpee..............................................Sodomy / Homosexuality / Anal sex
5. Trumu trumu..................................Sodomy / Homosexuality / Anal sex
6. Warning shot..................................Erection of penis for anal sex
7. House arrest.................................A cell leader deciding to solve a major issue within the cell without informing prison officers
8. Cry your own cry...........................Everybody for himself
9. Booza..........................................Food is ready or food is coming
10. All bus.........................................Junior prison officer
11. All bus tenten paa / kesee paa..............Senior prison officer
12. Di wo fie asem..............................Mind your own business / A cell leader deciding to solve a major issue within the cell without informing prison officers
13. Apegya..........................................Arrest
14. Apparatus.....................................Ingredients for cooking (Onion, Pepper, tomatoes)
15. Canvas........................................Not leaders
16. Sen..............................................Warning / be careful.
17. Bell............................................Disturbances / exchange of words
18. Edwie..........................................Go out
19. Car abome....................................Item has been seized / lost something
20. Me ne abre sen wo.............................Hungry
22. Aprapra (morning and afternoon).........Go out

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23. *Aprapa (Evening)*…………………………..Bed time / Time for sweeping
24. *Zontoli*…………………………………………Soup
25. *Banku данка*…………………………………Prison ‘banku’ (food)
26. *Yen hwie hwie*……………………………The menu is ‘gari’
27. *Wontete*……………………………………The menu is ‘banku’
28. Roadooo……………………………………Give way
29. *Esheoo*……………………………………Hot / give way / danger
30. ‘Outsideee’……………………………………Trouble/ problem/ somebody has lost something.
31. *Eyera meto be*……………………………Warning / keep it well.
32. *Asore*……………………………………..Arrival of visitors.
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