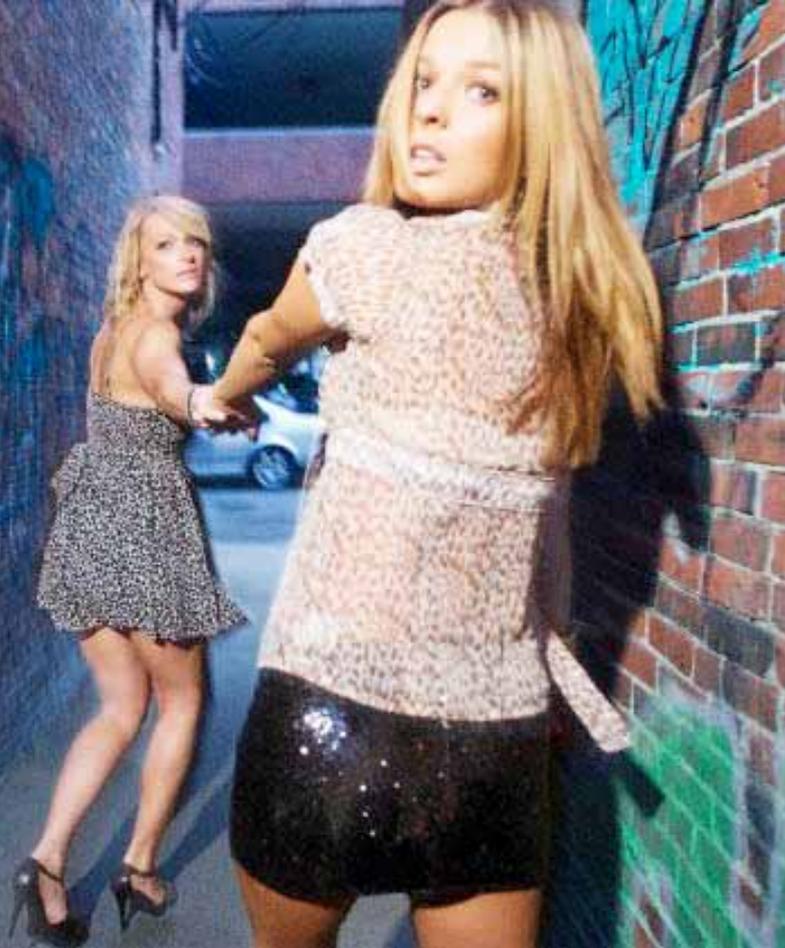


BAD girls

*Beware! Criminals
are using the fact that
we trust women more
than we trust men*



Would you trust an unfamiliar woman in need of money for petrol, or lend an old lady your phone to make an 'urgent' call? We like to believe we'd come to another woman's rescue if she needed help, because it's what we'd like done for us. We feel an unspoken bond of sisterhood in a largely patriarchal society. But the 'sisterhood bond' can be used as a trap. 'We should be as sceptical of women [as we are of men] when it comes to strangers,' says Laurie Pieters, a Pretoria offender profiler.

Crime by women is under-reported and statistics are outdated. In 1996, an online police report placed female prisoners at 2,3% of the total prisoner population. (In 2005 the percentage was still the same.)

Captain Ezra October of the Cape Town Police Station says the majority of women commit economic rather than violent crimes.

Female decoys count on you being blind-sided by their gender – and dress well to fool you further

'They're well dressed and impossible to pick out in a crowd,' he says. 'Frequently they're involved in crime because they're manipulated by boyfriends, for example, to become active participants – to work as shoplifters, as scouts who recruit robbery targets and prostitutes, and as decoys.'

THE RECRUITERS

In February last year, Cezanne Visser (aka 'Advocate Barbie') was sentenced to seven years in prison for abusing teenage girls and young women. She was found guilty of procuring and grooming these women to commit indecent sexual acts for her boyfriend, Dirk Prinsloo.

There are two primary motives for women's criminal behaviour: need and greed. Pieters notes that, while greed is solely a drive to improve economic status, need can include the survival instinct as well as a need for love and acceptance. This can mean that a woman such as Visser may 'commit crimes for her partner out of "love" in the belief that if she fulfils his needs then he will love her more,' says Pieters.

DECOY ALERT

Female decoys count on you being blind-sided by their gender – and dress well to fool you further. 'These criminals ask to borrow your cellphone or money for a taxi. In nightclubs, [a female criminal may] pretend to be alone, say some guy is making her uncomfortable and ask to sit with you. They gain your trust, "make friends" and, when you go to the bathroom, spike your drink,' says Pieters.

Decoys are hard to identify but there are a few things to look out for. 'Take note of where her eyes rest. Decoys are seldom alone and she'll keep looking at her accomplice,' says Pieters.

Never go out by yourself and never leave your drink unattended. Situational awareness is critical. Listen to your intuition even if the stranger next to you is a woman. 'If it feels wrong, it probably is wrong,' says Pieters. If you're attacked, fight to avoid being moved to a secondary location and draw attention by screaming. 'Consider keeping a small second phone concealed on you,' says Pieters. 'Criminals seldom search for a second one.'

Most importantly, stay calm and don't trust strangers – even women! ☘

