

**Managing Ties and Time: Men's and Women's Reports of Relationships  
During Men's Incarceration and Re-entry**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my partner, Darrell, and to our two sons, Miles and Darrell. The sacrifice was shared, and the rewards are shared too.

This dissertation is also dedicated to some of the strongest men I know—12839-424, K-73261, 11847-424, 11495-424, and B-65408—and to the women and children in their lives. To the prison system, you were a number; to your family and community, you are an asset.

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## **SUMMARY**

Examining correctional supervision's effect on intimate partner relationships is important in that strong family ties are crucial to male prisoners' post-release success. However, correctional control impedes normal family relationship functioning and often damages relationships such that they cannot be easily repaired, if at all. The need to maintain relationship ties through a system of control designed for isolation and punishment lies at the heart of this study.

I examined how correctional supervision through prison and parole affects intimate partner relationships among African Americans, using a secondary analysis of individual interview data collected through a qualitative multistate study of men in prison or on parole and the intimate partners of such men. First, I systematically studied the ways in which men's correctional supervision influenced the functioning of intimate partner relationships during incarceration and community reentry. Second, I observed how men and women manage their relationships during men's correctional supervision, exploring what was helpful and what was harmful to the relationship during this period. Finally, I examined relationship conflict, exploring relationship expectations and what occurred when those expectations were unmet.

Findings indicate that correctional supervision acts on relationships between men and women to diminish their value to each other, complicates relationship management and maintenance by creating barriers to contact, and alters expectations of each other, creating or exacerbating relationship conflict. Further, incarceration erodes trust between men and women, substantiating a need for both to demonstrate their trustworthiness or to verify it through other people. Finally, women described their experience of men's incarceration as a separate prison

### **SUMMARY (continued)**

characterized by their own contact with the correctional system, loneliness, depression, and limited support due to the contagious stigma of incarceration.

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore how correctional supervision through prison and parole affects intimate partner relationships among African Americans. Using secondary analysis of data collected through the Safe Return Initiative (Data Use Approval, Appendix A) to examine intimate partner conflict and violence during and after incarceration, I examined those data to understand how correctional supervision affects intimate relationship functioning.

The qualitative multistate primary study, Safe Return, analyzed intimate partner conflict and violence during men's incarceration and community reentry. This current study further examined the data, which was collected through individual interviews with African American men in prison and men on parole and with the female intimate partners of African American men in prison and men on parole.

My study took a different approach to the data: I systematically examined the ways in which men's correctional supervision influences the functioning of intimate partner relationships during incarceration and community reentry. That was the first objective. The second objective was to examine how men and women manage their relationships during men's correctional supervision, exploring what is helpful and what is harmful to the relationship during this period. This study also examined relationship conflict, exploring relationship expectations and what occurs when those expectations are unmet. That was the third objective. For this study, the term "intimate partner relationships" includes present and past marital and nonmarital relationships and assumed some level of emotional and physical intimacy (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015).

## **B. Background, Rationale, and Significance**

Incarceration affects the normal functioning of intimate partner relationships such that wives and girlfriends of men who are under correctional control metaphorically share their sentence. Researchers have referred to this condition as “sentenced by association” (Blake, 1990, p. 1), “doing time on the outside” (Braman, 2004), and to intimate partners of prisoners as “quasi-inmates” who are “doing time together” (Comfort, 2008). Research indicates that intimate relationships are, indeed, affected by incarceration (Bakker, Morris, & Janus, 1978; Harman, Smith, & Egan, 2007; Petersilia, 2003); this study focused on *how* they are affected and offers a systematic contextual analysis of those effects.

Studying the effect of incarceration on intimate partner relationships is important in that strong family ties are crucial to male prisoners’ post-release success (Hairston, 1988, 1991). Although it is not clear exactly *how* and *why* family contact is important to post-release success (Visher & Travis, 2003), family ties provide men under correctional control hope for the future after release (Fishman, 1990), connections to housing and employment after release (Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999), and ultimately play an important role in preventing relapse and recidivism (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Visher & Travis, 2013).

However, correctional control impedes normal family relationship functioning and often damages relationships such that they cannot be easily repaired, if at all (Lewis, 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005). This central conflict—the need to facilitate relationship ties through a system of control designed for isolation and punishment—lies at the heart of this study.

Several qualitative studies have examined the impact of incarceration on relationship dynamics. Some studies highlighted the perspectives of women who are the wives or girlfriends of men who are incarcerated (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990; Grinstead,

Faigeles, Bancroft, & Zack, 2001). Other related research focused on men's perspectives on relationships with women during and after incarceration (A. Goffman, 2009; Oliver & Hairston, 2008) as well as correctional policies and practices and their impact on the incarcerated father's ability to maintain family ties, especially ties with children (Braman, 2004; Hairston, 1991, 1998b; Nurse, 2002). To examine the effect of incarceration and reentry on intimate partnerships, two couples-based longitudinal studies took account of men's and women's perspectives together (Geller, Jaeger, & Pace, 2016; Lindquist et al., 2016). However, researchers indicate the difficulties of exploring intimate partners' perspectives simultaneously given the challenges of interest and cooperation of both parties, and the potential survey bias and non-response problems inherent in quantitative studies on the effects of incarceration (Geller et al., 2016). To gain both perspectives, it is helpful to study non-coupled men and women; that is, men and women who identified having an intimate partner during the incarceration period but were not coupled with one another. The qualitative study on domestic violence and prisoner reentry that the data from this study utilizes took this approach (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a).

Taking account of both men's and women's viewpoints places equal value on the perspectives of both partners and highlights the challenges and opportunities that are unique to each and are shared in maintaining intimate relationships while one party is under correctional control. Most of the qualitative studies on intimate partner relationships and incarceration use single-site convenience samples that are not generalizable to other communities (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). However, Hairston and Oliver's (2006a) small-scale multi-site study involved interviews with both men under correctional supervision and women whose intimate partners were under correctional supervision, adding a varied approach to the typical qualitative research in this area.

### **C. The Problem**

Research indicates that strong family ties are important to male prisoners' post-release success (Hairston, 1988, 1991). Support for consistent communication during incarceration may improve some intimate partner relationships when women adapt and recast their expectations to the realities of men's confinement (Comfort, 2008). Given the importance of family ties and consistent communication, correctional authorities could ensure that their institutions operate to facilitate family visits and communication with prisoners. Instead, incarceration places multiple demands on families, altering and sometimes permanently severing ties between men under correctional supervision and their intimate partners (Lopoo & Western, 2005). Incarceration's impact on marriage and family relations has been documented in research on prisoners and their families. However, no studies yet have offered a systematic examination of the impact of incarceration on intimate partner relationships using an ecological framework.

The strain of incarceration often has dire consequences for marriage. Lopoo and Western (2005) analyzed data from a 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, including over 12,000 men and women to examine incarceration's impact on marriage over two decades; their research indicates a strong positive relationship between incarceration and separation/divorce. Although the individual-level effects may be pronounced, aggregate effects were small, as very few men in this study (<2%) were in prison while married, in keeping with other research indicating that men at high risk of incarceration typically remain single. In married couples, other studies show that incarceration's effect on divorce is greater among non-fathers and those charged with major crimes (Apel, Blokland, Nieuwebeerta, & van Schellen, 2010), and fathers' incarceration reduces subsequent marriage and cohabitation (Lewis, 2010). Conversely, other large-scale research indicates that men's imprisonment increases the likelihood that new parents will separate

(Western, Lopoo, & McLanahan, 2004). The stress associated with new parenthood, coupled with the stress of incarceration, may be a stronger influence for marriage dissolution than not having a child in common.

Though many marriages end during incarceration, far fewer men in prison are married when they enter prison and are less likely to marry. The longitudinal research conducted by Lopoo and Western (2005) demonstrates the negative relationship between incarceration and becoming married. Never-incarcerated single men were 26% more likely to wed than single men with the experience of incarceration (Lopoo & Western, 2005). According to other research based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth in 2000 as compared to the Current Population Survey from that same year, about 25% of non-incarcerated African American men aged 22-30 were married, whereas only 11% of incarcerated African American men were married (Western et al., 2004). The benefits of committed intimate relationships—regardless of marital status—for returning prisoners and their families are documented in the literature, yet prison often creates more problems for families than it solves.

Examination of the problems created by incarceration using an ecological framework allows for a systematic analysis of the impact of correctional control on intimate partner relationships. This study applied an ecological framework to the analysis of the data and applied that same framework to the examination of the literature related to the effect of incarceration on intimate partner relationships. According to Arditti (2005), examining correctional control from an ecological perspective is important for social work in that it allows the opportunity to consider the roles, norms, and rules present at each contextual level. The ecological levels and related factors for consideration in this study are (a) macrosystemic factors (focusing on social stigma); (b) exosystemic factors (focusing on prison and parole conditions and community response to

reentry); (c) mesosystemic factors (focusing on interrelated contexts such as prison visiting rooms and parole home visits); and (d) microsystem impacts (focusing on the returning prisoner and intimate partner relationship). A synopsis of those factors is included in this section as a precursor to the full examination of the ecological framework as applied to incarceration and intimate partner relationships in the literature review section.

**1. Macrosystem factors.** An extensive examination of the macrosystemic factors related to correctional control, including related laws, policies, and social mores, was beyond the scope of this study. However, incarceration is stigmatizing, and the strain and stigma of correctional control experienced by both prisoners and their intimate partners has been documented in the literature on the impact of incarceration. People with criminal records often bear the label “criminal” or “convict” and may be considered amoral and perpetually untrustworthy (Braman, 2004), creating barriers to employment and housing (Chandler, 2003; Legal Action Center, 2014). Women are also stigmatized because of their intimate association with men who are under correctional supervision; they may be seen as accomplices, even if they were not involved in their partner’s criminal dealings (Girshick, 1996). Further, women may be treated suspiciously by corrections staff and family members alike, alienating them from both formal and informal supports (Braman, 2004). This has implications for successful relationship maintenance during and after a man’s incarceration.

**2. Exosystem factors.** The experience of incarceration affects prisoners psychologically and socially. Further, prison forcibly removes individuals from their family and community, and that removal has serious logistical and financial implications for intimate partners. The exosystemic factors—or factors related to the conditions of prison or parole in itself, and the experiences of community reentry—are examined at this level. Chief among them



are the psychological impacts of imprisonment, the distance of the prisoner from his community of origin, and the financial burden families experience related to his removal from the home. How prisons operate influences prisoners psychologically and, by extension, affects their intimate relationships. Prisons operate as single-sex facilities where expressions of manhood are both inflated and restricted; expressions of masculinity may include negative references to women, including each other's intimate partners (Nurse, 2001; Oliver, 1994). Typical roles for men as father and provider become constrained by the experience of incarceration, requiring dependence on the prison to have their basic needs met (Clemmer, 1958; Haney, 2002), fostering further dependency that spills over into intimate partnership dynamics post-prison (Oliver & Hairston, 2008).

The distance of the prison from the community often dictates how contact with an incarcerated family member is negotiated. The location of a correctional facility impacts the number of visitors and frequency of visits that a prisoner may receive. Often, prisons are located far from the prisoner's home, many times in rural, economically-depressed areas without public transportation (Hairston, 2002). The distance from family can strain relationships and increase the prisoner's sense of isolation from the outside world (Braman, 2004; Seymour, 2001), affecting social adjustment and recidivism post-release (Hairston, 1991, 1998a; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Visitors may not be able to afford the cost of travel (Braman, 2004), and caregivers of children may be unwilling to facilitate the child's visits with the incarcerated parent (Nurse, 2002; Seymour, 2001), especially given the burden of travel and related expenses.

The economic deprivation caused by removing an income-earner from the family creates significant financial strain for families that may already be struggling to make ends meet. Intimate partners likely need to work outside the home or pick up extra work, plus pay for the

childcare needed to maintain employment (Girshick, 1996). Most men in prison are unable to contribute financially to care for their children (Hairston, 1998). Furthermore, fathers in prison and those recently released are noncustodial parents who are required to pay child support (Rodriguez, 2016). If unable to do so, arrearages accumulate, and families often step in to assist with back payments to help the man under correctional control avoid further punishment (May & Roulet, 2005). This financial burden creates additional stress for intimate partner relationships and ignites or reinforces a cycle of poverty that is often difficult to escape for families experiencing incarceration.

Aside from support for children, intimate partners assume the financial burden associated with maintaining a relationship with a man in prison. Phone call charges, money to help meet his basic needs in prison, and travel expenses fall squarely on the woman (Braman, 2004; Grinstead et al., 2001). The costs of maintaining contact are both economic and emotional, and these strains influence how relationships are experienced and sustained.

**3. Mesosystem factors.** Maintaining contact with intimate partners during incarceration is logistically and emotionally challenging and is examined at the mesosystem level, providing an opportunity for analysis of interrelated contexts. Importantly, the procedures and conditions governing how contact is maintained during incarceration and family members' contact with parole after release are key factors for consideration at the mesosystemic level.

Prison conditions and procedures create barriers to the maintenance of positive relationships for both men under correctional supervision and their wives and girlfriends. For example, lack of privacy and inhospitable visiting procedures and facilities all create barriers to relationship maintenance. Incarceration is stigmatizing for those incarcerated and for families,

which also negatively influences to the ability to maintain and manage an intimate partnership (Braman, 2004).

The lack of privacy while under correctional control impedes the maintenance of intimate partner relationships (Fishman, 1990). If something personal needs to be communicated between a prisoner and an intimate partner, typically it cannot be done privately, as corrections staff read all inmate correspondence, routinely record phone calls, and closely monitor visits, which may require “no contact,” prohibiting even hugging and hand holding (Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Nurse, 2002). Furthermore, visitors are routinely subjected to both vehicle and body searches to search for contraband prior to being admitted to the visiting area (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). A qualitative study of California prison wives revealed repeated requests to remove wigs, take down carefully constructed hairdos, and submit to cavity searches to look for contraband (Girshick, 1996). Both personal and interpersonal privacy are non-existent in a correctional setting.

Even in an environment that prioritizes security and containment over connection with family, visits help maintain some sense of normalcy in intimate partner relationships while a man is incarcerated. However, prison visitation rules impede relationship development and maintenance (Nurse, 2002), and the restrictive extent of the environment has implications for family functioning (Lerner, Sparks, & McCubbin, 1999).

Visiting rooms and procedures emphasize correctional control over family connection; from facility to facility, the structure may vary but the intent to maintain security is the top priority. Children and adult visitors typically must wait in long security lines to enter, then pass through metal detectors, and may be asked to submit to a body search (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). Some visiting rooms have chairs bolted to the floor, prescribing where the prisoner and

visitor sits (Arditti, 2003), whereas other visiting rooms require prisoners and visitors to keep their knees at a 90-degree angle to each other (Girshick, 1996). Some facilities allow minimal contact during a visit, whereas other facilities are strictly “no contact” (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). Parents are expected to control their children’s movement, but without opportunities and space for play (Arditti, 2003).

Even though visits are logistically demanding for families, many still look forward to the opportunity to interact with a loved one who is incarcerated. However, correctional policies and practices exist that prohibit visits. For instance, even a routine visitor who is known at the facility but may have forgotten her identification documents will not be allowed access to the visit (Girshick, 1996). Further, visits are not allowed if a prisoner has been placed in administrative segregation, which alienates prisoners from the support of intimate partners, family, and friends (Haney, 2002).

After release from prison, contact with parole officers may influence how intimate partners relate. Family contact with parole officers is common, and research indicates that intimate partners are ambivalent about reunification with a returning prisoner and the role of parole. Intimate partners often want to see a loved one succeed in the community, but may also be inclined to work with parole officers to help monitor his behavior (Naser & Visser, 2006). By cooperating with parole, women may possess power over their intimate partner that might not otherwise be present (Oliver & Hairston, 2008).

**4.      Microsystem impacts.** The involuntary separation imposed by incarceration profoundly influences intimate partner relationships. The removal of a prisoner from his family

is both physical and psychological, and the aforementioned macrosystemic, exosystemic, and mesosystemic factors all influence the intimate partner relationship at the microsystemic level.

During incarceration, families may have reconstructed themselves in the prisoner's absence to compensate for the lost emotional and financial supports (Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2003). The removal from the family and the ways that both parties manage it *vis-à-vis* correctional control reveal sources of conflict between prisoners and intimate partners.

Parenting from prison presents numerous challenges, and relationships with children's mothers are key to maintaining contact with children. Maintaining relationships with children and intimate partners represents a common source of conflict for incarcerated men (Nurse, 2002).

Another source of conflict relates to differing expectations of contributions to the intimate partner relationship. Often, men in prison make promises that they cannot reasonably fulfill (Fishman, 1990; Hairston & Oliver, 2006a), and they also have expectations of a woman's commitment, loyalty, and sexual fidelity (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990; Oliver & Hairston, 2008). Conversely, women often expect men to settle down and avoid street life after release from prison consistent with the promises he made while incarcerated (Fishman, 1990; Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). They may expect him to contribute to the family financially but also respect the changes they have undergone to achieve independence and self-sufficiency in his absence (Oliver & Hairston, 2006a; Travis et al., 2003). When these changes include securing another companion, whether temporary or permanent, conflict is almost inevitable (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990; Oliver & Hairston, 2008).

#### **D. Introduction Summary and Conclusion**

There is a need to study how men in prison and their intimate partners are affected by incarceration and how they manage their relationships during a man's correctional supervision. This study explored how correctional control affects intimate relationship functioning, based on the premises that correctional supervision alters normal intimacy and that when a man is incarcerated or on parole, he, his wife or girlfriend, and their relationship are all affected. This is particularly true for African American intimate partnerships, given disproportionate rates of incarceration experienced by this group. How they manage their ties during men's incarceration and reentry was the focus of this study. This study contributes to the body of knowledge marshalled to address this problem by focusing on how correctional supervision resulting from incarceration and/or parole supervision in the community affects intimate partner relationship dynamics among African Americans, particularly African American men subject to correctional supervision and their female partners.

This study contributes to practice, policy, and research where the field of social work intersects with corrections. By examining the ways in which correctional control affects intimate partner relationship functioning, this study reveals opportunities to strengthen social work and corrections partnerships in favor of family-sensitive practices with men involved in the justice system and their wives and girlfriends. Also, this study shows opportunities to improve correctional policies and practices as they affect the intimate partner relationships that are critical to post-prison success. Focusing solely on the needs of incarcerated individuals leaves the families of those who are incarcerated with little support and misses an opportunity to assist those who are often closest to, and who can make the largest difference for, a returning prisoner. Family support may interrupt the cycle of criminal behavior and incarceration (Shapiro, 1999).

African Americans are overrepresented in U.S. prisons and jails, and African American intimate partnerships and families have been altered, perhaps for generations to come, by mass incarceration. Unless the current trend is reversed, incarceration may become the most significant factor contributing to the breakdown of African American families in decades (King, 2003). Researchers underscore the importance of examining and calling out the ways in which government institutions and their policies disproportionately affect African American men (King, 2003; Roberts, 2004) and women (Ferraro, 2008; Grinstead et al., 2001; Miller, 1999; M. M. Morris, 2016; Richie, 2012). Given this charge and given the disproportionate rates of incarceration of African Americans in the U.S., this qualitative study critically examined the ways in which both African American men and women experience men's correctional supervision in the context of their intimate partner relationship. This study brings African American men's and women's voices to the forefront of our public discourse about the impact of correctional control on intimate partner relationships, from which we can understand what is needed to create and sustain nurturing homes for the next generation, and ultimately, to create a just and equitable society.

## **II. Conceptual Framework and Research Questions**

The conceptual framework and research questions for this study are described in this chapter. The first section describes the conceptual framework, the second section names the research questions that the study has been designed to address, and the final section discusses this study's relevance to the social work profession.

### **A. Conceptual Framework**

The ecological model provides a framework for considering the multiple and layered contexts that families and prisoners operate within, shedding light on the impact of incarceration on intimate partner relationships. This framework also provides a context for scientific contributions from the field of social work in addition to contributions from the field of criminal justice to help explicate the experiences of prisoners' families (Arditti, 2005).

The ecological theoretical framework conceptualizes that human behavior and social experiences result from both autonomous and symbiotic factors existing concurrently at multiple contextual levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Social context refers to the physical, institutional, and social settings in which people interact and something happens. According to Arditti (2005), examining correctional control from an ecological perspective is important for social work in that it allows the opportunity to consider the roles, norms, and rules present at each contextual level. This approach supports the development of ecologically sensitive practice and facilitates understanding of the ways in which incarceration changes family interactions and structures, resulting in a "chain of adversity" (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999) both for the prisoner and for his intimate partner.

An ecological framework highlights the links in this chain by allowing for examination of the factors present at each contextual level, and, for the purposes of this study, facilitates analysis



of the impact of selected macro-, meso-, and exo-level carceral practices and conditions on micro-level intimate partner interactions (Arditti, 2005). Adapted from Arditti's (2005) application of the ecological model to examination of the impact of incarceration on families, Figure 1 outlines the systemic levels to be examined and the key concepts related to this study at each level.

SYSTEMIC LEVEL	CONSTRUCT OF INTEREST
Macrosystem	Laws, social mores; social stigma related to incarceration
Exosystem	Prison conditions; parole policies and practices; community response to reentry
Mesosystem	Intimate partner visits, calls, and letters; contact with parole
Microsystem	Intimate partner relationship

Figure 1. Ecological framework applied to incarceration and intimate partner relationships.  
Adapted from Arditti (2005).

Using this framework allows for systematic contextual examination and analysis of conditions at the macrosystem level (focusing on broad social and political contexts); exosystem level (focusing on community and institutional contexts); the mesosystem level (focusing on interrelated microsystems); and the microsystem level (focusing on the individual). Within this ecological framework, this study examined intimate partner relationships at the microsystem level. Intimate partner relationships include both marital and non-marital relationships and assume some level of emotional and physical intimacy. This includes current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends (Breiding et al., 2015).

Macro-, exo-, and mesosystemic factors will be examined in light of their impact on microsystem relationship dynamics. The broader social mores and legal policies and contexts that the macrosystem highlights are important to fully understanding the impact of incarceration on intimate partner relationship dynamics, but thorough examination of those factors was beyond the scope of this study. However, the social stigma associated with prison and parole was examined in light of the stereotypes that incarceration brings to both the incarcerated person and to the family, and the impact of those stereotypes on intimate relationship functioning.

For this study, the analysis occurred primarily at the exosystem and mesosystem levels. The exosystem level allows for examination of corrections conditions generally, including institutional policies and practices, parole policies and practices, and community response to reentry. This includes post-prison experiences with housing, employment, and systems that govern contact with and support for children, such as mandated supervised visitation and child support enforcement.

The mesosystem level allows for examination of linkages between home and prison, paying particular attention to family visiting policies, procedures, and conditions. The mesosystem was used to illuminate how key contexts interrelate. Given that this study was concerned with the impact of correctional policies and procedures on relationship dynamics, the key contexts for examination at the mesosystem level are the connections between corrections (prison and parole) and home. Communications governed by prison, including phone calls, letters and in-person visits, were all examined at the mesosystem level. Visitation in prison serves as the chief opportunity for in-person interaction between incarcerated individuals and their intimate partners, and therefore warrants close examination of its impact on intimate relationships. The reentry counterpart to prison visitation is home visits by parole officers or other types of family contact with parole, which were examined for influence on relationship dynamics.

Examining the microsystem, or intimate partner relationship in itself, facilitates understanding of the impact of the macrosystem, exosystem, and mesosystem men's and women's relationship functioning vis-à-vis adaptations to men's correctional supervision.

## **B. Research Questions**

This study examined how correctional supervision (e.g., incarceration and/or parole supervision) affects intimate partner relationship dynamics among African Americans, particularly African American men subject to correctional supervision and their female partners. Given disproportionate rates of incarceration of African American men in the U.S., this study focused specifically on this demographic group.

**1. Research question one.**

How do African American men and women characterize the impact of correctional supervision (imprisonment or parole supervision in the community) on their intimate relationships?

**2. Research question two.** How do African American men and women manage their relationships during incarceration and during community reentry? In addition, two secondary questions were addressed with regard to this question: What is helpful to relationships during incarceration and reentry? And what is harmful to relationships during incarceration and during community reentry?

**3. Research question three.** What relationship conflicts arise during a man's incarceration and/or during his return to the community from prison? Two secondary questions were addressed: What do men and women expect of one another during men's incarceration and reentry? And how do men and women manage unmet expectations of each other during incarceration and reentry?

**C. Relevance to Social Work**

With these research questions as a guide, this study contributes to the important discussion of how to help African American men and women manage relationship challenges related to the correctional control that many African American men experience in the U.S. To explicate relationship challenges, this study sheds light on the correctional policies and practices that influence relationship functioning. By improving our understanding of the nexus between relationship challenges and correctional supervision, this study offers recommendations for programs, policy, and future research.

### **III. Review of the Relevant Literature**

The United States incarcerates more individuals than any other country in the world, and African Americans are incarcerated disproportionately to their percentage in the U.S. population and when compared to Whites and Hispanics (Travis et al., 2014). One may infer, then, that African American families are disproportionately impacted when a family member is incarcerated. Incarceration can significantly alter family functioning, and while a loved one is incarcerated, families may metaphorically share the sentence with the prisoner, “doing time on the outside” (Braman, 2004).

This literature review critically examines research on incarceration in the U.S., prisoner reentry, and family ties during correctional supervision. The review specifically focuses on research on the experience of correctional control for African American male prisoners and African American female intimate partners given disproportionate rates of incarceration for African Americans in the U.S. (Carson, 2015; Harrison & Beck, 2004).

This review commences with an analysis of incarceration literature, comprising (a) a synopsis of relevant studies on correctional control and intimate partner relationships, (b) an overview of incarceration trends in the U.S., and (c) the experience of incarceration for prisoners or parolees and their intimate partners. Next, this section moves to an analysis of the literature following the ecological framework, examining (a) macrosystemic factors, focusing on social stigma; (b) exosystemic factors, focusing on the conditions of prison, parole, and community reentry; (c) mesosystemic factors, focusing on how couples maintain contact during incarceration and the dynamics during parole supervision; and (d) microsystemic impacts on intimate partner relationships, typical sources of relationship conflict between intimates during and after a man’s stay in prison.

This review of the empirical data on incarceration and intimate partner relationships drew from a number of qualitative and quantitative studies that have contributed to our understanding of this subject. The major studies serving as the basis for this review are discussed here and provide a context for an analysis of their strengths and limitations as well as their focus on African American incarcerated men and their intimate partners.

#### **A. Synopsis of Relevant Studies on Correctional Control and Intimate Partner Relationships**

This section sets the stage for an examination of the relevant research and offers a snapshot of empirical studies addressing the impact of correctional control on intimate partner relationships by examining their limitations, with information on findings to follow in subsequent sections.

Incarceration strains intimate partner relationships and often has deleterious effects on marriage. Using a dataset of over 12,000 men and women, Lopoo and Western (2005) found a strong positive relationship between incarceration and separation/divorce and a likelihood of divorce in the year a man is incarcerated to be triple that of a man who was convicted but not incarcerated. This finding is consistent with other studies on incarcerated men's family relationships (Hairston, 1989, 1995; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 1998). New parenthood may also correlate positively with divorce in marriages where a man is incarcerated. According to analysis of data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, new parents are at greater risk of separation when a man goes to prison (Western et al., 2004). However, rates of marriage among African Americans and among incarcerated men are lower than in the general population (Lopoo & Western, 2005; Western et al., 2004), emphasizing the need to understand the context of intimate partner relationships regardless of marital status. Several studies have sought to

increase understanding of intimate partner relationship functioning during correctional supervision.

In the last 15 years, two large-scale longitudinal studies have contributed to our understanding of incarceration and intimate partner relationships—the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Princeton Center on Child Wellbeing, 2002) and the Multisite Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (HHS, 2012). While both studies focused on vulnerable families, each included a focus on parental incarceration and its impact on family functioning. Importantly, both studies interviewed coupled men and women—men who had the experience of incarceration and women who were the wives or girlfriends of those men—to counter the survey bias and non-response problems typical of studies examining the effect of incarceration (Fragile Families, 2002). Neither study focused exclusively on African Americans but the large subsamples used to examine incarceration and relationships in each study (MFS IP,  $N = 647$ ; Fragile Families,  $N = 3,867$ ) and percentages of African Americans (MFS, 50%; Fragile Families, 48%) help ensure greater reliability and generalizability in these multisite studies.

“Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry” (Naser & Visser, 2006) was a landmark multistate longitudinal study of prisoner reentry that examined family support post-release through interviews with prisoners before and after release and with family members of each prisoner approximately three months after the prisoner’s release. Whereas 90% of the 247 participants in the relevant subsample were African American, over half were female blood relatives or step-relatives of returning prisoners, and only 1 in 5 were intimate partners.

Other smaller quantitative studies have made contributions to our understanding of incarceration and relationship dynamics. Carlson and Cervera (1992) studied the impact of an

extended family visiting program in a New York prison on marriage functioning, finding that lack of recidivism post-release was related to ongoing contact facilitated by the program and a stable and supportive family environment; about one-third of the study participants were African American, and few extended family visiting programs exist today (Travis et al., 2003). Both Freeland-Braun (2012) and Harris (2015) conducted studies on intimate partner violence and reentry, revealing the need to understand pre-prison relationship conflict on post-prison intimate partner violence.

To facilitate an understanding of the context of relationships impacted by incarceration, several seminal qualitative studies on incarceration and intimate partner relationships have focused on women's experiences with men's incarceration. P. Morris's (1965) groundbreaking research on the experiences of wives of incarcerated men in England and Wales created a touchstone for future research in this area, but obviously lacks the context of incarceration in America and its implications for African American families. Twenty-five years later, Fishman (1990) conducted 30 interviews with Caucasian women in Vermont who were the wives of incarcerated men to understand how they cope with a spouse's incarceration. Although Fishman's study is cited widely in literature on incarceration and families, it lacks a focus on the experiences of African Americans. Girshick (1996) conducted 25 interviews with women visiting paramours at Soledad Correctional Facility in California; one-fifth of the study participants were African Americans. These authors are criticized for their inattention to race and their lack of analysis of the differential impact of incarceration on African Americans, given disproportionate rates of confinement in the U.S. (Comfort, 2008).

Comfort (2008) and Grinstead et al. (2001) studied women visiting intimate partners incarcerated at San Quentin Correctional Facility in California to learn about their experiences



with visitation and with relationship concerns. While their small studies included some African Americans and discussed race, neither focused intentionally or exclusively on that population. Fifty percent of the study participants in Comfort's (2008) research with 50 women were African American, as were 37% of the women in Grinstead et al.'s research with 153 women. With the exception of Fishman's (1990) study in Vermont, these studies were conducted in one facility, using convenience samples that were not generalizable to other communities. Such issues are typical of qualitative research on incarceration and intimate partner relationships (Travis et al., 2014, p. 275).

Some studies of men under correctional supervision have included a focus on intimate partner relationships and families, mostly in the context of incarcerated fathers' relationships with their children. Nurse (2002) conducted interviews with 258 young fathers incarcerated in youth detention facilities in California; although there were some older youth nearing adulthood, the study excluded adult males. Hairston (1988, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2007) and Hairston and Lockett (1987) have written extensively about incarcerated fathers' roles in the lives of their children, parenting from prison, and the correctional programs, policies, and procedures that influence family connections and functioning during incarceration and post-release, including analysis of the differential impact on African Americans.

Other seminal qualitative studies on incarceration and intimate partner relationships have included both men and women as respondents to allow for a more complete picture of relationship dynamics. Braman (2004) conducted significant ethnographic fieldwork over three years in Washington, D.C., with 50 families of incarcerated men. However, his detailed account of those families' experiences lacks a description of the demographics of the respondents, making it difficult to interpret and generalize his findings.

Hairston and Oliver (2006a) conducted a multistate qualitative study of 59 African American incarcerated or paroled men and 29 African American women who were the non-coupled intimate partners of incarcerated or paroled men to understand conflict and violence during and after men's incarceration. This multistate study was conducted with men in prison and with men on parole in those same states. Interviews were with women in those same communities (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). The study intentionally and exclusively focused on African Americans, and its multisite approach increases its generalizability to other communities. However, the study lacked an explicit focus on how the stigma of incarceration influences access to help and on the explicit expectations that intimate partners have of one another during and after a man's incarceration, including how unmet expectations are managed.

## **B. Incarceration Trends**

The population of prisoners in the United States is the largest in the world. Approximately 1 in 100 adults in the U.S. is incarcerated, which is between 5 and 10 times the rate of incarceration in other democracies (Travis et al., 2014). As of 2012, the incarceration rate had increased by fourfold since 1972, an unprecedented prison growth rate not only for the U.S. but for the world (Travis et al., 2014). The four decades of rapid growth in the prison population can be largely attributed to trend changes in sentencing policy. The development of sentencing guidelines and procedures was intended to increase the "certainty and severity of prison sentences," particularly for drug crimes and violent crimes (Travis et al., 2014, p. 44). The primary policy changes occurred with the use of "mandatory minimum sentences, 'three strikes' laws, laws labeled 'truth-in-sentencing,' and laws mandating life without possibility of parole for certain offenses" (Travis et al., 2014, p. 44). This span of four decades in American history is widely accepted as a period of "mass incarceration."

The incarceration rate or number of prisoners compared to the general population began to decline in 2008 and has continued to decline overall based on analysis of 2014 data on imprisonment in the U.S. (Carson, 2015; Kaeble, Glaze, Tsoutis, & Minton, 2015). In 2014, approximately 6,851,000 adults were under correctional supervision, including prison, jail, and community supervision, representing a decline of about 52,200 from 2013 (Carson, 2015; Kaeble et al., 2015). Of that, more than half were under community supervision (Carson, 2015; Kaeble et al., 2015). Forty-four percent of the decline from 2013 can be accounted for by a decrease in the community supervision population; the remainder of the decline can be accounted for by a rise in the U.S. adult resident general population (Carson, 2015; Kaeble et al., 2015). The incarcerated population slightly increased during 2014 as compared to 2013 (Carson, 2015; Kaeble et al., 2015).

The term “mass incarceration” is a misnomer—incarceration is not experienced equally across all U.S. populations. Racial disparities in incarceration exist relative to the general population, related largely to differential arrest patterns driven by sentencing policies and case processing disproportionately affecting African Americans (Travis et al., 2014). According to a 2003 analysis, an estimated one-third of all Black males will serve time in prison at some point in their lives if incarceration rates remain constant (Harrison & Beck, 2004). This stands in contrast to incarceration rate predictions for Hispanic males (1 in 6) and White males (1 in 17). While an analysis of 2014 data revealed that incarceration rates in the U.S. were trending slightly downward overall, the racial disparity in incarceration rates persisted. In 2014, 6% of all Black males ages 30 to 39 were incarcerated, whereas only 2% of Hispanic males and 1% of White males in their thirties were incarcerated (Carson, 2015). Incarceration, and the impact of correctional policies and practices, was disproportionately experienced by African American

men, and, by extension, their intimate partners and their families. This review explored the ways in which prison affects intimate partner relationship functioning when a man is incarcerated or on parole, using an ecological framework to guide the analysis.

### **C. Macrosystem Factors: The Stigma of Incarceration**

Even though the scope of macrosystem factors influencing prisoners and their families is far reaching, the laws, polices, and social mores affecting how individuals interact with the criminal justice system and respond to those who are involved in it was beyond the scope of this review and study. However, this review considered the social stigma of incarceration as a key macrosystem factor given that it was referenced in several qualitative studies as influencing intimate partner relationships (Braman, 2004; Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996; Koenig, 1985).

Social stigma is an ascribed quality or characteristic that is socially discrediting such that it causes an individual to be classified as undesirable and excluded or rejected by others. Key components of stigma include labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination; for stigma to occur, power must be enacted (Link & Phelan, 2001). The association between stigma and incarceration has been examined at the individual and family level and is thought to lead to their stereotyping, discrimination, and disenfranchisement (Braman, 2004; Richie, 2012).

People under correctional supervision bear the label “criminal” or “convict,” rooted in stereotypes that influence notions both inside and outside prison about whether an individual is trustworthy and deserving of support (Girshick, 1996), and these stereotypes extend to both prisoners and their intimate partners. One may assume a negative relationship between stigma and incarceration; given the rise in incarceration rates, a criminal record would become normative, thereby reducing the stigma associated with criminal justice involvement. However, research indicates otherwise. Stigma influences how individuals access help during and after

incarceration, which influences their ability to stay together as a couple (Braman, 2004). Stigma is contagious. When returning prisoners and intimate partners experience stigma and shame as a barrier to help, the risk of separation or divorce increases post-release (Braman, 2004; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Massoglia, Remster, & King, 2011, Richie, 2012). Self-perceptions of stigma versus enacted rejection experiences also matter. Higher perceived stigma from incarceration is associated with higher rates of parole violations, weaker social bonds, and stronger identification with others who have had the experience of incarceration (LeBel, 2012).

The stigma of a criminal record can have real and long-lasting effects on employment and housing opportunities and on post-release support. Due in part to employers' and landlords' perceptions about the character of people with criminal records, obtaining employment and stable housing becomes difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals (Braman, 2004; Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2006; Pager, 2003). While the association between stigma and access to jobs and housing has been demonstrated, perceived stigma has been shown to be higher than experienced stigma in some cases (Lebel, 2012). Yet, Braman's (2004) ethnographic study of incarcerated men and families indicates that men's inability to earn a decent living and support the family—linked in part to unmet child support obligations—was at least as shameful and stigmatizing as the incarceration itself. Therefore, the impact of the stigma of incarceration during marriage may increase the risk of relationship dissolution post-release (Braman, 2004; Lopoo & Western, 2005).

Like economic costs, the stigma of correctional control is spread across families and communities, non-offenders whom the system is supposed to protect (Braman, 2004). Women are stigmatized because of their relationship with men who are incarcerated or on parole, and may be seen as complicit in their intimate partner's criminal dealings, making them guilty by

association (Girshick, 1996). Scholars contend that guilt by association colors the ways in which women are treated by correctional staff. In qualitative studies involving wives of prisoners, women reported that guards treated them distrustfully, disrespectfully, and even contemptuously (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996; Koenig, 1985), arbitrarily changing visiting rules, creating an even bigger barrier to connection for an incarcerated man and his wife or girlfriend (Koenig, 1985). Furthermore, family and community may also label and stigmatize women on the outside for their affiliation with prisoners, alienating her from support; how well she copes with the stigma may be mediated by the length of time she has shared his sentence (Fishman, 1990). When stigma leads to silence, family members do not get help when they need it, and the impact of incarceration becomes obscured (Braman, 2004; Richie, 2012). Ultimately, the shame of incarceration may be too much for partners to bear, and stigma may lead to relationship dissolution pre- or post-release from prison (Braman, 2004; Lopoo & Western, 2005).

Studies have examined the ways in which stigma affects prisoners and their intimate partners, with some attention to the influence on relationship dynamics (Braman, 2004; Fishman, 1990). How stigma influences access to resources, such as jobs, housing, and other forms of help, is clear (Braman, 2004; Holzer et al., 2006; Pager, 2003). What is less clear is how stigma influences the ways in which intimate partners manage their relationships and seek help in doing so.

#### **D. Exosystem Factors: Incarceration and Reentry**

This section explores the exosystemic factors related to correctional control that influence intimate partner relationships, examining the experience of incarceration and reentry on individuals and their intimate partnerships. Particular attention is paid to the experiences of and

conditions created by prison and by parole supervision, and the experiences related to achieving stability post-release through housing, employment, and family reunification.

### **1. Prisoners' experiences with prison.**

Incarceration can play a rehabilitative role for some prisoners who have access to programs and supports. Such supports can include a focus on healthy relationships, parenting, addiction recovery, general education, and preparation for community reentry. Participation in such programs has been linked to lower recidivism rates and to benefits to a prisoner's family and community (Lindquist, 2009). However, availability of prison-based programming has drastically declined in recent years. Program cuts may be due to state budget constraints, correctional officer shortages, and a correctional philosophy shift from rehabilitation to punishment (Lindquist, 2009; Travis & McBride, 2003). Absent these supports, the numerous challenges of incarceration may become magnified. While in prison, individuals face challenges related to structural factors, such as prison conditions and location, institutionalization via the structure of the prison experience, and correctional policies, especially those impeding ties with family.

The experience of prison removes individuals from the workforce and separates them from their families and communities. It may be argued that removing prisoners from the outside world is the greatest factor influencing prisoners and their families, how prisons operate also affects individuals and their important family relationships. First, prisons operate as a single-sex facility, either housing all men or all women (Nurse, 2002). Prisoners can live in multi-bed dormitories, shared cells, or single cells with varying hours of movement permitted outside the cell or dormitory, depending on the security level of the facility (high security vs. low security; Paulus & Dzindolet, 1993). The security level affects how prisons manage inmates (Camp,

1999). Prisoners may have a work assignment or prison industry job, or participate in other activities like vocational training, educational classes, or treatment programs (Petersilia, 2003). However, few prisoners participate in these opportunities, likely due to lack of program availability (Petersilia, 2003; Travis et al., 2003). Lack of opportunities to gain work experience, to earn even meager amounts of money, or to participate in rehabilitative programming while in prison put men at a disadvantage when reuniting with an intimate partner after release.

Expressions of manhood become both constrained and exaggerated while men are in prison. Given that men in prison do not possess the ability to express masculinity in “free world” terms relative to manhood roles imposed by their community norms (Oliver, 1994), expressions of masculinity in prison are prescribed by this hierarchical, same-sex environment and may include tough talk, use of the weight room for body building, and acts of physical aggression (Nurse, 2001). For men, spending 24 hours each day with same-sex peers can lead to exaggerated expressions of toughness and masculinity, including negative talk about women, generally, and each other’s intimate partners, specifically, to affirm their manhood (Nurse, 2002). This can carry over into communication with intimate partners, especially related to investigating accusations of her lack of faithfulness based on reports from fellow prisoners and others (Nurse, 2002; Oliver & Hairston, 2008).

Prison inverts the power balance between men and women (Nurse, 2002). In the outside world, men may come and go as they wish and operate relatively independently from women. They can contribute economically and act with reciprocity (Braman, 2004). They can also more easily monitor women’s behavior to ensure their faithfulness (Oliver & Hairston, 2008). The structure of confinement changes all of this, and the lack of power in intimate partner relationships is a source of stress for men in prison (Nurse, 2002).



Adjustment to the demands of life in a controlled environment bears costs on the psychological well-being of prisoners. The unprecedented increase in the prison population over the last several decades has led to widespread overcrowding, affecting housing conditions, prisoner safety, and access to programming (Haney, 2002). Overcrowding conditions leading to increased conflicts among prisoners and cramped quarters can exacerbate existing conflict or create new problems (Haney, 2002). In the face of overcrowding, the prisoner to staff ratio is higher, leading to the use of more punitive responses, such as confinement or segregation, to control conflict (Haney, 2002). When placed in segregation, prisoners are typically housed in a one-person cell and separated from the general prison population as well as from visitors. Segregation further alienates prisoners from important sources of support, including visits from family and friends (Haney, 2002).

Even in prisons operating at or below capacity, the extraordinary demands of prison life have well-documented negative effects on confined individuals, such as dependence on the prison structure, hypervigilance, and limited emotional expression (Haney, 2002). Life in a controlled environment requires individuals to give up freedom and autonomous decision-making, thereby relinquishing care, initiative, and control to the system. Many prisoners adapt to the loss of freedom by becoming dependent on the system that they may have formerly resisted. This process is known as institutionalization or prisonization (Clemmer, 1958). Institutionalization may affect a prisoner's decision-making capacity and self-initiation both while incarcerated and after release (Haney, 2002). The impact of institutionalization is compounded by the length of the prison sentence (Haney, 2002), and African Americans are incarcerated at higher rates and receive longer sentences for some crimes relative to their White and Hispanic counterparts (Fischman & Schanzenbach, 2012). Research with intimate partners

of men in prison validated that the prison experience fosters dependence on the system, making post-prison adjustment to the demands of home and community challenging (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a).

Dangerous prison environments give prisoners reason to become distrustful and suspicious of other inmates and of corrections staff, leading to a hypervigilant psychological state in relation to perceived threats (Haney, 2002). Intimate sharing and authentic emotional connection are considered signs of weakness, especially in men's prisons, and as a result, prisoners often develop a protective defense that involves overly controlling emotional responses (Haney, 2002), making emotional connection with intimate partners not only more challenging but potentially more dangerous for the prisoner.

**2. Intimate partners' experiences with prison.** Research indicated that strong family ties are important to male prisoners' post-release success (Hairston, 1988, 1991). Whether a prisoner is married or single, intimate partnerships play an important role in the prison experience and transition back home, and incarceration affects intimate partners and the relationship itself, to varying degrees. This section provides an overview of the impact of prison supervision from the perspective of the intimate partner, highlighting the role of finances, parenting, and unmet emotional needs *vis-à-vis* removal of a man from the household through incarceration. The important role of visitation is discussed in the context of communication in the section on mesosystemic factors, or interrelated contexts, examining where prison and home interconnect. However, a prison's distance from home influences connection to family and is discussed here as a structural consideration.

**3. Prison location.** Visits to prison must occur within the prison's stated visiting hours and are affected by number of other factors. An intimate partner's ability to visit a man in

prison depends in part on the logistical feasibility of the trip. Distance creates barriers to maintaining contact with prisoners. A study involving over 200 family members of prisoners revealed that distance was the most often cited obstacle to maintaining contact with incarcerated family members (Naser & Visser, 2006). The distance from family can strain relationships and increase the prisoner's sense of isolation from the outside world (Naser & Visser, 2006; Seymour, 2001) potentially affecting social adjustment and recidivism post-release.

**4. Finances.** Financial concerns are of great importance to individuals under correctional supervision and to their families. Families may have struggled financially prior to the experience of familial incarceration, and a stay in prison typically exacerbates those problems (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper & Mincy, 2009).

*a. Support for prisoners during incarceration.* One may assume that prisoners' needs are covered by the prison. Indeed, they receive the basic minimum needed to survive - food, clothing and shelter. Beyond that, hygiene products (e.g., soap, deodorant, razors, detergent, toothpaste, toothbrushes), letter writing materials (e.g., pen, paper, stamps), and supplemental food items must be purchased from the commissary at drastically inflated prices compared to market rate (Chandler, 2003). Family members often fund these items. These additional expenses, and the hurdles that families and prisoners must jump to maintain contact and support one another, are insurmountable for many.

*b. Support for families when a man is incarcerated.* When fathers are incarcerated, family income can drop by an average of 22% (Johnson, 2009). To offset this income loss, many families turn to federal assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (Rodriguez, 2016). Some prisons offer employment opportunities to prisoners, but the pay is typically pennies per

hour (Chandler, 2003), often not enough to meet prisoners' needs much less support their children and families (Hairston, 1998). Additionally, restitution and fines may be levied from the income prisoners earn.

Families with a member in prison cite problems paying for the childcare needed to maintain work, and covering basic necessities such as housing costs, food, and medical care (Geller et al., 2009). The expenses of maintaining contact with the incarcerated family member are steep; collect calls are expensive and transportation to far-flung prisons is often unaffordable (Hairston, 1998). Furthermore, prisoners often receive support for court-related costs and money for material goods from their families, so the family's income loss due to incarceration is further exacerbated by these increased expenses (Ella Baker Center, 2015; Hairston, 1998).

*c. Support for children during incarceration.* Mothers are often the custodial parents during a man's incarceration, and most men in prison are not financially able to contribute to care for their children. Their financial contributions are often limited to purchasing or making small gifts to celebrate birthdays and other special occasions (Hairston, 1998). Furthermore, fathers in prison and those recently released are still required to pay child support. Federal law requires a father's court-ordered child support debt be paid to the government to reimburse cash benefits that the caregiver of his children received from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (Rodriguez, 2016). If men are unable to modify their order during their incarceration, which is the case with many fathers, they may be released with high arrearages, including interest and penalties, due to be paid to the state, not to their children (May & Roulet, 2005). Non-payment of child support is punishable by arrest and incarceration in many states, creating a cycle of punishment and mounting debt that may be difficult to escape (May & Roulet, 2005). Further research indicates that these payments often

are made not by the father, but instead by the family members of those who should have received the child support; payments made by family are a way to help the father avoid the cycle of punishment (Hairston, 1998; Rodriguez, 2016). This exacerbates the financial difficulties that families face when a man is in prison, and further strains intimate partner relationships that are already distressed.

**5. Parenting and emotional support.** A full discussion of parenting during incarceration and emotional support for intimate partners when a man has been removed from the home is offered in the section describing microsystemic impacts. However, it is significant that removing the father from the household forcibly alters the family structure (Lowenstein, 1986). It often positions women as the head of the household, and as a single custodial parent, caregiver and disciplinarian. This involuntary restructuring has been described as a form of widowhood for which there is little sympathy or support, given that women are often regarded as guilty by association (Arditti, 2002).

When men are removed from the household, women often seek other means of emotional support from family, friends or another intimate partner (Fishman, 1990). However, this support may be mediated by the stigma of incarceration (Braman, 2004). Still, relationships are often restructured as a result of a man's absence from the family, whether temporarily or permanently. A closer examination of relationship dynamics is offered in the section on microsystem impacts.

**6. Reentry concerns.** At yearend 2010, more than 700,000 state and federal prisoners returned home, the equivalent of about 1,900 people per day, representing an increase of nearly 20% from 2000 (Guerion, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011). Many individuals enter incarceration with challenges that are not only unmet, but become exacerbated while in in prison. Prison-based treatment, education, and employment programs are insufficient to meet prisoners'

myriad needs (Petersilia, 2003). Therefore, returning prisoners carry often compounded challenges with them back to their communities and families upon release. For those released under conditions imposed by community supervision, returning prisoners must satisfy those conditions or risk returning to prison for a parole violation. This section explores the challenges that returning prisoners' face when they leave incarceration, and how those challenges affect intimate partnerships.

*a. Parole status and contact.* More people are under community supervision through probation and parole than are imprisoned (Carson, 2015; Glaze et al.). Prisoners are often released absent necessary supports to obtain employment and housing and to successfully transition to the community (Petersilia, 2003). Parole boards stipulate the conditions of a prisoner's release, often including community service, restitution, supervision fees, drug treatment program participation and/or periodic drug tests, sex offender registration, travel restrictions, weapons prohibitions, seeking or maintaining employment, submitting to search by parole and police, and complying with all parole officer requests (Petersilia, 2003).

Additionally, prior to release, if not mandated to a halfway house, the prisoner must provide the address of his residence. It is here that he may receive visits from his parole officer. Parole officers are field agents who possess the lawful right to carry guns, search a parolee's home or place of employment without a warrant, and order arrest without probable cause (Petersilia, 2003). Parole officers supervise the parolees based on the conditions of his parole throughout his remaining sentence served in the community.

Family contact with parole officers is common, and qualitative evidence suggests that families work with parole officers to access resources to help a loved one succeed in the community and also monitor his behavior in case he falters (Naser & Visher, 2006). Parole

partnerships with family case management services provide a means by which family can be involved in goal setting and support for the parolee (Shapiro, 1999). Conversely, parole officers may have less contact with intimate partners and other family members, limited to routine checks through home visits (Naser & Visser, 2006). Either way, the parole officer is a presence in the life of a parolee's intimate partner, and this positions her as either a resource or a risk to the parolee's freedom, depending on the information she chooses or threatens to share with the parole officer. This structure provides intimate partners with power in their relationship with returning prisoners that they may not otherwise possess, and is therefore a critical factor for closer examination at the mesosystemic level to aid in an

**b.      *Employment and housing concerns.*** Employment and housing are key factors in post-release success. Challenges related to securing housing post-release threaten a returning prisoner's stability, and limit his ability to participate as a fully functioning member of the family. Additionally, finding a job after incarceration is a well-documented struggle.

Research indicates that new responsibilities, habits, and community supports are critical to successful transition from prison to community (Laub & Sampson 2001). Employment is a critical component of that transition for the formerly incarcerated person, his family, and his community. First, employment allows former prisoners to support themselves and their families financially, which is critical given the lost earning potential during their incarceration and dependence on others for support. Work also offers former prisoners a legitimate role as a productive member of society. Additionally, former prisoners can gain new skills, job experiences, and prosocial relationships through work (Solomon et al., 2004). Furthermore, research indicates a relationship between unemployment and crime. For example, higher levels

of unemployment are linked to increases in arrest (Sampson & Laub, 1993) and as employment and income increase, crime decreases (Western & Petit, 2010).

However, a well-paying job is hard to find, especially for those who may not possess the skills or experience needed to obtain more than an entry-level position. Prison ill-prepares inmates for work life on the outside, and some returning prisoners have limited pre-prison work experience to draw upon (Petersilia, 2003). Furthermore, hiring practices requiring an individual with a felony conviction to report his criminal record, and submit to related background checks, may restrict employment options for returning prisoners, especially when these practices are not specifically tied to the requirements of the type of work sought. Federal non-discrimination employment law offers some protections, but this is for those who seek legal assistance when those laws are violated (Chandler, 2003).

The length of the sentence served may not be the only determining factor for the prisoner's absence from the job market; prior work history may be minimal, education may be low, and job skills may be insufficient to secure employment (Nelson et al., 1999). Discrimination in hiring practices further weakens employment prospects; even though they may not legally discriminate, many employers are unwilling to hire those with criminal records (Harwin, 2012; Pager, 2003).

Such barriers to employment reinforce returning prisoners' financial dependency on others, and limit their ability to live up to the expectations of intimate partners (Nelson et al., 1999). The lack of ability to attain economic independence and contribute financially to the family may underscore the power shift when a female intimate partner's financial independence and confidence has increased during man's prolonged absence, leading to or exacerbating relationship conflict (Oliver & Hairston, 2008).



Returning prisoners often struggle to find safe, affordable housing for themselves and their families. It is important to note that many formerly incarcerated men are housed by family members other than intimate partners (Nelson et. al, 1999), although it is not clear why. However, due to restrictive housing policies, family members living in public housing may not be able to shelter returning prisoners, narrowing their options for housing post-release. While the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development allows those with felony records to reside in their properties, local housing authorities can exercise discretion on this issue, and many ban people with criminal records altogether (Legal Action Center, 2014). Returning prisoners may also be rejected by private landlords who see them as a threat to other residents (Legal Action Center, 2014). These challenges threaten a returning prisoner's stability, and limit his ability to participate as a fully functioning member of the family.

*c. Reunification with family.* Reconnecting with families after a period of incarceration poses a unique set of challenges. For former prisoners who have maintained visits with children, they have been able to monitor their child's growth and developmental milestones. For those who had more limited contact, a returning parent may need to get caught up on the child's development, as the child may be in a very different stage of life upon the parent's release depending upon the length of the sentence (Nurse, 2002).

Reconnecting with intimate partners may also present challenges. If the intimate partner relationship was maintained through visits and calls during the incarcerated person's removal from the family, then the transition back into the relationship may be relatively easier than if contact was completely disrupted. The next section discusses the mesosystem factors or processes by which couples maintain contact during and interact after incarceration, and how that influences their relationship functioning.

## **E. Mesosystem Factors**

This section examines communication and visitation during incarceration, and contact with parole during reentry as key mesosystem factors influencing intimate partner relationship functioning. Given the importance of consistent communication to positive family ties, correctional authorities could ensure that their institutions operate to facilitate family visits and communication with prisoners. Instead, incarceration places multiple logistical, economic, and emotional demands on families, and often causes relationship strain between incarcerated men and their intimate partners. Couples' ability to weather that strain lies in part on their ability to communicate fully with one another over time (Carlson & Cervera, 1992).

**1. Communication and contact.** Prisoners and their intimate partners communicate through letters, visits, and telephone calls, all of which are governed by prison rules and procedures. Prison regulations stipulate screening of all correspondence in and out of a correctional facility (Fishman, 1990). Therefore all communication, especially personal or sensitive information, cannot be considered private. Prison correspondence is crucial to relationship maintenance for men and their intimate partners because men can divulge things in letters that they normally would not say in a phone call or visit (Braman, 2004); however, the content of the letters is also shared with corrections officers who scan each piece of mail (Fishman, 1990). The intense scrutiny over communication and the lack of privacy while under correctional control impedes the maintenance of intimacy in relationships (Fishman, 1990).

Prisons exert control over in-person contact, and visits to prisoners are structured in such a way that discourages maintaining ongoing emotional connections and bonds with family (Hairston, 1998). Visitation policies require visitors to be placed on a list and prescreened (Nurse, 2002). The condition of visiting rooms in most prisons is poor, and both adult and

children visitors often treated disrespectfully by prison staff (Comfort, 2003; Hairston, 1998). Visitors are required to wait in long lines and be subjected to offensive treatment and body searches for an opportunity to meet briefly with a prisoner in a noisy, overcrowded visiting room, or through a glass barrier, environments that are not conducive to private or emotional re-connection (Comfort, 2003; Fishman, 1990; Hairston, 1998). Prisoners and their visitors may forego visits to save themselves from further embarrassment and humiliation associated with degrading visiting experiences, which can ultimately sever family ties (Hairston, 1998). Manner of dress is prescribed by policy; some women bring changes of clothes to ensure that they meet the prison dress code for visitors (Comfort, 2008; Grinstead et al., 2001). In some facilities, food may be brought into the visiting room on special occasions, or purchased from the prison cafeteria (Nurse, 2001); routinely, it must be purchased from vending machines on site, which is another cost borne by the family visitor (Grinstead et al., 2001).

Corrections staff closely monitor visits, to which prisoners are not entitled; visits are considered a privilege. The method and frequency of contact is typically determined by a prisoner's custody level (Tasca, Wright, Turanovic, White & Rodriguez, 2016). Visits may range from "no contact" via a telephone behind glass, to face-to-face visits that prohibit any physical contact (Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Nurse, 2002). Other less highly controlled visits may allow for physical contact at the beginning and end of a visit, and handholding if hands remain in plain sight, as on a table top (Tasca et al., 2016). Ultimately, visits occur in the presence of guards, other prisoners, and their families, eliminating the opportunity for private conversation (Fishman, 1990). Feelings associated with the demeaning nature of interactions with corrections officers can influence how prisoners and their intimate partners experience visits (Comfort,

2008; Fishman, 1990). Both personal and interpersonal privacy are non-existent in a correctional setting.

Even in an environment that prioritizes security and containment over connection with family, visits help maintain some sense of normalcy in intimate partner relationships while a man is incarcerated. However, prison visitation rules impede relationship development and maintenance (Nurse, 2002), and the extent to which an environment is restrictive has implications for family connection and functioning (Lerner et al., 1999). In her study of incarcerated young fathers, Nurse (2001) describes that male prisoners cut off visits due to the difficulty of hearing about and managing problems outside the prison, or outside their immediate control.

Ties with intimate partners are a way to keep a prisoner abreast of family matters and involve him in decision making, particularly related to children they may have in common, which helps prepare him for post-release reunification (Nurse, 2002). Like many men without experience with the correctional system, some incarcerated men have children with multiple partners (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Visits with children during a stay in prison are often facilitated by the child's caregiver, and the prisoner's relationship with that caregiver often determines if and how often the child visits. Some of those relationship ties may be long severed, and the frequency of his visits with a child may be determined by the strength of his relationship to the child's mother. A former girlfriend who may be in a new relationship may not be inclined to bring the child to visit, especially if the new man in her life has taken up the role of father figure (Nurse, 2002). Also visits from a former girlfriend, even for the sole purpose of facilitating child visitation, may create conflict with the new wife or girlfriend (Hairston, 1998).

Phone calls are expensive, and costs associated with calls from prison are borne by the person receiving the call. Many prisoners' families do not have the economic means to routinely accept expensive collect calls (Hairston, 1998). In a study of over 200 returning prisoners in Chicago, researchers found that 60% of families had at least monthly phone contact with their incarcerated family member, and over half reported that the cost of phone calls was a barrier to contact (Naser & Visser, 2006). The economic hardship created by accepting phone calls places family members in the situation of either assuming the expense, or denying calls and avoiding visits as a way to manage tight funds. On the other hand, families may accept calls or make visits, which may exacerbate past conflicts or foster new conflicts between families and prisoners (Hairston, 1998). Other personal costs are borne from accepting collect calls from prison. For intimate partners, a phone call may be relatively private, but a recorded message about the origin of the call precedes the request to accept collect charges (Hairston, 1998). This makes it difficult to keep the prison sentence a secret when someone unaware of the incarceration answers the phone.

How communication is structured during incarceration bears great influence on the level of personal connection that can be achieved and sustained between intimate partners when a man is incarcerated. Therefore, this mesosystemic factor warrants close examination when seeking to understand the impact of incarceration on intimate relationship functioning.

**2. Contact with parole.** Family contact with parole officers is common, and qualitative evidence suggests that families work with parole officers to access resources to help a loved one succeed in the community. They also want to understand the rules associated with his parole to help monitor his behavior (Naser & Visser, 2006). This duality and ambivalence about reunification may be magnified in intimate partner relationships as women often want to see their

loved one succeed in the community after a stay in prison, but may also question his ability to succeed on the outside (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). On one hand, she may support his new freedom, especially if he is behaving in a manner that is consistent with conventional roles (e.g., job search or working, spending time with family; Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). On the other hand, when a returning prisoner does not comply with a family member's expectations of his behavior (e.g., staying out late, using drugs or alcohol, returning to street life), she may report, or threaten to report, the parolee's conduct to his parole officer (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). Finally, there are others who see parole officers as an intrusion and want as little contact with them as possible, knowing that they have the ability to send the parolee back to prison (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a).

Contact with parole officers may range from frequent, ongoing contact to infrequent check-ins to fulfill their duties related to monitoring the parolee. Parole partnerships with family case management services provide a means by which family can be involved in goal setting and support for the parolee (Shapiro, 1999). Conversely, parole officers may have less contact with intimate partners and other family members, limited to routine checks through home visits (Naser & Visser, 2006). Either way, the parole officer is a presence in the life of a parolee and his intimate partner, and this positions her as either a resource or a risk to the parolee's freedom, depending on the information she threatens or chooses to share with the parole officer. This structure provides intimate partners with power in their relationship with returning prisoners that they may not otherwise possess, and is therefore a critical factor for close examination at the mesosystemic level.

#### **F. Microsystem Impacts: Intimate Partner Relationships during Correctional Supervision**

This section examines empirical research on intimate partner relationships during correctional supervision. A critical analysis of several qualitative and quantitative studies reveals

the ways in which correctional control affects intimate partnerships, highlights the ways both parties manage their relationship during a man's stay in prison or time on parole, and examines key sources of conflict for intimate partnerships affected by correctional supervision. Impacts of correctional supervision and reentry are examined at the microsystem level for their influence on intimate partner relationship functioning.

### **1. Impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationship dynamics**

**during prison.** The forced separation imposed by incarceration profoundly affects intimate partner relationships, creating hardship that ultimately dissolves many relationships. While incarcerated, the prisoner is removed psychologically as well as isolated physically, and has limited connection to or control over family matters.

For incarcerated individuals, interactions with families allow them to maintain an ongoing role within the family versus solely assuming the role of the prisoner (Hairston, 2002). The theory of symbolic interactionism offers that individuals develop a self-concept in relation to how others see them (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, family interaction during incarceration provides an opportunity for prisoners to see themselves as normally functioning individuals, as opposed to solely assuming the label of "prisoner" or "criminal" (Hairston, 2002). Family connection has a value beyond the interaction between prisoner and family member; research demonstrates that positive family connections support pro-social decision making for prisoners after their release (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004), and family ties may help decrease recidivism (Petersilia, 2003). Furthermore, research demonstrates that incarcerated fathers who assume responsible parenting roles post-prison recidivate less than those who are not positively involved in the lives of their children (Hairston, 2002; Petersilia, 2003).

For many prisoners, religion plays an important role in their rehabilitation and in their relationships with children and intimate partners. In a qualitative study of 20 male prisoners, inmates described religion as beneficial to maintaining familial connections (Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken, & Dammer 2000). The experience of incarceration can cause a prisoner's loved ones to lose confidence in him, and family members may perceive him negatively. When a prisoner turns to religion during incarceration, this can be a means of demonstrating rehabilitation, instilling hope in intimate partners and helping them justify their continued contact with the prisoner (Clear et.al., 2000).

Women who express high levels of dissatisfaction with their intimate partner may see incarceration as a way to positively shape his conduct, especially related to violence and drug use (Comfort, 2008). Furthermore, some women appreciate the opportunity for intensive communication that confinement provides, especially with men who were previously less communicative and attentive (Comfort, 2008). Findings from a study of intimate partners of men incarcerated at San Quentin indicate that some women believe that, had it not been for prison, the relationship would not have survived (Comfort 2008).

Some women refer to the experience of maintaining contact during incarceration as “doing time together” (Comfort, 2008) or “doing time on the outside” (Fishman, 1990). How well one adapts to her partner's incarceration may depend upon how much she becomes transformed by carceral contact (Comfort, 2008). Comfort adapted Clemmer's (1958) construct of prisonization- or to be socialized to and transformed by the experience of being incarcerated—to intimate partners of prisoners via secondary prisonization. Comfort's accounts of secondary prisonization include the ways in which women adjust their schedules, manner of dress, communication, and behaviors to adapt to their partner's control by the state. She asserts that



women with greater financial and social resources often become less prisonized whereas women with comparatively scarcer resources see correctional contact involve more of their time and energy (Comfort, 2008). Furthermore, Comfort (2008) argues that the criminal justice system may be one of the most consistent and powerful tools available to resource-poor women in managing their relationships with men in need of services and treatment which are becoming less and less available in the community.

Finally, when family members are the direct or indirect victim of a crime committed by a family member, incarceration can provide a measure of protection against further victimization. This may be especially true in cases of intimate partner violence (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). However, research indicates that some women who are victimized by an intimate partner are reluctant to call the police because they do not want to be responsible for sending him to jail, or back to jail (Fishman, 1990). This reluctance may be especially true of African American women from low-income families and communities that have experienced firsthand the impact of mass incarceration and are forced to choose between their own safety and sending yet another black man to prison (Richie, 2012).

**2. Impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationship dynamics during parole.** Many families experience hardships related to a family member's incarceration, and reuniting after release can present a different set of challenges. The family may have relocated, may have limited finances, and may have reconfigured with new relationships (Travis et al., 2003). Furthermore, for those released on parole, correctional contact can extend beyond

the returning prisoner to his family as well and can influence intimate partner relationship dynamics.

In research on relationship conflict and prisoner reentry, male study respondents reported that being on parole limited their capacity to express themselves fully with their intimate partners (Oliver & Hairston, 2008). Men expressed concerns about how parole supervision might precipitate discord with an intimate partner. Their concerns centered on fear that an argument with a female partner could lead to parole revocation and fear that a wife or girlfriend could use his parole status as leverage for managing his behavior generally, as well as in the context of the relationship (Oliver & Hairston, 2008). For some, these fears may be well founded. Women in that same study reported that “they kept the parole officer’s number handy” as a preventive measure, threatening to call to report a partner’s behavior if she thought it became unmanageable (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). In this way, the balance of power in the intimate partner relationship tilts toward the woman as she leverages the coercive power of the justice system through the parole officer to attempt to control the behavior of her intimate partner (Nurse, 2002).

**3. Sources of relationship conflict.** Incarceration forcibly restructures household composition and kin relationships in many families, disproportionately affecting African American families. Some of the restructuring is obvious—absent fathers, and female-headed households (Braman, 2004). Other impacting factors are less obvious and based on the negotiations that couples make as they work to survive a man’s extended absence from the family due to incarceration, which may compound relationship conflict that existed before a man’s stay in prison (Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). Furthermore, the weight of the logistical

challenges of reentry—finances, housing, employment, and assuming family responsibilities—places a greater burden on already strained relationships with intimate partners.

The documented dynamics and sources of conflict between men and women during his incarceration and reentry center largely on expectations of each other's behavior. A related conflict centers on how those expectations are managed (Comfort, 2003; Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). Indeed, research indicates that relationship negotiations during and after incarceration often include managing unmet expectations and emphasize the connection between incarceration, family stereotyping, and family damage, if not dissolution (Comfort, 2003; Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996).

*a. Parenting* During a man's incarceration, family interactions, expectations, and composition may change, thus influencing the father's relationship with children. First, how children come to understand their father's prolonged absence depends on the level of communication within the family, affecting children's emotional state and ability to reunify with the father after release (Travis et al., 2003). Adults may avoid explaining to children an incarcerated family member's absence, or they may concoct stories that bear little resemblance to the truth, such as military deployment, a prolonged hospital stay, or educational or vocational programming (Braman, 2004; Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996). Deliberately misinforming a child about a family member's incarceration can result in emotional and psychological impacts, and a fractured bond between the caregiver and child, as well as between the incarcerated parent and child (Travis et al., 2003).

Qualitative studies show that men with criminal records have hopes for and attachments to their children (Nurse, 2002). What distinguishes prisoners from non-prisoners are the barriers created by incarceration to providing ongoing, consistent financial and emotional support (Nurse,

2002). Like families without the experience of incarceration, parents may have different views on child discipline, difficulty managing the presence of new paramours, and difficulty managing disappointment and unmet expectations (Braman, 2004). However, for families with the experience of incarceration, these challenges are compounded, exacerbated, and colored by correctional involvement.

A father's connection to his child is often moderated by his relationship to the child's mother both during and after release from prison (Travis et al., 2014). Furstenberg and Nord (1995) state that the strength of a father's relationship with the child's mother correlates with the strength of connection to the child; men see the mother and child as a unit. The strength of the relationship to the mother may be even more important when she is the custodial parent and serves as the gatekeeper to the relationship with the child, determining phone and in-person access through visits (Nurse, 2002).

Conflict often exists in relationships between men in prison, their children, and their children's mothers, and relationship conflict and stability affect fathers' connections with children, including where the fathers choose to live. (Nurse, 2002). Men in prison indicate that discord with a former intimate partner can harm men's relationship with their children (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). Issues often stem from the presence of a new man assuming the role of father in the household. (Travis et al., 2003). A qualitative study of young fathers incarcerated and on parole in California indicates that the presence of the mother's new boyfriend often reduces contact between the formerly incarcerated man and his child (Nurse, 2002). This may be due to the prisoner comparing himself to the new man. Furstenberg and Nord (1995) assert that if the new man takes on a more permanent role in the family, including greater involvement with the

children, the returning prisoner may feel like he has been replaced and that he can't compete with the new man, which leads him to withdraw from his children.

**b. *Prisoner promises and intimate partner expectations*** A common dispute between men in prison and their intimate partners relates to broken promises about leading a straight, conventional life after release versus returning to criminal behavior or associating with friends engaged in such behavior. Men in prison may be so future oriented that they make promises that cannot be fulfilled easily, if at all, thus "selling dreams" to their intimate partners (Fishman, 1990; Oliver & Hairston, 2008). Incarcerated men commonly promise their intimate partners that they will settle down and avoid street life after a stay in prison (Fishman, 1990; Hairston & Oliver, 2008). Research indicates that those who do make positive, pro-social choices have an easier post-prison transition (La Vigne et al., 2004), and that those who return to street life experience greater intimate partner conflict (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). Association with street life, characterized by resuming a lifestyle that may have landed a man in prison (e.g., engaging in illicit behavior and hanging out with friends in street corner settings) communicates to women that the former prisoner does not intend to change, nor is he making good on the promises made to her when he was behind bars (Oliver & Hairston, 2008). Furthermore, research suggests that women may undergo significant changes during a man's stay in prison, especially related to independence and self-sufficiency, which may alter her expectations of the role her partner will play upon return, especially if she supported him while he was incarcerated (Oliver & Hairston, 2008; Travis et al., 2003).

**c. *Emotional ties and sexual fidelity.*** Questions of a woman's sexual fidelity during a man's incarceration give rise to significant conflict between intimate partners. Research indicates men's concern about their partner's sexual fidelity and their preoccupation with

searching for evidence and discovering the truth about her romantic encounters (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 2009; Oliver & Hairston, 2008). This preoccupation extends into the period after release from prison and is a well-documented source of intimate partner conflict (Fishman, 1990).

For the man in prison, anything may constitute evidence of a woman's "second life," including not being at home to receive a phone call, not visiting, or not complying with his requests (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). Once the man is released, continued accusations and preoccupation with finding evidence of her infidelity are a main source of conflict (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). Indeed, research indicates that some women report engaging in other relationships while a man is in prison in an effort to ensure her emotional, sexual, and financial needs are met (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). For some women, these relationships are temporary, and they drop them once their partner is released (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b).

To handle men's suspicions and threats related to evidence of a second life, some women may understate or lie about their activities to avoid conflict, whereas other women may retaliate by reminding men in prison of their newfound power, by hinting about affairs, and by making promises that they do not intend to keep (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). Hostility and manipulation by both parties characterizes such relationships (Nurse, 2002). These ongoing dynamics create an emotional powder keg that can explode once a man is released from prison. In focus groups with men in prison, participants agreed that a woman's infidelity has the potential to lead to violence after release from prison (Oliver & Hairston, 2008). While men often expect women's loyalty and fidelity, some research presents contrasting views indicating that men expect women to find another mate to keep them company during a man's stay in prison (Oliver & Hairston, 2008). It

is not clear if these secondary or replacement relationships continue after men are released, or if they are expected to end at that point.

A set of behaviors that is linked to but not entirely explained by suspicions about sexual infidelity involves monitoring and attempting to control a woman's behavior while a man is incarcerated (Comfort, 2003; Girshick, 1996). An incarcerated man may solicit information from others about his wife's or girlfriend's behavior on the outside (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). He may also attempt to control who she interacts with, especially if those interactions threaten the relationship (Nurse, 2002).

Other common ways that incarcerated men attempt to control their intimate partners include regulating her contact with him and by providing monetary support (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). In a study on domestic violence and prisoner reentry, incarcerated men revealed that they demanded their intimate partners visit and accept collect calls regularly. They also demanded that women put money in their accounts and provide them with material items (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). Again, the men's controlling behavior and the women's response to it can lead to escalating conflict and even violence.

*d. History of relationship violence.* While family struggles during and after incarceration have been documented in the literature, far less is known about relationship conflict and intimate partner violence. However, inferences may be drawn from prevalence data on violence against women, on domestic violence among African Americans, and from a small-scale quantitative study on domestic violence among federal inmates.

Physical assault by an intimate partner is a significant social problem. The Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that violence against women is a problem of great magnitude in the United States, affecting approximately 1.5 million women per year. The National Violence

Against Women Survey estimates that approximately 22% of adult women have experienced assault by an intimate partner, and a little more than half of surveyed women reported being physically assaulted by an intimate at some time in their lives (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Most physical assault occurred against females (76%) versus males (24%) (Truman & Morgan, 2014).

National studies indicate that African American women are battered at higher rates than their White counterparts. The National Violence Against Women survey estimates that 25% of African American women are physically assaulted by a husband or boyfriend, whereas 22% of women overall experience intimate partner violence. Examining rates of intimate partner homicide, the disparity becomes clear; African American women are killed by a spouse at a rate 2.5 times higher than their White counterparts. When the intimate partner is a boyfriend or girlfriend, the homicide rate increases to 4 times that of White women (Catalano et al., 2009).

Very little prevalence data exists on intimate partner violence and incarceration. However, findings from the Multisite Family Study on Incarceration, Partnering, and Parenting demonstrate that after a man's release from prison, participants experienced partner violence at substantially higher rates than rates reported in the U.S. population (Lindquist et al., 2016). Similarly, retrospective research on incarcerated men and post-prison intimate partner violence examined correctional and law enforcement records and revealed higher rates of intimate partner violence than in the general U.S. population (Freeland-Braun, 2012). Further, in a study of low-risk federal prisoners, White and colleagues (2002) found that 33% of incarcerated men in their study reported recent assault against a wife or girlfriend while 10% described enacting severe violence against intimates.

Qualitative studies indicate that prior history of intimate partner violence affects relationship dynamics during and after incarceration, and incarceration may serve as a protective



factor for family members, especially when they are victims of the crimes the prisoner committed (Braman, 2004). Importantly, two have focused on this issue directly. Hairston and Oliver (2006a) have made large contributions to advancing our understanding of domestic violence during reentry among African Americans, indicating that prior history of intimate partner violence affects relationship dynamics during and after incarceration. In their study, female respondents who were physically abused by a partner prior to his incarceration were clear about not resuming a romantic relationship once their partner was released (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). The second more recent study of incarcerated men and incarcerated women reveals patterns of “reciprocal abuse,” especially in relationships where the couple had a child in common (Harris, 2015). Consistent with findings from other studies, respondents reported that those relationships did not endure the experience of incarceration. Both formerly incarcerated men and formerly incarcerated women reported less conflict and violence in post-prison relationships with new intimate partners (Harris, 2015). In sum, findings from these studies point to the need to identify pre-prison relationship dynamics to understand how couples manage their relationships during and after a man’s time in prison to understand what may lead to intimate partner violence after incarceration.

### **G. Literature Review Summary and Conclusion**

Correctional supervision disproportionately impacts African American men, and by extension, African American intimate partners and families, creating challenges associated with the normal functioning of intimate relationships, both during incarceration and reentry. Relationship functioning is particularly impacted by men’s and women’s ability to access help when they need it, and the stigma of incarceration poses a barrier to help. Further, men and women have expectations of one another during and after incarceration that may be unmet, or

even unattainable. These factors determine how men and women manage their relationships during and after men's incarceration.

The social stigma of incarceration marginalizes both prisoners and their intimate partners. Research indicates that stigma affects prisoners and their intimate partners, with some attention to the influence on relationship dynamics (Braman, 2004; Fishman, 1990). However, further clarity is needed to understand the connection between stigma, relationship management and access to help. This study seeks to provide clarity on this matter.

Men and women in intimate partner relationships have expectations of one another during and after incarceration. The research evidence demonstrates that men expect contact, especially in the form of calls and visits from wives, girlfriends, and their children, for whom the wives and girlfriends serve as the gatekeeper (Nurse, 2002). Given that they cannot generate much income while in prison, men also expect women to support them financially so that their basic needs are met. After release, men need support and often expect their intimate partners to supply material items that meet their basic needs, including housing (Fishman, 1990). Research evidence suggests that men continue to expect fidelity after release, and looking for evidence that a woman has been unfaithful can be consuming for many men (Oliver & Hairston, 2008).

On the other hand, women have expectations of men that often run counter to the realities of incarceration and reentry. While their male partners are incarcerated, women expect men to make the positive changes needed to transform their lives. They also expect men to resume the roles of husband and father, and become active in the parenting and discipline of children (Girshick, 1999). Further, women expect men to begin contributing to the household finances again, and money often becomes a source of relationship strain after release (Comfort, 2008). However, the ways in which men make money is often important to intimate partners and

signifies the degree to which a man has positively transformed his life. Women often expect men to seek and obtain gainful employment, and to not return to illegal activity or street life (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b). Given barriers to employment and other key indicators of positive transformation, relationships may improve if women recast their expectations to the realities of men's correctional control (Comfort, 2008). It is not clear if altering expectations helps men and women simply manage their feelings about one another in the short-term, or if it improves relationship outcomes long-term.

How men and women manage their relationship during and after a period of men's incarceration is influenced by their experience of correctional supervision, by their ability to access help when they need it, and by their management of unmet expectations of one another vis-à-vis the experience of carceral control. This study proposes to systematically explore these important matters using an ecological framework to facilitate analysis at each contextual level.

## **IV. Research Methodology**

This chapter describes the research methods that were employed in this study. The first section describes the study design, including a description of the sample, recruitment methods and data collection methods. The next section provides definitions of key terms, and the final section describes the data analysis methods that were used in this study and the steps taken to protect human subjects.

### **A. Research Design and Method of Investigation**

**1. Overview of the study.** This study is a secondary analysis that uses qualitative data collected by the Safe Return Initiative and made available by the University of Minnesota (2004). The Safe Return Initiative was a national training and technical assistance project jointly implemented by the University of Minnesota's Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community and the Vera Institute of Justice under a grant funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The purpose of the Safe Return Initiative was to provide consultation on improving efforts to address intimate partner violence for African Americans reentering the community after incarceration. The related study sought to inform this work by soliciting personal accounts from African American men and women experiencing prisoner reentry to better understand their experiences with intimate partner conflict and violence (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a).

Through that initiative, researchers conducted focus groups and individual interviews with four study populations: (a) African American men in prison or (b) on parole, and (c) African American women who were the intimate partners of men in prison or (d) on parole. The purpose of this research was to understand experiences with intimate partner conflict and violence during and

after a man's incarceration in order to inform training for case managers and counselors working in correctional institutions and for those working with families of incarcerated men. In the primary study, six focus groups were held with men in prison or on parole and five focus groups were held with women currently or formerly involved with incarcerated men or men subject to parole supervision. In that study, 36 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with these same respondent groups. The study was conducted in prisons and through community-based organizations in four states—New York, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Tennessee (SRI Researcher Manual, 2004).

To date, the publications which emerged from the original data collection have been based on analysis of the focus group findings with incarcerated men, men on parole, and women currently or formerly involved with incarcerated men or men on parole. As such, the current study examines individual accounts of research participants who were interviewed in private in order to uncover more personal accounts regarding the impact of incarceration and or parole on their intimate relationships with wives and girlfriends. These interviews gave participants the opportunity to say things about themselves or their experiences that they may not have wanted to share in an open group discussion. The individual interviews served as the dataset for this study.

**2. Sample description.** Adult African American men and women with the experience of men's incarceration and/or parole supervision were participants in this study. According to the SRI Researcher Manual (2004), men were included in this study if they:

1. Self-reported their age as at least 18 years old;
2. Self-reported their race as African American;
3. Were incarcerated or on parole at the time of the screening;
4. Reported having a current wife or girlfriend;

5. Were one year from release from prison;
6. Were under parole supervision for 2 years or less.

Women were included in this study if they:

1. Self-reported their age as at least 18 years old;
2. Self-reported their race as African American;
3. Reported having a boyfriend or husband who was presently incarcerated and would be released in one year or less, or;
4. Reported having a boyfriend or husband who had been on parole for two years or less.

Individual interviews for men in prison and men on parole were conducted in prisons and through parole offices in three cities: New York City, Milwaukee, and Nashville. The participating prisons were Ossining/Sing Sing Correctional Facility, a maximum security state prison in Ossining, New York; Wisconsin Correctional Facility for Men, a medium security state prison in Racine, Wisconsin; and Correctional Work Center, a minimum security county jail that also housed state inmates in Nashville, Tennessee (SRI Researcher Manual, 2004).

Individual interviews with women were conducted in three cities (New York City, Nashville, and Minneapolis). The participating community agencies were Parents Anonymous of New Jersey, Inc., and Osborne Association, both serving New York; the YWCA of Nashville, and African American Family Services, serving Minnesota. Researchers experienced difficulty in obtaining cooperation from a community-based agency in Milwaukee, so a substitution was made with an agency in Minneapolis. In making the substitution of the community-based agency from Milwaukee to Minneapolis to recruit women for the study, a key difference in agency type

influenced recruitment. It was the intention to recruit women through general social service agencies, which occurred in New York and in Tennessee. However, the agency in Minneapolis served battered women exclusively and recruited women for the study directly from their programs (Field notes, SRI Researcher Manual, 2004).

**3. Recruitment.** Prison staff informed prisoners of the study by posting notices in areas appointed for public messages and by distributing documents explaining the study and describing participant criteria. They also asked for study volunteers. Prison staff also made announcements at institutional meetings and classes (SRI Researcher Manual, 2004).

In each of the three study locations, an agency that provided services to prisoners' families recruited women participants by posting notices of the study at the agency and distributing flyers to women service consumers. Given the difficulty recruiting women participants in Wisconsin, a substitution was made to a community-based agency in Minnesota.

Staff from correctional facilities, parole offices and community-based service agencies were provided with an approach script to inform men and women about the study. Staff then gathered names of those interested in participating in the study and passed these on to researchers (SRI Researcher Manual, 2004).

Fifty-nine African American men and 29 African American women participated in the original study (Hairston & Oliver, 2006a). Those who were recruited for the study and elected to do so participated in an initial focus group to explore themes associated with interpersonal conflict and violence during men's incarceration and reentry. Following the focus group, those respondents were asked if they elected to participate in individual interviews. In total, individual interviews were conducted with 36 respondents, 21 men and 15 women (SRI Researcher Manual, 2004). Table 1 depicts the states where the interviews were conducted, the respondent's

gender, and the type of correctional supervision the male was under at the time the interview was conducted for the original study.

**Table 1.**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents in Primary Study**  
**(*N* = 36<sup>a</sup>)**

State	Male/Prison	Male/Parole	Female/Prison	Female/Parole
Minnesota	0	0	2	2
New York	3	3	3	3
Tennessee	4	3	2	3
Wisconsin	4	4	0	0
Totals	11	10	7	8

<sup>a</sup>Total men = 21; total women = 15.

**4. Data collection procedures.** Researchers using a semi-structured individual interview guide (Appendix C) posed questions that explored participant's personal experiences, covering basic themes including the effect of men's imprisonment on relationships, readiness for release and reunification, intimate partner relations, conflict, abuse, and community supports. All interviews were conducted by experienced research consultants and staff who assisted in the design of the study. Two same-sex research teams conducted interviews; male researchers interviewed male respondents and female researchers interviewed female respondents. All research staff were supervised by the project's principal investigators and received prior orientation and training in the use of the study instruments. The interviews lasted about two



hours each, and were tape recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed for the present study.

**5. Definition of key terms.** This study examines the impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationships. The term “correctional supervision” encompasses both incarceration in prison, and supervision in the community by a parole officer. The term “probation,” which often occurs prior to or instead of jail or prison time via correctional supervision in the community, is not included in this definition of correctional supervision. In this case, correctional supervision applies to those who are in prison, or who have been released from prison to the community but are still under some form of mandatory supervision by a parole agent during a period otherwise known as “community reentry.”

For this study, the term “intimate partner relationships” includes both marital and non-marital relationships and assumes some level of emotional and physical intimacy. This includes current or former spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends (Breiding et al., 2015).

*a. Intimate partner relationships.* To facilitate research on intimate partner violence, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), offers a uniform definition of intimate partners and of intimate partner relationships. “Intimate partners include current or former: spouses (married spouses, common-law spouses, civil union spouses, domestic partners); boyfriends/girlfriends; dating partners; or ongoing sexual partners,” all of whom may or may not be cohabiting, and may be of the opposite or same sex (Breiding et al., 2015). Further, the CDC offers that intimate partner relationships are characterized by at least some of the following elements: “emotional connectedness, regular contact, ongoing physical contact and sexual behavior, identity as a couple, and familiarity and knowledge about each other’s lives” (Breiding et al., 2015). Within these parameters, this study

uses a self-defined relationship status, which is particularly important given prior research indicating that men under correctional supervision are typically unmarried but consider themselves to be in an intimate relationship (Day, Lewis, O'Brien, & Lamb, 2005).

Intimate partnerships are also characterized by kinship norms associated with mutual aid and care, both material and emotional (Scheffler, 1985) and with contributing beyond oneself (Erikson & Erikson, 1981). Reciprocity may take the form of sharing costs and resources so that families operate more effectively together than they would individually; this exchange includes financial costs and resources, as well as advice, emotional support, and love (Braman, 2004; Scheffler, 1985). In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson ((Erikson & Erikson, 1981) contends that in midlife, adults express concern about nurturing things that will outlast them, offering care that extends beyond the self to the next generation, most typically, but not exclusively, through one's children; Erikson called this generativity. The absence of generativity is stagnation, characterized by feelings of disconnection from family or community and by a failure to find a way to contribute (Erikson & Erikson, 1981). Thus, mutual aid and the ability to nurture beyond oneself are considered normative elements of intimate partnerships for those who identify as partners.

**b.      *Correctional supervision.*** Adaptation to confinement has been widely studied and researchers examine how adaptation is influenced by indigenous factors specific to the prison experience or imported factors based on the influence of pre-prison life conditions (Useem & Piehl, 2006). This study focuses on correctional supervision, both prison and parole, extending beyond examination of individual adaptation to relationship adaptation, analyzing the influence

that correctional control mechanisms have on intimate partners and on intimate partner relationships.

Varying degrees of correctional control exist in different prison settings (DiIulio, 1987). However, prisons are “cooperative” environments, while still authoritarian and hierarchical, that do not operate solely through force applied via administrative control. Some level of cooperation by those under control is required to maintain stability (Cloward, 1960; Sykes, 1958). Yet the degrees of cooperation and control vary from institution to institution. Longitudinal research in prisons in multiple states indicates that prison environments vary with the security level of the facility (minimum, medium, maximum), correctional leadership and the resources available to the institution (DiIulio, 1987).

Community supervision operates through oversight by a parole officer who monitors a returning prisoner based on the conditions of release mandated by a parole board (Petersilia, 2003). Those conditions may dictate housing choice, employment, travel, drug testing, job and home search, and other forms of supervision depending upon the nature of the crime that was committed (Petersilia, 2003). Parole officers hold a tremendous amount of power over parolees in that they have the ability to arrest and confine for violating conditions of parole (Petersilia, 2003).

## **B. Data Analysis**

This study adapted the Grounded Theory Method to analyze content from the individual interviews to explore each respondent’s experiences with intimate partner relationships during incarceration and community reentry. This method was adapted to secondary analysis for this study given the existing framework of the primary study.

The Grounded Theory Method was developed in 1967 by sociologists Glaser and Strauss based on the concept of symbolic interactionism, which asserts that individuals construct their realities through social interactions in which common symbols are used to communicate meaning (Kendall, 1999). In contemporary social science research, perhaps the most commonly used references associated with Grounded Theory are Strauss and Corbin (1998), Corbin and Strauss (2014), and Charmaz (2006).

Grounded Theory was selected as the approach to analysis for this study for several reasons. Grounded Theory is considered ideal when examining social relationships and the contextual factors that affect individuals' lives (Charmaz, 2006). This approach is also ideal when examining how individuals attribute personal meanings to social processes and personal behavior (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014), which allows this researcher to understand how men and women manage their interpersonal relationships in the context of correctional supervision and attribute meaning to theorize the experience of that supervision from their individual perspectives. Grounded Theory allows for a focus on understanding a phenomenon from the vantage point of an individual's lived experience. This aligns with the person-in-environment perspective and with the ecological model, both of which are common to the field of social work (Gilgun, 1994).

Grounded Theory also allows for theory generation and prescribes specific data analysis techniques. I analyzed transcripts generated from 24 individual interviews using some of these techniques. Grounded Theory offers a systematic process of documentation, memo-writing, and coding that promoted close connection to the data, rigorous attention to detail and systematic analysis, and trustworthiness (Charmaz, 2006). This study applied memo writing and coding techniques offered by Grounded Theory to the transcripts.

For this study, 24 of the 36 transcripts were analyzed. Upon review of the dataset, 13 interviews were eliminated from the sample because the respondent indicated that they were not in relationship with a reference partner, decreasing the sample size to 24. Inclusion criteria for the sample involved having a relationship with an intimate partner prior to incarceration with the intention of maintaining that relationship during incarceration and post-release. Those cases in which the relationship ended at the point of entry into prison were excluded from the sample. All other cases remained in the sample. Table 2 depicts the reduced sample and indicates the state where the interviews were conducted, the respondent's gender, and the type of correctional supervision the male was under at the time the interview was conducted for this study.

**Table 2.**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents in Secondary Study**  
**(*N* = 24<sup>a</sup>)**

State	Male/Prison	Male/Parole	Female/Prison	Female/Parole
Minnesota	0	0	1	2
New York	3	2	2	2
Tennessee	3	1	1	1
Wisconsin	4	2	0	0
Totals	10	5	4	5

<sup>a</sup>Total men = 15; total women = 9.

The following steps guided the analysis process. First, I carefully reviewed the transcripts and conceived of them as one unit. This allowed me to consider the scope of the data and how they were interrelated (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Next, I wrote research question memos to focus attention on the research questions as they related to each transcript (Charmaz, 2006).

I coded all transcripts by hand, using a pen-and-paper color coding scheme. Coding occurred with a careful inspection of the data. A code is defined as “a specific event, incident, or feature” within the data that the researcher draws out in an effort to “relate it to other events, incidents, or features, implicitly distinguishing this one from others” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 149).

Given that the dataset consisted of four key demographic groups, I paid close attention to differences and similarities by gender and by men’s correctional supervision status. Coding memos were used to record and stimulate ideas about the data on a conceptual level.

Through focused coding, I identified frequent or significant initial codes, again paying close attention to differences and similarities by gender and by men’s correctional supervision status. Axial coding supported sorting and reassembling data to begin to make the conceptual links between categories explicit (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 1998). This process assisted with comparison of men’s data to women’s data, examining data for nuanced differences in meaning to begin to establish conceptual findings. I also created tables to help sort relevant demographic data for each transcript to clarify these findings. Demographic data included gender, correctional status, if contact was made during incarceration, if visits were made during incarceration, and if reunification was planned or attempted.

I used the constant comparison process to look for common themes and patterns such that concepts emerged from the descriptive codes to develop higher order or theoretical codes. The

constant comparison process involves linking the data to the idea back to other data to compare new information with previous information to uncover consistent themes, moving from descriptive codes to emergent concepts to theoretical codes (Saldana, 2013).

Theoretical coding was used to specify possible relationships between categories (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical coding guided the analysis toward theorizing key concepts linked to relationship management during correctional supervision. Self-reflexive memos were recorded throughout to capture researcher preconceptions, views, or biases about the data that arise during analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling, common to Grounded Theory to support the exploration of emergent theories, was beyond the scope of this study, given that this is a secondary analysis and new data cannot be collected (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Importantly, this secondary data analysis involved an adaptation of Grounded Theory given that the original study possessed an orientation that could not be divorced from the data, but I was able to use Grounded Theory's procedures for a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis.

I developed a codebook to guide operationalization of the analysis and to document coding for replication, creating an audit trail to ensure confirmability. The codebook contained each codename or label, a full definition of the code, and at least one example. The full definition of a code provided an extensive description as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

I also developed separate documents for each research question to capture all data from interviews to illustrate common themes and to identify outlier information that needed a new thematic categorical assignment. This process helped reveal themes that both within and across questions and interviews, and shaped the findings for this study.

There were four individual interview instruments, one for each study population (Appendix C). Each instrument contains approximately 15-20 questions that were used to guide the interviews. Certain key questions from those instruments relate more specifically to the research questions for this study; therefore, they are cross-referenced to draw close attention to responses to those questions in the analysis (see Table 3). However, critical information was revealed throughout the interviews, so I analyzed the transcripts in their entirety to address the research questions for this study.

### **C. Procedures for Establishing Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Patton (2002) says that qualitative researchers should focus on validity and reliability when designing a study, analyzing results, and judging its quality. In qualitative research, alternative approaches to ensuring validity and reliability for nonnumeric data involve a focus on credibility, applicability/transferability, consistency/dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To promote rigor, I compared the questions posed in the individual interviews with the research questions posed for this study. Table 3 cross-references the primary study questions with the secondary study questions, revealing that answers to the questions posed in secondary study could be found in the individual interview data.



**Table 3****Primary Study Key Questions Cross-Referenced with Secondary Study Questions**

	Secondary Study Question #1	Secondary Study Question #2	Secondary Study Question #3
Primary Study Instrument 1	3, 4, 5	3, 5, 18, 19, 21	2, 8, 9, 10, 13
Key Questions (Female/Prison)			
Primary Study Instrument 2	4 ,5, 6	4, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21	5, 7, 8, 10, 11
Key Questions (Female/Parole)			
Primary Study Instrument 3	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	4, 8, 14, 15, 16	2, 3, 5, 6, 10
Key Questions (Male/Prison)			
Primary Study Instrument 4	1, 2, 3, 4	4, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16	2, 4, 6, 7, 8
Key Questions (Male/Parole)			

**1. Credibility.** I took several steps to ensure the credibility, that is, the trustworthiness of this study's findings. Below, I detail the provisions I employed in pursuit of trustworthy findings. Credibility ensures that the study tests or measures what is actually intended (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To enhance credibility for this study I drew from previous research findings, conducted negative case analysis, and conducted member checks (Padgett, 1998).

First, I examined previous research findings to assess the degree to which my study aims aligned with previous studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). I drew on the primary themes identified in previous studies to develop the coding scheme and themes for this study. For instance, the themes generated from the primary study were a natural starting point for

developing codes, concepts and themes for this secondary study. I drew from other research focusing on incarceration, reentry, and intimate relationships for additional insights. The works of Hairston and Oliver (2006a), Comfort (2008), Braman (2004), Arditti (2005), and Fishman (1999) provided material that was crucial to the development of a systematic approach to data analysis.

Another technique I used to ensure credibility was negative case analysis to verify that the characteristics of the emergent themes applied across the transcripts (Padgett, 1998). This involved a re-examination of each transcript. During this process I discovered that some themes did not apply to respondents who were not in relationship with their intimate partner at the time of entry into prison. This disconfirming evidence led me to reduce the sample size to include only those respondents who were in relationship with an intimate partner upon entry into prison. Given that this study focused on the impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationships, the presence of a relationship was critical to the analysis.

Member checks are also recommended to ensure trustworthiness (Padgett, 1998). For member checks, I held three meetings with three African American men and two African American women in Chicago who were not participants in the study but had the experience of maintaining relationships during incarceration to provide feedback as a proxy for the participants from the original study. In the first meeting, I presented an overview of the emergent concepts to see if this reflected their own experiences or seemed authentic to the experiences of this population in general. The feedback from the first meeting indicated that the concepts as I had captured them were consistent with their experiences. In the second meeting, I presented preliminary findings to determine if these aptly described the experiences of those maintaining relationships during incarceration and parole. In this meeting, participants indicated that an initial

finding of third-party confirmation of trustworthiness should be subsumed under the concept “establishing trust;” third party-confirmation was a means by which trust was established. Using this feedback, I reviewed and recoded the transcripts for other means of establishing trust, which included demonstrating personal transformation. In the third meeting, I presented this modification to the participants, which was endorsed and ultimately used in the final analysis of the data.

**2. Transferability.** Transferability relates to the ability to transfer the findings to another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, rich descriptions of the phenomena being studied ensured that the context and time during which the data was gathered, how it was collected, where the study took place, and any restrictions were made sufficiently clear to help ensure transferability.

**3. Dependability.** Dependability refers to whether or not the study can be repeated with the equivalent subjects in an equivalent context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, I wrote memos that served as an audit trail. The primary purpose of this audit trail was to document the process and product (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) such as findings, interpretations, notes, and coding themes used in the data analysis process.

**4. Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the requirement to substantiate the research findings with evidence; as such, the research subjects and context should directly generate this evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I developed a codebook to guide the operationalization of the analysis and to document coding for replication as a part of an audit trail to ensure confirmability (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Further, I wrote self-reflexive memos to document views, biases, and other preconceptions that arose during the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). This memo-writing technique helped ensure that the findings were reflected the research

subjects' perspectives and not the researcher's personal bias. Given that this study involved African American respondents interviewed by African American researchers, but the researcher (i.e. me) conducting the analysis is Caucasian, self-reflexive memos were used to raise and document self-awareness in relation to the analysis, particularly as it relates to my outsider perspective. However, I possess some insider knowledge of the population through work in high-incarceration communities, and through personal relationships with those who have been incarcerated.

#### **D. Protection of Human Subjects**

This study was submitted for approval to the University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board. The review indicated that this study did not require approval given that it involved secondary data analysis. The original study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota. Through the project's principal investigator, the University of Minnesota (UMN) granted access to this researcher to use the individual interview transcripts for the purpose of the present study (Appendix A).

Several precautions were taken to ensure protection of human subjects in the original study, and those precautions extended to this study as well. Upon arrival, participants were asked to sign-in and were assigned a number that corresponded with their name. Participants were asked to use this number as an identifier on their background survey. This name-number system was used by researchers to match the demographic data collected to the interview data without using identifiers on the survey. As soon as the individual interviews were completed, the sign-in sheet and any other document that connected names to the numbers were destroyed. Therefore, after the individual interviews, there was no way to connect identities to individual interview

answers or to the surveys. Until destroyed, the sign-in sheets were stored separately from all other information gathered (IRB application, University of Minnesota, 2004).

The project was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice (Safe Return Initiative, 2003-WT-BX-K006). Thus the data are further protected by federal law which strictly limits the use of identifiable information to research or statistical purposes and protects private information from being used in any judicial, legal, or administrative process without the individual's prior consent.

The individual interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The electronic files of the transcripts used for this study were marked with indirect identifiers, linking transcripts to individuals not by name or number, but instead by the site where the data was collected, by the participant's sex, and by whether the male was incarcerated or released on parole (e.g., TNWI stands for Tennessee, woman, intimate partner of a man who is incarcerated; NYMP stands for New York, man, on parole). This coding system does not allow the transcripts to be linked back to the individual respondents (SRI Researcher Manual, 2004).

#### **E. Research Methodology Summary and Conclusion**

This study was a secondary analysis of 24 individual interviews conducted with incarcerated or paroled African American men and African American female intimate partners of such men. Data analysis involved an adaptation of the Grounded Theory Method. Grounded Theory allowed the researcher to approach understanding the data from the vantage point of the study participants' lived experiences.

## V. Findings

This chapter reports the findings from an analysis of individual interviews with men and women to understand the impact of men's correctional supervision on their relationship. The study sample consisted of 15 incarcerated or paroled African American men, and 8 African American female intimate partners of such men. The men and women in this study were not couples.

Several findings common to both men and women emerged from analysis of the data. Major thematic findings which emerged included relationship value, relationship management, relationship conflict, and relationship support. One major finding related to women only, which involved their experience of men's incarceration as a separate prison.

### A. Sample Demographics

**1. Male respondents.** This study involved individual interviews with 23 African American men. Upon review of the dataset of the initial study, the interview data of eight men were eliminated from the study because the men indicated that they were not in a relationship with a reference partner, decreasing the sample size to 15. The following is a description of the 15 male study respondents based on review of the dataset. Table 4 indicates how many men in this study had children in common with reference partners, how many had any contact with their partner during incarceration, if contact included visits to prison, and how many of these men planned or attempted to reunite with their partner post-release.

Ten men were incarcerated at the time of the interviews, and five were on parole. However, several men referenced previous incarcerations, so this was often not their first experience managing an intimate partner relationship during incarceration or parole.

**Table 4.**  
**Characteristics of Male Respondents (N = 15)**

Correctional Status of Male Partner	Children in Common	Contact	Visits	Reunification (Plans or Attempts)
Incarcerated ( <i>n</i> = 10)	8	9	6	5
Paroled ( <i>n</i> = 5)	3	5	2	2
Total	11	14	8	7

All but one of the men indicated that they maintained contact with their intimate partners while in prison. The one who did not have contact was prohibited from doing so by an order of protection. Some men wrote and received letters in return, and some did not. Some men spoke with wives or girlfriends on the phone regularly, and others had very limited phone contact. Seventy-three percent (11) of the men in this sample had children in common with their wife or girlfriend.

Approximately half (8) of the respondents reported receiving visits in prison from intimate partners. Of the eight men who received visits, four men described visits ending shortly into their stay in prison; they reported that women moved on to other relationships. Two men described relationships bound together by drug addiction; once their financial support for women's habits waned, the prison visits stopped. The other two men described their intimate partners moving on to other relationships shortly after their incarceration. Two of the men who received visits regularly were newly married; one married right before he became incarcerated, and another married while he was in prison.

Approximately half (8) of the men did not plan or attempt to reunite with their intimate partners post-release because the relationship dissolved during incarceration for the same reasons described for the cessation of visits. However, one man described that his incarceration was too hard for his intimate partner to bear, and the relationship ended as a result.

**2. Female respondents.** The initial sample included 15 African American women. Upon review of the dataset, six interviews were eliminated from the sample because the women indicated that they were not in relationship with a reference partner, decreasing the sample size to nine.

The following is a description of the sample of nine female study respondents based upon information garnered from review of the data. Table 5 indicates whether women in this study had children in common with the reference partner, if they had any contact with their partner during his incarceration, if contact included visits to prison, and if they planned or attempted to reunite with their partner post-release.

**Table 5.**

**Characteristics of Female Respondents (N = 9)**

Correctional Status of Male Partner	Children in Common	Contact	Visits	Reunification (Plans or Attempts)
Incarcerated ( $n = 4$ )	1	4	1	2
Paroled ( $n = 5$ )	2	5	1	3
Total	3	9	2	5

Four women in this sample had an intimate partner in prison, and five women had an intimate partner on parole. However, several women referenced their partner's multiple incarcerations, so this was often not their first experience of intimate partner incarceration.



All nine women in this sample had children, and three women had children in common with the reference partner. All women in the study remained in contact with their partner during his incarceration. For the most part, this involved accepting calls and exchanging letters. Only two of the female study respondents visited their partner in prison.

Five of the nine women described planning or attempting to reunite after men's incarceration ended. Women described the reasons for remaining in relationship with their intimate partner including love, commitment to the relationship, hope for his positive transformation, a sense of obligation to him, and facilitating his connection with the children.

Three of the nine women said they were not planning or attempting to reunify with an intimate partner post-prison. Their reasons for not reuniting were that the relationship dissolved due to conflict related to or exacerbated by their partner's incarceration.

The two women who visited their partner in prison did not have children in common with the reference partner. One female respondent described visiting as an attempt to build a family, as she was pregnant when her husband became incarcerated. She miscarried early into his incarceration, and the relationship ended shortly after. The other woman visited her husband for a combination of reasons involving a mix of obligation and love, and filling in the gap for his loss of contact with family and friends; she described that he simply had no one else on whom to rely for support.

## **B. Relationship Value**

### **1. Relationship value during incarceration—prison damages relationships.**

Both men and women described that prison changes the way men and women perceive their own value and each other's value in the intimate partner relationship. For this study, relationship value is defined as emotional, physical or material support or intimacy between intimate

partners. Generally, men and women both agreed that correctional supervision diminishes relationship value.

Seven of nine women described a husband or boyfriend's stay in prison as damaging to their relationship. They described becoming reacquainted with a person who had been negatively affected by their time in prison which in turn negatively affected their relationship. Respondents also described that incarceration inhibits support for intimate partners during times of crisis. Finally, men and women reported that incarceration prevents men from providing important supports to women and children.

*a. Prison changes men.* Some female respondents described becoming reacquainted with a person who had been negatively impacted by incarceration. They thought that the prison environment changed men for the worse, which damaged their relationship. Some described men becoming angry in prison, even mean and degrading toward them. One female respondent described the process of reacquainting herself with a man who was changed by the prison environment as a process of starting over.

It's just so hard, just like meeting a stranger. You have to learn people all over again. And it just takes time. (MNWP003)

One male respondent described that the negative prison environment is contagious, which can adversely affect relationships with intimate partners.

It [prison] make you negative, and you feed off into that. And then the next thing you know, you're talking the same way. (TNMP005)

This notion—that the negative prison environment is contagious, and infects intimate partner relationships—is consistent with some women's reports that their partner's change in

prison inspired a negative attitude toward them. One female respondent described her intimate partner as “meaner,” which implies that he may have been cruel or unkind to her before his incarceration, but also indicates a personality and attitude change linked to the experience of his imprisonment.

It made him, well, it, prison made him seem to be a little more meaner and stuff. When he came home, he just like, he had the “I don’t care” attitude about this and that, and always accusing me of sleeping with somebody else. I don’t know what happened to him in jail, but something happened. He was a changed person when he came home.

He was, he was degrading women more. You know, he put me down, call me all types of names and stuff. You know, he just, he just got meaner. To me, he got meaner.

(MNWI001)

After men were released from prison, the effects of incarceration became apparent, and some women described noticing how men changed, and feeling the impact of that change on their relationship.

One female respondent described that her boyfriend arranged a meeting for them in a local club upon his release from prison. She was surprised to see that he was aloof with her and even more surprised at his use of physical aggression toward her.

He was, he tried to get physical with me one time and he was drunk. You know, we had met up at this club or whatever and he was talking to other females and things like that. And he was ignoring me and acting like he didn’t, you know, I’m like, you told me to meet you up here. What are you talking about? You know, he was trying to play me. And

I guess he was trying to show off or whatever. And he tried to get physical with me. I'm like, oh no. This is not the same person I know. (MNWP004)

Another female respondent described the link between her intimate partner not getting his needs met in prison, her ineffective attempts to help, and the ensuing anger and frustration that carried over into their home post-release.

It's a lot of things that, um, the system, they just turn their back on them, you know, when they have their needs. And I think that makes them bitter and more angry. And then they be trying to reach out to the family, and there's just so much that we can do. You know, there really is only so much, you can try to help 'em, but sometimes people don't want to hear it. You know, the system, seems like it just shuts you down. It shuts you out. And they become so angry. You hear them complaining. And then they bring all that anger home with them. (NYWI005)

**b. *Incarceration inhibits support during crisis.*** Prison stymies support for incarcerated men and family members during times of crisis. Prisoners' ability to leave correctional facilities is typically restricted, even in emergency situations such as hospitalizations and funerals. Furthermore, the psychological barrier accompanying the physical separation imposed by prison can seem insurmountable, especially during a traumatic event. When men and women cannot lean on one another for support through crises, their value to one another becomes diminished, and the resulting damage to relationships can become irreparable.

One female respondent described how her mid-term miscarriage shortly after her boyfriend's incarceration devastated both of them. She described that they both suffered and were unable to adequately comfort each other.

S: And we were still, uh, socializing, communicating and writing. And, uh, shortly after I had a miscarriage, I think we kind of parted ways, kind of, you know. He was devastated. I was devastated. And we were still communicating, but it just wasn't the same. And he was still devastated to be behind prison, you know, so he was going through a lot of emotional torment too. You know, and here I was suffering cuz of you know, losing the baby. ...And then it was just like, when I had a miscarriage, it was just like, you know, now I don't have nothing to hold on to..... I got to 24, 25 weeks.

I: Was he able to comfort you at all when you lost the baby?

S: Nope. Not at all, except for sometimes they would have visits or whatever where you just, like they have a bus or something like that to come pick you up. And it's like a little lobby or like a little cafeteria area or something like that, that you can see him on special occasions. You know, physical stuff like on Christmas. But any other time, you just had visitation behind the glass or something. (MNWP004)

She then described how her visits slowed down and eventually stopped shortly thereafter.

Ultimately the relationship ended.

I don't know if I can stand to see him like that because that's going to make me want to be with him even more. You know? And if he's not doing well, I really don't want to see him suffering like that either. (MNWP004)

Another female respondent reported that her husband was not able to attend her father's or his own father's out-of-state funerals while he was incarcerated. She also described how she stopped visiting him because there was a warrant out for her arrest, and she feared that routine

screenings and interactions with correctional officers during visiting time would increase the probability of her arrest. Their inability to support each other through these losses compounded their grief.

Even though I might been, you know, there for a period of time, I had a warrant for me. So it's like, oh man, now I'm running from the law. So that mean I could not go see him, you know.

It [the loss] was more difficult for him. I accepted it more because my dad had always been sick all my life. So it was a little more, um, I was kind of like, had prepared myself. But on the other hand, my father-in-law just dropped off and just had a heart attack. So with my husband, it was a little more difficult for him. And him and his father was really close. (MNWP003)

*c. Men's inability to support women.* While men are incarcerated, routine support for intimate partners becomes almost impossible. Men's ability to provide women with financial support, emotional support, or intimate connection is greatly reduced. As a result, women in this sample reported that prison diminished a man's value to them during their incarceration. One female respondent reported that even though she maintained contact with her intimate partner, during his incarceration, she wouldn't call their connection a "relationship."

S: It's not really a relationship because he's in jail. I go and see him and stuff. I send him packages and stuff. But he's in jail. There's not really nothing we can do together, because he's in jail.

I: So you're not willing to call this a relationship?

S: Not until he comes home. (NYWP003)

Another female respondent reported that her boyfriend's way of communicating with her seemed to be stuck in time at the point when he first became incarcerated. Times changed, but he didn't, and his expectations of her role in the relationship seemed outdated to her.

I don't think he knows how to be a good boyfriend because he isn't around me to be good, or to do anything.

And he doesn't know how to talk to you. He don't know how to talk. I don't know. He don't know how to talk to you. To me. He's like stuck in the caveman days, where the woman's supposed to do this and the woman's supposed to be in the house, barefoot and pregnant. And this is the 2000's...He don't know the way of this world. He's back in 1988.

I: Is that when he first went in?

S: Yeah. (NYWP003)

Men agreed there was little they could do to support intimate partners while incarcerated. One man described the realization that his inability to support his intimate partner contributed to the demise of the relationship.

When I first came to jail, I'd say, real cool about it for the first two months, and then we broke up, reason being she, uh, she wanted to just, I guess when I was in jail, she wanted to see somebody else, uh, things weren't going right. Then I came to realize that maybe I can do nothing for her. So we broke up. (TNMI004)

**d. *Women replace men's support.*** Women described seeking other sources of support, including relationships with other men, to help meet their needs for support, intimacy, and companionship during their partner's incarceration. One female respondent described that the barrier created by incarceration negatively affected a man's ability to fulfill his role as her boyfriend, causing her to seek out another relationship.

You know, because when he had got locked up, it was just like, oh, well. I can't be with you. So then I might as well open up and look for other possibilities, you know, to see what else is out there, you know, that will make me happy. Because I was looking for that fulfillment, you know, that he couldn't provide no more because he was locked up.

(MNWP004)

That same female respondent compared her relationship with a new man, who was physically abusive, to her relationship with her incarcerated boyfriend, causing her to reassess her incarcerated boyfriend's value to her.

He [the new man] would like to bite me. More than anything, he would very rarely hit me in my face. He would more, like to, uh, attack on me, you know like wrestling. He would try to physically, a whole lot of times, physically stop me from leaving....And I'm like, he [my incarcerated boyfriend] would have never treated me like this. It's like, I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. I'm like, he's not like that. (MNWP004)

From her perspective, she was left to choose between allegiance to a man whom she thought could offer her nothing of any value due to his incarcerated status, and commitment to a man who was physically present, but also physically abusive. This left her feeling like there were no strong viable options for her in either relationship.



The female respondent who previously described her boyfriend's perspective on relationships with women as outdated, or like a "caveman," reunited with her son's father during her boyfriend's incarceration. While her boyfriend was in prison, her son's father became comfortable in her home, showing up in the middle of the night, cooking meals, and spending time with her and their son. Once her boyfriend was released, those routines stopped.

I had to stop him from doing a lot of stuff, because [boyfriend] is here now. My son's father, he didn't like it at all. (NYWP003)

**2. Contrasting views—prison improves relationships.** Contrasting views are noted throughout this analysis to indicate instances when study respondents offered accounts that were in opposition to the general pattern of responses for a particular question or area of inquiry. For example, while most men and women reported that prison diminished their relationship value, some reported the reverse. The physical separation imposed by incarceration served to increase some men's appreciation for women and the role they play in their lives. Further, some reported that men's incarceration even provided them an opportunity to restart their relationship on better terms.

*a. Increased appreciation for women.* Twenty percent of male respondents described how the experience of incarceration and the support they received from women during that time made them appreciate women, specifically their intimate partner. One male respondent indicated that by virtue of being confined in a same-sex facility, his appreciation for women grew in their absence.

I learned to appreciate women more. You know, because I said, to be incarcerated, I'm separated from the opposite sex. And you learn to more appreciate the beauty and the

love that they share, you see. That's what I learned from being away from women, you know. (NYMI007)

Another male respondent reported that separation from women increased his appreciation of them. Further, his intimate partner's continuous support during his imprisonment caused him to treasure their relationship.

Basically, by me not being able to be there and get the affection that a man needs from a woman; and by being around so many hard-legs men, you know, it's helped me look at the situation with the aspect of a woman being in a man's life, I cherish now. Because when I was out there I took her for granted. And out of all the things I been through, you know, by being locked up and not being able to be around her and the kids, she's still with me. (WIMI005)

Some men mature in prison, and incarceration causes them to reassess what they value. One male respondent described that he used his time in prison for deep reflection, and that his values changed. He reported now regarding his intimate partner and children above all else.

I feel I'm ready because, honestly man, I've done a lot of thinking, you know. I'm not a child anymore. I don't even think like a child any more, you know. I'm beginning to value my fiancé more, as well as my children more, as well as my family more. So you know, they have become more important to me than anything else in the world. (NYMI009)

**b.      *Experiencing prison as a fresh start.*** While most men and women described men's incarceration as damaging their relationship, a few reported that incarceration gave them

the opportunity to simply start over. One female respondent reported that prison gave her and her intimate partner a fresh start in their relationship. She described regular visits to her intimate partner during his short stay in prison as returning to a dating relationship. This respondent was an outlier in this sample, given that the majority of respondents indicated that prison damaged their relationship.

And he had to do a year. Um, and this time, it's like we're dating.

When my husband went to jail for that year, I was there every two weeks. I bought a new car. And I parked that car and get on the bus and ride. I was there every two weeks. He said it's the first time he ever had that type of visit and that type of love shown to him, being in jail.

It's been a positive experience because we were separated. And he was, we were looking forward to being in treatment [together], starting a new life in a new state. You know? So we were, it's, it's been, it was really positive for him, really positive. (MNWP005)

It was not clear if this couple could have sustained their “dating” relationship during a longer period of incarceration. Her partner was incarcerated for only twelve months, which may have made the separation more manageable.

Some men expressed that the experience of prison itself allowed couples the structure and time to have more meaningful, honest interactions. One male respondent explained that he and his partner had conversations in prison that never would have occurred on the outside. He indicated that his previous lifestyle prohibited him from slowing down to listen to her.

I: So it's like the imprisonment experience has given her an opportunity to say some things that she had been holding inside.

S: Right. (WIMI006)

As a result of their ongoing meaningful conversations during his incarceration, this couple grew closer.

**3. Relationship value during parole.** Both men and women described that men's parole status changes their relationship value. Men experienced this more acutely than women. Women's responses stood in contrast to men's responses in that their needs for emotional, material, and physical support and intimacy conceivably could be met by men once again. Men, on the other hand, reported that parole restrictions limited their ability to resume their relationship roles fully. However, a contrasting view is that some men and women saw parole restrictions as helpful to the relationship when men's problematic behavior was reigned in.

*a. Parole restrictions impose limitations on relationships.* Some incarcerated men described the ways they imagined parole conditions would impinge upon their relationships with their intimate partners. Men expressed wanting to interact freely once released from prison, but parole conditions limited their ability to do so. These conditions, limiting their time and travel, negatively affected their relationships with their wives or girlfriends. Some men described a desire to move about without restrictions, whether to relocate, socialize, or monitor women's behavior; however, curfews and restrictions imposed by parole thwarted those efforts.

Parole curfews and travel restrictions were mentioned as consistent examples of the ways in which parole obstructed men's attempts at rebuilding relationships with their intimate

partners. One incarcerated man expressed a desire to travel with his intimate partner, and perhaps even relocate, which he assumed would not be approved by his parole officer.

It [parole] will affect [my relationship] in a couple of ways. I won't be able to travel without permission. Sometime if we care to, we can't go on and attend things that we would normally do. I have to stay constantly in touch with these people coming by the house, interrupting what we doing. Uh, that is really ridiculous. Um, just the whole thing about being managed by the system. It just put a strain on. ... We can't move like we want to, can't get permission. They want to keep us right here, and we trying to branch out. I'm trying to do some things in life, and they just hold on to me by keeping me in one spot. (TNMI008)

While he was incarcerated, one male respondent's wife relocated and moved out of the state to which he would be paroled. As a result, he would need permission from his parole officer to visit her. Obtaining permission was possible, but he imagined that that it would be difficult.

And I can't go out of state [to see my wife] without a travel pass, which by law, the book states they have to give me one. But they have the option to say no. And they'll make it difficult for me. (WIMI002)

Men often looked for evidence of women's fidelity during their incarceration, and this continued once paroled. One male respondent described parole curfews as limiting his ability to participate in and monitor his intimate partner's social life.

Like she wants to go to the club, but you can't go to the club because you got curfew. It probably would be a problem because I'd want to be there to see what's going on in the club. (TNMI004)

Given that women's movements are unrestricted, paroled men's inability to move about and fully participate in activities with them may heighten men's sense of inadequacy, diminishing their estimation of their own value to the relationship.

**b. Contrasting view—*parole can increase relationship value.*** Generally, women did not describe parole as diminishing their relationship value in the same way they described incarceration's negative impact on the relationship. They did describe, however, that the boundaries imposed by parole supervision could work in favor of the relationship by mandating men's good behavior. Some women described their contact with parole officers to report violations of men's conditions of parole, especially when such violations served to harm the relationship. This positioned some women and parole officers as aligned in their desire to control men's potentially bad behavior, albeit for different reasons. One female respondent described calling her partner's parole officer to report a violation of his travel restrictions.

He [the parole officer] told me about his curfew and about...if he violates his curfew this is gonna happen and where he's gonna go, or whatever. If he do anything wrong, for me to call him. Like he wasn't supposed to leave New York, but he did. So I called his parole officer and told him. He was mad about that. (NYWP003)

It is possible that she didn't want him to leave town, and when he did, she used the coercive power of the parole officer to work in her favor.

One male respondent indicated understanding that parole officer's alignment with his intimate partner could give her additional power in their relationship post-release.

I think that they [women] have more control knowin' that that's over your head.

(WIMI006)

Some men indicated that parole supervision would be helpful to their relationship because it would establish transparent guidelines for men's behavior, which would keep them in check. This perspective was not the norm.

It [parole] will bring us closer together. Because she know it will limit doing certain things. I can't go to bars. She know that I won't go there now. Because I don't want to come back up in here again. (WIMI006)

One male respondent saw the process of completing parole supervision as a necessary way to demonstrate that he has changed for the better.

S: So, that's another job I have to tend to, as well, proving to my parole officer that I am a civilized citizen. It's part of the punishment. You know, this is, you know, my father always told me, you know, when you go to school and you're studying and doing your homework and passing your tests, you're working hard to succeed in life. You're working to be in a high stature later on down the line. When you're good in the streets and you're stealing bags of chips and you're working your way up to stealing clothes and you're working your way up to stealing cars, you're graduating and going to prison. So now, I have to, you know, being that I graduated in, and made it to prison, now I have to work to graduate to go...

I: To be completely free.

S: Exactly. Yeah, successful. (NYMI009)

**4. How women cope with men's correctional supervision.** Women in this study described "doing time" with men while they were incarcerated, experiencing their life on the outside as a separate prison. This finding is in many ways consistent with the literature on women's experience of men's incarceration, a condition described as "sentenced by association" (Blake, 1990), and descriptions of wives or girlfriends of prisoners as "quasi-inmates" who are "doing time together" (Comfort, 2008).

Women in this study described their experience of men's incarceration as a separate prison, characterized by accountability to men for their time, managing the household alone, and depression bordering on despair. Women's experience of correctional supervision as a separate prison was harmful to their relationships in that women described ensuing loneliness, despair and depression, thereby damaging their individual agency and diminishing their capacity to participate in the relationship as a full partner.

*a. Separate prison during incarceration.* Prison constitutes an involuntary separation for men and women. In men's absence, women described taking on sole responsibility for formerly joint matters. Women indicated that managing the household alone was a challenge during men's incarceration. They described managing children, elders, and finances. Several women also indicated battling loneliness and depression, sometimes leading to or exacerbating substance use. Women in this study described doing time with men while they were incarcerated. Common themes related to increased accountability for their time, carrying responsibility for the



household in his absence, and the related loneliness and depression that resulted from living in a separate prison.

*i. Accountability for time.* Women reported that men wanted them to be accountable for their time in the outside world, much in the same way that men were accountable for their time in prison. One female respondent described pressure from her partner to arrange her schedule around his calls. She understood that missing a call from him would likely lead to an argument because the purpose of these calls was to verify the status and extent of her support efforts.

I would try to be home in time for my phone calls. You know, it might be a day I decided, it's my payday, I don't want to go right home. If I know he gonna call at 5:00, but there's something I wanna go do, but then I don't want to hear his bitching.... I mean, "you're not backing things up." When you get your mail, ususally it has money in it. They usually circle it in red, with a red pen. I used to tell him, "didn't you get some red this week? I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing." And I would tell him that all the time. I just felt like I had to still be accountable for all my time. And I was basically doing my time, you know, with him. (MNWP003)

Another female respondent described receiving phone calls from her intimate partner at odd hours. She imagined that the purpose of these calls was to monitor her whereabouts and ensure that she was at home alone.

You always get that call in the middle of the morning and the middle of the night to make sure you're at home. Or listening in real good in the phone, who is that in the background? I mean, you don't got anybody in the background, you know? It was

difficult. And they don't know that you're not the only one doing this time. I'm doing this time with you.

ii. *Managing the household alone.* Women described managing responsibility for the household, taking care of children, paying bills, and caring for other relatives with very limited resources during men's incarceration. One female respondent described watching her incarcerated partner's social security checks stack up while he was away. She struggled to pay the bills in his absence, but he preferred to let the checks remain uncashed to create a financial cushion upon his release. This intensified her feelings of sole responsibility for managing the household.

His social security checks would come, but I couldn't cash them. I just sat up on them. He said, just hold on to it. Those are good. You know, it's a good thing that I am in here because you know, I can cash all those checks and we going to have us a big lump. I'm like, well, then what am I going to do until you come out? Because I can't take care of all these bills on my own. (MNWP004)

Care for elders typically falls to women, but especially so when men are incarcerated and absent from the home. One female respondent described taking care of her live-in father in law while her husband was incarcerated, and the father attempting to take advantage of her in his son's absence.

I had to cook for me and the old man. The old man be trying to hit on me. So I would go to my mother's house. And then I had to rub him down and stuff. He be coming, just give me a little bit. I be like, look, old man. (MNWP005)

She wondered if her father in law would have made such advances if her husband were not in prison. Her way of managing this situation was to ensure that his basic needs were met, and then stay at her mother's house as much as possible.

Women also described caring for children in men's absence, playing both the mother and the father role. All of the women in this study reported having children or caring for grandchildren, and stories of responsibility for child care were central to women's stories about coping during men's incarceration. Some women also described attempting to change their children's behavior as a way to tightly manage their household in preparation for their partner's return from prison.

He don't like my son. I tell him [my son] not to be bothering him. I say, just let him go where he going, and you do what you're doing. (NYWP003)

Another female respondent cautioned her three children to prepare for their father's return by acquiescing to his controlling behavior.

Like when we get phone calls, he wants to know who's on the phone. Or if we go somewhere, he wants to know where we're going. (NYWP002)

When women attempt to alter their children's behavior to keep the peace in the household during reentry, it's as if they are setting up a separate prison for their children, too.

*iii. Loneliness and despair.* Women described their loneliness, despair and depression related to grieving over men's incarceration. Women also described negative coping strategies related to grief, including drug use. One female respondent who experienced a miscarriage

during her boyfriend's incarceration reported compounded grief. She indicated that she became deeply depressed.

Yeah. I lost interest in going to school [after boyfriend was locked up]. And then like shortly after my miscarriage, I was just like, forget it, you know, this is stupid. You know, I just went into a depression. And I had gained a lot of weight and stuff. And I didn't want to see him no more because I just didn't feel, you know, it was just like no point in seeing him.

You know, I was really, really sad and really grieving over the fact that he was gone and my baby... You know, just like I just lost interest in just trying to make some kind of life for myself. (MNWP004)

Another female respondent described deep depression over her partner's incarceration, turning into substance use. She described using their savings for drugs.

I was devastated. I went to work every day. I was so, I was so depressed and so hurt. I just looked forward to the day that I would go and see him. And I went to work and I was smoking cocaine in the car. I was off the chain. And spent our savings that we were going to use to try to get us a building. (MNWP005)

One female respondent described that her partner had been incarcerated multiple times during their relationship. This time, he was away for two years. Her day-to-day life was spent taking care of her three children, working, and responding to her partner's requests for more visits and collect calls.

Sometimes I just get lonely. (NYWP002)

When she described her feelings about her partner coming home from prison, she indicated that their continued relationship depended on him changing for the better.

I told him I'm tired and I can't do this no more. (NYWP002)

*iv. Men's responses to separate prison.* Some men understood that their incarceration negatively affected women. However, this did not stop some men from still wanting full support from women during a stay in prison. One male respondent described women's support as an obligation that he likened to a "job."

You want her to do her job, writing you letters, sending you packages, coming to see you.  
(NYMP004)

Some men also described understanding that men's imprisonment can cause women to be lonely, and that they had needs that men could not meet from prison. Some men understood women's loneliness emanating from the absence of intimacy or a social life whereas women described this as loss resulting in depression and despair. These differing perceptions may indicate men's somewhat superficial understanding of the impact of their incarceration on women. It is possible that women simply did not share with men the depth of their feelings about men's absence from the home. However, it is also possible that men simply did not ask about matters over which they thought they had no control.

Although she loved me, also had needs. You know, the loneliness of just being out there when um, everyone is going to the discos or doing the social events; in the summer time when they're going to the beach and, you know, couples are getting together.

She was young at the time [I got incarcerated]. And over a period of time, the loneliness of not having no one there. Not having no one there, not just for the intimate part of it, but not having no one there to do social things with. (NYMI002)

However, one male respondent expressed a deeper understanding of the impact of his absence on his intimate partner. He was not present for the birth of his baby, which he described as a loss to his partner. In fact, this was a loss for him too.

She still feels that I left her, you know, at a point in her life when she needed me most. I got incarcerated and she was pregnant. She had the baby in my absence. And she felt neglected in many ways. She felt lonely. I wasn't there to physically support her and the baby. (NYMP004)

***b. Separate prison during parole.*** Women experienced the condition of a separate prison during men's parole, too. Men and women also described the ways in which men attempted to make them accountable for their time, interactions, and choices during men's parole.

One male respondent on parole indicated the importance of his live-in partner understanding and complying with his parole conditions so that he wouldn't be blamed for her behaviors. In this case, the physical structure of prison was gone, but the correctional control that this man experienced through parole was his partner's by association.

So I'll have to deal with my probation agency and try to see can I get the probation agency to bring my girlfriend in to when I have a one-on-one with my probation agent. I want my girlfriend to be there with me so she can see the rules and regulations that I have to go through by me being on probation, you know what I'm saying. Because I don't

want to get an apartment until, with my name, and the probation come there and something bogus be there, you know what I'm saying, and I get blamed for it. I want to be open where she knows, where we both know the rules. (WIMI012)

In this case, the man on parole expected his partner to comply with his parole stipulations as if they were her own.

### **C. Relationship Management during Men's Correctional Supervision**

Normal relationship functioning is impaired during correctional supervision, and men and women undertake a variety of strategies to manage their relationships under these conditions for the purpose of maintaining a connection with one another. The management strategies men described relate to how they maintain contact and connection with women during incarceration, express dominance and control or run things, and show support. The management strategies that women described included maintaining contact and connection with their incarcerated partner, shifting roles in their partner's absence, and showing support to one another. Both men and women described a need to demonstrate trustworthiness to the other when trust was in question, and both described the factors associated with relationship support during men's correctional supervision.

**1. Men on maintaining contact and connection during incarceration.** Male respondents described a variety of ways that they maintained contact and connection with their intimate partners during incarceration. The methods they described included maintaining communication and exhibiting a willingness to hold private moments in public spaces.

*a. Maintaining communication during incarceration.* Male respondents reported that communication was critical to maintaining their relationship during incarceration. This required that they change their former means and patterns of communication and establish routines that foster connection with their intimate partner to manage their relationships.

Overall, male respondents described relationship management during incarceration as relating to the ways in which they make an effort to maintain their connection with intimate partners. Men explained that communication is critical to relationship maintenance. This involved approaching the relationship with intentionality –being a good listener and putting their partner’s needs ahead of their own.

Communication. Being unselfish and understanding of her needs, her wants. And to listen. Yeah, listen to what she is telling me, and what she is going through. And to be able to be a good listener. (NYMI007)

Another male respondent reported conveying positive messages to his intimate partner to encourage her during his incarceration. He understood the strain and loneliness she was experiencing during his absence, and he served in a coach-like role to her, helping her go the distance of his incarceration in order to maintain the relationship during his incarceration. He reported asking another inmate who was an artist to make a small gift for her. His efforts also included writing her often, and encouraging her on the phone to help ensure their ongoing connection.

She come and visit me twice a week, um, I send letters home telling her how I feel about her. Um, getting people to do her a drawing by some that, anything I can think to do to touch her and make her smile, making her keep her head on why me. Then to know, you



know, it's raining, right now, the sunshine is gonna come back out. Always encourage her on the phone. Just tell her that some things ain't gonna average out right now. That we might have to let some small things go and then make it up when I get out there.

(TNMI008)

Another male respondent described his persistence and patience in reestablishing communication with his partner. After many months of writing to her with no response, she finally reciprocated.

There was the break up (but I kept writing). And you know, I guess with every letter that I sent her, she must have noticed a growth, a slow growth or a fast growth, I'm not sure. But she must have noticed something that must have let her know, like, alright, he's back. He's back to normal. He's where I want him to be. And finally....I got a letter from her.

(NYMI009)

**b. *Private moments in public spaces.*** Normal intimacy between men and women is interrupted during men's incarceration. The physical distance created by incarceration, visits that occur in public spaces, and rules prohibiting physical contact all serve to impede physical or sexual intimacy as well as emotional connection during a man's imprisonment. In-person visits during incarceration are one important way to foster intimacy, but only about half of male respondents and about one-quarter of female respondents in this sample reported engaging in prison visits, and even fewer offered descriptions of these accounts. Respondent accounts of

visits are reported here, in addition to accounts of contact by letter and phone, which were discussed much more frequently.

*i. Visitation rules and correctional officer enforcement.* Corrections staff closely monitor visits which may range from “no contact” via a telephone behind glass, to face-to-face visits that prohibit any physical contact (Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Nurse, 2002), to visits that allow for brief hugs and handholding (Tasca et al., 2016). Arguments, tender moments, and other sensitive conversations between incarcerated men and their intimate partners are all subject to the correctional facility’s visitation rules and are held in public spaces. Ultimately, guards, other prisoners, and their families all witness these visits, turning them into a public event (Fishman, 1990). Incarcerated men and their intimate partners must choose connection over privacy if they are to maintain contact.

Feelings associated with the demeaning nature of interactions with corrections officers can influence how prisoners and their intimate partners experience visits (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990). Further, prison guards may inconsistently enforce visitation rules, including women’s manner of dress and physical contact between incarcerated men and their female partners (Fishman, 1990; Comfort, 2008). As such, the presence and behavior of prison guards can create a barrier to contact during a man’s incarceration.

Given that few respondents in this sample described making or receiving visits, discussion of visitation procedures and their impact was minimal. However, one male respondent described a visitation experience highlighting how the treatment by prison guards can influence contact with intimate partners during prison visits. First, he described how his positive relationship with a female guard influenced his interaction with his wife during a visit.

I have a relationship with one of the nicer female guards. So I don't really have a relationship with her, but we relate. We can relate. You know, she knows that I'm married. (WIMI002)

He described a visit from his wife where this same female guard was present in the visiting room, and he avoided physical contact with his wife to skirt punishment for breaking no-contact rules. The wife perceived his rejection as related instead to his preference for the female guard over her, and she became suspicious and jealous of the guard.

So, I said, Miss [name], this is my wife. I said, is it okay if she goes over there and get us some checkers so we can play while we talk? And she said, yeah, sure. But then when I went to kiss my wife, because my wife is very intimate person, I went to kiss my wife and my wife tried to put her body on me. And I said, don't do that. I said, because you'll cause yourself not to be able to come up here. And I'll go to the hole. By my touching her. And she didn't understand that. (WIMI002)

This is an example of how an attempt at a private moment in a visiting room was witnessed and influenced by the guard with whom the male respondent had a friendly relationship. Following that visit, the respondent received a letter from his wife inquiring about the nature of his relationship with the guard.

Man, my wife wrote me the other day, man, and told me that, um, she said, um, who is that woman? And what is she to you? (WIMI002)

Here, the influence of the lack of privacy and the guard's presence raised questions for the wife about the true nature of her incarcerated husband's relationship with the guard.

ii. *Three-way calls.* Couples seek both traditional and creative ways to maintain or facilitate contact during incarceration (Fishman, 1990; Comfort, 2008). More than half of the men in this sample maintained contact through calls and letters, and all of the women reported the same. A means of connection by phone referenced by both men and women was multi-line calls facilitated by a third-party, or three-way calls. Given the barriers to contact during incarceration, three-way calls appeared to be an important way of maintaining contact and therefore can be considered a key factor influencing relationship dynamics. Importantly, calls made from a correctional facility are never private, so these calls had the additional intrusion of another party on the line.

Three-way calls are an example of men and women holding their intimate conversations in front of multiple audiences. First, when men initiate a collect call from a correctional facility, the call is made from a phone designated for use by prisoners located in a public area; conversations, therefore, are within earshot of guards and other prisoners. Next, calls originating from a prison are recorded, and those recordings may be accessed by prison staff at any time. Finally, a three-way call from a correctional facility is made to someone willing to accept the charges and connect the call to another party, typically to work around blocked lines or to manage costs. In these cases, the person connecting the lines becomes an audience member too.

One male respondent indicated that his sister served as the connection to his new girlfriend during his stay in prison.

[To talk to my girlfriend] If I call my sister, my sister go three-way. (WIMI005)

He further described that a three-way call was his preferred method of communication with her. While it wasn't private, he did not have to suffer the indignity associated with an in-person visit.

I: Have you met this woman, has she ever been here to visit you?

S: I won't let her come visit me.

I: Oh, okay. Why not?

S: I, I don't, I don't want to see her...you know...

I: See you in this...?

S: Yeah. Right. I want to see her face to face. Free. (WIMI005)

Another male respondent described using three-way calls through his sister to obtain access to his son, given the fractured relationship with his son's mother.

I would call my sister and sometimes she would hook up a three-way, and I'd get a chance to talk to [my son]. Or I would write a letter, and over a period of time, his mom would actually allow him to write me back. (TNMP004)

By accessing his son through his sister, this male respondent was able to bypass talking to his son's mother. While the three-way call was not private, it did provide him with an opportunity for conversation that might not have occurred otherwise.

These workarounds depend upon the willingness of the parties to serve as the connector and assume the expense of calls from prison. Later on, this same respondent's access to his son

through his sister faltered when her phone line blocked calls coming from prison. He then used his girlfriend or a corrections counselor to connect with his son.

That's like the only way I can talk to my family is through her, or one of the counselors because I can't talk to them straight out. Because there is a block. Oh, my sister, she's taking care of that now and is trying to get money on the phones. So I call her [girlfriend], and she'll call and talk to my momma and my sister on a three-way.  
(TNMI004)

While three-way calls are clearly a multi-party, public form of communication, male respondents expressed a preference for these types of calls, especially when the alternative was no communication at all.

**2. Men running things from prison.** Male respondents described attempting to control what women do from prison. Expressions of domination and control took many forms, including using religion, controlling women's access to drugs, and controlling finances from prison. One man incarcerated for domestic violence described the importance of setting a positive example for intimate partners and other family members from behind bars.

I have learned that...there, there are more ways, um, that you can hurt a individual when they say put the hand on, like I said, it's verbal and physical abuse. And I have learned that ....I just want to be happy. I'm ...what I'm seeking is love, peace and joy. And me, then, the head of the house, I have to set an example. You, I lead by example.  
(TNMI006).

While this respondent reported an epiphany about his own abusive behavior during his incarceration, it is not known how his intimate partner experienced his attempt to maintain leadership over the household, and if she perceived this as another attempt at domination.

*a. Incarcerated men using religion to control their relationship with intimate partners.* Several male respondents indicated that they restored their faith in God while in prison, and some also described using religion as a way to influence the relationship generally, particularly to dominate and control their intimate partner. One male respondent looked to God as a way to prevent him from being provoked into abusing his wife again.

My higher power told me that February the 11<sup>th</sup>, turn yourself in and I will take care of you. I tell myself then February the 12<sup>th</sup>, and ever since then, I been into my Bible. I have rededicated my life back to the Lord, I have. I feel great. It's nothing that my wife can do to provoke me, to, to, whether it physically or verbally, to do anything to her. I don't foresee it, not with me. And like, you know, I can't vouch for her. (TNMI006)

Another male respondent attempted to control his wife's actions from behind bars. He described telling her to affiliate with married women who attended church, as if to compel her maintain her fidelity to him by doing so.

And telling her, honey, you need to be more in fellowship with the married women in the church, rather than starting to try to fellowship with your old friends from school who aren't in Christ. You know, you're being pulled in two directions....and don't allow the enemy to get you like he got me. And because I had to be penalized for what my choice was, you'll be penalized if you make the wrong choice. Because you're still married. (WIMI002)

Another male respondent indicated that he looked to God to guide his next steps in returning to the head of the household post-release.

You know, I trust God; and I'm gonna do everything that I'm supposed to do as her covering, as her husband, as her provider. I'm not providing for her now, but I thank God, because we're both professionals. My wife ain't strugglin'. (WIMI002)

He went on to describe the importance of forgiveness in their lives. He reported that she forgave his drug use and infidelity, and he hoped he could offer her the same if she was unfaithful to him.

She forgave me. Even though she's still struggling with that, with forgiveness, but she forgave me. And she's still making the effort. So, I would be less...than a man, less than a husband, less than a man of God, not to forgive her if that should happen. God forbid that it does. I know it would hurt me. (WIMI002)

This is an example of an incarcerated man referring to the importance of being a "man of God" to manage his relationship with his intimate partner, guide him through possible conflicts, and restore him to his place as the head of the household.

**b. *Women's accounts of incarcerated men running things.*** It was the perception of some female respondents that some men attempted to maintain control over household finances and other important matters from prison. A few women indicated that their partners supported



their drug habit, and that incarceration changed the dynamic of their addiction and their relationship.

When he was incarcerated, he told the guy (dope man), give me \$30 a day. Well, I had to wait til he decided to give me the money. Well, he didn't want me using, doing it all day, and running around. So, he was pretty smart on that. I appreciated what he did because he would make me wait until he got off work....He wouldn't give me no dope in the morning, wouldn't give me no drugs, no nothing in the morning. He make me wait all day, every day til 7:00. (MNWP005)

One female respondent reported her attempts to manage their household on a single income, and said she was at first pleasantly surprised to see that her husband was finding ways to support her financially from prison. On second thought, she considered that this indicated his lack of trust in her ability to manage their affairs in his absence.

Making ends meet because my husband made way more money than I did. He was the solid breadwinner. So that mean I had to figure out how to really budget my money on how to maintain the house then, you know, without doing nothing crazy there. And he still at that point was trying to maintain things down from being incarcerated. People he knew, would come by and give me money. He would, you know, call and check up, you know, to make sure I paid the bill on the house. To me, that showed me, it sounded good, but again, it didn't sound good to me because that let me, I felt that he didn't have trust in me. (MNWP003)

These accounts indicate the ways in which female respondents described incarcerated men reaching from behind bars to control them or household matters.

**3. Men showing support from prison.** While incarcerated, men had little to offer women in terms of monetary support, physical assistance, or sexual intimacy. However, some men demonstrated support for women from prison, which can help diminish the relationship damage caused by incarceration. Men showed up for women in a variety of ways that included suppressing desires for extra attention, thoughtfulness, and planning ahead for reunification. The also made promises to do better upon release from prison.

*a. Incarcerated men and support for female partners.* One male respondent, who described himself as someone who enjoyed dressing well, reported understanding his partner's challenges managing family finances in his absence, and therefore, he made a point to not ask her for anything extra. By suppressing his own desires for expensive clothing or other items that required financial support from her, he showed support for her and the children, as well as made an indirect contribution to household money management during his incarceration.

If it was up to me and I had money, of course I like to wear some of the finer things, right. But I understand that, that I'm not in a position to provide any of this; and I understand that there are other children who if I asked for an \$80 pair of sneakers, that that's taking food from out of babies' mouths. So, management, money management and out of the larger concern for the larger family, right, that allows me to be able to, um, suppress those needs and focus on what's important for the family and what's important for the relationship. (NYMI002)

Another male respondent described encouraging his wife not to visit him given his short time until release from prison, especially since she would take on the associated burden of making a daylong, one-way trip. He reported his plans for reunifying with his wife after prison,

reminding her that he's "coming home." This was another demonstration of an incarcerated man suppressing his own desires as an indirect way to make a contribution to his intimate partner and the household.

I was up in Clinton, and that's 8 hours from home. I told her don't, because I'm short.

There's no need for her to go through all of that. I'm short, so you know. There's no need to rush. I'm coming home. I speak to her on the phone and I write to her. (NYMI009)

Yet another male respondent described how he helped his wife solve problems while he was incarcerated by leveraging support from his sister.

Every time she ran into a situation, or a certain thing, I tried to address it, and let [wife] know I understand. And we'd pray about it and let me see. I call the sister to get some money so she can help you out with that. You know, I showed more concern. And it was true. And once I kept doing it over a process of time, I wasn't trying to reap gain out of it. I just kept trying to show love. (TNMP004)

**b. *Incarcerated men's promises.*** Some incarcerated men used promises to do right upon return from prison as a way to manage their relationship with an intimate partner. While these promises may appear to be a show of support, in fact, some women regard them as empty, or as an attempt to string them along to help ensure support post-release. One female respondent described preparing her children for their father's return, relaying his desire to be a better person.

However, the children had become accustomed to the routines associated with his incarcerations, including broken promises.

I would just let them know that he's comin' home. And he said he's gonna make a change. And he's not gonna do the things he done and, you know, I can't keep tellin' 'em that because every time you tell them somethin', the same thing occurs. So, basically, I mean, they're used to it. If he get back, alright, it's okay. If he do wrong, then, no, it's not such a big surprise to 'em now. (TNWP007)

Another female respondent described her partner's promises to maintain sobriety after release. While she was initially skeptical of his claims to do right, she acquiesced to the idea of reunification based on his assurances of a straight life.

I thought things was going to work because he had promised me all these things he was going to do, you know, change. (MNWP003)

They reunified after his release, but he was unable to keep his promise of sobriety, which signaled the end of their relationship.

He got out. He did good for about a year. Eventually, um, he went back to using. He stayed gone for about three weeks. That's how I really knew he was back to using. He didn't want to face me or whatever have you there. And he just knew that was the straw. You know? It was like I was not even willing to even try, no, again, at all. (MNWP003)

**4. Women on maintaining contact and connection.** Female respondents were proactive in maintaining the relationship with their incarcerated male partners by adopting a

number of strategies, including: visiting men in prison, accepting collect phone calls from their incarcerated partner, shifting their role to the head of the household, and showing support.

*a. Visitation.* Seven of nine female respondents in this sample did not visit their intimate partners in prison for a variety of reasons, including their own criminal justice involvement, an active order of protection against the incarcerated man, hurt feelings, and ambivalence about maintaining the relationship. However, two of nine female respondents indicated that they visited men in prison. One female respondent described the importance she placed on establishing visiting routines, and the impact that had on her relationship with her husband.

When my husband went to jail for that year, I was there every two weeks. I bought a new car. And I parked that car and get on the bus and ride. I was there every two weeks. He said it's the first time he ever had that type of visit and that type of love shown to him, being in jail. (MNWP005)

Another female respondent described her early attempts at visiting her boyfriend in prison. They were both teenagers when he became incarcerated. It became too hard for to see him in distress, so her visits, once regular, tapered off and eventually ended. She described visits on special occasions as compared to regular visits, which were held via phone through a translucent barrier.

They [the prison] have a bus or something like that to come pick you up. And, um, it's like a little lobby or like a little cafeteria area or something like that, that you can see him on special occasions like on Christmas, you can have, you know, physical, you know, you can hug them and stuff like that. But any other time, you just have a visitation behind, you know, the glass or something, you know. (MNWP004)

Given that her boyfriend was incarcerated at age 14 and sentenced at 16, she is likely describing visiting him in a juvenile facility in the pre-sentencing phase of his incarceration. More often, female respondents indicated that they maintained contact through phone calls and letters.

***b. Accepting phone calls.*** Phone calls must originate from a correctional facility as collect calls; prisons are not set up to receive incoming calls for inmates. Therefore, accepting collect calls requires some preplanning if a routine is to be established. One female respondent described creating new routines for accepting calls from her partner in prison at a set time, reluctantly adjusting her schedule to accommodate these calls to avoid an argument.

I would try to be home in time for my phone calls. You know, it might be a day I decided: it's my payday, I don't want to go right home. If I know he gonna call at 5:00, but there's something I wanna go do, but then I don't want to hear his bitching....

(MNWP003)

She went on to report that paying the phone bill regularly to prevent the phone from becoming disconnected was an important way to avoid conflict with her incarcerated partner. This can become challenging with the added cost of expensive calls from a correctional facility.

The phone is like really vital to them. One time I forgot to pay our phone bill and I think the phone was off like a couple of days or something. Whew. I had to hear about that for about a month. (MNWP003)

Women relied heavily on phone calls to maintain connection with men in prison. Some female respondents described relying on phone contact in place of visits. One female respondent described communicating her feelings about her incarcerated partner's behavior to him while he was in prison via phone or letter, indicating that these forms of communication during his

imprisonment provided her with the freedom to express herself fully. She reported that they both battled drug addiction, and that he was serving time for domestic violence and for drug possession.

S: So, I...basically, once you go to jail and whatever I feel, whatever I feel that he did at that time, I tell him. Or I tell him what I didn't like that he done, or what he should be doin' that he don't do. And there's nothin' that he can do about it.

I: You tell him that on the phone or during a visit?

S: I don't visit him.

I: Okay. So, you're telling him that on the phone?

S: On the phone or in a letter. Mainly on the phone. (TNWP007)

For women who maintained contact with their incarcerated partner via three-way calls, or calls facilitated by third party, regular contact required additional pre-planning and coordination with the third party. One female respondent described the routines she created to remain in phone contact with her intimate partner, and the financial support she received from his family to do so.

We stayed in contact. We wrote all the time. And uh, we did conference calls and whatnot. I had set up, uh, a conference call through a friend of mine. So I got a conference call that my in-laws had paid for so we would be able to talk. Twice a week was all they was going to pay for. (MNWP003)

**5. Shifting roles.** Men and women reported that the ways in which they handled household matters like family finances and childrearing changed during men's imprisonment.

Traditional gender roles often become reversed during a man's stay in prison. In couples that assumed traditional roles such that men exerted greater influence over household affairs prior to incarceration, women often assumed an expanded role over decisions about and management of family matters during men's absence. Female respondents whose intimate partners were incarcerated reported that relationship roles shifted, and they described their added responsibilities for household management including financial and parenting challenges.

*a. Financial challenges.* One female respondent described an interruption in the bill-paying routine created by her husband's incarceration. In addition, she reported that her resentment over her husband's imprisonment caused her to ignore her financial responsibilities.

S: I had a bunch of creditors after me. I put some [money] on all of them. You know, some of them I didn't even pay. I got mad. There is a lot of shit I didn't even do. I really messed up. I really messed up.

I: Did your husband pay those bills before when he was home?

S: He would make sure that I did. (MNWP005)

Even though this female respondent indicated that she assumed responsibility for paying the bills prior to her husband's incarceration, she reported that his role was providing her with money and holding her accountable for this task. Without his contributions, the bills piled up. He also ensured that she was consistently supplied with drugs prior to his incarceration, which may have exacerbated her resentment over his incarceration.



Another female respondent described the financial challenges she experienced that were created by her husband's absence during his incarceration. Unlike the previous respondent, her husband brought home money and paid the bills. He was the financial manager for the family.

He paid all the bills when he was at home. He brought home the money and he paid. That was definitely one of the reasons why I really liked him. (MNWP003)

In his absence, these responsibilities fell to her. She also described enjoying shopping for herself, which was a point of contention between her and her husband prior to his incarceration. She described their arguments over money continuing during his incarceration, and rejecting his attempts at help to avoid his judgement about how she managed the money.

That was our battle there. You know? And then it got to a point where I'm like, you know, if he feel that, I had to hear about it, you know, throw it up in my face, I got to the point where I didn't want him to do anything for me. You know? While he was locked up....people came by, but, nope, I wouldn't even take it. Huh-uh. Cuz I just didn't want to hear the nonsense. (MNWP003)

**b. *Childrearing challenges.*** Some female respondents described raising children without a father, and the challenges that presented. One female respondent described challenges managing the household as an involuntary single parent, especially in managing childrearing tasks in both the maternal and paternal roles.

I have to play the mother and father role. We have a son that's ADHD and it's hard. If it was a 2-parent home, it would be easier when my son gets in trouble in school or something for one of us to be able to go.... Sometimes I have to take care of two

situations at one time. So that's the hardest thing to me, being able to play the mother and the father role. (TNWP007)

She went on to describe the family's difficulty coping with her addiction and pre-incarceration violence in the home. Managing these layers of issues without her partner's support was difficult.

Um, my children have, um...emotional problems. Because when he went to jail the first time it was about domestic violence. I had pressed charges on him, so they're dealin' with domestic violence; and they're dealin' with me bein' on drugs and, but I'm gettin' help now. I mean, they, it's a whole lot to be dealin' with. And then not only helpin' with what they have to deal with, I have to cope with what I'm dealin' with, too. So, it's kind of a hard tryin' to cope with both situations bein' on my own. (TNWP007)

Another female respondent described the stress associated with being a single parent, and considered that she might be verbally abusive to her children as a result of managing childrearing alone.

Sometimes I feel like I might be abusive, verbally abusive; because these are kids are a trip, and men don't realize that their sons need, their children, period, need them in their lives, you know. A woman can't do it all alone by themselves, you know. They really, really can't. (NYWI005)

**6. Women showing support for men under correctional control.** Male and female respondents described women showing support for incarcerated men and men on parole. Assistance took various forms, including maintaining active interaction, and as well as simply

not pressuring men to contribute financially with limited means. Women also prepared for men's release from prison by preparing themselves, the children, and their homes.

*a. Showing support for incarcerated male partners.* During men's incarceration, some women demonstrated support by maintaining contact through visits, calls, letters and offering monetary support. These were ways to communicate to men their faithfulness and their intention to maintain the relationship.

One female respondent described routine visits as a way to demonstrate fidelity to her partner. She reported that he experienced her consistency as love. According to her, his family helped pay for his lawyer's fees, but wouldn't visit him in prison.

I was there every two weeks. He said it's the first time he ever had that type of visit and that type of love shown to him, being in jail. (MNWP005)

She further described his year in prison as a fresh start for their relationship. During those visits, they learned new things about each other.

I say, you liked me since I was 18? I never asked him that before. (MNWP005)

Another female respondent described her commitment to maintaining a connection with her intimate partner during his incarceration as support. Comparatively, during her stays in prison, her intimate partner did not reciprocate, and she reported that the relationship seemed one-sided.

[I was] traveling on the road, making sure he had money on his books, whatever. And to not get that in return is a bitter pill to swallow. (MNWP003)

One male respondent described that his girlfriend demonstrated her commitment to him by not pressuring him for money while he was incarcerated. He earned a meager income from a prison-based job, but he used this income to cover the costs of necessities in prison. Therefore, he was unable to send her money, but he was relieved by the absence of pressure from her to do so.

My girlfriend was so good to me while I was locked up by not putting any pressure on me about nothing, you know what I'm sayin. I couldn't, when I was locked up, I couldn't send her no money. You know, I had a job. But that little piece of change, I would have to survive with that myself. Twenty dollars a month. (TNMP005)

When men are released from prison, they often require support to reintegrate into society, including assistance with finding employment, securing housing, and meeting parole stipulations (Travis et al., 2003). In anticipation of men's release from prison, some female respondents described the steps they took to prepare for their partner's release.

**b. *Showing post-incarceration support.*** Female respondents described metaphorically cleaning house to prepare for their partner's release from prison to show support for and commitment to the relationship. This involved improving the home, seeking mental health or drug counseling, and sending his step-children to stay with other family members during this transition period.

For example, a female respondent described preparing her home and herself for her husband's return. She purchased new furniture before his release, and enrolled herself in counseling. It was as if she were creating a clean slate for their relationship.

I had everything done, prepared when he got home as far as the house. I had bought a new living room set that he hadn't seen. Just getting prepared, because I really wanted...I believe in counseling. And I think counseling do work. (MNWP003)

Another female respondent described using her husband's release as a reason to get sober. Prior to his incarceration, they jointly enrolled in a methadone program, so it was her hope that they could both get sober again when her husband returned from prison.

I moved here. I got into treatment....I found out about all the resources to get myself together. (MNWP005)

Research indicates that the presence of step-children in the home can cause conflict between men and women, even increasing the risk of intimate partner violence (Campbell et al., 2003). Some women in this study described preparing for their intimate partner's release from prison by sending their children fathered by other men away to live with relatives as a way to demonstrate support for the relationship. This also may have been a measure of self-protection if they thought that the presence of his step-children might cause conflict in the relationship.

One female respondent who had experienced severe violence in her relationship before her husband went to prison sent the children to live with various relatives prior to her husband's release.

S: I sent [the children] away. All of them. Even his son. I sent his son back to his mom.

I: For how long?

S: Well, my daughter never came back. And my son stayed with my brother... He's still there. (MNWI001)

She described this as a strategy to prepare for the worst. Her husband was serving time for assaulting her and for shooting her brother, who tried to protect her. She stated that she wanted her marriage to work, and saw controlling the household by sending her children away as a strategy to help minimize distractions; she also assumed reunification might be rocky and she did not want her children to witness what might happen upon her husband's release.

You know, because I knew that some, some, something's going to give that he was going to go off on me for something....and I didn't want the kids to see us going at it.

(MNWI001)

At the heart of this show of support for her marriage is an attempt to pre-empt relationship conflict. It is not clear how she imagined the children would upset the equilibrium in the household – perhaps step-children might remind him of her former paramour, or perhaps the children witnessed activities that she wanted to keep private from her returning husband – but by sending them away, she appeared to prioritize her marriage over her children. She did not describe considering separation or divorce; their reunification seemed like a foregone conclusion.

**7. Demonstrating trustworthiness.** Trust is a building block of intimate relationships, and when men are incarcerated, trust is often broken. Men often distrust women's claims of sexual fidelity, and women often distrust men's claims of positive transformation during incarceration (Fishman, 1990; Hairston and Oliver, 2006a).

Several male respondents indicated that women's lack of sexual fidelity would cause conflict in their relationship. They expressed worry and angst over their intimate partner's possible affairs while they were behind bars.

Should I find out that she's been unfaithful to me, that would cause a conflict.

(NYMI007)

If there's been a relationship while I'm here, she don't want to let that go. Any kind of conflict like that then, well, I mean, is gonna escalate, and I might do kill somebody

(TNMI008).

Several female respondents indicated that they would need to personally witness men's positive transformation in order to believe their claims of growth and change. One female respondent indicated that she hoped and prayed that her incarcerated husband would overcome his battle with addiction.

So, um, I was just hoping that he would change. And, um, I just prayed a lot that, you know, God will make it better because I did want my marriage to work. (MNWI001)

Other women perceived men's assertions to be rhetoric intended to keep women engaged in the relationship during men's incarceration. One female respondent described her intimate partner's promises to "straighten up" lasting only into the first month after his release from prison.

You know how men always try to, you know, be all peaches and cream? Okay. I'm going to do right. I'm gonna get into counseling. You know, and they straighten up for a minute. But then slowly, but surely, it goes right back to the same old stuff over and over again, him starting drinking, and getting abusive again, and isolating me. You know? That just never stopped. (MNWP004)

This respondent stated that she wanted to believe her partner's claims that he had changed, but old patterns emerged very quickly after his release.

Incarceration creates physical and psychological barriers that strain relationships, causing men and women to seek other sources of information about each other's trustworthiness (Hairston & Oliver, 2006b, Fishman, 1990).

There are two main components of demonstrating trustworthiness during and after incarceration as men and women described them—men demonstrating personal transformation, and third-party confirmation of women's sexual fidelity.

Sometimes men's and women's efforts to rebuild trust are insufficient to overcome the negative impact of negative pre-prison experiences and of men's imprisonment on the relationship. Therefore, some men and women sought verification of a partner's truthful account of their own behavior from an outside source. Verification of women's fidelity or men's personal transformation can change the direction of the relationship when it contradicts a partner's claims. Men sought third-party confirmation of women's monogamy through reports from friends and family. Women sought demonstration of men's personal transformation to validate men's claims that they had improved themselves while in prison, and to find evidence that life would be better after release.

*a. Men demonstrating personal transformation.* Trust is often broken during incarceration, and both men and women described generating or receiving evidence of personal transformation related to living a straight life as a way to begin repairing their relationship. Often, women dismissed men's accounts of their own transformation, and wanted a trusted third party to authenticate men's claims of personal growth. Female respondents expressed desire for



third party verification from correctional counselors, or from classes that men passed, as evidence.

Men and women also discussed men demonstrating personal transformation through verifiable means including passing a test, using a sponsor, or expressing religiosity. Female respondents indicated that they wanted proof that men had changed for the better during their stay in prison, as it was difficult for women to believe men's stories of positive change. Men indicated that they wanted to prove to women that they had positively transformed during incarceration. Their method for doing so sometimes involved expressing heightened religiosity or a stronger relationship with God.

*i. Incarcerated men's demonstration of faith.* Some male respondents reported demonstrating a stronger relationship with God as a way to prove to the family that they had changed for the better during prison. In this sample, men who expressed religiosity had admitted pre-prison abuse in their intimate relationships, or recovery from addiction. It is possible that some men indeed became more spiritually centered, helping them make better choices related to avoiding substance use, violence and criminal behavior. It is also possible that some men claimed religiosity as a way to return to their family's good graces.

I think our relationship still gonna be more stronger; because I think I got more spiritual living into me now. I'm sayin' that I can show them that I can be more, a better father, that I can get rid of the drugs and alcohol. And they can see a new me. And I can show 'em more love and caring. (WIMI012)

I constantly let her know the changes that I'm going through, you know, and the things I'm doing to keep myself on the right path. When I be readin' my Bible, I probably write

a couple of verses down out the Bible and put where I found it and send it off to her.

(WIMI005)

Some women responded positively to men's claims of religious adherence or spiritual focus, as this was an important indicator of men's change. One female respondent described that her husband attended church and pastoral counseling at her request for help in repairing their relationship after physical abuse and incarceration. He complied, but she questioned his motives.

With my husband, he would go to church, you know, and get some counseling with the pastor. And you know, that seemed to help, but he was just doing all that to please me.

(MNWP004)

ii. *Measuring transformation.* Religious adherence and its impact are hard to measure. Therefore, some women expressed a desire for measurable verification of men's personal transformation. One female respondent requested a set of qualifications for release to confirm the incarcerated person's positive transformation.

I don't think that everybody thinking of the safety or the well-being of the people that are out and have to endure what the people on the inside are doing. I think that they should have to qualify and pass some class saying that they've worked on this. Whatever it may be. (TNWP007)

Men described the ways in which they sought to demonstrate their positive change to women. One male respondent described how a sponsor could serve as the third-party, vouching for his sobriety.

I don't know if she knows that I'm sincere, how sincere I am when I tell her that I'm done with it. You know, if I had like a sponsor, somebody that can really, other than myself, explain to her the drug, and just instill some confidence in her, you know, for me, from my standpoint. (WIMI009)

**b. *Third party confirmation of women's sexual fidelity.*** Another aspect of re-establishing trust during and after incarceration was to confirm women's sexual fidelity. According to reports from three of the nine female respondents in the sample, men relied on the accounts of family and friends as the primary source of information about women's fidelity during men's incarceration. While male respondents did not describe using third parties to check the veracity of women's claims of faithfulness, they did describe deep concerns about women's monogamy. Therefore, this may be an example of men underreporting their own behaviors.

Female respondents described men's interest in confirming their fidelity during incarceration through conversations with family and friends. It was not clear if the communication described by female respondents between men and their informants was unidirectional or bidirectional. Female respondents did not clearly describe if and when men solicited this information, or if information about intimate partners was simply brought to them as idle gossip. Regardless, female respondents described that men believed the reports from third parties about women's infidelity over women's own accounts, and this situation created relationship conflict.

One female respondent described that her incarcerated partner acted on information that she was sexually promiscuous in his absence.

People be saying that you a ho and all of this and that. I believe that you are a ho and all of this and that. (MNWP004)

Similarly, another female respondent described that her most heated arguments with her intimate partner related to accusations of infidelity, stemming from information obtained by a third party. The source of the information in this case was her partner's friends, who by her report, made advances on her to begin with. Furthermore, she alluded to the connection between substance use and sex, which was not otherwise present in these data, but is confirmed in other literature. In this scenario, we may infer that she was getting high with his group of friends, but paying more attention to one man over the rest. Petty jealousies ensued, and the "rejected" friends reported her "bad" behavior to her incarcerated partner.

That's always been the biggest argument. Somebody goes back and tells him I did something, or when I was on drugs, somebody would say I was giving a certain guy a lot of money. ...Family, his friends [would tell]. And the majority of his friends be the ones hittin' on me, but they'll go back and tell him something I've done...It's always a cheating thing. (TNWP007)

To prevent conflict, one female respondent described proactively communicating her version of rumors that her incarcerated partner might hear about her from his sources in their neighborhood.

People in the projects, basically, they just, they tell everybody. So I try to write him and tell him before he hear it the wrong way. (TNWI001)

**8. Relationship support during men's correctional supervision.** Customarily, men and women often seek support for relationship concerns by confiding in friends or family, or borrowing money and asking for a lead on a job when they fall on hard times. When men are incarcerated, the state is directly involved in family matters, and every facet of support is influenced by correctional supervision.

Men and women reported seeking sources of relationship support both during men's incarceration and after their release. The majority of respondents saw relationship support as positive, but some experienced certain forms of support as intrusive or counterproductive. Further, some men and women experienced the same sources of support for their relationship differently; for example, some women experienced law enforcement as a help, whereas other women and some men experienced law enforcement as an intrusion. The support described by respondents in this sample included correctional programs and staff; financial stability; friends and family; and professionals, including parole officers, social workers, and police. Men and women also described stigma as a barrier to support.

*a. Correctional programs and staff.* While most men described prison as damaging to relationships with wives or girlfriends, some men described support from correctional programs and staff that facilitated a positive relationship with their intimate partners. These men described ideas acquired from prison-based educational programs as benefitting their relationships. They also described interacting with volunteers and staff from outside the prison as important for improving their understanding of their intimate partners. Some men's positive interactions with prison-based programs, staff, and volunteers helped them improve their outlook on relationships with intimate partners.

*i. Exposure to prison rehabilitation programs and new ideas.* Men's exposure to new concepts in prison-based programs can be life changing. Some men described taking substance abuse, anger management, parenting, and other classes while they were incarcerated, programs that helped them learn things about themselves and their families and helped them improve their relationships with intimate partners and children.

One male respondent, incarcerated for almost two decades in a New York state prison, took advantage of multiple programs over the years that were provided by both the prison and by a community-based organization inside the facility.

As a result of taking those programs [in prison]...just having the opportunity to be around positive people like that who is bringing in information, um, and providing me with the tools, right, that would allow me to actually see myself and look at old negative behaviors, I was then able actually to apply the information that was given to me. And look at the relationships, and have a more meaningful [relationship] in a positive light.  
(NYMI002)

One of the programs he participated in focused on parenting skills, and co-parenting from prison. One take away from that program related to an increased respect for women.

What I've learned in the parenting course, that gave me more love and respect for women on how to treat women. And, like how not to take advantage of them. (NYMI002)

Due to his active participation in so many programs, he was given the opportunity to work in the prison children's center in the visiting room. This experience broadened his perspective on healthy family interactions.

I think this exposure has affected my experience in the positive sense, in terms on it allowed me to gain information that allows me to have a more meaningful relationship with my wife and daughter. (NYMI002)

ii. *Volunteers and civilian staff as surrogate family.* Men described positive relationships with volunteers and employees of community organizations working inside the prison. These relationships were meaningful to some men, and served as a surrogate for important relationships with family on the outside. It is noteworthy that the relationships these men described were with women.

One man reported that his relationships with female volunteers afforded him the opportunity to learn to talk to women and to understand their feelings. He indicated that prior to his incarceration, he wasn't inclined to listen to his girlfriend. Therefore, his relationships with volunteers taught him critical communication skills that were transferrable to his primary relationships on the outside.

Sayin' what has got to me by me being in prison, you know, I been seein' a lot of ladies come in here from the outside, churches and stuff; and they come in here and then we had a fatherhood program going on. And they was talkin' to me about their feelings and they, what they likin' to a man on the woman's behalf. And the things that I didn't have enough time when I was on the streets to sit down to talk to my girlfriend, with our family problems, or it's about her problems and her situation, what do she think that it needed. I was being more in control. If things didn't go the way I want it to go, it didn't go at all. So that's what I get out of it. It learned me to give 'em more respect, and have the ear to hear. (WIMI012)

Another man indicated that staff from a community-based program working inside the prison became like a family to him. His attachment to these volunteers and civilian staff may have been related to his deep engagement in prison programs and his two decades behind bars.

The Osborne Association is my extended family. Because there are several civilians from Osborne that come inside and work. The executive director is like a mother figure to me. And her daughter worked with me in the Children's Center for 18 months. Me and her daughter has a good relationship. (NYMI002)

**b. *Family and friends.*** Men described the ways in which family and friends were helpful to their relationships during incarceration. Eleven of 15 men in this sample had children in common with their intimate partner; therefore, assistance with parenting in men's absence was frequently reported. Men described the role of parents as key to maintaining connections with children when the relationship with the child's mother was severed. They also helped by standing in the gap for the incarcerated father and children's mother when neither were able to care for their children.

Some male respondents referenced family support as key for helping with child-rearing and with moral guidance in their absence. One man described the role his mother played in helping raise his children.

Right now she's got two of them in her care. [she takes them] to and from school, clothing them, helping me out a lot right now, instead of them going to foster care or to they momma house. I don't think that would be a good idea. (TMMI008)



Another man described his wife standing in for the mother of his other children. During his incarceration, his previous partner became addicted to drugs, and his current wife took in the children, folding them in with her own.

They [the children] all just together now. There's like no problem. (WIMI006)

Another man described his parents taking his son for weekend visits. This allowed the son to maintain a relationship with his father's extended family in his absence, including aunts, uncles and cousins. As he described it, this gave his son a more favorable impression of him during his incarceration.

That's something that he has always heard. My mother commends me. He's heard good things about me. And my brother is, I need some sneakers. Or you know, take him to the basketball game. (NYMP003)

*c. Financial stability.* Women identified the financial strain caused by losing an income earner to incarceration, and talked about the importance of financial help during a man's incarceration for family stability and the functioning of a positive relationship. Both men and women linked job stability to household and relationship stability. Men also indicated that employment during reentry could jeopardize reunification with family when work schedules conflicted with family time.

Overall, women wanted financial support during men's incarceration and reentry. One woman described the role that the state could play in supporting families with a loved one in prison. This was not help she received, but was an example of what she imagined might be helpful to women like her.

Yeah, I would have liked something that would give me more money to help me pay my bills, or something to, you know, help. And when they go, that income is gone, something to help us with what we got to do while we're out here by ourselves.

(NYWP001)

Another female respondent simply stated that any support provided to her husband as he returned from prison was in turn support for her.

Give him money so that he can give it to me! (NYWI005)

**9. Relationship support during parole.** Men and women described the ways in which support was needed to reunify after a man's imprisonment, and to maintain their relationship by helping formerly incarcerated men contribute to the family and adjust to life outside prison. Respondents described employment, housing, family, and professionals as post-release supports, and in some instances, intrusions into lives and relationships complicated by system involvement through parole supervision.

*a. Stable job, stable home.* Financial stability is important for couples post-release. For those who reunite after a stay in prison, women may be a primary source of financial support until their partners secure a job.

Women described men's need for stable housing post-release, and the importance of transitional housing to men's stability and to stabilizing the relationship. One female respondent described that she used her husband's release as a reason to get sober, and worked toward a positive future they could share by both living in supportive transitional housing. She understood this as their best chance for stable housing.

I moved here, got into treatment. Talked to men in the treatment center about getting him hooked up, so when he comes, he know where to go. I found out about all the resources for me, got myself together. And then I found out the resources for him. So when he got here, I had it all set up.

Now I am in transitional housing. He is in transitional housing. And we're getting ready to move into a sober building. They got sober housing where they have apartments for couples. It's couples only. I'm looking forward to this. (MNWP005)

**b.      *Employment has a price.*** Employment was a critical form of support for men on parole and their family members, given that an income provided additional stability for the entire family. However, employment was also often a parole stipulation; while helpful to the family, men also understood this as a mandate.

Some men described the demands of work as taking time away from reunifying with family and friends post-release. For some men, this seemed like an intrusion, and for other men, this seemed like a trade-off associated with balancing family and work obligations. The complicating factor related to men's absence from the family during incarceration and the perception that new work routines continued their absence from the home.

One man in prison imagined working extra hours at a low-paying job as a potential barrier to spending time with intimate partners and family.

Um, probably having to work extra hours because bills gonna be behind because the job that might hire me ain't paying enough because I'm a felon. An, um, doing all this type of stuff, being tired most of the time. (TNMI008)

Another man described preparing to let his son know that their weekend plans were cancelled because of his work schedule. He thought that the news might be better received if accompanied by a gift.

I gotta pick up sneakers and let him know that I can't get him this weekend....Because I gotta work nights. (NYMP003)

*c. Post-release interaction with professionals.* When men are released from prison, many are released to serve out their remaining time in the community under parole supervision. This puts an array of professionals in their lives and in the lives of their family members. Men on parole have routine contact with parole officers and with other professionals who supervise their participation in post-release programs, such as substance abuse counseling

*i. Parole and social workers: a mixed bag.* Men described their experiences during reentry in the context of their parole supervision. This was the overarching phenomenon that influenced how men perceived support. Some men conceded that parole could be a support to their relationship with intimate partners, but most men perceived it as an intrusion. Similarly, some female respondents indicated that contact with parole officers or others representing corrections or child welfare systems was intrusive.

*Men's contact with parole officers.* Most men described parole supervision as unhelpful to their intimate partner relationships. As was previously discussed, men felt constrained by the curfews and travel restrictions imposed by parole, and thought that this limited their full expression and participation in their intimate partner relationships. They also stated concerns about the intrusive nature of parole supervision into their homes, resenting home visits conducted at odd hours.

One man described parole home visits as intrusive, especially when they occurred in the middle of the night.

These people here, they are in your business. They will come to your house two or three in the morning. (WIMI002)

However, some men indicated that women's contact with parole officers could be beneficial to the relationship, but for different reasons. Some thought that women's firsthand knowledge of parole conditions would help increase their understanding of the rules related to compliance.

I try to get her to come in with me through the one-on-one counseling that I have with him, where we can have a stronger relationship, where she can see the situation that I had to go through. And she know the outcome. (WIMI012)

Some men thought that parole supervision provided structure and parameters for their behavior, encouraging them to make prosocial choices. These men recognized the role of parole as a protection against their future problematic behavior.

I think it will bring us closer together. Because she know it will limit doing certain things. I can't go to bars. She know that I won't go now. Because I don't want to come back up in here again. (WIMI006)

Some men regarded orders of protection similarly; they served as an additional layer of control that provided guardrails for their behavior. One man was serving out his time in prison and would therefore not be under parole supervision. However, he reported that the order of

protection issued against him by his wife would serve to keep his behavior in check, and his marriage vows would help him sustain his commitment to the relationship.

[I will] honor the protection order....And I still have my marriage vow. Then they have, I'm telling my wife, I'm with you win, lose, or draw. (TNMI006)

That same man described that his transitional housing provided by the VA post-release was tied to honoring his protection order.

Personally, I'm gonna honor it. I'm gonna honor it because I'm not able, it's not that, I just got into a program with the Veterans Association. And I will be staying there for 6 months when I leave here. I've already submitted my application, and they told me to come on or I need a house when I get it out. They help veterans with jobs and housing, so that's where I will be for the next six months. (TNMI006)

Stipulations and conditions appeared to be important to this man's prosocial choices. By violating the protection order, he would jeopardize his plans for housing. Legally, he was unable to return to his wife's home, so transitional housing through the VA seemed to be his best option to achieve stability post-release.

*Women's contact with parole officers and social workers.* Some women thought that their communication with a parole officer might keep men in check. One female respondent described remaining in constant contact with her intimate partner's parole officer.

The only person I know is his parole officer. And I keep in constant contact with him. I call him. He knows me. I went several times when he had to go report in. And my

information is on his papers, so he has to let me know information if I call. But if I wasn't on his papers, then he wouldn't be allowed to tell me anything. (TNWP007)

As was previously discussed, some women use the coercive power of parole to their advantage by reporting men's problematic behavior to parole officers. However, other women saw parole as an unnecessary intrusion into their lives. Those who saw parole as intrusive viewed parole officers and social workers through the same lens—as unhelpful agents who possessed the ability to remove their children from the home. This was especially true for women who had previous contact with the criminal justice system or child protective services.

One female respondent described wanting to avoid contact with her partner's parole officer because she didn't want to risk having any more system actors involved in the life of their family.

Like a lady said yesterday she didn't really want to be involved with a probation officer because it wouldn't concern her. That why I said, I'm like, no, that's just more people to have to get involved with. I'm already trying to stay on the straight and narrow with my situation with my kids. I don't need no more persons that I have to report to and talk to. (MNWP004)

Her primary concern seemed to be avoiding further contact with child protective services. Other women reported fear of involvement with the child welfare system as a barrier to asking for help from professionals.

Getting involved with a social worker...they want to take your kids...it probably don't have nothing to do with your child, but they gonna get involved anyway. That's why a lot

of people don't call the police, is that they don't want all that confusion. And when your child is in the system, it's over. (NYWP003)

They real nosy. A social worker will come into our house. They will want to see, make sure you got clean clothes for your kids, how you living, and they be wanting to take them, and all that. They feel like the kids is, you know, they life is in danger and all of that. That's why I wouldn't talk to no social worker. (TNWI001)

ii. *Complications and consequences of police contact.* Some women described problematic interactions with law enforcement, which influenced their desire to rely on them for help with relationship violence. This is consistent with the literature on African American women's experiences with police as inadequate purveyors of their protection, often times putting them in line for further harm from abusive men and from the state (Ferraro, 2008; Grinstead et al., 2001; M. M. Morris, 2016; Richie, 2012). Women also indicated that orders of protection were ineffective at keeping them safe from relationship abuse.

One female respondent reported that the police treated her dismissively, like she was a familiar, frequent caller for help with relationship violence, treatment which prevented her from calling them again. Another female respondent described how police told her that she was exaggerating her claims of abuse, telling her husband, "Let's take a walk, buddy. Come back in half an hour." She then described police arresting her for domestic violence when she called them for help.

Once when we were fighting they locked us both up.... But he had over 100 assaults on him. (TNWI001)



Yet another female respondent described the ways in which an order of protection intended to safeguard her from abuse further inflamed an abusive relationship, not offering protection at all.

Like when I got the order of protection, he was in there beating me up. Because he received a copy of the order of protection. I asked them people not to do that, because I knew what he would do. He had to show up in court. He beat me up. I did not call them people because I felt this way. I was so mad with the judicial system that I said what can these people do for me? (NYWP002)

These experiences with law enforcement served to increase women's risk of continued relationship abuse as well as increase the risk of their own arrest.

**10. The role of stigma.** Stigma, or fear of judgment, influenced men's and women's ability to seek help and to be successful. Some men reported managing stigma associated with finding a job post-release or managing impressions of their status as a changed man. Women, on the other hand, described stigma as a barrier to seeking help.

*a. Men on the stigma of incarceration.* Some men described their experiences of stigma related to reentry and reunification with intimate partners. They saw the ability to earn a living wage as critical to their success and the success of their relationships. One man reported fear that only low wage jobs would be available to felons, if they were given the opportunity for employment at all. Another man described managing stigma by changing his manner of dress to match his conception of himself as a transformed man.

One man described stigma as a potential barrier to employment. He imagined that his status as a formerly incarcerated felon would stand in the way of getting a job post-release, imagining that to some employers, his criminal record diminished his worth as a person.

Do not stigmatize. Yeah, don't discriminate because I'm incarcerated that I'm nobody.

Yeah. Give a person a second chance. (NYMI007)

Another man described stigma as a barrier to reunification. He described the ways that he portrayed himself as a changed man to manage stigma, particularly from his family.

I guess one of the major challenges I have had to face was probably been accepted again in society, where it pertains to some family members.

I've changed, before I got out, receiving the Lord into my life. When I went back, I was excited, but also was careful. Because I did not want to portray a wrong image, for people thinking that I was the same old person; or if they did thought that I was the same old person, I wanted to be able to relate to 'em in a different way.

If I go live a Christian life, they I don't want to portray that I'm still livin' a hard life, or the life of the world. ...I wanted to change and make my appearance better. I don't want to look like I'm a thug anymore or anything. So, I dress different. (TNMP004)

**b.      *Women on the stigma of men's incarceration.*** Women described a variety of reasons for not seeking support for managing their relationship with an intimate partner. Some women described intentionally avoiding support to avoid the stigma of men's incarceration. Some women in this sample had experienced abuse prior to their partner's incarceration, which also influenced their help-seeking behaviors. A few women also described fear of judgment of

their drug addiction and their own involvement with the criminal justice system as barriers to seeking help. For these reasons, some women kept to themselves rather than seeking support from family, friends, or professionals that they feared could result in judgmental treatment. When stigma leads to silence, people become isolated from help.

One female respondent criticized the church in her community, indicating that the minister spread gossip, which kept her from seeking support from them during her husband's incarceration.

She [the minister] be putting people's business out on the street. ... You don't take my business at Bible Study if I don't show up. You know, you just don't do that. (TNWI001)

Another female respondent described treatment by corrections officers rooted in perceived judgement associated with visiting an incarcerated intimate partner. She felt stigmatized from her affiliation with an incarcerated man, and judged for continuing visits even in the face of poor treatment by her incarcerated partner.

I think that if they see how you present yourself, and the corrections officers, I guess they see, I guess they get so tired of these women running up there and bringing them, you leaving them money; you're buying them clothes; you're leaving them food. And then they talk to you like you're a piece of nothing, you know. And I guess that's what ticks them off, you know, like the young lady said, he kept asking me, why you still coming here to see him? And the way he treats you, you know. Like you're being subjected to them, and I think that makes them kind of like turn away from the women. (NYWI005)

Stigma and shame combine to prevent people from seeking help. One female respondent simply stated that she didn't want people involved in her personal affairs, whereas others

specifically described keeping their partner's incarceration a secret in order to prevent negative judgment.

[I wouldn't turn to anyone for help] because I don't really like everybody in my business.  
(NYWP003)

A female respondent who had warrants for her arrest didn't reveal that her husband was incarcerated for fear that it would draw disfavor from her family, and negative attention from the police.

And I can sit back now and look at that, you know, and I kept it a secret. I didn't even nobody. And my sister and I is pretty close. I used to kind of reveal everything. And I just never told nobody anything. You know, people fall out with you. You never know, they might be trying to call the police on you. (MNWP003)

One female respondent described pre-prison abuse from her incarcerated intimate partner. The shame of the abuse she experienced, coupled with her drug addiction, kept her from seeking help.

A lot of times, I just stayed to myself. You know. I couldn't turn to nobody because I didn't want my family to know what I was going through and stuff. I basically just accepted the beatings and whuppings. (MNWI001)

S: He made sure that because he started me on heroin, so he saw to it that I always had my fix so that I wouldn't get sick.

I: And you felt like because you were using, you couldn't reach out to folks too.

S: Yes, I really did. Because you know, drugs, it's like killing yourself. (MNWI001)

Women's responses differed from men's in that women articulated the ways in which stigma influenced their help-seeking behaviors, particularly during men's incarceration. Women described experiences with judgement or stigma as a barrier to help, but men in prison did not. This may have been the case because women had the potential opportunity to conceal men's incarceration from others, whereas men's incarceration status was obvious. Men did describe stigma as a barrier during reentry, however, particularly when related to finding a job and communicating their status as a changed man.

#### **D. Relationship Conflict during Correctional Supervision**

Correctional supervision separates men and women from one another physically and psychologically such that they experience separate realities during men's incarceration. These separate realities, how men and women adjust to the related demands, and how they negotiate their relationships in light of them, are at the heart of relationship conflict (Fishman, 1990; Comfort, 2008; Hairston and Oliver, 2006). This study's core findings on relationship conflict during and after incarceration are related to two key areas: changes in relationship roles, and expectations of one another that are unmet.

**1. Change in relationship roles during men's correctional supervision.** Relationship roles can shift when men become incarcerated in response to the demands of men's and women's separate realities; men become dependent on others for care, and women often become more independent by virtue of taking charge of family and household matters to compensate for men's absence. Men depend on the correctional system to meet their basic needs, and they also rely on friends and family to meet their needs for financial support and to serve as a connector to the world outside the prison walls. Women, on the other hand, often fill the void created by men's

incarceration, assuming increased levels of responsibility and taking charge of family and related matters. In relationships that are guided by traditional gender roles, in which men assume a more dominant position and women a more submissive position in the relationship, role changes during incarceration can seem even more dramatic, as roles can appear reversed.

One female respondent explained what gender roles looked like in her relationship prior to her husband's incarceration.

Um, ooh, with my husband, I liked him because he's one of those take charge. I like that in a man. You know? He's a hell of a provider...I really liked that. And that is what I was used to. (MNWP003)

During his incarceration, the relationship dynamic shifted, and her husband relied on her for support instead. She described sending him money during his stay in prison, and his questions about when to expect it.

I'm doing what I need to be doing. [Her husband would say] I mean, you're not backing up things. [She would reply] When you get your mail, usually when you get mail, then it has money in it. They usually circle it in red, with a red pen. I used to tell him, I said, didn't you get some red this week? You know, I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. (MNWP003)

**a. *Men become dependent.*** Men and women described incarcerated men's neediness and dependence. Many men were not able to earn a living while incarcerated. If they did earn money in exchange for labor, their rate of pay was typically very little, usually only enough to cover their basic necessities, such as toiletries.

When I was locked up, I couldn't send her no money. You know, I had a job. But that little piece of change, I would have to survive with that myself. Twenty dollars a month.

(TNMP005)

Some men described seeking additional support from women during their incarceration. Men described their dependence on women for support as well as keeping their neediness in check for the sake of preserving the relationship.

**b. *Men's dependence during imprisonment.*** Prisoners are completely dependent on others to have even their basic needs met. While men are incarcerated, they rely on the prison for food, clothing, and shelter. The prison also prescribes their daily routine for eating, bathing, sleeping and recreation. Additionally, prisoners are reliant on others for connection to the outside world. This includes depending on others to assume the charges for collect calls from prison, to visit them, and to provide them with monetary support. Some men mentioned needing additional support, claiming that this fell into the realm of the women's responsibility to them.

You want her to do her job, writing you letters, sending you packages, coming to see you.

(NYMP004)

Some men also relied on women for emotional support and access to children. One male respondent described his reliance on his rocky relationship with his intimate partner to maintain a relationship with their son. He indicated that he was at his lowest point while he was incarcerated, and needed her to provide for him like he provided for her prior to his imprisonment, even though their romantic relationship was dissolving.

At the time, I provided. You know, I took care of you and my son. Now I need you. I need you to help me out now. I don't need you to come up every week. Just bring my son

when you can. That was all I was concerned about. Bring my son. Let me keep a relationship with my son while I'm incarcerated. (NYMP003)

*c. Men's dependence during parole.* After release from prison, some men's dependence continued. Successful transitions back to the community post-release were challenging, and some men indicated dependence on women for moral and financial support. One man described wanting constant reassurance from his intimate partner to help him cope with frustrations and setbacks related to post-release goal attainment.

That she's gonna be, you know, the best wife, best, you know what I'm sayin', business partner or associate. Um, she'll be there for me in times when I'm frustrated at school, where I work. Just her bein' a friend, more than a lover. Being a friend, man. (NYMP004)

When women expect men to move from dependence during incarceration to independence post-release as is indicated in the findings related to women's expectations of men on parole, then men's expectations of women's continued support and role as an exemplary partner during this adjustment period may create additional relationship strain.

Another male respondent described depending on his intimate partner's stability for his post-release success. When she lost her job and relapsed during his stay in a halfway house, he realized that he needed to quickly align himself with a more stable woman to secure a place to live upon his release.

And I realized that, you know, she [former girlfriend] wasn't gonna do it. So, but during this time, I think in the back of my mind I already knew, you know, that it wasn't gonna



happen. So, I was talkin' to somebody else already. I had another female in the wings already, you know. And I told her, of course, I was tellin' her about what's goin' on with me and the other lady. And told her, look, it don't look like this is gonna work. And if it don't, I'm gonna need somewhere to stay, you know. And by that time, man, I done got, you know, pretty well attached. And you know, when my time came to leave the halfway house, she said I could move in with her. And she let me live with her, and it's been good ever since. And I haven't, I haven't seen my other [girlfriend] since...I left the halfway house. (WIMP009)

In this case, the dependency on an intimate partner did not precipitate relationship conflict, but the perceived lack of stability brought the relationship to an end. When it became clear that his intimate partner could not provide him with stable housing post-release, then the relationship no longer met his needs.

*d. Men on managing dependence.* A few men reported that remaining selfless was an important way to mitigate the impact of their dependence on their intimate partner. Given the total control of prison life, men simply could not become independent during incarceration, but they could suppress their desires for support, which men indicated was a way to demonstrate care for women. One man clearly recognized that pressuring his partner for support was not an effective strategy for maintaining a positive relationship with her.

Unselfish, like...you want to, you want to get a visit when you feel like it. I want you to come up two days a week. And she says, I can't come two days a week. I got to take care of a lot of business. And you say, no, I need a visit. I need a package, and I need money in my account. And you know, I need it today. Because the mail, it might take three or

four days to reach you. And you come to visit, and the money go right into that account.

And in two days, I can go to commissary. So being unselfish. You know, understand that she had things to take care of, instead of what you want. (NYMI007)

Phone calls must originate from a correctional facility as collect calls; prisons are not set up to receive incoming calls for inmates. Therefore, when one male respondent indicated that he was not talking with his wife very often, he tried to manage his dependence by demonstrating restraint and consideration for the expense associated with those calls.

I don't get to talk to her much because I try not to run people's phone bills up.

(WIMI005)

**2. Women taking charge.** As a counterbalance to men's dependence during incarceration, women often become more independent, or even a dominant figure in the relationship and in the family as whole.

*a. Men's perceptions of women's role changes.* Men reported that women were changed by men's incarceration, and this changed the relationship dynamic. They described women as becoming domineering in men's absence. This may be a function of taking charge of household affairs, in some cases inverting the roles and power structures that formerly guided the household.

One man described that his partner's expressions of dominance in the relationship would be a cause for conflict.

Don't try to be a, what do they call it, be controlling or be too bossy. Because I'm incarcerated. You don't try to take advantage with being dominant. (NYMI007)

Another man described that both he and his partner changed during his eighteen-year incarceration. To his surprise, his partner used physical violence against him upon his release. He reported that this never occurred before his incarceration.

So of course, we was together, then about eighteen years later, we come back, both of us has went through this experience that have changed us in a certain way. So, through knowing each other, the hitting part is something that, because before, she never would have done that. That's before I came to prison. Before. But now, when she comes back, this is the new her. Bam! Want to hit me. And I said, whoa. Where did that come from? (NYMI002)

**b. *Women's accounts of their role changes.*** Women corroborated men's assertions that they expressed greater independence during men's incarceration. A female respondent revealed her thoughts on why incarcerated men might perceive their partners as dominant or controlling. She indicated that she simply wouldn't listen to anyone who couldn't meet her needs.

I think men are intimidated by a strong woman, someone who's smart and can handle her own....I just let 'em know, if you're not doing anything for me, then there is nothing you can say to me. (NYWI005)

Some women connected their change to fulfilling multiple family roles in men's absence and to adopting additional roles and duties outside the home. One female respondent described playing both the maternal and paternal roles in their family during men's incarceration.

I have to play the mother and father role. We have a son that's ADHD and it's hard. If it was a two-parent home, it would be easier when my son gets in trouble in school or something for one of us to be able to go.... Sometimes I have to take care of two situations at one time. So that's the hardest thing to me, being able to play the mother and the father role. (TNWP007)

This respondent went on to describe her desire for her husband to assume a stronger parenting role with their children, recounting a conversation she had with him prior to his release from prison. Her involuntary single parenthood created additional childrearing burden during her husband's incarceration, and she expressed a desire to have him alleviate some of that burden.

He needs to step up and be a dad. I'm not the only parent. Three, our three children are his three children. He needs to take responsibility of them. (TNWP007)

When men were the primary income earners in the relationship prior to incarceration, some women had difficulty making ends meet in their absence. This meant stepping into the role of managing household finances, but on just one income, highlighting the loss of support.

Making ends meet because my husband made way more money than I did. He was the solid breadwinner. So that mean I had to figure out how to really budget my money on how to maintain the house then, you know, without doing nothing crazy there. (MNWP003)

Those who have experienced multiple crises may have well-developed coping routines. One female respondent reported that she would simply fall back on her old patterns of survivorship in her partner's absence without calling on him or others for support.

I am trying to learn how to be independent and suffer life on myself rather than have to ask people. Now, if there is something that my son really needs, then I'm fine [to ask for help]. But as far as anything else, I've done without my whole life. I am a survivor. I will make it. (TNWI001)

Playing both parental roles, managing the household with one income, and coping with their partner's absence can increase women's self-sufficiency, possibly leading them to avoid connection and support that men can offer from prison. These changes may erode the relationship over time.

### **3. Expectations during men's imprisonment – men want a dependable partner.**

As with any intimate partner relationship, men and women have expectations of one another. In relationships impacted by incarceration, those expectations shift and can become challenging, if not impossible to meet.

Foremost, men expressed expectations of women's support, loyalty, and fidelity in the relationship. This involved maintaining contact by receiving calls, making visits, and providing material support. This also meant expecting women to maintain or increase their pre-prison level of commitment to the relationship. Men explained that unmet relationship expectations often led to relationship conflict. One male respondent described that unrealistic expectations of and demands on his intimate partner drove her away.

Me wanting too much from her...Come up here. Write me more than she's writing, you know. Put her life on hold for mines. You know, that right there kinda pushed her away, you know, until I, she gave me some time to really think about what I was doing, without even saying it, she just fell back. (NYMI009)

Another male respondent expressed frustration about his girlfriend's lack of employment, problematic parenting, and pregnancy from another man during his incarceration, which is an example of his unmet expectations causing relationship conflict, particularly as it related to parenting expectations.

We just fell off. Not only did I get locked up, incarcerated; but she also lost the kids from being irresponsible. And fought for about a year and half getting them back. She finally got 'em back, so you know, I'm still a little moody about that. And I'm also aggravated to the point where she had another child by another guy while I was locked up. And I'm not moody because of the fact that she had another child by another dude; but because for someone who's not working, you know, doesn't have a job, it would be foolish of you to have another child by another guy while I was locked up. (NYMI009)

He went on to state his expectation of her comparative stability for the sake of their children.

If I'm slackin', my children need somebody. If not both their parents, they need somebody. So if I'm slackin', you need to do right. (NYMI009)

**a. *Men's expectations of women's fidelity.*** Men described that their unmet expectations of women's sexual fidelity were a major cause of relationship conflict during incarceration. One male respondent was angry about his wife moving on to another relationship during his incarceration, but he maintained contact with her to gain access to their child.

Because I knew that, um, I wanted to see my daughter. And so that was, um, the leading reason why I didn't curse her out and tell her, you know, F you and go on about your business, although I felt that way in my heart. (NYMI002)

Another male respondent expressed that his wife's unfaithfulness would cause conflict in their relationship. They met and married during his imprisonment, so their relationship was constrained by his incarceration. He reported that he would perceive her infidelity as an affront to his deep commitment to her.

[on what may cause conflict] To be unfaithful; she been unfaithful to me and she commit adultery to me. I don't know what happened, and I'm saying, because I'm doing all that I can as a man, you know, for my woman. And I should find out that she's been unfaithful to me. (NYMI007)

The sentiment "doing all I can as a man" speaks to the constraints on men's traditional expressions of manhood during incarceration, as they are not able to provide women with monetary support, physical intimacy, or physical support during incarceration. As a result, a man might experience his partner's infidelity as an additional assault on his already diminished sense of masculinity.

**b. *Men's expectations of women's financial support.*** Men also expected women to provide timely responses to their requests for support during incarceration. Men wanted financial support from women while incarcerated, and women indicated that this additional financial burden, the strain of the loss of income, and the loss of support for managing household finances, caused additional stress. Women understood that not complying with these expectations would result in conflict.

When he asked me to send him what he wants, I have to have it there a specific time, I mean a specific day that he want it. If he call me today, like, send my package out now, today. I'm, send it off today? You don't know if I got money to send your package today,

or something like that. It's like, yeah, send my package out today. And that makes me mad..... And I can hang up the phone. And he, it's up to him if he calls again. If I want to accept the call or not. But I hang up on him, so. (NYWP003)

Individuals can send approved packages to inmates according to department of corrections guidelines, which stipulate the type, value, and amount of any item that an incarcerated person can receive. Men described expecting women to send them packages and provide ongoing support. One man described this as a partner's "job."

You want her doing her job, writing you letters, sending you packages, coming to see you. (NYMP004)

*c. Men's child management expectations.* Some men had expectations of their intimate partner that related to childrearing and visitations during their incarceration. One male respondent insisted that his partner demonstrate a conventional lifestyle compared to his to support their children. He expected his partner to counterbalance his negative choices and inattention to family demands by "doing right." In his conception of this relationship, there was no room for her to make mistakes.

I'm dealing with my own baggage. But see, what it is that, okay, I know my backyard is twisted. But I want to make sure she keeps hers clean. (NYMI009)

He went on to explain that if his intimate partner's parenting skills were insufficient, he would need to make up for her deficiencies.



My children's mother may not have done a good job of raising them the right way, with manners, their behavior. Me playing my part as a father and raising them the correct way. That will be very challenging. (NYMI009)

This respondent highlighted that the challenges associated with parenting from prison and reconnecting with children after release could be exacerbated by his children's mother's problematic parenting style.

*d. Men's expectations of emotional support and compassion.* Men and women often look for support from one another, but they may have difficulty providing it given that they are both experiencing men's incarceration, albeit in different ways. Anticipating the challenges he might face gaining employment and stability, one male respondent explained that he expected his partner to overlook his shortcomings upon his return from prison, and support him through this transition period.

[I need] support and understanding. Yeah, and support me. Understand I'm just coming home from prison and that, you know, she would bear with what I'm going through, that obstacles will be in my ways and she could bear with and understand that. You know, I'm trying to get on my feet. (NYMI007)

Another male respondent described his attempts to show more compassion in order to inspire his intimate partner to reciprocate it.

I guess I was lookin' for some type of compassion. At first, I probably wanted them to feel like, sorry for me. Mostly probably her. We was still in relationship. I guess it was like an underhanded deal. Because I wanted her to feel like I was so concerned and feel

sorry for me. Because I had in that relationship, I couldn't ask for something that I didn't give. (TNMP004)

His insights about feigning compassion to elicit sympathy from his intimate partner led him to reassess his communication with her. By stating that he couldn't ask her to offer something that he didn't give, he acknowledged the power imbalance in the relationship and relatedly, his backhanded means of garnering her support.

*e. Women's responses to men wanting a dependable partner.* Women understood that men expected them to comply with their requests and to be a responsible partner. One female respondent described her partner's stern reminder about sending his package. Through his assertion, we may infer that he prioritized receiving the package over maintaining positive communication with his partner. His demands also revealed his dependence on his partner for support.

Didn't I tell you to send my package today? (NYWP003)

This female respondent went on to describe that her boyfriend was "jail-prone." Through his frequent returns to prison, he jeopardized many personal relationships, including the one with her. She indicated that their connection was tenuous and that she hesitated to refer to it as a relationship until he was out of prison and proved that he could stay out.

Another female respondent described similar demands for financial support from her incarcerated partner. This time, the demand was for money to be deposited into his prison account so that he could purchase goods from the commissary.

[When he was incarcerated] like you gonna come and put some money on my books. You gonna come up here and give me it. (MNWP004)

Women often control children's visits with their incarcerated fathers. One female respondent described a variety of expectations held by her intimate partner. She indicated that she would not comply with his expectation to bring their son in for a visit out of concern for exposing him to the prison environment.

Writing me letters, asking me for things. Not bringing my son to see him, which I will not subject my son to, you know, going into the, being searched and having to see their father, you know. I don't know what type of environment and how upsetting it would be. And I don't know how my son would handle it. And then wanting to know if I'm in a relationship with someone. "Are you messing with somebody? Don't be giving nobody my stuff." (NYWI005)

The disconnect between men's and women's expectations related to child management may lead to conflict during men's incarceration – men often expect women to facilitate children's care and connection to them, and women don't always comply for a variety of reasons including distrust of their incarcerated partner and not wanting to expose children to the prison environment.

*f. Contrasting finding – men in prison offer understanding and support.* In contrast to the ways in which men wanted support from women during incarceration, some men described offering understanding and support to intimate partners. Their approaches centered on treating women with respect, and providing financial and emotional support. One male

respondent described making good on the promises that he made to his wife to provide her with support instead of having her support him.

[she wants to hear] I'm coming home to be the husband that I said I would want to be....She wants to always be like, uh, she's in criminal justice right now, so she's trying to get her bachelor's in there. Um, I could come home and support her. Yeah, pick up the slack for a minute, instead of her picking up mine. (TNMI008)

Similarly, another male respondent described wanting to provide support to his intimate partner post-release to alleviate her stress.

I need to go in to see, sit down with her and talk about and see what things she's been doing, how she's been doing, and see what part of my life, where can I jump in to help her out. Try to lift some of the weight off of her. (WIMI012)

Yet another male respondent described how he helped his wife solve problems while he was incarcerated by leveraging support from his sister.

Every time she ran into a situation, or a certain thing, I tried to address it, and let [wife] know I understand. And we'd pray about it and let me see. I call the sister to get some money so she can help you out with that. You know, I showed more concern. And it was true. And once I kept doing it over a process of time, I wasn't trying to reap gain out of it. I just kept trying to show love. (TNMP004)

*i. Expectations of men on parole – women want a dependable partner too.* During parole, expectations changed. Men and women reported that relationship expectations shifted from a focus on the woman as the primary provider to an expectation that the man demonstrate

change for the better and resume the role of a financial provider and family man. Many women expected men to resume a conventional lifestyle upon release, avoiding activity that would lead them back to prison.

Women did not directly describe their expectations of men in prison, but instead described their expectations of men's post-release behavior (e.g., finding a job and actively participating in the relationship). From this, it can be inferred that women expected men to use the experience of incarceration to focus on their positive transformation.

One female respondent described her expectations for her intimate partner prior to his release. She expected her intimate partner to get a job, but he was a tradesman, so she thought his reemployment would be easy. The more challenging expectation to meet related to staying sober.

I wanted to know, what was the plan? What are you planning on doing when you get out? Besides, you know you got to get a job. That was not a problem because of his trade. You need to, or are you going to plan on getting into some AA, you know, some counseling, some kind of drug rehab groups? (MNWP003)

The barriers to employment post-release can create challenges for men and women in stabilizing their relationship. One female respondent described expecting her intimate partner to find a job after his release from prison, but according to her, that proved difficult for him and was a major source of tension in their relationship. She described this as the primary conflict between them after his release.

He didn't want to look for a job. He was away for so long that nobody was gonna hire him. That was... Did you go look for a job? No. So, how you know nobody ain't gonna hire you? Because I just got out of jail. I don't have no ID. Well, get some ID. Twenty-

eight. Twenty-eight years old and you don't want to work. You ain't never had a job in your life. That was his complaint. He never had a job. Who's gonna hire him now? He don't have no high school diploma; he got a GED. I said, well, start at the bottom and work your way up. He don't want to start at nobody's bottom. (NYWP003)

Another female respondent expressed relationship goals during her partner's parole. She indicated that to be truly successful post-prison, men needed more than just employment; they needed to be able to control their temper, focus on their intimate partner relationship and children, and focus on rebuilding broken trust.

He's gonna be able to control his temper. And be loving and caring like when we first met. I told him there's more to life than just a job. I tell him to start being responsible. You know, getting a job is not just being responsible. You got to be a parent. You got to be my friend. You know, we have to be able to want to talk and trust one another. (NYWP002)

*ii. Financial pressures: playing catchup.* Men described managing multiple expectations related to reestablishing themselves financially. Often, returning prisoners pay restitution, court costs, monitoring and other fees to the state, as well as assume costs related to meeting parole stipulations, including treatment programs or classes. This must be balanced with meeting the financial demands of family, including care for children and child support. One male respondent described the pressure of expenses related to housing, family support, and managing parole stipulations.

I have a lot of weight on my shoulders trying to get an apartment. And not only that, plus me trying to deal with my probation agency. And by us getting this apartment, now he

putting me into a treatment center, or a halfway house. Now I gotta pay these people money to stay in this place here and how am I gonna support my family with the money I have left? (WIMI012)

Another male respondent on parole described the high cost of collect calls from prison from the vantage point of the recipient. During his incarceration, family members stopped accepting his collect calls, which he interpreted as a lack of concern for his well-being. Managing multiple financial obligations helped him understand their decision differently.

[Now that I'm out] I got so many bills that I laugh when I get 'em, because I'm payin' 'em. And I'm going through everyday life like everyone else. And I can relate to what everyone else say. For example, I used to call home as much as I could all the time. And they stopped accepting my phone calls. So I began to understand why now....I was just thinking that nobody cared about me. (TNMP005)

Some men and women described supporting each other's drug habits. In this study, male and female respondents who experienced addiction reported that incarceration changed their relationship dynamic related to support for drug use. One male respondent described how support of his partner's drug habit affected finances post-release. It is possible that his intimate partner expected him to fund her drug habit as an indication that he had resumed his previous duties in the relationship, or as a way to compensate for his absence during incarceration.

I be telling her that [she] need to stop smokin', man. You know, stop smokin' weed. . . . And then, I be tryin' to let her know that it's coming out of my pocket. I'm the one that's gotta pay for it. (TNMP005)

It is noteworthy that some women described men's post-release success in terms that emphasized their relationships and included rebuilding broken trust and reestablishing family roles whereas other women and some men focused more specifically on finding employment and getting their finances in order. The latter is likely due to the societal pressure on men to earn an income or even to serve as the primary breadwinner, coupled with parole stipulations to secure mainstream employment.

*iii. Failing to meet expectations post-release: a return to street life.* Men in prison imagined a struggle to maintain a conventional lifestyle post-release based on the pull of the forces that contributed to their imprisonment. When men in this sample imagined failing to meet their intimate partner's or their own expectations of successful reentry, they often attributed it to a return to street life.

Men indicated that a shared vision for the future would help men and women maintain a positive relationship after release from prison. However, men imagined that foregoing these shared goals for street life could damage their relationships and ruin their long-term plans with an intimate partner. Accounts of men's return to street life were common in both men's and women's reports of relationship conflict. Street life is defined as the spaces where men engaged in illicit behavior, often directly or indirectly connected to the reason for their incarceration (Oliver, 2006). The ongoing interface between street life and correctional systems positions the streets as a factor influencing relationship dynamics in the context of correctional control.

One male respondent described the process of relinquishing plans for the future by getting back into street life as "sidetracking."

What's gonna hurt me, what's gonna probably stop me, uh, sidetracking me is going back to that old neighborhood. My sister, my sister living back on, she near the Projects. So



going back to the Project, and I'm always surrounded. And the fellas all want to throw you something, dope for sale or something, so that's probably gonna sidetrack me a little bit. I gotta stay focused. It's gonna be hard, whatever. (TNMI004)

Another male respondent described promising his intimate partner that he would avoid engaging in street life to demonstrate his commitment to staying on a positive track post-release. He reported that even the act of returning to the hangout spots that he and his friends previously visited could negatively affect his chances of success.

Just basically, staying out of the streets. So soon as I head back to our old playground, bam [slaps hand], right bottom again. (TNMI008)

Another male respondent described the role of parole in helping curtail his behaviors associated with street life. He saw compliance with parole stipulations as useful to his marriage because this signaled to his wife that he was willing to make positive strides and avoid the streets post-release.

She knowing that I can't go out there and do the things that I used to do....The streets would put me right back up in here. (WIMI006)

Men indicated that women looked for evidence of sidetracking. One male respondent described that his manner of dress would indicate to his intimate partner a return to the streets, and perhaps a return to prison.

The only thing she would fuss about if I would put a suit on myself and go kick it. Because she figures that the streets got me in here. (WIMI006)

Women also described noticing when men's behavior signaled a return to street life or a drug or alcohol relapse. One female respondent described the moment her partner admitted his relapse. She had seen all the signs, and finally got direct confirmation from him.

And he woke me up and told me he really had something to tell me. And I sat up on the side of the bed, and he told me that, why he was, why the money was missing, what he had been doing, why he wasn't coming straight home. (MNWP003)

In sum, the experience of prison and parole both increases the need for support and simultaneously impairs an intimate partner's ability to provide it. Furthermore, the conflicts that men and women experience during men's correctional supervision often relate to their expectations of one another. However, these expectations vary depending on the way they experience incarceration, filtered through separate realities, a condition that makes these expectations difficult to meet. Men and women may also manifest some consensus on their independent and common experiences. What is significant is that incarceration versus non-incarceration status and gender may mediate experience and the attribution of meaning to those experiences. Men and women in this study reported that unmet expectations often led to relationship conflict or dissolution.

## **VI. Discussion**

This study yielded findings revealing that men's correctional supervision acts on intimate partner relationships in profound ways, affects the way men and women manage their relationships, creates or exacerbates relationship conflict, and inhibits couples' ability to resolve it. Major facets of men's and women's lives were affected both directly and indirectly by men's correctional supervision. This section discusses the study's major findings, its limitations, and its implications for social work research, policy and practice.

The key findings in this study are grouped by each research question. The findings related to relationship value and women's experience of men's incarceration as a separate prison are discussed together as they answer the research question on the impact of correctional supervision on intimate relationships. The findings related to maintaining communication, demonstrating trustworthiness and the impact of stigma come next, and they answer the research question on relationship management. Finally, the findings related to role changes and relationship expectation answer the research question on relationship conflict.

### **A. Relationship Value and Women's Experience of Men's Incarceration as a Separate Prison**

Generally, men and women in this study agreed that correctional supervision diminishes relationship value, and these findings are consistent with Fishman (1990) and Braman (2004). Both men and women described that prison changes the way men and women perceive their own value and each other's value in the intimate partner relationship. For this study, relationship value is defined as emotional, physical or material support or intimacy between intimate partners.

Most women described a husband or boyfriend's stay in prison as damaging to their relationship. They described becoming reacquainted with a person who had been negatively

affected by their time in prison which in turn negatively affected their relationship. Respondents also described that incarceration inhibits support for intimate partners during times of crisis. Finally, men and women reported that incarceration prevents men from providing important supports to women and children.

The contrasting view was that incarceration increases men's appreciation of women. This contrasting view was consistent with the contrasting findings in the study by Hairston and Oliver (2006b). A minority of men in that study indicated that incarceration strengthened their relationship with their intimate partners by creating space for awareness of women's needs and value to them, which may not have occurred outside the context of incarceration. Relatedly, some women in this study also indicated that men's incarceration strengthened their relationship, likening the experience to dating again. It is important to understand how long this positive outlook can be maintained; longer prison sentences may diminish these positive attributions to the prison experience over time.

This study supports the findings of Fishman (1990) and Comfort (2008) that women's experience of men's correctional supervision creates a separate prison for women. Women in this study described their experience of men's incarceration as a separate prison, characterized by accountability to men for their time, managing the household alone, and depression bordering on despair. Women's experience of correctional supervision as a separate prison was harmful to their relationships in that women described ensuing loneliness, despair and depression, thereby damaging their individual agency and diminishing their capacity to participate in the relationship as a full partner. This is consistent with Fishman's (1990) description of women's experiences with men's incarceration. Comfort (2008) offers that women become prisonized, or acclimated to the culture and norms of the prison environment such that they assume a quasi-inmate status.

Because so few women in this study described visiting or otherwise maintaining regular contact with men in prison, it is difficult to gauge the extent of the female respondents' secondary prisonization. However, they were affected to varying degrees and their lives became structured in accordance with men's correctional supervision.

### **B. Issues of Communication, Trustworthiness and Stigma in Relationship**

Normal intimacy is interrupted during men's incarceration, and men and women create workarounds to maintain communication and connection with one another. Importantly, no communication with an incarcerated individual is ever private, and the lack of privacy influences how men and women communicate with one another in person, in writing and by phone (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990; Grinstead et al., 2001). The findings in this study were consistent with previous research demonstrating that attempts at private communication was influenced by the public nature of the communication, and by its regulation via correctional supervision. A common theme that emerged related to the prevalence of three-way calls to maintain contact during incarceration. Both male and female respondents described this as an important tool to work around blocked phone lines, manage costs, and maintain contact with loved ones. While these calls were obviously not private, it is not clear the extent to which the lack of privacy influenced the quantity or quality of the contact. Independent examination of the impact of foregoing privacy during three-way phone calls from prison on intimate relationship maintenance could provide additional insights into the impact of incarceration on intimate relationship management.

Another key finding related to communication during men's incarceration is the promises men make to their intimate partners that things will be better upon their release from prison. This finding was consistent with findings from other studies (Fishman, 1990; Oliver & Hairston,

2008). Incarcerated men commonly promise their intimate partners that they will adopt a conventional lifestyle after a stay in prison (Fishman, 1990; Hairston & Oliver, 2008). Female respondents in this study indicated that they would need to verify men's positive transformation in order to believe their claims of growth and change. This finding is connected to the finding related to the importance of demonstrating trustworthiness.

Men and women in this study reported that they sought information from third parties to check the veracity of the other's claims of trustworthiness. Men also indicated that demonstrating their personal transformation was important to the relationship with an intimate partner. These findings are consistent with studies revealing men's concerns about women's fidelity (Fishman, 1990; Hairston & Oliver, 2006b) and women's concerns about men's change for the better (Clear et al., 2000; Comfort, 2008). Several men described increased religiosity during incarceration, which is consistent with findings from other studies (Clear et al, 2000) and may signal to intimate partners a positive transformation. However, this study extends the findings of previous studies by calling out the ways in which men and women express interest in or even seek verification of their partner's truthful account of their own behavior from an outside source.

This study supports the findings of Braman (2004) and Comfort (2008) that men's correctional supervision is stigmatizing for both men and women. Stigma, in short, keeps them from accessing the support they need to mitigate its negative effects. Their findings also revealed the role that stigma by association plays in the lives of women; women are socially disgraced by their continued association with incarcerated men.

Men in this study reported stigma associated with securing employment and convincing family and friends of their positive transformation. Braman (2004) asserts that lack of employment may be more stigmatizing for men than the experience of incarceration itself. While

this was not a major finding from this study, one returning prisoner did describe attempting to counteract his intimate partner's notion that his joblessness equaled laziness. Ultimately, what does a criminal record say about someone who possesses one? And what does unemployment status say about people without jobs? How stigma operates as a barrier to conventional lifestyle choices is an important area of inquiry.

Men's status as an offender is contagious, and women become infected with the negative associations that it connotes (Comfort, 2008; Girshick, 1996; E. Goffman, 1963; Western & McLanahan, 2000). This influences their treatment by corrections staff, as well as family and friends. When shame is transmitted to intimate partners of men under correctional supervision, their social supports can be diminished. Women in this study described managing stigma by avoiding family, church, friends, or simply choosing not to disclose their partner's incarceration status or details of their involvement to these parties. Either way, stigma rendered many women silent, and they were left to manage the fallout from men's incarceration on their own.

**1. Role changes and relationship expectation.** This study supports the findings of previous research indicating that prison changes the power balance between incarcerated men and their intimate partners (Fishman, 1990; Nurse, 2002; Oliver & Hairston, 2008). Men become dependent in prison, and are unable to freely engage in relationships with women as they would if not incarcerated. Once released, men's lack of economic self-sufficiency stands in stark contrast to women's independence gained from managing household affairs in the partner's absence.

Women fill the void created by men's incarceration, assuming increased levels of responsibility and taking charge of family and related matters. Women's process of taking charge of household and family management may appear to men as if men are inconsequential to the

family structure. Where couples may have previously adopted traditional gender roles prescribing men's dominance and women's submissiveness, the role changes during incarceration may seem reversed. Men in this study and in previous studies (Fishman, 1990; Nurse, 2002; Oliver & Hairston, 2008) indicated that these role changes precipitated conflict post-release.

Men and women expressed various expectations of the other during men's incarceration and parole. Both expected support from one another, albeit at different times and for different reasons. Many men expected women to remain faithful to them during incarceration, and many women expected men to adopt a conventional lifestyle upon release. These findings are consistent with findings from previous studies.

Several studies indicated that men expect women's fidelity during their incarceration (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990; Oliver & Hairston, 2008). Expectation of women's fidelity was a key finding in this study too. Furthermore, questions about women's fidelity were at the center of many respondents' reports of relationship conflict. This is consistent with the findings of Oliver and Hairston (2008), indicating that questions of women's fidelity during men's incarceration led many returning men to look for evidence of their unfaithfulness.

Women in this study indicated that third parties provided incarcerated men with information about women's behavior, and men tended to believe these third party accounts over women's accounts of their own behavior. These third parties were typically men's relatives or friends on the outside. Consistent with Hairston and Oliver's (2006b) findings, some men acted on "street news" about their wife or girlfriend, positioning the news pipeline between the streets and the prison as a valuable source of information related to monitoring women's behavior.



However, this study raises questions about the direction of the flow of information between the streets and prison. It is not clear if and when men sought information about their intimate partners, or if it was brought to them in the form of gossip. Gossip has long been used by both men and women to police women's behavior to ensure compliance with social norms related to decency (Findlay, 1999; Clinard & Meier, 2010). Men in this study expressed a strong interest in monitoring women's life on the outside, so it is likely that at least some men solicited this information from trusted informants. It is also unclear if third party confirmation of women's fidelity is commonly practiced by all incarcerated men, or only by a subset with particular demographic or relationships characteristics.

Incarcerated men in this study described imagining getting back into the streets, or engaging in illicit activity through former street life, as an impediment to positive relationship goals. This is consistent with the findings of Oliver and Hairston (2008) that men's post-prison engagement in street-related activities represents a rejection of a conventional lifestyle and mainstream choices, causing conflict with intimate partners post-release. Men in this study offered a slightly different perspective on this phenomenon, stating that engagement in the streets "sidetracks" men from their goals associated with adoption of a conventional lifestyle. Some men in this study described the importance of setting and sharing mutual goals with an intimate partner to facilitate the success of the relationship post-release. Sidetracking implies that men relinquish the plans and goals they shared with an intimate partner when they return to street life.

### **C. Application of Conceptual Framework to Key Themes**

Applying an ecological framework to examine the impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationships allows for a systematic analysis of the facets of correctional control and demonstrates how they interrelate and combine to affect relationships between men and

women. Using this framework helps demonstrate that correctional supervision affects intimate relationships and interrupts normal relationship functioning such that relationships become damaged, some beyond repair. Through these findings, the influence of correctional supervision on intimate relationships is apparent at every contextual level.

Figure 2 demonstrates the way in which the impact of correctional supervision can be understood at each contextual level, compounding and culminating in the impact on intimate partner relationships at the microsystem level. These contextual challenges are displayed as an inverted triangle, demonstrating their culmination in relationship impacts at the bottom vertex.

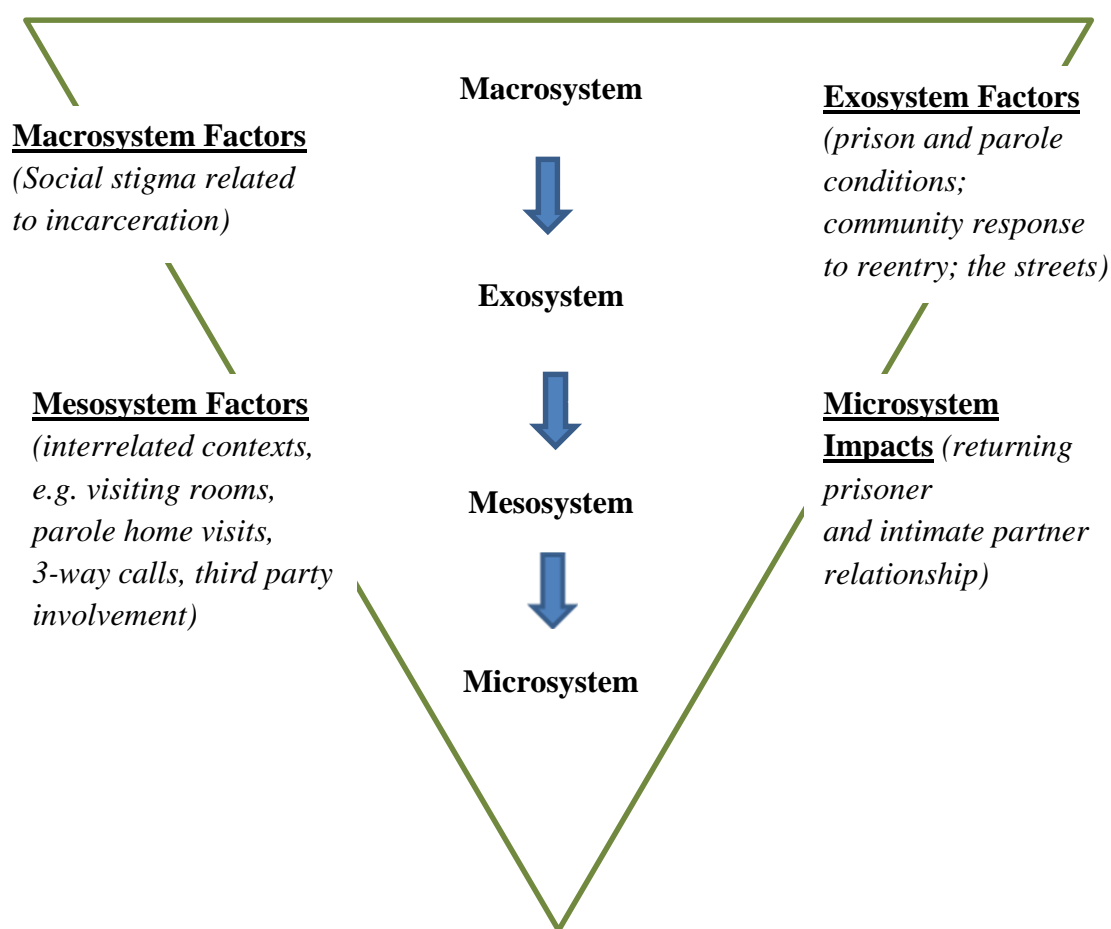


Figure 2. Ecological framework applied to examination of impact of correctional control on intimate partnerships.

**1. Macrosystemic factors.** Macrosystemic factors are the broad social and political considerations that influence the other systemic levels and determine how individuals are regarded in correctional and community settings (Arditti, 2005). In this study, women reported stigma as a barrier to relationship support. While other social or political factors influence relationships during correctional control, they are beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, stigma is the sole macrosystemic factor considered in this analysis.

Women reported stigma as a barrier to accessing help with their relationships. Although women did not use the term “stigma” when describing their reasons for remaining silent about their partner’s incarceration, the descriptions of their experiences indicated a fear of judgement from family, friends, co-workers and church members. Therefore, one can reasonably infer that the humiliating experiences associated with their partner’s incarceration became internalized as shame. Shame and stigma combine to prevent women from seeking help from family, friends, and professionals. Some men discussed stigma associated with their criminal histories as a barrier to employment. Given the importance that jobs play in stabilizing men’s and women’s relationships post-release, this is an example of the way in which stigma may act as a roadblock to relationship support. LeBel’s (2012) distinction between self-perceived stigma and actual enactment of rejection was not clearly identified by men in this study.

**2. Exosystemic factors.** Exosystemic factors are defined as the carceral contexts and community factors that influence intimate partner relationships (Arditti, 2005). Correctional control and community response to reentry are both exosystemic factors that relate squarely to this study; both men and women reported the ways in which correctional control creates or exacerbates conflict in intimate partner relationships. Both men and women also described the

ways in which a community response to reentry—including lack of access to jobs and other financial assistance—caused conflict in their relationships when men were not able to fulfill their partner’s or their own expectations related to providing financial support.

Men and women also described the ways they sought to overcome these conflicts by seeking relationship supports, and the barriers to these supports. Finally, the finding indicating women’s experience of men’s incarceration as a so-called “separate prison” is discussed as an exosystemic condition.

*a. Relationship conflict.* Applying an ecological framework to explicate relationship conflict indicates microsystemic dynamics related to (a) meeting partner’s expectations; (b) changes in relationship roles; and (c) reentry challenges. The scope of this study focuses on the impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationships; yet pre-prison conflict and drug addiction are important related matters to this inquiry. The ways they are connected can be understood by the relationship between pre-prison conflict and contact during incarceration, as well as drug addiction and contact during incarceration. Most men and women described that relationship conflict existing prior to incarceration continued during and after incarceration; correctional control typically did not improve relationship functioning. Men and women also described addiction severing relationship ties during men’s incarceration. A key example is the incarcerated partner supplying women with drugs; in such cases, women sought new sources of support for their addiction and ended the relationship with their incarcerated partner during his imprisonment. This limits the ability to fully examine how correctional control affects couples who have experienced drug addiction.

Men and women had expectations of each other during men’s correctional supervision that were challenging to meet due to the barriers created by prison and parole. Men expected

women's ongoing support and fidelity, and women expected men to change for the better and adopt prosocial roles in the family and community. While men and women may hold these expectations of one another outside the context of correctional supervision, the experience of prison simultaneously heightens expectations and makes them more difficult to meet.

A related matter is role transformation. Incarceration fosters men's dependency on the system and on intimate partners. Often, women take charge of household matters in men's absence, creating what can appear to be a role reversal. This dynamic directly relates to the experience of men's incarceration.

Finally, the ongoing interface between street life and correctional systems positions the streets as a key exosystemic factor influencing microsystem relationship conflict. Both men and women referred to "getting back into the streets" as a source of relationship conflict; they described the streets as a pathway back to prison. Men identified relationship conflict linked to foregoing goals for a return to criminal behavior linked to the streets; one man called this "sidetracking." Since women expected men to adopt mainstream behaviors after release from prison, any indications of men's engagement with people or places from their former life were a source of conflict. Therefore, the streets, or street life, can be considered at the exosystemic level as a community condition associated with reentry.

**b. *Relationship value.*** Correctional control diminishes relationship value. Women described the impact of incarceration on men's attitudes toward women (e.g., prison negatively influenced them) and on women's options for support (e.g., finding another man). These are prime examples of how incarceration damages intimate partner relationships. Conversely, some men and women reported that prison gave them a fresh start, or protected them from ongoing conflict or violence, which is an example of incarceration facilitating intimate partner

relationships or supporting safety. These influences on relationship value exist because of correctional supervision.

Applying an ecological framework to the finding “separate prison” relates to women’s experiences of men’s prison and parole as an exosystemic condition. It also relates to women’s experiences of men’s attempts to hold them accountable for their time on the outside as a microsystemic relationship dynamic. Men may also exert control over their intimate partners as a response to being controlled themselves through correctional supervision. Women experience control by correctional systems too, through interactions with prison staff during visitation, through non-private phone calls, and through the stigma of remaining in a relationship with an incarcerated man. In sum, women are doubly controlled—by the systems that they interact with to maintain contact with men, and by their intimate partners, thereby creating a separate prison for women in relationships with men during prison and parole. While “separate prison” could be considered a microsystemic impact, it is important to consider this at the exosystemic level as a carceral experience in itself, drawing attention to the contextual challenges created by men’s correctional supervision.

Some women described intense loneliness and despair during men’s incarceration. After men’s release from prison, women still experienced the double bind of the separate prison; men still attempted to hold them accountable for their time and whereabouts, and many women experienced men’s parole supervision as an intrusion into their lives. Further, some men wanted women to comply with their parole conditions as if they were their own.

*c. Relationship support.* In applying an ecological framework, relationship support indicates microsystemic adaptations to exosystemic conditions. In this case, the exosystemic conditions are the experience of incarceration and parole, both serving as a barrier to normal

relationship functioning. The ways in which women adapted and sought help managing their relationship differed from men. Furthermore, some respondents perceived support as positive, whereas others perceived support as an intrusion. Both men and women also described barriers to accessing support.

Key exosystemic supports included employment and financial support for women during men's incarceration, and for men and their families during reentry. Childcare, or assistance with childrearing, were discussed as important exosystemic supports for women during men's incarceration, and housing was discussed as a key post-release factor. Other key supports included positive experiences with corrections programs and staff, and prison volunteers and civilian staff, specifically when these provided men with a means to strengthen their relationships with intimate partners.

However, most men and women primarily experienced the condition of correctional control as a barrier to relationship support. Some described the distance from home and experience of visitation as too hard to manage; in those cases, relationships ended. Men and women in this sample also described correctional control centering on parole. Men typically experienced parole as a barrier to relationship support, describing curfews and travel restrictions as obstacles to the full experience of an intimate partner relationship. Yet some women, and a few men, saw parole as positive, providing guardrails and guidelines for men's conduct in the relationship, and a means for women to communicate men's problematic behavior to authorities.

Many women who reported calling the police for help experienced law enforcement as ineffective at best or harmful at worst. This was true for women who reported relationship violence, although not universally so. Women experiencing severe abuse by an intimate partner indicated that they would call the police after first exhausting options with family members for



relationship support. Women also described the ways in which family could serve as a barrier to support, citing histories of violence in families of origin as normalizing violence in their relationships; further, when families didn't see violence as problematic, they were of little assistance to those experiencing it.

**3. Mesosystemic factors.** Mesosystemic factors are inter-related contexts whereby correctional supervision and home life interface (Arditti, 2005). Examples include prison visiting rooms, family contacts with parole, and calls and letters from prison. Respondents in this study described three-way calls from prison and family contacts with parole as key mesosystemic factors. This relates directly to the areas of inquiry associated with relationship management and relationship support.

*a. Relationship management.* Three-way calls are an adaptation to maintaining contact during incarceration. Any phone call from a correctional facility should be considered a mesosystemic factor given that calls originate from a correctional facility on a monitored or recorded phone line. However, three-way calls are distinct from traditional calls in that they involve the cooperation of a third party to connect the incarcerated man to the intended recipient of his call. Therefore, they are even less private than a typical call, and are an important adaptation for examination given that they are used to circumvent blocked phone lines and help some individuals avoid the expense associated with accepting calls from a correctional facility.

*b. Relationship support.* Men and women described women's contact with parole officers as both beneficial and harmful to the relationship. Some men and women described parole contact as providing an additional measure of safety in relationships, providing women with support and men with externally-imposed parameters to live within. Other men and women experienced women's contact with parole as an intrusion, increasing the possibility of contact

with the child welfare system and heightening the risk of having their children removed from the home. This was especially true for women who had previous contact with law enforcement or child protection.

**4. Microsystemic impacts.** Microsystemic factors are defined as the context and immediate setting in which the individual of reference operates in relation to self, environment, and important others (Arditti, 2005). In this study, the primary focus of the microsystem is the individual of reference and the intimate partner relationship. This is described as “impacts” because correctional control at the macro-, exo-, and meosystemic levels converge to impact and change intimate partner relationship dynamics. This relates directly to the areas of inquiry associated with relationship management and relationship value.

*a. Relationship management.* In applying an ecological framework to these findings, microsystemic impacts can be directly observed in how men and women manage their relationships during correctional supervision. This is best described as a set of interpersonal relationship dynamics that exist as a result of incarceration and parole supervision. How couples maintain communication, handle household matters, maintain intimacy, and demonstrate trustworthiness are all microsystemic adaptations to typical relationship functioning due to the experience of correctional supervision.

Men and women maintained connections with one another despite the barriers created by correctional control. Several men mentioned the importance of self-sacrifice to facilitate a positive relationship. This meant postponing or denying their own wishes for calls, visits, or material items if needed in order to lighten the burden on women. Women described maintaining a connection by setting up routines that involved accepting phone calls at predetermined times, exchanging letters, and setting up visiting routines to create relationship consistency.

During men's incarceration, women often assume responsibility for managing household matters and other family affairs. Managing without a partner increases the burden on women. However, some men attempt to contribute to finances or household decisions from prison. Some women experienced men's efforts to provide or broker financial support from prison as a lack of trust in women's ability to manage on their own. These role shifts and the negotiations about handling household matters exist as a result of correctional supervision.

Men and women described that normal intimacy was interrupted during and after men's incarceration. The physical barrier imposed by incarceration prevented intimate contact. Further, some men's experiences of negative physical contact in prison affected their ability to resume a normal sex life upon release from prison. Finally, some women simply found other men to fulfill their needs for intimacy during men's absence. These constraints on intimacy exist because of correctional supervision.

The finding "demonstrating trustworthiness" is an interpersonal relationship dynamic common to both men and women that exists because of incarceration and parole supervision. Confinement creates unique challenges to relationship maintenance, and men and women reported that they sought third-party confirmation of the other's trustworthiness. Men reported seeking verification of women's fidelity and women reported seeking verification of men's positive transformation. Men also reported demonstrating a stronger relationship with God as a way to demonstrate their positive transformation. The experience of incarceration and the accompanying physical and psychological distance often necessitates rebuilding trust, and these additional measures to prove trustworthiness to the other are a result of the separation caused by and the experience of incarceration.

**b. *Relationship value.*** In applying an ecological framework, a change in relationship value indicates a microsystemic effect of an exosystemic condition. In this case, the exosystemic condition is the incarceration experience, which serves as a barrier to normal relationship functioning. Given the relationship-level effect of incarceration, men are less able to fulfill their role as a husband or boyfriend in the manner to which their intimate partners had become accustomed. Further, women often assumed roles in the relationship and in the family that fill the void that men left as a result of incarceration, and the relationship roles shifted, thus altering the perceived value of the other in the relationship.

#### **D. Key Contributions**

This study confirmed findings from prior bodies of work and extends our knowledge about how prisoners and intimate partners cope with men's incarceration in some important ways. This study examined the association between expectation and conflict, and revealed that unmet expectation is often an antecedent to conflict. Relatedly, Hairston and Oliver (2006b) and Fishman (1990) indicated that jealousies and suspicions of infidelity often were at the heart of relationship conflict when men were incarcerated. This study revealed that a broader category of relationship expectations exists for both men and women under which fidelity can be subsumed.

This study provided insights into how men and women demonstrate their trustworthiness to each other during and after men's incarceration. Several studies have demonstrated the association between men's suspicions of women's infidelity and relationship conflict, and this study adds to that body of literature by revealing the importance of third parties as purveyors of information about women's behavior during men's incarceration. Additional analysis can be

facilitated by examination of the role of third parties in confirming or disconfirming women's fidelity.

Further research can be used to examine the ways in which men communicate their positive transformation to intimate partners. This study demonstrated that women want men to change for the better, yet are hesitant to believe men's claims of transformation outright. An increased understanding of how men and women prove trustworthiness to one another during incarceration can help inform family-friendly correctional policies and practices.

This study offered an application and adaptation of the ecological model to understand the impact of correctional supervision on men's and women's intimate partner relationships (Arditti, 2005). The ecological model as a conceptual framework is useful to guide analysis to facilitate systematic examination of the context of correctional supervision. Given that incarceration is a powerful context in the lives of incarcerated men and their intimate partners, it is important to use a framework that guides analysis of context. Arditti (2005) used the ecological model and a related framework to examine the impact of parental incarceration on child: parent relationships. This study adapts Arditti's use of the model to the examination of intimate partner relationships, thereby making a contribution to the literature in this area.

### **E. Study Limitations**

This study exploring the impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationships has several limitations. This study is a secondary analysis of qualitative data, and the research questions posed for this study were a departure from questions asked in the original study. The original study focused on how correctional supervision affected intimate partner relationships and was associated with intimate partner conflict and violence among couples with the experience of men's incarceration. The secondary study examined the impact of correctional

supervision on intimate partner relationships, and on relationship conflict, but also focused on the impact of correctional supervision on relationship expectation and relationship management. While these research aims are distinct, they are related; therefore, the answers to research questions raised for secondary analysis had to be inferred from the dataset. Secondary analysis of qualitative data should pose questions that are similar to but distinct from the primary study (Long-Sutecall et al., 2010). In another qualitative study involving secondary analysis, the researcher echoed the importance of drawing inferences from more general questions that were associated with but different enough from the research aims of the primary study (Mullins, 2006).

This researcher was not a part of the research team that collected data for the primary study. Mauthner et al. (1998) and Blommaert (2001) are critical of secondary analysis of qualitative data, suggesting that in order to fully grasp the context of data provided through interview transcripts, the researcher must be personally engaged in data production from the beginning of the study. This argument does not account for the typical process of data generation wherein researchers work as a team, meaning that those who collect data may be different from those who interpret it.

In the locations where the study was conducted, local partners assisted with recruitment, and uniform screening criteria were not applied for all respondents. Upon review of the dataset, 13 interviews were eliminated from the sample because the respondents indicated that they were not in relationship with a reference partner and had no intention of reunifying, decreasing the sample size to 24. This limited the amount of available data for this study, but not so much as to reduce the sample size beyond the ability to generate enough data to facilitate analysis.

Given that the interviews for this study were conducted in 2004, the age of the data could be considered a limitation if prison conditions changed much over the past several years. While some attention had been given over the past decade to reducing the prison population in the U.S., the experience of incarceration for prisoners and their families remains largely unchanged, rendering these data useful for continued examination today.

Since the initial study was qualitative with nonprobability sampling, generalizability is not applicable to the findings. Further, this sample is restricted to African Americans, yet African Americans are not a monolith; therefore, findings from this small study cannot be generalized to *all* African American men who have had the experience of incarceration or parole nor to *all* African American women who are the intimate partners of such men.

## **VII. Implications and Conclusion**

### **A. Implications for Researchers**

The study adds to the growing body of research and literature exploring the impact of correctional supervision on intimate partner relationships. It will inform future scholarship in this area as well as offer an illustration of secondary analysis of qualitative data.

This study offers suggestions for future research on relationships between incarcerated or paroled men and their intimate partners. These suggestions are based upon questions that arose from the data.

The findings suggest that men in prison or on parole need assistance in maintaining connection with or reconnecting with intimate partners in ways that promote healthy relationship functioning. The findings also suggest that men and women hold significant expectations of one another that are influenced by the prison experience. The degree to which those expectations can be fulfilled depends in part on the prison structure (e.g. ease of maintaining contact), on men's ability to be positively transformed and to adopt a conventional lifestyle post-release, and on women's ability to manage the experience of incarceration for themselves and their children. What if corrections programs and systems allowed incarcerated men and their intimate partners to more easily support one another and meet each other's expectations? When expectations are met, what does this mean for relationship conflict, and for the sustainability of the relationship post-release?

This study raises further questions. When men and women seek to reestablish trust with one another during and after incarceration, what is the variety of ways that they prove their trustworthiness to one another? How effective are those methods? What are the implications for relationship maintenance over time?



A topic related to trustworthiness is the role of third party confirmation of women's fidelity. It is unclear if men receive unidirectional communication in the form of gossip or bidirectional communication in the form of a direct request for information about women's behavior. It is also unclear if or how each differs in precipitating relationship conflict. An increased understanding of how men and women prove trustworthiness to one another during incarceration can help inform family-friendly correctional policies and practices.

An important next step from this study is to continue to make meaning of the data to promote theory building, particularly as it relates to communication of expectations and trustworthiness during men's correctional supervision. Application and adaptation of signaling theory may have utility in future studies examining intimate partner relationships when one party is incarcerated. Signaling theory can be used when two parties have access to different information, and the parties must choose how to communicate to the other and how to interpret each other's signals (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2010). Used more frequently in management studies, this theory has utility for understanding social phenomena, especially when clarifying and resolving discrepancies in how individuals make meaning of each other's signals. This could also be applied to correctional institutions in themselves, examining what the structures and systems signal to both prisoners and families, and how that influences maintenance of intimate partner relationships during incarceration.

Several researchers refer to incarcerated men's promises as a significant element of communication between men and their intimate partners. While this study did not examine it, future studies could investigate the association between incarcerated men's promises and women's expectations of them post-release, as well as the association between incarcerated men's promises and their expectations of women vis-à-vis those promises. Researching

relationship expectation as an area of inquiry can deepen our understanding of how relationship dynamics are affected by incarceration.

While some women in this study called on family for support with relationship conflict and violence, some women called the police. Law enforcement, correctional control, and family life are all intertwined, and some women expressed ambivalence when balancing their personal safety against their partner's potential arrest and incarceration; sending their partner to jail is not optimal, but neither is experiencing relationship violence. Research on decision-making strategies and consequences for engaging law enforcement when women seek safety and protection would improve our understanding of this double bind.

Finally, this study serves as an example of secondary data analysis of qualitative data. While this research approach is not as commonly used as secondary analysis of quantitative data, this study proves useful in that it demonstrates how additional analysis can be extracted from an existing dataset through carefully constructed research questions and inference-making that does not overstate what the data tells us.

## **B. Implications for Practitioners and Policymakers**

This study has implications for the development of ecologically-sensitive practices that account for the context of correctional supervision via the impact of correctional policies and procedures on intimate partner relationships. This study also provides scientific contributions from the field of social work that can be useful for both criminal justice and social service professionals who work with both the returning prisoner and his intimate partner. Furthermore, it reveals opportunities to strengthen social work and corrections partnerships in favor of family-sensitive practices with men involved in the justice system and their wives and girlfriends.

Also, this study reveals opportunities to improve correctional policies and practices as they affect the intimate partner relationships that are critical to post-prison success. Focusing solely on the needs of incarcerated individuals leaves the families of those who are incarcerated with little support and misses an opportunity to assist those who are often closest to, and who can make the largest difference for, a returning prisoner, perhaps interrupting the cycle of criminal behavior and incarceration (Shapiro, 1999). Therefore, policies and practices focused on addressing the needs of families and explicitly involving families in support for returning prisoners may be informed by this study. For example, enhanced corrections programs and systems could allow men and women to more easily support one another and meet each other's needs and expectations. In doing so, relationships could stand a better chance of surviving men's incarceration, thereby providing greater stability for families post-release.

Finally, this study has implications for the development of contextually-sensitive practices with incarcerated or paroled African American men and with their African American wives and girlfriends. Findings from this study may be shaped into practice recommendations to enhance service utilization for very vulnerable populations who might otherwise not access services.

### **C. Conclusion**

Correctional supervision affects all facets of family life when a loved one is incarcerated. Importantly, positive family relationships contribute to post-release success for incarcerated men, but many intimate partner relationships perish due to a man's incarceration. We need to reimagine ways to support relationships during incarceration to improve the outcomes for men returning from prison and for their intimate partners and families.

We also need to reimagine the purpose and function of correctional supervision. This would involve dramatically reducing our current prison population, and limiting men's future contact with systems of correctional control. Given high rates of confinement in the United States, and disproportionate rates of confinement of African Americans, an overall strategy that prioritizes African American family and community well-being over punishment and confinement would improve the functioning, outcomes and possibilities for those typically involved with the criminal justice system. Social workers should be at the forefront of these criminal justice reform efforts to ensure that optimal family and community functioning is prioritized.

## Appendices

## Appendix A

### UMN Data Use Approval

#### UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

*Twin Cities Campus*

*School of Social Work  
College of Education and  
Human Development*

*155 Peters Hall  
1404 Gortner Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
612-623-1240  
Fax: 612-624-3744  
<http://cehsd.umn.edu/so/>*

March 12, 2016

Institutional Review Board  
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
1737 West Polk Street  
Chicago, IL 60612-7227

To Whom it May Concern:

In 2004, the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board approved a study entitled "Safe Return Initiative" for which I served as principal investigator. The purpose of that study was to understand relationship conflict and violence in the context of prisoner reentry, from the point of view of returning prisoners and women who were intimate partners of returning prisoners.

Through that study we collected qualitative data using focus groups and individual interviews, and obtained background data for individuals involved in the study. All data are de-identified.

Lori Crowder, doctoral student at the UIC Jane Addams College of Social Work, contacted me about using these data for her dissertation. Her study will focus on understanding how men's correctional supervision affects intimate relationships. Given that the original study has concluded and Ms. Crowder's proposed study is within the scope of the original study approved by the University of Minnesota IRB, I am providing Ms. Crowder with the data set for secondary analysis for her dissertation. The intent of her dissertation complements the original purpose of the Safe Return Initiative study and has the potential to make a useful and important contribution to knowledge about the impact of the correctional system on men's intimate relationships.

Should you have any questions related to use of this data, please contact me at [owilliam@umn.edu](mailto:owilliam@umn.edu), [owms63@gmail.com](mailto:owms63@gmail.com) or by phone at 612-624-0217.

Sincerely,

*Oliver J. Williams, Ph.D.*

Oliver J. Williams, PhD, MSW, M.P.H., Professor of Social Work

Cc: Lori Crowder, MSW

Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D.; Dean & Faculty Sponsor



## Appendix B

### UIC Notice of Determination of Human Subjects Research

#### UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)  
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)  
203 Administrative Office Building  
1737 West Polk Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

#### Notice of Determination of Human Subject Research

July 7, 2017

20170728-105700-1

Lori Crowder  
Jane Addams College of Social Work  
1040 W. Harrison  
M/C 309  
Phone: (312) 804-1071 / Fax: (773) 235-5747

RE:    **Protocol # 2017-0728**  
          **Managing Ties and Time: Men's and women's reports of relationships during men's incarceration and reentry**

**Sponsor(s): None**

Dear Lori Crowder:

The UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects received your "Determination of Whether an Activity Represents Human Subjects Research" application, and has determined that this activity **DOES NOT meet the definition of human subject research** as defined by 45 CFR 46.102(f).

You may conduct your activity without further submission to the IRB.

If this activity is used in conjunction with any other research involving human subjects or if it is modified in any way, it must be re-reviewed by OPRS staff.

## **Appendix C**

### **Instrument #1: Individual Interview Questions**

#### **Women whose partners are currently incarcerated**

We want to thank you again for being in our study on the relationship between domestic violence and prisoner reentry. We are going to ask you a number of questions about yourself, your experiences with your husband/boyfriend who is in jail or prison, and what it has been like since he has been incarcerated. We are seeking your expertise to help us understand domestic violence and prisoner reentry. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

#### **I. Tell me about yourself**

1. Tell how you came to be in a relationship with your husband/boyfriend.
2. How easy or difficult do you think it will be for you to reunify when he comes home from prison?

#### **II. During his incarceration**

3. How does having a husband/boyfriend who is incarcerated affect your day to day life? Family roles and responsibilities? What changed?
4. What are the major sources of conflict between you and your husband/boyfriend when he is incarcerated?
5. How is your life different now than when it was before your husband/boyfriend was incarcerated?



**III. When he is released**

6. What will you do to prepare for your husband/boyfriend returning home?
7. How will you prepare the children for your husband/boyfriend's return?
8. How do you think being in prison will affect your husband/boyfriend's ability to be a good husband/boyfriend when he comes home?
9. What do you think will be the major reasons for arguments between you and your husband/boyfriend when he returns home from prison?
10. What seems to make the difference in how arguments and fights with your husband/boyfriend are handled?

#### **IV. Issues of domestic violence**

The following questions will address issues of domestic violence. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

11. How do you define domestic violence? Have you ever felt like you were in a relationship where domestic violence was present?
12. Do you feel your husband/boyfriend treats you differently because you are a woman? If so, can you describe that for me?
13. What type of conflict might lead to a violent confrontation between you and your husband/boyfriend?
14. Has your husband/boyfriend ever been violent with you? What were the circumstances in which the violence occurred? Where do you think his violent behavior stems from?
15. Can you describe any ways your husband/boyfriend has tried to control or intimidate you? Since he's been incarcerated?
16. Have you ever experienced domestic violence with your husband/boyfriend and not reported it? If so, please explain why.

## **V. Supports**

17. Who would you turn to now if your husband/boyfriend were threatening, hitting, or beating you (were experiencing domestic violence with your husband/boyfriend)?
18. What services would you like provided to you when your husband/boyfriend returns home? How about now while he is incarcerated?
19. Describe the type of contact that you had with correctional counselors or other staff as a part of planning for his return home.
20. What do you think is the most important thing a parole officer could do to keep a woman safe before her husband/boyfriend's release? How about when he returns home?
21. What might prevent you from seeking help from professionals, such as social workers? How about from people in the community, such as food pantries, churches, or different ministries?

## **VI. Closing**

22. Are there any questions that we should have asked you that we did not ask you about your experience(s) of being with or waiting for your husband/boyfriend?
23. Do you have any questions for us?

**Instrument #2: Individual Interview Questions****Women whose partners were recently released**

We want to thank you again for being in our study on the relationship between domestic violence and prisoner reentry. We are going to ask you a number of questions about yourself, your experiences with your husband/boyfriend who is in jail or prison, and what it has been like since he has been incarcerated. We are seeking your expertise to help us understand domestic violence and prisoner reentry. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

1. Tell how you came to be in a relationship with your husband/boyfriend.
2. What are the things you especially like about your husband/boyfriend? Your relationship?
3. What things do you dislike or think are problems with him? Your relationship?
4. How does having a husband/boyfriend who is incarcerated affect your day-to-day life? Family roles and responsibilities?
5. What were the major sources of conflict between you and your husband/boyfriend while he was incarcerated?
6. How is your life different now than when it was before your husband/boyfriend was released?
7. What did you do in preparation for your husband/boyfriend coming home?

8. What did you do to prepare the children for your husband/boyfriend's return?
9. How do you think having been in prison affects your husband/boyfriend's ability to be a good husband/boyfriend now?
10. What are the major reasons for arguments between you and your husband/boyfriend since he came home from prison?
11. What seems to make the difference in how disagreements with your husband/boyfriend are handled?

The following questions will address issues of domestic violence. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

12. In general, what is your husband/boyfriend's attitude and behavior toward women? Toward you?
13. How do you define domestic violence? Have you ever been in a relationship where domestic violence was present?
14. Does your current husband/boyfriend use violence or try to control you in ways that are uncomfortable to you? What is that like?
15. Describe ways your husband/boyfriend tried to control or intimidate you while he was incarcerated. Since he has been home?

16. Have you ever experienced domestic violence with your husband/boyfriend and not reported it? If so, please explain why.
17. Who would you turn to now if your husband/boyfriend were threatening, hitting, or beating you (were experiencing domestic violence with your husband/boyfriend)? Why would you go to him/her/them/there?
18. What services would you have liked provided to you when your husband/boyfriend returned home? How about while he was incarcerated?
19. Describe the type of contact that you had with correctional counselors or other staff as part of planning for his return home? How about since he returned?
20. What do you think a parole officer should do to keep a woman safe before a women's husband/boyfriend is released? What things should the officer do to assure that she is safe when he returns home?
21. What would prevent you from seeking help from professionals such as social workers or service organizations? How about from churches, or different ministries, parole officers or the police?
22. Are there any questions that we should have asked you that we did not ask you about your experience(s) of being with or waiting for your husband/boyfriend?
23. Do you have any questions for us?

### Instrument #3: Individual Interview Questions

#### Incarcerated Men

We want to thank you again for being in our study on the relationship between domestic violence and prisoner reentry. We are going to ask you a number of questions about yourself, your experiences with your wife/girlfriend, and what it has been like since you have been incarcerated. We are seeking your expertise to help us understand domestic violence and prisoner reentry. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

The following questions will address your relationship with your wife or girlfriend. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

1. How has exposure to the imprisonment experience affected your attitude toward women generally and your wife/girlfriend, specifically?
2. How has imprisonment affected your relationship with the wife or girlfriend you had immediately prior to your most recent incarceration? **Probe:** Is there anything about your exposure to imprisonment that may cause conflict in your relationship with your wife, girlfriend or a wife or girlfriend that you may have in the future?
3. How will being on parole affect your relationship with your wife/girlfriend?
4. Did the wife or girlfriend that you had just prior to your most recent period of incarceration remain in a relationship with you? **Probe:** If yes, why do you think she did so? If no, why do you think she moved on?

5. What type of relationship conflict, if any, do you anticipate having with a new intimate partner upon your release from prison?
6. What type of conflict is likely to lead to a violent confrontation between you and your wife or girlfriend?
7. In the past, have you been violent with your wife/girlfriend? If so, can you describe the circumstances?
8. What specific things have you done to maintain a good/positive relationship with your wife or girlfriend while being incarcerated? **Probe:** How effective have your efforts been?
9. How will being on parole affect your relationship with your wife or girlfriend?
10. What do you think will help cause, facilitate and sustain a positive relationship between you and your wife or girlfriend during the first year of your release from prison?

The following questions will address your relationship with your children. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

11. What type of relationship did you have with your children before you were incarcerated?
12. What type of relationship do you have with your children currently?



13. What type of relationship do you think you will have with your children when you are released from prison?
14. What type of challenges or barriers may prevent you from having the type of relationship that you would like to have with your children after you are released?
15. Are you getting any support from anyone in your effort to have the type of relationship that you would like to have with your children?
16. What type of support would be helpful to you in maintaining a positive relationship with your wife or girlfriend?

## Instrument #4: Individual Interview Questions

### Men on Parole

We want to thank you again for being in our study on the relationship between domestic violence and prisoner reentry. We are going to ask you a number of questions about yourself, your experiences with your wife/girlfriend, and what it has been like since you were released from prison. We are seeking your expertise to help us understand domestic violence and prisoner reentry. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

1. What are the major challenges that you have had to confront since you have returned from prison?

The following questions will address your relationship with your wife or girlfriend. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

2. How has imprisonment affected your relationship with the wife or girlfriend you had immediately prior to your most recent incarceration? **Probe:** Is there anything about your exposure to imprisonment that serves to benefit your relationship with your wife, girlfriend or a wife or girlfriend that you may have in the future? Is there anything about your exposure to imprisonment that has or may cause conflict in your relationship with your wife, girlfriend, or a wife or girlfriend that you may have in the future?
3. How would you describe the relationship that you have with your current wife or girlfriend since you have been released from prison?
4. Did the wife or girlfriend that you had just prior to your most recent period of incarceration remain in a relationship with you? **Probe:** If yes, why do you think she did so? If no, why do you think she moved on?

5. How would you describe the relationships that you have with your family members (other than wife or girlfriend) since your release from prison?

The following questions will address issues of conflict and domestic violence with your wife or girlfriend. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

6. What type of conflict is likely to lead to a violent confrontation between you and your wife or girlfriend?
7. What specific things have you done to maintain a good relationship with your wife or girlfriend since you have been released from prison? **Probe:** How effective have your efforts been?
8. What do you think are the major challenges that you have had to confront in maintaining a good/positive relationship with your wife or girlfriend since you have been released from prison?
9. What type of support would be helpful to you in maintaining a positive relationship with your wife/girlfriend?

The following questions will address your relationship with your children. It is not our intention to cause you to feel exposed or uncomfortable by any series of questions which may be personal in nature. Please answer only the questions that you feel comfortable with. You can stop at any time. May I proceed?

10. What type of relationship did you have with your children before you were incarcerated?

11. What type of relationship did you have with your children during your incarceration?

12. What type of relationship do you have with your children since you have been released from prison?

13. What type of relationship do you have with any children that your wife or girlfriend may have that are not biologically yours?

14. What type of challenges or barriers may prevent you from having the type of relationship that you would like to have with your children after you are released?

15. Are you getting any support from anyone in your effort to have the type of relationship that you would like to have with your children?

16. What type of support would be helpful to you?

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